

# PAPERBACK INFERNO

56

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There's no one Stationer stall can fit all  
customers with books to their diet, nor  
can all men that write (if all that can  
but speak should write) fit some stationers.  
Go to one and offer a cory; if it be merry,  
the man likes no light stuff, if sad, it  
will not sell.

(Thomas Dekker, 1607)

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by:-

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Alan Fraser  
Mary Gentle  
Mark Greener  
L.J. Hurst  
Edward James  
Ken Lake  
Helen McNabb  
Andy Sawyer  
Sue Thomason

## Rust Never Sleeps ...

You'll have enough of me in the following pages, so why extend the editorial? Actually, the frequency with which my name is under reviews is partly due to carried-over material from last issue, partly because I've noted books which have come my way other than as review copies. But for various reasons I find writing as much of PI as I have done this issue unsatisfactory. I'll continue to note books of interest which the publishers don't send, but I hope that my presence on the review pages will stabilize at considerably less than in this issue.

George Hay's article was generally well-received, and I hope to follow it up next time with a closer look behind the reprinting of one particular title. Some concern was voiced that PI, being a reviewzine, may not have been the right place for such articles. All I can do is point out its relevance to the lack of paperback (or any!) editions of many worthwhile writers, but the general question is a valid one.

Long articles have appeared in PI and will, I hope do so again, but I see them as relating in some way to the contents of the magazine, or general questions about the SF paperback

scene, or as linked reviews of several books with a common theme. Using myself as experimental subject here, the piece herein on 'The Role of Imagined Worlds' (forgive the tortuous wordplay!) is not intended to be a definitive examination of role-playing game-books or the detailed creation of imaginary worlds, but a review of recent books which are arguably best looked at as part of a phenomenon. A more detailed account, a more analytical stance, would (I agree) be more suitable for VECTOR or MATRIX. I, personally, would be interested in reading one. But all I am doing is reviewing a series of books and raising one or two ideas for further discussion elsewhere.

Still, in the interests (as they say) of balance, different approaches could be taken. An individual book may spark off deeper questions; a subject (feminist fantasy, say,) could become manifest through several books. I'm unwilling to take a dogmatic stance against themes.

Structurally, though, PAPERBACK INFERNO will continue the tendency towards briefer reviews to enable a wider coverage of new and re-

printed paperbacks of SF (and related) books. One problem which immediately arises is the difficulty in taking a closer focus at books which might be worth more than an 'ordinary' review. Longer reviews are not necessarily the answer. 'Thematic' reviews, as mentioned above, are only part of it. So from this issue I will be emphasising reviews of one or two books under the general title Closer Encounters. This column will focus upon a book or books which particularly merit attention, which stand out from the rest: not necessarily because they come from the most famous authors or receive the most adulatory reviews. Although Geoff Ryman's THE WARRIOR WHO CARRIED LIFE has attracted considerable critical attention, I make no apologies for featuring it here, in conjunction with Paul Kincaid's interview with the author in the current VECTOR and Mike Dickinson's longer review in V127. I only hope that all this attention encourages people to buy the book and read it. Ramsey Campbell's INCARNATE is an unusually strong contemporary horror story with affinities to a certain kind of SF (in a similar way to the way the works of H.P. Lovecraft are closely related to SF). These are the lead reviews for this issue.

Finally, despite what I actually typed, George Hay has in fact NOT traced another copy of Hortense Calister's JOURNAL FROM ELLIPSIA and would appreciate hearing from anyone who has or has access to a copy. Rust never sleeps, but it sometimes dozes off a little...

ARTWORK this issue by Nik Morton, but you wouldn't let him do all the work, would you? NEXT ISSUE will contain reviews of H.G. Wells' IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET (originally inspired by the last visit of Halley's comet) and Mary Shelley's THE LAST MAN (the first UK reprint for over a century), both from Hogarth Press, as well as a look at some political near-SF from Journeyman Press and reviews of Frederick Pohl's THE DEMON IN THE SKULL, Larry Niven's THE INTEGRAL TREES, Terry Brooks' THE WISHSONG OF SHANNARA, and TOP SCIENCE FICTION - THE AUTHORS' CHOICE, edited by Josh Pachter... and more, more, and more.

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MAGAZINE REVIEW

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by CHRIS BAILEY

## Overview...

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION  
(JANUARY - AUGUST 1985)

With the January to August 1985 issues, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction continues in its usual readable, if unremarkable, way. The overall quality does not seem to have changed significantly over the last few years, even if, for the purposes of this column; I am given to sweeping summaries, such as "It's been a good year," or, "It's been a bad year." When recollecting, one or two stories may tip the balance either way, and one can be fairly certain that editor Edward Ferman is working to no literary master plan but to the more prosaic and pragmatic aim of publishing a saleable product, choosing what he sees as the best pieces, whether SF, horror or fantasy, from the pile in front of him and junking the rest. (Unless Harlan Ellison fails to deliver his film reviews again, in which case some lucky also-ran gets a reprieve. Harlan Helps Young Writers!) It's as simple as that. I have no way of knowing if some of what is rejected is better (in my eyes)

than what is printed, but I know what Rule One for acceptance is, and that is that you smack the reader with a strong ending.

This time round, I have been struck by the number of potentially strong stories that lose their sureness of footing at the end, the writer forcing the story towards a conclusion that may strike the reader as not having a feeling that is integral to what has gone before, although it may be 'striking' in its own right. (And if I am discussing endings, I am perforce obliged to give some of them away. I am glad this is a retrospective and not a preview.) There is, for instance, Bradley Denton with 'The Summer We Saw Diana' (August), a claustrophobic tale about a group of friends spending a humid summer in a small Kansas town, a story which invites and which gets reader involvement. It is not long before the reader realises that the Diana of the title is an alien. Nothing wrong with that, until the alien starts saying intrusive alien things - "Surprisingly little progress has

been made since the last survey" - and the atmosphere of the story is blown away. (Why do aliens talk like that?) Or, in the same issue, there is Paul DiFilippo's 'Stone Lives', about a blind man adrift in the Bungle, the Bronx jungle of a high-tech, "multiplex, extravagant" New York of the future (a whiff of Bester and of Gibson). The reader senses early on that Stone's employer is also his mother, and it is a shame to see DiFilippo sacrifice his pacy narration, succinct characterisation and prodigality with ideas in the cause of the clanking resolution. Another unfamiliar writer, Rolaine Hochstein with 'Neighbours' in the July issue, does it too, a lot of silly stuff about double identities at the end marring the real sense of the story, which is a beautifully simple illustration of the ways in which we subtly manipulate and use each other.

Neither are bigger names immune. The revelation at the end of Ian Watson's 'White Socks' (February), that animal spirits may beat in human blood seems to run against the sheer actuality of the story, to appear somehow inadequate after such a deal of craftsmanship. Up to that point, 'White Socks' was an outstanding read. (Perhaps, in a slighter and lighter way, the July Watson, 'Skin Day, And After', was better. Some of the lines were irresistible: "Actually I was beginning to prefer Urfs to real eggs...") And Robert F. Young ought to know better, blowing his 'Three-Mile Syndrome' (August) - otherwise a compelling study in nihilism and rich in its suggestions of there being spiritual analogues to physical decay, and vice versa - with a double cliché. The first can be guessed from the title, the second... The narrator was Satan! Wow!!

I like my endings downbeat and laid-back, so my favourite piece from these eight issues of F&SF was 'Side Effects' by Walter Jon Williams (June), an expansive piece with much character development and incidental sidetracking. The story is in a sense routine and the ending one of several that might have been expected, except for one marvellous implication - and implication it remains, being left unstated. This is typical of the writer's approach. Sensational byways that might have been milked lengthily are handled in a very deadpan manner and I shall treasure Williams' po-faced treatment of a bizarre scene in which a grave-robber, together with his bathful of skulls, falls through a rotten ceiling into the flat below. I shall vote for 'Side Effects', even if nobody else does. I might also reserve a place for a riskier piece, James Gunn's 'Man of Parts' (August), the best story I can recall from that writer. Bittersweet

and literally painfully funny, it is about a simpleton who sacrifices himself to help others and it reveals a delicate and thoughtful humaneness at the end.

Other stories fall into the category of being a good read, if not much more. Lucius Shepard ('The Jaguar Hunter', May) indicates his growing stature obliquely, showing that he now can bash off a formula story (encounter with creepy old spirits) with great facility. I was bored rigid, but the story was ever so well done. The question of formula writing is also applicable to Lisa Tuttle, many of whose stories, as with 'No Regrets' (May), seem terribly similar - person moves into house, starts hearing noises and voices... then perm from a limited selection of endings. For all the formulaic elements, though, 'No Regrets', like all of Tuttle's stories, has an emotional resonance that distinguishes it, keeping it individual and particular. And one of the oldest SF plots of all is used by Reginald Bretnor in 'The Proud Foot of the Conqueror' (July). I didn't think people still wrote stories about aliens strongarming it around the solar system and demanding to be taken to our leaders, but Bretnor's cynical view of the likely human response is convincing.

Other familiar names come up with stories that are succinct to the point of brevity, as if they have passed beyond all this tedious scene-setting and characterisation stuff. Jane Yolen's 'The Face in the Cloth' (February) is not the best of her fables I have read, although she again demonstrates her easy mastery of the archetypes. 'The Woman Who Went Out' (June) is Gene Wolfe being enigmatic, with one of his little pieces that from one angle are simplicity itself - then tilt the story slightly and the fiendishly twisted logic becomes apparent. Damon Knight's 'The God Machine' (July) is, as the title might suggest, a throwback to the 1950s, an enjoyable squib about technology apprehending religion. I liked the theometer.

Room for a bumper, as it comes from a big name: Gregory Benford, with 'To the Storming Gulf' (April), about the aftermath of a nuclear attack on America - interesting to see a hard SF writer having the balls to tackle the nuclear issue, and enjoyable to see the corners he argues himself into with his 'nuclear autumn' scenario, the rationale for this ranging from the fatuous ("The US chose to stand fast. It launched no warheads.") to the intelligently speculative (Russians lob over a few canisters of plague along with the hot stuff, recognising that "there's a nuke wint-



## CLOSER

# ENCOUNTERS

Geoff Ryman - - THE WARRIOR WHO CARRIED LIFE (Unwin/Uncorn, 173pp. £2.95)

The first novel of the man who won the BSFA award for short fiction this year with 'The Unconquered Country' (*Interzone* 7) and who published the (even better?) 'O Happy Day!' in the recent *INTERZONE: THE 1ST ANTHOLOGY* was almost certainly going to be worth reading. The story of *THE WARRIOR WHO CARRIED LIFE* is, in itself, not exceptional. A warrior, with the help of magic, journeys through the world in order to find a way of avenging herself on the evil beings who have tortured or killed her family. The Grauniad blurb on the back cover calls it 'a densely crafted re-write of the Gilgamesh epic', which seems to be remarkably unfair, short-sighted or (probably) simply quoted out of context. *THE WARRIOR...* resembles *THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH* in that its hero goes into the land of the dead and recovers a plant with miraculous powers: there the resemblance ends. One could equally helpfully call Ryman's book a re-write of the Bible, for both contain the myth of Adam, Eve and the tempting serpent. But comparisons like that imply that Ryman is re-writing or re-working old myth and legend, just as countless fantasy writers have done. And Ryman is doing much more than that. Certainly we do have some of the staples of fantasy: magic, sword fights, an epic journey, shape-shifting. But look how Ryman does that (pp. 14-15):

"Then she exploded. She was torn apart as they watched: great jets of blood and splintering of bone, hair and

er limit on the megatonnage you can deliver." ) Whatever you think of Benford's arguments, though, it is a poor story, dull, inconclusive and narratively annoying in the author's adoption of various backwoods personae ('sall written in a drawl'). A useful comparison piece is Michael Kube-McDowell's 'When Winter Ends' (July). As a story, it is as bad - leaden-footed and soggly emotional by turns - but the writer at least grasps the bull by the horns, the message being that there can be no 'nuclear autumn'. Civilisation will not survive.

Benford still might have a point, though. An author's narrative options are strictly limited by the nuclear winter - there's really no need to worry about your story's ending.

(Chris Bailey)

scalp dancing freely, the teeth flying apart, the skin lifting up like wings. The mass of it hung in the air and swirled, heart opening out, lungs blossoming open like red flowers, ligaments and strands of muscle circling upwards like seagulls in the wind. Then suddenly it all began to collapse in on itself again, liver and intestines scurrying back as if for shelter, the rib cage closing like a trap, the skin wrapping itself back around again and healing, and finally, from nowhere, something that some of them thought for the moment might be the shell of a giant tortoise closed over the skin. The wind dies, and there before them stood an armoured warrior."

Thus the girl Cara becomes the male 'warrior who carried life'. And thus Ryman writes: poetically, with extraordinary imagination, power and originality, and with a capacity for describing horror and atrocity that is unsettlingly calm and matter-of-fact. The style is far removed from that of most ordinary modern fantasy, but very reminiscent of genuine fantasy or epic. Those who have read Thomas Kinsella's translation of the Old Irish epic, the *TAIN BO CUAILLNGE* (and everyone who reads fantasy ought to have!) will recognise the similarities between the above passage and the battle-spasm of the hero Cuchulainn: and the horrific illustrations by Louis Le Brocquoy to the Kinsella translation would almost serve to adorn a future edition of Ryman's book. I am not implying any direct connection; merely that Ryman has caught the fantastic element and the epic tone of real fantasy much better than most of his rivals. Only occasionally (as in the title of chap-

ter 7, 'Flower Power') does the tone falter. Since the days of Dunsany, Eddison, Hodgson or Lovecraft most fantasy writers have avoided pseudo-archaic English as a means of producing the necessary alienation or faerification, and have often consequently failed to raise their prose above the level of the mundane. But Ryman largely succeeds, and without any re-writing of old material: he devises his own mythology and peoples his world with his own haunting creations, such as the Men who are Baked or the Warriors who Advance like Spiders. At the same time he explores the themes that have interested him before, such as the relationship between the sexes. I stand ready to be corrected by those who know better (Mary Gentle, where are you?), but he seems to me to have a quite remarkable facility with female characters. If you feel like a relaxing read, then pick up something else; if you want to see how fantasy can be written, and are prepared for a fairly harrowing experience, read Ryman.

(Edward James)

Ramsey Campbell - - INCARNATE (Granada, 472pp, £2.50)

Why is something like Christopher Priest's A DREAM OF WESSEX - which also begins with a research project involving dreams - recognisably SF, while something like Ramsey Campbell's INCARNATE - despite suggestions of 'explanations' which could very easily be made to fit into an SF context - isn't? Because Campbell is a horror writer, is the flippant answer: a more detailed one may involve the nature of his novel as an exploration of the deep structures of the irrational. "Science thinks it can distinguish between reality and dreaming," says one character. But 'science' is a pitifully inept mode of thought: "Preserve us from rationalism, that's all I can say. It's at the root of all our troubles."

An investigation into prophetic dreaming goes out of control, leading the participants into a shared dream of inexplicable terror. But it isn't until eleven years later that they find themselves drawn together once more, as aspects of the dream take on elements of reality. In reading INCARNATE I was reminded of 'The Island where Dreams come true' in C.S. Lewis's THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER:

"Do you hear what I say? This is where dreams - dreams, do you understand - come to life, come real. Not daydreams: dreams."

But although Campbell has built upon a similar realisation of terror, the squalid urban settings into which these intrusions slide are miles away from Lewis's cosy bourgeois environments. He's writing for adults in the eighties, writing a complex, disturbing novel of horror in which not all the fear comes conveniently from some author-created 'threat' but is implied in the setting and character as well as the plot.

TV researcher Molly Wolfe fights desperately against the growing danger which she - and we, the readers - barely comprehends. Through her and her colleagues in the experiment is being forced manifestations of a dream-world with its own intelligence; one of those nightmares which are so vivid you don't even imagine you are asleep - until you can't wake up. The novel builds and builds tautly and logically, but the logic is only apparent from hindsight. Events which seem perfectly connected to previous episodes turn out to be 'merely'

dreams. INCARNATE needs two or three readings because the transition from 'dream' to 'reality' is so masterfully blurred.

Ramsey Campbell is probably the best horror writer currently operating because the roots of his fiction lie so firmly in an unpleasant reality. A brutalised police force, a child coping with a neurotic mother, an old-people's day centre torn down by the planners, the growing paranoia of a mentally sub-normal cinema-projectionist: all these are part of Campbell's world before the world of dream begins to take control. Add to this a story in which what appears to be happening very frequently is not happening and a climax which guarantees that you are very foolish indeed if you use this book as light bedtime reading, and we have truly disturbing, unsettling fiction far from the cosy chills of certain big-name American writers. Even the aforementioned police brutality is presented in such a way as to undermine the conventional knee-jerk liberal reaction...

INCARNATE is an excellent novel by Wallasey's finest. In the end, it's not SF for the same reason that Christopher Priest's THE GLAMOUR is not SF... or maybe they're both SF: it's the books I'm interested in, not the argument, and in the case of INCARNATE I'm interested enough to confess that it scared the hell out of me!

(Andy Sawyer)

# The Role of Imaginary Worlds

- Steve Jackson - - APPOINTMENT WITH  
F.E.A.R. (Puffin,  
£1.95)
- Mark Smith & Jamie Thompson - - FALCON  
1: THE RENEGADE LORD/  
FALCON 2: MECHANON/  
FALCON 3: THE RACK OF  
BAAL/FALCON 4: LOST  
IN TIME (all Sphere,  
£1.75)
- John Butterfield, David Honigmann, &  
Philip Parker - - BLOODFEUD OF ALTHEUS  
(Puffin, £1.95)
- Seth McEvoy - - THE RED ROCKET (Bantam,  
121pp. £1.95)
- Steve Jackson & Stephen Lavis - - THE  
TASKS OF TANTALON (O.U.P.  
£5.95)
- Robert Asprin & Lynn Abbey (eds.) - - THE  
FACE OF CHAOS (Penguin,  
205pp. £1.95)
- Harlan Ellison (ed.) - - MEDEA: HARLAN'S  
WORLD (Bantam,  
532pp. \$10.95)
- Robert Jordan - - CONAN THE UNCONQUERED  
(Sphere, 180pp. £1.75)

that they are actually very different linguistic constructs, you can formulate a measure of serious assessment for them. Doubts do arise when books written as novels seem actually to be bastardised or lightly-adapted game-texts: see, for example, L.J. Hurst's review herein of Jefferson P. Swycaffer's BECOME THE HUNTED. I could also cite Christopher Carpenter's THE TWILIGHT REALM (Arrow) and Sheri S. Tepper's THE TRUE GAME (Corgi) as examples of a growing trend of basing novels on the practice, or actual examples of, role-playing games. That good instances of such exist, I have no doubt, but in many instances it seems a lazy, trivial fashion of hacking up a formulaic product.

Looking at game-texts as and for themselves, there are a lot of them about; moreover, a lot of very good ones. According to the statistics, they are immensely popular among early teenagers and under, predominantly males: my own experience leads me to agree. Over three million copies of the 'Fighting Fantasy' books have been sold world-wide, and although there are other popular series, these have consistently achieved high sales, appearing frequently at the top of the National Book League's Children's Books Bestsellers list.

Steve Jackson's APPOINTMENT WITH F.E.A.R. is the latest (17th) 'Fighting Fantasy', this time taking a step into Marvel/DC 'Superhero' territory. You are the Silver Crusader, your mission to vanquish a lot of super-villains and in particular the eponymous organisation. You can choose your super-powers, which gives you a choice of routes to success, and as usual a mixture of taking the right decision and being lucky with the dice will bring you through. (For the purpose of reviewing, I cheated!) One particularly nice touch about the scoring is the warning that you lose points if you kill your enemies. "As a sworn upholder of justice, you may not take the life of a supervillain." The baddies themselves are a lot of fun, as is the whole game.

More detailed than most, the FALCON books from Sphere come with meticulous diagrams of your Time Machine, Blaster, etc. and some determined efforts at scene-setting. The plots are standard space-opera stuff. You are a special agent, fighting missions through time and space: in volume 1, you have to identify a traitor Timelord only to have him escape in vol. 2; in vol. 3 you combat a godlike alien and finally you voyage into the future and become lost in the timestreams. Convoluting enough to carry you through several

"TIRED OF THE EVERYDAY GRIND? EVER DREAM OF A LIFE OF HIGH ADVENTURE? WANT TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL?" - These words scream at you from the back cover of MEDEA, but they could equally refer to any of these books. Although the recent waves of role-playing game-books, fueled by the Livingstone/Jackson 'Fighting Fantasy' series and the vogue for 'programmed text' learning materials, are different from the kind of novel which sketches out an author-created world (of which Tolkien's fantasies are the prime example), both appeal to the desire for escape which the puffery quoted above tries to manipulate. Whatever else it can be measured by, success in both cases is partly a matter of convincing detail.

The declared strength of role-playing games is that they allow players to, as it were, create their own novels, experience and operate the twists and turns of plot. This is, I think, only partly true: interplay of imagined character, evocative use of language, and the counterpoint of subplot and subtext are only three of the qualities unexpressed in a game, however complex. This is to be expected, and is no bad thing in itself. Although the 'Fighting Fantasy' books and their ilk have been criticised as not being novels, once you approach them with the premise

wet Sundays, these games are certainly more fun than reading the same thing in 'novel' form, although how much of a compliment that is I'm not sure. I did seem to end up in an unbreakable loop in volume three on one occasion...

BLOODFEUD OF ALTHEUS, in which you are the brother of the Ancient Greek hero Theseus on the path of revenge, is perhaps my favourite of the books I've looked at (owing to an early and never-quite-shaken obsession with Greek myth). The complicated scoring system (with points for Honour and demerits for Shame as well as the usual 'Might' and 'Wound Record' categories) is, I think, a plus: a definite minus is the rather silly characterisation given to the 'Patron Deities' which comes from keeping too close to the target audience of 13-year old boys. Nevertheless, the cod Homeric similes are quite amusing and the potential length and meandering of the quest even greater than the FALCON series.

Aimed at a younger audience is the series of which THE RED ROCKET is an example. You progress not by choosing alternative courses of action or rolling dice but by solving simple puzzles. Car-journey stuff for 7 - 9 year olds. Mine enjoyed it. It's SF in name only, though, for kids who've seen similar plots on cartoons.

For obvious reasons, I don't want to make a habit of reviewing hardbacks, but Oxford sent me a copy of THE TASKS OF TANTALON, which is possibly best looked at in conjunction with the rest of these books. It's due for paperback publication (Puffin) in March, and in the meantime would make a good Christmas present for someone looking for more in the MASQUERADE (by Kit Williams) mould of picture books. It's a large-format illustrated quest, in which clues for the reader are hidden in the pictures. The pictures themselves are far superior to the text, which is weak, and the storyline, which is routine fantasy-quest material, but although the book isn't as visually stunning or as fiendishly rune-like as the Kit Williams books (to which it is heavily indebted), it's well worth consideration for anyone with a flair for puzzles.

I've not seen a role-playing game of the 'Thieves' World' series, but I understand one is either available or planned. However, the series seems very much a role-playing exercise for the authors involved, and THE FACE OF CHAOS is no exception. The stories unfold within an overall plan - from the appointment of Prince Kadakithis as Governor of Sanctuary in the first volume to the town's invasion by the half-alien Beysib in this, the latest - and focus on the events from individual viewpoints. Thus the 'heros' of one story - Tempus, Critas, Prince K., Hanse Shadowspawn, Lalo the artist,

Jubal the Slaver, etc. - are villains or minor characters in others. Just like, in fact, characters in RP games who affect, are affected by, or are unconcerned with others during a turn. This makes for a potentially rich fiction, but opens up a gap for a yawning abyss where you might look for a unifying centre. Unfortunately this series slants towards the latter rather than the former. Nice concept, shame about the execution.

The stories in THE FACE OF CHAOS, by Asprin and Abbey themselves, Janet Morris, C.J. Cherryh, David Drake and Diana L. Paxson, are no better and no worse than stories in the previous volumes. Behind all, human and trans-human conspiracies weave in and out of each other, but only rarely does anything other than the forgettable arise, and the reader is, in the end, more attracted by the plethora of contending forces and the increasing complexity of the relationships between them than by the actual stories. It's that, I suppose, which makes the series closer to RP games than to 'traditional' fiction. For the fan, Diana L. Paxson's 'Mirror Image', part of the thread which involves Lalo the artist and his gift (curse?) of painting the souls of his subjects, answers one obvious question and ends with a development which will spur more investigation.

Generally, however, parts remain far inferior to the whole and by this means the whole is seriously flawed.

Conceived and edited by Harlan Ellison, with stories from Poul Anderson, Hal Clement, Thomas M. Disch, Ellison himself, Frank Herbert, Larry Niven, Frederick Pohl, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Kate Wilhelm and Jack Williamson, and illustrations by Kelly Freas, MEDEA, despite its pretentious back-cover blurb, is perhaps the most important book discussed here. If I'm reviewing it as part of a 'game' discussion it's because, unlike Tolkeinian world-creation but like a game in progress, it has a collective rather than individual genesis. MEDEA stems from a seminar at an adult education course in SF which Harlan Ellison hosted for UCLA in 1975, at which Silverberg, Herbert, Sturgeon and Disch were handed specifications of the planet Medea created by Clement, Anderson, Niven and Pohl and invited to 'imagine' into existence the stories they would write. As well as eleven stories, then, the book contains the original specifications around which the writers were invited to create, and transcriptions of the seminar and the lengthy question-and-answer session which followed.

Detailed preparation is often part of writing about an imagined world: see, for example, the 'Helliconia' trilogy from Brian Aldiss. But the

Helliconia books give us the 'facts' deeply embedded in the story. At the end, we want to know more about the world, because the story has gripped us so (and perhaps the reason for so many peoples' dissatisfaction with Tolkien and the 'Dune' books is that we've been given more!) I don't think this is the case with MEDEA. Rather than expanding upon a facet of the imagined world, the stories often reflect the individual universes of particular writers. Thus an omniscient 'Ship' is part of Frank Herbert's 'Songs of a Sentient Flute'. In many cases, we don't learn much about Medea: the stories are 'just' stories set in the created environment. Larry Niven's 'Flare Time' is a throwaway, with much invention but little plot. The best 'idea', the memory-tape gathering tourist with whom people won't sleep out of puritanical reticence is, like the artificial intelligence in Hal Clement's 'Seasoning', nothing to do with the Medean 'concept' as such. This is not necessarily a negative factor. Indeed, one of the strengths of such projects is the individuality which can be brought to the task. Disch's chilling 'Concepts' - the book's best story - barely touches upon Medea. The real focus is elsewhere, on the interface between computer-simulation and reality, and the sardonic brilliance by which Disch introduces devices like a born-again-Christian data-bank. Sturgeon's 'Why Dolphins Don't Bite' is perhaps the story closest to the ideas tossed about by the writer during the initial discussion: an audacious suggestion that the breaking of a basic taboo could mean a quantum leap in conceiving reality. The 'fluxes' (eight-limbed creatures which are one of Medea's two indigenous sentient races, the other being airborne 'balloons') reveal this to a Terran who, ironically, has just 'saved' the Medean colony by introducing and applying a philosophy which has just transformed Earth society. But the further step is much too alien for mankind... Not the least fascinating thing about this story is the apparent germ of it in what appears to be a throwaway witticism by Sturgeon on p. 98, before he enters into discussion of what will be its broader theme.

The most rewarding way to read MEDEA is not as an exercise in detailed world-creation but explicitly for the gaps between concept and execution. In this, it is different from concepts such as 'Sanctuary'. What is interesting for the reader, in many cases, is just how far some writers have gone from the basic idea. And in other cases, I must admit, some of the outstanding suggestions thrown out originally have become watered down to formulaic pulp characterisation and general 'cuteness'.

MEDEA falls naturally into two halves: a 'workshop' on world-creating and a collection of middling-to-excellent stories. There's an uneasy fit between the two, but this is part of its impact: a book which is almost worth reading as much for its failures as its successes.

Finally, Robert Jordan's CONAN THE UNCONQUERED shows the strength of a tradition. The complete lack of sophistication of Robert E. Howard's Hyborian Age only adds to its appeal, and these stories must virtually write themselves by now. Even when I was chuckling at the audacious way Jordan builds his plot upon the most unoriginal of cliches, I kept reading, pulled in by the action and familiar settings. Like Mills & Boon romances, these stories may be the Lowest of Low Art, but they are skillfully written to appeal to those who wish to read them and there are far worse books with greater pretensions to quality.

(Andy Sawyer)

## REVIEWS

Robert Sheckley - - DRAMOCLES: AN INTERGALACTIC SOAP OPERA (N.E.L., 204pp. £2.25)

For some reason best known to themselves, NEL have changed the subtitle of DRAMOCLES to 'An Intergalactic Space Opera' on the cover of the book, while quoting Douglas Adams to hint that its content is really humorous.

Sheckley's book sends up most modern SF cliches, with a story of how Dramocles, King of Glorm and absolute ruler of the Local Planets, discovers his Destiny and plunges the Galaxy into interplanetary war. Of course Dramocles is not following his own plan, but is being subtly manipulated by forces unknown, as is gradually revealed as the story unfolds.

I found the book very enjoyable, even though only one or two parts were actually hilarious. Ardent admirers of writers who follow up best-sellers with interminably pretentious sequels would, however, be happier if they didn't read it. If you liked the 'Hitchhiker' books then you will also like this one, though perhaps not quite as much. Rather than creating a completely zany environment, Sheckley is mostly concerned with poking fun at the foibles of specific writers, whom you will recognise as you read through the novel.

Recommended.

(Alan Fraser)



Sharon Webb - - THE ADVENTURES OF TERRA TARKINGTON (Bantam, 204pp. \$2.95)

THE ADVENTURES OF TERRA TARKINGTON needs a friend, the which friend is certainly not its title, or cover, or indeed its past history. One might well expect it to be a fix-up of Sharon Webb's 'Bull Run' stories that appeared in IASFM some years back, but while they're included, this is mostly new material, and not so much a fix-up as a genuine (if episodic) novel. Tarkington is space opera/spy story/nurse romance spoof, and a funny one at that - all of it featherlight, and entirely un-serious, a farrago of lunacy that ties itself into equally batty knots and solutions, and then dares you to dislike it... Student nurse Terra graduates, and is sent to the armpit of the universe; a medical space station where humans are so rare as to be classified under 'Species, Other: 0.01'. Of course, there's always milage to be got out of 'alien' cultures - "How was I to know that the patient was the Ambassador from Hyades 11? I thought he was a family pet," writes Terra, well on her way into yet another felix culpa. Little does she know that two mutually antagonistic pan-galactic intelligence agencies have Plans for her. Paranoia rules, amid endearing incompetence... Meanwhile her own true love Doctor Brian-Smith is trapped in an automated alien hospital, threatened with having all of his protuberances removed...

What do you mean, rubbish? Of course it's rubbish. There are worse things to read than some entertaining trash, after all. THE ADVENTURES OF TERRA TARKINGTON owes quite a bit to Keith Laumer on a good day, so if you liked Retief - well, you know the rest.

(Mary Gentle)

Betty Ballantine (ed.) - - FRANK FRAZETTA Book 5 (Peacock Press/Bantam, 95pp, \$12.95)

A collection of sketches and reproductions of paintings by Frazetta, an artist I find tending to the gross in his anatomy (particularly of the female form) and really too close to pulp sensibility for the major status some have claimed for him. Apart from a short dialogue between the Ballantynes and the Frazettas, there is little text to relate the illustrations herein to each other or Frazetta's work as a whole, but those who buy the book will probably know it all anyway.

(Andy Sawyer)

C.J. Cherryh - - THE CHRONICLES OF MORGAINE (methuen, 682 pp. \$2.95)

This is a collection of all three books in the Morgaine trilogy which were first published separately - Gate of Ivrel, Well of Shiuan and Fires of Azeroth - and as the action in the books is continuous it makes more sense to read them in a sitting, but although I like Cherryh's sf books this one failed to work for me and I have been trying to analyse why, somehow and for some reason it fails to come alive.

Vanye, the hero, is an exile from his clan, made ilin - i.e. a virtual slave - to any lord who cares to claim him. He is claimed by Morgaine, a witch from the past, a ghost from a century ago suddenly returned to life, who can use taboo weapons and who carries a fearsome sword which is a direct route to nothingness for whoever gets in its way, being powered by the same force which powers the Gate between worlds. There are short introductions to each book which explain that Morgaine is one of a group of people sent out to close the Gates, which gives the reader enough information to understand much of what is puzzling Vanye, from whose point of view the rest of the narrative is seen. I felt that to stick as rigidly as Cherryh did to Vanye's viewpoint was quite an achievement in itself; it could be a first person narrative for most of the book, although whether that improved the end result I'm not sure.

The books follows the adventures of Morgaine and Vanye on his own world where his cousin Roh becomes their enemy, and their pursuit of him through two more worlds and the catastrophe thus brought about. Vanye changes from terrified slave to, in the end, equal and lover of Morgaine, a gradual and well charted growth and development as he learns about Morgaine and about himself. Morgaine, despite what we know about her past, retains much of her mystery. We see her happy, sad, frightened, ruthless, gentle but somehow never quite alive. She should be a wonderful hero, more than a heroine because that implies a secondary role which is filled by Vanya in this book (role reversal in fact), but somehow she fails to live off the page, she never took over my imagination in the way she was clearly meant to, and it is there I think that the book's lack of sparkle derives. As Morgaine is not completely successful as a character then neither can the book which she dominates, despite all its other virtues, be a complete success itself.

There were some things which were irritating, the chief of which was a missed opportunity to expand the S&S genre, mix it up with others, although that may have been decided against in case it lost readers. The space system in which the story is set obviously includes advanced technology worlds. so why are all three of the worlds we enter set in a pre-industrial technology with vaguely similar medieval peasant economies?

(Even then they all seem short of blacksmiths enough to forge all the steel swords, armour etc., I always think.) Only in Azeroth is there a remnant of the power left by the race which made the Gates; in none of them do we encounter the technology of the worlds Morgaine comes from, with stun guns, torches etc. It's both a shame and a missed opportunity. I would have liked to see Vanye's reaction to something so completely alien. I also could have done with some maps of the worlds we trekked through but none were provided.

On the positive side there is a great deal of character development especially with Vanye and Roh. Even the extras seem to have real lives behind their spear carrying roles: the horses are flesh and blood needing food, rest and care instead of robot running machines, which makes a nice change. People are killed with regret rather than glee: although many die it isn't a gory blood and thunder book. In many ways it is a superior book; its aims are very much higher than a simple S&S story and for the most part those aims are achieved, but by failing with the central character, Morgaine herself, the book fails in its main objective which makes the whole something of a disappointment.

(Helen McNabb)

Richard Grant - - SARABAND OF LOST TIME  
(Avon, 327pp. £3.75)

"THE OVERMIND... The people of Earth whispered the name in fear...the powerful entity which could reactivate the dreaded machines of long ago, before the last great war... In this troubled world, a brighter destiny has brought together an intrepid band of adventurers - - ...Across dangerous lands and through evil perils, they will venture to the secret place of the Overmind - - to a rendezvous with the beginning of a new future for their world."

I have quoted at length from this book's back-cover blurb because; (a) it outlines the all-to basic plot, and (b) it should give the Prospective Reader some idea of what he or she can expect in the way of originality. There is a diffuse quality about Saraband of Lost Time that is difficult to describe, let alone explain. The characters (male, female, or ?) tend to blur into each other, while the author's sway-backed style varies wildly from matter-of-fact to mock-heroic, and from 'profound' to 'zany' - - sometimes within the same paragraph! Here is part of a would-be 'exciting' sex scene:

"I love you," he (Falspur) said, holding her tightly, and Alisha purred a reply that was stranger and deeper than his. His hands had found her breasts and she moved softly against him, shedding her dress like a false skin. She pressed herself to Falspur's chest and breathed lightly, rapidly, in his ear.

'They were lying down, their bodies twined and pulsing. Alisha enveloped Falspur with her legs, and he groaned and thrust against her. With a quick movement she guided him in, and her airy moan spoke the greatest possible truth.

'Hotstuff (sorry, 'Falspur') felt the night sky engulfing him in its warm, slippery embrace. Stars lived and died in his mind, and the entirety of his being shimmered in a small space of flesh. He made some inchoate exclamation and collapsed into a sea of limbs...

'Falspur was inside her again. From Alisha's perfect body he drew a limitless store of vitality, and fed it back to her in slow, languorous thrusts. Her eyes absorbed him until he vanished from his own awareness and lay gasping in disbelief on the surface of a reconstituted planet.

"Falspur," she murmured, stirring.

"Just five or six more times," he whispered.

'She laughed a quiet, timeless laugh and drew him in.

'It was really a (wet?) dream. It was really (animal?) magic.' (pp. 123-4)

Saraband ('a slow, stately Spanish dance, or the music for it') of Lost Time reads like a typical 'first' and/or 'first draft' novel. If such is the case, then Richard Grant must be given every chance to put it far behind him. "I mean that most sincerely, friends, I really, really do..."

(Graham Andrews)

Allen Wold - - V: THE PURSUIT OF DIANA (New English Library, 186pp. £1.95)

In recent years it has become almost obligatory to release a novel to 'tie-in' with a successful film or TV show. The novel can either be a re-issue of the book which inspired the film or, if the show was not based on an original book, a novelisation appears on the shelves. In the latter case the book should be a direct transposition from the visual to the written medium. Indeed, it is possible for the book to improve upon its source by filling in the gaps left by overzealous editing. V: The Pursuit of Diana reflects its source perfectly and there is no more damning indictment than that.

The reptilian aliens, which had invaded Earth in order to obtain adequate supplies of food, in the form of live humans, and water for their planet, have been beaten off by a group of rebels. During the battle the resistance was able to capture one of the aliens' spaceships. However, the victory is not complete, as the aliens' leader Diana escaped. A group of rebels set out in pursuit to capture her and bring her to justice.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the rebellion who stayed on Earth are attempting to restore order to an anarchic America. They are hindered by the 'converts': humans in positions of power who remain under the aliens' telepathic control...

If you enjoyed the teleshow then you will enjoy the novel. If, on the other hand, you found V dull, uninspired, predicatable, riddled with internal contradictions and just plain silly, you probably would not consider buying this book in the first place. That would be a wise decision. The best that can be said of The Pursuit of Diana is that the novelisation is true to its source and thus repeats the faults inherent in the TV show. Indeed the book augments them by being written in a dull, flat, turgid prose which compliments the flaccid plot. This style only serves to bring the book's faults into sharp relief. The entire novel gives the impression of the author being as bored writing this book as I was reading it. Don't waste your money.

(Mark Greener)

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Michael Moorcock - - ELRIC AT THE END OF TIME (Granada, 208pp. £1.95)

Only the title story and 'The Last Enchantment' are actually Elric tales: the rest of the book is made up of various comments by Moorcock about his fantasy writing and the philosophy behind it and New Worlds, his 'Sojan the Swordsman' cycle (written between the ages of 15 and 17 for Tarzan Adventures in the 1950s), and 'The Stone Thing', a parody of his own S&S work. So buyer beware, particularly as most if not all of this material has been published as the Savoy Editions Sojan.

The Elric stories are below par. 'At the End of Time' neatly combines the 'Elric' and 'Jherek Carnelian' cycles, but exudes a sense that the desire to bring out the similarities between Elric's 'Chaos Lords' and the 'Dancers at the End of Time' was the main reason for writing the story. Elric becomes a figure of fun. 'The Last Enchantment' was written as "The last Elric story" but apart from the first couple of pages lacks development and power: the resolution is trite rather than profound, even by S&S standards. The Sojan stories may attract completists, but ordinary fans should remember that they are Moorcock's juvenilia: in themselves, sub-sub-E.R.B. in origin. The essays are interesting, even illuminating, particularly the one describing Elric's part-origins in Moorcock's own romanticism and desire to write allegory, but you will have to judge for yourself how much you're willing to pay out for such peripheral material. For what it's worth, I recommend inspection, if only because Moorcock's development as a writer is one of the sf field's great success stories and any-

thing which sheds light on it is worth reading. But two silly typographical errors in the first two sentences which really should have been spotted in proof-reading hardly act as an attractive introduction to the book.

(Andy Sawyer)

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Edmond Hamilton - - STARWOLF (Hamlyn 456pp, £2.5)

Basically, Hamilton was a thirties pulp writer, but STARWOLF, his last series written in 1967/8 and comprising three stories here bound together, is excellently crafted in his traditional style - overfull of adjectives, fluent, with plenty of light and shade both in subject and in such minutiae as the length of sentences.

However, it cannot be denied that - at least by the standards of the eighties - it was written for late adolescents, or perhaps for delayed adolescents. It abounds in such 'period' sentences as

"He had an oddly unfinished look about his hands and face and figure, as though he had been roughly carved out of rock by an unskilled sculptor."

I confess I have met many people to whom that description might apply, but never in real life - only in pulp fiction. And that's precisely what Venture SF aims to provide, according to their advertising, so one should be neither surprised nor disdainful. There has to be a market for this stuff - swelling sales prove it.

It's just that readers of PI are unlikely to be among their number; we have all, I imagine, had our fill of Starwolves, born to missionary parents on vicious alien planets and growing up regarding themselves - like Romulus and Remus - as the siblings of wolves. Our hero gets thrown out of his clan, runs his amoral course through the three stories and comes out basically on the side of the angels but through what can only be described as enlightened self-interest - that is, he cheats everyone, but puts down the baddies with gusto, then sails off into the dawn to fight some more.

A welcome feature of this book is the thirties no-explicit-violence convention - nasty things are done to people but there is little actual description. You can read this book while consuming even something as carnivorous as steak tartare, without having your gorge rise up in revulsion against the author's gratuitous viciousness. Modern books, please follow!

(Ken Lake)

Poul Anderson - - THE LONG NIGHT (Sphere, 320pp. £2.50)

The Long Night is an essential purchase for all Poul Anderson fans because it contains five stories from his Technic series omitted from the three-volume collection The Earth Book of Stormgate. The stories are 'The Star Flunderer' (Planet Stories, 1952), three stories from Galaxy, 1967/8, and the only one I'd read before, 'Starfog' (Analog, 1967). The first two Galaxy stories and the Analog one are novelette length, so the book is a good read. The prologue and linking text are by Sandra Miesel, the American writer and critic also noted for her appreciation of Gordon R. Dickson's 'Dorsai' series.

The stories in this book are all peripheral to the main events in Anderson's series, and feature none of his main characters. 'The Star Flunderer' is set during the chaos following the decay of the Polesotechnic League, and features the man who is eventually to found the Terran Empire that Flandry serves. The longest story in the book, 'Outpost of Empire' from Galaxy is set during the Imperial period at the start of the war with Merseia that debilitates the Empire. The last three stories take place after the Empire's fall, the 'Long Night' of the title, when communication between the stars fails and many human-settled planets are forgotten. 'Starfog' is set some three thousand years after the story which precedes it, when a new 'Commonality' is once again assuming authority and rediscovering these lost human colonies in far-flung parts of the galaxy.

To be honest, I found the first three stories merely 'OK' - well-written and eventful enough, but not inspiring. To give an example, the ending of 'Starfog' is an anti-climax in that the people of a long-lost planet are revealed as 'not human' merely because the genetic changes they have undergone to survive mean they can no longer breed with mainstream humanity. I did, however, enjoy 'The Sharing of Flesh', where a scientist investigating an earlier lost planet which has reverted to savagery is killed and eaten by the natives. Cannibalism is then found to be an intrinsic part of this society. Even the comparatively civilised people of the towns breed slaves for eating by their young men at the time of 'Sharing of Flesh' when they are initiated into manhood. It falls to the widow of the murdered man to put aside his companions' and her own thoughts of revenge and search out the real reason why these people become cannibals at one, and only one point in their lives.

To sum up, the book is a selection of extremely competent 'space opera' stories from Anderson: essential for the Anderson completist, but not really good enough to turn anyone on to him as a writer.

(Alan Fraser)

Arthur C. Clarke - - THE SENTINEL (Granada, 299pp. £2.95)

Arthur C. Clarke is not a great writer. In many ways, he's hardly even a good writer, but like many writers who work well within a fairly narrow range, what he does do well he does almost unsurpassingly well. This collection - neither a conventional 'Best Of...' nor a selection of his most popular stories - is Clarke at his finest and that is top quality.

Clarke is often hailed - and criticised - as a prophet of technology. But if you actually examine his work you find a haunting ambiguity in the way he hails the inevitability of radical change in our self-perception as we discover more about the universe. From the sardonic joke at the conclusion of 'Rescue Party', one of his earliest stories, to the discovery of the nature of Karellan the Supervisor in 'Guardian Angel' (which later became the first part of CHILDHOOD'S END) to the suggestion of inevitable conflict between two species in 'The Songs of Distant Earth' (which Clarke suggests bears the same resemblance to 2010 as 'The Sentinel' does to 2001), his short fiction has never been blandly optimistic. The marvels the future brings may be more disturbing than the surface of his fiction suggests.

The warning towards the end of 'The Sentinel' - a serious contender for the finest SF short story ever written - shows this ambiguity at its starkest:

"Now its signals have ceased, and those whose duty it is will be turning their minds upon Earth. Perhaps they wish to help our infant civilization. But they must be very, very old, and the old are often insanely jealous of the young."

Clarke is at his best when writing fiction extrapolated from fact or hypothesis. This means that, obviously, over the years, as new facts or theories become current, some of his ideas become outdated and some of his images, such as the Englishman frying sausages on the Moon (again, from 'The Sentinel'), become silly rather than deliberately mundane. He is at his best in short fiction, when the idea or scientific hypothesis is to the fore and his cool, highly underrated narrative powers are not overstretched. Here, we have both factors, and this large-format volume, with illustrations by Lebbeus Woods and introductory comments on each story by Clarke himself, can only be highly recommended.

(Andy Sawyer)

Clifford D. Simak - - THE WEREWOLF  
PRINCIPLE (Meth-  
uen, 190pp. £1.95)

WHY CALL THEM  
BACK FROM HEAVEN?  
(Methuen, 191pp.  
£1.95)

These two reprints, of books published in 1968 and 1967 respectively, nicely point up Simak's virtues and vices as a purveyor of fine-quality science fiction. But before the deeply meaningful critical insight, here are a couple of plot summaries to refresh the memories of the old hands, and whet the appetites of those meeting these titles for the first time.

THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE is the story of Andrew Blake, a young man suffering from total amnesia. His body was discovered in a remote area of (human-explored, but not colonised) space, and brought back to Earth for revival. It rapidly becomes apparent that the body of 'Andrew Blake' houses more than one mind. There is a human mind with generalised recollections of the Earth of 200 years before the revival of 'Blake'. There is the emotionless information-gatherer and data-collector, a kind of biological computer. And there is Quester, a wolf-like alien who studies the stars. When 'Blake' is frightened or angry, he involuntarily becomes Quester. And soon the wolf-hunt is on...

WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN? develops from one of the more haunting and bizarre ideas of the sixties; one of the many human ideas to cheat Death. In the near-future of this book, every citizen is frozen when they die, awaiting a time when their diseases can be cured, their injuries repaired. The emotional and economic life of most people is bound up with the need to prepare adequately for their 'second life'. To this end they stint themselves in 'this life'. The all-powerful Forever Centre is investigating terraforming and time-travel as ways of finding lebensraum for the sleeping millions when they are finally revived, and holding out the promise of immortality, definitely within the next ten or fifteen years...

Both books are the work of a lively and creative imagination. Simak is interested in getting the 'feel' of his future society where the technology of bodily resurrection is an accepted part of daily life. He's interested in what this will do to politics, to religion, to stamp-collecting. He is interested in getting inside the head of an alien intelligence who suddenly comes to consciousness on a planet which is too hot, too wet, too dark... or inside the head of a man who doesn't know who he is. This is speculative fiction at its best.

But. Unfortunately what both these books lack is a coherent plot. Simak's main style of writing in both these books is to make a mosaic, a vivid, large picture built up of a number of small incidents that illuminate each other, but which doesn't necessarily provide a strong storyline. He is fascinated by his worlds, and that's necessary in a writer; but he's too easily distracted by detail. Oh, certainly he should have explored all the things he has done in these books, but not all the information should have got into the final draft of the novels - or it should have kept more under control.

And besides satisfactory plots, the books both lack satisfactory endings. It is as though in each novel Simak explored his strange new world at random and with endless invention and delight, for 185 pages, and then suddenly thought "Damn. Only another five pages left. Must draw some kind of conclusion to all this." And did so. We have (Ahrgh!) a quick dose of irrelevant God-is-dead spiritual angst at the conclusion of WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN? which is tedious but bearable, and (double Ahrgh!!) an even more irrelevant Girl Stowaway In A Spaceship at the end of THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE, which is simply ridiculous. Girl stowaways in spaceships went out with 'The Cold Equations'. (Ouch. Sorry. I promise I won't do it again...)

So, flawed but worth reading, the both of them. And worthy reprints. And a gratuitous thumbs-up to Methuen for advertising Interzons, Foundation AND THE BSFA in the back of THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE, though they then rather misleadingly say "these and other Methuen paperbacks are available at your bookshop or newsagent." But at least they're trying.

(Sue Thomason)

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T.E.D. Klein - - THE CEREMONIES (Bantam,  
255pp. £3.95)

Firmly in the tradition of lengthy American gothic-horrors in a rural setting, THE CEREMONIES possesses a frisson above the normal caused, perhaps, by its overt reliance upon the writings of Arthur Machen and the effective, self-referential device of making the central character, Jeremy Friers, an academic researching into the gothic-horror tradition. So as Jeremy immerses himself among the books of Walpole, Radcliffe, Machen, LeFanu, Stoker and others on a secluded farm owned by a Fundamentalist couple, real-life horror is brewing, which will involve Jeremy, his hosts Deborah and Sarr Poroth, the innocent dancer Carol Conklin to whom Jeremy is attached, and the apparently philanthropic Mr. Rosebottom.

If not wildly original in structure, the novel has all the brooding power you'd expect from this kind of thing. The shifting viewpoints, from authorial narrative to Jeremy's journal to his letters, allow a rounded build-up of characterisation, and Jeremy is revealed through what he does and says: a shallow, self-centered creep. This is, in part, the book's most effective side, the other being the interweaving of themes from Machen - whose *THE HOUSE OF SOULS* plays a part in the development of the plot - with the world of the novel as Klein bases his 'Ceremonies' (by which an unearthly evil will be roused to life) on hints from his tales. Parts of the actual plotting suffer from a certain clumsiness: themes, events and characters appear, invested with more significance than subsequent developments give them and (although this may well be deliberate) the novel's people seem content to act out their structural roles in the story with only a flicker of 'reality' where, it seems, they might have the possibility of acting differently. But it's only afterwards that you realise this. Reading the book, Klein's storytelling ability and use of his genre-patterns (call them clichés if you like!) keeps you reading.

(Andy Sawyer)

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Robert E. Vardeman - - *THE FROZEN WAVES*  
(Avon, 204pp,  
\$2.95)

Although I've never been an advocate of the KTF school of reviewing I am unable to find anything to say in favour of this book. It is unrelievedly bad, as the heroine Kesira Minette battles through ice, cold, brigands, attempted rape etc. with her two friends, a talking bird and a werewolf, to try and persuade the Demon Ayondela to lift the spell of eternal winter. The plot is bland and dull, the characters boring, and I only finished it out of a sense of duty.

Read the Corn Flakes packet instead, it's a lot better written.

(Helen McNabb)

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Zecharia Sitchin - - *THE WARS OF GODS AND MEN* (Avon, 377pp,  
\$4.95)

Vol. 3 of a series proving (yet again) that the Gods of the ancient races were really aliens and that the *Illiad*, etc. records a cosmic conflict. To think that Homer lived and breathed so that the inability of some people to understand poetic imagination could reach fruit in tedious tracts like this!

(Andy Sawyer)

Villiers De L'Isle-Adam - - *CRUEL TALES*  
(Oxford Paperbacks,  
288pp. £2.95)

Although Villiers De L'Isle-Adam wrote a genuine early SF novel (*THE NEW EVE* (1880) reissued as *THE FUTURE EVE* (1886)), he is probably best known as a Symbolist contemporary of Mallarmé and Verlaine, a struggling writer in Bohemian Paris until the publication of *CRUEL TALES* in 1883 brought him fame if not fortune. As with Edgar Allen Poe, whose influence can be seen throughout the volume, Villiers' stories are well worth attention for their own distinctive sensibility as well as the frequent pre-SF. Some, such as 'Celestial Publicity', 'Doctor Tristram's Treatment', or 'The Chemical Analysis of the Last Breath', are satirical 'essays' on spoof inventions, while 'Vera' describes a lover's mental contact with (or re-creation of) his late wife's spirit. 'The Sign' is a homage to Poe in many respects, a tale of a premonitory dream, while 'The Messenger' is an ornate (and overwrought, to modern tastes) supernatural tale based on Biblical legend.

Recommended for those willing to explore less conventional by-ways of literature, with the caveat that those who find something illuminating in thinking about how the relationship between bourgeois capitalism and literature in 19th-Century France spurred the development of SF will probably find more in the book than those looking for the genre in its more definitely crystallised form.

(Andy Sawyer)

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J.C. Mezieres/  
P. Christin - - *HEROES OF THE EQUINOX*  
  
*WORLD WITHOUT STARS*  
(Both Hodder/Dargaud,  
48pp. £2.50)

English translations of the French comic books featuring the adventures of 'spatiotemporal agent' Valerian and his sidekick Laureline. The first is an amusing romp with the hero as wimpish underdog in a team of champions competing to father a new generation on the planet Simlane. The second is a more heavy-handed adventure in a hollow world where two cities (one dominated by women, one by men) wage unending combat. Energetic narrative and excellent graphics, particularly in *HEROES...*, but the price may confine them to addicts only. Still, better value for money than many such a novel I've read recently.

(Andy Sawyer)

L.E. Modesitt Jr. - - THE HAMMER OF DARKNESS (Avon, 343pp. \$2.95)

I thought the best thing about this book was the outside until I got to the section illustrated on the cover and found that the artist had got that wrong as well.

THE HAMMER OF DARKNESS is about Martin Martel. He is expelled from galactic university when he is found to have ESP, and loses his girlfriend, the future queen. A secret organisation ensures that he becomes a holovision presenter on a planet where the upper classes are mostly re-creations of the classical gods. Over a long time he becomes god-like himself despite the rivalry of his neighbours. Battles with the gods ensue; he starts travelling in time, living in space-vacuums, destroying fleets of space cruisers, and eventually he is re-united with the queen of half of the universe. This is all told in the present tense, in elliptical sentences, and with passages written in italics representing people's thought.

It is not a rhetorical question to ask, What was Modesitt thinking of? The lack of detail about almost anything means there is no continuity of plot. Early on, Martel investigates the cults of four gods for a holovision programme. Space technology and psi-power could promise some interesting comparative theology, like VALENTINE'S CASTLE or THE WARLOCK IN SPIRE OF HIMSELF, but it never comes. Considering the importance of the gods they are given almost no treatment. And similarly, with Martel, who becomes the god of darkness but not evil - that is not dealt with and neither are his psi-powers. This is no TIGER, TIGER.

At the best, the book is two-thirds too long, and it's filled with quotes from galactic encyclopedias and space hymns. We've read it all before. Avoid it.

(L.J. Hurst)

## Contact

Some response on the self-examination I conducted last issue: TOM JONES welcomed the magazine coverage and the shorter reviews, but was dubious about longer articles - - "I don't think PI is for the George Hay article; that should be in MATRIX. PI is for reviews of the written word. There are three other magazines in the BSFA producing articles, PI should not be in competition with those. Indeed it is probably only MATRIX you would be in competition with and I fear both would suffer. MATRIX has been somewhat erratic for several years and still isn't on a

steady footing, it needs all the interesting little articles it can get. Conversely PT needs all the space it can get for reviews (particularly as I'd like to see the magazine section enlarged)." - - ROB GREGG enjoyed George Hay's because - - "I don't consider that PI is solely a reviews zine. I'd welcome as many articles as you could fit in... I enjoyed reading George Hay's piece on out of print books and I sympathize with the difficulties encountered by completists of any author who is largely out of print..." - - but - - "I disagree with your reviewing children's and juvenile paperbacks... I guess the odd one or two is OK, but I can't see many fen being interested and I don't believe the average BSFA member is quite that young." - -

MARY GENTLE, though, disagrees - - "Somebody really ought to do some more on children's literature, as you say, there's some real innovation sneaking in under the line there." - - A position to which I hold firmly: I'd also refer back to Edward James' comment on Piers Anthony's audience which I quoted last issue. You've already read my comments on longer articles unless you never read editorials on principle.

JACK D. STEPHEN quoted examples of how reviews in PI have guided his reading - - "Since joining the BSFA my reading has been improved by the 'discovery'(through the review pages) of such as John Crowley, Michael Bishop and Michael Coney. Enthusiastic reviews made me seek out book by these authors wherever I could find them; I was not disappointed. My interest was also rekindled in Keith Roberts and J.G. Ballard by 'good' reviews and/or comment. ... There sometimes is a difference of opinion between PI and VECTOR over a book: two particular examples I can remember are Silverberg's LORD OF DARKNESS and Cherryh's DOWNBELOW STATION. This obviously means two different standpoints and I think it is important to maintain this diversity, so PI should review all SF-related paperbacks even if already reviewed in VECTOR. You can then pay your money and take your choice." - - Difference of opinion is frequently to the good. While I don't subscribe to the "it's all subjective" school of criticism, there will be at least one favourable review of a book coming up which I, and I'm sure many others, would disagree with, while I discovered after praising another book that it had been thoroughly trashed in a recent VECTOR: both reviews, incidentally, by people whose opinions I'm usually in agreement with! Jack also added remarks on production - - "...if we are to influence others and improve the standards of published SF our case will be stronger if we are as literate as possible in our own publications.

In this respect I do not know how much editing out of such examples of bad practice is actually performed, or if the contributors' efforts are left more or less as they were written, apart from subsequent retyping for the journal. I think it is legitimate to leave any errors in letters as received, but the actual reviews themselves should be subject to more stringent inspection. In saying this I know it must be very difficult to accomplish it in terms of the time constraints involved in processing the reviews." -- To which ROB GREGG again - - "The thing that makes PI look inferior is the single staple at the corner approach in collating." - -

Finally, MARY GENTLE (again) and TERRY BROOME on more general questions arising from last issue's contents. Praising George Hay's article, Mary asks - - "why is it all the things I'd like to see in print are books only 3½ people would buy? It's the old question, do you give people what they want, or do you assume they don't know what they want until they've seen a much larger selection of what's available? What price Robert Graves and Robert Aickman when the punter is reading Asimov and Piers Anthony? All of which sounds very elitist, I must admit, but what the hell. The real way to get rid

of an elite is to make it an option open to everybody." - - Terry's letter expanding on points from an earlier one arrived after the first half of this lettercol. was typed up, but he had much of interest to say concerning Joy Hibbert's review of the Women's Press SF books. Basically he wondered whether the seperatism implied by the "Women's Press" label itself reinforces alienation but was also deeply worried by the apparent lack of ethical responsibility suggested by the "Venture" series.

WAHF : Nik Morton: Margaret Hall.

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#### ALSO RECEIVED:-(This does not preclude further reviews)

M. Greenberg (etc.) - THE TWILIGHT ZONE (Avon) // Edmond Hamilton - STARWOLF (Hamlyn) // Patrick Tilley - FIRST FAMILY (Sphere) // R.S. McEnroe - SKINNER (Bantam) // Robin McKinley - THE BLUE SWORD (Arrow) // M.Z. Bradley - THENDARA HOUSE (Arrow) // Douglas Hill - EXILES OF COLSEC (Puffin) // Mary MacKey - THE LAST WARRIOR QUEEN (Unicorn) // Derek Sawde - THE SCEPTRE MORTAL (Orion) // Michael Shea - NIFT THE LEAN (Granada) // Ian Watson - THE BOOK OF THE RIVER (Granada) // Barbara Hambly - THE ARMIES OF DAYLIGHT (Unicorn) // G.R. Dickson - THE FINAL ENCYCLOPEDIA (Sphere) // Harry Harrison - SKYFALL (Granada) // J.P. Swycaffer - THE UNIVERSAL PREY (Avon) // Kurt Singer - 4th TARGET BOOK OF HORROR (Target) // Donald Cotton - DR. WHO : THE MYTH MAKERS (Target) // David Gemmell - THE KING BEYOND THE GATE (Century) // Katherine Kurtz - HIGH DERYNI (Century) // Philip E. High - SOLD FOR A SPACESHIP (Hamlyn) // Rudy Rucker - SOFTWARE (Penguin) // G.D. Martin - THE SOUL MASTER (Unicorn) // Gene Wolfe - BOOK OF DAYS (Arrow)