

PAPERBACK 58 INFERNO

Contents

15p

PAPERBACK INFERNO -- issue 58, Feb. 1986.
A publication of the British Science
Fiction Association, edited by Andy Sawyer.

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Copy for next issue by March 14th, please.

BSFA membership costs £7 per year. Member-
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David V. Barrett	Andy Sawyer
Denis Gorse	Steven Tew
L.J. Hurst	Sue Thomason
Mary Gentle	
Tom Jones	
Ken Liske	
Helen McNab	

Paperback Purgatory...

Alex Hamilton's annual survey of paperback
fastsellers in The Guardian is always inter-
esting reading, but from the the point of
view of SF it's not very encouraging.

Sales of THE GROWING PAINS OF ADRIAN MOLE
(Home and Export grossing 1,645,667) pushed
it firmly in the number one spot. You have to
look as far as no. 13 for the first SF title;
Douglas Adams' SO LONG AND THANKS FOR ALL THE
FISH: still that's a creditable position for
a minor genre... but as with so many books
here we're dealing with a 'phenomenon' rather
than something attracting sales by its own
merit. So as we continue the search for more
concretely identifiable SF we pass Stephen
King's PET SEMETARY (25), J.G. Ballard's
EMPIRE OF THE SUN (26), King/Straub's THE
TALISMAN (30) before we home in on Frank Her-
bert's HERETICS OF DUNE, which shifted 220,
684 copies and is the 44th fastest selling
paperback of 1985. And THAT's just about it.
Isaac Asimov's ROBOTS OF DAWN is at 52, but
fantasy continues to be represented by David
Eddings fifth BELGARIAD novel (45) and Step-
hen Donaldson's DAUGHTER OF REGALS (95). Cine-
ma tie-ins SANTA CLAUS NOVEL and SANTA CLAUS
STORYBOOK (48 & 49) and fighting fantasy -
TALISMAN OF DEATH (72), FREEWAY FIGHTER (62),
SPACE ASSASSIN (89), TEMPLE OF TERROR (90),
and RINGS OF KETHER (96) - are either worth
including or scraping the barrel depending
on your point of view. Two more tie-ins -
James Kahn's GOONIES (63) and George Gipe's
BACK TO THE FUTURE (74) - are more strictly
SF, while Gordon McGill's OMEN V (97) and -
just possibly - Joseph Heller's GOD KNOWS
(60) are worth considering from our view-
point.

And that's it.

Nineteen SF/Fantasies under the most
elastic definition I can think of, and that
includes a 'non-SF' novel by an 'SF' author.
Interestingly (depressingly?) that's by far
the best book among those I've extracted if
not among the whole list.

Of course, inclusion in this 'fastseller'
list is no guarantee of long-term staying po-
wer, or even of quality (Brian Aldiss's HELI-
CONIA SUMMER also came out in paperback dur-
ing 1985), but it's a good guide to immediate
contact with the public pulse. And there's a
sure-fire formula for immediate sales and
large grosses.

Don't write SF.

The perceptive reader will note a change
or two in this issue. Part of it has been
word-processed by David Willis, and I hope
that the clearer typeface and the neater col-
umns will make a great difference to the ap-
pearance of PI. Once David and I have got more
time to organize the flow of material, I hope
we can produce a more consistently readable
magazine. Meanwhile, I hope the mix of form-
ats this time round is not too off-putting.
Christmas, and the possibility of moving house,
has meant that the remainder of this issue -
this editorial and the letter-column - is be-
ing typed up and laid out at greater speed
than I would like.

On that move, by the way, if it does come
off, I will of course make sure that my mail
is redirected... so you have no excuse not to
send the artwork I'm still in need of! To be
serious, though, it may mean that my own cor-
respondence becomes delayed. Normal service
will be resumed as soon as possible...

This time, I've extended the magazine re-
views, with Phil Nichols looking at TWILIGHT
ZONE and my own glance at INTERZONE. I would,
though, be grateful if someone else could take
over the latter.

"Upon the rack in print . . ."

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE and ANALOG,
December 1985.

(Reviewed by Edward James)

Only three issues here, I'm afraid: December and Mid-December ANALOG and the December ASIMOV'S. The Mid-December ASIMOV'S hasn't reached me yet, and Ken Slater (of Fantast (Medway) Ltd: address supplied on request if you don't know him!) tells me that the distributors seem to be getting ASIMOV'S late these days. So no comment on the stories by James Tiptree, Ian Watson etc. in ASIMOV'S last story of the year.

The December ASIMOV'S contained the longest story yet by Ian McDonald, 'Empire Dreams' set in the Royal Victoria Hospital of his native Belfast. And one of his best, although neither the plot nor the setting are as original or as exotic as those in his earlier stories. A small boy suffering from leukemia is given a computer-induced dream based on his own Star Wars fantasies, which help him on his own orthohealing process. The problem: he won't come out of his coma-like state. It's as beautifully written as any of Ian McDonald's; he has an excellent touch with dialogue, in particular. It should be a contender for an award, for McDonald certainly deserves one. The BSFA one, perhaps? (Read it and vote!) Sydney J. Van Scyoc's 'Meadows of Light' is about two women of different cultures; quite an effective comment on social relations. There is also a post-holocaust story by Lucius Shepherd, and an Aegean fantasy, 'The Nebraskan and the Nereid', by Gene Wolfe. And a stirring plea for internationalism from Asimov in his editorial. (Apparently Arthur C. Clarke was shouted down by Pournelle and his cronies when he argued against Star Wars, on the grounds that he was not American. Whatever you think of Asimov, at least his political heart's in the right place - i.e. near where mine is.) The only booby prize in the issue goes to 'O Little Town of Bethlehem II' by Robert F. Young. A colony world, 2053 light years from Earth. It is AD 2086. They are waiting for the light of the first Christmas on Earth to reach them. It does, and we have a rather nice but cynical comment on original sin. But I'm sure you noticed the blunder: Young thinks that Christ was born in AD 33. Now, either this is a deliberate mistake (in which case I'm not sure what the point of the story is), or else Young hasn't realised that Christ was born in AD 1 (or 4 BC if you believe Matthew; 6AD if you believe Luke). He has, apparently, confused the first Christmas with the first Easter. Jesus Christ!

The December ANALOG had a no-more-than-average Callahan's Cross-Time Saloon story from Spider Robinson; another tall tale from Thomas R. Dulski about his Sherlockian chemist Baker; three other fairly ordinary stories. The best thing in it was the fact article on the Moon's maria. The Mid-December ANALOG, on the other hand, had the best set of stories of any copy of the magazine this year. Perhaps because most of the stories were not about gadgets, but about moral dilemmas. An above average Haviland Tuf story

from George R.R. Martin, the 4th in a series that started in January, in which some of the issues get more into the open, most notably the moral problems associated with demographic control (abortion and the like). A very moving story by S.C. Sykes (who?) called 'Rockabye Baby', concerning a quadriplegic given a chance at a normal life, at the cost of forfeiting the memory of his past life. A fair attempt by Ed Byers at that most difficult of things: as SF whodunnit involving a new scientific invention. Rounded off by, among others, a lecture from Tom Ligon on the evils of the US television system; a story from Stephen L. Burns, 'The Man of Peace', on the dilemma of the best way to expose the evils of nuclear warfare, and one from P.M. Ferguson on the consequences of scientific proof of the existence of the soul. A good meaty set of stories this, which leaves one thinking that ANALOG has a future after all.

INTERZONE 13 (Autumn 1985), 14 (Winter 1985/6)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

INTERZONE doesn't seem to have been noted in PI since Chris Bailey looked at issues 8 and 9 in PI 51. Since then, how has it developed?

Issues 13 and 14 mark a further step in becoming a magazine, with a magazine's presence. And a more varied read it is, too. It now has news items, media reviews (by Nick Lowe), and issue 14 even has a stirring manifesto for 'the native literature of a post-industrial society' by "Vincent Omniaveritas" which deserves close scrutiny. Good new writers are interviewed - William Gibson in 13 and David Barker in 14 which also, incidentally, sports a colour cover by Pete Lyon, an unashamedly "sciencefictional" evocation.

Issue 13 contains more "big names". J.G. Ballard's 'The Man Who Walked on the Moon' explores the metaphor of astronaut embodiment 'the absolute loneliness of the human being in space and time'. It's extremely difficult to assess Ballard's stories briefly without stumbling into the critical shorthand mentioned by Colin Greenland last VECT-OR, but its fusion of shabby charade and bleak internal landscape (how's that?) is as haunting as ever. Barrington Bayley's 'Escapist Literature' explores similar metaphysical territory, with an interesting question for SF readers at the heart of the story, while Ian Watson ('The People on the Precipice') writes about a race dwelling on a sheer cliff, speculating an alternative existences and the nature of their world - until that world drastically changes.

Neil Ferguson's 'The Monroe Doctrine' (IZ 6) summed up much of what can be dodgy about INTERZONE: the easy adoption of figures from popular culture as icons. Fortunately, his 'Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw' for IZ 13 is a delight. Oh, a "semiotic detective" may fall within the trendy area of the previous tale - we're all semioticians now, aren't we? - but it's successful for two reasons. First, because a semiological

search for meaning through the interpretation of signs is, when you cut the crap, the province of every detective since Sherlock, and second, because there's a well-constructed plot with an amusing twist. Old-fashioned virtues seen through post-structuralist sunglasses? Well, well.

The two "first professional sales" this issue are Don Webb's 'Rhinestone Manifesto (revolution and subversion in the inanimate world) and Peter T. Garratt's 'If the Driver vanishes...', a story of the Rapture before Armageddon when all true believers will vanish from the world: apparently this is firmly believed in by some of the fundamentalist Christians in Reagan's cabinet. In both, IZ lives up to its reputation of printing "firsts" of a higher standard than stories from many other magazines' established writers.

Ian Watson also appears in IZ 74 with 'When the Timegate Failed' - a science fiction story of aliens and space travel. Or at First. The captain of a starship is supposed to seduce an alien to gain the secret of the "timegate" which powers the ship. The aliens are known as "Those Who Run Faster" because of a feature of their sexual congress: but the name also has a more symbolic meaning, and the story opens up into a more ambiguous narrative.

It's a good story and there are other good stories. David Zindell's 'Caverns' dramatises a deliberately engineered consciousness and resulting loss of humanity. Paul J. McAuley's 'The King of the Hill' describes the revival (recycling?) of the Arthurian struggle against the Invader in a Britain taken over by the U.S. to defend her military bases. In many ways, though, the highlight of the issue is Sue Thomason's 'Finn', a very different and more personal reworking of Celtic legend. It's perhaps unexpectedly bleak (that word again!) in its passionate charting of the progressive solidification of the heroine's estrangement: how alienation becomes fantasy becomes a presence becomes...? Moving, very.

The remaining two stories - Bruce Sterling's 'The Compassionate, The Digital' and Kim Newman's 'Patricia's Profession' are typical "magazine" stories. I started by welcoming INTERZONE's crystallisation as a magazine. But magazines have house styles: the appearance of stories which could only appear in those magazines. IZ has been going for quite long enough to have developed its own niche in the market place, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, and is inevitable in any case. If you were to come across the Sterling or Newman stories on their own, whatever their other merits they would have shrieked "INTERZONE!" at you just as other stories might shriek "ASIMOV'S" or "F&SF!" They're topical - 'The Compassionate, The Digital' is a printout describing the insertion of artificially-intelligent consciousness into the fabric of space-time by a future Islamic Fundamentalist State: 'Patricia's Profession' is set in a near-future wheremurder is the latest party game. Both stories are pleasurable unsettling but lack the imaginative power of 'When the Timegate Failed', the emotion of 'Finn', or the cold compelling appeal to humanity of 'The Man Who Walked on the Moon' or 'Caverns'. 'Patricia's Profession' ends with 'the last thing that had crossed her mind was that this was supposed to be funny.'

Hmmm...

ROD SERLING'S THE TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE
Oct. & Dec. 1985.

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

In these two issues of TWILIGHT ZONE, as always, the fiction is dominated by new or relatively unknown writers trying their hand at horror and fantasy. It is inevitable, then, that much of the material is unpolished, poorly developed and, at times, derivative. AM. Ronning's 'Fade to Black' (Dec.), the story of a man who comes to exist only on the TV screen, eventually disappearing completely from the tangible world, is a good example, being an inferior steal of Robert Bloch's 1969 story 'The Movie People'.

Anette Hard's 'Dwindling' (Dec.) simply rambles aimlessly, while in Donald R. Burleson's 'The Terminator' (Oct.), that thick shadow advancing up the beach devours people - for no reason. Robert Grant's 'Where You Lead, I will Follow' (Oct.) randomly mixes Bradburyian prose ("the laughter sewed us together, stiched us up joyous, wove us so gently with soft golden thread...") with unstructured conversational slang. Randall Silvis, in 'Why The Stranger Dreams' (Dec.), offers a neat premise - a woman tormented whenever she is dreamt of by a particular stranger - but in his zeal, the author forgets this premise when it becomes clear that the stranger is not a stranger.

The more successful TZ stories are generally brief, anecdotal. John Sherman's unassuming 'Compensation' (Oct.) is a bar-room tale of a man who decides his only way of supporting his family is to get himself an industrial injury. It may not be Arthur Miller, but it is short and to the point. Charles L. Grant's 'Give Us A Big Smile' (Dec.) is a welcome antidote to Christmas good cheer, but perhaps a shade too long.

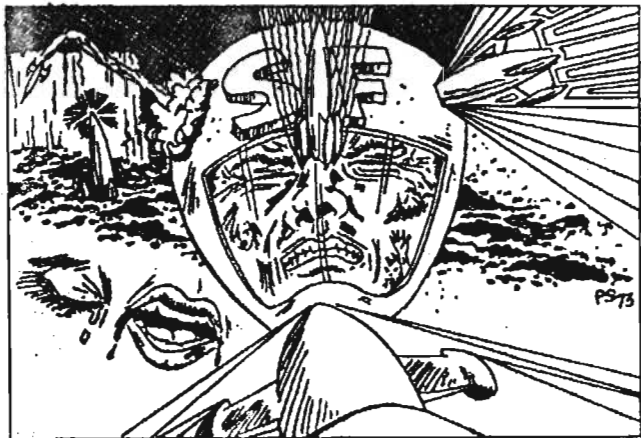
The best offerings in these issues are T.M. Swain's 'He and My Shadow' (Oct.) and Harlan Ellison's 'Paladin Of The Lost Hour' (Dec.). Ellison brings us an old white man, Gaspar, guardian of mankind (cf. 'Demon with A Glass Hand', or even 'Paingod') and keeper of sixty spare minutes, which he passes on to a young black man. It's too long, and surprisingly sweet; and it's the first product of Ellison's involvement in the new TZ tv series. Swain's piece, similarly, is no masterpiece, but his perspective-shifting psychology-of-guilt story shows a competence rare in TZ's pages.

Former editor T.E.D. Klein managed to retain TZ's obvious television connection, whilst encouraging literary interest through the inclusion of reprints of, and factual articles on, the likes of Shirley Jackson and Algernon Blackwood. His successor, Michael Blaine, is apparently steering a different course. With the exception of a Ted Hughes poem, the reprints seem to have been dropped. In their place: science and technology news - which sits most uncomfortably with the present fiction, most of which is contemporary fantasy. The impression given is of an attempt to move 'up market', in the direction of Omni, though Blaine's debut editorial indicates his intention not to turn TZ into a 'robotics information guide'. But then life is full of contradictions.

Closer Encounters

Gene Wolfe - - - - - BOOK OF DAYS
(Arrow, 246pp. £2.25)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)



CHRIS BAILEY

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,
November - December 1985

The pick of the stories in the November issue of *F&SF* is 'You Never Asked My Name', an elegant piece from Brian Aldiss, although I am not sure it counts for the purposes of this column, coming, I think, from the 'Seasons In Flight' volume which has already appeared in the UK. Otherwise, there was not much I liked, even if I found the idea behind Gael Baudino's 'The Persistence of Memory' to be rather charming. It would make a wonderfully twee Disney movie, and Baudino does not spare the sugar coating. 'The High Purpose' by Barry Malzberg and Carter Scholz attracts with the intriguing situation of Chandler and Hammett at the wrong end of a car chase, though the story tries to be too clever for its own good. 'The Black and Tan Man' is another of Cooper McLaughlin's grey and atmospheric tales of Ireland, unfortunately marred by the gratuitous insertion of an episode set in Vietnam.

December's issue is better. Lucius Shepard's 'A Spanish Lesson' is one of those stories that demonstrate fantasy at its best, heterogenous ideas being yoked by violence together (Johnson said that intending disapproval, but he didn't read fantasy); in this case, a group of unloveable American hippies colliding with an awesome vision of the billion - year Reich. The terror is palpable. Joe Hensley's 'Savant' also has a couple of genuinely chilling moments, even if I didn't like the ending. Hensley tries to make his story seem big and significant, whereas essentially it is one of those nasty little stories that lurk in dark corners and creep up on the reader when his defences are down. The issue is fleshed out by three pieces in the whimsical, gently humorous vein - too many, although none of them were awful - from Thomas Wylde, Stan Dryer and G.A. Effinger, and by a curious contribution from Richard Cowper, an aliens-and-Christmas story. Due allowance for the season of goodwill and all that, but I think this is the only Cowper story of the many I have read that is positively poor. Still, lots of fiction in the December issue - Harlan Ellison missed the line again.

For a prolific writer there are themes that are bound to occur and recur, themes such as freedom, servitude, courtship, birth, war and peace. It is also just such basic motifs that have come to be celebrated on the high days and holidays, saints' days and commemorative days of the calendar. It is, then, a neat trick of compilation to cull theme stories, written in this case for magazines and anthologies over the decade of the seventies, and to fit them to relevantly associative special days; though in instances such as the Christmas Eve story ('The War Beneath the Tree') the tale did first appear in the appropriate seasonal number of a magazine (*Omni*). The result for the most part exports well, even if it is not always easy for British readers to catch fully the domestic savour of certain festivals deep-rooted in American tradition; and it is, of course, in the disparity between the 'folksy' ambience of, say, Halloween or Thanksgiving and the atmosphere of alienation, the starkness of technological or sociological no man's land, that the thrust of these stories lies. Nevertheless, there is enough universality in both festivals and stories to make the coupling viable on either side of the Atlantic.

In his Introduction (which Gene Wolfe admits, and complains, that everyone may not read - though they certainly should) he shakes the critic's confidence. "You cannot judge this book now, he says. "Ten (or twenty) years from now you will know it was a good book if you remember any of the tales you are about to read." He also suggests that the best way to tackle it might be to sample through a year, reading each story on its designated day. P.I.'s deadlines don't permit this; so all a reviewer can offer is instant judgement after a straight read-through.

Obsessions, games, dreams, lives, fantasies: all provide frameworks within which Wolfe's worlds exist - and pretty bleak worlds they often are. Getting on for a quarter of this volume is occupied by 'Forlesen', the bleakest of them all, its humour and satire tinged with angst. Certainly, overall, this *BOOK OF DAYS* is not short on macabre and sometimes riotous humour. The Mother's Day story of procreative automobiles ('Car Sinister'); the story for Valentine's Day ('Of Relays and Roses'); and that for Memorial Day ('How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion'); these are funny and disturbing, each going over the top - oriented towards the absurd - in their respective modes of fantasy. A few of the stories are very realistically grounded in particular landscapes or events. 'An Article About Hunting' (linked to Opening Day) for example is folk-redolent of North American farm-land. It has too a pleasant hint of Pickwickian adventure; along with Commissioner Cowly and Mr. Swint one could easily imagine Mr. Winkle in the cast. Utterly realistic, terrible and powerful is 'The Blue Mouse' (Armed Forces Day) - a classic of war psychology set in a future where there is a polarisation of ethos between combatant and technological support personnel.

When Gene Wolfe's imagination lifts the story well clear of the ground, the fantasy heights reached may appeal according to taste. There may be those who will follow him into the eerie and beautiful reaches of 'Many Mansions' (Halloween) but may find 'The Changeling' (Homecoming Day) a shade too whimsical - and, of course, the reverse. There is not space to detail all of the 18 stories, but one that above all contains and mingles successfully elements of fanciful game-playing, humour, realistic location and depth of underlying concern, is that for Thanksgiving, 'Three Million Square Miles' - a masterpiece of ecological over/understatement which though specific to the terrain of North America, could mutatis mutandis have implications valid for the verges, the service-areas and hinterlands of the M5 as for those of any U.S. Interstate. The story is only a fragment, but its purport and its essential imagery could be relevant not only for ten (or twenty) years but for as long as we are in symbiotic relationship with our planet.

Larry Niven - - - - - THE INTEGRAL TREES
(Futura, 240pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

THE INTEGRAL TREES is Larry Niven's first solo novel since the THE RINGWORLD ENGINEERS and THE PATCHWORK GIRL (both 1980), and I started to read it with the very best of intentions - "Give the old boy a break," and all that. I'd read the laudatory review in Locus, part of which is reprinted on the back cover of this edition: "Niven is a master of the odd surrounding and the strange alien... for pure escape science fiction, fast and furious, THE INTEGRAL TREES is practically ideal."

"Practically ideal" is a very well-chosen phrase, from an optimistic point of view. THE INTEGRAL TREES is, in fact, the most contrived SF novel I've read since, well Joe Haldeman's MINDBRIDGE (which was quite good, considering). Yes, I know that all novels are, by their very nature, 'contrived', but any writer worth his salt tries to conceal rather than flaunt his stylistic carpentry.

The crowded 'Contents' page lists, in order of appearance: (a) a Prologue; (b) 22 (short) chapters, one of them (Ch.4) with the sleazily promising title of 'Flashers and Fan Fungus'; (c) the usual (for latter-day Niven) Dramatis Personae and Glossary. After that comes five pages of line drawings (Dalton-Quin Integral Tree, etc.) which are obviously intended as 'guide maps' for disoriented hikers, er, readers.

The story moves along on the 'one step forward, two steps back' principle much loved by authors who are striving to create an 'air of mystery' out of a total vacuum. Every so often, the reader is treated/subjected to large, unrefined chunks of expository material. There is also the above-mentioned Glossary containing those items of information which Niven couldn't (be bothered to?) integrate with the story line, such as: (a) "BRANCH - One at each end of an integral tree, curving to leeward" and (b) HUTS - Any dwelling. In the integral trees, huts are woven from living spine branches." I particularly like the following Directions (a) "OUT - Away from Levoy's Star", and (b) "IN - Towards Levoy's Star."

Admittedly, many readers of hard SF lap up these 'scholarly' appendices, but against that I must cite the examples of TAU ZERO (Poul Anderson) and MISSION OF GRAVITY (Hal Clement) in which the authors managed to put across their complicated scientific scenarios in the text of their novels, with little or no loss of dramatic unity. By the way, Niven defines an "INTEGRAL TREE" as "a crucial plant". More helpfully, they are shaped like mathematical integration symbols and/or seahorses (bending right at the top, left at the bottom) and they hang about in a 'gas torus', i.e. smoke ring.

The story line itself - if 'line' it can be called - is of the 'Earthmen - reduced - to - barbarism - fighting - against - hostile - environment variety, and the blurb for this edition is refreshingly accurate: "For five centuries they had survived, descendants of the mutinous crew of the starship Discipline. The Earth, the State, even the Discipline were legend at best. The Smoke Ring, the Discipline and its cyborg 'adviser' neared the end of its 500-year wait..."

Now as to 'characterisation' - (pause for laughter). The characters in this book are not so much one-dimensional as non - dimensional, being more a collection of funny names (Harp, Clave, Glory, etc.) or prosaic titles (The Scientist, The Grad, The Chairman) saddled with various mental and physical disabilities than authentic human beings (or whatever). It is, I think, no coincidence that the most interesting 'character' in the book has been dead for 500 years.

Niven's list of Dramatis Personae reminds me (unfavourably) of the little 'character sketches' which Don Wollheim used to tack on to his Ace Books, e.g. "CIRCE DAFNER - Her appetite would not be sated until she had swallowed the universe." (from THE CHAOS FIGHTERS by Robert Moore Williams, 1955). However, the main problem with the characters in THE INTEGRAL TREES is their lack of consistent emotional lives, i.e. they have more conditioned reflexes than Pavlov's dogs, but their feelings are totally bound up with the turns of the plot ('despair' here, 'jubilation' there, 'apathy' somewhere else). I've seldom come across such a collection of manic depressives outside a psychiatrist's casebook.

If Niven had devoted as much attention to the plotting and characterization of THE INTEGRAL TREES as he did to its scientific background, he might very well have produced a hard SF classic along the lines of TAU ZERO or (even) RINGWORLD, instead of a listless potboiler. Locus (Aug. 1985) reports that Niven is currently working on a sequel to this novel, entitled THE SMOKE RING in which (claims Himself): "There's going to be a lot of culture shock." I can well believe it...

And a happy new year
to you all!
Andy

REVIEWS

Jefferson P. Swycaffer - - -THE UNIVERSAL PREY
(Avon, 191pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Set against the same background as BECOME THE HUNTED (see L.J. Hurst's review) with a mildly complicated plot involving James Tyler, an assassin sent to kill the mastermind behind a recent nuclear war. His own complexities and the machinations of the people behind him (of whom Athalos Steldan, from the previous novel, appears to be one) lead him into trouble. Romantic interest is provided by a young whore in love with Tyler.

I've nothing to add to the first paragraph of L.J. Hurst's review. "Forgettable" is, I think, the word.

Gregory Benford - - - ACROSS THE SEA OF SUNS
(Futura, 399pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

I finished this book not knowing what had really happened. This must have been partly Gregory Benford's intention - to overpower his reader - and it is, in the end, not a bad intention. Re-reading the book I found the answers to some of the questions left after the first reading, and I expect another reading would be just as fruitful. Peculiar as I found it at first, it grew on me. I haven't read Benford before, so I compared him with Charles Sheffield, another hard-SF author - unfavourably, at first, but, as I say, I now rate the book.

There are two things that make it interesting: firstly, the way the story is told. This has two strands.

On Earth, alien sea monsters have led to the collapse of the world economy, while nations try to communicate with a second group of more friendly aliens also in the sea. Meanwhile in space, an exploratory starship is following a signal (a 1956 radio show beamed back at the Earth) and finding devastated worlds and electrical beings on the way. In my first reading I was unsure of the connection intended between the two or three groups of aliens that the different terrestrials encounter. I'm unsure now.

The writing style of the Earth scenes is straightforward, but the starship scenes are odd - they can be described as observational and restricted: page after page contains only intercom broadcasts or dialogue without captions or a person's thoughts. Charles Sheffield does not write like this, but it works at least part of the time, and it was in these sections that I found what I needed to understand what was going on (I tended to avoid them on first reading).

Secondly, ACROSS THE SEA OF SUNS contains many echoes of other books. This must have been conscious - Wyndham's KRAKEN WAKES for the sea monsters, Skyhook elevators from planets to space described by both Sheffield and Clarke; the signal-chasing mirrors Kubrick and Clarke's 2001 and Ballard's VOICES OF TIME, which is also echoed in the closing pages. Is there any great significance to this? I don't know.

And thirdly, in the characters of the novel there are some nice touches and treatment. The starship sequences follow the personal and professional lives of four or five main characters - these allow all the old jealousies and some new satisfactions. Social and sexual problems of adjustment in a future technology are dealt with in passing, with a pleasant liberalism, and without being voyeuristic.

In some ways ACROSS THE SEA OF SUNS reads like an experiment. I'm not sure what the experiment was meant to prove but it seems to have worked.

Douglas Hill - - - - -EXILES OF COLSEC
(Puffin, 126pp. £1.25)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Douglas Hill is a writer of unpretentious action-adventure SF for children, and EXILES OF COLSEC is typical of his work.

Cord MacKiy is one of a group of young misfits sent by Earth's totalitarian government to colonise the planet Klydor. The ship crashlands and Cord finds himself thrust into the reluctant role of leader among the survivors - but one of them is the Lamprey, a vicious psychopath. There are aliens too, and as Cord argues for the virtues of self-reliance combined with co-operation the aliens play a part in the inevitable showdown.

The message of the book is fairly simple - "If we're going to survive, and have any kind of life here, we have to work together. Because we want to." - and the plotline is routine rebels-against-a-totalitarian-state stuff (there are two more volumes to follow). But within its limits it's a swift pageturning read and Douglas Hill is writing considerably more mature action-adventure SF for children than many who would claim to be writing for adults.

Norman Spinrad - - - - -SONGS FROM THE STARS
(Bantam, 275pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Aquaria's way of life is based upon the righteous white laws of muscle, sun, wind and water, rejecting the black sciences which polluted and destroyed the world. Clear Blue Lou, a Perfect Master of the Way is sent to judge the Sunshine Tribe, who stand accused of using black science. Along with their leader, Sunshine Sue, he finds that all has been stage-managed by the Spacers, who live in the wastes: they wish to launch a spaceship to the Big Ear space station which has been receiving messages from the stars.

Spinrad takes a conventional SF plot and, with wit and intelligence, turns SONGS FROM THE STARS into a poetic and contemplative novel, which presents an optimistic view of how humanity will survive its present perilous state of nuclear escalation and ecological suicide. The Spacers, users of atomic power and fossil fuels, represent the old humanity - us - careless of the long-term effects of their technology. Tellingly, it is their leader, Harker, who is unable to face up to the 'songs from the stars' - Sunshine Sue and

Clear Blue Lou, leaders of the new humanity, freed from the paranoia and lust for dominance of the people who destroyed the Earth, are left to enter fully into the Galactic stage of development. Spinrad is not so naive as to condemn Harker out of hand, however; cowardly and parochial he may be, but he still represents humanity at a necessary stage of development. His values are shared by many today, and are not dismissed lightly - but Spinrad's rationale favours the open and just way of life represented by the Aquarians. The book is refreshingly optimistic and intelligently argued - well worth reading.

Rudy Rucker - - - - - SOFTWARE
(Perquin, 174pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Tom Jones)

Back in 1981 I read Rudy Rucker's WHITE LIGHT. I thought it was a most interesting and original book, a sort of travelogue around the theories of infinity, but I wasn't sure it was really a novel.

SOFTWARE is a more 'normal' SF novel; indeed I found the subject matter and to some extent the style reminiscent of Philip K. Dick (if you're willing to count that as normal) but with a greater emphasis of the effects of technology. Interzone have coined the phrase "radical hard SF": I wonder if this is what they mean?

Cobb Anderson gave the robots on the moon freedom, he gave them evolution, he allowed them to overcome their Asimov circuits. The moon now belongs to the robots (or boppers as they're called: read the book to find out why). Mankind wasn't exactly pleased by this (slavemasters usually aren't keen on the release of their slaves) and Cobb is tried for treason but escapes with his life. This is background information: the story opens years later. Cobb is an old man living in a geriatric area. A robot illegally gets to Earth and offers Cobb immortality, but one has to remember that to a robot the hardware is dispensable and only the software matters.

The story tells us how Cobb becomes immortal; how Sta-Hi Mooney (who really does try to stay high) becomes involved having escaped from the Little Kidders who're keen to eat his brain; how the little boppers and big boppers fall out and fight, and why it might be worth avoiding Mr. Frostie ice cream vans. Confused? Well, you've got a 50/50 chance not to be if you read the book.

There's lots of interesting ideas in this book (not all original), more than the 174 pages can fully explore. This isn't a bad thing. Length has no merit in itself, nor the desire to squeeze every last drop from every idea.

The book has many faults. Lots of the ideas are stock SF, there's a similarity to some Philip K. Dick books, parts of it seem rushed, and I'm not completely happy with the ending. But there are some nice touches. Chapter 5 (4 pages long) where Sta-Hi is the centre of a 'monkey' brain feast is delightfully nasty (not for the kiddies just before bedtime) though I'm sure some of you will find it disgusting.

Yes, I did enjoy the book. It isn't a classic, and it doesn't have the originality of WHITE LIGHT, but it's a better novel than WHITE LIGHT. Rudy Rucker is a good writer and he might just have the makings of a classic or two in him somewhere.

Sondra Marshak / - - STAR TREK:THE NEW VOYAGES
Myrna Culbreath (Bantam, 237pp. \$2.95)
(eds.)

- STAR TREK:THE NEW VOYAGES 2
(Bantam, 252pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

"...a collection of moderately dire ST stories written by fans of the series..." is how the ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION describes the NEW VOYAGES. Certainly the fannish origins of the stories are clear to see, but that is not to say that they are without a certain worthiness.

As the stories are written by fans, continuity with the series is apparent in most of the stories; in some by means of reference to past episodes, in others by actually utilising elements from the series, e.g. The Gateway of Forever and the Klingon Mind-Probe in the first-volume story, 'Mind-Sifter'. This is perhaps to be regarded as desirable, as it not only proves that the authors know their subject, but it also maintains continuity with the series. (It is worth noting that, with the exception of the "soaps", STAR TREK was one of the few American TV series that maintained any kind of continuity; most others seem to consist of episodes which exist in total isolation from each other.)

Certain story ideas are irresistible to fans. Included in these volumes is a story in which Spock is split into his Vulcan and Human constituents, and another in which the ST actors find themselves on board the "Enterprise". Not that they are all like this, of course. There is a considerable amount of originality in many of the entries, and more than a little humour, not all of which is of the Spock-Bones type.

There are a few rotten eggs, but most of the stories are at least enjoyable. These volumes should make a nice, light read after ploughing through the likes of COVENANT or HELLICONIA.

Graham Dunstan MartinTHE SOUL MASTER
(Unwin/Unicorn, 293pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by L.J.Hurst)

THE SOUL MASTER is about illusion and reality but it is about them at different times. It is science fiction and fantasy but it is those at different times. The solution to the story - indeed, the progress of the story - relies on swapping between the two modes. But this is also how people live in the book, as one person but trying to be another.

Lithran, the hero, lives in a distantly post - atomic world, where a series of feudal wars of succession may have just ended. Lithran's village is visited by a new governor, sent by the possible new war-lord. Frightened by the man, the villagers fight back and Lithran kills him. Punishment descends when more police are sent, and Lithran's girlfriend, who confesses to the crime, is executed. He goes off into the woods.

In a roundabout way, under threat of torture, Lithran enters the service of the new king, Kosmion, only to find that Kosmion takes over the minds of his servants and can see through their eyes. Lithran is one of the lucky few who finds that, while he has to obey Kosmion absolutely, even to the way he walks,

(Kosmion is the 'soul master') his mind is still free. He plots and escapes with a princess. He hides in a zone that is invisible and physically non-existent to Kosmion's perception; discovers that others do the same, and leads a revolt that finally overthrows the king. However, he then faces a trial from his own side and ends in banishment with his princess.

Just as Kosmion or Lithran are aware or unaware of the hidden zones, and Lithran's men can slip into them and Kosmion's troops miss them completely - so that marching across, their bootprints stop at one side and start on another - so THE SOUL MASTER slips between SF - where alternate states of mind are possible explanations of some of the phenomena - and Fantasy - the way the states are used has to rely on battles, castles, dungeons etc. But it is done quite well, and I liked the way the book is written, in a straightforward, modern style. It might not be THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN but it is better than average.

Sheri S. Tepper - - - - - THE TRUE GAME
(Corgi, 543pp. £4.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Mentioned recently when I reviewed novels based on role-playing games, THE TRUE GAME is not perhaps The Great RPG novel, but it'll do for starters! On Peter's world, people develop a talent or talents which determines their roles in the 'Game'. On the one hand are the Pawns, who possess no talent; on the other are the Immutables whose very presence cancels out talents. In between are such levels as Demons (Mindreaders), Shifters (Shapechangers), Rulers (possessing Charisma), Healers, Necromancers, and hundreds of combinations of the eleven basic Talents.

Peter becomes involved in a quest to investigate the disappearance of Gamesmen who have begun investigating a new concept - 'Justice', and to discover his own identity as son of Mavin Manyshaped and possessor of the ability to take on the roles of the original eleven Gamelords. Both quests are, naturally, linked and before the book ends we discover the secret of humanity's presence on this world and the true nature and history of the Talents and the Game.

Despite odd occasional failures of nerve (why 'Peter' when all other characters have made-up names?) this is an immensely enjoyable book. Peter's maturing during the course of an imaginative, eventful plot may be standard stuff for this kind of fiction, but it is very well handled, even though the resolution seems to come too quickly. Very good indeed...but nearly five quid? Even for a book originally published in three separate volumes, that seems steep!

Richard S. McEnroe - - - - - SKINNER
(Bantam, 198pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

The beginning of this book, against the author's intentions, had me giggling because the first half dozen pages make a passable Chandler pastiche. As I was reading I could hear Humphrey Bogart in my head, but then the author evidently got bored with his efforts to be artistic and got on with the story. The story follows three separate tracks, that of

Chavez Blackstone who is forced to become a dragonskinner, that of the "Irish Missed", a spaceship and her crew of two, and that of Tovas, a wheeler-dealer employed by the baddy; it shows how they interconnect to free Blackstone, give the goodies their reward and the baddies their comeuppance. I think McEnroe has missed an opportunity to do more than that; he's created a society which needs reform but instead of a large scale work dealing with reform he's contented himself with the slighter adventure of Blackstone's revenge and escape, which may be more true to life but which makes duller reading.

The plot isn't wildly original; there's nothing terribly exciting but it's an adequate workmanlike effort without holes or discrepancies. The background is consistent and the economic forces and human greed which form one of the main plot lines are believable, as are the characters which, although not endowed with any great depth, don't show puppet-like strings either. The writing, once McEnroe drops the Chandler imitation, is businesslike and uncluttered, not getting in the way of the story. This is a passable book to while away a journey, but it isn't one to get too excited about. It's neither particularly good nor particularly bad. It's up to you whether or not you bother to read it, but there are a lot around which are very much more worthwhile.

Philip K. Dick - - - - - THE COSMIC PUPPETS
(Granada, 143pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

Sometimes the marketing of a book is almost as interesting as the contents. What do you say about an obscure Philip Dick novel, written in 1956, making its first UK paperback appearance in 1985, with "Bestselling Author of Blade Runner" on the cover?

Well, I think it could be too easy to do Granada a disservice. They have a fine record of backing Dick through the lean times and so now I don't mind if they milk the Blade Runner connection for every last penny they can. I liked the way they printed a full list of Dick books, and not just the ones they publish, inside this volume. I also liked the novel itself - it deserved republication on its own merits.

Dick is very obliging to the critic. His concerns and ideas show a linear development as one follows the chronology of the novels. The theme of THE COSMIC PUPPETS is Dick's familiar one of reality and illusion and even if there were no other pointers it would be easily recognisable as an early novel by the fact that he comes down on the side of reality. Later on he did not see things so straightforwardly. Neither did he structure his books so simply. The story of a web of illusion laid over a small town, THE COSMIC PUPPETS is, for all its brevity, a satisfying whole. The control shown in the pacing and development of the narrative is impressive, Dick scarcely putting a foot wrong as the tale moves from a pastoral opening to a conflict that reaches cosmic proportions. (I relished the young author's confidence: "The whole universe shuddered.") The novel's ending is gentle and quite magical.

I'm not suggesting that THE COSMIC PUPPETS is a neglected masterpiece, but neither is it for completists only. Most readers should enjoy it.

Josephine Saxton - - - - - THE POWER OF TIME
(Chatto, 222pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

Josephine Saxton is a writer with a reputation for being daring, innovative and generally interesting, prone to non-conformity, experimentation and New Wave excess, given to stream-of-consciousness writing and flights of bravura prose.

That is what I always thought, anyway. I don't know where I got the notion from. You would expect a story from a writer of the above tendencies to comprise dazzling successes and abject failures, and I was therefore surprised to find that the pieces gathered in THE POWER OF TIME, ranging over sixteen years of publication, show a very even tenor of production, dealing out no killer punches and equally avoiding spectacular crashes to the canvas. In those stories which the strict conventionalist might regard as risky there is no overt straining for effect at the conclusion, even while the themes and ideas and the expression of them may shock and delight. These stories often conclude discreetly, the author betting each way and leaving the reader to speculate as to their significance.

So while I found none of the stories brilliant and none crass, I still preferred those of a science fictional bent to those in which Saxton demonstrated her talent for rummaging in the psychiatrist's cupboard. Throw Saxton a science fiction notion and something particular emerges, and her fascination with the mind's working shows in a subtler light. In a story such as the marvellous 'Dormant Soul', for example, an absurd SF situation is viewed through a mind unable to distinguish reality and illusion, yet a blunt no-nonsense attitude convinces the reader that it is the absurd that is real. The main character, as in many of the stories, is an outcast because of her mental state, but is sympathetic for the reader because she is also so ordinary. One abiding memory of this book should be the humour, acute and whimsical, a deadpan Midlands voice cutting into the most bizarre scenario.

THE POWER OF TIME did not amaze or outrage me as my preconceptions had me expecting it might, but there is a very individual voice in the writing - and any writer with a unique voice is worth the reader's time.

Randall Garrett &
Vicki Ann Heydron - - - - - RETURN TO EDDARTA
(GANDALARA No.6)
(Bantam, 149pp. \$2.75)

(Reviewed by Mary Gentle)

Despite being labelled a 'science fiction adventure series', the Gandalara books are in fact fantasy. Dispossessed heirs to city-states (the heroine), telepathic bonds with intelligent giant cats (the hero), talismanic jewels, swords that legitimise rulers - it's all here. The science-fictional justification, such as it is, gets mislaid; there's but a brief mention of the hero and heroine having human personalities technologically imposed on Gandalaran alien bodies, and memories of the race being available through 'Recorders' who have access to something like a computer data-base.

This sixth episode sees Rikardon and Tarani returning from a lost city with the sword of the King, on the way to establishing Tarani as rightful High Lord of another city, the Eddarta of the title. Being sixth in series of seven, it spends a lot of time recapitulating events narrated in previous books. This means that emotional impact is muted, if not wholly absent. RETURN TO EDDARTA sets up one genuine problem, a choice of political priorities for Tarani, and then, in the manner of cliff-hanger serials, leaves the resolution for episode seven.

All of it is fun, of course, which is what one looks for here; but it isn't particularly satisfying fun. People are not this simple, events are not this uncomplicated. Political coups in fantasy need either to be done with some attention paid to the real world, or else with the bravura disregard for plausibility that Robert E.Howard used to manage. The Gandalaran books are subHowardian, with a touch of feminist icing on the cake; but if you remember them at all, it's because they are entirely unmemorable.

Patrick Tilley - - - - - THE AMTRAK WARS 2:
FIRST FAMILY
(Sphere, 344pp. £2.25)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

MISSION was the book of Patrick Tilley's that really turned me on, sucker as I am for well-reasoned approaches to the problem of the Second Coming of Christ (perhaps a minority interest but a valid subject for good SF). His earlier FADE-OUT was competent SF in the Greg Benford mode, but a cursory reading of the blurb for the AMTRAK WARS meant that I never came to try Book 1, CLOUD WARRIOR and would not have sampled the second book had it not been sent me for review.

That really rules my opinion out of court, but I'll give it anyway. It's post-holocaust Earth in 2989, what the author himself admits is a scenario filled with anachronisms and contradictions, and it never for one minute convinced me of its verisimilitude. Deke is a Tracker - a VidCommTech manning a video watchtower against "armed bands of Mutes" (also referred to as "screaming lumpheads") who are "the perpetual enemies of the Foundation." As the Foundation is so self-assured that it teaches its members that "It is only people who fail - not the system," you will realise that we are not on the side of the goodies from the start.

I had some difficulty discovering who the goodies are anyway, and right up to page 338 (of 344) we are still being fed large lumps of essential background, so obviously there's a lot more to come. This means that even this sturdy volume is by no means complete in itself - you have to buy the next bit or give up in midstream. I gave up - it's really not worth your trouble. There are fights, sufferings, tortures, sundry miracles in battle, the heedless and heartless mistreatment of humans of all types, and there is of course the obligatory modern routine whereby such viciousness is carefully described in what speedily becomes an overkill of nastiness, a sort of masturbatory violence.

The text is full of acronyms that have to be explained, and abounds with crude sexual metaphors of the "balls" and "asshole" kind. Who the hell reads this kind of crap anyway?

Sheila Finch - - - - - INFINITY'S WEB
(Bantam, 230pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

Science fiction is still claimed by many to be the literature of ideas; unfortunately the 'ideas' that find their way into the pages of SF are too often tired, dull and clunkingly old-fashioned. INFINITY'S WEB is a welcome attempt at novelty, taking as its springboard the Everett-Wheeler interpretation of quantum mechanics, within which probabilistic events (like the tossing of a coin) instead of having a single outcome - heads or tails - lead to a 'splitting' of the world (into one in which the coin came down heads, one in which it came down tails). Thus 'our' world would not be the only one, but would exist alongside a multiplicity of others in which things had worked out differently.

Finch assumes that information can leak between the worlds, and her novel concerns one woman, Anastasia Valerie Stein, who becomes aware of her 'other lives'. The pivotal character is 'Ann', an unhappy housewife who initially perceives these intrusions as the onset of mental illness, but Finch also explores the worlds of 'Stacey', 'Val' and 'Tasha'. Val's polluted world, on the verge of ecological breakdown, bears more than a passing resemblance to that depicted by Gregory Benford in TIMESCAPE, and indeed there is a whiff of Benford about the whole of this book. TIMESCAPE, however, is an SF novel about science and scientists; at its heart INFINITY'S WEB is a fantasy. It works by magic, for although a group of physicists do try to contact the other Everett worlds their results are unimpressive compared with those obtained by professional clairvoyant Tasha. There is a great deal of talk about consciousness and the role of the observer; an increasing mysticism undermines the novel and eventually (with the introduction of the godlike figure of the Magus) brings it to a soggy end. Nevertheless Finch deserves credit for tackling a difficult subject, and the result, although not wholly successful, is a good deal better than the usual formula tripe.

Martin H. Greenberg/ - - - - THE TWILIGHT ZONE:
Richard Matheson/ THE ORIGINAL STORIES
Charles G. Waugh (Avon, 550pp. \$8.95)
(eds.)

(Reviewed by David V. Barrett)

I can't really see the point of this collection, except to cash in on reruns of the TV series. The book contains all but one of the original stories bought by Ron Serling for the series which ran (the first time around) from 1959 to 1964, but not, it seems, story adaptations of any original screenplays.

There are some excellent stories here, including such classics as Bradbury's 'I Sing the Body Electric' and Bixby's 'It's a Good Life'. The problem is that most of the good ones have been anthologised many times before, and a good number of those unavailable should have stayed that way - they may have been good on the small screen, but on paper are just typical low-grade 1950s pulp stories.

To the hardcore SF purist, only a handful of stories in this volume would be considered SF. But in fact it is the weird, the eerie, the strange tales here which carry the most

power. A number deal with pacts with the devil, or with unusual aspects of death - and here lies another problem. Over a five year period it's fine to have several programmes with broadly similar stories; in one volume, it isn't.

The Introduction, by Richard Matheson (who wrote eight of the stories in this collection; another eight are by Charles Beaumont), is actually apologetic about the TV series. "The production values (are) well below the standard of what we now see customarily on television." We know that: they are a product of their time, and the average viewer surely appreciates this. But the Introduction is so self-congratulatory it's not really worth bothering with anyway.

Maybe I've been too negative. Anyone who has enjoyed THE TWILIGHT ZONE will enjoy a fair number of the thirty stories in the book. But I certainly wouldn't pay the Sterling equivalent of all but nine dollars for it.

David Langford - - - - THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT
(Sphere, 197pp. £2.25)

Dave Langford - -THE TRANSATLANTIC HEARING AID
(74pp. available from the
author at 94 London Road,
Reading, Berks. England
RG1 5AU, £2.25 inc. postage
"To those who accost me
personally".

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

A most cunning fellow is this Langford. Realising that the late October publication date of the paperback edition of THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT will preclude review in BSFA mags until December at the earliest, he swiftly leaps in with a plug for the book in the October VECTOR, with the result that this review is superfluous because you've all read and enjoyed the book anyway.

In case you only joined the BSFA last week, THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT concerns the trials and tribulations of one Roy Tappen, a scientist at the Nuclear-Utilization Technology Centre at Robinson Heath, who discovers that sneaking the plutonium core of a nuclear warhead out of the centre is easy enough: the problems arise when he tries to sneak it back in. It's either a gloriously absurd farce or a sober record of The Great British System at work disguised as a gloriously absurd farce: whichever way round it's "the kind of book you can give to spouses/partners who can't stand SF". (Mary Sawyer, who can't stand SF).

The same grasp of detail and absurdity in the observation of hapless humanity caught up in circumstances beyond its control appears where David Langford the Novelist reincarnates as Dave Langford the Fan in THE TRANSATLANTIC HEARING AID, a collected edition of the various episodes of Dave's TAFF reports. (Dave was European delegate to the 1980 Worldcon in Boston, Mass.: profits from this booklet will go to TAFF (Transatlantic Fan Fun) to support the transportation of another masochist).

So it's technically a fanzine? Well, it's still also a paperback (I'm assured) and if I can review 17th-century pamphlets then there's room for a writer who's funnier than Thomas Campanella and more fannish than William Morris. Listen to this:

As the queue oozed forward I began to develop paranoid worries about what would happen to us... "Hey, do you think Stu Shiffman will meet us? Will we even recognise him? Does he look like those pictures he draws of himself? Is he not rather a hunchbacked Mexican dwarf with only one leg? " At this point Harry and Jim pointed out a chap two places down the queue from us, who by some chance happened to be a hunchbacked dwarf. Bloody hell. I hid behind a suitcase.

Eat your heart out, Roy Tappen.

Why not buy both these books? Not only could you develop good material for your thesis on Fannish in-jokes in the fiction of D. Langford but you could also see just how funny a writer Langford actually is. I don't think you can actually give THE TRANSLANTIC HEARING AID to someone who can't stand SF...but THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT is rapidly going round my particular extended family to great appreciation!

Warren Norwood - - POLAR FLEET (Bantam, 234pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

First of all, a brief word from our sponsor: 'Under the Bantam Spectra Books imprint you'll find the best of all possible worlds: from serious, speculative novels to the most light-hearted tales of enchantment; from hard-science thrillers and far-future epics to the most visionary realms of magic realism.'

POLAR FLEET must belong to the "far-future" category, being vol. 2 of "The Double Spiral War" series: 'an explosive epic of... humanity's descendants who set out across the dark ocean of space to find new worlds to conquer. There, centuries later, two mighty powers - the United Central Systems and the Sondak Confederacy - clash in a titanic struggle to control the stars...'

Sizzling Saturn! Welcome back, Thrilling Wonder Stories. Seriously, though, POLAR FLEET is the sequel to MIDWAY BETWEEN and if you liked that one - you'll probably like this one as well. New readers should be able to find their way into it easily enough. ... Norwood's epic is neither a good book nor a bad book. It just is - take it or leave it.

Katharine Kurtz - - HIGH DERYNI (Century, 369 pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

The contents page of the third volume of THE CHRONICLES OF DERYNI lists its chapters by their substantial epigraphs: one is incestuous, one from Cicero, and 2nd from the O.T. A bonus spin-off is this reminder of the splendid imagery of Isaiah, Psalms and Lamentations. Readers encyclopaedically addicted will delight in over twenty pages of appendices, which extend even to setting out, fruit-fly style, the genetic complexities of the Deryni. Far-away fantasy fans will enjoy its fast-moving action, well-structured plot and descriptive excellence. The naming of kingdoms, creeds and per-

sons in the depths of alternative dark ages usually operates by eclectic licence. Katharine Kurtz is on the whole consistently Celtic but with a good sprinkling of Saxon-sounding barons and saints, Norman-sounding bishops, and characters with such Kipling-esque yeoman names as Dawkin, Dickon and Dobbs though, disconcertingly, these are prone to a kind of Rabbie Burns Scots vernacular.

In narrative the sword parts are brisk, soldierly and gory; the sorcery parts imaginative, evocative and persuasive. The book's most impressive bit of occult engineering goes into the creation of the time-skipping Transfer Portal; and the climactic four-way "duel arcane" is as effectively devised as anything to be found in aeons of the heroic-magic genre.

Jack London - - THE IRON HEEL (Journeyman Press, 224pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

"THE IRON HEEL is no ordinary novel. The power and drive of the vast events it describes, the excitement of revolt and resistance, and the brilliance of its political visions have made it a classic, an inspiration to socialists the world over." Thus the sparse back cover blurb, and one that I don't think is wholly true. THE IRON HEEL does indeed describe vast events, and it's certainly the case that it and others of London's works have been an inspiration to socialists the world over (particularly socialist realists, and London would probably throw a fit if he knew the uses to which they've put his fiction); but the modern reader might balk at the idea that it's a classic, that it's exciting, and that its political vision is brilliant.

Especially its political vision, which is straightforwardly Marxist, straight out of the historical schema elaborated in DAS KAPITAL, and delivered straight to the reader in a series of lectures by the novel's chief "revolutionist", Ernest Everhard, whose truncated biography THE IRON HEEL purports to be. Given that it was written in 1907, this is probably excusable; but the developments in Marxist thought and practice that have taken place since then nevertheless renders London's presentation of the inevitability of proletarian revolution - and of the inevitable ruthlessness of the oligarchic capitalism that is rebelled against - rather dogmatic, perhaps even rather simple. (Although it's fun to try finding the odd few parallels with the present. Can the break-away UDM, for example, and its apparent friends the AEUW and the BEPTU be considered akin to London's labour castes, specialised unions which management has lifted above the others for the purpose of securing uninterrupted production?)

It can't be denied, though, that the scenes of revolt and resistance are exciting and do have a great deal of power and drive (and are sometimes very violent). Here London is clearly drawing on the same experience that informed his preceding fiction, with the cavalry and machine guns of the Iron Heel's troops substituting for the arctic cold and the blizzards of the Yukon gold rush - with, perhaps, an admixture of others' eyewitness accounts of the suppression of the 1905 Russian Revolt. But these are by no

means the whole of the work... and, because all the lectures establishing the fictional America of 1912 and lambasting its billionaire plutocrats come in the first half, the less dedicated reader may unfortunately never reach the scenes of revolt at all.

Not that I wish to suggest that the novel is unreadable in this day and age, or even without interest; on the contrary, although I think that it is now perhaps best regarded as a social commentary on its times than a work of pure fiction - especially given its wealth of footnotes on the comparative positions of rich and poor in turn-of-the-century America; a conscious attempt, no doubt, to emulate Engels' classic *THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN ENGLAND*. And, too, a commentary on some enduring aspects of the enduring struggle between labour and capital: the latter is certainly no longer as rapacious as London paints it, nor the former as brutalised and peevilaged, but the imbalance between their relative power and wealth still remains. Once you've read it, however, you'd probably do better to turn to any current issue of *NEW SOCIALIST* or *MARXISM* today for a more thoroughgoing, and certainly a more sophisticated, analysis of the problems that currently confront us in trying to construct a fairer and more equal society.

Samuel R. Delany - - *STARS IN MY POCKET LIKE GRAINS OF SAND* (Bantam, 375pp. \$3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Delany's books don't lend themselves to brief reviews. I will try and give a brief review, and will feel that I've missed much, but as part of this book is the sense of expansion implicit in information, the impossibility of pinning down concepts to fixed meanings, by definition I'm going to give a limited sense of the experience of reading and enjoying the works of Delany.

(If you want an excellent extended look at Delany try Judith Hanna's article in PI 48: let me underline the tentative nature of my own response to him, however. Sometimes I find him: exhilarating, sometimes pretentious. Where do you draw the line?)

STARS IN MY POCKET... is a return to the world of SF, rather than the fantasy-world of his *Neveryon* series. It is set against a vast backdrop of planets and races. We see it at first through Korga, a petty criminal who becomes a 'rat' in whom the power of independent decision is removed. His planet is destroyed. The voice of Marq Dyeth takes over the larger part of the novel, and through Marq we understand more of the alien basic assumptions on which the novel is based. 'Woman', for example, rather than 'man' is the assumed word for 'person': work-patterns are indicated by 'job₁; job₂' etc. People do not have professions as such but primary, secondary tasks. We meet the multitongued evelmi, living in close (sexual?) relationship with humans.

So far, this is surface structure, reflecting what the novel explores more deeply; the arbitrary nature of signs. We balance between deprivation of, followed by unlimited information, the fact that words, symbols, metaphors, do not have meanings other than culturally-defined ones: a raised hand, the dawn breaking, mean different, unconnected things. Take, even, Korga, the sole survivor of a planetary

catastrophe. Or is he? Do you count people on the way to or from the world? What is his 'sign' as symbol of a world destroyed? - "A whole world: that's frightening, Marq. And Rat Korga is the living sign of that fear, as well as the sign for the possibility of surviving it."

There's also, of course, the story you expect, of Korga as focal point of a struggle between two factions. *STARS IN MY POCKET* is a science-fiction novel with firmly constructed and finely detailed exotica: enough to spawn dozens of lesser novels with a greater degree of slam-bang action. It's SF as too many don't write it, challenging and ambitious. Take, for example the chapter 'A Dragon Hunt'... think, from your knowledge of SF, what that title means. Try to imagine it, as you would expect it from the pens of any other SF writers...

THEN read the chapter. And then think about the difference Delany brings to it.

I'm not uncritical of Delany. But his failures are, I think, usually failures of the ability to carry intellectual contact over to emotional power, and these failures are rarer than you'd think. Real SF ought to bring these two fields together; too often it avoids the risk of failure by avoiding the chance of success. *STARS IN MY POCKET* (which, by the way, is the first novel of a diptych) is real SF.

Harry Harrison - - *WEST OF EDEN* (Bantam, 508 pp, \$3.95; also available from Granada, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

Consider a world in which the dinosaurs never died out, but evolved further to gain intelligence. Consider also the possibility that, despite the presence of the great lizards, homo sapiens still somehow evolved. This is the world west of Eden, in which the Yilane - the intelligent saurians - and the Tanu - mankind - are destined to clash.

Central to this conflict is Kerrick. Captured at the age of eight by the matriarchal Yilane, he is brought up by them in their city of Alneasak, under the guardianship of Vainte, leader of the city. Several years later, when Kerrick finally escapes the city and Vainte's domination, his knowledge of the Yilane is to prove invaluable in opposing the Yilane's plan to exterminate the Tanu.

Harrison sought expert advice in creating the race of the Yilane, and the result is a well-presented and believable culture, similar, perhaps, to our own in some ways, vastly different in others. Technology, for example, has taken a different route to our own. The Yilane rely on genetic engineering achieved by means of enzyme-producing bacteria to create organic machines for a number of purposes: transport, weapons, even as optical instruments. Pizarré? Yes, but given the millions of years of Yilane civilization, not absurd. Consider the achievements of nature, and then imagine what might be achieved with such "controlled evolution".

My one quibble with the book is this: wasn't it the extinction of the dinosaurs that allowed men to evolve in the first place? Still, I am sure that we can accept that conditions West of Eden were such that both races could evolve simultaneously. (Well, there'd be no story otherwise!)

WEST OF EDEN is an excellent novel which can only enhance its author's already high reputation.

Isaac Asimov - - THE UNION CLUB MYSTERIES
(Panther, 234pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Kev McVeigh

To be quite honest, if it had not been for that name I would not have bought this book. I alone attempted a review for PI - though do not interpret this as saying I only read SF, please.

There are 30 short stories, each about two or three thousand words in length, and each of which contains a puzzle set by Griswold to his three companions in the Union Club. Each puzzle ostensibly occurred to Griswold or a former acquaintance of his, though his companions often doubt this. The puzzle themselves range through obscure but commonly available facts to word plays and number puzzles. Some, such as "Hot or Cold" I guessed immediately (there is a convenient pause in the text before Griswold reveals the answer) whilst others had me stumped. The first tale, "No Refuge Could Save" will probably be beyond all non-Americans and any Americans who spot the reasoning are guilty themselves, at least by Griswold's logic.

This is a very entertaining book, though definitely not one to be read straight through all at once. The stories must be taken in small doses like most good short pieces. Most are very good, a couple contain atrocious puns, and a couple are poor. In general, this is well worth your money if you like these kinds of puzzles. But it most definitely is NOT SF.

David Gerrold - - STARHUNT (Hamlyn, 252 pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

The first thing you've got to know about STARHUNT (alias YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN, Dell, 1972) is that it's a space opera, and the second thing you've got to know is that it's a very good space opera.

Most - no, all - of the action takes place aboard the not-so-good starship Roger Burlingame, an antiquated destroyer that should have been mothballed long ago but which has been kept in service to help fight a "forever" war on behalf of a clapped-out future Earth. Captain Brandt, a sort of composite Bligh-Queeg-Ahab, thinks it would be suicidal to press home an attack on their fleeing quarry (a fantastically elusive alien vessel), while his First Officer, Jonathan Korie, is determined to wipe out the enemy "at all costs". The crew couldn't care less either way.

STARHUNT is something of a "novelised" Star Trek script ("United Systems Starship" indeed!), which is hardly surprising since Gerrold had recently written THE TROUBLE WITH TREKKIES (or whatever) and he may have been trying to "write his way out of" the past. The novel is written in a jerky "present tense" style (except for Chapters 8, 13 and 25 which have been put together in "memo" fashion) that should have been irritating, but somehow isn't - probably because Gerrold has managed to strike an effective

balance between "form" and "content". I could, however, have done without the "cute" chapter headings, one of which - 'Thirty-four hours. A lot can happen in thirty-four hours...' is used four times (and in three consecutive chapters!)

The "Venture" line of SF "action-adventure novels would do well to bring out more "yesterday's children" like STARHUNT. I would recommend another of Gerrold's better efforts, SPACE SKINNER (Ballantine, 1972).

Joy Chant - - THE HIGH KINGS (Bantam, 245pp, £3.50)

R.A. MacAvoy - - THE BOOK OF KELLS (Bantam, 340pp, £3.50)

Kenneth C. Flint - - MASTER OF THE SIDHE
(Bantam, 246pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

'Is it me, or is every second book published in the US to to with Celtic legend?' asked Andy when he sent me these three to review. Well, there does seem to be a lot of it about these days, and these three books are an interestingly representative group of typical Celtic fantasies, illustrating three of the commonest approaches to reworking the (rich and splendid) original material for marketing as a "popular" (rather than "scholarly") book for a contemporary audience.

First, Joy Chant's contribution to the Matter of Britain. The large-format, lavishly illustrated edition was (deservedly) well reviewed by Judith Hanna in an earlier PI. Chant's text, a series of stories that might have been told to King Arthur (from Geoffrey of Monmouth, etc.), interspersed with factual précis of Dark Age Celtic life, stands well without the illustrations. Chant treats her material seriously, trying to retain something of the flavour of the originals without resorting to the Anglo-Welsh equivalent of Kiltartanese. She succeeds admirably, and the result is a highly readable set of stories. Recommended.

Next, MacAvoy's time-travel story, in which an expatriate Newfie artist visits nineteenth century Ireland with his rather down-increasing Irish academic lover. There they have Adventures of pretty much the usual historical-novel style. The historical factual background is well-researched and convincing, the characters plausible, the intrusion of a Gravesian Goddess (Bride the Brewer) powerful but out of context. The book reads too much like a modern Irish-American Pagan's idea of what Ireland should have been like. I suspect MacAvoy of writing too much, too quickly. This book shows signs of having been groomed for the bestseller genre, rather than Historical or Fantasy. It's well-written, entertaining, but it doesn't say enough. Okay for train journeys.

The less said about Flint's miscegenation the better. It is an attempt to "explain" Irish mythology in terms of an Evil Advanced Scientific Civilization (Fomorians) and a Noble Heroic Band of Fighters with Psychic Powers (Tuatha de Danaan). A myth is a story about a symbol. A symbol should be understood as the expression of an intuitive perception which can as yet neither be apprehended better nor expressed differently' (Jung). To rationalise a symbol, or a myth, is to trivialise it, and this book is a trivialisation of its material. Avoid.

Parke Godwin - - THE LAST RAINBOW (Bantam, 358pp, \$7.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Perhaps because - as I've commented elsewhere - there are so many of this kind of book about, a synopsis of THE LAST RAINBOW seems awfully lacklustre. The after-the-Romans-have-departed ennui of Celtic Britain, the spiritual travails of a Saint discovering sex, a dwindling race already feared as supernatural, "faerie" beings... haven't we read such things before?

Well perhaps these elements have been overused and smothered in too much gushy romanticism. I was certainly prepared to be cynical about THE LAST RAINBOW, but to my slight surprise I was gripped and involved. The historical St. Patrick - here, a young zealot burning with ambition to bring the Word to pagan tribes - is adopted by a clan of the Prydn, the faerie folk of the hills who were the first race in these islands and who have been promised Tir-nan-Og, the Land of Youth, by their deities. Patrick brings to the Prydn a knowledge of Christ interpreted through their own nature-worship, and removes their fear of iron. But his passionate love for Dorelei, "queen" of the clan is underscored by the shocking betrayal of the Frydn by Patrick's Romano-British allies. By the end of the book the stage is set for the Matter of Britain.

There are books which use Celtic legend parasitically, as a cheap way of pretending to be "mythic". There are books in which the stuff of legend at the core is a burning centre which illuminates the rest. It's not necessarily a question of authenticity to fact or legend - although I assume that the chronology is accurate (the connection between St. Patrick and the pre-Arthurian Romano-British seems plausible) and the dramatised reconstruction of post-Roman Britain is as accurate as anything I've read - because parts of the book could only be written by a 20th-century American. But that is no demerit to Parke Godwin's depiction of love and betrayal, 'theological' and 'natural' religion, and the clash between different world-views and ideologies which is as applicable to his country as to ours. In fact, the ending - no, I'll leave you to find out for yourselves. You'll enjoy it, I think.

Ramsey Campbell - - THE NAMELESS (Granada, 272pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Literary agent Barbara Waugh's daughter was abducted and murdered nine years ago. So why is Barbara receiving telephone calls from her?

Barbara's investigation brings her into a world of gruesome horror following a cult of 'people with no names who were into things even Manson wouldn't touch.' It's bloody and brutal, but as always with Ramsey Campbell it's more than a run-of-the-mill tale of gore and nastiness; more, even, than a particularly literate specimen of such. Not only is Campbell a master of raising tension, he is particularly good at creating firmly-realised pictures of social derelicts. The shadowy

Mansonoid cult who have abandoned all traces of humanity including their names, and the even more shadowy Force behind them are probably less realistically frightening than the pathetically neurotic Margery Turner who, like Barbara, is searching for a missing daughter. Horror here lies less in blood and sadism than in the spiritual malformation of an ordinary person: the horror of everyday reality.

It's this which overcomes a slightly, and surprisingly, weak ending, with what seems to be an unforeshadowed intervention. THE NAMELESS (first issued in 1981) is not quite Ramsey Campbell at his best, but is still a good buy.

Harry Harrison - - SKYFALL (Granada, 270pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Tom Jones)

Harry Harrison is one of our best craftsmen. I don't think I've ever disliked any of his books. Particular favourites are BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO (not only a fine satire but a very funny book) and DEATHWORLD (a classic adventure story). SKYFALL isn't a classic, but it is a good read, a page turner.

The book is actually a hi-tech thriller rather than pure SF. It has the characteristics of this type of fiction - today's technology with just a touch of tomorrow's, political intrigue, many changes of scene and viewpoint and an apparently unrelated subplot.

This is a story of US-Soviet co-operation over a plan to put a huge solar energy generator into orbit to provide these two countries and eventually the whole Earth with cheap energy: The Prometheus project. Politics result in a launch earlier than the technologists would prefer and then things start to go wrong. Can the astronauts be saved? Can the world be saved from this massive spacecraft crashing back to Earth? Read the book to find out.

The subplot deals with Cottenham New Town, England, and whilst it doesn't seem to tie in any SF fan will realise something is going to happen to Cottenham, something nasty. What actually happens is signalled well in advance.

The number of things which go wrong with Prometheus are legion. The crew must have spent all their training period walking under ladders. I would worry about the unreality of this if I hadn't read how many things went wrong with Apollo 13 and at least one of the shuttles. Even so you get the feeling it's been laid on a bit thick.

We are presented with stock characters, whether they be Presidents, NASA controllers, astronauts or Cottenham industrialists. They have characteristics to suit the part but not characters. This is another trait of the hi-tech novel; perhaps it's because whilst page-count is relatively high there are so many changes of scene and so many characters that none of them get many pages. But this is nitpicking. Harry Harrison has written a straight-forward adventure story and it succeeds. It certainly kept me turning the pages.

CONTACT



((The fact that I had to drop the letter-column last issue means that much of this one is taken by a debate stemming from Joy Hibbert's review of the first batch of Women's Press SF books in PI 55. I don't think, though, that the passage of time necessarily destroys the relevance of the stances taken. First, PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN:))

Regarding Joy Hibbert's fear that THE FEMALE MAN will 'confuse the average feminist'. I would have thought Joy had a higher opinion of feminists, presumably including herself, than that. In fact, THE FEMALE MAN got rave reviews from the US feminist press when it first appeared, including one in middle-class Ms. magazine; perhaps the "average feminist" is less threatened by complex, sophisticated work than Joy imagines. (And less limited by prejudice about "genre" labels: Jane Austen and the Brontes were stigmatized as "genre" writers themselves for decades, and it doesn't take a whole lot of effort to realize that, if that dismissal was invalid, others might be as well. Isomorphically, the best mundane write-up of a Worldcon I ever saw, or Noreascon II, appeared in Boston's Gay Community News. Oppression has recurrent forms, and outcasts tend to recognize one another.)

Similarly, I boggle at Joy's worry about whether Russ's 'Everyday Depressions', in EXTRA(ORDINARY) PEOPLE is 'really SF' and thus properly 'part of the Women's Press's such-vaunted SF range'. Since the overwhelming bulk of EXTRA(ORDINARY) PEOPLE is as SF-as you could ask for, crammed to the hilt with reassuring quantities of alternate worlds, high technologies, telepathy, and similar exotica, I confess I can't quite imagine what Joy thinks the Women's Press should have done: cut the story? (Unlikely Russ would have agreed.) Rejected the book on the basis of that story alone? (Good grief.) Withal, in her plodding, category-round way, Joy has missed the point of 'Everyday Depressions' entirely: a series of letters from a woman playing with the idea of writing a lesbian Regency romance, it's devastatingly pertinent to the whole business of literature in genre forms. 'It's all science fiction,' reads the Carol Emshwiller epigraph to the story. I'm sorry the point escaped Joy and her easily-confused friends. I suspect most readers of EXTRA(ORDINARY) PEOPLE had less trouble.

Ultimately, Joy's main problem seems to be that she wants the Women's Press series to effectively proselytize SF to feminists, while at the same time she doesn't seem to think much of the intelligence of either. This sort of condescending attitude is corrosive to any effort at intelligent reading and reviewing: if you look at any book, much less THE FEMALE MAN, through the eyes of your thickest acquaintance, the image you get is likely to be unclear. The fact is that really good literature - among which I count Joanna Russ's work - is uplifting, by which I don't mean something twee and Victorian but something quite real. Really good literature makes readers smarter: drags people up to its level instead of talking down. But for this reason really good literature rarely sits well with people whose primary interest is in propaganda, whether political or aesthetic: its integrity is too complex, they can't grasp it and pin it into their preconceived categories, stereotypes of "average" feminists and "average" SF fans. Ultimately, I think Joanna Russ confuses Joy Hibbert, and it'll behoove Joy to be so condescending about Russ and Russ's readership both.

((To which Joy replies:))

Patrick, in his criticism that I 'want the WP to effectively proselytize SF to feminists' misses the point that the stated intention of WP is precisely that (and also to proselytize feminism to SF fans), and that I was reviewing the books in the context of how well they achieve this. I suspect Patrick is failing to realize that things might not be exactly the same over here as in his country. No doubt TFM got rave reviews in the USA - but none of the WP SF series have got so much as a mention in the feminist press over here as far as I am aware. Surely the simple fact that WP thought there was a need for a feminist SF line - so much of a need that they took the financial risk of running the SF line as their first mass-market paperback (as opposed to trade paperback) publications - suggests that my interpretation of the way things are over here is closer to the truth than Patrick's wishful thinking?

Obviously, many genre labels are invalid. But people have a limited amount of time and emotional energy, and it is my experience that feminists who have wasted time and upset themselves reading the average, sexist, SF novel will hesitate to waste any more time on a novel recommended by someone who reads such stuff all the time (as they perceive it). There is a limit to how much trash or offensive material anyone will wade through looking for the mythical gem, and most of the feminists I got to know outside fandom had reached that point long before they met me. No doubt Patrick will prefer to see these women as "thick", but I can quite understand their viewpoint, and feel happy that the WP is printing SF that I know they will not find offensive, and which may encourage them to search further for non-sexist SF, and to learn to disregard the garish covers of most feminist SF.

I'm afraid I was unaware that I had to review collections of short stories as monolithic - that I'm not allowed to select certain stories for different remarks. And since

I am reviewing WP for an SF audience, it is surely obvious that I should mention whether or not the stories could be seen as SF, irrespective of their qualities as literature.

Perhaps Patrick should have actually read my review, in which I said something to the effect that TFM repays the effort put into reading and understanding it, before his snide final paragraph? All good literature is harder to read than trash, in my experience, simply because the reader has to put more into it. And since different people will have different angles on the same book, it is easy for the likes of Patrick to continue to believe I'm too stupid to understand Russ, instead of merely accepting that my opinions may be different.

((On a different subject, here's BRIAN ALDISS))

Re the conclusion of Edward James's review of Mary Shelley's THE LAST MAN. He says, "The novel is not going to appeal to many readers today." I disagree. Skip the first third, which is admittedly prolix. Jump to where Lord Raymond liberates Constantinople. The great gates open: a mushroom cloud arises. Plague is loose on the world. From then on, the novel catalogues the decline and fall of homo sap. in a marvellous muscular way. Come on, it's a wonderful vision, and this first ever British reprint is an event. It will appeal to every SF reader!

((And from the President of the Mary Shelley Memorial Society to that of the Brian W. Aldiss Appreciation Society! PAULINE VALENTINE (25 Margaret Avenue, Long Eaton, Derbyshire) writes with details about the society.))

Fee is £5 p.a., cheques made payable to the B.A.A.S. Members will receive newsletters, signed photos, answers to questions they have always wanted to ask about Brian and his work, and on membership, a special gem, a limited edition of one of Brian's stories only available to the club members. This is being discussed with Brian at the moment.

(WAHF Phil Nichols, who noticed my quotation from Thomas Dekker and took issue with my review of IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET... "COMET assumes that we already share his vantage point, and the plot is buried under his (very worthy) commentary. Particularly in the first section of the book, very little happens!" and Nic Howard, who "was most pleased to read of the Journeyman Press and Jack London... it's time more London became available." Apologies if I've missed out anyone.))

((What do editors of PAPERBACK INFERNO do when they relinquish the post? A clue might be given in the list of winners in the Guardian's People column competition in which readers were invited to nominate 1985's various kinds of wallies. Foot-in-mouth artist of the year was LORD GOWRIE who resigned as Minister of the Arts because his £33,000 salary was not enough to live on in central London. The poverty-stricken peer was nominated by Joseph Nicholas of Pimlico, who received a book token...))

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

Thomas F. Monteleone - MICROWORLDS (Hamlyn//
E.C. Tubb - NECTAR OF HEAVEN (Arrow)// Jane Gaskell - SOME SUMMER LANDS (Orbit)// Kim Stanley Robinson - ICEHENCE (Orbit)// S.P. Somtow - VAMPIRE JUNCTION// Robert Holmes - DR. WHO: THE TWO DOCTORS// Clifford Simak - ALL FLESH IS GRASS (Methuen)// Clifford Simak - TIME AND AGAIN (Methuen)// Piers Anthony - POLITICIAN (Methuen)// Sterling Lanier - MENACE UNDER MARSWOOD (Methuen)// Robert Jordan - CONAN THE TRIUMPHANT (Sphere)// John Christopher - THE DEATH OF GRASS (Sphere)// Christopher Priest - THE GLAMOUR (Abacus)// C.H.Cherryh - FORTY THOUSAND IN GEHENNA (Methuen)// Roger Zelazny - UNICORN VARIATIONS (Sphere)// Piers Anthony - EXECUTIVE (Avon)// Freda Warrington - A BLACKBIRD IN SILVER (N.E.L.)// Jefferson P. Swycaffer - THE PRAESIDIUM OF ARCHIVE (Avon)// Robert E. Vardeman - THE WHITE FIRE (Avon)// Sydney J. van Scyoc - STARSILK (Penguin)// Robert Holdstock - MYTHAGO WOOD (Grafton)// Jules Verne - JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH (Puffin)// Steve Jackson & Ian Livingstone - DEMONS OF THE DEEP (Puffin)// Nicholas Fisk - YOU REMEMBER ME (Puffin)