

PAPERBACK INFERNO

59

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PLUS reviews of recent paperbacks by Chris Bailey, K.V. Bailey, Mark Greener, Edward James, Tom A. Jones, Ken Lake, Kev McVeigh, Phil Nicholls, Christopher Ogden, Andy Sawyer, Martyn Taylor, Steven Tew and Mark Valentine.

Paperback Purgatory...

The BSFA depends on the hard and often unsung work of many people. Perhaps because of my own problems with time during the aftermath of moving house, I've been more conscious than usual of the demands I'm making upon David Willis and his wordprocessor, John and Eve Harvey and their duplicator, and Keith Freeman and his mailing system. Thank you. And everyone else.

Not everything I'd planned for this issue will appear in the form I'd wanted it to. Little Neston doesn't appear to have the friendly neighbourhood photocopying services I could rely on in Birkenhead, so I've not been able to get everything reduced to quite the size I needed. At times, when laying out these pages, the old adage of the quart and the pint pot comes into mind.

However, if all goes well, you should receive an issue containing some interesting reading matter. Any deficiencies will, I hope, be made up for in the next issue.

Change of address:

Please note that the editorial address of PAPERBACK INFERNO is now:-

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All books for review, publicity material, correspondence, etc. should be sent to the above address.

"Upon the rack in print..."

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE Mid-December 1985 to February 1986 and ANALOG, January to March 1986.

(Reviewed by Edward James)

The mid-December ASIMOV'S contained an earnestly relevant story, 'All This and Heaven Too', from James Tiptree jr. at her most twee, concerning a princess from Ecologia-Bella and a prince from Pluvio-Acida. Dear, oh dear. Some of the satire, particularly the tongue-in-cheek ecological utopia, was actually rather well done, but it was overlong and overdone. Much more worth reading were 'Lord Kelvin's Machine', by James F. Blaylock, a Buchanesque pastiche about skullduggery in exotic Yorkshire and elsewhere, set at the time of the last Comet Halley flyby, and a neat story by Susan Palwick, 'Ways to Get Home', about a disturbed child whose imitative ways lead him to recreation of Lewis Carroll characters. The lead story was 'Storming the Cosmos' by Rudy Rucker and Bruce Sterling. They are two leading members of The Movement, or 'The Neuromantics' (also called 'Cyberpunk') a self-proclaimed and self-publicising group of American sf writers who aim to bring 'the real issues' back into sf. You'd never have guessed it from this story, in which some most unconvincing Soviets go to Tunguska to find, guess what? - an alien star-ship drive. Yawn. The Tunguska explosion was done so much better in Ian Watson's novel. And as if to point out the difference, the same ASIMOV'S has a short and electrifying story from Ian Watson himself, 'The Wire Around the War', in which a new and unexpected Messiah comes to the aid of the peace protestors gathered outside a nuclear base. Written after a visit to Molesworth at the time of Yorcon III, I believe. Plenty of real issues here - Rucker and Sterling pay heed - and some convincing writing too.

ASIMOV'S in January reached its hundredth issue, and did it in the first issue edited by Gardner Dozois. And to celebrate, the first ASIMOV'S serial, 'Count Zero', by Mr Cyberpunk himself, William Gibson. I am waiting for the third and last installment before I judge this, so no comment here. January also brought a series of tributes for Theodore Sturgeon, and four quite sharp and effective shorts, one or two of them rather in the Gibson mould - that is, stories which extend our (or their) present obsession with electronic media into a nightmarish near future. (That seems to be a distinguishing feature of The Movement, apart from their interest in self-publicisation that is.) So we have

Pat Cadigan's 'Pretty Boy Crossover' in which stars of the club circuit can have their personalities immortalised within a computer terminal (terminal being the operative word), and Lewis Shiner's 'Jeff Beck', where a guitar-player who achieves his dream of being able to play like Jeff Beck realises, too late, the psychological consequences. (That rang very true to me, with my occasional dreams that I could pick guitar as well as Stefan Grossman.) Gregory Frost and John Kessel contribute a little chiller called 'Reduction', stuffed full of allegory no doubt, about a man whose world slowly disappears around him, and Tim Sullivan in 'Special Education' offers another variation on the theme of the resident alien in the mind of a psychiatric patient. An interesting issue, even discounting the unread Gibson.

The most recent ASIMOV'S I've seen is February's with its cover illustrating the insectoid alien race who come to Earth, or more specifically Egypt, in Gregory Benford's 'Of Space-Time and the River'. It looks as if he's put an Egyptian package tour to good use; the background is impeccable, the narrative voice of the Comp. Lit. academic very convincing, and the slow unfolding of the real (and fairly implausible) reason for the alien presence well done. Benford has a much lighter touch than he once had, and can still give us the ideas we thought we went to sf for. It almost made up for the unreadable 'Salvage' by Orson Scott Card and the whimsical nonsense of Lafferty's 'Junkyard Thoughts'. Molly Glass's 'Field Trial' was a fairly conventional mix of planetary exploration and esp. William P. Wu's 'Kenry', on

STOP PRESS:

This is the centenary year of the birth of Olaf Stapledon (1886 - 1951), author of LAST AND FIRST MEN, SIRIUS, THE STAR-MAKER and undeniably one of the major forces upon the development of science fiction. To mark this, Liverpool University are hosting a conference on 26 - 28 September. Speakers will include Brian Stableford and K.V. Bailey, and there will be an exhibition of Stapledon's work in the Sydney Jones Library, which holds the Stapledon archive. (Olaf Stapledon was a lecturer in philosophy at Liverpool University for many years.)

I only received notification of this yesterday, so I've no more details of the conference. I hope to be able to pass on more by next issue.

the other hand, was an interesting moral fantasy about, among other things, the relations between adults and their childhood pasts. It's a pity we don't see rather more of Wu, who was strong in the running for a Hugo in '84.

ANALOG has been running a serial too: Frederick Pohl's 'The Coming of the Quantum Cats', which I shall comment on next time, if I can overcome my reluctance to read anything with such a terrible title. January's issue was not all that impressive. A first in Tom Ligon's 'The Devil and the Deep Black Void', perhaps: a tale of pacifism versus fanaticism on a colony world, a first in that I can't think of any other story with a Baha'i background. It is all a bit like a slice of Iranian history, transported a few dozen light years, but well in the Analog tradition: earnest, uplifting, full of moral conflict, with a bit of violent action thrown in for good measure. The only other story which stands out is another in Harry Turtledove's (Eric G Iverson's) series about an alternative world where seventeenth century Englishmen meet homo erectus in the New World. This one, 'And So To Bed' is set in London, and is told in a passable Samuel Pepys pastiche, though it coyly conceals the fact that Pepys is indeed the narrator. The February issue has another one, this time set in the New World itself: 'Around the Salt Lick'. These stories are early colonial history with only one or two variables changed: no one could really praise them for ingenuity or imagination, but they pass an idle quarter hour. Susan Shwartz's 'Survivor Guilt', also in February, tells some of the consequences of the slaughter of an alien race described in 'Heritage of Flight' (ANALOG April 1983): add in galactic conflict, clones, and another stiff dose of moral conflict and you have another typical ANALOG story. Finally I'd mention P.M. Fergusson's 'God-killer': quite a convincing story of space-farers contacting and influencing, despite themselves, a primitive alien race. But guess who the 'aliens' are? That's right! Von Daniken and the Shaggy God story are still with us.

The most recent issue I've read, March, is a little more interesting. Another in J. Brian Clarke's series about the meeting between Earthmen and an apparently superior alien race, which started with 'The Expediter' in February 1984; W.T. Quick's ironic story of rich aliens who move into the neighbourhood, 'The Gentrification Blues'; another archetypal ANALOG story, '2E6' from John Barnes, about the difficulty of persuading business to take on new ideas. And most successful, perhaps because least serious, two stories: 'Acceleration Constant', by Robert L. Forward, in

which he explains why a beautiful girl in a see-thru plastic space-suit has been kidnapped by tentacled aliens, but in which he has some interesting science too, as he always does; and 'The Barbecue, the Movie, and Other Unfortunately Not So Relevant Material' by Harry Turtledove, concerning the frustrations of a far-future history student trying to do research on Genghis Khan but time-travelling to Late Middle First Primitive (20th century) by mistake. It was Turtledove (writing as Iverson) who did a similar moral tale of culture shock in 'Hindsight' in ANALOG for mid-December 1984, though there it was the late 20th century meeting 1953: both are good examples of sf as a form of didactic literature - a perfectly valid art form, but hardly found outside ANALOG these days.

CHRIS BAILEY

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,
Jan-Feb 1986

Sometimes you have to wonder at F&SF. February's issue opens with Effinger's 'Maureen Birnbaum at the Earth's Core', one of the most pointless, witless and plain unskilled 'humourous' pieces it has ever been my misfortune to read, and yet this is followed by 'The Metaphysical gun' from the rapidly improving Wayne Wightman, a grim tale of degradation and vice, the bleakness and bitterness of which leaves the reader feeling quite numb. Can editorial Catholicism also be construed as purposeless stumbling?

Better to turn to January's issue, where there were several pieces I enjoyed; Robert J. Tilley's 'Outsider' for example, a last-man-in-the-world story with an original twist and a genuinely touching conclusion. A wee gem. And there was 'The Rise and Fall of Father Alex' by Amyas Naegele (why do I always like the pieces from writers with a 'mainstream' background?), a delightfully individual and joyful work with enough potential material for a novel. It wasn't science fiction or fantasy by any stretch of the imagination, though - neither was Stephen Gallagher's 'To Dance By the Light of the Moon', which was essentially the same story as his first F&SF contribution, 'Nightmare, With Angel', and not quite as good, although it the same genuine frisson at the end. Richard Mueller contributed 'A Creature of Water', a warmly felt story about music in which the author was understandably evasive about his notion of 'seeing sound'. Gregory Benford's 'Newton Sleep' rounded off the issue, an interesting and readable tale, if rather diffuse - boring to say so, but I feel that Benford needs a good meaty idea to get his teeth into and his narrative juices circulating.

Harlan Ellison reviewed Back to the Future: "The story is by turns cheaply theatric, coincidental, obvious and moronic. Not to mention that Robert A. Heinlein and his attorneys are rumoured to be murmuring the word 'plagiarism' because of the film's freightload of similarities to Time Enough For Love..." Ouch.

Overview:

A look at Bernard Wolfe's
LIMBO.

by Andy Sawyer

A sadly neglected masterpiece, a "grand cornucopia of a book", a "veritable TRISTRAM SHANDY of the atom-bomb age" - these are some of the terms used by David Pringle to describe Bernard Wolfe's 1952 novel LIMBO. He concludes his piece on the book in his recent SF: THE 100 BEST NOVELS by calling LIMBO "the most ambitious work of science fiction, and one of the most successful, ever to come out of America".

Praise indeed: are we in a position to agree with it? There has never been a complete paperback edition published in the UK. LIMBO was published in hardback by Secker and Warburg in 1953 under the title LIMBO '90: Penguin issued an abridgement in 1961, and this is the version I possess. My own judgements are based, therefore, on this rather than the full-length Ace edition, also published in the '60s. Apparently, there has been no American edition since that one, and I'm not sure by how much the variant versions differ, which makes it difficult to know whether my own opinion is based on exactly the same stimuli as David Pringle's. However, in the end, I agree. LIMBO is superb. I cannot understand why it has been out of print so long.

A quick plot resume is perhaps necessary. Dr. Martine, a neurosurgeon, has escaped from nuclear war to a remote island in the Indian Ocean. It is a peaceful island, made more so by the crude lobotomies which the natives have developed to curb the aggressive instincts of the more antisocial individuals. This is carried on, using modern techniques, by Martine. But in 1990, after eighteen years of isolation, Martine is forced to flee back to society as the island is discovered by the outside world. He finds a society transformed by the doctrine of "Immob", discovering that the prosthetic limbs on many of the men he sees are not from war injuries, but deliberate acts of self-mutilation in the belief that this will counter man's warlike urges. Martine is horrified to discover that he himself is one of the founders of Immob. One of the book's most effective sketches of black comedy is the reprinting of Martine's journal of 1972, written in a welter of confusion and despair leading up to an act of defiance and escape. His satirical Swiftian "modest

proposals" are presented as sane suggestions, his despair and anguish as jocular, through the editorial interventions of his former colleague Helder. The suggestions of voluntary amputeeism - "just an ironic figure of speech, you see, an elaborate pun," he later explains - are taken literally. In any case, East-West rivalry is beginning again over supplies of the rare mineral needed for the prosthetic limbs of the "Vol-Amps". War breaks out again.

LIMBO is full of verbal play and satirical psychology. Some of the punning is heavy-handed, and some readers (I am not one) may find something wearying in the obsessive eclecticism of the book. But most readers would find LIMBO one of the great satirical works of SF. I've alluded to Swift, and I don't think it's too far fetched to suggest a parallel between LIMBO and the vitriolic humour with which Swift played 18th-century England. While apparently having no regard for SF as a genre (although he acknowledges a debt to A.E. Van Vogt's THE WORLD OF NULL-A) Wolfe used its techniques to present a blueprint of the present and its potentialities rather than an imagined future.

In his afterword he writes "Anybody who 'paints a picture' of some coming year is kidding - he's only fancying up something in the present or past, not blueprinting the future. All such writing is essentially satiric (today-centred) not utopic (tomorrow-centred). This book, then, is a rather bilious rib on 1950 - on what 1950 might have been if it had been allowed to fulfil itself, if it had gone on being 1950, only more and more so, for four more decades."

Surely it is not that alone which has kept the book out of print? Is it - a book anatomising 1950 - out of date in the 1980s? No, that surely must be a superficial way of looking at it. Or is it because, with all its verbal and visual puns, its psychological jargon, allusion to Rimbaud, and uncomfortable digs at authoritative texts which are read far from their author's intentions, it is thought to be too sophisticated for the SF genre-reader? But even that, fashionably cynical though it may be, cannot be the real reason.

Perhaps it's just a matter of style and cycles...if so, I do feel that the time for the book to become fashionable again is here. I have to admit that several times, while reading LIMBO, the expression "radical hard-SF" trickled through my consciousness. Bernard Wolfe died in October 1985 at the age of 70, following a heart attack. If someone could be persuaded to reprint a paperback edition of LIMBO, the memory of a genuine masterpiece could be reawakened.

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((I'd like to acknowledge the aid of David Pringle for this piece, particularly his own look at LIMBO in his SCIENCE FICTION: THE 100 BEST NOVELS (Xanadu). I'd welcome similar submissions from others, on the theme of out-of-print books which deserve revival in paperback editions.))

Closer Encounters

Christopher Priest - - - - - THE GLAMOUR
(Abacus, 215pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V.Bailey)

From the helmet of Perseus to the vibratory physics of Wells's Mr. Griffin, whether magically or technologically based, fictional invisibility has blessed or cursed its possessor with power to manipulate the world for his own ends and satisfactions. In Christopher Priest's novel that same endowment, the essence of the "glamour", is, at least in part, metaphor for his characters' psychological, social and sexual manipulatory potential. Niall, the densely invisible prime manipulator, veers from being a grossly exhibitionist prankster to a pathetically dropped-out "lost boy". The Glamour, with its emphasis on the perpetual adolescence of the "glamorous" in their neverland of alienation, does oddly share a certain mythos with Peter Pan; and its "heroine", Sue Kewley, has distinguishable Wendyish traits. In the novel's conclusion Niall's individuality is fragmented into elemental components indigenous to those he has manipulated - and perhaps this has been his true status all along, the "invisibility" he paradigmatically represents being a shadowy threshold of the persona emergently responsive to unpredictable environmental stimuli, physical or emotional.

In this complexly structured story the psychopathic functioning of "invisibility", the euphoria and misery occasioned by its possession, is only one strand, and though certainly a dominant one, its intrinsic fascination should not be allowed to obscure other aspects of the "glamour", those paradoxical configurations of time and place so integral to the plot. They involve imagination and memory, the veridical and the fantasised, the conscious, and the unconscious, "truth" and fiction: all familiar Priest territory.

The novel's critical moment is the detonation of a car bomb which savages the body of Richard Gray and produces an amnesia in respect of the preceding months. By switching between subjective and objective narration alternative scenarios are presented which, when pieced together, appear to embody and extend the missing time-span. Gray, invalided in a private hospital, fails to recognize his girl friend Sue when she visits him; but under hypnosis seems to part-remember (and in one sequence recounts completely) a recent holiday journey with her through France. That trip ends in a quarrel over Niall, contacted by Sue on the Riviera. Then follows their return to England and the bomb disaster. After Richard's recovery he and Sue (who tells him that never in her life has she been in France) tour England, and there are correspondences, place by place, incident by incident, with the supposed tour of France. Both Niall and Richard unaccountably send the

identical and uniquely identifiable postcard from Saint-Tropez and Niall writes as a fiction the intimate details of Richard's hospital experiences long before the bomb detonation which caused his injuries.

These temporal / spatial, subjective / objective, and synchronistic anomalies create an ever-shifting hallucinatory narrative pattern. During the French journey, apparently a confabulation of subconscious imaginings, a "glamour" substratum exists, but is unidentified; and Richard's own account of the tour has an air of sanity and realism. Its English counterpart (which "actually" happened) has, as Sue recalls it, an air of madness, brought about by the overt intrusions of Niall, Richard's "glamorous" rival (and alter-ego). Later (and for real) Richard tours France, with a different girl friend, and once again from Saint-Tropez sends the identical postcard.

This amnesiac fantasia leaves us wondering in what ways are memory and recognition the keys to our experience of "reality", are the instruments of our relationships, the guides, reliable or unreliable, to our perceived routes through the phenomenal world. Christopher Priest (in Vector) has described a childhood accident and his own consequent spell of retrograde amnesia. His novel has evident recollective content, but like all good "autobiographical" fiction its imaginative range carries - or rather draws - the reader into wider areas of supra-personal experience and speculation.

Robert Holdstock - - - - - MYTHAGO WOOD
(Grafton, 317pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by L.J.Hurst)

MYTHAGO WOOD deals with the implications of our knowledge of the past, and it does so in a historical context: the Huxley family live in an old house on the edge of Ryhope Wood, three square miles of pre-Roman forest. The story starts at the end of the Second World War, during which George, the father, has explored the wood and died, worn out by his experiences. The younger son, Christian, has also discovered something of the wood while his brother Steven (who tells the tale) is away. It is with Steven's demobilisation in 1947 that the story begins. Christian has married but the marriage has ended by the time Steven returns.

Christian has a tendency to disappear into the wood. While he is gone Steven starts to discover something of his father's research and conclusions - that the wood possesses the powers to produce creatures from the past as they perceived by the unconscious mind (such a product is a mythago). The mind has a long reach, and this being a wood that goes a long way back in history, it produces beaker people, Celts, Romans, Saxons, and a medieval knight. It has also produced the girl married by Christian - Guiwenneth - an archetypal figure. She is not Guinevere but Guinevere's archetype. She is also a product of the Huxleys' ideas of woman, being courted by all

three. Although Christian killed her before Steven returned, she re-appears to Steven and falls in love with him.

The wood is not friendly. In the second section the wood invades the house, and the mythagoes raid it. Christian has joined a group of demonic huntsmen and lead their attack to take back his bride (whom he has killed once) and to attempt to hang his brother. The hanging is prevented by an even more archetypal figure, produced by the wood from the mind of their father - a gigantic cross between man and boar, filled with hatred, and with a human visage only because it paints it on. In the third section Steven pursues his brother through the Tardis-like wood. The girl is never seen again.

MYTHAGO WOOD is a book of resonance and a work causing one to reconsider the past - How would you live in the past if it were as you think it was? - but it is also a book of familiar experience. It is a book that is different in approach rather than its subject matter. The appearance of a cave-man in the present day is the basis of Clive King's Stig of the Dump, and Lem's Solaris deals with a woman who keeps re-appearing, while The Hound of the Baskervilles starts the demonic hunt, though I suppose William Hope Hodgson's The House on the Borderland is the most well known

book in a similar style.

The point of this list is that the idea of the past invading us and capturing us is not new but MYTHAGO WOOD raises it to new levels by the intelligence of its invention. The Urscumug (the father-boar), brother hunting brother, the eternally feminine, the huntsman and his dog - these are all known but they are given a new significance.

On the other hand descriptions of the novel such as "indescribably enchanting" or "true fantasy", I think, are inaccurate. Although there seems little purpose in setting the novel in 1947, apart from a passing mention of rationing, the book is generally bleak. Steven finds his love and satisfaction in times that really were nasty, vicious, brutish and short. And at the same time, the implied references - ways of seeing the world that you or I live in having a link to the wood - are scientific, relying on the psychology of Jung and Freud.

There is a lot in MYTHAGO WOOD. There could be a lot more. I found the last (third) section the least interesting but I can accept that others would reverse my choice. It is bound to be a success, it has already won the BSFA award, and it will provoke a lot of discussion.

REVIEWS

Jack L.Chalker - - - THE RIVER OF DANCING GODS
(Futura, 263pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

I am a strong supporter of Jack Chalker's status as a gripping, entertaining and inventive writer of mainstream science fiction, and cannot think of one of his SF books that I have not enjoyed and admired. However, in a recent letter to him I explained that fantasy is a field that holds little appeal for me unless it be humorous, and that as a result I had not read his Dancing Gods trilogy, of which the first part has now appeared in the U.K. in paperback.

Sod's Law, of course, immediately decreed that I should receive this book for review, and I confess that while I am still not converted to the joys of straight fantasy, I found this an intriguing if frustrating book. The intrigue came first of all from the very real differences between American and British life - the book opens with a CB-radio trucker and a female hitch-hiker in the Texas desert telling each other their life stories to establish characterisation and motivation, and I found these tales just as strange and unbelievable as anything in the "fantasy" part of the book.

The frustration came from what I must regard as an integral part of any work of fantasy: given that the competent author always keeps to "the rules of the game" in that he does not transgress his own supernatural laws of existence, there are so many unforeseeable ways of tricking the baddies, tripping up the goodies and generally

befuzzling the mind of the reader that personal involvement is weakened, and suspension of belief made ever harder, by the twists and turns of an over-complex plot where every action and reaction needs paragraphs of explanation as to how and why those laws remain intact while the protagonists continue to be tricked.

I also find that the personification of forces of good and evil in the required black-and-white form is something foreign to my nature - I believe everything is really shades of grey, which destroys my ability to accept the characterisation that underlies traditional fantasy.

However, let it not be denied that this is a well-crafted, excellently written, rarely over-verbose book that has a genuine plot, twists and turns galore, nothing to surprise the fantasy fan and much to please and divert him/her. It has touches of humour (a magic sword called "Irving" for example), and the story has the added merit of being complete in itself while at the same time offering Jack Chalker the opportunity for the now -almost-obligatory second and third volumes. Yes, if you like fantasy you should enjoy this one.

S.P.Somtow - - - - - VAMPIRE JUNCTION
(Futura, 362pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

A horror melodrama for the sub-Stephen-King market, instantly identifiable by its crimson-and-black cover (and insides) and the customary portentous endorsement, in this

instance by Robert Bloch; "The closest thing to a nightmare ever put on paper!" it shrilly proclaims, brushing aside such ephemera as Stevenson's "Jekyll & Hyde", not to mention the collected works of Poe and Le Fanu, any one of which has an incomparably greater claim than this turgid tome. The idea of a 12 year old boy becoming an object of mass adulation as a rock singer because of his physical appeal and macabre imagery is too crass to be believable even of the USA. That this should be the latest of a vampire's long sequence of lives is an equally crude device. That this being is so disturbed by its fate that it should consult a psycho-analyst could make a good if slight black comedy. For 'Somtow', however, this format offers the opportunity to punctuate present day blood-spillage with flashback spasms of remembered violence from former incarnations. And it is here that he exposes the poverty of his imagination. With all ages and all nations at his disposal, with the vast panoply of man's inhumanity to man to choose from, what does he regurgitate? The dungeons of Gilles de Rais, and a Nazi extermination camp! Even the most hackneyed purveyor of dubious pornography could conjure up something a little less blatant! Certainly, 'Somtow' can concoct gruesome episodes with a bizarre gusto - of which Bluebeard's auto-eroticism on the rotting remains of his child-victims is probably the most desperate. But his evocations of murder, torture, perversion et al are merely squalid and glib, and rapidly tiresome. He makes the fundamental flaw of all product in this category - mistaking quantity for quality - into an article of faith, and presumes that smatterings of Jungian psychology and cosmic mythology can impart that added extra which will distinguish the the book from its competitors. The climax to the novel is clever, and written in a kind of free-form frenzy which belatedly creates an impression of fire and feeling. It would be worth reading a more sustained and disciplined piece by 'Somtow', written at this pitch, and in this swirling, stream-of-imagery style. But 'Somtow' is unlikely to oblige. He is apparently far too concerned with fulfilling the expectations of the commercial horror formula.

Piers Anthony - - - - BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT 3:
POLITICIAN
(Granada, 398pp. £2.50)

BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT 4:
EXECUTIVE
(Avon, 330pp. \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

As I said in PI 55 - simplistic political allegory (United States of Jupiter and all that). Potentially interesting but the tawdry trappings and tasteless sexual posturings drag down what could be a witty send-up of US politics. Piers Anthony knows his market and writes for it in a thoroughly professional manner. The J.T.Edson of SF. Now you know what to expect; it's a pity that something

unexpected doesn't appear. I can't help feeling that there could be a lot more in these books than there is, but at every level they lack so much in readerly satisfaction that they're more aggravating than less imaginative books.

Jack Vance - - - - - PLANET OF ADVENTURE
(Grafton, 536pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

In this omnibus edition of Vance's epic series the Explorator IV is sent to Carina 4296 to investigate radio signals; crash landing on its sole planet, its one survivor, Adam Reith, is launched into a series of adventures as he roams the planet in an attempt to find some way to get back to Earth. He allies himself with two natives of the planet - Traz, 'a member of the bizarre Emblem Men, whose status and even their personalities are determined by the emblems they wear, and Anacho, a Dirdirman, one of a race of humans subordinate to the Dirdir and bred to resemble them. There are four main races on Tschia: the Chasch, the Dirdir, the Wankh (unfortunate name!), and the indigenous Pnume, each with their subordinate human races. When he is not engaged in haggling with the natives over money, Reith spends his time trying to convince his friends that Man originates from his own planet, and appoints himself as Saviour of Humanity on Tschia. Humanity is presented as being debased by their association with aliens. In "The City of the Chasch", the Chaschmen are reluctant to assert their independence when Reith defeats their masters. In "The Servants of the Wankh", the Wankhmen are shown to be devious and sly, manipulating their masters; Reith exposes them. In "The Dirdir", the Dirdirmen are cannibalistic beasts emulating the Dirdir's primitive lust for the hunt and the taste of human flesh. In "The Pnume", the Pnumekin are starved of their humanity, drugged to halt their physical development and brainwashed into a mindless routine.

"The Planet of Adventure" is essentially a Boy's Own adventure for men, a wish fulfilment, a place of 'zest and adventure' as opposed to the 'drab and colourless' Earth. Despite high recommendations on the cover from Silverberg and Herbert, I found it offensive and bigoted in its treatment of aliens, sexist and militaristic in its treatment of humans. However, I do not wish to be too harsh on Vance's work, for much of it is very imaginative; but the invention is ill sustained, and at times two-dimensional. Overall, the book lacks a sense of direction. For addicts only.

R.Silverberg - - - - - SUNRISE ON MERCURY
(Pan Books, 176pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Finding a paperback under two quid is quite a feat these days, and this made me immediately suspicious. Checking the contents page

against the fourteen other Silverberg collections on my shelves, I found seven of the thirteen stories were already there - four of them in World of a Thousand Colours, a Bantam paperback issued in the same year (1983) and revealing for all to see a quite cynical desire on the author's part to squeeze every possible penny out of the resale of his older pieces.

Older? Yes - one first appeared in 1954, six in 1957 and three in 1958; one came along in 1968, another in 1969, and only one is as recent as 1974. O.K., fine, Silverberg is popular, is a recognized good writer, has many a superb novel under his belt, and cut his teeth on the difficult field of SF shorts; I've read each of his previous collections with pleasure - though I've chucked out a dozen or so as totally or virtually duplicating the ones I keep - and I had no reason to doubt that the six stories here which I'd not read before would be at least up to scratch.

Sadly, they have revealed that much of Silverberg's earlier stuff, while more than competently tailored and excellently researched, is - note this word carefully for I have chosen it with care - inconsequential.

The pieces are mere snippets, taking a single idea and giving it the works to a pretty standard formula. The 1974 story has more depth as one might expect, and not one of these is sloppy or unable to affect the reader. But there's too little to them; the book is a table full of hors d'oeuvres that leaves you longing for the meat course.

In case I had suddenly "gone off" Silverberg, I turned to three more of his books before I wrote this review, and I uncovered a peculiar but relevant fact: when reading solely for pleasure and relaxation I am far more easily satisfied than when I approach a book with you lot out there in mind. Silverberg novels are mostly safe for decades yet if not forever, but it's true, many of his short stories just don't satisfy the taste of the longtime fan. Do yourselves a favour: read his 1984 collection The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party, which dates from the 1980-1982 period when, after a long break, Silverberg came back renewed to the short-story fray and really showed his mettle.

Compleatists will want the present volume; anyone who has read very little Silverberg ought to take advantage of its cheapness and to read it as an introduction to his work. For the rest of you: well, it'll sit well by the bedside for those interminable bouts of insomnia - it won't keep you awake!

Marion Zimmer Bradley - - - - NIGHT'S DAUGHTER
(Sphere, 204 pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

About ten years ago I thought of writing a fantasy novel based on Mozart's The Magic Flute. It seemed a good idea at the time; it's a marvellous fantasy, with plenty of opportunity for puzzlement and subtlety. I can't pretend that I'd have done it better

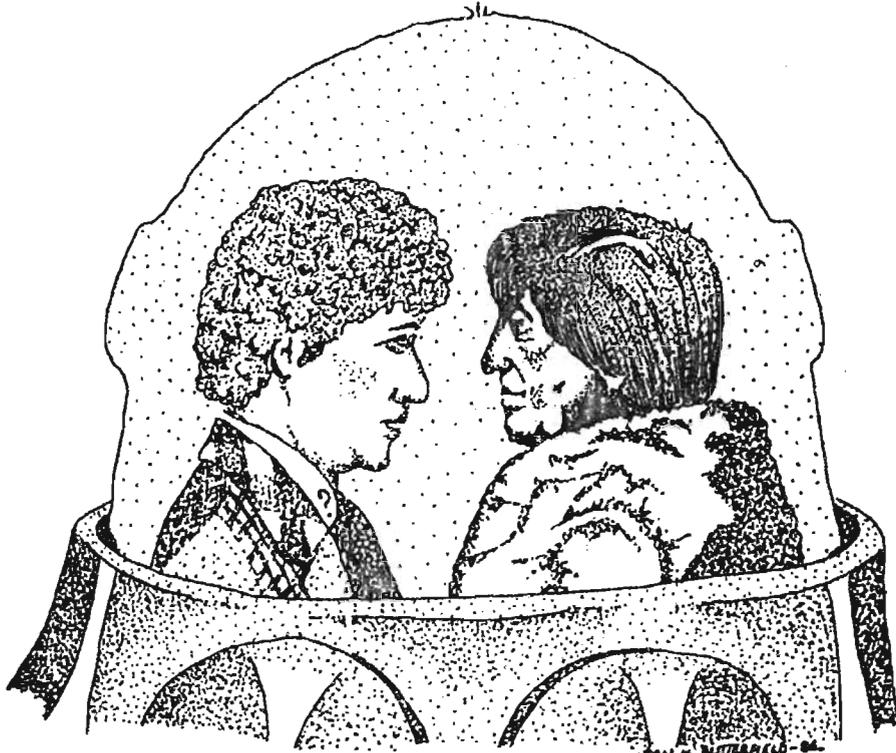
than Bradley, but I do wish that she had done it with rather more awareness of its mystical and philosophical qualities. At times it does read very much like a hack novelisation of a movie, the dialogue transferred from one medium to another without much thought. But there are some nice touches, particularly when she departs from the 'script'. The Ordeals are well done, for example - much more spectacular than anything that could be staged. And her one imaginative addition, hybrid man-animal races bred from dogs, seals, birds etc, just about works, although it means that the class distinction between the royal couple Papageno and Papagena becomes a racial one, which in a sense trivialises it. Perhaps I know the opera too well to be impartial; I certainly found it difficult, for instance, to separate the images in Ingmar Bergmann's film from those in the book, and kept on imagining the robust peasant Haakon Hagegaard when I read about the fragile halfling Papageno (a bird man as well as a bird-catcher). But I shall go back to the opera with new ideas and new things to look for. And if there are parents around who want to introduce their fantasy-loving teenager to opera via one of the most glorious of them all, then I'd recommend this heartily.

Nicholas Fisk - - - - - YOU REMEMBER ME!
(Puffin, 152pp, £1.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Nicholas Fisk's SF occasionally falters, but at his best he can portray an all-too-familiar threat with a chillingly realistic twist. GRINNY was one of his best - a story in which a robotic invader with strange hypnotic powers insinuates into a family and is finally defeated by two children. YOU REMEMBER ME! takes the story further a few years. Timothy, the elder child, is now a reporter on the local paper, and his duties bring him into contact with Lisa Treadgold, the charismatic leader of the "Rule of Law" organisation whose rallies become national beacons for "Decency, Discipline, and Dedication". More and more people succumb to Lisa's spell, but Timothy's sister Beth has her suspicions. Once more, we have a child at odds with the adult world, trying to put across an uncomfortable truth.

As this is a sequel to GRINNY you'll guess the nature of that truth and how the book ends. But this is a sequel which manages to genuinely extend the experience of the first book. It's tautly written, with a finely balanced contrast between the increasingly puzzled Timothy and the more perceptive but increasingly desperate Beth, and contains an acutely-observed portrait of one of the undertows of the Whitehouse-Gillick "moral facism". The suspense never slackens, and the rosy result is a superior story of attempted invasion which has some depressing things to say about our propensity to follow leaders. Worth buying!



Robert Holmes - - DOCTOR WHO - THE TWO DOCTORS
(Target, 159 pp. £1.75)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

If you want a plot synopsis, read my article in Matrix 60. With this piece I am more concerned with the question of how well this script made the transfer to novel form.

Most DW novels are written by Terrance Dicks, former script editor of the series. Now, because he writes several such novels each year, he is not able to devote sufficient time to each script to give it the attention that it deserves. Couple this with the fact that he cannot possibly fully understand the original intentions of the original scriptwriter, and the result is a rather bland "identikit" feel to these renditions.

Robert Holmes has on many occasions shown himself to be an able DW scriptwriter, and with THE TWO DOCTORS he demonstrates his considerable skill as a novelist, too. Because he is dealing with his own script, he knows the story better than anyone else could; he understands the natures of his alien creations - the Sontarans and the Androgums - simply because he invented them; he knows what motivates his characters. Thus Holmes' intellectual involvement with the story serves to add considerable depth to what, in the hands of another - although not necessarily lesser - writer might read as little more than a straightforward narrative. This coupled with the writer's love of, and skill with, the English language, results in a most enjoyable

rendition of what was, at worst, the second best DW story of 1985.

A limitation of such transfer between media is the possibility that ideas which work in one medium may not work in another. Thus, although the Sontarans are well presented, certain mannerisms which have to be seen cannot be, thus some of the satirical quality is lost. Nevertheless, this novel is an enjoyable reminder of the broadcast, and to claim otherwise would be to brand oneself as some kind of antediluvian fogey!

Sterling E. Lanier - - - -MENACE UNDER MARSWOOD
(Panther, 255pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

Don't let the pulpish title put you off; or, for that matter, the pulpish blurb; "ON 23RD-CENTURY MARS, A MAN'S BEST FRIEND IS HIS SIDEARM..." It's really not that bad. Unfortunately, there's not a lot to recommend it, either.

Mars has been partially terraformed and is inhabited by two groups of humans: the regular colonists under the protection/command of UN forces; and the Ruckers, who have long since left the colonies for a more naturalistic existence in the Martian outback.

Now, the UN and the Ruckers exist in a state of mutual and permanent hostility, but when a third force - possibly the mythical Old Martians - threatens both groups, an elite UN/Rucker force is formed to deal with the problem.

There are some interesting touches to the novel, notably in the description of Rucker society. While this is left largely as a mystery, certain elements are described in sufficient detail to suggest a convincing cultural background, although not explicitly enough to spoil the illusion.

The Martian wildlife is, perhaps, less convincing. Most of it has come from Earth - apparently, when America and Russia first colonised Mars the Chinese were upset at being left out and sent rockets of their own, complete with pestilence - and has grown to enormous size. True, Martian gravity is one third that of Earth's, yet I was not wholly convinced.

MENACE UNDER MARSWOOD is largely a rehashing of old ideas, and while this does not necessarily make it a bad novel, it does mean that there is little that is new about it. Still, there must be somebody who hasn't read this sort of thing before.

David Drake - - - - -CROSS THE STARS
(Venture, 342pp. £2.25)

(Reviewed by K.V.Bailey)

"Mad dog" Slade, mercenary, late of Hammer's Slammers, on his homeward way to Omicron Eridani II, is conscripted to captain a pirate starship. Later, marooned on arcadian planet Elysium, he narrates his guts-and-gore adventures to the gentle Elysians who, Greek chorus-like, interweave their commentary on his deeds and motivations. Eventually, the hero-wanderer having returned, dynastic palace knavery on Omicron Eridani II is dealt with by strategies designed "to enforce Slade's will with the muzzle of a gun".

Curious alien ecologies, the "Greek chorus" framework, Homeric allusions and the evocative odyssean plot-structure give this a certain imaginative dynamic which lifts it rather above the run of "star-warrior" formula novels to which it might otherwise be relegated.

Moyra Caldecott - - -THE TOWER AND THE EMERALD
(Arrow, 348pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

Princess Viviane, fiancée to Caradawc, comes upon a ring of tall stones imprisoning the spirit of the evil Idoc, her lover in a former incarnation. Foolishly, she frees him. Possessed by Idoc, Caradawc murders his own father (who has molested Viviane); Viviane sets fire to the scene of the crime, and runs off. There follows a chase. A long, rambling chase, with Idoc observing from the Tower, and Viviane protected by an enchanted crystal (several, in fact).

This book is for those who like their heroines beautiful and feminine; who like their heroines free-thinking and independent; who like their heroes to be perfect lovers; who like their heroes to take their women fiercely; who like arbitrary acts of magic rationalised; who like to see characters running in circles, chase and counter-chase; who like characters to flee from the ones they love on account of a fear of having to explain the increasingly fantastic truth; who like characters to suddenly change their minds

about the foregoing because the author has evidently come up with a better idea; who like carefully-provided plot summaries (see p.121) in order that one may know which preceding incidents are relevant to the story at hand. This book has all of the above, and more. I do not like this book.

David Wheldon - - -"THE COURSE OF INSTRUCTION"
(Black Swan, 175pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

A concise but curiously inadequate letter advises Alexander to attend a course of instruction, and gives the time, date and place but little else. He goes to the venue, which proves to be a neglected Victorian villa in a small provincial town. Before entering, he briefly encounters a man departing from the house who carries a book - this he tosses negligently to Alexander.

Existence inside the house has its own standards of logic and behaviour. There is no evidence of a course and the inhabitants act in a way which is bewilderingly futile. At first, Alexander reacts with lucid, ironic calm; but we witness him become drawn inexorably into a squalid, obsessive and ultimately absurd world. Could it be, as one character suggests, that this process is the course? And if so, what is its purpose?

Wheldon's prose is deft and remorseless and the cover comparison to Kafka is apt - there are obvious parallels to "The Trial", and we are left with the same conviction of intellectual integrity. Along with Wheldon's earlier novel, "The Viaduct" (Penguin, 1984), about a fugitive's strange journey, "The Course of Instruction" is convincing testimony that here is a writer of crucial, enduring relevance.

'Identity, Communication and Significance' is the title of the book which Alexander receives on the threshold of his immersion into the nightmare incongruities of the house; he never gets to read it. Its title conveys the essence of Wheldon's concern. Alexander's dilemma, like that of Josef K., is really one that we all share; his search for meaning is also ours. It is this dimension which ensures that, bleak and brooding though this novel is, it is, once begun, inescapable.

E.C.Tubb - - -NECTAR OF HEAVEN(DUMAREST 24)
(Arrow, 160pp. £1.75)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

As we all know the (seemingly interminable) Dumarest series has its hero - the eponymous Earl - in search of his ancestral home - Earth, the legendary long lost origin planet of humankind - while trying to stay one step ahead of the Cyclans - a race of all purpose thinking machines bent on universal domination (and was there ever a race of thinking machines not so intent?) Dumarest, as you might guess, is the one sure fly in the Cyclan ointment. Now nobody will pick up a Dumarest book expecting great art and in 'Nectar of Heaven' what we find is heads down, no nonsense, mindless boogie. Perhaps I am old fashioned, but in a professionally published book I expect to find sentences which make sense even if they do not

conform to traditional grammatic norms. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that an examination of really good 'simple adventure' stories shows them to be often epitomes of good, clear writing. In 'Nectar of Heaven' the writing is shoddy, so much so it works against a plot which - creak as it does - could nevertheless have provided a modicum of harmless entertainment.

This is a dull, tedious book, badly written to a modest formula. It is the first Dumarest book I have read. I doubt it is the first of many.

E.E. 'Doc' Smith with - - REVOLT OF THE GALAXY
Stephen Goldin (Grafton, 186pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

Beti Bavol arrives on DesPlaines to enlist the help of her exiled big brother Pias in the overthrow of Tas the Tyrant, wrongful ruler of their home planet, Newforest. Pias sneaks home, overpowers Tas and ends his evil rule in minutes. Pias' reputation is rehabilitated, characters suddenly begin appearing by the cartload having completed missions offstage, and it becomes apparent that the foregoing is merely preamble when the cracks start showing in the Empire...

Stephen Goldin clearly knows how to get blood out of a stone: this is the tenth volume he has squeezed from Doc Smith's reportedly flimsy outline, whilst safely hiding behind Smith's name. To his credit, the book is readable (just) without previous knowledge of the series, though the inevitable expository lump - carefully held off until chapter two - is hard to swallow. The book's most noticeable feature is its supreme clumsiness. But what else could be expected of a work whose opening line is the following bet-hedging statement? "The heavy-gravity world of DesPlaines ranked reasonably high in galactic commerce."

Rick Raphael - - - - -CODE THREE
(Granada, 224pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

"Before MAD MAX there was CODE THREE" extols the cover of this book. However the only connection between MAD MAX and CODE THREE is that they both feature cops and fast cars. MAX is a contemporary icon born out of the conflict between technology and man's barbarous nature. CODE THREE has no such aspirations and yet it still fails to provide even the most basic escapist entertainment.

CODE THREE is a collection of three connected novellas first published in the early sixties. In the near future even normal family cars can attain speeds of up to 500 mph. This obviously results in horrific accidents. In order to minimize the risk of such accidents the police cars can travel at even greater speeds and are manned by highly skilled personnel employed to enforce a very strict highway code.

The first two stories chronicle the events that occur during typical patrols and the final novella is concerned with the testing and development of a faster police car. The book is poorly written. The characters are dull and lifeless and during the course of the

book they only develop in the crudest of terms. The stories themselves elevate the technology involved in a delirious apotheosis. Horrific car accidents are described in terms that only glorify the pain and suffering meaninglessly. Furthermore, the underlying sexist philosophy is not only anachronistic but offensive.

Even when considered as a pedestrian escapist adventure story, CODE THREE fails. Raphael cannot invoke the sympathy for the characters, which is essential for the success of any adventure story. I felt that I could not care less what happened to any of the characters. The climax of the book, the death of one of the main characters, has no emotional power. The only emotion that the event invoked in me was a sense of relief as it heralded the end of the book. Perhaps Mad Max should sue for defamation of character.

Peter Dickinson - - - - -THE CHANGES TRILOGY
(Puffin, 348pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The "Changes" saga - the tale of an England in which some mysterious force turns people away from machinery - is one of the classics of recent children's literature. In THE DEVIL'S CHILDREN a young girl, separated from her parents in the initial panic-stricken exodus from London, is adopted by a family of Sikhs, unaffected by the changes. HEARTSEASE concerns the rescue of an agent from the outside world. THE WEATHERMONGER reveals the cause of the Changes and the resolution of the saga; it also possesses the strongest elements of fantasy as Geoffrey, the "Weathermonger" of the title, has the power of controlling the weather.

Peter Dickinson has a sure control of his conventions. In HEARTSEASE, for example, we have Margaret's conflict of loyalties between home and freedom: a theme to be found in innumerable children's books. Margaret's involvement in the rescue of the "witch" (an agent sent to find out just what is happening in the England of the Changes) is very much a stock situation of children's adventure fiction. But Dickinson uses these themes with imagination and skill: never more so, perhaps than in Geoffrey's bizarre quest to a mysterious tower in the Welsh Borders in a Rolls Royce Silver Ghost.

The appearance of THE DEVIL'S CHILDREN upon innumerable lists of non-racist children's books may owe much to Dickinson's ability to present an involving, sympathetic and positive picture. West Indians and Irish may agree less than Sikhs...but having said that, if you want to exercise the imagination you could do a lot worse for three quid than this book. Like many writers who write both adult's and children's books, Peter Dickinson seems to be freer when he writes for children.

Bob Shaw - - - - -FIRE PATTERN
(Grafton, 208pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Bob Shaw is a 'brand name' author possessed of a devoted following whose expectations he serves assiduously. As a fan what I expect in a Bob Shaw story is ingenious hardish SF,

tight, pacey and equally ingenious plots, characters carved from the best cardboard and coloured with the best poster paints, and a 'just give me the facts, ma'am' storytelling manner blessedly free of half baked nostrums and endless diversions on the benefits of a militaristic social order. With Bob Shaw you know what you'll get for your money, and that he will do his considerable best to give you full value for your money. He is one of but two SF authors whose complete works weigh down my bookshelves.

After that passage you may guess I am unhappy with 'Fire Pattern'. Not unusually it is a book of two halves; unfortunately the halves belong to different books. In the first half a recognisably Shavian hero investigates spontaneous human combustion, and the plot bustles along merrily, building suspense and making the reader pant to turn the page. How will Shaw explain the phenomenon? We expect something deft and plausible.

What we get is standard SF plot 37b - Earth is not the only planet seeded with humans and our long lost cousins want a piece of our greener and more pleasant land, like, the biggest piece. What a disappointment. The hysteria of a Farmer or the odd ingenuity of a Watson might have carried this change of tack and mood to a satisfactory conclusion but Shaw doesn't, and leaves a number of promising possibilities unexplored. Added to which are some irritating tics - the 'non' appearance of SF's man with the red flag, John Sladek, the meaningless inclusion of local Barrow colour (on Mercury!), in character grammatical lectures followed by less than grammatically perfect narrative.

This is second best Shaw, although the first half is up to standard and the cover - showing an igniting Arthur Marshall - is a delight.

C.J.Cherryh - - - - FORTY THOUSAND IN GEHENNA
(Methuen, 445pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Take a good idea - a colony ship on an inhospitable planet already possessing sentient inhabitants. Leave for 200 years to stew in its own juice. Show the interaction between humans and indigenes. A recipe for a fascinating tale.

Why, then, is this book indigestible?

Well, the characterisation - allowing for most of the humans being clones - is lamentable, even by the genre's low standards. Verisimilitude and consistent motivation are absent. The leader of a major operation such as a colony would not blow his brains out just because the weather gets to him! Even those characters who do establish themselves come and go in the twinkling of an eye at the behest of an at times arbitrary plot.

Then Cherryh virtually ignores the aliens. We are told nothing of them except through the eyes of at best indifferent and ignorant human colonists or explained second hand in terms of impenetrable mysticism by colonists who have gone native. Even the banal conclusion is deeply inconsistent. If everything we see in the later stages of the book is a Calaban plot why do they kill each other so enthusiastically in the final battle?

You will note that the enigmatic aliens are called 'Calabans'. Are any bells ringing? If I say that the main human researcher is called McGee I'm sure few need reminding of the original coupling of Calaban and McGee. McGee's equivalent on the other side of the Calaban divide is Genley... Doubtless Cherryh is merely paying her respects but she is unwise in reminding how much better SF can be when written by Herbert and Le Guin than it is here.

My major complaint about this book, though, is the language. No language should be so abused. Consider this sentence from page 18: "Conn took his id from his pocket and slid it into the receiver." Now I know what Ms Cherryh means, but it is not what it appears on the page and I'm tempted to ask where the good Colonel keeps his ego and superego. At least that sentence makes sense - many do not. Even within her limited vocabulary Ms Cherryh is ugly, staccato and all too often opaque.

Yet the book is not entirely awful. The first 80 pages and some of her irritating tricks may be as dispensable as they are boring but the last 100 pages are exciting in their fashion. Doubtless some will lap this up wholesale. I would suggest, however, that this sequence of stories might well benefit from being written properly in what is obviously their natural form - the much derided trilogy. This could have been a very good book. It isn't. It isn't even a good book and comes very close to being a bad rather than merely mediocre one.

Robert Jordan - - - - CONAN THE TRIUMPHANT
(Sphere, 182pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

"And Dinah responded to her body overruling her mind to the extent that she had to consciously refrain from whispering his name aloud. Conan...Conan...Conan...it rang through her mind as her lips finally parted and moved to meet his own. His arm lost none of its crushing power, but it was no longer needed as she strained against him..."

-Actually, that quotation's from Victoria Gordon's ALWAYS THE BOSS (Mills & Boon), but if you were to change the vocabulary slightly it wouldn't be out of place in Robert Jordan's latest instalment of the Conan epic. I have a certain affection for these stories and, were the subplot in this novel not virtually identical to that of its predecessor, I'd like this a lot more. I suppose a sense of familiarity is what's required.

Steve Jackson/Ian Livingstone - - REBEL PLANET
(Puffin, £1.75)

Lynn Beach - - - - CONQUEST OF THE TIME MASTER
(Avon, 103pp. \$2.25)

R.L.Stine - - - - CHALLENGE OF THE WOLF KNIGHT
(Avon, 103pp. \$2.25)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

I was going to ask, rhetorically, why it was that straight SF-based Fighting Fantasy tends to be mediocre - until I came upon these two Avon books.

In REBEL PLANET you combat the grip of the Arcadian Empire on the galaxy. It seems that one Robin Waterfield is actually responsible for the text, whatever the spine of the book says, and there's some depressingly silly attempts at wit and little real imagination. The Avon books are part of a series in which you can choose whether to be Wizard or Warrior, master of magic or weaponry. That's the gimmick. Otherwise the storylines are standard and the gameplaying technique the less complex one of following the maze of choices rather than playing with dice and manipulating strengths and weaknesses. It makes them easier than the Puffin book for my daughters to handle, but they're gathering dust after a short while.

Piers Anthony - - MACROSCOPE (Grafton, 480pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

If Le Carre was writing SF, he might have produced something like this. MACROSCOPE is a very enjoyable, gripping thriller with a very complex background.

The macroscope is used to view macrons as an alternative to normal methods of observation. Unfortunately an alien transmission has been located which ruins the brains of top scientists who view it. One genius may be able to solve this mystery. This is Schon; but only Ivo can find him and he won't. The search for Schon and for a solution to the mind destroyer is the subject of this book.

As the plot develops, we are drawn into Astronomy and Cosmology, Physics, Biology, Poetry, Astrology and even Ancient History, all of which are marvellously researched and logically woven into the story. There is excellent detail when it is required, particularly the delightful description of the Melting process on pages 168 - 172. In other places, however, detail is thin as developments are skimmed over to prevent the reader becoming bogged down in technology.

In 1969 when MACROSCOPE was first published it received controversial reviews. I can understand that. The original manuscript was rejected several times on the strength of the last 90 pages. In this part of the book Anthony achieves the effect that Heinlein aimed for in THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST. There is a severe dislocation of reality and a beautifully schizophrenic feeling that must have scared those editors and critics half out of their minds. MACROSCOPE is another CHILDHOOD'S END and so much more again. Our (humanity's) position in the universe is plainly put to us, but stronger than that is Anthony's view of intolerance and bigotry on racial, sexual, intellectual and ultimately human grounds. These points are well made; some are very obvious but some are like a razor blade in tissue, con-

cealed but very sharp.

Finally, a query. My copy has a sticker saying 'A Paperback Original'. Does this mean that MACROSCOPE has never been published in paperback form in almost seventeen years? If so, Grafton are wrong. Sphere published it a few years back, according to the credit inside my copy of TRIPLE DETENTE.

Robert E. Vardeman - - THE CRYSTAL CLOUDS (Avon, 222pp, \$2.95)

THE WHITE FIRE (Avon, 199pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The previous volume in this series was roundly dismissed by Helen McNabb in PI 56. This sort of fantasy - 'proud she-warrior and last flame of a fallen creed now faces a challenge greater than ever before' - really is the literary equivalent of filling the inside of your head with damp cotton wool.

Jane Yolen - - DRAGON'S BLOOD (Orbit, 243pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

I suppose it's inevitable that any book about dragons is going to be compared to Anne McCaffrey's series. It is particularly appropriate in this case.

DRAGON'S BLOOD is a reasonable light juvenile fantasy of the sort that I would have read at eleven or twelve. Unfortunately I get this funny deja-vue feeling. This book comes over as an inferior blend of McCaffrey, Andre Norton, and Heinlein (in his CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY but without the morality).

The dragons here are used in "sport" like the cockfights that used to be (still are?) a source of sadistic entertainment and gambling in our world. Ms Yolen seems to glorify this barbaric practice, and to imply that there is a nobility in her dragons which cause them to relish their duels. I don't like this philosophy, particularly in a book which is likely to appeal mostly to young readers.

That aside, the book lacks depth, despite the cover using the phrase 'richly detailed'. I didn't like it.

Kurt Singer - - 4th TARGET BOOK OF HORROR (ed.) (Target, 142pp. £1.60)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

From the 'traditional' end of the horror genre comes Lord Lytton's tale of a haunted house, W.B. Seabrook's strangely sexual account of a voodoo ceremony, and others: accursed jewels, a phantom coach, a ghost-hunter's encounters, a family curse, and tribal sorcery. After the first two stories the standard declines rapidly.

Kim Stanley Robinson - - ICEHENGE (Futura, 262pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

So, on Pluto there's this immense circle of huge ice blocks set on their beam ends and, on one of the liths, an inscription in Sanskrit. Who put the henge there and why?

Robinson provides an answer of sorts - it's an answer that's also a teasing statement of one of the many human predicaments and it's not quite the solution you would expect if this were but a regular genre mystery. I suspect that, in his turn, Robinson himself had a predicament, if only he knew it. Someone ought to tell him that he's a bit too good for this sort of material. And so, although it is my job to reach a conclusion and to communicate that to you, I can't tell you whether this is a bad book almost rescued through heroic effort or a good book dragged down by its plot.

ICEHENGE is a bad book about mysterious henges, routinely authoritarian governments and freedom-loving asteroid miners and, burrowing beneath this rubble, a good book about archaeology and about amnesia. Archaeology as a method for digging down to the truth, sifting through the generations of deceitful silt that longevity deposits. Yes, longevity, that old warhorse of SF - here ICEHENGE picks up as Robinson breathes new life into a tired animal. Longevity does not bestow an immense Heinleinian wisdom, stemming from millenia of contemplating one's own ineffable navel - longevity brings intense nightmares into which centuries of fractured experience are compressed, bewildering flashes of illumination that alternate with terrifying blanks as the overloaded brain attempts to cope with its cargo before finally 'funking out' - and you get a society of witless, stumbling amnesiacs. A powerful vision, and there is a splendid moment when one character yells that he remembers what happened and everyone else taps their heads knowingly. Of course, a wicked government can turn this situation to its advantage, leaving time to bury certain misdeeds... the problem with ICEHENGE is that the government's urge to repress lacks convincing motivation. (Unless it be that the behaviour of the libertarian space colonists found in American SF drives even the meekest of folk to reach for the nearest truncheon.) The brutal administration in ICEHENGE is essential to the story, yet is also a crucial weakness, the reader sensing it is there only for the other ideas to kick against.

Still, there's the archaeology and, along with that, some correspondingly interesting stuff about geology. Robinson gets off on gneiss and grabens like Ballard does on abandoned airstrips, and those who recall his vivid stories "Ridge Running" and "Green Mars" need no telling that, almost-elicited situation or not, human figures in an elemental landscape bring out the best

in him as a writer, and it is a best that is very good. It is a trait that indicates an individual quality to Robinson's work, something that distinguishes him - the sooner, then, he stops running with the herd, the better.

Poul Anderson - - TIME PATROLMAN (Sphere, 185pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

The blurb gives the impression that this is a novel. In fact it's two novelettes, "Ivory, and Apes, and Peacocks", and "The Sorrow of Odin the Goth". Both are stories from Anderson's Time Patrol series. Manse Everard, Unattached Operative, is the linking character, starring in the first story and having a small father-confessor type role in the second.

"Ivory..." concerns the city of Tyre, 950 BC. Some bads from the far future led by one Merau Varagan are trying to hold the Time Patrol to ransom. If the Transmuter (converts anything to anything) isn't handed over to them then they will bomb Tyre and thus disrupt the timeline. Manse is helped by a young Phoenician, Pummairam, to track down the baddies and find a suitable point in time to attack them. Expecting a novel I was surprised when the first attack resulted in a win for the good guys (and the consequent end of the story).

The plot is simple and fails to raise any level of tension. It is padded out by descriptions of Tyre and by short history lessons plus a story within a story when Everard tells of his first encounter with Varagan in South America, 1826.

Anderson has a tendency to use lists in his descriptions to convey atmosphere. A short example: 'Porters beneath their yokes, litter bearers conveying the occasional wealthy burgher, forced a way among sailors, artisans, vendors, labourers, housewives, entertainers, mainland farmers and shepherds, foreigners from end to end of the Midworld Sea, every variety and condition of life.' Too mechanical a descriptive device for me, I'm afraid.

"The Sorrow..." is a much better story. A scholar, Carl Farness, is given the job of tracing the origins of certain Germanic tales and following their development. I doing so he becomes intimately involved with one family of Goths. His involvement becomes too personal, too protective: further, the Goths decide he is Odin. The timeline is subtly changed and to restore it Carl must betray his Gothic family.

The story alternates between 20th and 4th century following Carl between rest periods at home and the field work. The viewpoint alters between first and third person, little bits of archaic

language are mixed in and surprisingly all this works well. Even the occasional list isn't sufficient to detract from the story. Carl Farness and the Goths are worth caring about.

CONTACT



((Not many letters this time, which will probably be a sign for dozens to arrive tomorrow. First, GRAHAM ANDREWS comments on PI 57:))

I half-agree and half-disagree with Ken Lake about THE FINAL ENCYCLOPEDIA... I think that Ken was a little naive to think of TFI as 'the majestic culmination of the Dorsai cycle'; that was the blurb-writer's statement, not Dickson's. By its very nature, the Childe cycle can't have a 'majestic culmination'. History itself is, after all, a continuing process. And when I think of what Farmer did with the 'Riverworld' series... But Ken is right about TFI's excessive length and lethargic pacing - and even more right about the uselessness of Sandra Miesel's Afterword.

((PHIL NICHOLS disputes statements made in two reviews in PI58))

Firstly, David V. Barrett believes that THE TWILIGHT ZONE: THE ORIGINAL STORIES contains no 'story adaptations of any original screenplays.' In fact, two of the stories therein are adaptations by Anne Serling of original scripts by Rod Serling, though this is not explicitly stated (or justified). Further, I believe that Ray Bradbury's 'I Sing the Body Electric' is also an adaptation: the TV episode appeared in 1962, but the short story was not published until 1969.

Secondly, Christopher Ogden's review of STAR TREK: THE NEW VOYAGES 1 & 2 includes the unusual assertion that 'ST was one of the few American series that maintained any kind of continuity.' Now -

and this is a potentially embarrassing boast - I know ST like the back of my own hand, and I can recall very little internal continuity. I can think of only two specific instances in the run of 79 episodes in which particular reference is made to another episode. Indeed, I would argue that ST showed enormous lapses of continuity. Remember the 'prime directive' - asseverated one week, totally forgotten the next? Remember the 'subcutaneous transponder' - invented one week (as a means of locating a person whose communicator has been stolen) and forgotten the next? Not to mention the maximum speed of the Enterprise, or the limit of Mr Spock's alien powers, each of which fluctuated wildly according to the whim of the individual writer. Sorry, but it won't wash. ST scores low on the scale of continuity.

Glad to see further attempts to improve the previously tatty appearance of PI.

((ANDY MILLS comments on the tendency towards shorter reviews))

To begin with, let me offer my congratulations for an interesting and informative publication. Being a new member of the BSFA, I've no idea as to what PI was like before no. 55, but certainly the present incarnation alone justifies my joining the association (VECTOR too is of interest, but its reviews - primarily of unaffordable hardbacks - are of little immediate concern).

Harking back to your editorial in PI 56, you gave mention to a trend I would like to see encouraged - shorter reviews. From the reader's point of view, the value of reviews depend on reviewers stating their opinions. The reader, to put it briefly, needs to know if books are good or bad, and why; reviews may be long but if the reader comes away from them with no more idea than before as to whether he or she should part with money, then the reviewers - to my mind - have failed their public. In any case, you quite often find that the only difference between a long review and a short one is that the former reveals more of the work-in-question's plot...

What has impressed me most about PI is that its reviewers - unlike some in, for instance, VECTOR or INTERZONE - screw their courage to the sticking point and take a stance on the books they have read. It doesn't matter if those opinions are positive or negative so long as there is a forum for debate in the form of a letters page. Moreover, with time you tend to gain some familiarity with a reviewer's tastes and can thus better evaluate their valuations.

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

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Artwork this issue was, of course, Nik Morton and Ian Butterfield, who were left off the front page by sheer error on my part...