

PAPERBACK INFERNO

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Paperback Purgatory...

I've tried several times to write this editorial and each time scratched out my attempts. I've tried to be ironic, even comic, and worked out an extended conceit in which we're all living in a pretty undistinguished SF novel (the sort which would get slammed in this magazine). But it hasn't worked. The only possible approach is the one which recognises these events as what they are -- dangerous and frightening.

I am, of course, referring to the fact that since we last met aircraft of a foreign power stationed in this country took off and flew to a third nation, committed an act of war, and flew back. I am referring also to an event which must, surely, bring doubts to the mind of even the most committed supporter of nuclear power, an event which was more terrifying than even the most explicit SF tale of meltdown and catastrophe, because real people were killed, a real environment was mutilated, and real people did not warn other real people what was happening until some time after the event.

Within a few weeks, the kind of thing people like you and I read about every week nearly happened -- twice. We now know that our Prime Minister will

head over backwards to accommodate Ronald Reagan's homicidal whims. We now know that no country is prepared to deal with a serious nuclear accident: the French are even more secretive than we are, and when a British official gives advice it's more on the "boil your water and don't drink the rain" level than anything else. But in a sense, that's understandable -- because while these vastly expensive and dangerous producers of "cheap power" proliferate, there's nothing that can be done except hope if a serious accident occurs.

I'm reminded more than ever that I read fictional alternatives because I'm convinced that we need real ones...

But what else has 1986 brought us? Is SF going down the chute like everything else (though would it matter if it wasn't)? Not everything, as yet, is coming Pt's way, but the range of quality seems wide enough. Futura's 'Orbit' imprint, for instance, in the same month gave us Richard Cowper's ROAD TO CORLAY -- which surely needs no further boosting from me to be acclaimed as the brilliant novel it is -- and Seanus Cullen's A NOOSE OF LIGHT, an Arabian Nights fantasy involving djinns with detachable sentient willies. Ten for ingenuity, minus several million for taste.

New paperback imprints deserve a

mention. Gollancz's extremely well-produced 'classic SF' series gives us Delany's NOVA, Silverberg's A TIME OF CHANGES, Sturgeon's MORE THAN HUMAN, and Vonnegut's THE SIRENS OF TITAN as initial offerings. Unwin's uneven 'Unicorn' fantasy series is joined by a sister SF imprint, 'Orion', with three original titles, Gwyneth Jones' ESCAPE PLANS, Lisa Goldstein's THE DREAM YEARS, and Graham Dunstan Martin's TIME-SLIP. Reviews of all these books will appear next issue, along with reviews of the latest four Women's Press SF books. Not a new series by now, perhaps, the WP range offers a commendably eclectic selection, and Jody Scott's PASSING FOR HUMAN, Rhoda Lerman's THE BOOK OF THE NIGHT, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's HERLAND and Josephine Saxton's QUEEN OF THE STATES seem to be more of the same, and for once, that's not necessarily a criticism. It's worth pointing out that at least three of the WP SF list - the two Joanna Russ books and Suzanne H. Elgin's NATIVE TONGUE - are on my personal list of best books I've read this year.

Elsewhere, things are much the same, and that's the problem. Take, for instance, fantasy. No doubt my credibility has totally vanished after my admission - see Ken Lake's review - that I found something to enjoy in Jack L. Chalker's 'Dancing Gods' series. No doubt I'll have more to say on that subject, but let me just say now that I don't disagree with Ken's evaluation but I can quite happily fill a train ride with that particular kind of nonsense. But over the past few months an awful lot of fantasy trilogies have come my way, and while some of them are Good Reads which you'll enjoy and forget about until the next installment, in others the creative spirit of J.R.R. Tolkien has become a malevolent ghost which sucks the life out of the author's inspiration.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS is, rightly, the touchstone for a certain subgenre of fantasy with all its flaws and excellences. And when I read, say, Guy Gavriel Kay's THE SUMMER TREE (Unwin Unicorn) after the adulatory reviews on the back, what do I find? A book where a fallen god, Rakoth Maugrim, breaks free from imprisonment under a mountain, a book about elves, goblins, dwarves and a wizard named Silvercloak, a book, in short, which relies far, far too much on the Tolkien model to ever have the chance of being taken for itself.

This is a shame, because although I felt literally angry at the book I don't want to give the impression that it's the worst I've read. The author has obviously researched his sources. There is a potentially powerful echo of Odin's ordeal on Yggdrasil when one of the earthborn humans brought into the world of Fionavar volunteers for immolation on the limbs of the Summer Tree to save the land from drought. Kay's 'elves' are the Norse lios-alfar and svart-alfar (light-elves and dark-elves) which (although Alan Garner got there first) could have been a useful distinction, even if in terminology alone, from Tolkien. But the book fails to come to life.

And why? Because, I think, when I read Tolkien I am in touch with a scholar who knew his subject backwards, who wrote to recapture the feeling of involvement he got when he read myth and legend and wove his reading and writing into a highly personal mythology symbolising his estrangement from the world. Who created. And when I read Guy Gavriel Kay I am merely reading a book written by someone who has read Tolkien. Who has borrowed. Sometimes this works, and we get Good Reads of various degrees of literary quality. Far too often, however, it doesn't and we get poorly-written bores: even quite well-written and heart-in-the-right-place bores like THE SUMMER TREE. How do we distinguish between them? Good question. Your turn...

"Upon the rack in print..."

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, March 1986
ANALOG, April 1986

(Reviewed by Edward James)

These issues contain the final parts of two serials: Frederick Pohl's THE COMING OF THE QUANTUM CATS in ANALOG and William Gibson's COUNT ZERO in ASIMOV'S. I am sure that more competent, or sympathetic, critics will be dealing with the new Gibson in these pages sooner or later. Enough to say that this is a second glimpse into the cyber future of NEUROMANCER, seen through the eyes of a number of equally unpleasant characters, who engage in a series of frenetic and (to me) uninteresting activities, told in a breathless prose in which three-word (or even one-word) paragraphs are not uncommon. Maybe I read it on an off day. Maybe it

just required much more concentration to appreciate (or even follow) than I had at the time. Maybe frenetic American tales of skulduggery and intrigue are not my cup of tea.

Anyway, I enjoyed THE COMING OF THE QUANTUM CATS, despite the title. But then I usually do enjoy Pohl, as one of the few 'old-timers' who have come to terms with the modern world without sacrificing their unique qualities. Unpretentious but clever; a nice twist added to tales of multiple parallel worlds and, for once, no assumption that our version of reality is the best. (It all takes place in a variety of 1983s. One character mentions to Senator Jack Kennedy that there were actually a couple of aberrant time-lines where he became President, was assassinated and, as an ultimate result, was succeeded by Ronald Reagan; the Kennedy response is a stunned 'Remarkable'.)

It starts in a well-created world in which the Moral Majority, with Arab financial backing, have won control of the States. Another time-line invents a way of travelling to others, and these travellers, 'cats', have, of course, doubles in many other time-lines. We see several Reagans, several Asimovs, and even (not in the best possible taste) several Stephen Hawkings, in various degrees of illness. There are plenty of opportunities for Pohlman satirical comment on different life-styles, and some intriguing speculation on alternative histories. Worth a try.

ANALOG had little else of interest. A long and tedious story by Sheffield; another story, by Robert F. Young on the age-old theme of the faster-than-light traveller returning to meet his great-grandchildren on Earth; a Sucharitkul story on equally hoary themes, of an alien artifact discovered by archaeologists for instance, but redeemed by an amusingly described (and presumably authentic) Thai background.

ASIMOV's displayed its literary superiority to its sister mag, as usual. A story by Ian Watson, "The Great Atlantic Swimming Race" - a wry and witty look into the future on the same lines as "The World SF Convention of 2080": who would have thought that the author of THE EMBEDDING would develop such a sure, light touch with what is a real rarity in SF: a funny and intelligent story? Also here, Watson's one-time collaborator Michael Bishop with "Close Encounter with the Deity": the second appearance in this issue of Stephen Hawking, here as a professor of a genetically deformed physicist who is inspired by the late medieval mystic Juliana of Norwich to seek the meeting point of physics and theology in a black hole - an intelligent and thought-provoking example of SF at near its best. And finally, and equally well-written, John Kessel's "The Pure Product", following the trip of a chillingly amoral time-traveller from the future across the States. An award-contender somewhere in that bunch, surely.

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION

March - April 1986

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

Familiarity can breed, if not contempt, then a terrific lethargy, and I often find it a struggle to keep this column sounding positive when discussing F&SF. Overexposure to the house style of one magazine brings the danger that one's responses to the occasional item of interesting material may be numbed and I do not doubt that I may in the past have bypassed worthy stories when afflicted by the general torpor that the sight of F&SF brings on; and conversely may sometimes have praised below-par pieces in an attempt to raise the spirits.

But enough of such despair. I think I have it right when I tell you that the April F&SF was quite a good issue and the March issue pretty dire, the one crisis being David Garnett's "Still Life", in which the too-clever-by-half reader expects a re-working of the Dorian Grey theme but gets something subtler and even more cynical. Otherwise there was Karen Jay Fowler's "Wild Boys" - cute, Scott Baker's "Sea Change" - ditto, James Tiptree Jr's "Good

Night, Sweethearts" - dull dull dull, and, shock horror, a poor story from Kit Reed. And a neat mathematical notion from George Zebrowski, which is soured by the author's pomposness: 'SF is supposed to be a fiction of ideas, but most of the time the ideas are merely superficial conceits.'

Discuss this statement as applicable to the lead story for April, Ian Watson's "Cold Light". Does your reading of "Cold Light" lead you to evaluate Zebrowski as a small-time operator on the ideas front? Highlight aspects of the Watson method with reference to: batty yet not wildly implausible idea which is fixed with an unflinching stare and thought through to a conclusion both satisfying and ambiguous; interesting setting people with interesting people; attractive and readable prose dotted with enough incidental throwaway notions and speculative asides to feed a regular novel.

Easy, isn't it? April's issue also offered Richard Kearns's "Grave Angels", a subtle and well-paced horror; W. Warren Wagner's "The Day of No Judgement", a freshly expressed if ultimately predictable exploration of insanity (doesn't that sound dreadful - but it shows how often mental instability is used as a cheap plot device in fantastic literature); and Larry Tritton's "Serendipity", a definite advance on F&SF's usual dreary run of 'humorous' offerings - this tale of an upwardly mobile derelict modulated into something quite surprising. Harlan Ellison only made one issue and continued his campaign

to expand the vocabulary of criticism, informing us that he went 'absolutely bugfuck over TIME BANDITS'. An expressive advocacy, I guess, though I didn't go to see it, nor BRAZIL, which he was meant to be reviewing; instead, I sampled the special SF issue of THE FICTION MAGAZINE, which was worth getting to read an extract from a forthcoming first novel that seems to have a fantastic element, "The Song of the Forest" by Colin McKay. The strictly SF and fantasy contributions were not so strong: a dated-feeling story by Ralph Noyes that kept an uneasy balance between silliness and genuine originality; a brave story by Lisa Tuttle, "The Birds of the Moon", that never quite fulfilled the promise of a few absolutely nightmarish moments; a good but too-short interview with Aldiss and commentary from Edwards and Kincaid. THE FICTION MAGAZINE seems worth reading, although the standard of both fiction and criticism - admittedly judging from only one issue - does not approach that of INTERZONE. Dent are doing an anthology similar to that they did on IZ, which should provide a useful sampler for prospective new readers.

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, May - June 1986

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

Quite the most interesting piece in the May F&SF is 'A Transect', Kim Stanley Robinson being subtle and literary. Also being too clever by half, some might say, and I cannot admit to being absolutely certain as to whether the story's references to South Africa were entirely sincere or whether they might have been stitched in as an easy emotional refer-

ent - one of the penalties of being less than straightforward about an issue that is so close to the bone. Initially very different in mood is Harry Harrison's 'The View From the Top of the Tower', which promises to be riotous until the author, presumably striving for effect, tacks on an uncharacteristically sombre conclusion. Another story that doesn't quite come off at the end is Bradley Denton's 'In the Fullness of Time', an intermittently powerful, and strangely bitter, reversal of the theme of 'The New Accelerator'.

There is another faint echo of Wells in the lead story for June, Robert F. Young's 'Revolution 20', in that in that the protagonist is known simply as 'The Time Traveller', although the comparison must stop there. Young has a retrogressive and fatal tendency to write on the big issues, God and Armageddon. It is nevertheless a pleasant

surprise when a writer does whip up a genuinely fresh interest from an ancient theme. In spite of its awful title, John Barnes' 'How Cold She Is, And Dumb', was a ghost story with a strongly individual voice; even better was Judith Moffett's 'Surviving', a thoughtful variation on the Tarzan story. It is to Moffett's credit that not only does she have the courage, with her first published SF story, to tackle so familiar a theme, but that she does it so well. The central relationship between the psychologist and the 'Chimp Child' is very convincing.

Harlan only seems able to make every other issue these days. All the more reason, then, to treasure those gems of advice that do come our way: 'Some of you act as if you are miraculously free of the ravages of intellect...'

Closer Encounters

Keith Roberts - - - - - MOLLY ZERO
(Penguin, 251pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

You open this book, and you see that it starts in the second person present indicative. You sneak a hasty look at the last page, and you groan when you realise that the whole book is in the second person present indicative. (You also feel rather guilty, firstly because you're subject to an irrational prejudice against a particular type of speech, and secondly because you've seen the twist at the end.) But as you start reading you're gripped by the immediacy of the narrative, and you are almost convinced that it was a good idea.

Penguin are doing well by Keith Roberts: they've recently republished Pavane and The Furies, and now this novel, originally issued by Gollancz in 1980. I've now read five Roberts books (including the over-rated PAVANE), and am much more enthusiastic about Molly Zero than any of the others: it is beautifully plotted, filled with thoroughly believable people, and with a horrifyingly plausible setting - and to my mind these three characteristics are not all found in the other works by Roberts that I've read, nor, of course, are they all that common in SF as a whole. And it shares another feature possessed by most of the very best SF: it reveals its carefully constructed world very slowly and logically, without any lecturing, and, by the end, revealing the reasons behind what had seemed to be inconsistencies, such as the names of the towns.

It takes place in a Britain somewhat over 200 years from now, where Birmingham has been nuked (wish fulfilment, suggests this heretical former member of the Birmingham SF Group), and the rest of the country split up into various military sectors as a response to the economic collapse and social disorder of the late twentieth century. The narrator, Molly Zero, is being brought up in boarding

schools run on military lines, from which those who fail the continual tests and examinations mysteriously disappear. That she escapes, travels across Britain with a group of gypsies (the only ones who can easily travel in a tightly controlled society) and eventually joins an urban terrorist group in London is no more than is revealed, regrettably, by Penguin's blurb. The three societies she encounters, a small isolated community in Cumbria, the Romany travellers, and the violent world of London, are each subtly extrapolated from present conditions, each a beautiful mixture of the strange and the familiar. Sad that this fine product of British SF took five years to get into paperback.

John Christopher - - - - - THE DEATH OF GRASS
(Sphere, 222pp. £2.25)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

The blurb describes The Death of Grass as a classic. What makes it so? Five reprintings are indicative but not definitive. More significantly, it stands (first published 1956) as a signpost within the catastrophe/post-catastrophe sub-genre between The War of the Worlds (1897) and, say, Hello America (1983). It perpetuates the Wellsian trick of abruptly transforming lives which seemed settled, conventional and enduring into existences likely to be short, nasty and brutish, doing so by counterpointing images of domestic solidity with those of encroaching disaster, and by playing a vicious war-game over comfortably familiar territory - in Wells the lower Thames Valley, in Christopher the length of the A1.

From Wells to Ballard there is a shift towards global scale. Although Book II of The War of the Worlds is entitled "The Earth under the Martians", there is no real sense of a planetary perspective. Little is detailed as

happening beyond estuarine Essex and the universe is targeted on Woking. Hello America maps out a catastrophic arena ostensibly continental, but made to embrace the fauna, flora, climates and cataclysms of the entire earth. In this mid-way novel, The Death of Grass, while immediate action stays within England, the fates of Europe, America, India, China and Britain are intimately and graphically unified. Though Bow Bells on the wireless and absence of motorways promote now a period atmosphere, the ambience is already and recognizably that of the global village. The movements of famine-stricken masses; relief aid given or withheld; the spread of an uncontrolled virus - these, now the instantly communicated commonplaces of satellite television, are here fictionally documented, not melodramatically, but with social realism and some forward-looking apprehension. In its placing within the genre, as in its treatment of catastrophe, it thus may claim a classic role.

There is, however, a further imaginative dimension. The work has no overt pretensions to myth or allegory, yet there is in it that journey from "the city of destruction" to "the celestial country" which is thematic in Christopher - a Bunyanesque scenario found equally in such juveniles as The White Mountains and such adult novels as A Wrinkle in the Skin. John Custance's journey is not aimless escape. It has in it the "quest" element - quest for the symbolically remote, pastoral Cumbrian valley, a journey through tribulation to a tough but harshly redemptive conclusion. Christian had what one might call the selfish soul: Custance is representative of the selfish gene. Inheritance and kinship emerge as basic strands in the plot which, from "Prodrome" to last chapter sounds variations on the themes of Jacob and Esau, Cain and Abel. The patriarchal Beverly Custance says in the "Prodrome": "The best land in the world might as well be barren if it brings bad blood between brothers." All of these resonances have penetrative power to make this a memorable and durable if not a classic work of science fiction.

Eric Frank Russell - - - - -SINISTER BARRIER
(Methuen, 201pp. £2.50)
- - - - -WASP
(Methuen, 175pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Eric Frank Russell lives! If there is an SF fan who has not at some time read both these novels, I shall be surprised, and editor Andy Sawyer, in sending them to me for review, commented "I hope they wear well - I used to be a big fan of his."

Well, Andy and all the rest of you out there, breathe again: at least so far as these two books are concerned, you can renew that fan support. Get the two of them - with their evocative forties-style covers - and save them for one of those long, lazy summer afternoons while cricketers prance, or punters pole you along the river, or you simply lie in a deckchair on the lawn.

Of course, there are differences between the two books. Sinister Barrier, the archetypal disaster book, hinges on Charles Fort's claim that "I think we are all property." It was written for the short-lived but superb magazine Unknown although it is straight "pulp sf" and not fantasy; it appeared there in the very first issue back in 1939 when its wise-cracking, hardboiled basic style must have amazed the editor, coming as it did from a quiet, studious British member of the B.I.S., a contemporary of Arthur Clarke.

Revised in 1948 by dragging in the "atom bomb" as the latest scare weapon, it offers constant fast action, a plausible explanation for many aspects of man's inhumanity to man, levitation and a few dozen other mysteries, and our gallant hero comes nonchalantly through while all around him fall dead in droves. It was an instant classic on publication, and despite its very, very dated sound and feel it'll remain that way, the more so since so many lesser hacks copied, adapted, bowdlerised, expanded, and otherwise messed about with the basic plot in the nearly-fifty years since its first appearance.

Wasp is something else - a taut war novel with immense and still effective suspense that relies not on power or viciousness but on sheer guile and brainpower. First appearing in 1957, it hadn't aged a day since then and I defy any keen fan of "this type of book" to read it without losing himself in its spell and coming out the other end forever enraptured of its ingenuity and panache.

Again, newer fans may feel it's all been done before - it hasn't, but it certainly has been done again - again and again, with one twist or another to revive it, renew it, gloss or brutalise or simply change it for the sake of avoiding plagiarism actions. No, you can't beat a real master, and Russell was, is and to my way of thinking always will be recognised as one of those. Both books are going on my permanent shelves, and both will be re-read at leisure whenever I'm feeling in need of a good hard jolt of clear thinking and fast action.

REVIEWS

Roger Zelazny - - - - - TRUMPS OF DOOM
(Avon, 184pp. \$3.50)

UNICORN VARIATIONS
(Sphere, 252pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

TRUMPS OF DOOM is the first book of a new trilogy in the Amber series, a smooth blend of 'realistic' thriller-adventure and S & S. The thriller plot has the unmistakable genre stamp and would not disgrace a Bagley or Lyall. Merle Corey is a bright young thing in computers. Someone is trying to kill him. He doesn't know how, or why, but in recent years every April 30 has brought an increasingly serious and bizarre attempt on his life.

Now enter the S & S element. Merle Corey is actually Merlin son of Corwin, Prince of Amber. Existing Amber fans, read on; others are advised to look at the earlier books in

the Amber series first. (These are Nine Princes in Amber, The Guns of Avalon, Sign of the Unicorn, The Hand of Oberon, and The Courts of Chaos.) Although TRUMPS OF DOOM does have just about enough integrity to be readable as a novel in its own right, a good deal of background knowledge is assumed. Readers who are not already Amber aficionados will find the book a competent potboiler; the devotees will, of course, already have bought it.

UNICORN VARIATIONS is a ragbag (or treasure trove, depending on how much you like Zelazny's work) of 22 pieces, mostly fiction, some non-fiction, with copyright dates from 1965 to 1981. They range from the award-winning novella Home is the Hangman to stories of a few hundred words and material only previously published in fanzines. Zelazny himself in the book's dedication describes it as an 'assemblage' and in my opinion the collection's main fault is that it is not a collection, but a heap of bits and pieces thrown together between paper covers. Unicorn Variations contains some very good work, and some surprisingly mediocre work (or is it just that Zelazny is master of a broader range of writing styles than most people's reading tastes), and would hence do nicely as a representative volume for a cramped bookshelf, or as an introduction to Zelazny's work.

Marion Zimmer Bradley - - - - - THE CATCH TRAP
(Sphere, 69lpp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This book is not SF. In her foreword the author calls it a book about the flying trapeze, which it is, but it is also the story of a complex and difficult love affair, made unusual because the affair is a homosexual relationship between two men. I'm not a devotee of Marion Zimmer Bradley, I read a few Darkover books which I found acceptable if not riveting; this book however I enjoyed enormously, it has stayed in my mind since I read it, thoughts about the characters surfacing from time to time despite what I consider to be some glaring faults, the chief of which is the unbalanced structure of the book. The two main elements in the book are the relationship between Tommy and Mario, and the flying which are uneven so that the flying is swamped and often becomes merely a background against which the story is set, which is a shame. The book is written in three sections, two long ones with a very short interlude between them. The first one is Tommy's introduction to flying at 13 years old, his absorption into the Flying Santellis and the slow growth of the relationship between himself and Mario. Here is where the author missed out on an opportunity to tell us more about flying, for the reader to discover it with Tommy, as it is the tense and difficult relationship swamps everything else making the first half of the book drag, even the exhilaration of flying fails to penetrate and lighten the emotional dramas of the protagonists. The second half of the book is much more successful. The flying and the

relationship unite to form an integral whole, neither separable from the other, Mario and Tommy's searching for professional achievement and personal peace make a story which I found totally riveting. The characterisation is good, all of the Santelli family are believable, complex people, particularly the almost self destructive Mario; the writing is fluently effective, not sliding into either sentimentality or cliché which could be a strong temptation in some of the more emotional passages. Despite its faults I would recommend it as a readable book with action, personality, emotion skilfully handled so that it is a memorable and an impressive novel, because I will remember it and it has impressed me, much more than I expected it to.

Atanielle Annyn Noel - THE DUCHESS OF KNEEDEEP
(Avon, 170pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by David Willis)

Some authors prefer to adopt exotic Nom de Plumes, presumably to attract attention (I can only assume, since I have not heard of her before, that this is one such author). First impressions of a book mean a lot to me, and I'm sure that the tacky cover illustration did a lot to deflate my enthusiasm. Basically, the book is a humorous tale - not to be taken seriously as hardcore SF - of Sidonee, a young duchess who flees from her husband on her wedding night, because she believes him to be a madman. Along the way, she is hindered or aided and abetted by various strange and unbelievable characters, such as Missy Rose, the madam at a whorehouse where Sidonee takes refuge, Bret, the trustworthy, independent-minded robot, (robots in this book are unfortunately called AIDs), and the mysterious True Love, who for some unaccountable reason, follows Sidonee about, but does not reveal his identity to her until the end. Essentially, the 'plot' is Sidonee's journey across the planet of Kneedeep, so called because the seas are only knee deep; she encounters strange people, strange places and strange creatures before we are brought back to (relative) normality at the end. From the style, I wouldn't class it as science fiction - it is like the science fantasy written by Robert Sheckley or Piers Anthony. If the plot and the humour had been more convincing and less weak, I might have enjoyed this book more. The contrived style and often idiot turns of phrase left a lot to be desired. I got lost about halfway through, when the plot became confusing and surreal. This book did not inspire my sense of wonder, but this is probably a matter of taste, and I expect somebody will enjoy reading it.

T.E.D.Klein - - - - - THE CEREMONIES
(Pan Books, 549pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

I can just see this novel as a three part mini-drama on ITV, with David Soul as the smug New York academic retreating to the country to work, and Jane Seymour as his landlady, misfit in a repressive religious community

smouldering with sexuality. Of course, her taciturn husband with an unexplained store of occult knowledge and the academic's dim but virgin girlfriend will be pushed into the background even though they both suffer a nasty fate in the woods, around which the plot of the novel actually centres. On the other hand, it's not the sort of plot that's going to suffer unduly if scriptwriters do tinker with it. All you really need to know is that evil is abroad once again, that it's going to be pretty bloody on the way, and that evil may, or may not, be destroyed at the end. Uncertainty is vital - after all, the publishers might want a sequel, ditto the TV company.

This is not the book that T.E.D. Klein set out to write. His intention seems to have been to examine the survival of an ancient force of evil and its effects on both the strictly religious country folk and the godless citizens of the Big Apple, but achievement fell somewhat short of aspiration. He obviously worked hard on the novel's complex but very self-conscious construction - a mixture of flashbacks, diary entries, letters and even straight narrative. He tried to give it artistic integrity by alluding to the Gothick novelists, particularly Arthur Machen, which was wasted on me because I've never read any of them, particularly Arthur Machen. Characterisation, I think, must have been overlooked, and the plotting is slow and tortuous beyond endurance, not to mention totally unbelievable. All that remains is airport bookstall fodder with unjustified literary pretensions.

Freda Warrington - - - - A BLACKBIRD IN SILVER
(New English Library, 302pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

At last, a science fantasy series whose blurb does not mention Tolkien! The Quest of the Serpent begins fittingly enough in the House of Rede where we find Eldor, rumoured to be the oldest man on Earth, who fled to the South Pole to escape the growing madness of mankind. To this house come three diverse people, drawn by one aim, the destruction of the Worm. According to legend the Worm is the source and power of many evils in the Earth; recently, it had risen from its Arctic hideaway and devastated Forluin, the most ingenuous and peaceful land on the planet. To seek revenge, a Forluinishman, Estarinel has travelled to the House. He meets up with Ashurek, once ruthless chief warrior of the cruel and feared Gorthian empire, now atoning for his sins. And there is Medrian, a young mysterious woman in black who conceals some terrible secret. For their own reasons they are set upon their quest to destroy the evil M'gulfn, the Worm that flies.

Freda Warrington's descriptive passages are powerful, especially where the devastation and desolation caused by M'gulfn is concerned. One of the most powerful sections concerned the debauching of Ashurek's mind by the evil entity, led to the Dark Regions where he was systematically taught Fear. With the exception of the clever twist of making Ashurek's past shrouded in evil-doing, you

could easily have met him in either Lord of the Rings or the Shannara books. But there is a depth unplumbed in Ashurek, and it still needs illumination at the end of this first book of the series. For, he has committed evil yet has a reborn conscience. My only quibble with the description is where Ashurek was captured by a monstrous eagle-like creature and rescued by Silvren from the evil Gastada: all in the space of one small paragraph (p69); here alone the description is found a little thin (!) and it seems cuts were obviously made to condense the book size. (We experience a reprise later, though, in more detail...)

But this is a little more than a quest story, there appear to be manipulative beings involved, Guardians, concerned about the domination of the Earth by the evil powers of the Serpent, M'gulfn. And these Guardians must seemingly atone for what they have set in motion - this is the Earth's only hope. Magic is present on this Earth, though it does not come easy; I liked Silvren's explanation, "Sorcery... actually hurts. It's not like the children's stories where the wizard just waves a wand. It's more like giving birth."

A number of Planes, identified by colours, had been created by rifts in the vast cosmic energies when the Earth was born. Each was inhabited by immortal beings; Hrannekh Ol by men, Hrunnesh by nemen (neither men nor women), H'tebhmella by women. The three adventurers first stumble into the White Plane of Hrannekh and meet silly mathematicians, then combat and befriend nemen, where they also encounter one of the book's more interesting characters, Arlenmia, straight out of Grimm's fairy tales, with an eerie affinity for mirrors. This part was regrettably too brief; but the character has potential, and it seems likely that they will all meet again...

Only the Hrannekh section seemed to pall; the pace quickened and the characters underwent many trials and tribulations, changing as a result, though not melodramatically. I ended the book with its cliff-hanging final page eager to carry on with Book 2, A Blackbird in Darkness. Surely, there can be no better comment than that?

Roger Zelazny - - - - - LORD OF LIGHT
(Methuen, 261pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

I haven't read this since it was first published when it was one of the first books to introduce me to the wider field of SF beyond space opera. Then I thought it was brilliant, innovative, stunningly clever and profoundly thoughtprovoking. Coming back to it so many years later I was apprehensive that it would disappoint the expectations and memories I had of it. I needn't have worried. It is every bit as good as I remembered, in fact rereading it with more sophistication and more knowledge than I had then, my appreciation of it was greater.

Zelazny uses Hinduism and Buddhism as the basis for a novel about a human society on a far world where reincarnation by mechanical means is the norm. In lesser hands the novel

would probably describe how the original colonists set up the hierarchy of the world using Hindu mythology, Zelazny tells us that only in asides and references, as history; his story is that of Sam, a rebel set on improving the conditions of the majority of humans on the planet and his use of Buddhism, of the original inhabitants of the world and of any other means which will aid him in that struggle. It is well written, well executed, well plotted and a gripping and exciting read. In my opinion it is a classic and anyone who hasn't yet read it should lose no time in doing so.

Louise Cooper - - - - - THE INITIATE
(Unwin Paperbacks, 278pp. £2.75)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

The cover says it all - Book 1 of The Time Master Trilogy. I will definitely not be wasting time looking for Books 2 and 3 if The Initiate is any measure of what is to come. I feel confident I can predict the eventual outcome. The thing I cannot grasp is why Allen & Unwin imagine that the world needs yet another variation on the already threadbare theme of a young man of mysterious origins, revealed as a powerful magician whose strength eventually exceeds that of his teachers, making him prey to the blandishments of some nameless evil which he then releases into the land. The only question remaining is whether he will die unrepenting or turn back to the path of goodness and to be honest I don't give a damn either way. Whichever ending this author settles for, there's always another fantasy trilogy to supply the alternative. They're mostly interchangeable after a while, and there is nothing in particular marking this story out from the rest. It's competently written, though the descriptive passages are distinctly mauve in places, and it has all the hallmarks of the standard fantasy - a map, a remote and mysterious castle housing remote and mysterious magicians, not to mention unpronounceable polysyllabic names, and characters with all the expression of shadow puppets. There is nothing in it that hasn't been done before, no real flight of imagination, no evidence of original thought. In fact the only thing in its favour is a rather nice cover, and even that owes more than a passing nod to Mucha and Burne Jones.

James P. Hogan - - - - - CODE OF THE LIFEMAKER
(Penguin, 405pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

James P. Hogan is an Englishman who, along with that boring and cliched "hard-boiled" American type of humour that used to permeate pulp SF, has also taken aboard the equally pernicious American habit of writing blockbusters by having everyone talk to everyone else at length, explaining every damn thing you can imagine - especially things that matter not one iota to the plot but are supposed to provide "background colour".

An example of the "humour" comes when the cosmic destruction of an entire and advanced

alien race is dismissed in a few lines with the comment "Everybody has a bad day sometimes." Examples of his wordiness prevail throughout the book - open it at any page and you'll learn what I mean.

The story opens with a delightful description of how a race of "lost" robots develop into pseudo-humans with all the trappings of our own lifestyle; this is heavy going but just about believable in an oddball way, but then Hogan seems to chicken out in the last few lines, a pity.

We switch to phony Austrian mindreader Karl Zambendorf and learn exactly how he obtains the information that allows him to fool people so smoothly; next we meet "real scientists" who discuss incredibly boring things like UFOs for pages and pages, till on page 63 we briefly rejoin the robots for a bout of needless descriptive matter and crosstalk.

Then it's back to Zambendorf trickery until finally on page 133 we take off into Space with another gang of gabby characters. Page 125 returns us to the robots where we encounter such mind-numbing characters as Thirg, "Asker-of-Forbidden-Questions", who engages in umpteen pages of chatter with the picturesquely named Groork.

Unlike most paperbacks, the publisher's blurb on the back cover does not reveal much about the story - in fact, it tells you no more than you could have extracted by reading about one page in twenty of the first 130-or-so pages of the book. However, its terminal comment that "Clearly something was up - but no one was talking!" is about the most misleading statement I have ever read in a blurb: believe me, everbody is talking!

There is some action here and there, and some interesting ideas - though none that I could honestly extract as being original or really striking. If you really feel you need a companion for a long and solitary rail or air journey, this is undoubtedly high on the list as suitable reading. But if you want a story you can get your teeth into, one that will make you actively seek to find the time to continue it, you've picked quite the wrong book. Sorry!

Jack B. Chalker - - DEMONS OF THE DANG-
ING GODS (Orbit,
1986, 257pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

No, you didn't read a review of the same book in PI 59 - this is the second part of the trilogy. As I felt I had indicated my lack of sympathy with this category of fiction in the last review, the following telephone call followed my receipt of this book:

"Andy, are you sure you want me to review this book?"

"Why not? I know you admire Jack Chalker."

"But I did a hatchet job on the first bit - fantasy's not really my bag. Surely you read my crit?"

"Yes, and it persuaded me to read the book - and I enjoyed it a lot!"

OK, so somebody likes this sort of thing. Why don't I? Well, for a start the obligatory map reveals a land called High Pothique, a Witchwood and a Circe Farm, there are rivers called Rosagnol and Bird's Breath - not to mention the River of the Sad Virgin. How can anyone actually swallow all this, especially when the story comes equipped with such bits as:

The creature was terrible to behold, one who had once been a creature of near perfection, an angel, distorted by hatred and an unquenchable thirst for revenge into a vaguely manlike thing that oozed the rot of long-dead corpses and whose face, twisted in an expression of permanent hatred, was set off by two huge pupilless eyes glowing a bright red... the demon prince gave a bull-like snort, "You really blew it, didn't you, Baron Asshole?"

Let's face it, most gothic-horror writers can do that sort of thing so much better - purple prose with dirty words for light relief really aren't enough, especially when backed up by pseudo-medievalisms such as "Aye, thou art a changeling sure" and a touch of the Conan with "a huge man, well over six feet and so totally muscled that those looking at him generally expected him to crash through stone walls rather than be bothered to walk around them" (even I could have thought of a more striking way of getting that idea over and I guess you could, too).

Unfortunately this comicbook crap does have a strong story line. It's well crafted, excellently paced, carefully contrasted, wilfully spattered with humour both fake and genuine, has snappy dialogue (when it avoids sheer kitsch) and a continuing sequence of Pearl White cliffhangers which are all resolved almost convincingly until you stop, look back at the road you have travelled, and realise you are on a child's carousel, a madman's merry-go-round, an idiot's delight of totally unscary jollifications trying hard to masquerade as straight S&S with a dash of S&M.

Chalker can write and does write. There's more challenge to the careful reader in this farrago of magical nonsense than in a dozen traditional horror stories - what a pity he chooses to expend his talents on such sub-DeCamp pastiche!

But, you ask, what's it all about? Well, our former truckdriver and hitchhiker have now been transmogrified into "a superbarbarian hero...and...a flying fairy woman" and with the help of "master sorcerer Throckmorton P. Ruddygore" they set out to save the world from "the final war that would bring about Armageddon." Look, you can't really want me to carry on, can you? If this

is your bag, you'll love it for its skill; if not, you probably quit reading this review around line ten anyway.

Harry Harrison - - A STAINLESS STEEL
RAT IS BORN (Sphere,
1985, 185pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The past couple of 'Stainless Steel Rat' books were, frankly, disappointing. Slippery Jim DiGriz is, however much Harry Harrison tries to tart up the old reprobate, now a happily married man with two adult sons. Shouldn't he be allowed nothing more strenuous by now than the weekly toddle to the Intergalactic Post Office to nick his pension? Wisely, then, in this new episode, the author has rolled back the calendar to when DiGriz was just beginning his career.

We find James Bolivar DiGriz, not yet 'Slippery Jim', graduating from more efficient ways of lifting candy bars to bank robbery in an attempt to get into jail so that he can pick up tips from the criminal fraternity. But the best crooks don't get caught... so Jim is soon on the trail of The Bishop, a mysterious master-criminal, to become his apprentice.

From then on it's break-out-of-impossible-situation time all the way as DiGriz cocks a snook at law, order, and plausible plotlines (it's nice to see you can still escape from prison in the far distant future by tying blankets together) in order to further his education. Leaving their home planet one jump ahead of the law, Jim and the Bishop find themselves on the repellent planet Spiovente where their scheming is put to its most stringent test. If, like me, you think that Harrison's novels are better the more light-hearted they are, you'll enjoy this froth-and-comic-book concoction. Dull it ain't!

Sydney J. Van Scyoc - - STARSILK (Penguin, 1986,
245pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This is the third and purportedly the concluding book of the trilogy whose other portions are DARKCHILD and BLUE-SONG. It's nothing to sing about...

It is clear that Van Scyoc can write and has emotional import to convey. But why is it that I don't like it? Could it be that I am not interested enough in the main character, Reyna, nor in her destiny? Running parallel with the story of Reyna is that of the sithi (a kind of thinking ape/bear of the forests) Tsuka, who tends to be appealing though is so humanised as to be presumably a progenitor of humans. Not having read the first two books in the series, maybe I am being unkind;

possibly the finale is more meaningful if you have read the first two - but really the book should still stand as a work of interest, which this does not. Why not? that is the question! One of the aggravating things is the joining of words, like 'warmseason', 'Earthexodus' - an abortion if ever there was one! - 'stalklamp' and 'sunstone'.

Reyna lives on Brakrath in the Valley of Terlath where the people seem closeted from the real universe, oblivious of outside worlds. Her destiny seems to be to undergo a trial by ordeal for inheritance of the throne, but she becomes diverted by the plot and the 'hook', namely the talking silk with the voice of Birnam Rauth who was apparently imprisoned on the planet of the silks... You guessed it, a quest is launched to find out what happened to him. Accompanying her is Juaren, a tall handsome hunter, and Verra, an Arnimi woman who stayed in Brakrath and studied the inhabitants with her strange instruments. The reason for Verra's presence does not seem great, merely to provide transport to the silk planet and to offer them jetpacks to fly over the forests. Most irritating of all the mannerisms of Van Scyoc, though, is the proliferation of question marks - there is virtually a '?' on every page, though usually a great deal more than one per page! Perhaps the profusion of these squiggles was trying to make up for the mystery of the quest which was thoroughly lacking? The ending is less than anticlimatic. There is some thinly veiled philosophy of people being 'aware' of their world, of their place in the universe etc., but it is no saving grace for a fairly boring read barely enlivened by occasionally colourful descriptions of the sithi and the jungle, some aspects of which were reminiscent of Aldiss' HOTHOUSE.

Barrington J. Bayley - - THE ROD OF LIGHT (Methuen, 1985, 208pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

THE ROD OF LIGHT is a sequel to THE SOUL OF THE ROBOT, featuring the adventures of the robot Jasperodus on the single giant continent of Earth in the far future. Jasperodus is unique, because he is the only robot to have a soul.

During his travels Jasperodus explores the concept of robotic intelligence, and learns about several rival robotic religions, detailed by Bayley with obvious enjoyment. Jasperodus, being endowed with human consciousness, finds all these rather shallow.

He is then led to Gargan, a robot of brilliant intellect who has gathered together a group of other robots in a remote, desolate spot on the fringe of the robophobic Borgor Empire. Gargan has built a laboratory with which to manufacture souls. Once equipped with souls, robots will be mankind's superiors, and will be able to defeat humanity, revenging themselves for millennia of oppression.

Jasperodus knows how his own soul came to him, but does not reveal this information to Gargan. However, the robots do eventually find out that souls cannot be manufactured, they can only be taken from living humans. Once taken they can be stored in a cylindrical optical storage device - the 'rod of light' - before being transferred to a target robot brain. Because of the inefficiency of Gargan's process, twenty or more humans must die to create one potential robot soul.

Jasperodus has an invidious choice. He can either help his own kind achieve their full potential and assist in the destruction of the human race, or he can betray the robot endeavour to the Borgors.

With THE SOUL OF THE ROBOT, Bayley produced an enjoyable novel which took the theme of robotics in SF further than Asimov's Three Laws. This book takes the concept still further - the frighteningly intelligent and ruthless Gargan is a far cry from the Good Doctor's obedient mechanicals. Jasperodus is, of course, simply a man in a metal skin, rather like the Autobots of my son's favourite cartoon programme. THE ROD OF LIGHT is a thoughtfully written book, with some interesting ideas, although the actual plot is rather thin. THE SOUL OF THE ROBOT is unfortunately essential pre-reading - the book does not stand alone. For this reason I can't really recommend it except to those who liked the first book and are keen for more.

Jane Gaskell - - SOME SUMMER LANDS (Orbit, 360pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This is the fifth and presumably the concluding book in the Atlan saga, which stretches from the 1960s to 1977, when this book was first published in America. It has taken almost ten years to see it printed in Great Britain, while the previous Atlan books have been in print repeatedly over here.

Regretably, I have not read the foregoing stories, THE SERPENT, THE DRAGON, ATLAN and THE CITY. But on taking in the style and world that Gaskell has created, I have been prompted to purchase these four books. I may know about the end of Atlan, but I am still curious about the diaries of

Empress Cija, a complex heroine if ever there was one. Perhaps it was inspired writing to continue the first-person narrative concerning Cija but from her voiceless daughter Seka's viewpoint. The descriptions and Seka's emotions reminded me of the sure touch of Mary Stewart's Merlin, though some of the detail is more explicit.

Presumably the story begins where THE CITY left off, with Cija taking refuge in the palace of her mother the Dictatress with her voiceless daughter Seka. Here she was betrayed, abducted by her incestuous half-brother Smahil, whose intention is to deprive Cija of the ape-child growing inside her. The history behind this conception may be of interest; but as her mother declared, "Bestiality can be fun, but let's not romanticise it, dear." There are numerous small but appropriate humorous touches, such as, "Didn't he even have a statue of you reared in Atlan's capital, a statue of you in rock-crystal? There were jokes that no bride ever was honoured with a bigger erection."

Then dark and mysterious alleys, the earthquake-ridden lands, the colourful characters, peasants slicing meat off their cattle as they grazed, the the mysterious growing up of psychic Seka held me in thrall for most of the book. Atlan's control of electricity or concentration as they called it, of synthetic fibres and their knowledge of destruction of the soil with fertilisers are but a few little throwaway gems in the rolling saga as Cija finds again her dragon-husband and loves him, then loses him, to fall in with a most peculiar township where she is bartered as a slave until fate takes a hand in her eventual release. We meet the magical Juzd, a terrible name but an appealing character, probably fugitive from earlier books, but very pertinent to this one. "e is involved in the end of Atlan, a place too good for people..."

There were a number of impressive aspects of the novel, not least being the atmosphere of a horde. Cija's husband's Zerd's brutal army, travelling with camp-followers and entertainers beyond the floating islands, across ravaged landscapes, while Cija must suffer deprivation and poisoning at the hands of Zerd's former wife, the beautiful Sedili... On, on they move, sometimes separately, but always converging, on, on towards the holocaust of Atlan. The creation of Atlantis in myth, no less.

Atmosphere there is in plenty, oppressive, dark and mysterious, depressing, despairing at times, light and ironic at others, and spiced with philosophy of self and hope, the attainment of ideals, the eternal striving of some people, such as the powerful character Cija, more than a match for the impressive Zerd. Prehistoric creatures

roam the land, and some of the emotions are primitive, yet the fundamental sentiments are there; and Seka learns that compassion towards an enemy is a double edged sword... There are some depths I am sure I have not plumbed; the earlier stories may not be as complex or as satisfying, but I do feel that Gaskell has created - and destroyed! - a memorable and fascinating world inhabited by characters for whom you can care. Certainly worth spending your money on this one! Good reading.

Bruce Sterling - - SCHISMATRIX (Penguin, 1985, 288pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

The hero of this book is Abelard Lindsey and the story is the events of his life over the 171 years covered by the narrative. He lives in a future where Earth is forbidden so mankind lives in a variety of asteroid and satellite worlds which have differing economies and ecologies but are still interdependent. Lindsay through various circumstances, chiefly the rivalry of his enemy Constantine, moves from world to world always somehow managing to rise to the top, to become a man of supreme influence.

Sterling has created a very believable universe with aliens appearing but not swamping the story, satellite worlds whose ecologies are failing, rotting from the inside out, details like the necessity of roaches in space ships to help clean up, political factions which destroy and raise up different worlds over time. The book is densely packed with much more than it is possible to assimilate at a single reading.

It is unfortunate that this virtue is also something of a curse. Because Lindsey does so much in so many worlds with so many people in a relatively short book the characters tend to blur under the weight of physical detail; even Lindsey himself is not completely satisfactory, he never quite comes alive.

In many respects SCHISMATRIX is an admirable book. It is clever and original. The writing in places is too compressed for clarity but is generally extremely readable, so it is sad that it is let down by the shallowness of the characterisation. Nevertheless I recommend it to you because it has a freshness and originality which are rare and which compensate for the flaws elsewhere.

UNCOLLECTED STARS

Edited by Piers Anthony with Barry Malzberg, Martin H.Greenberg and Charles G.Waugh. (Avon Books, 312pp. \$3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J.Hurst)

This is a collection of SF stories never before anthologised. It is not clear whether any of them have appeared in book form before, but the authors in it include Walter M.Miller, Lewis Padgett, Jerome Bixby and Donald E.Westlake. The stories come from the fifties (8), sixties (5), and one each from the

forties and the seventies. Surprisingly, this is as good a general anthology as I've read - as good as any of Edmund Crispin's, say, or the Spectrum series. The style is traditional, there is nothing here for the New Wave buff, but generally the book reads well. This will pass an evening or two.

It might be worth pointing out one or two features of this mainstream SF. Take it as granted that they are automatically successful as stories holding their read (with one or two exceptions). Their concerns are with imagining the alien - the alien both as a creature and as an experience, with fear of the alien, with the twist (or "kicker"), and with the potential horror of alien contact.

Usually encountering the alien manages to combine both the alien creature and the experience alien to the human. The most elaborate in this collection is Jack Sharkey's "Arcturus Times Three", in which a zoologist has his mind transplanted into three different alien creatures all undergoing horrific experiences, but at least three more deal with the same idea.

Fear of the alien is seen in "Beast in the House", when an alien takes over a dog to steal a child. "The Risk Profession" is a detective story with the "kicker". Alfred Coppel's "Defender of the Faith" might be a satire on dogmatic ideology, unfortunately it takes feminism as a vehicle for its comment and crashes.

But given that different environments give many more opportunities for dying nastily, many of these stories are not only SF but horror as well. If you're in the mind of a being being eaten alive, say, and that's the only description you get, I'd say that's horror. And it may be sadistic, as well, to imagine and subject the reader that form of imagining.

Anyway, if you want trad SF, this is it. You'll only be disappointed if you expect to be.

Clifford D. Simak - - - - - TIME AND AGAIN
(Methuen, 255pp. £2.50)

ALL FLESH IS GRASS
(Methuen, 255pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

I don't intend to review these books so much as greet them as long-lost friends. Both Time and Again and All Flesh is Grass come from Simak's "vintage" period, which I date from 1950 to - approximately - 1968.

Time and Again is the older novel (Galaxy, October-December 1950, as 'Time Quarry') but it is, without doubt, the more 'significant'. The protagonist, 'Asher Sutton', has written/will write a book that has changed/will change the human/android race itself. Simak has written a complex SF melodrama that manages to be cosmic and (pleasantly) parochial, at one and the same time.

All Flesh is Grass (Doubleday, 1965) lacks the panache and metaphysical vigour of Time and Again, being a linear 'whatdunit'. The plot concerns the 'quarantining' of a small American town, Millville, by an alien intelligence determined to save humanity from itself. But, as the Irish Times once pointed out: 'This is not just a mere fantasy but a deeply serious book...

...as are all Clifford Simak's writings'. Well, almost all; the less said about such botches as Out of Their Minds (1970) and Shakespeare's Planet (1976), the better. But: 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' (not taken from the Irish Times).

Mike McQuay - - - - - MY SCIENCE PROJECT
(Bantam, 169pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Carson, Arizona: 18 year-old Mike Harlan has been neglecting his schoolwork in favour of Springsteen, girls, and, most importantly, cars. In a desperate attempt to graduate he raids an Army junkyard to find something to fix up for his science project; the something turns out to be an alien device which causes thunderstorms, disappearing teachers and worse, as it warps time to create a Gateway for alien merchants. While saving the universe with suspicious ease, Harlan gets his girl and an 'A' in science. A barely literate cross between 'Grease' and 'Sapphire and Steel'.

Philip K. Dick - - - - - LIES, INC.
(Granada, 224pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

I don't understand this at all. It is an updated version of The Unteleported Man, published in magazine form in 1964, incorporating 30,000 words written in 1966 and discovered among Dick's papers after his death; a couple of link passages have been added by John Sladek. The Unteleported Man told how THL, a powerful German company, discovered a process whereby they could teleport Earth's excess population to an idyllic colony world, Whale's Mouth; the teleport process, however, was one-way. Rachmael ben Appelbaum, the son of a space-ship owner put out of business because of teleporting, suspected that THL were lying about the idyllic conditions on Whale's Mouth and were perhaps even devising a new version of Hitler's Final Solution; he decides to take his last space-ship on the 18-year journey via real-space to see things for himself. Matson Glazer-Holliday, head of a CIA-type organisation called Lies, Inc., also has his suspicions, and decides to teleport his operatives to Whale's Mouth to take over from THL. He goes himself, incognito, as Stuart Trent. Glazer-Holliday discovers that Whale's Mouth is run as a labour camp; his female assistant sends the message back to Earth, and the UN cavalry teleports to the rescue, so to speak. Ben Appelbaum's space-flight is aborted.

The new material used in Lies, Inc. begins in chapter 8. In The Unteleported Man the chapter began "To the pleasant, rather overextensively-bosomed young female receptionist Matson Glazer-Holliday said, "My name is Stuart Trent..." In Lies, Inc., or this version of it, it begins "To the pleasant, rather overextensively-bosomed young female receptionist Rachmael ben Appelbaum said, "My name is Stuart Trent..." It is Rachmael who is teleported to Whale's Mouth, goes through a series of reality changes (partly induced by LSD), at one point apparently meeting Matson. But near the end Rachmael is seen once again still in his

space-ship. I don't understand this at all. The Unteleported Man, a neat, fast-paced story, has had 30,000 words of turgid rubbish inserted into it, which has rendered the whole plot totally nonsensical. Whose fault is it? Dick's, Sladek's, Gollancz's, Granada's? Mine?

Susan Cooper - - - - - SEAWARD
(Puffin, 173pp. £1.50)

Patricia Wrightson - - - - - A LITTLE FEAR
(Puffin, 173pp. £1.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Both of these books are by authors not, perhaps at their most representative here, but first class reading nevertheless. Susan Cooper's THE DARK IS RISING is one of the classic fantasy sequences and SEAWARD returns to a Celtic-flavoured mythology in the story of Cally and Westerly, two teenagers from widely different environments, who find themselves travelling westwards to the sea in a land ruled by contending forces. They meet the Stone People and the insectile Peth and Cally has her own internal conflicts to face, in her relationship with Westerly and the presence of Snake, who reveals her deepest, oldest self.

One of the important attributes of this kind of fantasy is the way in which the powerful subterranean currents of selfhood can be explored symbolically rather than realistically. SEAWARD manages to say more about emerging sexuality, trust, and life and death than many a novel set in a more naturalistic mode. (I'm not suggesting that one mode is necessarily "better" than another, merely that an oblique approach can at times be more powerful.) It explores myth and legend - specifically the "selkie" legend of the seals who are human when they put aside their skins - found in Celtic lore - in a way which is less uneven in tone than the previous sequence and evocatively written if, perhaps, less immediately gripping. One to read slowly, and savour for its richness.

Patricia Wrightson's magnificent "Book of Wirrun" trilogy, THE ICE IS COMING, THE DARK BRIGHT WATER and JOURNEY BEHIND THE WIND are based on the myths and legends of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, and part of the attraction of these and other books by the same author must be the relationship of their sources to the traditional Western-European tropes of fantasy: at times utterly alien, at times hauntingly similar. If "The Book of Wirrun" is epic - stretching over the length and breadth of Australia encountering the lore of many tribes of the People - A LITTLE FEAR is nearer to folktale: local, almost comfortable in scope. Mrs. Tucker is unwilling to spend the rest of her days in an Old People's Home so she runs away to a lonely rural cottage willed to her by her brother, where she aims to live her own kind of life with her dog Hector. But in the chicken-run dwells a Njimbun, a local nature-spirit, which has its own reasons for not wanting to be disturbed. A LITTLE FEAR is an amusing tale of a clash of wills, as well as a spirited celebration of independence. Again, you can take it as an allegory on several levels (which needn't be explored in depth here) or you can read it with perfect satisfaction for the story alone. Patricia Wrightson is one of the finest writers of fantasy around; like

Susan Cooper, the fact that she's packaged as a "children's writer" should not deter anyone searching for a really mature story.

Wolf von Niebelshutz - - -THE BADGER OF GHISSI
(Unicorn, 262pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

This is essentially a straightforward story of political and personal conflict among a group of powerful medieval families and their allies. Its hero is Barral, a shepherd who is also the illegitimate son of a local nobleman, and the novel details his progress from outcast to knight and landowner. The story moves very fast - months or even years may pass within a few paragraphs - and requires careful reading, partly due to the curious style in which it is written. It is difficult to know whether this awkwardness of expression is the fault of the book's translator, but certainly some passages need to be read several times before their meaning becomes clear.

The Badger of Ghissi has been marketed as a fantasy (including the obligatory back-cover comparison with The Lord of the Rings), which in my opinion it is not. True, it is set in an imaginary country, Kelguria, but nothing intrinsically fantastic takes place there. There are no magical or supernatural events, and the culture unswervingly depicted is that of 12th century France. By setting his story in an imagined locality von Niebelshutz may have sidestepped the more detailed research necessary to write a true historical novel but the result is not a fantasy in the usual sense of the word, since his Kelguria appears to fit seamlessly into the historical medieval world. Judged simply as a work of fiction this novel is no more than moderately interesting, occasionally vivid in its imagery, more often cluttered and obscure. I cannot really recommend it to anyone except those with a special interest in the historical period it depicts.

Karel Capek - - - - - WAR WITH THE NEWTS
(Unicorn, 241pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

First published in 1936, Capek's satirical fantasy comes up surprisingly fresh. A hitherto-unknown species of giant salamander is discovered in the South Pacific by an old sea captain; these creatures seem to possess a rudimentary intelligence and the ability to use tools. The captain makes a modest profit supplying them with knives (with which they can defend themselves against their natural enemies, the sharks) in return for pearls, but upon his death the Newts pass into the hands of a powerful business syndicate whose plans are somewhat grander. A flourishing international trade in Newts - placid, obedient, beaver-like workers - develops, and plans are drawn up for the extension of continents, construction of new land-masses and similar extravagant schemes. The trade is undeterred when the Newts begin to display unexpected intellectual powers, learning to speak human languages and comprehend science and mathematics, and continues to ship them around by the ton. In a few years the Newts - which in the absence of predators multiply at an alarming rate - are numbered in their

billions and have settled every coastline in the world, with large numbers of them heavily armed and trained for war by nations anxious to ensure their submarine security. The story develops in an entirely plausible way; humanity rushes headlong toward the inevitable and disastrous conflict, ignoring every danger sign in the race to make a fast buck. Capek's writing is sharp, witty, and anti-sentimental, and in *War With the Newts* he paints a convincing picture of civilisation brought to a premature end by human greed and stupidity.

Thomas F. Monteleone - - - - -MICROWORLDS
(Hamlyn, 175pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

MICROWORLDS, according to Monteleone's technophilic Introduction, was inspired by the rising popularity and use of the microcomputer and the whole phenomenon of video/computer games. There are seventeen short stories in this user-friendly anthology, plus one Rhymin' Simon-type poem by Ray Bradbury, 'The Haunted Computer and the Android Pope'.

Five of the stories date from the fifties and sixties: Dickson's 'Computers Don't Argue'; Clarke's 'The Nine Billion Names of God'; Pohl's 'The Schematic Man'; Ellison's 'I Have No Mouth...'; and Asimov's 'The Last Question'. But these oft-reprinted tales have lasted very well, except for the (obligatory?) Asimov, which has been laughably over-praised by Asimov.

The stories written especially for this anthology (Bischoff's 'Copyright Infringement', Monteleone's 'The Greatest Game', etc.) are mostly extended Feghoots vying for fame/infamy alongside Fredric Brown's classic punchline, 'Now there is a God!'. But: 'Answers', by John Sladek, effectively debunks the video game 'craze', while Barry N. Malzberg's 'The Union Forever' (which does, in fact, date from 1975) takes the idea of computerized 'war games' to its (logical?) conclusion.

In my opinion, the best (recent) stories in the book are 'Armaja Das', by Joe Haldeman, and 'Love Calls', by Ben Bova, both of which concern themselves with real people (remember them?) rather than whimsical notions. But - speaking of 'whimsical notions' - my favourite story is 'Loki 7281', by Roger Zelazny, in which Zelazny's own (mythical) home computer makes the following 'remark':

'I think that my next story will deal with artificial intelligence, with a likeable, witty, resourceful home computer such as the hero/heroine, and a number of bumbling humans with all their failings - sort of like Jeeves in one of those Wodehouse books. It will be a Fantasy, of course'. (p.122)

MICROWORLDS is an oddly dated anthology, in which the 'old' stories seem more relevant to the 'Computer Age' than do most of their younger brethren. Moreover, just as the demand for home computers and/or video games has reached its saturation point, this book might also fall victim to user-hostile 'market forces'.

Somtow Sucharitkul - - - - -THE DARKLING WIND
(Bantam, 384pp. \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

THE DARKLING WIND is the new novel by Somtow Sucharitkul who has been hailed as the new

campus cult author following in the footsteps of Vonnegut and Hesse. However to compare Sucharitkul with such modern masters is to deride their achievements in a manner that is almost offensive.

THE DARKLING WIND forms part of a series of books that chronicles the rise and fall of a galactic empire ruled by an intellectual elite known as the Inquesters. However a political intrigue has torn the Inquesters asunder and they have become entrenched in two opposing camps. The rebels led by Kelter are in conflict with the establishment under Karakael. Kelter issues a challenge to his adversary to meet and decide the fate of the galaxy. Kelter derives his power from the throne of madness, which acts as a channel for energy from a sentient black hole, the source of the Inquester's might. However the symbiosis between Kelter and the throne is leading him towards madness...

THE DARKLING WIND represents the heartland of fantasy. Sucharitkul reincarnates very old themes and dresses them in a thin veneer of literacy. However the book is betrayed by the essential unoriginality of the plot. The illusion of literacy which gives the impression of resulting from an overuse of a thesaurus, only serves to counterpoint and augment the intrinsic faults of the book. However it might be this pseudo-literate quality that endears the book to students.

Sucharitkul is able to invoke images in the mind of the reader but this is a consequence of the use of clichés rather than any narrative skill. The characterisation is non-existent and as a result the characters give the impression of being third rate actors hamming their way through a formalized series of movements. The motivations and aspirations of the main characters are not described in enough detail to give the resultant actions any credibility. The plot itself meanders aimlessly, striking a median that is incoherent, confusing and dull.

This novel, when considered in conjunction with the fact that Sucharitkul won the Campbell Award for best new writer, does not bode well for the future of American SF. Just hope Sucharitkul is not popular enough to spawn a host of imitators.

Paul Cook - - - - -DUENDE MEADOW
(Bantam, 227pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Margaret Hall)

American scientists working on an idea for the ultimate bomb shelter discover how to destabilise matter whilst still retaining the essential nature of the thing destabilised. In the premises of a recently bankrupt shopping mall on the outskirts of a town in Kansas, they set up seed banks and collections of all the flora and fauna needed to re-establish life on Earth after the ultimate catastrophe. When World War Three breaks out they "de-opaque" the mall and - because no one is sure what effect radiation will have on the M-field that keeps them insubstantial - the whole thing is lowered to a depth of more than a thousand feet below the ground surface.

For six hundred years, the Appleseds (as they call themselves) live within the earth, tending the Arks, waiting for the day when the man-made ice age ends and they can move back onto the surface to make good the damage to the environment. In the meantime they discover that theirs wasn't the only M-field

generator constructed. The military too have de-opaquet one of their establishments, well armed with missiles and a bomber and well stocked with soldiers in suspended animation.

An uneasy truce exists between military and scientists, until the day when Jay Preston reaches the surface and finds wheat fields instead of ice and a Soviet combine harvesting the crop. The scientists have to come to terms with the fact that the Russians have not only survived too, but have beaten them in the race to re-establish life on the surface. Meanwhile the military - who have one track minds - plan to wipe out the Soviet survivors.

With subtler treatment this could have been an excellent novel; as it is, it turns into a science fiction thriller with a race against time ending. Which is all very well as these things go, and perfectly readable, but not as good as it might have been considering all the good ideas the book contains.

Crawford Kilian - - - - - EYAS
(A STORY OF THE TWILIGHT OF MAN)
(Bantam Spectra, 360pp. \$2.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

"Eyas" is the first book I've read by this Canadian author from Vancouver, British Columbia. It is set primarily in what is still recognisable as the American Pacific North West.

The Stone Age life of the peaceful fishers of Longstrand is disrupted by a shipwreck. They rescue a woman, a small boy, and a baby from the stricken ship. The survivors are refugees from the medieval Empire of Sun, the most advanced civilisation on the continent, set where Texas is now, and spreading. The woman is the concubine of 'the Sun' (the Emperor of Sun); the small boy, Brightspear, is the heir to the throne fleeing from a palace coup; the baby, a boy later named Eyas, is that of a drowned servant woman.

The boys grow to manhood in Longstrand, Eyas soon shows a love of the primitive life, and a rapport both with animals and with the half-human centaurs and wind-walkers that share his adopted homeland. However, the sunnish armies push steadily nearer, and Brightspear chafes for his birthright. Cast out from Longstrand, Brightspear heads south to reveal himself as the true Sun and overthrow the usurpers. Eyas in contrast becomes the successful and respected leader of his adopted tribe.

One day, however, Brightspear returns at the head of an army and slaughters most of the defenceless fishers. Eyas escapes to fight the Suns, and to become the first to unite all the oppressed peoples against the Empire. Much later, when Eyas faces Brightspear in what he thinks is the final conflict, he realises that Sun is not the true enemy.

The rest of the story reminds me of Bob Shaw's "The Palace of Eternity", being concerned with life after death, and the inter-reaction of the dead with the living. Whether or not you can accept this supernatural element will determine how successful this book is for you. In the end Eyas finds himself fighting for the living and the restoration of humanity's 'true heritage'.

Although I found this plot development unconvincing, I found much in "Eyas" to enjoy. Also, Kilian ends the book by ending the story of Eyas - these days that is a literary feat

of some merit. Kilian is a promising writer, with some new ideas, even if this is an imperfect novel. If he resists the temptation to reuse the material he could write some good books.

Jerry Yulsman - - - - - ELLEANDER MORNING
(Putra, 293pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

If there's one class of SF for which I am an all-time buyer, it's alternate history. And if there's one class of writer that really gets up my nose, it's Americans who write about Britain and get it wrong, when by simply asking your present reviewer (or, doubtless, many another inhabitant of these isles) to check their typescripts all these silly errors would be avoided.

Examples? - Two will suffice: the ancient borough of Woolich (where?) and gentlemen getting kicked in the "bullocks" (I kid you not, a load of bull indeed).

I confess a possibly irrational dislike of fake names too, and Elleander Morning turns out to be not some form of Irish autumn greeting but the name of Our Heroine in both her incarnations, including that of madam of a London brothel so luxurious and indeed uxurious that I'm afraid I believe Yulsman simply snatched the descriptions from one of the great New Orleans houses where they really did know how to do this sort of thing in style.

But the story? Perhaps spoiled for British readers (at whom surely it is aimed) by the NEWSBREAK at the head of each chapter - where not too corny for words (Reagan playing President Jefferson in a 1980 Oscar winning movie) they are often obscure (who's Ted Williams?). But the story? Well, although one could be sexist and say it's "for women" I found it quite exciting, well plotted, and based on a really delightful premise: the revelation of the horrors of WW II to a world where it never happened, through the photographs and text of a two-volume Time-Life History of the Second World War. The war never happened because Our Heroine shot the young artist Hitler, but ultimately we see history repeating itself a few decades late, only to have Our Heroine's daughter (who has woven in and out of the convoluted telling of this tale) re-enter to...but I mustn't spoil the denouement for you, for it really is worth trying this one for a leisurely evening's read.

Oh yes, I did find the motivations of some of the characters, and the actions of others, a little hard to believe in, but then, suspension of belief is all a part of sensawunda, innit, and all in all it flowed, it flowed. Enjoy!

CONTACT

...or lack of it. Not your fault, mine. But some of the letters received demand rather more lengthy consideration than I've space for, so I thought it best to hold over the lettercolumn until next issue, and tackle the backlog of reviews. Most comments on my LIMBO piece were extremely favourable, so to continue the series, next issue will see Sue Thomason looking at another neglected book.

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

Mark Smith/Jamie Thompson - Falcon 5: THE DYING SUN: Falcon 6: AT THE END OF TIME (Sphere) // Lisa Tuttle - A NEST OF NIGHTMARES (Sphere) // Richard S. McEnroe - THE SHATTERED STARS (Orbit) // Richard Cowper - THE ROAD TO CORLAY (Orbit) // Barbara Hambley - DRAGONBANE (Unicorn) // Gwyneth Jones - ESCAPE PLANS (Orion) // Lisa Goldstein - THE DREAM YEARS (Orion) // Graham Dunstan Martin - TIME-SLIP (Orion) // Samuel R. Delaney - NOVA (Gollancz) // Robert Silverberg - A TIME OF CHANGES (Gollancz) // Theodore Sturgeon - MORE THAN HUMAN (Gollancz) // Kurt Vonnegut jr. - THE SIRENS OF TITAN (Gollancz) // Paul Jennings - UNREAL (Puffin) // Steve Jackson & Ian Livingstone - SWORD OF THE SAMURAI (Puffin) // Clifford D. Simak - A HERITAGE OF STARS (Methuen) // Patrick Tilley - XAN (Grafton) // David Mace - FIRE LANCE (Grafton) // Isaac Asimov - X STANDS FOR UNKNOWN (Grafton) // Katherine Kurtz - THE KING'S JUSTICE (Arrow) // J.P. Miller - THE SNOOK (Arrow) // Myra Caldecott - GUARDIANS OF THE TALL STONES (Arrow) // Nancy Springer - WINGS OF FLAME (Arrow) // John Christopher - THE CAVES OF NIGHT (Sphere) // George R.R. Martin - SONGS THE DEAD MEN SING (Sphere) // Cherry Wilder - A PRINCESS OF THE CHAMELON (Unicorn) // Robert Clarke - LESS THAN HUMAN (Avon) // Bernard King - STARKADDER (NEL) // M.K. Wren - SWORD OF THE LAMB (NEL) // Anthony Horowitz - THE NIGHT OF THE SCORPION (Magnet) // William Gibson - NEUROMANCER (Grafton) // Esther M. Friesner - SPELLS OF MORTAL WEAVING (Avon) // Nigel Frith - JORMUNDGAND (Unicorn)