

# PAPERBACK INFERNO

61

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## Paperback Purgatory

There's something of an embarrassment of riches in this issue. Responses from PI reviewers seem to show that much SF is not written by old men who can produce nothing more than self-congratulatory rehashes of their earlier work, which perhaps wasn't that good anyway but did have a certain freshness now totally absent in tedious sermons where plot, character and storytelling have all gone for a burton but this is somehow supposed to be all right because it's all hack writing anyway. And yes, I am talking about Robert A. Heinlein.

However, books from The Women's Press, Orion, and Gollancz, have all met with enthusiastic responses. In this issue are reviews of books by Richard Cowper, Keith Roberts, Josephine Saxton and Gwyneth Jones which could have warranted a 'Closer Encounter', not to mention the recent Puffin reprint of Bram Stoker's DRACULA, which nearly made it. But I've chosen to go a little beyond the obvious choices to include an unusual double viewpoint of a DR WHO spin-off novel. I say 'unusual', because the author himself has contributed an amusing background piece. I'm at a bit of a loss here (for once?) because I was an avid DR WHO fan until the BBC decided that I was watching far too much TV and switched the program to a time I wasn't available for. Consequently, I never made the acquaintance of Turlough. However, I'd like to thank Tony Attwood

for his article and suggest that DR WHO fans among you seek out his book. Personally, I'd say that anyone who admits to an 'incessant dislike of Margaret Thatcher' has to be somewhere among the Forces of Humanity...

The Second 'Closer Encounter' is a book which most of you will not have read, but many others will. (As a post-script to what I've written, it doesn't seem to be selling as well as I thought, so perhaps there is hope for the taste of the Great Reading Public!)

Because of the unusual shape of the 'Closer Encounters' column I've had to defer Sue Thomason's piece on a neglected book: it will appear next time. And talking of unusually shaped columns, I hope you've noticed the unusually neat appearance of the parts of PI which have been word-processed by David Willis over the last few months. Unfortunately, David will shortly have to stand down to concentrate on other commitments. I'd like to thank him for the help he's given me. To maintain standards, I would be very grateful indeed if anyone with word-processing facilities is able to lend a hand with typing copy for PI. I would also be grateful for artwork. I'm hoping over the next few months to improve the layout and appearance of PI, but this can only be done really effectively in accordance with the strictest tenets of participatory democracy!

## "Upon the rack in print..."

INTERZONE 15 (Spring 1986)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

This, the second new-look INTERZONE, again features a colourful Pete Lyon cover. The fiction contents this issue are rather a mixture. The headlining story is 'The Winter Market' by William Gibson, and a very fine tale it is too. The plot - the effect a crippled druggie's bid for a cybernetic immortality, at the cost of her physical death, has on the narrator, who facilitates her attempt - may not be the most original in SF (despite that resume!) but it doesn't have to be. What makes the story is Gibson's telling prose and vocabulary coupled with his rich, consistent view of the future. One cannot help but wonder when the "cyberpunk" furrow he ploughs will become a rut; that time, however, has yet to come.

The other highlight of this issue is Garry Kilworth's 'The Vivarium'. Like Gibson's piece, it deals with immortality, albeit of a very different sort. The protagonist inherits his Greek father's estate, complete with a mysterious, closed-environment greenhouse. But what does the vivarium contain? Thanks to an ill placed illustration you find out somewhat quicker than you should, but never mind - Kilworth's story, part metaphysics, part horror, part black comedy, works very well indeed.

The remaining three stories, unsurprisingly, are not of the same high calibre. 'The One and Only Tale From The White Horse' by John Brosnan is utterly derivative and totally unconvincing but for all that is highly entertaining. On the other hand Diana Reed's debut piece, 'A Multiplication of Lives', is very original; however, I confess to finding her story so complex as to be almost incomprehensible. 'The Ibis Experiment' by S.W. Widdowson is another first story. It's much more accessible than Reed's, but one has a sneaking suspicion that both writers had INTERZONE's call for "radical hard SF" too much in mind...

Apart from a rather unsatisfying interview with Bruce Sterling the non-fiction part of the magazine is of much interest. Especially notable are the bright film reviews and another controversial article on the state of SF. To my mind, INTERZONE has now achieved a near-perfect balance between fiction - of which there's always something of note - and features. All it lacks is the dynamic letters column the editors are obviously attempting to stimulate. INTERZONE 15 may not be a great issue, but it's still a good read and gives value for money.

INTERZONE 16 (Summer 1986)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

This is the 'Sex Wars' issue! At least, according to the editorial it is. Going by a rough page count, however, non-Sex Wars pieces outnumber Sex Wars items by about two to one, which does tend to belie the hype. And whilst I'm on that topic, the blurb on the cover proclaims that inside IZ

16 you'll find a special feature on artist Jim Burns. This turns out to consist of four paragraphs and four b&w pictures... Wow!

Away from the griping, what about the fiction? There are six stories here, starting with Brian Stableford's 'And He Not Busy Being Born...'. Apparently, this is the first fiction he's written in five years; it shows us what we're missing. There's enough material here to fill a novel, as Stableford mixes Heidegger, cyrogenics and future history with a fine sense of irony. 'The Protector' by Rachel Pollack is even better. She takes an old theme - that of a plague from space - but gives it a new perspective and horror, all the while deftly drawing the reader into this tautly-written tale. For my money it's the best of this month's bunch. 'His Vegetable Wife' by Pat Murphy is definitely a Sex Wars piece. It's short, unobtrusive and highly acerbic. It's also very good. (The title, by the way, is a physical description).

The remaining three stories are all, in different ways, fine pieces of writing, but they didn't really work for me. Josephine Saxton's 'The Cup is the Wine' disputes the claim that no man or woman is an island. I wouldn't call it SF. Shirley Weinland's 'The Final Episode' takes an interesting look at the interface of reality and fiction but there's far too much crammed into the tale to enable one to properly understand what is going on. Unsurprisingly, given his track record, Michael Blumlein has perhaps the most interesting and extreme - if not controversial - story in this issue. 'The Brains of Rats' has (like 'The Protector') a frightening virus but it is really incidental to the story, which is concerned with sexuality and which contains some uncomfortably realistic medical consultation scenes. Not for those with delicate sensibilities...

Finally, IZ 16 has the usual features and a jolly but short interview with Iain Banks. A little more background on the author would not have gone amiss here. All in all, another good issue, especially if you ignore the hype!

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, April to June 1986 and ANALOG, May to June 1986.

(Reviewed by Edward James)

Less of interest (to me) in these five issues than in the two I reviewed last time. Though perhaps I will be in for a surprise: I have not yet read the first two parts of the ANALOG serial: Vernor Vinge's MAROONED IN REAL TIME, a sort of sequel to his THE PEACE WAR (serialised May - June 1984 and now in paperback).

The April ASIMOV'S had an article by Joe Haldeman on 'Science Fiction and War' which was in some ways the most interesting piece in the issue. It was placed alongside Lucius Shepard's 'R&R', certainly beautifully and memorably written, and an atmospheric foretaste of what the next US

war in central America is going to be like but for me too much like a lot of what came out of Vietnam and with very little SF content. The same might be said of Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Down and Out in the Year 2000', although the war here is the war for survival in downtown New York. Again, a fine piece of writing, but with only minimal interest in extrapolation or speculation. Judith Tarr contributed a medieval fantasy set in the kingdom of Jerusalem. ASIMOV'S deserves congratulations for getting the accents on its title correct: 'Pièce de Résistance'. Last year it published a story called 'Déjà vu'... (Hope you can cope with all that, Andy!) The fiction that will stay with me longest from this issue is probably Lisa Goldstein's 'Daily Voices', a beautifully chilling allegory about a woman who had a voice which led her through every decision of the day.

In May ASIMOV'S featured a novella by James Tiptree Jr: 'Collision'. A first contact story which, with a few alterations, would not have been out of place in a 1950s ASTOUNDING: Tiptree's fiction has been disappointing of late, though this is at least readable, unlike her mid-December 1985 contribution. It was paired with Connis Willis's 'Chance', which as far as I could tell was an accurate enough story of psychological breakdown on a 1980s university campus. SF or fantasy content nil. Why publish it in ASIMOV'S? These two come together with little nothings from Lafferty and Blaylock. The only story really worth reading (but perhaps you'd rather wait until it's anthologised) is Aldiss's latest: 'The Difficulties Involved in Photographing Nix Olympia'. (Not as difficult as climbing it (it's the old name for Olympus Mons), as those who read Kim Stanley Robinson's

splendid 'Green Mars' (Asimov's Sept. 1985) will remember.) Like Robinson's, Aldiss's Mars is plausible, almost ordinary, yet inhabited by some people with - what's the phrase, so long since anyone's used it, ah yes - a sense of wonder.

Far too much of ASIMOV'S June number is taken up with an article on artificial intelligence, and an uninteresting novella by J.P. Kelly, 'The Prisoner of Chillon'. Highlights are, in ascending order, Melanie and Steve Tem's 'Prosthesis', about the perverse desires of an alien race to imitate the human form; Jim Aiken's 'A Place

to Stay for a Little While', concerning a sanctuary for sad ESP misfits; and Michael Bishop's 'Alien Graffiti: A Personal History of Vagrant Intrusions'. The latter, in tone as well as in theme - the intrusion of inexplicable hi-tec from Somewhere Else - is rather reminiscent of Watson's 'Slow Birds'. (But then perhaps the Bishop-Watson collaboration of 1981 was done by some kind of brain transplant or thought transference: Watson's piece for the April F&SF shows that he's picked up Bishop's obsession with eyes...)

Finally, ANALOG. May had what appears to be the very last Callahan's Cross-Time Bar story by Spider Robinson, 'The Mick of Time'. Callahan turns out to be an Irish time-traveller called Justin: Justin the Mick of Time. At last, no more appalling puns! Well done, ANALOG! Eric Iverson's (sorry, Harry Turtledove's) series about the colonisation of an alternative-history America continues into the early nineteenth century with 'The Iron Elephant'. But the most interesting thing in May is probably Duncan Lunan's article on 'The Fermi Paradox - the Final Solution?'. June has two very typical ANALOG stories (typical, I said, not necessarily good): Geoffrey Landis' 'Stroboscope', which twists the hoary theme of cryogenic survival in order to satirise bureaucracy, and W.R. Thompson's 'Rocking the Boat' (published before the report on NASA's incompetence, I suppose), arguing the case for space colonisation. What makes them typical? - they're still in the Campbell tradition of being thinly fictionalised editorials. The only story worth thinking about in this issue, really, is Timothy Zahn's 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen'. Zahn won the 1984 Hugo for Best Novella with 'Cascade Point' (ANALOG December 1983) - which is now reprinted by Bluejay in a collection called CASCADE POINT, reusing the old ANALOG cover. It was an intriguing story, I thought at the time, concerning an odd physical effect of FTL travel - though it was hardly the best novella of the year.

The latest Zahn is the sequel, featuring the same characters, and featuring the same odd effect, and one more of its psychological results. Readable, as an adventure or detective story, but it adds not a single idea to 'Cascade Point': a sparkling lesson in the futility of doing sequels.

## CLOSER

# ENCOUNTERS

Is there a DOCTOR  
in the TARDIS?

TONY ATTWOOD on... TONY ATTWOOD  
and TURLOUGH.

TURLOUGH AND THE EARTHLINK DILEMMA is Tony Attwood's second attempt at bringing the dead back to life. His first, BLAKE'S 7 AFTERLIFE, took the various bodies left lying around at the end of episode 52 of the BBC TV series and attempted to explain just why Avon shot Blake and why everyone else felt like lying down in pools of blood for a while.

Following the publication of AFTERLIFE Attwood was given a rough ride on the convention circuit. Nooses, salvos of (fort-

unately) fake laser rays, and black armbands were common. With TURLOUGH he's been given an easier time by the media fans. Here the author has taken the most popular of all the Doctor Who companions and told the story of what happened after the alien Turlough left the TARDIS for the last time.

It's a full length story, not a normal Doctor Who novelisation, and therefore contains more complex a plot. The Doctor isn't in it, but the basics of the Doctor Who universe are maintained. What Attwood has done however is to face that most annoying of problems: with the whole universe to choose from why do all the aliens keep on invading such a pitifully insignificant little planet like Earth? The answer is moderately amusing, and discovered through a tale of parallel universes and time travel. Unfortunately when both concepts become combined life can get difficult and as numerous Doctor Who fans have pointed out, the book does end up with one Turlough too many in one time sphere. The answer from the author that he has left himself the opportunity to resolve the problem in a follow-up is not totally convincing.

Some of the problems encountered in AFTERLIFE are here again. For a start, the most interesting character is not in the lead role. In AFTERLIFE Avon, Vila and the rest were displaced by a silly box computer called KAT (kinesthetic analysis and transmission) which got hooked on dops. In TURLOUGH the ex-companion plays second fiddle to The Magician, a freelance Time Lord devoted to going round the universe picking up the mess left by the Doctor.

Then there's the fact that part of the plot seems to be culled straight from a very old episode of The Avengers. Plus the author's incessant dislike of Margaret Thatcher. Time and again Attwood has told the story of how, when writing the part of Servalan in Blake's 7 he used to watch Thatcher on the news and jot down the mannerisms. Now we have Rehotat (try it backwards), paranoia and ambition personified, another Tory leader lookalike set to take control of the four forces of Nature (see New Scientist on Grand Unified

Theories for more detail). Once you've cottoned on to the political and scientific fact he's making it's rather obvious the woman (like Servalan before her) is going to die. The difference lies in the fact that Attwood is pro-science, unlike many writers today who seem to be afraid of a scientific future. He is thus against the Time Lords with their attempts to restrict knowledge of how time travel works, and is probably the only writer to bring this approach anywhere near Doctor Who.

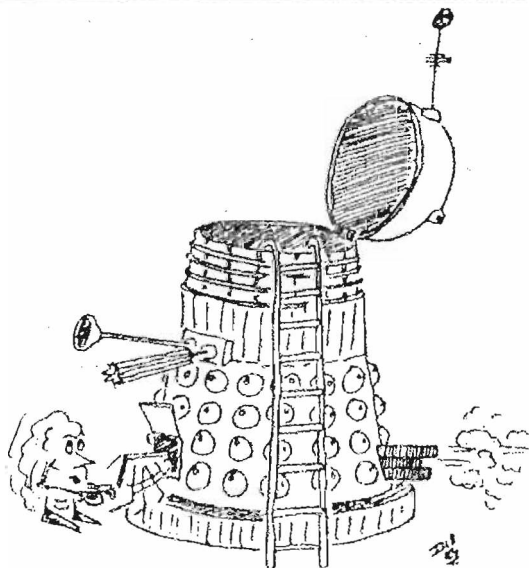
Tony Attwood is having a hard time of it getting other SF published (although he does write a lot in other fields). As he says, 'If I take the politics out everyone says it looks like The Avengers in an alternative universe, if I put the politics in, no one will risk publication because it's too political.' And with titles on the stocks like RAISE THE BELGRANO and ORIGAMI FOR PYROMANIACS it is clear that even with settings in alternative universes he's not going to find it easy.

Tony Attwood -- TURLOUGH AND THE EARTH-LINK DILEMMA (Target, 1986, 221pp, £1.80)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

TURLOUGH AND THE EARTH-LINK DILEMMA is set in the Dr Who universe though the Doctor never appears. The hero, Vislar Turlough, must have appeared on TV at a time when I had abandoned all hope for the series, for I don't remember him, but though the character was seen on TV this is not a novelisation but an original story. On the other hand it could have been stolen from A.E. Nan Vogt's wastepaper basket, when he gave up an attempt at Null-A IV. Everything you hated in Gilbert Gosseyné is here and what's worse is that the author does not know it. And his political analysis is naive and incredible. The novel has as an epigraph Marx's famous Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' which Attwood misquotes as 'Philosophers merely explain the world. The thing is to change it.' Let's consider the book's dialectical materialism.

Attwood is unsure about the nature of time and actually adopts two positions: the first is time travel, the second is differing timestreams, in some of which some things happen, in other streams other things happen. While the idea of time travel is possibly acceptable in the light of historical materialism the second is not. And given that currently we experience neither time travel nor division into alternate time streams, to be scientific one ought not to adopt a scheme incompatible with one's general logic. Dialectical Materialism says that a series of human experiences and actions in absolute chronological sequence cause physical, economic and social change. These changes are benefits to some (like the factory owners of the Industrial Revolution) but hell to others. Thus we have a thesis (the limited benefit to the rich) and an antithesis (the suffering poor who don't want to suffer) which can be resolved (by revolution, say,) and synthesis is



PHUT... PHUT... PHUT...



achieved. This analysis is scientific and works by explaining cause and result. To a certain extent it can even allow for and overcome the subjectivity which any social life imposes on even its scientists, but it is only true if we agree that certain axioms and conditions are true. For instance, an effect always follows a cause, it never precedes it. It would be meaningless to say that an effect occurs before its cause but that is the possibility of Attwood's system. He would also deny that the same events have the same consequence. The idea of any number of different results simultaneously from one cause acting on the same subject, which is what he says in accepting time-streams diverging from one moment, is equally unscientific.

Those broken down wretches who enjoyed Peter Davison's role playing, or the emphasis placed on the Time Lords in the last decade, may like this book. They are the sort who yearn for the return of writers like Bob Baker and Dave Martin. They have false consciousness.

What has happened to DR WHO that books like TURLOUGH AND THE EARTHLINK DILEMMA can be written is a matter for deeper analysis. Clearly some of the scientific reasoning that originally underpinned it has disappeared. For instance, the Doctor was always being asked why he did not go back before some disaster in which the Tardis manifested itself and stop the disaster happening, and the scriptwriters (principally Terry Nation, I suppose) took care that this was not available by having the time control unit not work for the first ten years or so. Now that is not an answer to the cause and effect problem listed above, but within the logic of the scriptwriting it stops it being raised as a problem. That sort of intelligence has disappeared.

And I haven't got round to criticizing the political analysis yet. But I won't. Not here.

Colleen McCullough - - A CREED FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM (Futura, 1986, 443pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

At time of writing this book is 7th in the paperback bestseller ratings and will probably be the best-selling SF novel of the year.

Set in the 2030s when a worldwide downturn in average temperature is creating a mini-ice age and migration from colder northern regions has resulted in drastic measures to limit population, CREED begins with a project, led by Judith Cariol, to regenerate U.S. morale. The man chosen as symbol of the movement is a clinical psychologist who has identified a syndrome he calls 'Millennium Neurosis' and has successfully dealt with it using a mixture of his own charisma and a message of social and spiritual renewal.

So far, so good. The fact that the book isn't packaged as SF and that Colleen McCullough, author of THE THORN BIRDS and AN INDECENT OBSESSION, is more a writer of blockbusters is beside the point. What's more relevant is that despite - or because of? -

an obvious attempt at extending the range of her writing, Colleen McCullough has given us a book which contains some of the most dreadfully banal clichés of the territory she attempts to colonise.

The charismatic psychologist is called Joshua Christian. His father was Joseph. His brothers are Andrew and James and he has a sister-in-law called Martha and a sister called Mary. His mother - always referred to as 'Mama' - is of the 'typical Jewish mother' mould although much play is made of her youthful looks (at 48, she is 'the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in all his life'). The American President who worked out all the major changes in social structures by which people now live is, forsooth, 'Augustus Rome'. Get the picture? The present office-holder is - wait for it - 'Tabor Reece'. Take another look at the name of Christian's mentor, and groan.

Even this heavy-handed wordplay is not necessarily a bad thing. But given the apparently realistic structure of the book, you'd surely think that someone would notice the biblical resonances, though it's not until p. 315 that Joshua is accused of being on a Jesus Christ trip. And as a cure fable, the very realism of the setting drags symbolism down to bathos. I'm sure you can guess the ending, and I don't have to identify the oh-so-obvious ambiguity in the final few pages, while throughout we have a tone reminiscent of the most obvious

kind of Shaggy God story. The saddest thing is that there's nothing in the outline I've given in the second paragraph above to suggest that this isn't a damn good SF novel. And on one level we do have a moving story of the use and misuse of charisma, of caring and manipulation combined and of the confusion of a man chosen to act out his ability to make personal contact with individuals on a wide scale. But on the level on which Colleen McCullough has chosen to tell the story, all these Messianic parallels are more spiritually uplifting in an exploitative John Lennon biography.

Moreover, the actual storytelling is surprisingly clumsy. In the early chapters, the plot progresses by that time-honoured device of Character A telling Character B something they already know: the 'let's remind ourselves why we're here' school of writing. Some of the actual use of language is appalling: 'The mailman came not any more' (p. 9)... 'The adjectives and the metaphors tumbled one on top of another into the formidable recesses of his brain like bits of glitter down a chute in a sequin factory.' (p. 286) I kept looking for some sort of clue to suggest that the author knew that she was creating the equivalent of a very bad gospel play put on by ill-trained amateurs and that the deep structure of the novel was something very different. But all I could discern was an approach like that of the prologue to E.E. Smith's TRIPLANETARY where he brings on Marxes, the Atlantean Minister of Work, for a bit part. I suppose some people do think that that sort of thing is terribly witty or deeply meaningful, but I find something faintly offensive in a novel purporting to be about spiritual regeneration cloaking itself in such banality. 'A creed for the Third Millennium - who the hell needs it?' is what I get from the

book.

As a science fiction enthusiast I find CREED interesting as an example of the genre used unsuccessfully by a writer to whom it is inappropriate. Most of the fans of Colleen McCullough who have commented on the book to me have found it dreadful. I hope it's because of its intrinsic shoddiness rather than its sciencefictional elements.

## REVIEWS

William Gibson -- NEUROMANCER (Grafton, 1986, 317pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Glorious things have been spoken of William Gibson and NEUROMANCER has been honoured by everyone bar Egon Ronay. So, how good is he, and how good is the book?

As a writer he is brilliant, or rather his writing is 'brilliant' - bright, hard, brittle and exciting in the manner we have come to expect since Chandler and the 'hacks' usurped the American novel. SF may be an unregarded genre - it must be for Gibson not to be rated above those boring young Turks who have captured attention with their facile tales of sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll in the 'more money than sense' set - but Gibson is a mainstream writer, with one exception. Like the detective story 'hacks' he is hooked on story. NEUROMANCER buckets along at a breathless rate from a very Dickian West Coast to a Rastaman space station via an electronic limbo. Like the hacks too, when Gibson's action gets hard his writing becomes its most precise and illuminating.

The story itself is too dense to describe here, besides which this is one of those stories which comes apart when unpicked. Just read it straight through, from beginning to end (that way you miss the imperfections).

I have compared Gibson with the detective writers in style. He also shares with them a stern morality beneath the 'anything goes' exterior of his drug and crime ridden future. Just desserts are handed out all round at the end, and the greatest of all sins seems to be hubris. Both Case's mentors (the electronically assisted Molly and the Jah warrior Maelcum) swaggeringly take the field against a ninja and are instantly disabled without his breaking sweat. Gibson does this with style and no emphasis, which is unwonted restraint.

Whatever it takes to get you to read an SF novel - imagination, action, style, humour, character, surprise - NEUROMANCER has it. How good is it? Not perfect but bloody good. How good is William Gibson? Only time will tell, but we will probably tell our grandchildren 'I bought his first novel, you know.'

Buying his first novel, now there's an idea...

Charlotte Perkins Gilman -- HERLAND (The Women's Press, 1986, 146pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

"Why, this is a civilised country!" I protested. "There must be men." Thus the narrator of HERLAND, one of three chaps who find themselves stranded in a country literally unknown to man. The female inhabitants have been cut off from the rest of the world for two thousand years and have been reproducing by means of a bizarre form of parthenogenesis that results in exclusively female offspring.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 - 1935) allows herself few easy ironies such as that above. She has a clear eye for the absurdities in her own society - most of which persist today - but spends less time in scoring cheap points than in building up a cogent structure for her utopian society. Indeed, Herland is remorselessly perfect - what saves this utopia from being uncritical wish fulfilment is its firm foundation in socialist principles, coupled with a refusal to blindly accept theories where they might contradict the author's experience of real people and their desires. People are not to be driven by forces they do not understand. They can shape their own societies and engineer their own destiny.

Given the time at which HERLAND was written - 1915 - it would have been relatively simple for the author to have assumed a posture of self-righteous feminism and merely paraded her ideas and ideals, yet she is conscientious in thinking them through. Necessarily lumbered with the notion of parthenogenesis and with the Herlanders ignorant of male-dominated Christianity, she is obliged to make a religion of motherhood - 'bearers of the very Spirit of God' - but nonetheless examines the condition of maternity critically, noticing how easily it concentrates on so little and how easily it is hurt. It is Gilman's habit to see past the obvious and through to underlying concerns, and it is a trait that gives this book a radical flavour. (On the treatment of criminals: 'Do you punish a person for a broken leg or a fever?') While she comes to make a complete reassessment of the relationship between the individual and the community, this does not preclude a sharp eye for detail: 'We had always unconsciously assumed that the women, whatever else they might be, would be young' - one of the many subtle ways in which men take dominance upon themselves. In the end, the simple crux is - to see women as 'People' and not as 'sex'.

Men's personalities, too, may suffer as a result of stereotyping. One of the party of three, Terry, is a chauvinist oaf who demonstrates this perfectly, although he is at the same time too chauvinist to play an effective role as devil's advocate. All utopian visions ought to have one such; otherwise, as occasionally with HERLAND, the prolonged recital of perfections becomes wearisome. It is nonetheless an intelligent book that still has plenty to say nowadays and The Women's Press deserve thanks for bringing it to our attention.

Josephine Saxton - - - - - QUEEN OF THE STATES  
(The Women's Press, 1986, 175pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

I can see little point in issuing a verdict as such on QUEEN OF THE STATES, a book that is sui generis. It is a song to doing your own thing and doing it naturally, and its content is twin to its form. It is a trip round the inside of someone else's head and your reaction to it may depend on the affinity of that head to your own.

The head in question belongs to Magdalen, who is variously seen in a mental hospital, motoring around Britain, visiting Morocco, visiting America, ruling America, and being kidnapped by aliens who quiz her in order to add to their collection of facts. At least, I think it is Magdalen who is in these situations. She fantasises other people as readily as they fantasise her. Imaginations cross-breed. Many of the characters, you decide, are redefinitions of Magdalen, except that character is too positive a word. Personality, perhaps. Magdalen's personality is continuously remapped.

So do the aliens represent other people? Or are they made by Magdalen, just as they fashion instant environments to her whim? Or they might even be genuine aliens - it would be typical of Magdalen's luck to get caught. You see the difficulty. The book sticks out no easily graspable arms or legs, but twists and turns in on itself.

One chapter begins: "There was a dream trying to reach her through the barrier of the drug." This will do as an example of the machinery by which the narrative moves. Form and content twinned perfectly, as I said, the explorations the novel makes are indivisible from their expression, and, given the license that Saxton's theme allows, it is to her considerable credit that the book appears neither forced nor wilfully random. Certainly, without a linear narrative to guide it, QUEEN OF THE STATES requires diligence of the reader, who must not expect to be carried, but the text, the prose, is splendidly clear and at the same time, says plenty - finishing these few pages, you look back and realise what a lot has been conveyed.

QUEEN OF THE STATES feels contrived only at one point, when the lady who gives creative writing lessons at the hospital says: "I am writing a science fiction novel about my sojourns with (the aliens), the problem being to make it credible within its own parameters. I had thought of doing it from the point of view of a mental hospital patient, so that people could have a choice of realities." Josephine Saxton is usually free of this sort of cleverness. She doesn't need it. One thing she is saying, though, is that drugs, dreams, madness, even fiction - they are all different states of consciousness. There is nothing wrong as such with any of these states - of which Magdalen is the undisputed queen - and it is natural to hop from one to another, a "traveller through time and space", as it is put at one point ("darling that is just too science fiction", being the reaction at another). The book is genuinely speculative in that it leaves the reader completely at sea as to which of Magdalen's many states might be the 'right' one, in that it provides no bottom line of reference.

"What is funny?" the aliens ask. Well,

they are, for one thing, and the rest of QUEEN OF THE STATES is for another. Saxton has the occasional weakness for me-generation indulgences, but always restores faith through her humour and bluntness. And those awesome meals ("if you can't get sex then by golly food is the best thing in the world".) The Women's Press science fiction list hasn't to date galvanised me - "I've brought back your Marge Piercy. I find her relentless" - but QUEEN OF THE STATES might be the book they, and we, have been waiting for. Give it a go.

Kurt Vonnegut - - - - - THE SIRENS OF TITAN  
(Gollancz, 1986, 224pp. £2.95)

Theodore Sturgeon - - - - - MORE THAN HUMAN  
(Gollancz, 1986, 233pp. £2.95)

Numbers 1 and 2 respectively in the Gollancz Classic SF series.

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

Reviewing classic novels is both a blessing and a burden. The blessing is that the yellowing paperbacks currently adorning my bookcase can be replaced with immaculate new copies. Furthermore nuances and subtleties missed first time around reveal themselves on rereading the novels. The burden is that a review has to be written. By their very nature classics have been analysed in great depth and any comments I have are bound to be unintentional plagiarism.

THE SIRENS OF TITAN is the better novel although this is not to belittle MORE THAN HUMAN. The elements of Vonnegut's writing which were to bring him recognition as a major post war writer are present in SIRENS OF TITAN although in a somewhat unrefined state. THE SIRENS OF TITAN, Vonnegut's second novel, is a more conventional SF story than his later work. When Winston Niles Rumfoord flies into a Chrono - synclastic infundibulum he ceases to have a material existence and becomes a wave phenomenon. This results in Rumfoord having the ability to materialise at various points in the solar system and to foresee the future. Rumfoord uses his abilities to create a new religion, aid the Martian invasion of Earth and to cause innumerable problems for his wife and one Malachi Constant, the richest and possibly most obnoxious man in America. However there is one method behind Rumfoord's apparent madness. He is helping an alien messenger robot stranded on Titan to obtain a spare part for its spaceship. The whole of human history has been manipulated by the robot's alien masters to lead to the creation of this spare part so that the messenger can complete his mysterious mission. Rumfoord has to find a way of getting it to Titan...

THE SIRENS OF TITAN is a masterpiece. Vonnegut is firmly at home within the confines of SF and although he was going to reject the classification he is a brilliant conventional SF writer. SIRENS OF TITAN is, however, not his best novel. The satire is a little too blunt and the plot almost gets the better of him at times. Furthermore Vonnegut's descriptive powers consummately shown in SLAUGHTERHOUSE 5 are not given full reign, which is to the book's detriment. However the SIRENS OF TITAN overflows with brilliant invention, it is witty, well written and intelligent. I cannot recommend it too highly.

MORE THAN HUMAN is a more mellow novel than THE SIRENS OF TITAN. It is certainly a masterpiece of science fiction although it lacks the power and originality of Vonnegut's novel. I am deliberately not going to reveal much of the plot. Part of the magic of MORE THAN HUMAN is inherent in the manner in which Sturgeon reveals his plot developments.

Essentially the book concerns the symbiotic relationship of a group of social outcasts with paranormal powers who go to form a gestalt. Although each is individually powerful the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The book details the events befalling the gestalt as it aspires to maturity.

Sturgeon was SF's incurable romantic. As such most of his fiction is broached in terms that an adolescent can understand and relate to. This could easily result in books which are shallow and transient. However Sturgeon was too great a writer to be caught by this trap and his books appeal to adults as much as teenagers.

MORE THAN HUMAN is a fix-up centred around 'Baby is Three' first published in 1952. This part of the book is written from the perspective of one element of the gestalt. The dawning realisation of his role in the gestalt is one of the most powerful pieces of literature in the corpus of science fiction. However the novel is flawed. The initial section of the book is overlong. Furthermore Sturgeon fails, in the final third of the book, to convey fully the emotions of the protagonists. The adequate expression of these emotions is essential for the true power of the climax of the book to be transmitted to the reader. That Sturgeon is capable of expressing these emotions is shown in THE DREAMING JEWELS written before MORE THAN HUMAN. Sturgeon's partial failure makes MORE THAN HUMAN a less moving book than THE DREAMING JEWELS although it far surpasses the latter in other respects. However do not miss the opportunity to read MORE THAN HUMAN. It may not be perfect but it comes pretty damn close.

Gollancz should be congratulated for the quality of the presentation of the books. The cover art is impeccable. The art director has done Gollancz proud. The books stand out without being gaudy, a balance that is by no means easy to achieve. My only regret is that these novels will be constrained to the graveyard of the SF shelves and hence be denied to the general public. These books deserve a larger audience than I suspect they will attain.

Buy both of these novels. It will be the best six quid you will spend in a long time.

Marion Zimmer Bradley - - - - - HAWKMISTRESS  
(Arrow, 336pp. £2.25)

(Reviewed by Margaret Hall)

The MacArans' Gift, their particular form of the laran (psychic ability) common amongst noble families, is an intense empathy with animals which makes them the best horse, hound and hawk trainers on Darkover. Romilly has the gift in full, but because she is a woman she cannot succeed her father as head of the MacArans' estates, even though Ruyven, her elder brother, has run away to a tower (where people with laran are trained) and her brother Dikken, having no particular love for animals, prefers a life of study. Adulthood is closing

in on Romilly. Behaviour acceptable in a girl is no longer considered proper in a woman and she feels trapped, knowing that her only future is a life of domesticity and child bearing. When she learns who her chosen husband is to be - a middle aged, flabby and to her repulsive man - she can bear it no longer and following Ruyven's example, she runs away.

The MacArans have always kept out of politics, but alone and on the run, after almost being murdered and then almost raped, Romilly meets Dom Carlo, a nobleman who supports the deposed king Carolin. Disguised as a boy, Romilly travels with Carlo and his few followers, looking after the sentry birds which he is taking to Carolin's army at Neversin. Gradually Romilly becomes more and more involved in the affairs of Dom Carlo and King Carolin and learns to use her laran to help the king in his war.

The novel covers fairly well trodden ground - young girl struggling to find her true vocation in a world in which men get to do all the interesting things - but the characters are not stereotypes. Romilly's father believes he is doing his best for his family in making them follow the traditional roles and he truly loves his children. Her stepmother genuinely loves her and only tries to make her conform because she thinks it is best. At the end of the book, Romilly finds no easy solution to her problems, but she has found her independence and does not mean to give it up again.

I have one or two complaints. Marion Zimmer Bradley is good on the emotional side of the animal training, but the technical details are sometimes rather vague. For instance when Romilly is training Preciosa, the hawk who becomes her companion throughout the book, it is not clear that the bird is being flown on a creance (a long fine line), though it must have been, because Romilly later talks about flying it free for the first time. And after training the bird to return to the lure, Preciosa brings her first prey back to Romilly's wrist. Neither is it true that, "No horse could do anything better than a ladylike trot in a sidesaddle." Women have been galloping and jumping sidesaddle since the leaping head was invented in the last century.

However, the book was a Good Read. Darkover fans should certainly enjoy it and, being a self contained story, it would be good as an introduction as any for newcomers to the series.

Robert Silverberg - - - - - A TIME OF CHANGES  
(Gollancz Classic SF, 220pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Its 1971 Nebula Award doesn't necessarily make it a "classic", but did perhaps give this book particular significance at the end of a decade in which psychedelic drugs had had their vogue as a gateway to individual and social metamorphosis.

Kinnall, frustrated and guilt-ridden bureaucrat, seems secure within the confines of "the Covenant", planet Borthan's irrationally-founded but stabilising religion. Its code is one in which repression of the ego plays a role comparable to the repression of the sexual libido in certain manifestations of Christianity. "I" and "me" are extreme spoken



obscenities. The use of "one" is mandatory. (This creates odd overtones for British readers who continually hear what sound like caricatures of caricatures of the Prince of Wales!)

Schweiz, a commercial agent from founding Earth, revolted by a morality which allows almost no intimate interpersonal exchanges, persuades Kinnall secretly to promote a psychedelic drug which breaks down barriers of consciousness and produces total blendings. The drug effect is symbolic of the reorientation of minds mutually opened to one another: the outcome of its use is symptomatic of traumas arising when any destabilising ethos conflicts with rigid socio-religious conventions. Kinnall, self-seen as "the martyred prophet", leaving a trail of broken confidences and disturbed lives, suffers social and political ruin; his conversion of the planet to a regime of reciprocal love hovers in the end between hope and fantasy.

Silverberg's descriptive skill suspends disbelief. Borthan's landscapes are splendid but ecologically suspect. Its technology, though archaic in flavour, has telephones, taxis, air and interstellar travel; but its corridors of "inky-fingered-clerks" rate with its sail-assisted power ships. Admit these as distancing and estranging fictional ploys, and the book offers all the pleasures of planet-roving. Its intellectual appeal lies in more pedestrian accounts of meta-religious social and psychological conflicts, counterpointed by those legends, dreams and psycho-physical experiences common to vintage Silverberg. In recording his final vision of "a network of communication", of "shining filaments of sensory perception", the exiled and defeated prince writes "My spirit wandered in realms of dream." He hopes all this "may yet be...no idle dream." With a shift towards myth and saga, half escapist, half deep-rooted, amid even more extravagant alien landscapes and structures, Lord Valentine emerges a decade or so later. "One" (to use the novel's obligatory pronoun) can see in Borthan's continents, oceans, climates, bestiaries, in its legendary past and potential future, rather distinct presentiments of Majipoor, with its web-work of soul-mergings and telepathic dreams.

Lisa Goldstein - - - - - THE DREAM YEARS  
(Orion, 1986, 181pp. £3.50)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

THE DREAM YEARS is the first title to come from Allen & Unwin's new science fiction imprint, Orion. Whilst it promises well for the future of this list I can't help feeling that this novel is actually more appropriate to the Unicorn imprint, which would have been immeasurably enhanced by its inclusion. As it is, Orion is off to a slightly shaky start with a curious novel which doesn't quite fit into the category designated.

Even its subject matter immediately creates a dilemma. Is the uneven construction of the narrative actually an exercise in surrealism, or is it merely the result of disorganised plotting? The story revolves around a mythical member of the embryonic Surrealist movement, a follower of Andre Breton, who makes contact with anarchists in the Paris of 1968, in particular with Solange who has discovered that their attempts to

break free from the perceived tyranny of their society has also enabled some people to break free of time itself. She has come back in time to seek the help of the Surrealists in changing society forever, too idealistic to realise that people don't necessarily want to be entirely free, and that even anarchists and surrealists need leaders and organisers. Having said that, the story weaves confusingly in and out between the 1920's, 1968 and 2008, through battles, riots and arguments, pursued by some sort of time monitor whose purpose is never fully explained. In fact, many things are never fully explained. This doesn't always matter but I would have welcomed a little more explanation on the future battle sequence, which seemed somewhat gratuitous, merely an opportunity to demonstrate that the surrealists had got it right, and the actual fact of the characters being able to travel through time is taken more or less for granted. I'm not sure that this is a good thing.

Yet, putting aside these quibbles, this is an interesting and unusual story, well written even if plot construction leaves something to be desired. Lisa Goldstein manages to evoke the unreality of twentieth-century Paris in each period, although her future Paris is too surrealistic to be entirely believable, which is surely the whole point of the exercise anyway. She also creates believable characters, although 'creating' real characters is not always easy, or indeed wise. Students of the Surrealist Movement may find this book irritating - I enjoyed it.

Jody Scott - - - - - PASSING FOR HUMAN  
(The Women's Press, 1986, 191pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

PASSING FOR HUMAN is a remarkably apt title for this apparently lightweight novel, featuring a thirty-six foot long dolphinlike anthropologist whose various disguises on Earth include the likeness of a cartoon character, Emma Peel and Virginia Woolf. She may pass for human but she certainly doesn't act like it, her behaviour being governed partly by her own remarkably hedonistic outlook on life, and partly through relying on the results of telepathically monitored thoughts and analyses of old movies. It doesn't say a lot for the human race, and it's no wonder she refers to us as 'bushmen'. Having said that, she has come to save Earth from an alien universally known as 'The Prince of Darkness', as well as deciding whether it's worth letting us survive into the future. We're let off the hook - for the time being.

As a rule, I'm not particularly fond of the superficial, wise-cracking style that Ms. Scott employs, any more than I like the idea of using 'real' characters in such an odd context but in this novel they did work, more or less. The narrative became a trifle disorganised in places, particularly in the sections concerning the human abducted by 'The Prince of Darkness', which seemed to act more as a respite from the chaos generated by Benaroya than to make a real contribution to the plot, but this is a minor quibble. This is a well-paced, racy piece of science fiction humour, very amusing and occasionally thought-provoking in its oblique commentary on the American lifestyle.

Samuel R. Delany - - - - - NOVA  
(Gollancz Classic SF, 224pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

*Nova* has certain stylistic and narrative features which may irritate: though generally well-paced, there are slowing-down passages of discursive conversation or exposition; its splendidly ornate descriptive prose sometimes goes over the purple top; the syntactical inversions invented to represent star-cluster dialect can be excruciating. And yet, this book once read goes on living with you. Mouse has been a denizen of my brain for nearly twenty years. That *Nova* is now in paperback print as a "classic" is wholly welcome.

Few works have created so rich a galaxy as an analogue of our planet's global culture, and as prognostic of its future options. Through this galaxy move such memorable puppets as the colonial twins, Lynceos and Idas, albino and melanic respectively, golden Sebastian and Tyy, flapping black gillies perched on their shoulders; and among others, but above all, Mouse with his sensory harp. Although their personalities are vividly sketched they seem puppets in this game-like quest, gathered for it from a Neptunian moon as randomly as cards might be accumulated in a gypsy's "spread". Even major protagonists - Prince Red, Ruby Red, Lord Von Ray himself - identify with figures in the Tarot's Major Arcana, constantly and randomly laid out as indicators in rapport with the adventure's progress. Moreover the novel's characters have a puppet/slave aspect in that they are convertible into "cyborg studs" by plugging into the Illyrian powered artifacts of thirty-first century industry to operate them in a kind of neuronic-electronic symbiosis. This is seen as utopian - but the wandering gypsies are socketless, and that ambivalent cyborg-stud Mouse is a one-time gypsy.

The quest is enough for Illyrian, dredged from a sunburst, to change the balance of the economy of star systems. Its course is shaped by a contest between two dynasties - Von Rays and Reds - played out in terms of sexual/psychological confrontation, charted and symbolised by the fall of the Tarot cards. In more esoteric guise the quest is paradigmatic of twentieth century resource and energy exploitation. There are the equivalents of commercial rivalries between nations and between internationals; of old world, new world tensions; of third-world discontents and neo-colonial power (the "Outer Colonies"); all are there on galactic scale. The macrocosmic mirror-images are more in the mood of sardonic bembling than of satire; but certainly there is an authorial viewpoint, projected chiefly on to Katin, the shambling, half-giant, Luna-born eccentric whose obsession is to record, analyse and fictionalise experience, and whose talking-partner is the Mouse. They complement each other, as do intellect and emotion, in their dialogues, where Katin's strategically introduced discourses delineate the book's - and the galaxy's - extended and extensive *weltanschauung*.

At the end of the novel it is Katin who remarks on the voyage's resemblance to "some allegorical Grail quest"; who is "aware of all the archetypal patterns it follows"; and who says that it could contain for him "all sorts

of mystic symbolism". Delany, apart from the implications of the threaded-through Tarot theme, does not push forward this symbolism, but leaves the individual reader to respond to whatever of it may be found between the book's lines and pages. It is a recipe for a classic which for this reason, and on the several other grounds I have suggested, *Nova* undoubtedly is.

Bram Stoker - - - - - DRACULA  
(Puffin, 449pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Some years ago, in the library I then worked in, kids constantly asked me "Have you got DRACULA?" I'd then direct them to an old hardback copy of Bram Stoker's novel which they'd finger dubiously and - as like as not - leave on the shelves. (I finally understood, and ordered a few copies of a suitably bloodily-covered abridged paperback, which went in and out like the proverbial hot cakes.)

All of which tends to buttress my theory that DRACULA - as opposed to DRACULA or a hundred or so Hammer House of Horror-type sequels - is one of those books which people think they want to read but on closer inspection find that it's not what they thought it was. Nevertheless, I think I'd have had more success with my readers had this Puffin Classic edition been available. The cover is certainly one of the worst book-covers I've ever seen, but its very garishness (totally unsuitable for this particular story) is obviously aimed at readers who've heard of 'Dracula' rather than Bram Stoker, and should encourage those who may have difficulty with Stoker's detailed text to persevere.

For despite what later generations have done to the bloodthirsty Count, the original novel is somewhat weighty and by no means what we see now in the 'horror-nasty' genre. Stoker's presentation of the story, through the notes, journals and letters of several witnesses allows him to build the story up gradually, to suggest and imply rather than to state, and to increase suspense and dramatic irony as pieces of the jigsaw fall into place. Jonathan Harker's horrific experiences in Transylvania, for instance, are not revealed to the rest of the characters for around 200 pages. The almost cinematic shifts of viewpoint, the slow crescendo of suspense, the careful piecing-together of the disparate elements of the story (is it no coincidence that DRACULA was written at the time of the flourishing of the Victorian Detective tale?) create a novel which is utterly rewarding to any careful reader. Above all, there is the menace of the Count himself, who apart from the first episode appears directly on very few occasions, yet his implied presence is on almost every page.

Which isn't to say that DRACULA doesn't have flaws. The second half of the story, after the death of Lucy Westenra, seems until the last few pages to lack much of the tension of the first. Further, DRACULA is very much a Victorian melodrama at heart and how you react to it depends less upon your taste in vampire stories and more, probably, on your taste for uplifting goo. The men are pure, noble and brave, the women invariably pure, noble, brave and inspiring. The result is, that despite

Stoker's considerable efforts, there are moments of sheer cardboard. The female characters particularly are something of an embarrassment: careful to jeer genteely at the independent 'New Woman' and classic examples of the suggestion that one of the 'messages' of the vampire theme is that female sexuality is horrific, alien, threatening. Take Lucy, after her transformation into one of the Undead:

She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace said, "Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you..."

You could go through DRACULA and find dozens of similar examples, and of the class bias which gives us every working-class character cadging money for drink. But at the heart of the story is something you rarely find in any of its derivatives. Like FRANKENSTEIN, the magnificent creation overshadows any flaw in writing or sociological context, and makes the book something other than a minor melodrama chained forever in the shackles of its own attitudes.

After the genre-bound attitudinising, DRACULA manages to touch (quite successfully, I feel) on the nature of insanity and the Victorian (and our?) problem with scientific progress in an apparently irrational world. It's worth pointing out that, despite the Hosts and crucifixes, the forces of Good are scientists and it's their confrontation with a mode of experience their rationalism can't deal with which is at the heart of the book. DRACULA is more relevant to science fiction than you'd at first think, and after all the derivations and retellings it's well worth returning to the original for a reminder of just why DRACULA has achieved classic status.

Katherine Kurtz - - - - - THE KING'S JUSTICE  
(Arrow, 336pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

If you don't know the Deryni books, of which this is the eighth, don't start here. Try the first of them, DERYNI RISING, or the first of the Camber series (set 200 years earlier), CAMBER OF CULDI. If you can overcome the oddness of her fantasy world, differing totally in geography and history from ours, and having magic, yet set in a medieval Christian context, in which Church rituals are in Latin and highlanders speak Scots Gaelic, then you'd find it has much more solidity and vividness than most. She's excellent on ritual, has well delineated characters, and a moral concern which is probably terribly old-fashioned in adult fiction now, but which I find suitably reassuring. THE KING'S JUSTICE follows on from THE BISHOP'S HEIR, as the second volume in the trilogy which picks up the story of Kelson started in DERYNI RISING, way back in 1970. Subsequent volumes continued to intrigue, because they introduced new concepts and problems. This is perhaps the least interesting of the eight: nothing new here, nothing unpredictable, except for the disturbing introduction of violence and sadism on a quite unnecessary scale. A disappointment then, but probably a must for addicts (like me).

Jefferson Swycaffer- THE PRAESIDIUM OF ARCHIVE  
(Avon, 199pp. \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

The first thing that irritates about this book is fairly obvious; it's a book of short stories very badly linked together, and nowhere does it say so. The second is more personal: I've read some of Jeff's other, unpublished writing, fiction and articles, and so, unlike previous people who have criticised his work, I know he can do better.

The stories are set around a meeting of the people who run the galaxy. The linking parts show every sign of having been written by someone who has just discovered how much fun formal meetings, debates etc. can be and who expects everyone else to share his enthusiasm. This ties in with the dedication to the OSMUN (Outer Space Model UN), a group of people who get together and roleplay various characters who would be expected to attend a meeting of a galactic council. Which I'm sure is very interesting to do, but less so to read about like this.

Some of the stories are not even relevant to the theme of the book. The first story, which explains why the Justicar wants to pass a constitutional amendment forbidding any belief in the supernatural, is good enough. Except for the assumption that the American legal and governmental system will still be in operation several millenia in the future, but then that's Americans for you. The American influence can also be seen in the economics of the book, the assumption that it's ok to keep certain planets in a state of poverty and jump on them with the full military might of the Praesidium if they want a fair share of the wealth. Two of the stories deal with the putting down of such rebellions, and go to show that writing action adventure isn't necessarily easy.

But why should a bunch of politicians, who don't even like each other most of the time, be interested in hearing about the death of someone's daughter, killed in action to make the world safe for democracy?

A disappointing book, made more so because of the wasted potential.

Ian Watson - - - - - THE BOOK OF THE STARS  
(Grahada, 236pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

Occasionally it happens that you jump the gun; that your mind is made up sooner than it should be. Such, I now know, was the case with my opinion of THE BOOK OF THE RIVER. The story of Yaleen, begun in that book, is continued in the present volume, THE BOOK OF THE STARS. But this volume is more than just a continuation of an unfinished plot; it extensively reshapes the meaning of its predecessor.

From a playful, flirtatious opening, through the surprising, sudden death of the narrator herself (I'm glad I didn't read the cover blurb, because it would have spoiled the shock) and into an ingenious contorting plot which ends up right back where it started, Ian Watson has here written one of those books that makes you want to go back and re-read it, just to figure out how the author did it! He takes us with Yaleen, his dead narrator, on a journey through a universe made curiously

small and domesticated (I am reminded of Mark Twain's CAPTAIN STORMFIELD'S VISIT TO HEAVEN and Cyrano de Bergerac's A VOYAGE TO THE MOON), the effect of which is to heighten the notions his story entertains. Having gained knowledge in the previous volume, Yaleen now gains wisdom, understanding: "What was happening to me was a relating - a relating and a re-ordering along an unfamiliar axis."

My own puzzlement at the role in RIVER of the character of Narya, Yaleen's sister, and particularly of the monstrous Dr. Edrick, is in STARS completely resolved; indeed, the story would fall apart if they had not popped up where they did. This is no get-rich-quick sequel, but a masterful extension of an apparently simple fantasy. "I had to go back over everything," writes Yaleen, "just as if I were re-writing THE BOOK OF THE RIVER entire..."

Philip Jose Farmer - - - - - DAYWORLD  
(Berkley, 258pp. \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

The basic premise behind DAYWORLD, and the innumerable sequels I feel sure will follow, is that in the world of the future each person will be allowed to live for only one day in seven, spending the remaining six in suspended animation. I don't for the life of me see any advantage in this scheme - a more efficient way of saving the Earth's resources would be simply to limit the global population - but the sheer arbitrariness of the idea is perhaps the key to understanding both the book itself, and the phenomenon of which it is a part.

Farmer finds it necessary to give an introduction explaining the rules by which DAYWORLD operates: he is laying out the rules of a game. In these days of role-playing games he has written a novel with a role-playing protagonist, a violator of the one-day-a-week rule who finds the strain of adopting seven separate personas too much. It's the story of a man who is both watcher and watched, far better handled in the past by Hester and Dick.

In that the hero develops a multiple personality disorder as a result of his role-playing, this volume could be taken as a critique of the very activity to whose practitioners it panders - but that's probably wishful thinking on my part. I wouldn't know whether, as the blurb claims, this is Farmer's best book in years; I found it a passable piece of pre-packaged fiction.

John Brunner - - - - - THE TIDES OF TIME  
(Penguin, 235pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by David Willis)

THE TIDES OF TIME gave me the impression that an old theme had been reworked in a manner which strove for originality. Nothing wrong in that, perhaps, but the treatment of the subject matter, whilst literate and very well researched, gave the novel a directionless, rambling quality. I must confess that I found the book hard going, and was lost more than once. Its inability to go somewhere reminded me of Samuel Becket's WAITING FOR GODOT; and indeed, the two main characters act in a similar manner to those in Becket's play - they even appear to be waiting for something, and are incapable of much action.

On a positive note, Brunner has researched his information fairly well and has tried to approach the old subject of time travel from a new and original viewpoint. The two main characters, Gene - a black man - and Anastasia - a pregnant woman - travel backwards in time; as they do so, their names, their memories and even their behaviour, change to blend in with the era they appear in. They themselves are oblivious of the process, and genuinely think that they belong to each particular era. Their lives are centred around the beach on a small Greek island, and as they travel backwards in time they re-experience the past life of the island.

Each chapter is more or less similar in content, but relating to a different era, until later in the book, when Eugene and Anastasia are pulled back to the 'present' by a team of scientists. Continuity between chapters is maintained by Brunner's use of recurring background details such as a broken sword and a discarded icon left over from previous eras, which have since been forgotten by the characters. Minor features such as these crop up all over the book at various intervals, and somehow contribute to the 'historical' background and the feeling of entropy in a fairly convincing way.

The last part of the book deals with the scientists who pull Anastasia and Eugene back into their true time. In fact, it is in this last part of the book that we learn more about the true nature of the events which have already taken place, and why they have occurred. Brunner has obviously engineered the plot so it keeps the reader in suspense until the end. However, this may not be such a wise tactic; I myself had trouble getting to the end, and would not have known what was the point of the novel if I hadn't forced myself to struggle manfully to the novel's conclusion. I won't tell you what these latter passages disclose, in case I spoil the story for you.

THE TIDES OF TIME is a passable novel; it is literate and strives for depth and originality. However, it starts off very slowly and comes across as rather cerebral in its approach, and I found it a little dull. Whilst it does have its good points, and there were some elements of interest, it seemed a bit repetitive. Repetition does not make for a very exciting novel. I feel that this is not Brunner's most accessible novel, and it is certainly not his best. If you are a Brunner fanatic who must complete the collection - buy it. But if you are unacquainted with Brunner's writing, I suggest that you read another of his novels instead.

Rhoda Lerman - - - - - THE BOOK OF THE NIGHT  
(The Women's Press, 1986, 289pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

A biographical note informs the reader that "Rhoda Lerman worked for ten years on THE BOOK OF THE NIGHT". During that time she also managed to write and publish three other novels. Now call me suspicious, cynical even, but something like that makes me very uneasy, and after reading this book, justifiably so. The first twenty or so pages leave one in no doubt that it is very much a labour of love on the author's part, a declaration of her personal mythology. But why publish it as science fiction? The answer lies in the



author's decision to give her beliefs a fictional framework, within a story purporting to examine the conflicts between the Celtic and Roman Church on tenth century Iona. But Rhoda Lerman's fictional Iona serves as a nexus for all times, a place where time barriers are thin enough to cross if you are the proper person to do so. In the twentieth century Celeste is brought by her madman father to the island, disguised as a boy, his intention being to live among the tenth century monks and educate her according to his own strange beliefs. As Celeste reaches puberty her new self-awareness forces her to confront the chaos that lurks behind all created order as well as the apparent order of nature, bringing her to the understanding that chaos is as vital as order, an understanding counterpointed by the struggle between the old and new religious factions.

Clifford D. Simak - - - - - A HERITAGE OF STARS  
(Methuen, 219pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

First published (it says here) in Great Britain in 1978 but copyright the year before, this potboiler - cum - philosophical - romance is not among Simak's better works, I'm afraid.

We're in the 41st century or so, after a holocaust and the wholesale disappearance of technology. Yes, it's another struggle - against - nature, back - to - the - soil epic - yet people still have names such as Nancy, Cushing and Dwight Cleveland Montrose, which I found discouraged any sense of reality. And when Our Hero gathers around him a hilltop witch, some ghostlike snakes, the last surviving robot and heaven knows what other weird entities, and sets off on The Quest, I knew I was in for a hard struggle to maintain even a semblance of suspension of belief.

They're off to find the "Place of Going to the Stars" from which mankind set out to colonise the galaxy and make friends and influence aliens. But the book, with its carefully constructed story line, is constantly bogged down by staged pseudo-philosophical discussions and meanderings.

Simak is, of course, noted for his espousal of outre visions and humanist causes (not that I equate the two!), but where CITY, WAY STATION and WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN, for example, manage to incorporate such concepts and rise above them, here the words make action sluggish. I can't even class this as a "flawed masterpiece", I'm afraid, but if you don't mind some whimsy and some preaching, a dash of scientific mysticism and a cast of highly unlikely "personae" (for they are not "characters", merely abstractions draped with with physical attributes) then you will surely enjoy this book as much as any of Simak's lesser works.

But if you are misled by the publisher's "Hugo and Nebula award-winning author" blurb into believing that you are in for a truly meaningful literary experience, disappointment lies before you.

Richard Cowper - - THE ROAD TO CORLAY (Futura, 1986, 202pp, £2.25)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

This book is one of that species of minor

classic that is not recalled as often as it should be, but when it is recalled it is with fondness, so Futura deserve our thanks for this new edition, especially as it would appear - correct me if I'm wrong - to be their intention to reissue the 'White Bird of Kinship' trilogy in its entirety. The present volume has a pleasing cover in romantic pastels and, more importantly, the novella 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn' - the seed of the trilogy - printed in its rightful place as a prologue to the first volume.

As trilogies go, 'Kinship' is pretty classy, although Cowper's grand design is not too clear at this stage - I suspect that neither was it overly apparent to him as he wrote. The reader easily forgets the epigraph dated 'June 3798', and the episodes set in rainy 1986 (is Cowper known to be precognitive?) seem intrusive and, well, science-fictional: "Encephalo-Visual Converter," said Ian. "It's out of this world, Peter! Fantastic!" The reader might not be aware that there is a final volume, entitled THE TAPESTRY OF TIME, to come, and anyway all the attention is on the events set in the first years of the fourth millennium, the growing pains of the cult of 'Kinship' and its vicious persecution by the established church.

Our present world has hit eco-disaster, the polar ice-caps have melted, the sea-level has risen and a new Britain of 'Seven Kingdoms' has been created. Only one feature of this scenario makes me unhappy - that the Britain of the year 3000 so closely resembles the Britain of circa 1550. The book is a bad case of neo-medievalism. Absolutely no survivals from the drowned civilisation? No point at which the new world remained trapped in a second Dark Ages? The reader is not encouraged to think of this as fantasy - the author insists that this is future history, and dates it firmly.

Cowper does however offer kinship, which could well be a way for the individual to cheat time:

He felt the world lurch and rock all about him; he heard a voice intoning the burden of the Testament: 'Lo! He shall return and all things old shall be made new' ... But even as he struggled to encompass his exploding vision a black wave rose up out of the past...

There are plenty of such vaguely ecstatic visions and equally vaguely menacing nightmares but in this instance the wooliness is far more successful than the precision Cowper brings to his dating. Whatever the reader's own beliefs or attitudes, he can identify with the Kin and against their tormenters, and as such the notion of Kinship contributes greatly to the book's attractiveness. In spite of the equivocal references to Christianity, Kinship is scarcely a religion. It is perhaps a symbol of man's potential, a focus for his aspirations - or even just a nice warm feeling.

Whether or not you have the time of day for Kinship or however you rate Cowper as a futurologist, though, he is always worth reading for his skill as a story teller. The economy with which he sketches details of a character or of a scene is remarkable; I am unable to recall anything that stood out as a descriptive ramble and

yet I carry with me a most firm impression of Blackdown and Quantock Isles and some of their inhabitants. This is narrative of a high order and, as a whole, 'The White Bird of Kinship' is a genuine trilogy - the story found that it wanted to be written to that length and the first volume leaves you wanting to read the others.

Richard Cowper - - A DREAM OF KINSHIP (Putnam, 1986, 239pp, £2.50)

(reviewed by Chris Bailey)

This second volume of the 'White Bird of Kinship' trilogy lacks the exploratory feel of the first book and reveals Cowper settling down for a comfortable narrative cruise. He has a stock of brave images, a familiar landscape and known characters. There is plenty in the way of family relationships, births, marriages and deaths. He is not averse to a little sentimentality.

There is a modest poetry in the writing. If there is a complaint against the narrative it is that this poetry is perhaps too modest and restrained, and that the flow of the story is too comfortable and relaxing. A major theme concerns the dilemma facing the Lord Marshal Richard; the reader quickly perceives this to be no sort of a dilemma at all, and a useful thread of tension is snapped. Nevertheless, without being gripping the book remains eminently readable, and if you're feeling drowsy you may miss a small technical triumph, that while the story spans twenty years, the seams are invisible.

The neo-medievalism is explained away as one of the consequences of repressive rule. I remained unconvinced - repressors can always find a use for new ideas - yet the medievalism does account for the curious flavour of these books. They are soggy with nostalgia for the future. More successful and vital is the sense that this book in particular gives of the presence of time and its function as an active force in people's lives. The past feels very close; the stones of Corlay drip with antiquity; Carver from the drowned world is recalled; certain episodes echo events in 'Piper' and THE ROAD TO CORLAY. The future too rolls out only the remorseless fulfilment of old prophecies, so that one character cries, 'We're none of us Free.'

This notion of inevitability as a dynamic and frightening power does much to put some steel into the book. I found it an odd situation actually: that determinism should be the wild card in a narrative that is otherwise so dictated in tone.

Gwyneth Jones - - ESCAPE PLANS (Orion, 1986, 246pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

The world is a nature reserve, run from the surviving space habitats. Ecological balance has been restored; the water is clean, the grass is growing, everything is beautiful.

Under the world are the subs in their cities. The subs are Cordwainer Smith's underpeople, except that they are not humanised animals but dehumanised humans. Except that they are not fully human beings with

developed personalities, they are parts of machines. Except that they are human, despite their cultural poverty; they have compassion, they have understanding. They have souls.

The world is everything that is the case, and everything that is the case is a series of (computer) functions and their data, the functions of the controlling and regulating (computer) systems that keep everything going. But something - perhaps - has come in from outside the system. Someone from outside the system entirely. Someone with a message. Or perhaps she IS the message. Some of the subs see that her message points to revolution and the overthrow of the oppressive system. The resulting ferment is as bitter, as bloody and as unsuccessful as that in, say, first century A.D. Palestine under Roman occupation.

Other people interpret the messenger (or message) differently. Perhaps God is an astronaut, and perhaps if She is, it won't mean what we thought it might mean. Perhaps it just means that we should all be nice to each other. Perhaps it means that the world as we know it is about to change or to end, and she, the inexplicable messenger/message, is a sign of this. Perhaps she was lying, or mad. Perhaps all humans can translate themselves into pure data, break through the event horizon, and live for ever. Or then again, perhaps not.

If you don't read the New Testament, read this book instead. If you do read the New Testament, read this book as well. You will certainly find some interesting illuminations of the one on the other. You may even achieve enlightenment. That is the story from the bottom up.

The story from the top down is the humanisation through degradation of a member of the ruling class who goes slumming on a whim, and gets trapped in the slums for real. She becomes a sub, she gets her face rubbed in her powerlessness. Her work is compulsory, physically damaging, and soul-destroying. Her food is petfood, her unique individuality a vanished string of numbers, her life is hell. But she comes to understand that she would rather suffer evil than do it. That the only roles available are exploiter and exploited, and that she cannot return to being an unthinking exploiter of her privilege. Physically cannot, morally cannot, intellectually cannot. She can no more un-know her experience, un-live her life, than she can heal the holes in her skull where she's been hard-wired to interface with a machine. You can't go back. But perhaps you can get out...

And best of all, the whole thing is absolutely pure, squeaky-clean Science Fiction. The real stuff, the stuff that people ought to be saying 'best thing since DUNE and LORD OF THE RINGS' about. It's easily the best novel I've read in years. Go and do thou likewise.

Keith Roberts - - KITEWORLD (Penguin, 1986, 288pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

In approaching KITEWORLD as a collection of related short stories I made a mistake. Whilst the book is indeed so struct-

ured, the fact that there is a definite progression - especially during the latter half of the book - suggests that the term 'fragmented novel' might be more appropriate. In other words the novel - as I now regard it - tells a complete story, but in a series of jumps rather than as a continuum.

The first half of KITEWORLD gives much background information, not only about the Kites themselves - which maintain a constant vigil against the legendary Demons - and the mystique/glamour which surrounds the Kites and those who are involved with them, but also about the Realm, the geographically obscure (though probably European) locale of the story. Now, this latter aspect is important, because it would have been easy for a lesser author to have become obsessed with the Kites and concentrate almost exclusively on them. Instead, Keith Roberts has taken the notion - or image - of the Kites and created a believable setting in which the Kites play a dominant - and credible - role. The Realm's history, on the other hand, is left deliberately obscure, the natives being largely ignorant of their heritage. There are pointers towards a nuclear catastrophe - and not merely on the cover blurb! - but this is by no means definite.

The latter half of the novel describes, through the eyes of one Rand Pennington, the disturbances which threaten the security of the Realm and the religiously inspired conflict which eventually erupts. Religion plays a dominant role in the society of the Realm, and I wonder if there is a slight element of parody of certain elements of religious fanaticism amongst our own society.

Read as a book of short stories, the stories themselves may be found to be individually a little unsatisfying. However, read as a whole KITEWORLD is, to use a cliché, greater than the sum of its parts.

## Capsules ...

Richard S. McEnroe - - THE SUNDERED STARS  
(Orbit, 1986, 186pp, £1.95)

ALAN FRASER was attracted by praise from Charles Platt (more readable than anything Clarke, Heinlein or Asimov have turned out in the last 20 years). 'And he's right... this is a compact 180-odd pages of space opera with a final bloodthirsty shoot-out.'

Paul C. Williams - - THE DOME IN THE FOREST  
(Orbit, 1986, 214pp, £2.50)

Book 3 of the post-holocaust Pelbar Cycle set in a tribal USA. KEV McVEIGH found it 'hard to read but not in the way Joanna Russ is, rather because it has no depth despite trying to give the illusion of depth in its style.'

John Christopher - - THE CAVES OF NIGHT  
(Sphere, 1986, 184pp, £2.50)

Reissue of a 1958 non-SF adventure by the author of THE DEATH OF GRASS, THE TRIPODS, etc. Five people are trapped in some Austrian caves. 'Although it's easy to read it shows its age.' (TOM JONES)

Poul Anderson - - THE AVATAR (Sphere, 1986, 404 pp, £2.25).

A story involving interstellar travel made possible through alien machines and political conflict between isolationist and expansionist factions. TOM JONES found it read as if 'Anderson tried to make this something more than the simple standard tale it really is and in doing so failed.'

Ben Bova - - ORION (Methuen, 1986, 432pp, £2.95)

Bova's version of an 'Eternal Champion' story, according to ALAN FRASER. 'I wanted to like this book very much. However, the story isn't original enough.'

Barry Longyear - - ELEPHANT SONG (.Orbit, 1986, 234pp, £2.50)

'Who can resist a circus?' says Joan D. Vinge on the cover of this interplanetary travelling-show epic. KEN LAKE was driven away: 'obvious adjectives...unnecessary swearing... clichés galore.'

## \* CONTACT \*

The winds of purgatory bring comments on PI 59...

KEV McVEIGH and NICHOLAS MAHONEY both point out, with reference to Kev's review of the book, that Grafton's edition of Piers Anthony's MACROSCOPE is the first complete UK pbk. edition. The previous Sphere edition was apparently heavily abridged. KEN LAKE offers the following thoughts on book reviews:

"As a professional writer I confess I pay little attention to wordage. Naturally I realise I have to have a damn good excuse if I exceed an editor's stipulated maximum, but when I review a book - or for that matter write an article on any topic at all - I set out to deal with the subject adequately. Then I stop. I have never tried to pad out an article, and I won't start now. If a book is adequately reviewed in ten lines, so be it; if it excites me to the point where I knock off 10,000 words, it's up to the editor to accept, prune or reject. Still, I do strive to give both 'value for money' and enough information for the reader adequately (there's that word again!) to decide whether he wants to read the book.

Of course my view is personal - all criticism is personal, and it's unfortunate that it's easier to be adversely critical than to praise without sounding unctious. It's also a lot more fun to savage something which seems to deserve such treatment. In such cases the editor's other function is to decide whether justice would be better served by either junking my review or getting someone to parallel it with one less adversely inclined (if possible). I just hope I don't get a reputation within the SF field of being needlessly destructive: low standards never helped anyone."

And there I was, thinking that attent-

ion to wordcount was as much part of professionalism as keeping to deadlines... but NICHOLAS MAHONEY again also had something to say on the subject of reviews, particularly 'super short demolition reviews':

"Even Robert E. Vardeman deserves better treatment than you give him, and I don't care how bad he is. You have to remember there's a good and bad side to everything. At Yoron III last year the editor of NED's SF line said, 'You'd be surprised at the number of letters we get asking for more Robert Vardeman.'... If people want to do the literary equivalent of filling their heads with cotton wool then let them get on with it. As far as PI is concerned, show us what to read and what to avoid."

While I'd much rather run reviews which show how interesting even the most mediocre potboiler can be, it's a sad fact that many mediocre potboilers aren't very interesting. I do believe that you have to establish some critical standards (which is, please note, a very different thing from claiming that one particular scanner says all that can be said about a book) and sometimes a warning to avoid is preferable to a potentially tedious blow-by-blow hatchet job. We could, of course, ignore the 'undistinguished-potboiler' end of the market and concentrate solely on books which have some spark of creativity. But it's precisely because I believe that most books have some spark of creativity somewhere, however diminished author and publisher may be to hide it (see my comments, brief as they are, on Sierra Anthony's SPACE TYRANT books in PI 59) that I want to cover a broad spectrum of books. And this will mean, inevitably, that a bad book may be dismissed in a few lines if that means that more space may be given to suggesting why a good book is good.

BUT - turning to PI readership in general - if a book is given too much in the way of praise (or adulation) in your opinion, I welcome corrective viewpoints. There may be reviews you don't agree with (hell, there are reviews I don't agree with...) and while we don't have the space to run long debates a few alternative viewpoints may be interesting.

And that was it... WAME Tom Jones, who made an interesting point about Bernard Wolfe's LIMBO not having 'classic' status in marketing terms - 'The book may be a "masterpiece" but it isn't a classic, so the publisher can't honestly say "this classic, now back in print."' (although the point really is that the book ought to be reprinted because it's a damn good book, irrespective of 'status'; Tom also felt that the 'Closer Encounters' of PI 59 were of books which had had a great deal of critical attention in the recent past - a fair comment as the CE slot is not necessarily for the best books (see this issue!) Martyn Taylor, who shared my concern with the implications of Chernobyl when it comes to being forthcoming about nuclear accidents WMO makes the spin look like a chatterbox': Phil Nichols: Terry Broome,

Douglas Hill - - THE CAVES OF KLYDOR (Puffin, 1986, 120pp, £1.25)

Jane Yolen - - HEART'S BLOOD (Orbit, 1986, 238pp, £2.50)

Paul Jennings - - UNREAL (Puffin, 1986, 107pp, £1.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Much gets written about children's books which appeal to adults in search of a rewarding read. Douglas Hill writes good action adventure SF with a welcome moral core: this second part of a 'teenager-marooned-on-hostile-world-by-totalitarian-government' saga may be formula SF, but it's well done and enjoyable. HEART'S BLOOD is a children's book published under an adult imprint. One to be read only if you've read every other SF novel featuring telepathic semi-sentient dragons.

UNREAL is eight fantasy tales with an amusing slant: a haunted toilet, 'smart ice cream', magic underpants. Well told and whimsical without being frivolous or pretentious in a way it would be difficult to match were the stories written for adults. Great fun and worth checking out.

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