

# PAPERBACK INFERNO



FRANK HAMPSON : & DAN DARE.

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## Paperback Purgatory

This month's competition will be to count how many times I have used the term 'transitional issue' in an editorial...

BSFA editors should not take summer holidays. The advantage is that you can get lots of reviewing done: but almost immediately you find that you've sent out the best books to other members of the PI reviewing team. The return home, full of virtuous pride at the number of books you have reviewed, is marred almost immediately by the thought that the next issue has to be prepared. And soon.

So what you should be reading is the first litho edition of PAPERBACK INFERNO as we continue to improve the quality of our productions. PI is now being professionally printed, which will cost more but will open up possibilities to give the magazine a much more attractive and flexible appearance. For now, many thanks to John and Eve Harvey, whose printing of BSFA publications has really been service beyond the call of duty. The BSFA membership owes a great deal to John and Eve, as a quick glance through the last few mailings will show. All I can do is offer my own appreciation of what they have done.

The 'New Look' will give me a chance to take stock of what I have been doing with PI. It has become clear to me over the last couple of issues that my attempts to increase the coverage in PI have not been working as well as I would like. More and more books have been arriving - I'd particularly like to thank Grafton and Futura for their kind response to my requests for a wider range of books - but the space available to review them does not increase proportionately. In PI 61 I made a start at drastically reducing some reviews of books I and/or the reviewers felt were of marginal quality or interest. This has been continued this issue with, to balance the magazine, another article in our irregular series of 'reviews' of books which aren't actually available in paperback editions. I have another such on file which will appear in a future issue... it is my dream that my plans to feature these articles will be forestalled by the fact that the book in question is actually reprinted. I'll let you know if this happens.

Before I leave you to the interesting parts of this magazine, can I extend a final thanks to David Willis for his help in turning reviews into legible columns of print, and Nik Morton for his illustrations which he didn't know would end up on the cover. Illustrations? - oh yes, an interesting point...

Now I know that all you BSFA illustrators are busily scribbling designs for our MATRIX editor. But the odd filler or cover illustrator for PAPERBACK INFERNO would not come amiss either. I do hope this editorial has not left you with the impression that I have been having a Hard Time putting PI together; that I sit down at the typewriter with sighs of anguish at the thought of bashing out another X thousand words. Honest - I like it really. But I'd like it even more if I could be deluged with illustrations for use. Reviews and reviewers we have aplenty: but pictures, alas are conspicuous by their absence.

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

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, July/August 1986.

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

July's F&SF brought me my first encounter with award-winning star David Brin. 'Thor Meets Captain America' comes up with an ingenious science-fantasy rationale for the Nazi extermination camps. How novel! How witty! 'The Gestapo man... picked up a truncheon... and smacked it into his gloved left hand.' This is a contemptable performance.

F&SF's editor ought to know better and in this issue does do better with two after-the-disaster stories. Nancy Etchemendy's 'The River Temple' treats of post-nuclear neo-barbarism more skillfully than is routine; it is unclear whether Garry Kilworth's scenario in Hobblythick Lane' is post-holocaust. Simply and elegantly Kilworth shows how fragile - and even meaningless - are the foundations of morality on which we have built our society. It seems to me that the SF element in his short stories is becoming more perfunctory. He seems less interested now in speculating on the development of the human condition than in exploring its eternal paradoxes.

The August issue opens with Vance Aandahl's 'Born from the Beast', non-sense adventure that is redeemed by its cheerfulness, even if seventy pages of such material scarcely seems suitable as the lead story for any magazine with pretensions to quality. Neil Hiller ('First I Came to Los Angeles') shamelessly offers a writer making a pact with Devil story that has a tail-in-mouth construction. He ties the two elements together cheekily enough to make you smile. I liked Satan's Apple computer, and his boastful pride in his Diablo printer. Stephen Gallagher's 'By the River, Fontainebleau' starts out as a subtly textured piece, well written, strongly visualised and ripe with menace. The horror when it arrives is too coarse though, the excess unjustified by the intelligence of the preceding text. Much the same might be said of 'Trick' by a new writer, Augustine Funnell, which shows bags of promise until he starts piling on the sensation.

Harlan Ellison has so much to say about 'Young Sherlock Holmes' that he makes both issues. When on the subject of recent Spielberg, Ellison is funny, he is vicious and he is not unjust: 'Junk that insults the honourable term 'junk', creativity at the level of dispensability where one finds Kleenex...'

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, July/August 1986 and ANALOG, July/September 1986.

(Reviewed by Edward James)

If you are puzzled by the newest New Wave, and wonder who's writing it anyway, then you could do worse than cough up your £1.90 for the August ASIMOV'S and read Michael Swanwick's 'A user's guide to the postmoderns'. It introduces the main characters,

and sketches in some of the history and the feuds quite conveniently. It discusses the terminology too: cyberpunk, the Movement, the Neuromantics, radical hard SF (is the latter, INTERZONE's phrase, the same thing as cyberpunk? - only INTERZONE's editors know, and they're not telling.) 'Post-moderns', for Swanwick, are divided into cyberpunk (Gibson, Sterling, Shiner) and, a group hardly known over here to people who don't read the American magazines, the 'humanists' - Willis, Shepard, Kelly, Kessel and, the one who is probably better known here, because of his two published novels, Kim Stanley Robinson. The same issue of ASIMOV'S offers you a fairly typical example of one of the best of the 'humanists': 'Aymara', by Lucius Shepard. Set in familiar Shepard territory, Central America, and concentrating in 'humanist' fashion on the interplay of personalities, yet dealing with some standard SF themes, like time travel and ESP. ESP, at least, apparently added as an afterthought, to make it all seem significant. There is something to be said for the cyberpunk complaint about the humanists: all fine writing and no original ideas. But it is fine writing. Also in August, an effective tale by Harry Turtledove set in an alternative history Byzantium, 'Strange Eruptions', about the making of a scientific discovery (what's science doing in ASIMOV'S?) and three fairly tacky fantasies.

To go back to the beginning. ANALOG finished its four-part serial in August: MAROONED IN REAL TIME by Vernor Vinge. It is a sequel to his THE PEACE WAR, set a few years later - well, about fifty million years later, actually. Various groups in the 21st and 22nd centuries have used stasis machines to jump a couple of hundred years in the future; they find that, apart from themselves, the human race has disappeared. So they go into the far future, and there attempt to restart things. The novel is a double who-dunnit: who killed the woman who was leading the attempt to reconstruct civilisation, and who (or what) ended civilisation in the 23rd century. The first problem is resolved, after a satisfying amount of suspense and somewhat implausibly pyrotechnic displays of 22nd century technology; the second is left unresolved. Was it a holocaust, or a Childhood's End-Blood Music evolution? No sequel, I suspect. But a good entertaining read, for those that like old-fashioned SF.

The Vinge serial has, in fact, been the best thing in ANALOG for some time. July ANALOG had a few readable stories, but even more old-fashioned in style: the best was probably Bob Buckley's, about genetic engineering on Mars ('Red Wolf'). August had the latest of J. Brian Clarke's Expeditor series: to start with (ANALOG February 1984) interesting because of its setting and problem, now, I'm afraid, tediously going through the motions. More interesting, a story by L.A. Taylor, 'Cultural Exchange', about alien reaction to human music (and loneliness), and a fact article by James E. Oberg showing that NASA is now starting to do something about the problem discussed by Lee Correy in his ANALOG novel way back in September 1980: a forced shuttle landing in the Pacific. Mind

you, it was not until September that the Challenger disaster hit ANALOG, giving NASA other things to worry about. Also in September a pleasant enough little conceit by Vernor Vinge, again; 'The Barbarian Princess'. Settling not unlike Vances' SHOWBOAT WORLD, but the travelling boat on this alien world is not producing plays, but copies of magazines, including Fantasy. Eric Ninicoff's 'Haiku for an Asteroid Scout' is readable, and at least gets away from the traditional US space empire; his space is dominated by the Japanese, as in 'When the High Lord Comes' in ANALOG April 1985. In 'Though the Heavens Fall' Harry Turtledove (again) attempts to show that his alternative history series (in which America is inhabited not by Amerindians but by sub-humans) is not racist after all. And Arthur C. Clarke offers an interesting science fact article entitled 'The Steam Powered Word-Processor: an epic of Victorian Engineering', about the invention of one Charles Cabbage, vicar of Far Tottering in Sussex. (Its information handling rate was 0.1 baud). Could it possibly be a hoax? A welcome and amusing, if very brief, return of the Chancellor of Moratuwa University (so he signed himself in NEW SCIENTIST on August 14th) to the pages of ANALOG.

Finally, back to ASIMOV'S, and the July issue. Silverberg, unwilling to relinquish the hero he had in his blockbuster historical novel GILGAMESH THE KING, has reintroduced him in 'Gilgamesh in the Outback'. This is pure fantasy. Gilgamesh is in hell: he meets Julius Caesar, Prester John - also H.P. Lovecraft and R.E. Howard. Howard feels strangely attracted to this over-muscled hero... Great fun, and beautifully written too. A mere conceit, however, and tends to confirm what Geoff Ryman says about Silverberg in FOUNDATION 37 (forthcoming: subscribe now to find out what he says!) Unfortunately, the presence of the Silverberg story, which included the medieval legendary figure of Prester John, persuaded editor Dozois to accept an article on Prester John by Avram Davidson. Perhaps I'm biased (as a medieval historian myself), but it could have been done better in half the space. Walter John Williams' 'Video Star' was worth reading, however: the usual heady cyberpunk mix (rock videos, computers, drugs), with a fast plot and some good ideas. 'Something Rich and Strange', by R. A. Lafferty, about how aliens impose a new concept of beauty on mankind, was one of the funniest Lafferty's I'd read in a long time. Together with interesting stories from Andrew Weiner and Molly Gloss, a good issue. Shame about Avram Davidson.

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Now it is well known among literary circles that the graphic talents of one A. Sawyer have recently been employed to add lustre to such coffee-table works of art as COLLECTED VOGON VERSE and FIVE THOUSAND VOGON EPICS vol. iv. Unless we have alternatives, they will be brought closer to home.

You have been warned....

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## Closer Encounters



FRANK HAMPSON: THE MAN WHO DREW TOMORROW (Who Dares Publishing, 1986, 215 pp, £9.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This large format colourful book is subtitled 'How Frank Hampson created Dan Dare, the world's best comic strip'. Obviously, some purist comic collectors may argue over the word 'best', but there is no denying that Frank Hampson exhibited a remarkable flair for invention and draughtsmanship, with incredible detail and colour.

In retrospect, Frank rationalised his creation of the famous pilot of the future: 'I felt the prognostications about technology were too gloomy. Attitudes were too pessimistic, with The Bomb, the Cold War and rationing in the forefront of everyone's mind. I wanted to give hope for the future, to show that rockets and science in general could reveal new worlds, new opportunities. I was sure that space travel would be a reality... Dan was the man I always wanted to be; Digby, his batman, was the man I saw myself as...'

In the early days, the Dan Dare strip was sent to Arthur C. Clarke to check that SF details were believable, but this arrangement lapsed when Clarke pointed out that the art studio was wasting its money on getting him to check it, the details were always authentic - so much so that an aeronautics engineer for RAF Farnborough asked for source material to help in the designs then of a space suit!

From the beginning when the Reverend Marcus Morris approached Frank with the idea for a revolutionary boys' comic of the highest calibre, Frank was inflamed with the ideals set. It was to have a morally uplifting tone, Christian in outlook, educational, and with artwork of superior craftsmanship. He set up a studio and hired associates and together with his father, Pop, Frank created Dan Dare. Almost every frame of the strip was sketched in rough first by Frank - he also wrote the storyline - and then photographs were taken of the various team members to act as models for the finished strip drawings. Most of the team members commented that even Frank's rough sketches were good enough to be the finished article, but Frank was a perfectionist and this attitude often entailed the team working into the early hours of the morning to finish the strip: eight people to produce two pages of artwork may seem extravagant,

but time has vindicated the approach - Frank was voted the best post-war writer and artist of strip cartoons in 1975 by an international jury of his peers.

This was in fact a long-overdue accolade, for prior to this he spent virtually 14 years in the wilderness hiding from the fans that pursued him and suffering from a series of debilitating illnesses. He hid because he was deprived of the copyright to Dan Dare, his creation. Under the terms of his contract he was not allowed to draw Dan Dare after leaving! After completing the remarkable *THE ROAD TO COURAGE* in 1961, Frank left *EAGLE* never to return.

The comic lasted from April 1950 til April 1969, 991 issues. It was reborn in 1982, though a pale reflection of itself. Having just turned 60 in 1979, Frank was presented with his Open University BA, something he did to fill in the empty hours, though the studying of art was a lifetime love, too... In July 1985, at the age of 66, he died, leaving the world a poorer place.

Crompton's book is very well illustrated, using pages from the old *EAGLES* and studio photographs and sketches, plus glimpses of Hampson strips that were never taken up by Fleet Street. Dan Dare was a team effort, but the driving force was undoubtedly Frank Hampson. His treatment by Fleet Street, its accountants and editors, seems tragic, even if his personality and work methods did not suit them. The book is a must for anyone who remembers *EAGLE* with a fond glint in the eye; it is useful to art students and comic enthusiasts alike, and is invaluable as an object lesson in the dangers of signing away copyright...

Aileen La Tourette - - *CRY WOLF* (Virago, 1986, 192 pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This book is easily recognised as 'feminist speculative fiction'. For a start, the narrative sequence is non-linear (women should create their own forms of writing out of their own tangled or interwoven life experience, breaking out of the false-to-reality narrative convention) and there are holes in the plot logic (logic is a rigid, limited and repressive patriarchal construct which women should discard in favour of a more organic, intuitive approach). The main characters are women who spend a lot of time discovering and experiencing their true feelings, and talking about their personal situations (the personal is political).

The book consists of a number of thematically related fantasies that slide into one another with no clear divisions or boundaries. One common thread running through all the sections is the relationship between storytelling, truth and lying. Each section of the book is untrue or inconsistent with itself and with other sections of the book, and the author

often presents situations in which a direct lie, an untruth or a withholding of the truth could be seen as 'truer' than any bare rational statement of fact.

In the close-to-reality sections of the book are a group of present-day feminists living together in a church, a single parent who gets shot at Greenham Common, and a deprived and mendacious (or creatively inventive) nanny who looks after Curie, the child of the Greenham martyr. In the further from reality sections of the book are a set of stories told by the Church women to the men with their fingers on the nuclear buttons in a effort to stave off the destruction of the world by using Scheherazade-type delaying tactics. There are the mishapen nuclear survivors, the Potters, created through a programme of breeding experiments, and there are the followers of the Gods of the Body cult, inheritors of a future with only three seasons.

Another thread running through the book is the reinterpretation of the story of the child who cried wolf. The Greenham Common protesters may be crying wolf. They may be actively attracting the wolf by naming it. A lone wolf may be a friend to a lonely child, but a wolf-pack, like a pack of men, is too powerful and fond of killing to be trusted (says the story).

I suspect that people who aren't close to the current feminist sub-culture will find this book irritating and/or difficult to read, and I found it 'an interesting book' rather than a 'good book'.

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Miles Gibson - - DANCING WITH MERMAIDS  
(Paladin, 1986, 175pp,  
£2.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

Rams Horn is a decaying Dorset seaside town peopled, so Miles Gibson would have us believe, with saucy-postcard and situation-comedy characters, whose dominant impulses are either lust or lunacy. Popular forms of occultism (folk-medicine, clairvoyancy, ufo-watching) and insipient erotomania provide the ingredients of an otherwise unremarkable plot, but this slick, superficial pseudo-satire doesn't invest its cast with sufficient credibility to merit much more than idle attention. Gibson is strong on his created landscape, even interspersing passages about its ancient history and legends; and he writes clever dialogue, taking the banalities and catchphrases of common speech and giving them an extra twist of parody; but there is a prevailing tone of supercilious disdain which estranges the reader from his creation. For balance, perhaps I had better add that the novel seems to have received ecstatic reviews in several 'serious' newspapers, with comparisons to Dylan Thomas being bandied about; I would have thought Tom Sharpe a likelier reference point.

## OVERVIEW

TURNER, Frederick, see TERRAFORMING

(by Sue Thomason)

Thus one of the brightest and best science fiction novels of the Seventies, and by a British author at that, gets a whole two-and-a-half lines in The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction. The entry gives author, title, and (American) publication date, and incorrectly implies that the novel is about the terraforming of Mars.

"A Double Shadow," said David Barrett when I told him I was thinking of writing about the book. "Isn't that the SF novel with the translations of Das Lied von der Erde in? I copied them down, they're much better than the translation on my sleeve notes." But then, Frederick Turner is a noted poet.

"A Double Shadow," said another friend, an Orientalist. "Isn't that the SF novel that follows the structure of Classical Japanese drama? It certainly captures the flavour and paradox of Japanese culture; restraint, sensual indulgence, the idea of a society ruled by Style..."

"A Double Shadow," said another friend. "Oh yes, that terrific archetypal SF novel. It's basically a Heroic Conflict; full of references to Homer and the Tain..."

A Double Shadow, I thought. Well it's this terrific pulp SF novel set in the far future on a terraformed Mars, about these two nobles who are locked in a status-war and end up duelling to the death... Well, it's this novel about the Two Cultures, the difference between Art and Science. Well, no; about the difference between philosophy and reality. Well, it's about these two noble houses, and Athene is the Goddess-patron of one of them, and Aphrodite is the Goddess-patron of the other (oh, did I forget to say, Mars is ruled by a Pantheon of Goddesses who live on Nix Olympica). And I haven't said anything about Chrysanthemum, "a magnificent old homophile and pederast, with fat fingers and elaborate makeup, weighing even on Mars over two hundred pounds", who is everything that Baron Harkonnen should have been and wasn't. Oh, and the Goddesses are actually emanations of (or dwellers in) The Vision, which is an omniscient artificial intelligence, "its memory-cores were forged out of the probability-states of all the matter in the universe; its logic circuits were spun from an artificial patterning of all exchanges of energy." And I haven't said anything about the wonderful clarity and strangeness and sensitivity of the descriptions. And nothing about the 'set pieces', like Chrysanthemum's art forgery...

In short, A Double Shadow is what happens when you let a scholar-poet loose on all the myths and tropes of pulp science fiction. It is one of the most idea-packed books I have ever read, and it's pretty action-packed as well, and it's painstakingly well subcreated and beautifully written. You should certainly go out and read it this minute.

Except that you can't, because it's out of print. It was published in this country in 1978 by Sidgwick & Jackson, not the first publisher's name that springs to mind in connection with science fiction. It was marketed as SF, a hardback costing £5.95. As far as I know, it's never appeared in paperback, which is a sin and a crime. I discovered it by accident in my local library;

it had been issued three times over the previous two years.

If we, the SF-reading community, are stupid enough to clamour for more film novelisations, more dulled and trivialised and second-hand ideas, when we have The Real Thing lying neglected and gathering dust in the stacks, then may the Gods help us, I suppose we deserve what we get.

## REVIEWS

M.K.Wren - - - - - THE SWORD OF THE LAMB  
(N.E.L., 1986, 436pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

Do blurb writers actually read the book in question? To judge by this case the answer would seem to be 'no': THE SWORD OF THE LAMB is graced by a tacky ('Alexand...his destiny and his heart are forever at war...(yeuch)') and misleading ('Rich...leader of the Phoenix...' (no, he isn't)) blurb guaranteed to make you replace the book on the shelves pretty smartly. Which would be a shame, because this, the first volume of the 'Phoenix Legacy' is a well-written and thoroughly entertaining book if not entirely original in its underlying concepts; there are echoes of many other works in here, most noticeably Asimov's FOUNDATION series. Like Asimov, Wren postulates a powerful empire on the brink of collapse, its rulers blithely unaware of the coming storm. Like Asimov, she invents an underground organisation - the Phoenix - whose members work to avert or mollify the threatened Dark Age and use some exact and predictive extension of the social sciences to guide them in their plans. However, unlike Asimov, Wren has the ability to create characters one cares about and to create a future world with depth and texture; I found the society of the Concord well presented and plausibly extrapolated from the present. Yes, there is an element of 'future-historical romance' in here but it is not the dominant theme the blurb-writer has implied. Wren's abiding interest seems to me not romance but (in its broadest sense) politics, and her book is intelligent and skilfully plotted (her attitude to her characters is admirably hard-headed in that she does not shrink from disposing of a good guy when the plot demands it). The standard of the writing is usually at least competent, exceptions being the occasional purplish passage and the rather clumsy exposition of the Concord's history in the first chapter. I would not pretend that THE SWORD OF THE LAMB is great literature, but I enjoyed it and await the next volume in the series with interest.

Graham Dunstan Martin - - - - - -TIME-SLIP  
(Orion, 1986, 164pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

I missed THE SOUL MASTER, Graham Dunstan Martin's first adult novel, but shall certainly seek it out now. TIME-SLIP, as the cover blurb implausibly suggests, is indeed 'no ordinary holocaust novel'. Once the reader has accepted the notion that Scotland, and Tasmania might, alone, have escaped the nuclear war of 1998, the rest follows logically and convincingly. The action, beginning in 2035, takes place mostly in Edinburgh (where, in 1986, the author is a lecturer in the university's French

department, and a writer of children's books). And Edinburgh, of course, is far too civilised to relapse into the post-holocaust barbarism or rural stupor which is the fate of America and England in so many novels. Instead, and very plausibly, it reacts in a great flourishing of religious fervour and ferment. We meet, among many others, the Clapping Hand of Zen, the Church of Christ Pacifist, the Divine Astronauts, and the Christian Feminists (who rename Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat 'Martha's Seat'). The main character is Gilchrist, who comes to terms with the wreck of his life by receiving a revelation which explains God's apparent cruelty. His revelation is obviously a result of his previous study of the banned physics of the twentieth century: there may be evil in Herenow, but in Ifwhere, in the infinite other time-lines, God is Merciful. The novel charts the birth and immense success of Gilchrist's Church of Instant Salvation, up to and beyond the time of his martyrdom. If you believe that SF is about ideas, there are more ideas per page than anything else I've come across recently: not just about politics and theology (where, for once in an SF novel, we find sympathy and knowledge as well as a wry sense of the ridiculous) but also about the concept of multiple time-lines and the possibility of slippage from one to another (hence the title). Ideas, combined with lucid and witty writing about convincing characters. Who could ask for more?

Martin Gardner - - - PUZZLES FROM OTHER WORLDS  
(Oxford University Press, 1986, 189pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Please, I beg of you, do not try to read this book!

It's not a book for reading - it's a browser's paradise, a trickster's practice pad, a puzzler's vade mecum and a very present help in time of insomnia.

Compiled from the pages of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine (1981-1984), the 37 "puzzles" are certainly not all mathematical - there are puns, logic traps, all the paraphernalia of the skilled sower of confusion. Following these come 37 "first answers", some of which raise further problems whose solutions follow as "second answers"; there are even third and fourth answer sections for a slowly decreasing number of chapters.

The titles are tricky too - "tethered purple-pebble eaters" vie with "the dybbuk and the hexagram" and "the balls of Aleph-Null Inn" to entertain and perplex you, and a damn fine job they do of it, too, as is to be expected of prolific scientific, mathematical and philosophical author Martin Gardner, for many years regular contributor to Scientific American and in 1983 named Science Writer of the Year by the American Institute of Physics.

It's not even his first IASFM compilation - Science Fiction Puzzle Tales appeared in 1981, and I wouldn't be at all surprised to see Volume III in the palindromic year of 1991.

Frankly, I have just one criticism of this book, and that's the layout. Ideally, each solution and subsequent trail of problems should follow immediately after the original problem - the keen puzzler wouldn't peek, while the cheat (like me) will merely dogear the book faster by thumbing back and forth and trying to mark four pages with four right-hand fingers while keeping his place with the thumb of his left hand - which just adds a requirement of prestidigitational skill to the need for intelligence, logic, mother wit,

mathematical training and sheer stick - to - it-iveness so lacking in the present reviewer.

The book is somewhat larger than standard paperback, but the large, clear, child's-primer print shows that it could well have been brought down to the normal size without sacrificing readability. Since such a reduction would surely have reduced in turn the somewhat high cost of the book, it is a consummation devoutly to be wish'd: why do they do this, I wonder?

However, no matter what your IQ or other gauge of gaming ability, get out and buy a copy of this book - it will afford many hours of pleasure, many ideas for SF plots, many opportunities to infuriate your friends and relatives, and the chance at least occasionally to feel real good when you defeat the author. Enjoy!

Lisa Tuttle - - - - - A NEST OF NIGHTMARES  
(Sphere, 1986, 212pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

I should have thought that as the co-author of the prize-winning STORMS OF WINDHAVEN, Lisa Tuttle would have been a recognised SF name for Sphere. However, this book has been classified as 'Horror', so will have to jostle for shelf-space with Stephen King and the rest of the stomach-churners. Seven of the thirteen stories in this collection originated in 'The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction', and they span from 1972 to 1985. The earliest is in fact Ms Tuttle's first published story, 'Stranger in the House' from Clarion II. All the stories have a domestic, small-scale setting, and lead the main character from an innocent, normal situation into a disturbing situation or trap of some kind. Any horror is implied or sketched rather than described in explicit detail, and this approach makes it more effective and disturbing than those books which go all-out for grisly descriptions. These stories gain also because of their commonplace backgrounds - everything that happens to the characters could happen to anybody.

If I have one reservation it is that this collection is rather monochromatic; each story is excellent in its own right, but taken together their similarity of structure causes the effect of the later tales to be diluted. A well-chosen short story collection should be synergistic, in that the diversity of the pieces should complement each other and increase your enjoyment of them when read together. If you want to know what I mean, read Ursula Le Guin's THE COMPASS ROSE. Despite this, I do recommend that you seek this book out from its hiding-place behind CARRY ON OMEN XVIII and buy it.

Cherry Wilder - - - -A PRINCESS OF THE CHAMELON  
(Unicorn, 1986, 275pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Yet another 'dispossessed heir' fantasy, this at first sight has little to recommend it. All the ingredients are there: exotic invented nations, magic, fairy folk, but they never quite seem to gell into a positive hook for the reader.

Aidris is one of the heirs to the double sovereignty of the Chamelton, a land invaded by the giant warriors from Mel Nir after the rightful rulers are assassinated. In exile as a cavalry soldier (kedran) in the neighbouring state of Athron, she bides her time and eventually returns as rightful queen. Aidris herself is a positive enough heroine and the kedrans are dwelled upon just enough to make them noteworthy but not so much as to make

them a clumsy inverted 'Amazon' stereotype. But much of the action, the major developments of the book, appears offstage, giving a curiously oblique slant to the narrative. After a while, one reads the book looking for the relationships which will become apparent further on, as plot, intrigue, and prophecy intermingle. But neither the locale nor the characters are quite forceful enough to remain for long in the mind once the book is finished.

The further volumes, which will presumably focus on the other nations of the continent of Hylor, should round off the picture. Until they appear, however, it is hard to say if the two-dimensional quality of A PRINCESS OF THE CHAMELON is a failing in the book itself or part of the way a more complex work is put together.

Cherry Wilder - - - - -YORATH THE WOLF  
(Unicorn, 1986, 178pp £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

My rather puzzled conclusions about A PRINCESS OF THE CHAMELON, the first volume of the 'Rulers of Hylor' trilogy, remain unresolved by this second part. YORATH THE WOLF takes up a recurrent thread in PRINCESS, the fate of the rightful heir of Mel Nir, raised in secret because of a dark prophecy. This is obviously becoming a story of counterpoint and correspondence to be read with some care for the subtle linkages. But does the overall impact of the books warrant this? My reservations remain because few of the characters really stand out, and I was disappointed to find that the giant Mel Nir race was not, I felt, as alien as in the first volume where hints were present of a society with more different values.

Cherry Wilder appears to be writing a series with all the cliches of its type but with a deliberate withholding of the energy of the cliches: a curious mixture which could be worth savouring. Yorath fights his way to self-recognition and a half-mystical ending considerably at odds with what the reader is led to expect. But 'the last word in the chronicle is never set down'. What will the third volume hold?

George R.R. Martin - - -SONGS THE DEAD MEN SING  
(Sphere, 1986, 214pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

Sphere class this as horror and in the widest sense perhaps it is. Certainly these seven stories show Martin is capable of writing good tales beyond the hard SF genre for which he is perhaps best known. The stories range from 1975 to 1983 and mainly come from traditional SF&F sources - F&SF, ANALOG etc.

My favourite is 'Sandkings', an award winner if I remember correctly, but a story I'd not read before. The plot is simple: the nasty rich man who likes exotic pets, preferably of a predatory nature, which finally provide his comeuppance. Even though you know in general terms what is going to happen it kept me turning the pages from start to finish - I even missed my customary morning sleep on the train into work.

'Nightfliers' was also very good. An ill assorted crew set off to find a mythical space travelling race in a ship whose owner/pilot keeps himself isolated. The tension grows, bad things start to happen. Perhaps the ending is a little telegraphed, but what the hell, it's still a good story.

There are two love stories which are also straight SF stories. ...For a Single Yesterday' is an after the war story. It contrasts those who can put their previous lives and loved ones behind them and start again and someone who can't. Not a bad story but 'Meathouse Man' is far more powerful. The SF 'gimmick' of having controlled corpses to do the manual labour is pretty nasty but the story of love is far crueller. At some time Mr. Martin must have suffered, it has a feel of personal grief (the kind you'd associate with Harlan Ellison), 'Of all the bright cruel lies they tell you, the cruellest is the one called love.'

This is a damn good book, I enjoyed it more than any other this year. I hope you do too.

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Robert Sheckley - - - -THE STATUS CIVILIZATION  
(Methuen, 1986, 143pp, £2.25)

- - - -THE ALCHEMICAL MARRIAGE  
OF ALISTAIR CROMPTON  
(Methuen, 1986, 184pp, £2.25)

(Reviewed by Martin Taylor)

Reissuing 'classic' novels is the publisher's staple, which is only wisdom for our hard pressed SF publishers faced with an ever renewing young audience of transient passion. In these books Sheckley has not aimed one inch above the stereotype of the SF reader as a socially deficient 14 year old male with delusions of adequacy. When THE STATUS CIVILIZATION came out I was 14, more or less, and quite capable of yawning over Heinlein's '...vent in spleen' joke (?) in STARSHIP TROOPERS. What might I have made of THE STATUS CIVILIZATION had I been so unfortunate as to read it then? Not a lot. I've always liked cliché retold with style and bravura, but Sheckley confuses blind vigour with panache and mere noise with robustness. A comedy set on a planet auditioning for Salusa Secundus ought to have at least some hint of catastrophic possibility for the 'hero', even if only to feed the reader's fantasy. Similarly it ought to have an end in which loose ends are tied, mysteries satisfactorily explained. THE STATUS CIVILIZATION just stops and the 'twist' doesn't. Not that I minded. I was relieved to be finished the book.

Not half so relieved, though, as I was by the end of THE ALCHEMICAL MARRIAGE OF ALISTAIR CROMPTON, an end which attempts to be Cocteau on speed without the slightest suggestion of Cocteau's wit, style or intelligence. I am rarely embarrassed reading anything, but there seems to be a first time for everything. I imagine Sheckley had fun writing it. Funny that, I always thought it was the reader who had the fun and the writer the blood, sweat, toil and tears.

When I finished these books I was half inclined to go to the nearest tree and apologise to it on behalf of humankind for losing so many cousins that this dross might be published.

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Damon Knight - - - - - THE MAN IN THE TREE  
(Penguin, 1986, 246pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

I liked this book. Further than that, I am not willing to commit myself.

This is the story of Gene Anderson, about whom there are two extraordinary aspects. First, he is extraordinarily tall, eventually growing to a height of eight and a half feet. Second, he has various 'abilities' of the kind

usually attributed to psi powers, but in this case explained in terms of an affinity for parallel worlds. Thus he can duplicate objects by removing similar objects from parallel worlds; he can heal various afflictions; or he can use his abilities to hurt people. It is this last ability which causes Gene to run away from home at the age of nine after accidentally killing an older boy who had been taunting him over his size.

From here Gene's odyssey begins as he journeys around the world in a quest for - what? The meaning of life, perhaps? At various stages he attends art school, befriends a sculptor, becomes a carnival freak, a businessman (just duplicate a few diamonds...) but throughout his life is maintained a consistent love of Art. Is this the message of the book, then; that Art, a creation of the mind, should be regarded as the ultimate human endeavour? What then of the closing chapters, in which Gene Anderson begins a movement, religious in style though not in content, and becomes a Messiah in the cause of world peace?

THE MAN IN THE TREE is a little difficult to evaluate, being somewhat obscure in whatever message it may contain. However, regarding, as I do, Damon Knight to be a better author of short stories than of novels, I was happy to find this to be a welcome exception to the rule.

Damned if I understand it, though.

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David Mace - - - - - - - - - -FIRE LANCE  
(Grafton, 1986, 399pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

This is a book I would not have finished had I not been detailed to review it. However, having dutifully ploughed through all 399 pages - the last 200 of which were not that bad - I would have to judge it on its own terms a modest success.

FIRE LANCE opens in a world already devastated by nuclear war. Life has been all but exterminated in the northern hemisphere, and plumes of dust crossing the equator threaten to bring the nuclear winter to the rest of the world. The shooting, however, is not yet over. In the US the hardliners want to finish the job by throwing everything they have left at the Soviets; apart from a few remaining land-based missiles this means the four hundred Fire Lance cruise missiles aboard the 'unsinkable' supership USS Vindicator. The Vindicator is an interesting concept which Mace works hard - too hard - to make seem plausible. The first half of the book consists largely of long and loving descriptions of the ship and its weapons systems, page after page of indigestible facts and figures about every nut and bolt and microchip. It is at some point in this seemingly interminable technical manual that FIRE LANCE and I would normally have parted company, especially as Mace's fascination with the machinery of warfare is not matched by a commensurate interest in the people who press the buttons: the tone of the book is throughout flat and detached, characterisation almost non-existent.

However, I slogged on, and rather to my surprise found I had begun to care about the fate of the Vindicator and its crew. Mace paints a very bleak picture of the aftermath of nuclear war. His WWII is not an adventure - even for the story's protagonists - but a disaster. As conditions outside worsen the novel's characters finally begin to come to life; the gosh-wow technology suddenly looks all too vulnerable, the enclosed world of the Vindicator a small and fragile community bent on self-destruction. The final outcome is inevitable. It is to Mace's credit that he

does not attempt to tack on a conventionally upbeat ending; this would have been entirely implausible and destroyed what merit the book possesses. FIRE LANCE could have done with losing at least 100 pages of long-winded description. With that, and with a bit more effort expended on characterisation, there might have been a good book in there.

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Alan Dean Foster - THE PATHS OF THE PERAMBULATOR  
(Orbit, 1986, 279pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Kenneth Grahame meets Piers Anthony in what must be the silliest fantasy series yet. Law student and aspiring rock star Jon-Tom Meriweather, transported to a world of talking animals becomes apprentice to a turtle called Clothahump who is, naturally, a wizard. In this - vol. 5 of the 'Spellsinger' series - the world is suffering a perplexing series of reality shifts. So off on a quest they go...

I was going to rip this garbage to shreds until the character of Mudge, a randy otter, appeared and (gulp!) I found that I was enjoying it! There's some amusing if underdeveloped commentary on rock music throughout as Jon-Tom incorporates it into his spellsinging and the disreputable Mudge is quite fun. But I suspect the good bits only underline the silliness of the whole concept. Approach warily!

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Orson Scott Card - - - - - HART'S HOPE  
(Unicorn, 1986, 301pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

I approached this novel with a certain degree of trepidation. Fantasy, after all, is not my thing. I prefer science to mysticism; technology to magic; equations to spells.

Still, HART'S HOPE is a pleasant little tome, concerning itself with paedophilia, civil war, child rape, cannibalistic infanticide, revenge, incest, dysentery... Dysentery? Well, at least it's original.

Hard to actually recommend, but I must admit to having enjoyed it (the novel, that is, not the dysentery). It is sufficiently well written, with no small amount of attention to detail, to encourage me to look at some of the author's science fiction. Now where did I put all those back issues of Analog...?

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Roger Zelazny - - THE LAST DEFENDER OF CAMELOT  
(Sphere, 1976, 246pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

A mixed bag of stories, both in length, quality and interest, 14 in all. The longest is a rather too long story about a man who heals by going inside the patient's mind, and the risks of the job. The most original is the horror story of an all robot future: the werobot who sucks the life-force from robots. The most frightening is the one about the unexpected visitor to the first showing of a snuff movie. The most nauseating is the assassin of the future - telepaths are used to prevent assassinations so the only way to cause a successful one is to use someone in two minds about the matter.

The length of the review, and the fact that it's 2 months late shows how little I have to say about this collection. A good read, but almost instantly forgettable.

Jack L. Chalker - - VENGEANCE OF THE DANCING GODS (Orbit, 1986, 303pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

In his reviews of the previous volumes of this trilogy, Ken Lake spoke of 'a well-crafted, excellently written, rarely over verbose book' (PI 59) and 'this farrago of magical nonsense' (PI 60), establishing that the books are good of their type but that 'type' isn't necessarily what every reader wants. In this volume, Marge and Joe end up back in the USA to combat the exiled Baron and avert Armageddon, guided only by an oracle who speaks only in verse (didn't Robert Sheckley do that?) and of course the master wizard Throckmorton P. Ruddygore. I certainly wouldn't want to argue with Ken's suggestion that Chalker dashes through these stories with skill and panache, but that it's all a bit silly. Or even all very silly: no wizard called Throckmorton P. Ruddygore or (in this volume) Tinkerbelle-fairy with a Brooklyn accent is going to boost the books among readers with anything like taste...

But at least you can tell when the writer is being facetious, which is more than you can in certain other fantasy novels. The 'Dancing Gods' trilogy is, in fact, a jolly good read for people who like fantasy but find much of it too po-faced for words (which is, I suppose, where I come in) and even though too much of it will no doubt rot your brains it will serve excellently as passing entertainment. Take as part of a balanced diet.

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Piers Anthony - - WITH A TANGLED SKEIN (Grafton, 1986, 413pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is Book 3 of the 'Incarnations of Immortality' fantasy series in which mortals are incarnated as personifications of Death, Time, Fate, etc. in the conflict between Good and Evil. This one tells the story of Niobe, who becomes the triple Aspect of Fate.

Despite a neat retelling of the folk song 'The Trees They Grow So High' at the beginning, and despite Anthony's apologia for the book and his writing in a note to the reader at the end (which is by far the most interesting part of the book), it is lacklustre stuff, with neither background nor real resolution. 'My current success has as much to do with the efforts of the publisher and its sales force as it does with my skill as an author.' Quite.

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Josh Pachter (ed.) - - TOP FANTASY (Dent, 1986, 311pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

A longer review appeared in VECTOR 132, so this is deliberately brief. For quibblers over categories, at least four of these tales are - on the surface - SF: more importantly, not all of them are of the high quality you'd expect in a collection of this nature. While Ballard, Bayley, Campbell, etc. provide enough good stuff to ensure that the title isn't totally a misnomer, there's sufficient silly whimsy from such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, Anne McCaffrey and HL Gold to undercut a thorough recommendation. It's perhaps unfortunate that the stories from the two 'biggest names/ most "quality" writers' (J.G. Ballard and Thomas Disch) have a virtually identical 'fantastic element'. On balance, an enjoyable collection, but is 'on balance' enough for a 'best of...' collection such as this?

Alan Dean Foster - - - - - ALIENS  
(Futura, 1986, 247pp, £2.50)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

By the time you read this review you will probably have seen the film, so you will be better placed than I to compare the text with the film. Betancourt (*Amazing Nov 86*) has pointed out that Foster claims to add an additional third to each script he novelizes, such as providing the characters with thoughts and past history. (For the budding sf-novelization writers, you can earn circa \$5,000 for three weeks work - and big movie novelizations can command \$30,000 - \$80,000!) Without seeing the film, it is not possible to spot where Foster's imagination takes over from the initial creation - the script.

Manipulation of the viewer or reader can annoy; the scene in *Alien* where Ripley stripped to her underwear, besides seeming unnecessary for the story, was to my mind deliberately manipulative, offering her up visibly defenceless, without even the dubious but psychologically reassuring protection of clothes, and of course the scene was there for titillation too. *Aliens* does it, too, manipulating, that is: not only is Ripley destined to face the aliens, but she is to be accompanied by a child - a sure-fire heart-stopper. Despite these misgivings, the manipulation is effective, as it was in the forerunner, *Alien*.

The sequel picks up Ripley in suspension floating in her drifter, *Narcissus*, some 57 years after she rid herself of the alien... The character of Ripley is enlarged upon, and her susceptibility to nightmares is both understandable and well conveyed - in the event she undertakes to return to the alien planet of her nightmares in order to exorcise them... The planet now has a name, Acheron, and a colony, which inevitably succumbs to the aliens... So the space marines are sent in, with state-of-the-art weaponry which is convincingly featured - a far better marines-in-space story than David Drake could muster!

You won't get a great deal of style or literary writing, but the story and characters are convincing and occasionally Foster illuminates with a telling phrase or two, viz,

"Both wore the expression of men for whom sleep is a teasing mistress rarely visited."

There are minor irritations, such as "politicorporate manoeuvring", repeated use of "heretofore" outside of legalese contexts, "she was slipping on her equipment" for she was putting on her equipment, a different image entirely, death is an "irritating finality" - irritating seems an inappropriate description... But these are trifling quibbles concerning a good edge-of-seat read which kept me awake till 2.30am! One reviewer of the film said he felt drained and limp after the film, due to unremitting tension, and the book does read like that too. Yes, it is very well done.



James White - - AMBULANCE SHIP (Futura, 1986, 184pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is one of a series of Sector General novels, first published in 1974. The previous paperback publisher was Corgi: this is a first edition for Futura.

Many of you will have read it already or have read others in the series. It is a typical Sector General book. For those who haven't read any of them then there is a gap in your SF education. The concept of a multi-species, multi-environment hospital like Sector General was a stroke of genius. The hierarchical structure of the hospital, the aliens who work and are treated there, the species classification scheme, the translator system are an entire believable world in their own context.

AMBULANCE SHIP has the human hero, Conway, outside the hospital in a special ambulance for the three stories in this book, all of which have neat, well-constructed plots and all of which fall short, as all the Sector General books fall short, on characterisation. Conway is never a fully realised person, he never quite comes to life. The people are all types rather than individuals; they do the job the author created them for rather than taking independent action. If that particular fault doesn't bother you and you like stories with a clever idea, a puzzle and a neat punch line, then I recommend the book to you. I enjoy them, I just wish that they had more depth as well as good plotting.

Patrick Tilley - - XAN (Grafton, 1986, 332pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

When I read FADE-OUT by Tilley some years ago I was perplexed. It was an obvious 'aliens land on Earth/first contact' story and thus SF, but it didn't read like SF; it didn't have the feel or emphasis, in fact it was what I would now call a hi-tech thriller.

XAN is pretty much the same. An alien, the 'Xan' of the title, arrives on Eath, a surveyor for an advanced race. It requires energy to continue its journey; that energy is the life-force from humans. Initially being low on energy it picks up individual humans. Later it moves on to larger things.

The Williams family stop off in Gainsborough, Kansas so that Clay Williams, ex-NASA scientist on his way to Denver to start work in industry, can meet with his old pal Joe MacKellan, ex-NASA scientist and now successful SF writer. Within a few pages XAN has one of the Williams' children and they are drawn into the problem.

The plot has many twists. You just get used to the 'we must find the children' scenario when the US army arrive and cordon the area off - somehow they know about the alien. Now we get the intrepid scientist tracking the alien down then twist and its spunky feminist and mother Laura Williams defending children against evil and then twist it's... well I won't spoil the ending. Having said that the ending is true to the situation as set up so Tilley is to be congratulated for sticking to his guns when a different ending would have been expected/wanted by many people.

Particularly at the beginning I found the style reminiscent of Stephen King: the down home America feel, the little bits of background detail on minor characters and spear carriers, not as good as King but then King is one of the best writers around. Later this detail drops away, there's a sparseness to the writing (not necessarily a bad thing) perhaps a throw-back to Tilley the script writer.

I believe Tilley has done pretty well with his previous books and Grafton obviously hope to do well with this one - it even has an embossed cover! Actually I associate embossed covers with horror novels and the blurb on the back does use the word 'horror' twice in red letters. Perhaps Grafton are hoping to attract both the SF and horror market. It will be interesting to see if they succeed, though I think the horror fan is likely to be disappointed.

Anthony Horowitz - - THE NIGHT OF THE SCORPION (Magnet, 1986, 159pp, £1.75)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

THE NIGHT OF THE SCORPION is one of those 'juvenile' novels that can also be enjoyed by adults. It is a direct successor to THE DEVIL'S DOORBELL, which I haven't read - yet.

Martin Hopkins (schoolboy, aged

13) and Richard Cole (reporter, aged 26) investigate a man called 'Todd', who has links with Tower Communication, a sinister research complex in the Peruvian desert. The plot involves something akin to the Cthulhu Mythos, the Nazca Lines and a 'golden scorpion'.

Horowitz has a neat style that conveys information and suspense. To (slightly) paraphrase Kingsley Amis: 'If even a tenth of (juvenile) science fiction were as good, we should be in clover'.

Colin Greenland - - DAYBREAK ON A DIFFERENT MOUNTAIN (Unicorn, 1986, 246pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by David V. Barrett)

Colin Greenland is well known to us as a longtime writer and reviewer for the BSFA, INTERZONE and FOUNDATION, and for his other critical works, including his study of Michael Moorcock and the New Wave. In the SF world, novelists often make good critics, though the reverse is not always the case. DAYBREAK ON A DIFFERENT MOUNTAIN, however, shows Greenland taking his place amongst Britain's few outstanding young writers.

Two young aristocrats, one cynical and a mite depraved, the other a somewhat wet poet and failed lover, together escape from the closed world of the walled city of Thryn, heading across the wasteland for the distant mountain where they may find the answer to their quest: what, if anything, is the Truth underlying the myths of Gomrath, the god who promised to return someday to perfect the city and his people? DAYBREAK, like Delany's NEVERYON books, is concerned with the reality of myth, with the living out of past myth in our present lives to bring about a visionary future. But it is always difficult to see our own part in the mythic process; the present moment, caught between past and future, is confusing, casting uncertainty on both:

But in this uncertainty, the feeling of void after the completion of enterprise, he trusted that something new was arising. They were freewheeling, moving into new time, beginning again in a different direction. Time is an illusion by which we differentiate pattern out of chaos. Dubilier believed that his failure to recognise, and thus to create, the pattern of the future was due to the fact that time had been renewed; the patterns would be new patterns. Events were working, but as if underground, unseen, even by him.

Someone once said that the test of a good anecdote is that if it isn't true, it ought to be: its truth is more important than its mere factual historicity. This is the essence of myth: why search for the factual basis when the meaning of the myth is what counts?

'What's this about kites?' asked Lupio. 'How can you remember something I've never even heard of?' 'I don't.'

'Why did you tell them you did, then?'  
 'I don't know. It sounded like a beautiful story, entirely preferable to the truth, so I thought, why spoil it for them?... I'm not sure disillusioning people is a good thing, not when its unnecessary.'

DAYBREAK is a beautiful story; it may not be true, in that it is fiction, but it contains much truth.

Richard Cowper - - A TAPESTRY OF TIME  
 (Orbit, 1986,  
 186pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

This is the third volume in Richard Cowper's 'The White Bird of Kinship' series (the previous volumes are THE ROAD TO CORLAY and A DREAM OF KINSHIP) and with the story now complete, the scope and the elegance of the whole are at last apparent. The tale of Tom the Piper comes to the sort of indefinite conclusion which is all that can be gleaned from still-recent history; eight hundred years on two researchers must draw out all the threads of that story's legend and the relative sophistication of the 'modern' reviewers is effectively bridged. The cuteness comes from that reliance of the Kinship dream on the individual's sensual perceptions. 'I am the thing I make: the thing I make is I,' says Tom. We're all going to Corlay, with flowers in our hair. But set against that the emotional power of the final revelations, that freeing of the 'immortal spirit' and that sense of simultaneous command of and liberation from the immense gulfs of time which have been summoned for the reader.

Perhaps Tom's words are two-edged. The MSS that the two historians - one of them 'RJC' - decipher are earlier installments of the Kinship trilogy and the other RC obviously enjoys playing palaeographer to his own material. Is this too precious a trick? The sage Morfedd draws patterns in the air to change the scene in his crepuscular spirit-world. Cowper draws patterns too, yet the scenes he creates hardly seem nebulous. In reviewing A DREAM OF KINSHIP I pointed to some sentimentality. (PI 61) Cowper can control this tendency though, and when he does it is expressed as a remarkable degree of emotional involvement by the author with his characters. This involvement communicates successfully to the reader of A TAPESTRY OF TIME and it easily overrides any sense of artificiality. In the final analysis it is the vindication and triumph of the 'Kinship' books.

Iain Banks - - WALKING ON GLASS (Futura, 1986, 279pp, £1.95)

(reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

After his gratuitously shocking debut with THE WASP FACTORY, Iain Banks' second novel is an altogether cooler, more dispassionate affair where the emphasis is on structure rather than

style. In alternating chapters he recounts three seemingly unconnected stories. Innocent Graham walks through London on his way to meet the girl he adores, sure that she loves him, and only vaguely troubled by the person in motorcycle leathers who is his apparent rival, and by the cynicism of his best friend. Steven has just been sacked from his latest job, and he's convinced it's because 'they' are after him, because Steven knows that he is a soldier in the eternal battle between good and evil who has been imprisoned in this modern London by the forces of evil. While in a Gormenghastly castle two real combatants in that eternal struggle must pay penance for past crimes by playing stupid games (spotless dominoes, Chinese Scrabble) in order to answer the question that may win their freedom. And as they play they explore in their own way the strange castle in which they are imprisoned. And each is due to have an unexpected effect upon the others. The story of Graham is closest to THE WASP FACTORY in its gleeful revelation of incest at the end. And Banks clearly has great fun with poor, deluded Steven, in an odd way the pivotal character in the book. But it is in the third section, the story of Quiss and Ajayi that Banks really lets his imagination loose in a wild and inventive melange of Peake, Kafka and Borges. It is the glee with which he plays his word games and cruel jokes that has won Banks his following, and that is present here in abundance. Nevertheless it must be said that sandwiched between two much better novels (THE WASP FACTORY and THE BRIDGE), WALKING ON GLASS is not as good as it might have been. The rather formal structure and the imbalance between the sections both tend to get in the way of the story, and at the end the parts don't come together as dramatically or as significantly as one might have hoped. What we have are three very good novelettes, of which the tale of Quiss and Ajayi is easily the best, but they don't quite add up to a novel.

Nikolai Tolstoy - - THE QUEST FOR MERLIN  
 (Coronet, 1986, 378pp,  
 £3.95)

(reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

In this inquiry into the reality behind the figure of Merlin - a poet and prophet of more significance than even his role in the Matter of Britain - Nikolai Tolstoy studies the legends and verse identified with Merlin. Out of this he tracks down a historical Merlin - a pagan bard, heir to the Celtic druid tradition who was identified with the losing side at the battle of Arderydd (?573 A.D.) and retreated to a wooded fastness on the slopes of Hart Fell, in Dumbartonshire. To the aura of this figure is added that of the mythical Merlin, associated with the Horned God, the Wild Huntsman, and the Trickster. When it tries to pull the two strands together, the book becomes more problematic: nevertheless it's a fascinating account and probably essential for anyone interested in Arthurian or Celtic lore.

Roger Zelazny - - THE HAND OF OBERON  
(Avon, 1986, 188pp,  
£2.95; also available  
from Sphere, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

THE HAND OF OBERON (Doubleday, 1976) is the fourth, penultimate, volume in the original 'Amber' series (the new one began with TRUMPS OF DOOM, reviewed by Sue Thomason in PI 60 and now available in a U.K. edition from Sphere @ £2.50). It is, perhaps, the best in the series after NINE PRINCES IN AMBER (Doubleday, 1970): no small achievement in my opinion.

Thumbnail 'plot-sketch': Lord Corwin and his brothers 'Random, Gerard, etc.) must find the traitor in their midst and discover the source of the black road that unites the 'one true world' of Amber with the many-dimensioned continuum called Shadow. For the Final Battle will soon be upon them...

OBERON showcases some of Zelazny's wry 'naturalistic-symbolic' writing, a quality difficult to illustrate with out-of-context quotations: 'Moons, cast like a handful of coins' (p. 129) etc. And the 'episode' can be read as a separate entity, containing as it does enough background material to orientate the veriest newcomer.

Christopher Fowler - - CITY JITTERS  
(Sphere, 1986,  
164pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

There is very little blood in this book and no lust or carnage, which makes a very pleasant change in Horror fiction recently. Ten short stories, ten brief links and an epilogue, with the links referring to a council discussing a city redevelopment and the stories centred on a different aspect of the city; Nightclubs, Taxis or Car Parks. Some of the ideas are old, a few are new, but they are all told well.

Some horror makes the reader squirm and be revolted, like Clive Barker for example, but so much of this style fails by slipping into gratuitous obscenity. There is a better form of Horror writing which genuinely scares, and it does this through tension, and not the actual 'kill'. At its best this can leave its reader drained long after the actual book has been put down. It is this effect that Fowler has tried for, and on two occasions, 'Her Finest Hour' and 'Change for the Spy Master' he achieves it. Overall the feel is like much of Robert Bloch's short work, though Fowler has not reached those heights yet.

CITY JITTERS could easily have become a poor copy of THE BOOKS OF BLOOD, instead the author has aimed for something else, and this shot is not that far short. The only point that struck me was the absence of a first name for a lot of the characters, which leaves Fackham, or Conway or Kent slightly flat. Otherwise, a good comfortable read with more than a hint of je ne sais quoi to leave you with.

Jeffrey A. Carver - - THE INFINITY LINK  
(Orbit, 1986, 540  
pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by David V. Barrett)

Don't be, as I was, put off by the cover, the blurb, or the note in the acknowledgments that reveals the author read the entire manuscript aloud over four years to his local Writers' Group; any novel passed by committee, I thought, will be a multi-humped donkey. It ain't. THE INFINITY LINK is one of the better First Contact novels, well-paced despite its length, on the whole well written, and with a strong plot which seldom falters.

Mozy Moi, a young student doing vacation work on a hyper-secret project, falls in love with David Kadin, whom she has never met physically, but who shares telepathic linkups with her in computer-simulated worlds. In an attempt to meet him, she has her personality transmitted out to an unmanned spaceship heading away from Earth. Carver excels in his depiction of Mozy's emotional problems as she learns how to cope with the fact that she is now 'living' within the onboard computer - or, as it tells her, 'you occupy the developmental programming memory section.'

Despite much of the narrative occurring within the computer this is in no way a Cyberpunk novel; Carver's handling of emotion makes this an intensely human book, without the coldness of, for example, Gibson's NEUROMANCER.

Mozy's contact with the alien race which is rapidly approaching Earth is telepathic, empathetic, sympathetic, and almost symbiotic. They are not looking for conquest, colonisation, formal diplomatic relations or interstellar trade in goods or knowledge; they are more like wandering minstrels wanting to give a good show.

And that, of course, is something the US military can't understand; responding to perceived threats in their usual way, they try to bounce nukes off the alien craft. The struggle between scientists, politicians and the military is a major subplot, held together by the dogged investigations of a freelance TV reporter who knows something important is going on simply by the number of official blank walls he keeps banging his head against.

THE INFINITY LINK raises major questions about freedom of information; about national security paranoia; about the conflicts between science, security and morality, and about basic decent humanity and following orders; about politicians trying to make decisions bigger than any man or high-level committee, on the basis of incomplete information, with the hard-line military breathing down their necks - and just how powerful should the military be in a democracy anyway?

It doesn't have all the answers, but asking the right questions is the first move towards finding the answers and the more questions such as these are asked in fiction the more they will lodge in readers' minds, perhaps to good effect. Or am I being naively optimistic?

*Capsules ...*

Steve Perry - - THE MACHIAVELLI INTERFACE  
(Ace, 1986, 196pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

'The explosive conclusion to THE MATADOR TRILOGY.' Or so sayeth the blurb. Actually it is an attempt to recreate DUNE or FOUNDATION, but if this weren't so blatant it would be a reasonable book. What a pity. It is well written and only the lack of originality lets Perry down.

Robert Jordan - - CONAN THE MAGNIFICENT  
(Sphere, 1986, 213pp, £2.50)

Steal treasure... seduce maidens... fight monsters... slay enemies...does nothing INTERESTING happen to Conan any more? (Andy Sawyer)

R. A. MacAvoy - - THE BOOK OF KELLS  
(Bantam, 1986, 340pp, £2.95)

The UK edition of the book reviewed by Sue Thomason in PI 58. A modern couple are transported to a richly imagined 9th-century Ireland. Sue wrote, 'The historical factual background is well-researched and convincing...(but)... this book shows signs of having been groomed for the bestseller genre, rather than Historical or Fantasy.' A good read, particularly if you are in-to Celtic myth, but with distinct bodice-ripper tendencies. (Andy Sawyer)

Damien Broderick - - THE BLACK GRAIL  
(Avon, 1986, 310pp, £3.50)

Barbarian warrior Xaraf is transported a million years into the future to become the tool of the Powers who seek to regenerate Earth's dying sun. Superior science fantasy which suffers, however, from a meandering structure and rushed ending. (Andy Sawyer)

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman - - DRAGONS OF AUTUMN TWILIGHT (Penguin, 1986, 447pp, £2.95)

DRAGONS OF WINTER NIGHT (Penguin, 1986, 399pp, £2.95)

A role-playing game is one thing and a jolly good one too. A role-playing game written down and turned into a 'novel' is quite another. These books are such, having all the ingredients of an exciting epic fantasy bar originality, readability and plot. (Andy Sawyer)

Piers Anthony - - BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT: EXECUTIVE (Grafton, 1986, 336pp, £2.95)

I reviewed the U.S. edition of this in PI 59. An intriguing mix of sexual and political fantasy which manages to prematurely ejaculate on both counts, it's a 1980's version of the 'SF is written for bright sexually frustrated 13-year olds' cliché. (Andy Sawyer)

Terry Brooks - - MAGIC KINGDOM FOR SALE/SOLD (Orbit, 1986, 342pp, £4.95)

THE WISHSONG OF SHANNARA (Orbit, 1986, 498pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The roots of modern fantasy can be as much Enid Blyton as folk-tale and legend. MAGIC KINGDOM, with its talking dog and incompetent wizard, is strictly the former. Ben Holiday is an idealistic lawyer who has suffered a personal catastrophe. In an exclusive catalogue he sees advertised the fantasy kingdom of Landover. So he pays his million bucks... shortly afterwards anyone who doesn't think THE MAGIC FARAWAY TREE is the greatest work in English literature falls asleep. Perseverers will discover a thinly-veiled apology for Monarchism as the only true guarantee of the rule of law. To be fair, my 12-year old nephew thought it was great.

The trade paperback edition of WISHSONG was reviewed by Nik Morton in PI 57. For diehard fans of so-called epic fantasy only, but as such it's passable and certainly better than MAGIC KINGDOM.

Esther M. Freisner - - SPELLS OF MORTAL WEAVING (Avon, 1986, 215pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

A rotten potboiler, perversely notable in its comprehensive grasp of fantasy cliché, viz:

Jewels of power, furtive thieves, turrets of amethyst, dying kings, exiled kings, usurpers, dodderly old councillors, banquets, jugglers, players and minstrels, wizards and warlocks, spells enchantments, bindings, prophecies and curses, dark lords, witchkings and shapechangers, trials by temptation, gryphons, imps and demons, sea voyages, pirates and storms, enchanted trackless forests, country inns and woodland sprites, mermaids and ondines, temples, shrines, sacrifices and priestesses, poets, warriors and barbarians, hunky princes, pert princesses and devoted companions.

A selection of silly names: Prince Phalaxsailyn, Llew-on-fish, Castle Snowglimmer, Panomom-Midmists, Fara-gore-Tren, Potentilla, Maspas of Wiggin-sdale.

But no map.

Nathan Elliot - - EARTH INVADED/SLAVE-WORLD/THE LIBERATORS (all Dragon, 1986, £1.95: 160pp, 143pp, 144pp respectively)

(reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Something of interest to 'Robin of Sherwood' fans? This trilogy takes First Sergeant Hood of the 21st Century UN militia and his comrades Will Redman (geddit?), Marianne, 'Big Mac' and an energy-hungry robot dubbed AMOS and sets them against the invading K'Thraa. This is unsophisticated childrens' SF where clever boffins come up with enough answers to account for plot inconsis-

encies. However, if you delve deep enough, you'll find that Nathan Elliot may be asking his young audience to tackle more complex questions than you'd think from the formulaic 'goodies v. baddies' style.

Seth McEvoay - - BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED/ALL GEARED UP/A BUG IN THE SYSTEM/RECKLESS ROBOT (all Dragon, 1986, £1.95: 147pp, 149pp, 147pp, 146pp respectively)

(Reviewed by Andy and Harriet Sawyer)

These four books make up the 'Not Quite Human' series in which the basic twist is that Chip, the hero, is really an android built to look and react like a 13-year old boy. The plot usually involves a threat to the secret of Chip's identity and the jokes come from his reactions to the more illogical structures of our language: 'Are you all right?' 'No, only half. The other half is left.' So far, so excruciating: how many comics have you read with that story in? But both my daughters think these books are brilliant. Over to Harriet (8): 'I think the NOT QUITE HUMAN books are good for eight year olds upwards. They also have not quite human jokes!' So there you are: The author's reached his target and need an adult reviewer say more? Personally, I think they're fun so long as you don't take them seriously: perhaps if you're locked in a children's library on a wet afternoon...?

Brian Aldiss & Sam J. Lundwall (Eds.) - - THE PENGUIN WORLD OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION (Penguin, 1986, 320pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Introducing this, Brian Aldiss says that the ubiquitous SF of the USA ('gaudy, exciting, and generally apocalyptic in tone') moves to save or win or destroy the world or the galaxy. The present collection he says presents a more level-headed view of the universe. I agree; but also one more eccentric and eccentrically diverse in appraisal of the universe, and as exotic in tone as are (to our ears) the names of such science fiction authors as Lyuben Dilov, Sridhar Rao and Quah Kung Yu. That the works of many of these are unknown to us is a loss which this samplinh can only start to remedy.

Basically the book is an offspring of the professional body World SF which since 1976 has worked to further common ends and understandings across barriers linguistic, ethnic or cultural and has instituted the Karel Awards for translation. With two exceptions the editors have selected from submissions by national groups, with the generally happy result that while a global community is the recipient, distinctive regional origins are authentic and everywhere apparent.

A brief review cannot do justice to 26 stories, only 7 of which are from Western Europe and only 1 from the USA. They are arranged neither chronologically nor regionally, but in such a way that themes (e.g. the consumer society, wild talents, time travel and time paradoxes, cybernetics, exobiology, alien contacts,

miscegenation and communication) link and merge through juxtaposition. Space allows only for the recording of a few personal preferences. I give high rating to Peter Lengyel's 'Rising Sun': the traumatising alien bridgehead forms in Latin America, but is surely imaginatively rooted in the history of Lengyel's native Hungary; also Bob Shaw's 'Small World' - one of several stories of youth. Here the youngsters gang-warfare-play on an artificial mini-planet embodies a neat macrocosmic symbolism. From China, a delight for its bizarre locale, is Zheng Wenguang's 'The Mirror Image of Earth'. I fancy the original may harbour many subtleties and ironies, but in translation, and to the western imagination, it blossoms into a kind of willow-patterned ufology. There are many other excellencies, mostly of near-contemporary date. Vintage material are stories by Robert Sheckley, the

Strugatskys and Bertram Chandler, the last-named using virtually a 'formula' plot a present (quite literally) a good survivor. The publication could do with fuller biographical and bibliographical information, and certainly with a more appropriate cover design and blurb; but it is a most valuable dip into the pools and oceans of world SF and, one hopes, it may presage further hauls.

Steven R. Boyett - - THE ARCHITECT OF SLEEP (Ace, 1986, 290pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

Nowhere on or in this book does it say that it is volume one in a series, which it is. This is not fair. I was expecting a conclusion, not a cliff-hanger, so it creates a false impression. Despite that, despite a cover plug by Piers Anthony, a terrible cover design, special thanks to David Gerrold and horrible paper, all of which put me off before starting, I enjoyed it.

The hero - James Bentley - falls through to an alternative Earth where racoons rather than apes had opposable thumbs and won the evolutionary race to become the dominant species. Jim is befriended by a racoon he calls Truck (the 'Architect of Sleep' of the title) who, he gradually realises, has been ousted by a military coup. The book is about Truck's attempts to get help in the chapters written by her, while the chapters by Bentley relate his discoveries about this world, a complex place where the rulers are people who 'dream true', a form of precognition. The thing which really aroused my interest was that racoons cannot speak, their vocal cords are inadequate. Instead they have a highly evolved sign language which they patiently teach to Bentley. The idea and its application is new to me and is very well done. It's impossible to judge the whole from one volume, but I do want to read the next one. The plot is sufficiently original to keep me guessing, the use of sign language is creative, the writing competent, even enough research seems to have been done. If it comes your way then it's good enough to while away a few hours happily.

Barbara Hambly - - DRAGONSBANE (Unicorn, 1986, 292pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Apart from the joy of subcreation, fantasy seems to me to be mainly 'about' moral values; both because the Conflict Between Good and Evil provides the raison d'etre for most fantasies, but also because most fantasies advocate, either explicitly or implicitly, a particular ethical system for dealing with moral conflict. In DRAGONSBANE, all the vital energy and tension of the book is summed up in the paradox of the dragon, who is very beautiful, very powerful, very wise, magical and amoral (by human standards). Jenny Waynest, self-taught mage only too conscious of her own limitations, loves the dragon, who embodies everything she has ever wanted. Well, almost everything. Jenny's lover and

the father of her children is famed in song and story as a Dragonsbane, the only living Dragonsbane. With Jenny's help, he once killed a dragon, because there seemed to be no other way to stop it from killing him and the people he is pledged to protect. DRAGONSBANE is about what happens when he is asked to kill another dragon. It's a novel about innocence and its loss, power and its corruption, love and choice and pain.

It's also a cracking good story. Barbara Hambly has a great gift. She can take an ordinary, standard fantasy - plot, background, characters - and fill in all the little details that lazy authors leave out. She takes pains with her world, not liberties. Consequently her work is always satisfying to read, and her stories always hold the attention. DRAGONSBANE is more of the same, and a good thing too.

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