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## Paperback Purgatory

Recently I attended a symposium organised by Books For Students and the Book Marketing Council to mark the BMC's Teen Read promotion, the centre of which was a 'Top 21' list of books chosen by teenagers.

SF/Fantasy titles made up the second largest group (second only to romances, in fact) chosen by the 'jury', although what I'm including in that group is a catholic selection which, I hope, shows the richness of the SF/Fantasy field rather than my desire to 'claim' for it books which aren't really of it. Certainly, there are some surprises. Douglas Adams of course is present with *THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY* and perhaps one would still expect J.R.R. Tolkien's *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* to be perennially popular. But would you have expected any of the following to be included? Raymond Briggs' *WHEN THE WIND BLOWS* (in its comic-strip format this only makes for a more brilliantly chilling story which must be reaching many who'd turn down a CND tract). Susan Cooper's *THE DARE IS RISING* (one of the best fantasy series although not actually the best volume of it: though is it not slightly odd that Cooper appears to the exclusion of, say, Alan Garner?) Louise Lawrence's *CHILDREN OF THE DUST* (I've yet to read this, although it looked good). Margaret Mahy's *THE CHANGEOVER* (a kind of 'supernatural romance' from this justly celebrated New Zealand writer). Seth McEvoy's *BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED* (see my comments in the last PI: I suspect this was treated as a science-fictional version of a 'Sweet Dreams' romance).

Why these title rather than others? Well, for a start, the jury was given a pre-selected list of 100 to choose from, consisting of a strange mixture of good 'SF for young readers' and a few totally duff books which seemed to me to be chosen by pundits who didn't know much about SF. In a sense, the actual titles don't matter, though. What the exercise does show is, I think, that SF remains something more than a minority cult interest among young readers (discussion at the symposium also threw up many suggestions that what such readers actually read is often different from what is carefully marketed and packaged as books for them) and that there is a defined desire for imaginative, thought-provoking literature at various levels.

If you've come across the promotion I'd be interested in hearing what you think of the SF titles involved...



APOLOGIES to Mike and Debby Moir, Margaret Hall and Chris Ogden for not printing their reviews of books by Keith Roberts, Jack Vance, Nigel Frith, Bernard King, J.P. Miller, Nancy Springer and Kevin O'Donnell jr. which should have been in this issue but which have fallen victim to hi-tech gremlins. Microchips willing, these will appear next issue. Meanwhile the *Closer Encounter* column this time round waxes enthusiastic about a couple of books which already have been praised to the furthest corners... the only excuse is that they really are that good.



MANY THANKS to those of you who sent artwork, especially those named on the cover. I hope to continue featuring more art in PI, so despite a healthy file, there's still the opportunity if you want to contribute. I may not have space to say this elsewhere, so can I also record how pleased I am with the response to the revamped PI. What a nice lot you are!

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

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER 1986

and ANALOG, OCTOBER and NOVEMBER 1986

Reviewed by Edward James

Perhaps this is a sign of senility or incipient gaffiation, but when one of these magazines comes, I invariably turn first to the non-fiction - the sf reviews and the science (not the gaming pages that both magazines carry). This time the highlight was possibly the review article by Norman Spinrad - in the September *Asimov's*. It was on "Critical Standards": starting with a review of Carol Hill's *Eleven Million Mile High Dancer*, which Spinrad flays, and proceeding to a discussion of the "serious" literary world, which likes Hill because it has no standards by which "good" sf can be judged. Spinrad then moves to someone the literary world can accept, Ursula Le Guin and her *Always Coming Home*, which fails (for Spinrad) because it has been tailored to meet with general literary approval, and purged of all genuine sf content. The fault, for Spinrad, lies in part with the sf community, which itself has failed to establish critical standards. And I can't (as the new editor of *Foundation*) refrain from quoting one passage: "The critical academic journals? There are a handful, but most of the criticism within them, with some notable exceptions, is publish-or-perish stuff, narrowly-focussed, repetitive, and more concerned with scholarly minutiae than any comprehensive evolutionary overview. Only *Foundation* really consistently strives to maintain such an overview, and that overview, although the best available, is somewhat idiosyncratically British." What better recommendation do you need? Subscribe now, and see how our many transatlantic contributors become idiosyncratically British as soon as they enter our pages...

Spinrad's always interesting critical articles are not frequent enough. The usual book-reviews are by Baird Searles for *Asimov's* and Tom Easton for *Analog*: competent reviewers, but not serious critics. *Asimov's* rarely carries other non-fiction (apart from the Good Doctor's usually quite missable editorial), but *Analog*, of course, has the science, provided alternately by the opinionated G. Harry Stine and the more scholarly John G. Cramer. Like Stanley Schmidt's editorials, they are usually entertaining, because deliberately provocative. These two issues have even more provocative - if not positively cranky - additional science articles: George Harper (October) on how air pollution is saving us from a new ice age, and Richard Hoagland on what may be (?!?) an alien artifact discovered by NASA on the Moon. The non-fiction in these magazines is sometimes very interesting; it is rarely as dull as the fiction can be (at least in *Analog*: I still maintain that *Asimov's* is now the best sf magazine we have).

The fiction in October's *Analog* includes "Windrider" by Eric Vinicoff, in which, somewhat implausibly, a complex civilisation survives in dirigibles above Earth's irradiated surface; P.M. Fergusson's addition to that sub-sub-mini-genre about murder on the Moon, "Murder to Go"; Gregory Kusnick's "Deadline", an addition to the sub-sub-mini-genre dealing with a gadget which foretells the moment of one's death (starting with Heinlein's "Lifeline", I suppose). In November there was a typically *Analog* engineering tale by John Berryman about building "The Big Dish" in space. Marc Schulzinger's "Sight" was a variation on the old idea that the blind might be able to see in hyperspace: but what they see may depend on their own particular talents. The most effective story in either issue was probably Michael F. Flynn's "Eifelheim". Not many stories deal with the effects of technological advance on historical research: this one extrapolates, not very far, on the use of computer techniques to investigate medieval settlement patterns. An anomaly is discovered in South-West Germany, and more conventional historical and archaeological research

reveals the science-fictional answer - I am spoiling little or nothing, since the illustrations give it away - the arrival of aliens in the fourteenth-century village, which strains the theological and humanitarian responses of the villagers. A neat story, opening up all kinds of speculation, as the best sf stories should.

The September issue of *Asimov's* had three excellent longer stories, each of them possible contenders for awards. George R.R. Martin's "The Glass Flower" is a far-future tale about an alien artifact used in a game in which the wealthy players try to win control of a new body: full of sensawonda, and some marvellous visual images. Kim Stanley Robinson's "Escape from Kathmandu" is superbly readable as usual, and bang up-to-date: it takes place as Jimmy Carter visits the Himalayas. I saw the pictures of Carter in this week's newspaper - funny - no mention of Robinson's Yeti. Very well written, but without much originality. More intriguing - and chilling - than either of these is Andrew Weiner's "The News from D Street". To say that it is a computer-age up-date of Pohl's "The Tunnel under the World" is, sadly, giving away the plot to those with long memories, but Weiner does the up-date (whether consciously or not) with fine suspense. The issue also contains above average short stories by Avram Davidson, Nancy Kress and others. A good issue, and, for once, almost entirely sf.

The October issue had Connie Willis's "Spice Pogrom" as cover story: a novella in which she explores her fascination with the ambiguities of language and communication, as she did in "Blued Moon". This time the problem is communication with alien traders, who are offering a space program. Or is it a space pogrom? Or spice pogrom? Frivolous but fun. Much more serious, and beautifully written, is the fantasy by Kate Wilhelm, "The Girl who Fell into the Sky" - as atmospheric and disturbing as her Nebula finalist of last year, "The Gorgon Field". Kate Wilhelm, whose novels *Welcome Chaos* and *Huysman's Pets* are both out in Gollancz this year, is re-emerging as a major sf writer, and this novelette certainly enhances her reputation. In addition, a more-than-competent tale of aliens on post-holocaust Earth from Neal Barrett Jr, "Trading Post", and what the contents page describes as a short story by Lucius Shepard called "Challenger as Viewed from the Westerbrook Bar" - in fact a moving poem in which a group of Ordinary Americans react to seeing the Challenger disaster on television. The sf poetry is, I confess, an element of *Asimov's* that I tend to skip over; wrongly, I am sure. I shall try to Do Better in future: watch this space.

INTERZONE 17 (Autumn 1986)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

The highlight of this issue is Ian Watson's 'Jingling Geordie's Hole'. It is the longest story in the magazine yet Watson is economical as he effects the transition from a tale of burgeoning sexuality in a boy growing up in a small northern town in the fifties to a full-blown horror story. The nostalgic, period-piece material is handled beautifully. 'Hard Work' by Thomas M. Disch is of similar length and starts off promisingly enough, using as its base the total control over its workers' lives the big corporation of the future will have (a peculiarly American obsession) and - Rambo. Yes, it's humour; however, while Disch begins brightly his story is overlong and is wearing well before the end.

The other big name present is Gregory Benford. 'Freeze-frame' is about yuppie childrearing in years to come. The premise of this 'traditional' SF piece failed to convince me. The remaining three short stories are likewise short indeed but are more effective. Barbara Hills' 'Future Fish' just avoids being a sermon rather than a story. In 'Soundspinner' D.C. Haynes adopts an academic style to tell us about the life and times of a peasant miracle worker. 'Adam Found' by Simon Ounsley poses one solution to the problem of being a square peg in a round hole. Whilst I enjoyed the aforementioned stories I cannot help but feel that, rather than having one long story, they were all included to meet an editorial desire to have six short stories in each issue of INTERZONE. Personally, I believe this to be an irrelevant requirement - what is important is the quality of the fiction. I'm not saying that the latter three stories weren't good, merely that few short stories can develop into anything memorable unless they are very good.

On the non-fiction side there are two author interviews (with John Shirley and Gene Wolfe) which are enjoyable and interesting - certainly worth checking out if you are fans of theirs. There are also the usual review columns but the letters column has disappeared. I hope this is only temporary as I do believe that such a forum for readers is essential in a magazine.

To sum up, IZ 17 in total is rather disappointing but on the plus side it does contain an excellent fantasy from Ian Watson and a couple of informative interviews.

## Closer Encounters

Brian Aldiss - - *HELLICONIA WINTER* (Grafton, 1986, 393pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Tony Attwood)

The thesis is simple - climate and geography affect human behaviour. Where climatic extremes are held within certain limits, or exist only tens of thousands of years apart, mankind develops technologies, skills, mastery over aspects of the environment. But where the extremes are too great and come too quickly, then the gains of spring and summer are lost in autumn and winter.

And yet there is more, for mastery of the environment (in Earthly terms) implies control, manipulation... As *HELLICONIA* slips into winter so Earth falls into a nuclear disaster and its exploratory space ship circling *HELLICONIA* goes into a terminal decline. The Earth Mother has been harmed but She recovers and a truer link is forged between human and planet.

Of course *HELLICONIA* is brilliant, equalling the very best of SF. When *SPRING* was published I was working on a commission to write a novel in conjunction with Terry Nation. It was a breakthrough as an unknown in SF terms to link with one so well known, and I was putting everything I had into it. And yet on reading *SPRING* I nearly abandoned the novel, for no reason other than that I could never write a tenth as well as Mr. Aldiss.

Do I then dare to criticise such a work? Only because I'm genuinely puzzled. Observation Station *Avernus* corrupts, initially not through the technology breaking down but through the society going wrong. The station becomes a variant on *NON-STOP*, but there (from memory) I think there was a biological reason for the loss of awareness of purpose. Why was the sociological planning on the station so weak? (This is a constant theme in SF - technological triumph becomes undone because society gets screwed up. Do we really all believe in the Doctor Who version of human emotionalism?)

So I wonder, in *HELLICONIA* did we need pictures of Earth-future? Certainly not from the point of view of beautifully entertaining gripping tale. It must be there to teach a

deeper lesson - that the Earth Mother is less than perfect maybe? OK - so should we parallel Hellenic problems with our own? But no, surely the Fat Death which culls half the population prior to the Great Winter cannot really be related to AIDS. Hellenic tries to prevent it but the advance is necessary for the survival of the planet. But if there is an Earth Mother maybe She is working in mysterious ways prior to our own nuclear winter? Or maybe all technology corrupts? Is Hellenic corrupted each Summer and purged each Winter?

A little note from the publishers told me that Mr Aldiss lives not far from me and is available for interview. I was tempted to approach. But what could I say? 'Excuse me, but your masterpiece is flawed?' Somehow I think not, and yet Mr Aldiss, may I say to you as a fellow member of the Association, HELLENIC - and especially SPRING - is a masterpiece. I approached WINTER with some dread, expecting only decay as the hopes of SPRING were lost. And yet there is life - no, more, there is Life. The characters are alive whereas so often in SF they die. Creations such as the Great Wheel are magnificent both in conception and execution on the printed page. In my personal world HELLENIC will not replace THE 80-MINUTE HOUR as my favourite novel, but it is your greatest literary achievement. Excuse my criticisms, perhaps I didn't fully understand those parallels.

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Gene Wolfe - - FREE LIVE FREE (Arrow, 1986, 399pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

We can trace a circular, or rather a spiralling movement. The first punning chapter heading is 'Four Roomers of War'. The book's last sentence is 'The quadrumvirate is complete.' A rumour is insubstantial, lacking foundation; a roomer is a casual lodger or stablemate. But a quadrumvirate extends the triumvirate, defined in the OED as an association of persons of authority or distinction. The 'war' involving the roomers culminates in a transformation. While indicating the process, I shall not expose in detail the machinery or occasion of transformation - just as reviewers of detective stories do not reveal what the author has kept hidden.

The analogy of a detective novel is apposite, because in a minor aspect FREE LIVE FREE is just that. The one of its four chief protagonists who is used as the author's prime agent in unravelling and moving on the plot is the dwarfish but astute private eye, Stubb, a creation pitched somewhere between Marlowe and Columbo. He and the others of the quartet, the eventual 'quadrumvirate', are first discovered as transient lodgers in Mr Free's about-to-be-demolished house. They are prototypes of the American urban rootless, but are all destined eventually to assume archetypal roles: Candy Garth, the fat, blonde, gluttonous, thieving though generous hooker; and Ozzy Barness, with Clark Gable moustache and glass eye, a slick, randy, unsuccessful novelty salesman. The fourth member is the gypsy 'witch', lovely and sophisticated Madame Serpentina, whose devious ways and snake-like transmuting energy are linked not only to trickery, but to a more genuinely numinous source.

These four, ejected from the threatened house, go questing, ignorant of what they seek, but knowing it to be connected with the vanished Mr Free. They are none of them free, dominated by their respective compulsions - mental, visceral, sexual, spiritual. Each is brought to an appropriate ordeal, and taken (save for our mandating Candy, Gargantuanly physical) beyond breaking point. Their quest is progressed through stations of the urban wasteland:

sandwich bar, convention hotel, mental hospital, night club, airport. Secondary characters weave in and out - Sergeant Proudly, Dr. Bob, old Mrs. Baker with her splendid stream of Joycean puns and skewed quotations. They advance or counterpoint the action and entertain in doing so, but the core of the action never ceases to concern a search for whatever treasure or miracle came with Mr. Free from the mysterious 'High Country'. There are riotous sequences which move into the key of Popeye or the Marx Brothers (allusion to 'being in the wrong film' is a frequent perspective-shifting device); there are passages which read like Charles Williams written by James Thurber; but through all the farce and comedy the essentially serious theme of the quest is pursued.

Chapter titles, allusive, punning and descriptive, signpost the story. That of Chapter 56, which starts the final 'High Country' sequence, is (with only seeming irrelevance): 'April is the Cruellest Month'. Complete the Eliot lines and you have a clue. They open THE WASTE LAND, a poem whose symbols are those of the Grail Quest, of the decay of life, the land, the spirit, and of their renewal. The pseudo scientific trans-dimensional gizmo and hardware of Wolfe's denouement, though ingenious, are minimally important. More significant are the mandala circle traced on the clouds, the symbolism encoded in the name of the slain but living General Buck Whiten, and explicit in the attained unifying/individuating 'quaternary' (completing the mandala) of the four chosen ones. In their freer, renewed state of existence in the Epilogue they are the 'quadrumvirate', linked esoterically with the witch's earlier prophecy by 'catopromancy' (mirror divination). FREE LIVE FREE is a marvellous book to be laughed over, enjoyed, but also certainly to be taken on board for its psychological, ecological and philosophic intimations and insights.

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Jules Verne - - JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH (Puffin, 1986, 254pp, £1.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

'This classic story,' according to the cover blurb, 'written over a hundred years ago by the "Father of Science Fiction", is considered one of the finest of its genre.' *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* was one of Verne's earliest novels, and the second title accepted by Hetzel, his regular publisher. It seems to have been well-received upon its first publication in 1864, and it was translated into English in 1872. This new Puffin Classic edition is a repackaged reprint of the 1965 Penguin translation by Robert Baldick, which preserves the flavour of Verne's style without becoming too heavy or stilted. As the story is probably familiar to most BSFA members through the Walt Disney film of 1959 (which bears some resemblance to the book, this review doesn't restate it).

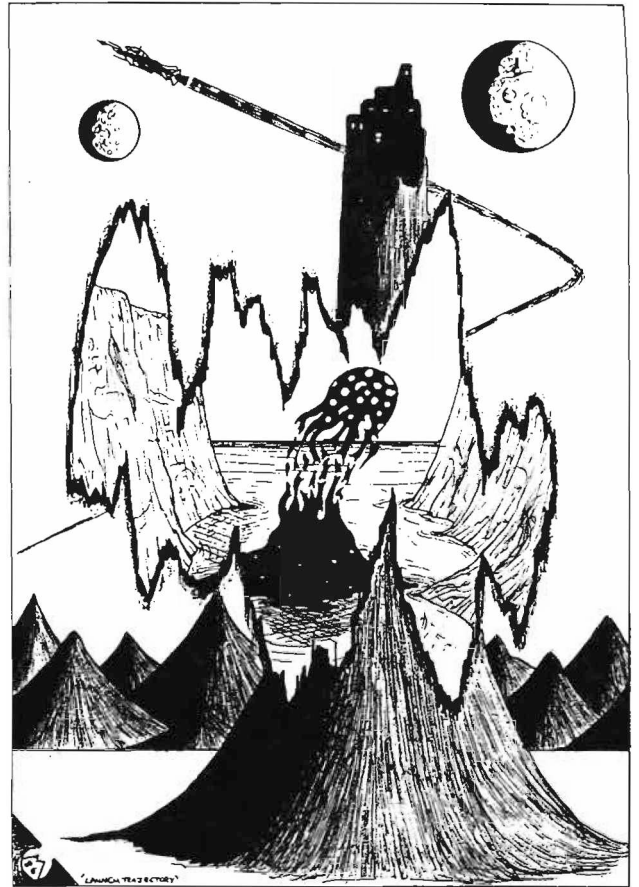
Although these days JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH is regarded as straight SF (see any public library's fiction shelves for confirmation), to me it seems more like the boys' travel-adventure stories of Rider Haggard (KING SOLOMON'S MINES) and Conan Doyle (THE LOST WORLD). Verne regards Iceland almost as Haggard regards Africa. It is a terra incognita populated (sparsely) by barbarian savages, and necessitating the use of a native guide, a landscape scarcely less strange and amazing than the interior of the earth itself. Professor Lindenbrock and his nephew Axel, the protagonists of the story, are gentlemen-adventurers in the inimitable tradition of the Victorian Alpinists, even to their passion for reading the barometer. Science (or rather,

Natural History) is presented as an even better excuse for tourism than a love of the classics, and the story is really a kind of adventure-holiday with a gloss of learning.

The plot doesn't stand up well to examination, being simply a hook on which to hang a fantastic travelogue. This emphasis on scenery and the wonders of nature is increased by the stilted interaction between the three protagonists, and the absence of life to interact with in the earth's hollow interior. The science used to underpin the scenery is oddly disjointed, almost perfunctory, as though Verne was chiefly interested in conveying an atmosphere of science to somehow validate his exuberant cataloguing of wonders. He uses the technical jargon to particularise the book's landscape, giving the impression of vast learning and close attention to detail without having to actually DESCRIBE anything. The 'hollow earth' theory was not a reputable geological speculation in Verne's day, and despite much pontificating, his characters don't actually reach the centre of the earth.

The tone of the narrative fluctuates wildly. There's a discourse on the origin of Iceland which could have been lifted straight from a textbook, or better yet, an improving lecture. But the expulsion of the protagonists from an active volcano is milked for all the sensationalism Verne could wring from it, even to 'brain fever'. Although such extremes of emotion are characteristic of much 19th century literature (and much appreciated by contemporary audiences), the naive energy of the book is probably more typical of writing for the 'juvenile' market.

It's interesting that neither of the two 'heroes' is very very likeable by contemporary standards. Professor Lindenbrock is a prototype 'mad scientist' who appears as paternalistic autocrat and a dangerous lunatic by turns. His nephew Axel is a coward, a fool and a snob. Hans the native guide, probably intended as an uneducated peasant comic-relief, is by far the most sympathetic character. There are no women in the book, except for Axel's offstage beloved, a cipher to be pined for.



In conclusion, I couldn't honestly commend this book to contemporary children (I was bored stiff by Verne as a child, at an age when I'd eagerly read anything from the local library with a yellow cover). It was much more interesting to re-read the book as a kind of academic exercise, and ponder where we've come from, and how far we've come.

## REVIEWS

Philip K. Dick - - THE MAN WHOSE TEETH WERE ALL EXACTLY ALIKE (Paladin, 1986, 256pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

Leo & Janet Runcible and Walter & Sherry Domrosio are neighbours in a small Californian town. They get off on the wrong foot with each other, and there follows a series of misunderstandings and misinterpretations which culminates in Walt fabricating a Neanderthal skeleton - the 'man' of the title - which he buries in Leo's land.

Leo and the other three characters are struck down by the familiar Dickian anxieties - Leo longs for respect and recognition within the community, Walt is paralysed by the fear that his wife's independence threatens his masculinity - but the anxieties are never fully communicated: each character is fixed to his own viewpoint, constantly speculating, always destroying himself by projecting non-existent motives onto the behaviour of others.

This story does have elements of science in it, but typically scientific knowledge is of little use to Dick's characters. Leo is not happy to have his Neanderthal find dismissed as a hoax, and proceeds to write to every authority in the country in the hope of finding someone who will validate his beliefs. Ultimately, the fake remains take on a meaning, since in Dick's worlds the only meaning

is that which his characters project.

At times, the book is excessively historic: there is much throwing of things to the ground, hurling of furniture. It is as if the author himself is frustrated at having to confine his tale to such a small town. But there are compensations. As so often, Dick tells the story from many viewpoints, and at all times is sympathetic to his viewpoint character. They never fully understand each other, but we get the fuller picture and can see the grander tragedy that their lives represent. An immensely enjoyable book.

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - SHINING STEEL (Avon, 1986, 216pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

Lawrence Watt-Evans is a good writer (grammatically) who has yet to write a good novel (thematically). SHINING STEEL does not offer an exception to this general 'rule'.

The following paragraph neatly sums up the 'philosophy' of this Immorality Tale:

He cared more for (the machine gun's) value as an artifact than a weapon: this gun was a piece of Godsworld's history... it was not to his liking, killing indiscriminately at a distance. He preferred more personal weapons. He wiped the blood from his sword, holding it up so that the blade gleamed bright in the sun. (p. 13)

An interesting novel could have been written around such moral ambiguities (butcher someone with a claymore at close quarters is 'preferable' to machine-gunning people x number of yards away!) but SHINING STEEL is - alas - no more profound than its catchpenny title. Each chapter is headed by extracts from the Old and New Testaments (mostly the former), to little or no effect.

The wraparound cover (by Carl Lundgren) shows a demented warrior-priest/soldier-hero hefting a suitably 'shining' sword with a carbine leaning against the ammunition box (?) on which he is sitting. Behind him - in the distance - is a towering spaceship, while all around him are scenes of pastoral life. A picture is, as they say, worth a thousand words.

But if it's action you're after -

Captain John Mercy-of-Christ (no kidding!) is happily hacking the sacre merde out of his sworn enemies, the 'Chosen of the Holy Ghost' when he learns of a new and greater enemy; the 'People of Heaven', off-worlders from you'll-never-guess-where. These 'Heaveners' bring 'ancient, banished sins' to Godsworld: improved machine guns, airships, plastics, etc. 'Give 'em Hell, John!'

However, not-so-Dear John finally escapes from the situation rather than resolving it. He is not so much The Man Who Learns Better as The Man Who Stays The Same: 'The fun, the excitement, lay in the taking, not the having! ...Whether by sword or starship, he was a conqueror, and the entire galaxy awaited his steel' (p. 216).

John Mercy-of-Christ never becomes anything more than a 'muscular Christian': Ian Paisley turned into Rambo (or is it the other way round?) The novel itself... just... peters... out...

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Robert Clarke - LESS THAN HUMAN (Avon, 1986, 194pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

From About the Author:

'Weary and embittered, (Robert) Clarke wrote LESS THAN HUMAN in 1975, immediately before his untimely death in a choking episode at a fried chicken restaurant. Possibly manuscripts of Clarke's early works still exist somewhere. In the meantime, LESS THAN HUMAN remains his only work ever to see publication'.

The above extract may make the Gentle Reader think that the book under discussion is a Comedy (sub-type: parody) and he/she would be 100% correct. 'Comparing like with like': LESS THAN HUMAN is (much!) better than Sheckley's DRAMOCLES and not (quite) up to the high standard set by Sladek's THE STEAM-DRIVEN BOY.

The plot, which progresses through a series of hit-or-miss comic turns, centres about a 'she' robot termed B.E.R.T.H.A. ('Biosynthesis of Extraneous Radio Transmission via Holographic Accretion') who - thanks to a ten minute programming gap - becomes a 'he' robot later nicknamed 'Burt'. He/she/it explores a near-future New York City characterised by mutant 'wildlife', deviant 'mechanised' sex, homicidal cops, and bombproof luxury shelters. (So what else is new...?)

VENUS MINUS X - sorry, LESS THAN HUMAN - can hardly be described as a 'novel of character', which may help to explain its title. Nevertheless, some of the dramatis personae (mechanae?) are memorably offline, for example (from the cast of characters): 'Crosby Surfer (retired) and flowerperson, relocated in Chrysler Building Commune, waging a lonely battle against sexual deprivation and senility'.

Apart from the 'Cast of Characters', the author has seen fit to include three other 'frontpapers': (a) SPACETIME FLOWCHART, which 'may be used as an aid to disassembling the plot'(!); (b) NEW YORK CITY IN THE YEAR 2010, 'not drawn to scale' (obviously!), and (c) THE CHRYSLER BUILDING 'viewed from Lexington Avenue' (well, why not?). Eat your heart out L---y N---n!

There is, to me, a late sixties and/or early seventies feel about this novel, which makes it seem like a real 'blast from the past'. 'Robert Clarke' has picked just the right style and adopted an appropriately 'spaced-out' attitude. The character Crosby could just as easily have been called Stills, Nash, or Young. If you can imagine a joky version of THE ARMAGEDDON RAG...

('Robert Clarke', under his real name, is perhaps best known for his 1972 novel, PLANET OF THE VOLES).

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Barry Hughart - - BRIDGE OF BIRDS (Corgi, 1986, 271pp, £2.50)  
 Michael Shea - - THE COLOUR OUT OF TIME (Grafton, 1986, 160pp, £1.95)  
 Robert Sheckley - MINDSWAP (Grafton, 1986, 191pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

In Sheckley's MINDSWAP (first published in 1966), Marvin Flynn, enticed by visions of Mars, mindswaps with a Martian, only to find someone else has a prior claim to the Martian's body and that he faces imminent eviction. To survive, he must mindswap on the open market, taking certain-death occupations whilst the detective he has hired recovers his original body. From this point on, things can only get worse. Unfortunately, Sheckley loses interest in the book after page ninety and only regains it in the final three pages.

When MINDSWAP is at its best, its ribs at politics, stereotypes, law and psychology (to name the more obvious) are extremely witty. Pity the author seemed to lose interest halfway through though.

By comparison, THE COLOUR OUT OF TIME does not have ANY saving grace, bar the almost tongue-in-cheek quaintness of its Victorian pulp style, which is a poor imitation of Lovecraft's (if it is at all and I doubt that having read the original story on which it is based). Two visitors to a New England valley, Sternbruck and Carlsberg, discover an evil COLOUR, which they later learn came from a meteor, and meet a sixty-four year old woman who has been waiting for fifty years to exact vengeance on it for killing her friends (which, she says, Lovecraft fictionalised in his short story 'The Colour Out Of Space'). The plot, characterisation and dialogue are typical of many horror stories and towards the end I got the feeling I was reading the novelisation of JAWS. The book is also full of purple prose, stock situations, and italics, but ONLY WHEN SOMETHING NASTY IS BEING DESCRIBED.

Lovecraft encouraged many well-known writers to contribute towards what was to become the Cthulhu Mythos, and even though Shea's self-conscious addiction does not add anything of significance to it, Cthulhu completists may find something in this. If you like your fiction a little more sophisticated you could do better reading E.C. Tubb's Dumarest saga.

From SF and horror to fantasy, and Hughart's first novel, BRIDGE OF BIRDS, which is a curious blend of cliché and originality, relying overly on coincidence, childish cheap titillation and some of the worst poetry I've ever come across. It is not a haunting Tale (as the blurb says) but a gimmicky romp through a mythical and greatly westernised

ancient China. The only difference between this book and so many other fantasies is that this is given an unusual setting.

The children of Number 10 Ox's village are stricken by a poison only the Great Root of Power will cure, so off goes Ox, accompanied by a detective-adventurer, Master Li Kao, in search of it. Their quest happens to coincide with another and the two, in the manner of too many fantasies, require various items which are picked up on the way in order to prolong the agony, er...I mean the story.

The magical elements are restrained until the last twenty pages (again, ignore the erroneous blurb) the main interest coming from Li's trickery and the many fairy-tales recounted. Hughart shows a lot of promise - more than the usual minimum research has gone into this - but instead of writing his best (as this evidently is not) he resorts to ham characters, old and bad jokes and crude titillation so that I could never forget this was just a story. Okay if you like your fiction ultra-light, but how this won the World Fantasy award is anybody's guess! Oh, and there's a hint of a sequel.

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Isaac Asimov - - BANQUETS OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS (Grafton, 1986, 250pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

'Can you imagine how miserable my life would be if I disliked my books, considering how many of them I write?' - Isaac Asimov.

Spare a thought for your readers, Isaac!

A collection of twelve mysteries, each following a rigid formula: guest arrives at Black Widowers' meeting with seemingly insoluble problem; Black Widowers interrogate guest; Henry the waiter comes up with the solution.

It's difficult to know what to say about this book, for while the stories are formulaic, old-fashioned, and devoid of all but the most cardboard of characters, they exactly fulfil their intended purpose of being brain-taxing puzzles. As always Asimov is eager to show off his immense store of trivia (to solve the puzzles one must know Milton, Frederick the Great, a little ancient Greek, and the rules of baseball), for which one either admires or abhors him. This would appear to be Asimov reduced to his essence: the involution of unlikely threads of plot into an intellectual mystery, followed by an equally unlikely resolution of that mystery. If these stories lack the sparkle of the robot stories or the scope of the FOUNDATION series, they also lack the pretensions of those works.

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Roger Zelazny - - ISLE OF THE DEAD (Methuen, 1986, 189pp, £2.50)

TO DIE IN ITALBAR (Methuen, 1986, 183pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Tony Attwood)

The problem with so many Sherlock Holmes stories is that the solutions are arrived at, not by clever logical deduction alone, but by the late introduction of a fact known to Holmes but kept secret from the reader.

To overcome this the good author, by my reckoning, ought to give us all the info from the start and then let the plot unfold. And that applies to SF just as much as any other type of fiction.

ISLE OF THE DEAD is a typical refusal to deal in this way. Someone wants to get hold of and possibly kill the mega-rich hero. First there is a man, later a motive, later a religious overtone, later a slighted alien, later a fight between two god-figures... It's like a train journey where the end is so totally different

from the start you forget where you came from.

But still, I finished it and had a bash at TO DIE, only to find every fact and every person piling so high on top of each other in the opening pages that no solution could be found because the cast list gets in the way of the problem. My objections to ISLE are all overcome, but the result is a mess.

Until the end of chapter 3 (which happens on p. 94). The out of the blue, in walks the hero from ISLE OF THE DEAD and all makes sense, and I desperately want to know if he really is killed, and I think I can work out what is going on, and my wife is complaining 'cos its gone midnight and I've still got the light on, and I tell her there is only another 20 pages...

My book that knows about these things says that Zelazny is hyper talented but appears to dash off everything too fast thus never delivering all that he promises. Certainly the first 20 pages of ISLE are almost poetic, but after that it fades. The books are short - only about two-thirds of normal paperback length, but the subject matter is epic. I really feel that the writer got bored with it all and rather fancied a pint down the road. How else do you explain the fact that the final chapter of TO DIE is only 130 words long and appears to mean precious little on its own (although it was one in the morning when I read it)?

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Michael Moorcock - - THE CHRONICLES OF CASTLE BRASS (Grafton, 1986, 432pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

A paradigm of contemporary fantasy is fairly easy to construct. Typically the modern fantasy novel is poorly written, episodic and riddled with deus ex machina. Fantasy's right wing politics are reflected in the sado-masochistic, homo-erotic and miscengenetic undertones. These undertones are reinforced by the inherent sexist attitudes of fantasy. Women rarely occupy roles other than attractive 'window dressing' and neo-Circeian temptresses. The prose rarely attains even an off-shade of lilac and God forbid it ever wax lyrical. All those polysyllabic words might interfere with the ultra-violence. I am sure you can all supply your own example.

However Moorcock's work lies far removed from this paradigm. Moorcock's intellect, literacy and education (in the widest sense of the word) shine through every sentence. Moorcock might well have churned out the Eternal Champion stories in a weekend: however the result is one, notwithstanding the occasional stylistic crudities, that many fantasy writers would do well to emulate.

Five years have passed since the events chronicled in THE HISTORY OF THE RUNESTAFF befell Dorian Hawkmoon. Although he is content in his idyllic life with his wife Yisselda, he still laments the death of his companions at the battle of Londra. However, contrary to Hawkmoon's belief the last vestiges of the Dark Empire have yet to be destroyed. Hawkmoon's destiny and that of all mankind has yet to be sealed. When Hawkmoon confronts the spectre of Count Brass he is once again called upon to fight on behalf of the legendary and enigmatic Runestaff.

THE CHRONICLES OF CASTLE BRASS is typical Moorcock. The linear narrative is stripped of any superfluous event and the reader is swept away in a tidal wave of incident. Moorcock's easy style compliments the pace of the narrative by being unobtrusive yet intelligent. The book may not be cerebral yet in no way does it appeal only to the base instincts.

Perhaps surprisingly in view of the brevity of the characterisation the book packs quite a powerful emotional punch. This is probably a

result of the vast swings in Hawkmoon's mental state during the course of the novel.

THE CHRONICLES OF CASTLE BRASS is well worth reading. Moorcock's consummate literary virtuosity which lead to the creation of THE LAUGHTER OF CARTHAGE is evident here albeit in an unrefined form. I cannot recommend THE CHRONICLES OF CASTLE BRASS too highly.

Robin McKinley - - THE DOOR IN THE HEDGE  
(Orbit, 1986, 216pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

To say that this book is surprisingly good is to run the risk of being offensively patronising to Ms McKinley, but reviewing is an odd business: after a while you do have books you think you'll like and books you think you won't, but the joy of it all is to discover a book you'd put in the latter category which in fact you like very much. Although I quite enjoyed THE BLUE SWORD, its North-West-Frontier dashing heroics seemed to fit uneasily with its genre-fantasy plot, and I was uneasy about how much I would appreciate this retelling of four traditional fairy tales.

However, these versions - of 'The Stolen Princess', 'The Princess and the Frog', 'The Hunting of the Hind' and 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses' - have a genuine magic about them, keeping closely to the originals yet being allowed enough expansion in description, characterisation and motive to create a well-realised touch of Faery background reminiscent of Dunsany's THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER or Hope Mirreles' LUD-IN-THE-MIST. The longest story, 'The Stolen Princess', in particular is a delight, a rich and faintly ironic narrative of the theft of children from 'the last mortal kingdom before the unmeasured sweep of Faerieland begins' which manipulates the reader into thinking more about the nature of the borders of 'Faerieland' and the Fields We Know than at first appears to be the case. Unintimidated by the 'classic' status of her sources, Robin McKinley avoids the twin traps of making her retellings pretty kidlit of pseudo-witty updatings and remains in control of her tone throughout. I do hope she will write more in this vein.

Ramsey Campbell - - OBSESSION (Grafton, 1986,  
280pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

It is 1958 in a small East Anglian town. Four bored teenagers meet on the common one evening and one of them hands the other three a sheet of paper. On the top of the paper it says 'Whatever you most need I do.' At the bottom it says something about a price to be paid. They all fill in their private wishes and a gust of wind sends the sheets into the sea below the common. Soon after this the four participants are faced with their wishes becoming reality and for a time they are disturbed by the coincidences.

Twenty-five years later the four participants of this bizarre ceremony have long forgotten about their wishes. Until things start going wrong. They all begin to lose touch with reality with terrible consequences. Is it some strange supernatural power collecting its due for the twenty-five year old bargain? Did they sign a pact with the devil?

Campbell has written a marvellously eccentric horror novel with a strong psychological strand running throughout. He makes full use of the paranoid guilt locked in the subconscious of the four main characters so that an ambiguous quality is added to the narrative. The story is told from the viewpoints of all four participants giving the book a dense feel without unnecessarily complicating the

plot. OBSESSION may not have the visceral drive to make it a truly scary read but the subtle shadings allow a thought-provoking arena in which the reader can project his own angst. And besides, this must be the only horror novel to be inspired by ROCKY III, as Campbell claims in his acknowledgements!

Ramsey Campbell is, above all else, a fine story teller and you don't have to be a horror fan to enjoy this book.

Barry B. Longyear - - ENEMY MINE (Corgi, 1986,  
& David Gerrold 192pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

This looks appalling. The plot appears to be the old Star Trek cliché of man and alien on hostile planet: do they kill each other or become friends? The alien, from Dracon, is referred to as a 'Drac' and looks like a lizard. It sounds like a recipe for pure xenophobic trash.

Don't judge a book by its cover, or the publicity blurb that comes with it. ENEMY MINE is a delight to read in these troubled times. It is very readable and extremely moving. This book is full of feeling. The only hint of xenophobia is in the first 40 pages because it is told from the Earthman's point of view, and from there on this is a story of hope and belief, honour and love. There is tension and drama, humour and sadness and a very great message in the pages here.

The character of Davidge, the human, comes across in a similar fashion to Hawkeye Pierce in M.A.S.H. - sensitive, honest (in most things) and dedicated to the things that matter, yet with a great sense of humour in adversity. The Drac has many human attributes, which serve to emphasise the message, yet is sufficiently alien to make it work.

I stopped two-thirds of the way through this when it became difficult to read. I'd like to say it was hay-fever, but at 3 a.m.? I guess I'm a romantic type but the innocence of some of this got to me. Perhaps Ian Paisley, P.W. Botha, Ronnie Reagan and the rest should read this.

Some of this marvellous book is predictable, but the way the events occur is not. As this is the book of the film I hope the film works as well as this, since it is likely that the film will reach more people than the book, and I hope they heed the repeated line of this story;

'Intelligent life takes a stand.'

Pamela Dean - - THE HIDDEN LAND (Ace, 1986,  
202pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Take five all-American kids, transport them to a fantasy land which they thought they had invented for their role-playing games and you can easily imagine the result: a never-ending series of boring little paperbacks with clichéd covers presumably aimed at the less discerning end of the adolescent market. THE HIDDEN LAND is only the second in this particular series, but it is best left there: the idea is too well-worn to be a success on this level. As a commercial product it is about as exciting as Ronald McDonald without the hamburgers. As a book, it is more on the level of Enid Blyton than J.R.R. Tolkien, with lines like 'Patrick looked at him as if he were the worst part of a horror movie; except that horror movies never bothered Patrick.'

If you get off on stories of magic swords, battles between good and evil, and mythical beasties, you might like it, but put aside any desire for inspiration or thought-provocation.



Garry Douglas - - HIGHLANDER (Grafton, 1986, 252pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

The book of the film, about a group of immortals who go around decapitating each other in order that the sole survivor may receive the mysterious 'Prize'. It is basically sword-and-sorcery with the emphasis very much on the swordplay, the final duel between the two remaining immortals atop a New York skyscraper somehow reminding me of the light-sabre duel in RETURN OF THE JEDI.

If you enjoy the film - and it looks as if it might be fun - you will probably enjoy the book. As a novel it is probably no better - or let's be fair, worse - than the film, but as a novelisation it is quite a credible attempt, taking the opportunity to develop the background and characterisation further than the film could possibly do.

As for the title: the Highlander in question is Connor McCleod, born into the clan McCleod in sixteenth-century Scotland. Does he defeat the villain, the evil Kurgan? Come now, you wouldn't want me to spoil it for you, would you?

Elizabeth H. Boyer - - THE ELVES AND THE OTT-ERSKIN (Corgi, 1986, 351pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The problem with this book is the blurb. (So what's new?) Reading it, you get the impression that what you're about to savour is a comic epic about Ivarr, the 'reluctant hero' and his companions - 'a group of outcast, incompetent elves and a wizard of doubtful qualifications' - something, in fact, like the wonderfully wacky THE LIGHT FANTASTIC by Terry Pratchett, reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Ken Lake.

Unfortunately, what humour there is, is that of the mediocre TV sitcom. If there is meant to be a parody of THE HOBBIT in the picture of a naive but redeemable hero in the company of a band of squabbling elves and a wizard (there's also a dragon with a hoard of gold), it's neither sustained nor forceful enough. If not, then we have a relentlessly ordinary fantasy novel which never settles into any kind of consistent tone. Even the villain Lorimer and his henchman (herchhead?) Grus are grotesque rather than threatening.

Stephen King - - SKELETON CREW (Futura, 1986, 612pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The archetypal Stephen King story is set in rural or suburban New England. A small boy plays an important part, either as a focus for the hero's fears and terrors or as a tragic victim: sometimes both. Rock music references are common, often offering an ironic counterpoint to the action. Finally, something extremely disturbing happens...

SKELETON CREW consists of one novella, 'The Mist', about a supermarket besieged by an extra-dimensional zoo of monsters, two poems, and 19 stories ranging from the gruesome ('Survivor Type') to the science-fictional ('The Jaunt', 'Beachworld') or the pastoral ('The Reach'). King can use a traditional Gothic theme such as a haunted object ('The Reaper's Image') or a curse ('The Man who Would Not Shake Hands') or turn to more trivial, everyday things as sources of horror ('The Monkey', 'Uncle Otto's Truck'). He can add a macabre tinge to a frivolous subject ('The Word Processor of the Gods', 'The Ballad of the Flexible Bullet') while evoking the horror of random murder ('Cain

Rose Up', 'Nona'). And as a New Englander, he can, naturally, nod homage to H.P. Lovecraft ('Gramma').

Not all of these tales are archetypal Stephen King stories in all respects. Some, such as 'Here There Be Tygers', 'Cain Rose Up' and 'The Reaper's Image', are early stories, which while readable are the work of a talented beginner who will turn to more ambitious projects to find his own voice. In one or two, the intrusion of the supernatural is even benign. But in general, the atmosphere of the book is of a guided tour through the Dark Fantastic, with that special ambience you get from books written by authors with large and enthusiastic followings: embracing, discursive, with a touch of comradely grossness.

M.K. Wren - - SHADOW OF THE SWAN (N.E.L., 1986, 338pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

SHADOW OF THE SWAN is, like its predecessor SWORD OF THE LAMB, an entertaining and well-crafted book. However I must admit to being a little disappointed by this second volume in the 'Phoenix Legacy' trilogy. The forthright and unsentimental attitude to plotting which was displayed in SWORD OF THE LAMB is no longer apparent. Wren seems instead to have fallen into the common trap of becoming too fond of her major characters; not only has her hero Alexand acquired an air of invulnerability, his friends and associates too appear to have been brought under this protective umbrella - all of which may facilitate a happy ending but does nothing to increase suspense. In addition, although the plot does not actually creak - Wren is too competent a writer for that - some of its components are decidedly rusty. There is a fine line to be drawn between drama and melodrama, heroics and superheroics, and sadly Wren has in several places crossed it. Here we find daring escapes, startling revelations, coincidence and mistaken identity, all the predictable stuff of pulp fiction. Here also though are some well-drawn characters, insightful writing and a loving and detailed piece of world-creation; it is a shame that Wren has allowed formula elements to creep in and mar what had promised to be a memorable piece of work.

Geoff Ryman - - THE UNCONQUERED COUNTRY (Unicorn, 1986, 134pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

When I first saw this book I couldn't understand how a 16-page story in INTERZONE 7 (winner of the World Fantasy Award, etc. etc.) could be made into a book of 126 pages. The answer is, in good part, large print, several totally blank pages and lots of full-page illustrations. It is a slightly enlarged text, we are told, but the differences between the two versions appeared very minor to me. (I couldn't find any.) So, those who have the magazine version of the story are basically being offered a very well produced reprint together with a number of striking illustrations in oriental style (by Sacha Ackerman) and a six-page afterword in which the author explains how the story grew out of a trip to Thailand and in reaction to the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia. Those who don't take INTERZONE (shame on you!) should certainly think about buying the book. Subtitled 'A Life History', it tells of the experiences of Third Child, a young girl caught up in invasion, revolution, marriage. Her world has some affinities with our own - American tourists, adverts for Coca-Cola - and some with SF

worlds: girls in advertising posters are programmed to come down at night and run after customers, and machinery and houses are grown rather than manufactured. But the whole is clearly a fantasy, and one of the most original and powerful in years.

Tercy Carr (ed.) - - SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME IV (Avon, 1986, 434pp, \$4.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Tercy Carr claims to present the best in written SF with this volume because the SF writers of America thought so; this needs some investigation. It is true that there is some fine writing in this book, but there is a fair sprinkling of purple prose and yawns too. Anderson's 'Goat Song' is virtually unreadable for its strained and stale imagery. In 'Queen of Air and Darkness' he fails to hold together his presentation of the Sherlock Holmes type character, Eric Sherrington. Leiber's 'Ill Met in Lankmar' (non-science fiction!) is flat and lifeless despite an adventure-strewn plot. However, there are some worthwhile efforts. Sturgeon makes valid comments on the scientific establishment in 'Slow Sculpture'. 'The Missing Man' (Katherine MacLean) is an excellent hard-SF thriller, with some good characterisation. Gene Wolfe's 'The Death of Dr. Island', set in a regulated artificial environment-cum-robotic psychiatrist, is a good man-machine study. Clarke's 'Meeting With Medusa', precursing some of the ideas in *2010*, is well worth a read. My favourite is Silverberg's 'Born With The Dead', an examination of the nature of death and the wish for immortality. Here, the imagery is communicative, commenting on the themes, rather than just sitting on the paper trying to look pretty.

There is some political comment sprinkled throughout the volume, although much of it - as in 'The Missing Man' - is unsatisfactorily dealt with, leaving the issues undeveloped. Ursula Le Guin's story of an aging revolutionary leader is an interesting study of an individual's personality distorted by historical perspective. Joanna Russ goes for the perhaps more predictable feminist comment in a well-written narrative. 'Good News From the Vatican' has a political slant if seen as a comment on the generation struggle, with the New God of technology being used to uphold conservative values, while the young prefer human-centred values.

A good read, but most of the stories are too well collected to justify the cash outlay.

Michael Moorcock - - THE CORNELIUS CHRONICLES (Avon, 1986, 341pp, \$3.50)

THE OPIUM GENERAL (Grafton, 1985, 304pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Moorcock's 'Jerry Cornelius' stories are among the few really indispensable books for anyone wanting to make sense of the last two or three decades. The Avon book is a handy way of getting THE LIVES AND TIMES OF JERRY CORNELIUS and THE ENTROPY TANGO in one volume. Seek it out at your local import specialist. THE OPIUM GENERAL is a collection of stories and essays unified by Moorcock's political concerns and feminist sympathies, and is worth the money for 'The Alchemist's Question', billed as 'the final Jerry Cornelius adventure', which reinterprets the Cornelius saga for the 1980s ending with a startling showdown at Glastonbury Tor, and for 'Starship Stormtroopers' (first published in Cienfuegos Anarchist Review) which examines the thesis that 'the

majority of the SF writers most popular with radicals are by and large crypto-facists.' Please read it.

J.R.R. Tolkien - - THE BOOK OF LOST TALES 2 (Unicorn, 1986, 385pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

As Tolkien completists know, this is a companion volume to THE SILMARILLION and is essentially a collection of variant texts showing how Tolkien developed the conception and changed his mind, rewrote passages, and sometimes had a surprisingly tin(fang warble) ear for names.

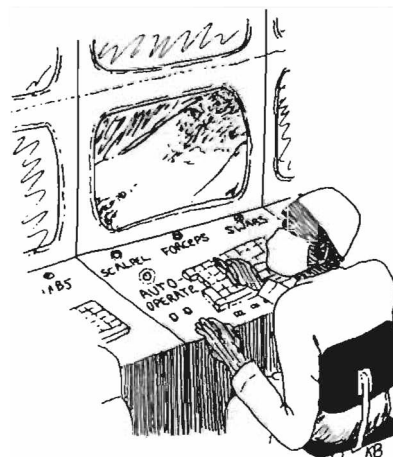
Book 2 of the LOST TALES covers the stories of Tinuviel, Turambar, the Fall of Gondolin, the Nauglafring, Earendel, and the History of Eriol, with Christopher Tolkien's weighty scholarly apparatus drawing attention to changes and obscure points. It's this which is the really interesting part - but only if you're interested in the techniques of how a writer created an oeuvre which is more of a minor classic than his more ardent admirers claim, but more of a minor classic than is admitted by his detractors. Otherwise, what is the reviewer to say? The hunt-the-text aspects are fascinating, the stories less so, partly because of Tolkien's 'High Chronicle' style, mostly because they are, after all, working drafts rather than texts revised for publication by the author. If you know what to expect, you'll probably make up your own mind. If you don't, you'll probably not be interested anyway.

G.J. Cherryh - - CHANUR'S VENTURE (Methuen, 1986, 312pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

This is the sequel to THE PRIDE OF CHANUR but it is also the first volume of a trilogy, the second of which, THE KIF STRIKE BACK, is already available in the USA. I may be at an incredible disadvantage in not having read either book (and especially so as CHANUR'S VENTURE stops dead in the middle of the story) but if any book does not make an effort to stand on its own legs I, as a reader, feel a little cheated. If I had bought CHANUR'S VENTURE I would have been extremely unhappy, especially as the cover mentions the previous volume but not the need to buy a sequel to find out what has happened in this one.

As far as I can make out very little does happen. I seem doubtful because, while Ms Cherryh has degrees in French and Latin,



she seems to have problems in English. There are three reasons for this - firstly and simply she does not write grammatically: 'The lift let them out where Tully and Hilfy

should have gotten to, in the upper security levels, where guards looked nervous at the appearance of a clutch of blood-stained hani armed with rifles, and one of them a male'. Well you know what she means.

Secondly, her style is elliptical or telegraphic, and thirdly, Cherryh's fondness for including alien languages and words means that whole paragraphs allegedly translated into English still need translating. In this book as her earlier ones her taste is for a lexicon in which every word starts with five consonants and includes two consecutive apostrophes.

Anyway, the whole story is about an intergalactic merchants' war in which this solar system is peripheral. The interesting thing about the book is the creation of the hani - a feline-like race, matriarchal, with almost complete gender reversal to Earth humans today. The Appendix in which the different species mentioned in the book are described in more detail reads much better than the para-novel to which the Appendix is attached. It shows that Ms Cherryh can write clearly and imaginatively when she tries. It's only a pity that she did not bother with the book.

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Alan Ryan - - CAST A COLD EYE (Sphere, 1986, 248pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

Jack Quinlan, an American suspense writer, has come over to Eire, the land of his forebears, to research the Famine of the 1840s. And he has taken a west coast hill cottage the better to mingle with the people and soak up the spirit of the place (I don't just mean the poteen). On the way he befriends a college girl in a Dublin bookshop; once there he strikes up an accord with the priest. There is much lyrical evocation of the wild, primeval landscape; plentiful unforced celebration of Irishness: the music, the mists, the melancholy. Jack doesn't have to look far to find out about the Famine; in fact, in a hideous way, the Famine finds him...

And I try to resist all this. I look suspiciously for Ryan to project onto his writer-character smugness, self-congratulation ('Look! I sign autographs! I have agents, fame, money!') I wonder whether he's giving us a patronising, travel-agent Ireland; is it mimicry that makes him reproduce the way of talking (as it seems to me) so well, or a genuine, affectionate attunement?

But the quick of it is this; that Ryan writes with such respect for language, and such care for his theme, that I cast aside all prejudices and become immersed. For what we have here is a fine, traditional sort of ghost story told calmly, poetically, unforgettably; and there's grim, tragic images within which moved me to a silent, almost reverent sadness. So, yes, it's horror, not SF; but horror at an eerie, spiritual pitch, seeking out chinks in our armour of rationality, asserting an otherness just beyond our reach, and tingling the fibres of what for want of better definition we'll call the soul.

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Connie Willis - - FIREWATCH (Bantam/Spectra, 1986, 271pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Judith Hanna)

When you come across a short story in a magazine, you assess it against a background of other stories and articles by other writers. When a writer's stories are collected up into one volume, you assess her work as a body.

Reading this collection is like listening to an album by a guitarist who knows only one riff. Collected together, Willis's stories become a repetitive pattern of insistent auctorial direction towards a conclusion left carefully blank.

Yet her stories pick up a challenging range of ideas. I found the helter-skelter comedy of improbabilities of 'Blued Moon' the most satisfactory. Its virtues provide the key to the dissatisfaction left by her more serious, more ambitious stories. 'All My Darling Daughters' juxtaposes the sexual obsession with his daughters attributed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's father with the promiscuity of a future college of 'trust kids' whose 'fathers' are spermatozoa spurted into plastic bags with bestiality to helpless animals. 'Fire Watch' is about the textures and contradictions of life that underlie history, about suspicion, misunderstanding, irrationality and self-sacrifice. 'The Sidon in the Mirror', set on a frontier world that echoes the Old West of saloon bars and the New West of oil rigs is about sadism and unconscious copying without free will.

They are ambitious stories, charting tracks across the underside of the human psyche. Yet I feel that they are tracks plotted across the surface, planned to fit theories and oddments of facts snipped from psychological and sociological journals. Unless the underlying geology of the subconscious has been explored, the auctorial indirection that concludes each story is an evasion, a conjuring trick to trick the eye. Letting oneself sink below the surface is dangerous, but Willis needs to risk relaxing her grip on the webs of cleverness she is so good at constructing if her stories are to work real magic.

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Tad Williams - - TAILCHASER'S SONG (Orbit, 1986, 333pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

Since the appearance of WATERSHIP DOWN, publishers have climbed onto the anthropomorphic bandwagon with varying degrees of success, bringing us moles, eagles and even harvest mice, but nothing has ever matched Richard Adams' standard. TAILCHASER'S SONG, despite its promise to do for cats what WATERSHIP DOWN did for rabbits, is no exception. Adams succeeded because he created believable rabbits, based on firsthand study and available research, and provided them with a contextually appropriate story. Most authors, Tad Williams among them, fall into the trap of using something cute and furry to breathe fresh life into a jaded plot. The species is irrelevant and the characters behave like humans unless the author remembers to add some authentic colour. To give Williams his due, he does ladle on the feline detail but seems to know very little about actual cat behaviour, presenting them as mystics and story tellers whilst blithely ignoring the sordid realities of hunting and mating. As cats they are twee, as humans they would be downright sickening.

The plot is sadly familiar, the author's preliminary research having apparently been confined to LORD OF THE RINGS, several major episodes of which surface with a minimum of rewriting. Even with Tolkien's help, Tail-chaser's search for his missing friend and his mission to destroy evil in the land are ineptly handled, and the story is riddled with hackneyed plot devices. The shame is that there are occasional hints that Williams might do far better were he to free himself from the conventions of his chosen form. TAILCHASER'S SONG is an intriguing taster of things to come, but beyond that it is nothing more than a lightweight holiday read, and not the last word on cats.



A Blackbird in Darkness.

A BLACKBIRD IN DARKNESS by Freda Warrington (New English Library, £3.50, 473pp) Review by Nik Morton

Although the front cover may give the impression that this is the second in a continuing quest story, it is in fact not only the sequel to *A Blackbird in Silver* but also the concluding part: so there is no trilogy here; I suspect that both books were originally one but size considerations suggested splitting it into two - particularly when you consider the time between each publication - I reviewed the first book in March this year and this was published October...

One reviewer in *Fantasy Advertiser* mentioned that this book is only for masochists because the quest of Ashurek, Estarine and Medrian is one of unrelieved gloom, with the evil M'gulfn - the Worm or Serpent - casting its blight upon the strange lands and on

their thoughts. Yet it is because of the sure touch, creating such a terrible atmosphere, that Freda Warrington has succeeded in creating a *different* quest novel; the denouement is tragic and inevitable: in the silent, suffering woman Medrian, she has created a character of quite memorable and heroic proportions.

This book begins on the Blue Plain of the good if unpronounceable M'tebhmella where immortals dwell, where the reader learns that one of the Quest trio is the human host for the Serpent...

Though the mood is grim throughout the quest, there are plenty of colourful descriptions; "There was a light in her grey eyes, like the sun shining through spring rain", "Mist that was like sparkling heliotrope light drifted between them... sentient..."

And this imagery goes on; "... mist attaching itself to them in motes of azure incandescence. Their hair ... floated in the charged air, full of sparks." That perhaps gives a fair impression of the style; perhaps there is a tendency to overwrite on occasion, (p216, "and the morning was beautiful, and they were alive, and walking through it"), but usually the mood seems to warrant such treatment.

There is over-use of "cyan" when describing "greenish-blue", and I could not work out what "all was blotted out by canescence" meant. And there is to my mind one absurd moment when two women successfully fight off attacking bears using magic and, standing in the protected circle, they are so pleased with their victory they shake hands. (p239). I doubt if lightning makes a "giggling" sound: "while lightning chased them like the giggling of demons" jarred.

The quest is dual-purposed, in that they must first obtain the Silver Staff with which to fight the Serpent, then they must track down the evil M'gulfn in his polar lair... The first part of the quest is not accomplished till page 250; and the hovering menace attached to that "success" is nicely done. For always looming was the vision of the Serpent's intentions for Earth - "a bloated sac which can never expel its poison."

We meet again the zany mathematicians of Hrunnesh, and some amusing philosophers whose deliberations add to the humour of the probabilistic characters; light moments in an otherwise unremitting darkness. One can offer allegorical interpretations, that the blackbird Miril seems to be a world-saviour, that the Staff is the embodiment of Hope. But in the end the book can be appreciated on its basic level, of a long but interesting quest story involving characters who are changed by events, who experience fears and defeat, whose reactions are not typically fantastic and unbelievable.

M. John Harrison - - - - - VIRICONIUM NIGHTS  
(Unicorn, 1986, 158pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

The first feeling an M. John Harrison fan will have on seeing this paperback is one of annoyance. Why did I buy the first edition (Ace paperbacks, 1984) when this is a much better produced book? Closer examination will show that there are substantial differences, which may increase the annoyance. The dedication of the book is different, the order of the stories is different, the quotations placed at the head of each story (Barthes, Turgenev, Colette et al) are new (quirkily, two stories are prefaced by the same quotations, in reverse order). "Lamia Mutable", from AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS, and "In Viriconium" are left out; "A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium", from INTERZONE 12, is put in. So, no complete edition this;

merely a bibliographer's puzzle.

This is, of course, a paperback version of the 1985 Gollancz edition, reviewed at length by Barbara Davies and Paul Kincaid in VECTOR 128. Paul's judgement is immortalised on the back-cover of the Unicorn: a "stunning, captivating work of staggering imaginative power". All visitors to Viriconium know that it is a confusing, ever-changing world, sometimes close to our own, sometimes millenia away, with no fixed reference points and, one might say, no clear purpose and nothing except its stylishness to suggest a second visit might be worthwhile. Barbara Davies quoted Harrison's own words about the ideal fantasy, in which the reader is dumped without preparation: "if he doesn't enjoy his subsequent bewilderment he should be reading **Which Car** instead." Thanks for the advice, M. John; I'll pop down to W.H. Smith as soon as it opens...

John C. McLoughlin - - THE HELIX AND THE SWORD  
(Orbit, 1986, 293pp,  
£2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

The accusation that space opera is absurd is one that even its greatest aficionados would find difficult to refute. THE SWORD AND THE HELIX is typical space opera in that it is absurd.

Man has left earth and lives on genetically engineered 'islands' deep in the solar system. All resources are controlled by powerful cartels. However a lack of raw materials is beginning to limit man's expansion and a war between rival cartels seems inevitable.

Mankind's hope lies in a very motley crew consisting of Dr. Dyson Tessier, Linsang - a renegade princess, and a genetically manipulated cheetah with an encyclopedic knowledge. They return to earth in a desperate bid to prevent the devastating war.

THE HELIX AND THE SWORD is far from being a bad book. As a light read it is competent. The poor characterisation, common to most space opera, is evident although in this case it does not wreck the narrative. The plot is fairly fast-moving and at the very least THE HELIX AND THE SWORD is not boring and precious few space operas can make that claim. However I felt that more could have been made of the relationship between man and his genetically altered 'slaves'. This missed opportunity irritated me for most of the novel.

You could do a lot worse than read THE HELIX AND THE SWORD. However, it is indicative of the state of space opera in general when my favourite character is not one of the human protagonists but a genetically altered, telepathic cat with a nice line in feline wit.

Dennis Schmidt - - THE FIRST NAME (Orbit,  
1986, 307pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

First in the 'Twilight of the Gods' trilogy, and - as that implies - this owes much to Scandinavian myth: part of the story is the coming to manhood and self-awareness of the Aesir Voden among the Vanir tribes. But we also have elements of Babylonian myth incarnate among the darker elements of Muspelheim, and the two - however original their use may be - co-exist uneasily in a fantasy world which is neither one nor t'other.

This may be creative tension. More disturbing is the fact that virtually every sexual encounter appears to be rape, while the evil Surt counterpoints the deliberately stressed barbarism of the Aesir by speaking like a pantomime villain. ('Soon, ah ah, soon now the Sons of Muspell will bend their knees to me.') An interesting fusion of mythologies (Schmidt also brings in the Tao) but it really should be more than Just Another Fantasy Trilogy and so far I can't say it is.

Terry Pratchett - - THE LIGHT FANTASTIC (Corgi,  
1986, 247pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

When, some time ago, I reviewed THE COLOUR OF MAGIC, I was rather unfair to Terry Pratchett. Now this sequel has appeared, I have the opportunity to put things right.

Terry Pratchett is a very, very funny man. He's a skilful writer with an imagination that any three other writers could share and still outwrite your average author.

In THE COLOUR OF MAGIC he sketched out a totally unbelievable universe and proceeded to take the mickey out of fantasy fiction

quite unmercifully. Unfortunately, I find fantasy fiction impossibly silly anyway, so his irony, sarcasm, bathos and other literary quirk's didn't do a great deal for me.

In other words, Terry Pratchett writes fantasy the way I think it ought to be anyway. And it has taken a second exposure to his style to show me that there's more to it than that.

Any attempt to summarise the plot, any selection of the thousands of bits that he has woven into a completely ridiculous tapestry, would be pointless. You'll just have to get the book, lie back, expect to be amused, and try hard not to let the top come off your head as you laugh. Do not try to read this book in a bus, on the tube, or for that matter anywhere in public - most people tend to sheer away from those showing unmistakable signs of incipient lunacy, and attempts to corner innocent passers-by and force them to listen to the bits you are impelled to read aloud will merely bring the forces of law and order pounding up to impound the book as conducive only to a severe disturbance of the peace.

Oh, and yes, do get a copy of THE COLOUR OF MAGIC while you're at it. You don't have to read it first, but it will probably help. Pray God that Terry Pratchett is NOT going to produce a trilogy - I don't think I could stand it.

Michael Lindsay Williams - - MARTIAN SPRING  
(Avon, 1986,  
277pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

This book has several strikes against it before you even get into it. The first chapter left me wondering what on earth I was reading: it seemed to make little coherent sense at all. Perhaps fortunately, the author pulls that hoary old 'and then he woke up' gimmick right there on page 4, leaving the decks clear for virtually every other skiffy cliché you can imagine - and no, I'm not going to list them, enough is enough.

The tale concerns a 'nhumbie' (go on, pronounce it), a 'nonhuman' who is Our Hero and is a psionic whiz. He's going to Mars to discover why the planet is undergoing a 'thaw' - yes, folks, spring is coming to Mars, along with goodies, baddies, and the indigenous Hhronka (try that one around your teeth, too).

In his acknowledgements the author thanks Michael Hayes for 'excellent constructive criticism for improving literary quality' - believe me, when you need that kind of help, you're no writer anyway. Linda Fumia and John Douglas apparently 'took the time to give me the inspiration and advice that kept me from dumping this entire effort.' Pity.

Marvin Kaye & - - THE MASTERS OF SOLITUDE  
Parke Godwin (Orbit, 1986, 398pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Readers who get half way through this book will have put their fingers upon what seems to be a major flaw: that it begins with Singer, son of Garick of the Shando coven and Judith of the City, as the focus of attention but then tells the main story with the spotlight firmly upon Arin, Singer's half-brother. There is, of course, a reason for this which I shall not divulge, partly because I'm not wholly convinced that it works.

You may have your own doubts about whether the whole thing works were I to retell the complex plot. But push them aside: this is a very good book despite what I've just said, which is really a minor quibble. To set the scene, the Shando and related tribes or 'Covens' are of the Circle - following a creed loosely based on Wicca, in tune with the earth

and a-technological, with occult powers. The City, remote and incomprehensible, is reached only through the Self-Gate which destroys the minds of those foolish enough to force entrance. Across the Blue Mountains are the Kriss, enigmatic followers of a dead god nailed to a cross, and it is in one of their cities that a clue may be found to the whereabouts of the Girdle of Solitude, an artifact dating back to the days before the USA was conquered by the Jing, and which may enable safe entrance through the Self-Gate.

So far, another tale of post-holocaust tribal factions warring against the remnants of science - not dissimilar, in fact to Piers Anthony's *BATTLE CIRCLE*. But the book I was reminded of in the end was Ursula Le Guin's *ALWAYS COMING HOME* in the way the novel illuminates the ways of life of its characters. The Covenanters accept life in its fullness - 'Life is their religion, so all-pervading there is no word for it except "Circle", and it includes hardship, suffering and death, and yet they have a sense of joy and oneness too deep to speak.' (p. 114) To the Kriss with their sense of sin, this is hedonism - 'in the ecstasy of Circle dance, there is balm and consolation, but no cleansing or absolution.' (p. 173) The City folk - virtually immortal - devote themselves to knowledge and analysis. Arin is virtually broken by the clash between these viewpoints while other characters - Jay, the Kriss, Bowdeen, the mercenary, find themselves in positions where they must transcend their backgrounds.

Twice at least the universe intrudes upon the mental constructs of Arin and the Covenanters: once when some of Arin's followers die a horrible, pointless death and again when they (the defenders of Life and Joy!) commit a foul and cynical act of national revenge. From the sadness and despair comes (if I read the book rightly) the possibility of integration into a new whole, but on the way *THE MASTERS OF SOLITUDE* paints some impressive pictures of the shadows of Utopianism.

Isaac Asimov, Martin H. - - *THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF SHORT SF NOVELS*  
Greenberg, Charles G.  
Waugh (eds.) (Robinson, 1986,  
574pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Matthew Dickens)

*MAMMOTH BOOK* is a weighty tome of 13 novellas, featuring authors from Campbell to Longyear.

Asimov's offering is a somewhat bland story, *PROFESSION*: a future where people are 'educated' in a day in order to take up specific functions. John Campbell's *WHO GOES THERE?* is possibly the pick of the bunch, a tense, tightly written story of the discovery by a Polar exploration team of an alien that exactly duplicates living organisms and threatens to wipe out mankind. The reader almost breathes a sigh of relief when the last alien is atomised...

*FLASH CROWD* by Larry Niven is another story of quality, demonstrating how technology can be as big a bane as blessing. Barry Longyear's recently screened *ENEMY MINE* is also present, so before buying the expanded version, read the novella to see if you like it. There is an intriguing story by Lester Del Rey, *FOR I AM A JEALOUS PEOPLE!*, in which a priest is horrified to learn that God is helping aliens commit hideous atrocities on Humanity.

*THE ALLEY MAN* is Philip Jose Farmer's answer to *STIG OF THE DUMP*, a likeable story concerning the discovery of the last Neanderthal man, living in a refuse dump. There is a snippet from Silverberg's *MAJLFOOR CHRONICLES*, *THE DESERT OF STOLEN DREAMS*, where the hero uncovers a fraud who makes people believe that dreams can kill them. John Jakes breaks from fantasy with a well-crafted SF yarn, *THE SELLERS OF THE TREK*, in which an unscrupulous

mega-corporation carries fashion consciousness to extremes.

The lesser stories are all by lesser authors. *TIME SAFARI* by David Drake uses the hackneyed theme of a dinosaur hunt by time travellers. *IN THE WESTERN TRADITION* by Phyllis Eisenstein is about a historian who becomes catastrophically obsessed with the past. Donald Kingsbury's characters in *THE MOON GODDESS AND THE SON* are distinctly reminiscent of those of the latter-period Heinlein, while the Lassie-style relationship in *THE MORTAL AND THE MONSTER* by Gordon R. Dickson (between a researcher and the Loch Ness Monster) doesn't quite succeed.

On the whole, the *MAMMOTH BOOK* is a good £5 worth, and contains a few novellas you don't come up against every day. Like all anthologies it has its duds, but the general consensus is the good outweighs the bad, without a doubt.

Robert Bloch - - *THE NIGHT OF THE RIPPER*  
(Grafton, 1986, 255pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

Robert Bloch seems to have a minor obsession with Jack the Ripper which manifests itself with the slight irregularity of the twenty-two year sunspot cycle. In 1943 we were presented with the short story 'Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper'; circa 1967 he wrote 'Wolf in the Fold', a Star Trek episode in which Red Jack was the villain; and now we have the novel *THE NIGHT OF THE RIPPER*.

The traditional elements of the Ripper case are here: the setting around a London hospital (the Ripper is usually assumed to have been a doctor); the multiplicity of suspects; the Royal connection (with Queen Victoria's grandson, the Duke of Clarence); and - as regards Ripper fiction, at least - the revelation of the Ripper's identity and the subsequent cover-up.

This is a very credible work, written using known evidence from the time of the Whitechapel murders, a certain amount of speculation, and the appearance of several actual people, whilst the description of 1888 London is easily comparable to the writings of Leon Garfield, though maybe not to Dickens, who had the distinct advantage of being alive at the time.

One other aspect of this novel warrants attention. Most of the chapters are headed by a description of some barbarism from history, these passages spanning the years from 2300 BC to 1887 AD. Perhaps the author is trying to suggest, as is backed up by the author's note at the end, that there was nothing exceptional about the Whitechapel murders, but they were merely the latest in a long line of human atrocities.

Mike Resnik - - *SANTIAGO* (Arrow, 1986, 376pp,  
£2.95)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

Murders galore  
Full of thieves' argot  
With so much more.  
That's Santiago.

With poetic license or no, the four liners introducing each chapter make *SANTIAGO* even more compulsive reading than it would otherwise be. This added spice of a ballad and its off-stage composer Black Orpheus complement the main story by giving additional insights into the characters. Sebastian Cain alias 'The Songbird' takes up the hunt for Santiago, the outlaw who is a legend in his own lifetime. Somewhere on the inner frontier the Angel has taken up the same task and rumour has it he's the best. These are just two of the bounty hunters that appear in Black Orpheus's epic

along with almost every character in the book. If by some miracle a character doesn't appear in it then an explanation is immediately tendered. The only thing more improbable than this is how fast information creeps down the grapevine. Half the characters know exactly what all the other characters are doing at any one time and the other half don't know and don't care. What a marvellous set of characters they are though, larger than life, sometimes making the imagination catch fire: The Angel, Giles Sans Pitie, Sebastian Cain, Father William, ManMountain Bates, The Swagman, Virtue MacKenzie, Altair of Altair and many more.

After ten pages or so I was looking for an excuse for this being science fiction instead of a western. What excuse could there be? The most cynical amongst us would say there isn't one.

Aliens? There are emptyheads, menials, extinct ones... the only really interesting aliens call themselves the Great Sioux Nation...hmm.

Lasers? Sonic Pistols? They get in amongst the bullets but...

Spaceships? They do for horse analogues, all except one who is a character in 'his' own right - Schussler the Cyborg.

He's one excuse but a more powerful one is that Resnik would have had a hard time walking the tightrope between unreality and grim realism if SANTIAGO had been a mere western. I found it a little disturbing that when death comes it's unmercifully quick and in one case sandwiched between the funniest lines in the book. That scene amongst others was so good that it seems almost carved into my memory.

Like a comic Delany, ruthless and riveting it kept me up til dawn.

in a rather camp, freewheeling sixties style that looks a bit dated nowadays, entertaining enough but nothing special. (Denise Gorse)

Margaret Weis & Tracy - - DRAGONS OF SPRING  
Hickman DAWNING (Penguin,  
1986, 382pp, £2.95)

Vol. 3 of the game-based trilogy. Derivative and longwinded, this series is virtually unreadable for anyone not a game-playing fanatic. Even dedicated gamers would be better off actually playing and using their own imaginations. (Andy Sawyer)

Gordon Kendall - WHITE WING (Sphere, 1986,  
308pp, £2.95)

Human survivors of destroyed Earth form an elite warrior 'wing' among Galactic League forces against the Sejiedi. But there are Sejiedi undercover agents at work... Competent space opera with absolutely no attraction to anyone apart from fans of such stuff. (Andy Sawyer)

Richard Haigh - - THE CITY (Grafton, 1986,  
191pp, £1.95)

'Gut-crunching, bone-grinding horror', as it says on the back of this sequel to THE FARM, featuring the same bunch of massive homicidal pigs. You'll enjoy this if you like books where most of the characters are killed horribly: me, I've gone right off bacon butties. (Andy Sawyer)

Philip Jose Farmer - - DAYWORLD (Grafton,  
1986, 322pp, £2.50)

The US edition was reviewed by Phil Nicholls in FI 64, and the hardback by Ken Lake in Vector 129. Like most recent Farmer this is a wonderful idea never quite realised: a world where six out of seven days are spent in suspended animation and only criminal 'daybreakers' live full lives, a different identity each day. The contrast and confusion of identities this creates make the best part of the novel, undercut by a fast-moving but banal plot. (Andy Sawyer)

Tabitha King - - WOLVES AT THE DOOR (Grafton,  
1986, 367pp, £2.95)

You may rick this up, knowing that Tabitha King is the wife of Stephen, and wonder if it is another horror story. It is, but the horror is strictly mundane - of the rape-and-terrorising pattern written for the semi-rorn best-seller market. Unpleasant. (Andy Sawyer)

## Capsules...

Larry Slonaker - - VOICE OF THE VISITOR (Avon,  
1986, 227pp, £3.50)

Aubrey, newly pregnant with her first child, hears a voice in her head promising spiritual insight. Her husband Bert and Tony Richey, a former Catholic priest, become involved in trying to understand the phenomenon, which has links with a horrific murder many years ago. Even as a routine post-EXORCIST horror plot, the book doesn't go anywhere. (Andy Sawyer)

E.C. Tubb - - THE COMING EVENT (Arrow, 1986,  
160pp, £1.95)

The 26th 'Dumarest' book... which is all that needs to be said. Those who've read the other 25 will no doubt want this, but I doubt if those who've missed the acquaintance of Earl Dumarest and his quest for Earth until now will start looking for back numbers. I'm sure there's something significant in my feeling that I really would have enjoyed it were it a TV space opera like BLAKE'S SEVEN, but as it is even some sharp switches of locale and some dramatic new evidence failed to make it a memorable read. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Moorcock - - THE RITUALS OF INFINITY  
(NEL, 1986, 159pp, £2.50)

I have not read much by Michael Moorcock, but I have gained the impression that he could have written this book in the time it took me to read it (and possibly did). THE RITUALS OF INFINITY is not only slender (£2.50 for 159 pp) but slight, the long short story of Dr. Faustaff, a large, genial 'Earth repair man and physicist' and his quest to save the world(s) from destruction by the mysterious D-squads. It is competently written, although



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CON

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The previous issue sparked several people with the inspiration to write with correction, criticism and constructive comments. KEN LAKE sent a postcard celebrating the first anti-imperialist revolution of modern times to tell us that Frederick Turner's A DOUBLE SHADOW was published in paperback by Berkley in Feb. 1979.

DAVE LANGFORD writes on a slightly less colourful postcard "My illusions have been shattered. I always thought PI reviewers were frighteningly omniscient. But surely Martyn Taylor's exquisite sense of style must have blown a fuse, for him to ascribe a joke as bad as that 'vent in Spleen' line (or even a good joke, at that) to STARSHIP TROOPERS. It is of course from BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO, a book with one or two important differences..." Dave also goes on to point out (in the nicest possible way) a couple of infelicities in the layout of PI 62, as did SUE THOMASON, who emphasised that her comments were not meant to be negative: "It's partly a way of showing that the new emphasis placed on appearance has been noted. I have previously considered PI solely as a utility; I would never have dreamed of commenting on its appearance before."

I agree entirely with what Sue mentioned and I hope this issue is an improvement over last issue. I'm still trying out one or two experiments which may or may not work out,

and certainly as far as I'm concerned I've yet to get the appearance of the magazine right, but time will tell. One point which I had better stress in this context is that by the time I actually see a printed issue of PI I have the next issue half typed up, so it's difficult to immediately institute major changes.

ANDY MILLS raises an interesting question in conjunction with his review of IZ 17. "...which is that SF/Fantasy (particularly that with feminist content) written by women is reviewed by women... Now, I can understand the desire of reviewers to review books by people with similar interests/beliefs/concerns and I can equally appreciate editors wanting informed reviews. But surely a corollary of this is the 'ghettoization' of feminist SF: is SF with a feminist content to be read only by feminists? Surely not - so should it be reviewed only by feminists?"

A.A. MORRIS defended "an enjoyable read" in the shapes of books by Chalker, Foster and Brooks which I allegedly trashed last issue. In fact, only the third was voted down in an opinion I still stand by: the others I partly enjoyed and said so - but do you really find those authors more enjoyable than, say, Barbara Hambly or Terry Pratchett? Even in escapist, 'enjoyable reads' there are levels of writerly skill and quality.

Merry Christmas!

★