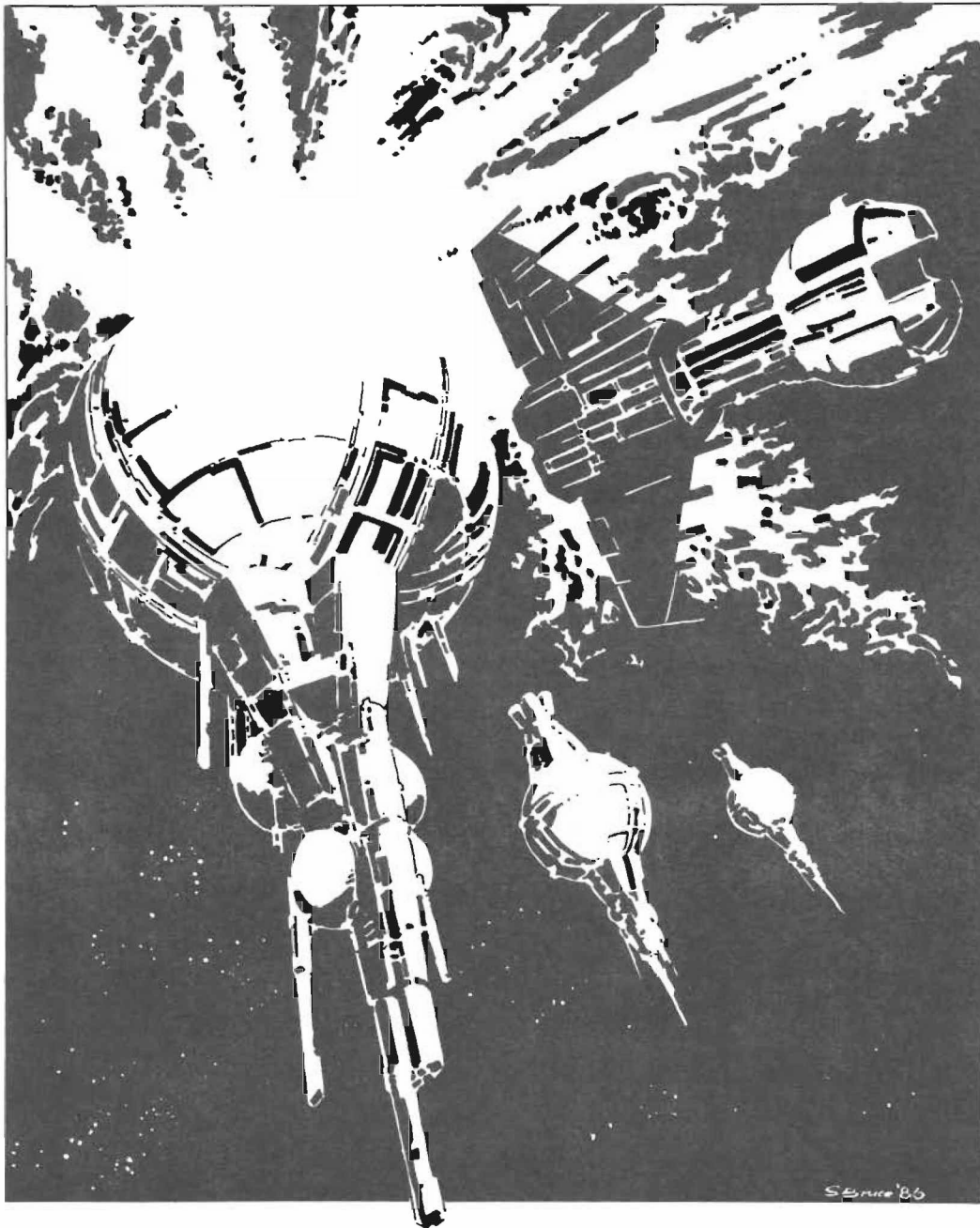


# PAPERBACK

50p.



# INFERNO 64

Feb. - March 1987

# Paperback Purgatory

## PAPERBACK INFERNO

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ARTWORK this issue by STEVE BRUCE (Cover)  
KEITH BROOKE (p.2, p.3)  
SHEP KIRKBRIDE (p.15)

Many thanks to the new P.I. production assistant, PHIL NICHOLS and his word-processor, who have come to our rescue to improve the look of the magazine and give me more time to balance the contents - something which you should be noticing from this issue.

It has just stopped snowing and I have an editorial to write: two facts which are not necessarily linked apart from occurring at the same time, although those of you with a metaphysical bent may care to draw symbolic parallels between the sheet of unbroken white which is The Flaxyard's front garden and the equally unsullied sheet of white which is the paper I gaze upon when I stop looking out of the window...

P.I. 63 was generally well-received - particularly Shep's cover artwork - although NICHOLAS MAHONEY made the point that the magazine 'looks too much like VECTOR and MATRIX. Before it had a sort of identity it lost with the new look.' (There's something to say for that viewpoint in that the constraints of production will nudge the magazines into similar moulds, but I'm now finding a greater flexibility in the new P.I. - not to mention that over the last few issues I've been able to fit in more reviews and include some good artwork.) Few people commented at length about the contents of PI, but HELEN McNABB offered a dissenting view of Terry Broome's judgement of Barry Hugart's BRIDGE OF BIRDS. 'The author explains all the seeming coincidences in a way that I for one found completely convincing. I thought it was a lovely book, it was funny, original, witty and clever.'

Many thanks to those who sent Christmas greetings and cards: by the time you read this it will probably sound a bit late for wishing 'best of luck in '87!' - but I'll do so anyway!

This issue contains material which I had to leave out of the last issue - which in turn means that my review of Clive Barker's BOOKS OF BLOOD and THE DAMNATION GAME have been squeezed out until next time (meanwhile I refer you to VECTOR 131 where Neil Gaiman and Mark Greener consider them at greater length. Also coming is Denise Gorse's look at a new edition of J. Neil Schulman's THE RAINBOW CADENZA (Avon): like Barker's books, this has been reviewed by BSFA magazines in the fairly recent past, but unlike them it is being revisited less because of its intrinsic merits and more because incorporated with the book are essays from a variety of people making some astonishing claims for it. Next issue will also contain reviews of Robert Heinlein's DOUBLE STAR (Grafton), James Tiptree jr.'s BRIGHTNESS FALLS FROM THE AIR (Sphere), Robert Sheckley's OPTIONS (Grafton), Michael Coney's GODS OF THE GREATAWAY (Orbit) - among others.

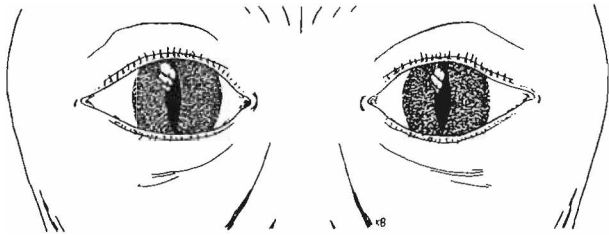
I also have artwork on file from Keith Brooke, Matt Brooker, Steve Bruce, Colin Davis and Nik Morton - anyone else with fillers and cartoons is very welcome to send some along!



All opinions expressed in this magazine are the views of the individual contributors and must not be taken to represent the views of the editor or the BSFA except where explicitly stated.

# Overview

# "Upon the rack in print"...



Keith Roberts - - - - - THE CHALK GIANTS  
(Panther, 1976, 75p)

(A Re-View by Mike Moir)

Keith Roberts' most famous book PAVANE has received a fair proportion of the acclaim it deserves and along with THE FURIES has recently been reprinted by Penguin. In fact there is probably more Roberts available now than ever before. Alas the publishers seem to have forgotten THE CHALK GIANTS.

THE CHALK GIANTS is an unusual book, probably best described as a black PAVANE. Alternatively, for people who like to categorise, instead of a parallel world, it considers next time around. But categorisation is dangerous at the best of times, here it definitely misleads.

The book consists of seven linked episodes. The first two are holocaust tales with Stan Potts, the frustrated central character, dealing with new situations and relationships almost as badly as he did in normal life. The remaining five are both tales of the far future and at the same time Stan's dying fantasies largely based around his obsession for a Purbeck barmaid. The episodes range in scale from the sordid squalor of an immediately post holocaust survival struggle, to great Homeric sagas of 'not quite' history with murders and monsters, kings and cuckoldry.

Analysing its parts so clinically misses the point of the whole. The book is a true novel, a 'mosaic' novel, the kind all Roberts fans will know and appreciate. It is a novel about love, love at its worst, about the horrid things people can do to, and because of, the people they love. You could almost say it's a book about sex and violence, but again that would seriously mislead you.

Stan may be the cornerstone of the novel, but the girl is its centre. She is the 'Multi-girl', at first Martine, an ordinary barmaid, and then transformed, by either Stan or time itself, into Mata the universal woman/goddess. This complexity is probably the reason for the novel languishing in obscurity, it is also the most important element in the book.

This is an excellent novel and early Roberts at his best. The novel and its tales will stay with you a long time. (Who could forget titles like 'Monkey and Pru and Sal', 'The Beautiful One' and best of all 'Rand, Rat and the Dancing Man'). It should be kept permanently in print, not left almost forgotten for ten years. In fact, for once, we are luckier than the Americans they have only ever seen a butchered version of THE CHALK GIANTS. Someone, somewhere please reprint this book.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, NOVEMBER and DECEMBER 1986, and ANALOG, DECEMBER and MID-DECEMBER 1986

(Reviewed by Edward James)

As we were approaching the end of the year, I was obviously getting jaded - or else the magazines were. They seemed to serve up a more than usually high percentage of reworkings of old and tried themes. (Read "tried" as a typo for "tired" if you wish.) Some of them were expertly and entertainingly executed, but...

Take the November *Asimov's*, for instance. Jack McDevitt's cover novella "Voices in the Dark" was well written, with plenty of suspense, and carefully and successfully calculated to push all the right emotional stops. But how many times have we read of a story in which messages from a star prove to contain material for an enormous scientific advance? Frederik Pohl gave a stylish and very Pohlman performance on "Iriadeska's Martians", but how many times have we seen Pohl make fun of consumerism, bureaucracy, religion and politics? Lucius Shepard offered "Fire Zone Emerald", but how many times has he shown us American troops in a technology-dominated Central American jungle war? (An unfairly jaundiced comment, that, since presumably he is writing these connected stories as part of a series - and very effective stories they are, too.) The most unexpected, and moving, story was from Susan Palwick: "Elephant", about a surrogate pregnancy. All these stories were polished performances; all left me, in my solstitial state, slightly unsatisfied.

The December *Analog* had its high-spots (though not the polished writing), but the impression was similar. The best was the story by Charles L. Harness, "The Picture of Dora Gray": a legal wrangle which uncovered the existence of an immortal woman, whom Oscar Wilde had met on his 1882 American trip: a neat idea, but not very neatly told; unnecessarily prolix, and without any surprises. The cover story was Robert R. Chase's "Bearings", which mixed the themes of immortality and star navigation, to come up with something that was at least an interesting construct. Which is more than can be said of the other stories in the issue.

The Mid-December *Analog* was similar: that is, it too had its unmentionables. Unfortunately, without the high-spots. Joseph H. Delaney forsook his normal court-room scenes to tell of a star-ship crew infiltrated by alien parasites, in "An Ill Wind". The aliens are eventually defeated by garlic:

"How come we didn't run into them before, Mr Lisanti?" "Maybe we did... Ever heard of vampires?"

Oh dear. And we had a computer program running amok from Bill Johnson, computer hackers using sophisticated graphics programs for criminal purposes from Jack Wodhams, and yet another wail on behalf of past technologies from Rob Chilson and William F. Wu. (Rather more effective in this line was Joe Haldeman's poem in the December *Asimov's*: "Machines of Loving Grace, a lament on the passing of the manual typewriter.) These were, however, at least plausible stories, unlike "The Hephaestus Mission" by Arlan Andrews, where the criminals who discovered time travel used it to set up factories to use cheap labour in the past. (Or was the point of that story that criminals have limited imaginations?) Finally, there was our own John Gribbin's "The Sins of the Fathers", which looked as if it was going to be yet another story about enhancing the intelligence of apes, but turned out - as usual in a Gribbin story - to be making an interesting and thought-provoking scientific point.

The year was redeemed by the December *Asimov's* (I haven't yet seen the Mid-December issue), which made me remember why I read these magazines. The cover story was Ian Watson's "Windows", in which a few Windows from Mars multiply all over Earth; they display images of scenes on this and other worlds, but

their origin and purpose is unknown, until... An interesting idea, but the execution, for me, left something to be desired: an awkward presentation of the background, and a disappointing resolution. Perhaps I just expect too much of Watson, or perhaps I expected too much from a situation which seemed to offer the opportunity for plenty of old-fashioned sensawunda. I sighed when I saw that this issue also offered (unlike *Analogue*) the usual Christmas stories; I still haven't entirely recovered from last year's story by Robert F. Young, which appeared to revolve around the fact that Christ was born in 33 AD. But they were a pleasant surprise. One was a collaboration by Ed Bryant, Connie Willis and others, about several Christmas presents which were "Exactly What One Wanted". The other was "The S.O.B. Show" by Elissa Malcohn, who worked for several years in planetaria: it was set in a very plausible world of planetaria conferences, in which the December talking point was, "How can I put on the mandatory Star of Bethlehem Show this year and find something new to do?" Equally enjoyable, though in a very different vein, was the unashamedly space-operatic "Walkaway Clause" by John M. Ford. There was also a neat story from Nancy Kress about a crossed line, "Phone Repairs", and an enjoyable squib from Don Webb based on the premise that William and Henry James were the brothers of Jesse James. But the gem of the issue, and one of the gems of the year, was Cherry Wilder's "Dreamwood", in which a Russian poet and dissident drags his friends and associates into a shared world of dreaming. Not a fantasy, but pure sf, packing well-rounded characters and some atmospheric writing into a mere 25 pages. This issue is well worth your £1.95.

## Closer Encounters

Kevin O'Donnell Jr. - - - - - ORA:CLE  
(Grafton, 1986, 343pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

Opinions Research Advice: Computer Linked Experts. In the year 2188 ORA:CLE - as with BASIC, it's a safe bet that the acronym was thought up long before the definition - is a form of database comprised of around twenty thousand people world-wide, each an expert in his/her field, linked to a central switchboard program via transceivers implanted in the brain. The protagonist is a Seeley - Computer Linked Expert; CLE; Seeley - called Ale Elatey, whose expertise is in East Asian history and whose hobby is growing house-plants. After surviving three attempts on his life he decides to protect himself from further attempts by conspiring with a computer expert, Wef DiNaini, to arrange the downfall of the Coalition, the global government, whom he has discovered to be the perpetrator of these murder attempts. In this he succeeds, but far from solving his problems, this only serves to compound them.

Now, staging a global coup may not seem to be the easiest of tasks, but the author describes a world in which life at all levels is dominated by computers. Thus whoever controls the computers controls the world. Communication with any part of the world is available at the touch of a button, and the author has seen fit to include 'massies', Matter Transceivers which are not used for personnel transport but for more mundane items such as groceries. Given this ability to communicate instantly wherever and whenever it is desired, and having removed much of the need to travel, the author has been able to set virtually the whole of the novel in one apartment. A problem with such a setting is the creation of a background. Short of having the characters tell each other what they should already know, or having the author deliver lectures to the audience, how does

INTERZONE (Winter 1986/87)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

It's ironic, but following on from an editorial which states that the IZ audience consists of readers 'who are not afraid to run the risk of having their preconceptions rearranged' there runs, for a quarter of the issue, a Gregory Benford story entitled 'As Big as the Ritz'. It's certainly got what it takes to challenge a reader's perceptions of SF: an eccentric scientist, who has a beautiful daughter, single-handedly carves out his own private empire in space, wherein enters our young genius astrophysicist who, etc. etc. Oh, I forgot to mention that the private empire is actually a socialist utopia. You know this is so because all the people are exactly alike, they have an absolute dictator as leader, and everything's based on a capitalist bedrock anyway. They don't write 'em like that anymore! Or perhaps the whole story is a spoof... unfortunately, I don't think it is.

The only other stories of any length are 'Boiled Alive', a typical Ramsey Campbell tale, with the mundane becoming the horrific, and Peter Lambert Wilson's 'Fountain of Time'. This is the best story in the magazine, rich in atmosphere and original enough to give the ghost story a new lease of life, although the reason for the odd grammar is beyond me. Greg Egan's 'Mind Vampires' lost me too, I'm afraid. Very gory, very obtuse. I enjoyed the short-shorts. 'When Jesus Comes Down the Chimney' by Ian Watson is humorous and topical, asking exactly whose arrival is celebrated at Christmas. 'Paths of Dying' by Simon Ounsley has a fresh outlook on death, and contains some very neat lines. I only wish these stories were longer. There is also a well-drawn comic strip by SMS which does serve to add variety, even if you don't care for that sort of thing. Apart from a hilarious review of the recent film 'Invaders From Mars' the only other item of note is a rather bland interview with M. John Harrison, from the same session the interview in the last VECTOR was taken from, but more or less on different topics. Channelling the interview into two periodicals merely served to give each separate piece too narrow a focus.

All in all, one or two good bits, but overall it has to be said that this is the weakest INTERZONE of 1986.

he describe the setting? The best ideas are the simplest. Each chapter begins with a series of news headlines taken from an hourly-updated, globally-transmitted file. Thus we are given a picture of events outside Ale Elatey's apartment.

I liked this novel and could find little to fault about it. True, there are some questionable aspects, such as the numbering, rather than naming, of people. Ale Elatey, for example, is a phoneticisation of ALL80, itself short for ALL80 AFAHSC NFF6. In a computerised society this may well be deemed expedient, but I have doubts about its being accepted, at least, not without considerable opposition.

Then there is the threat of the alien 'Dacs', short for 'pterodactyls', which is a description of these creatures rather than a name, for the simple reason that they are somewhat reticent about communicating with us. (DAC is an abbreviation for Digital-to-Analogue Converter; is this significant, or mere coincidence?) Apart from occasionally killing individuals - Ale survives such an attack - their chief purpose seems to be to limit Man's spaceflight routes. Of course, there are good reasons for allowing aliens to remain enigmatic - who, after all, can really claim to comprehend a cat? - but if the author should ever attempt a sequel - or prequel, or

parallel novel, as there is no reason why ORA:CLE could not form the basis for a credible Future History - he should take the opportunity to explore the 'dacs' further.

Overall, this is a very competently written work. I know a fair amount about computers, although not enough to say for certain whether or not all the aspects of their operation described in the novel are possible, but it certainly all seems to be plausible. In fact this is probably the best 'computer based' novel I have read since James Hogan's THE TWO FACES OF TOMORROW, a work which has to be admired for its speculation on the potential and the development of Artificial Intelligence, if for nothing else.

Of course, as many readers have discovered over the years, one problem with such 'hi-tec' novels is that the technology tends to dominate at the expense of such aspects as plot, style, and characterisation. Here, I am pleased to report, is an exception. If anything, the technology, whilst maybe not subservient, can be regarded as instrumental to the plot, and not the entire raison d'être of the novel. In fact, plotwise, ORA:CLE, is a fairly conventional thriller composed of fairly unconventional elements, and bears a certain degree of resemblance to the BBC thriller serial, BIRD OF PREY.

Both Ale Elatey and Henry Jay, the protagonist of BIRD OF PREY, are projected into situations which they neither originated nor can fully comprehend, but both struggle with what resources they have - mainly intelligence - to survive the threatening forces and eventually confront and defeat them. Both men feel compelled to act, not merely to protect themselves, but also because they see the damage which the evil forces are

doing to others. I sometimes feel that having one character remind me of another, or imagining a character being played by a particular actor, is a sign of good characterisation, whilst cynics might suggest that it is merely an indication of stereotyping. Both points of view are probably equally valid, the actual view taken depending on the individual characters. In this case I feel that the author had done a good job. The reactions of Ale's wife, Emdy Ofivo - MD 050 - are similar to those of Anne Jay but more extreme; she leaves him. Disloyal, perhaps, but quite sensible. Not that she is a mere weak-kneed moaner, mind. She is an intelligent and sensible business-woman who could perhaps have helped Ale in his struggle but decided - and who can say she took the wrong course of action? - that Ale should not have got involved. What she seems to fail to comprehend is that Ale did not involve himself, but once dragged in to the affair had to take an active role in order to keep himself alive. The last straw for Emdy comes when Ale causes a computer crash which loses her a recently amassed fortune. At that point she packs her bags and leaves and, although I could sympathise with Ale's plight, I can't say I could blame her.

My praise for this book has fallen little short of adulation, so it seems inappropriate to end on a negative note, the source of which is to be found - where else? - in the cover blurb, in which the year 2188 is described as being 'nearly two centuries on from 1984'. Depends on which end you approach the number two-hundred from I suppose.

William Burroughs - - - - - THE NAKED LUNCH  
(Paladin, 1986, 251pp, £3.50)

- - - - - THE SOFT MACHINE  
(Paladin, 1986, 143pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

William Burroughs' work was introduced to a

wider British public in 1963 when John Calder published DEAD FINGERS TALK, an amalgam of these two books with THE TICKET THAT EXPLODED. The reprint of THE NAKED LUNCH contains the extended correspondence following a dismissive and contemptuous review of Burroughs' novels in The Times Literary Supplement in November 1963, and it's well worth turning to the appendix before you read the novel itself if only to get some idea of just what it was all about. 'Irony' (Michael Moorcock) or 'filth' (Edith Sitwell)? Since then, of course, Burroughs' influence has become part of what for want of a better word I'd better call our culture (as interpreted through New Worlds magazine and David Bowie albums) but I'm willing to bet that the debate remains pretty much the same.

The emphasis may have changed: gay sex and drug abuse aren't quite so shocking as subjects for literary description now as they were in 1963, and more people may be able to deal with stream-of-consciousness and cut-up/fold-in narrative, but even so, these books are pretty uncompromising stuff. True, I could talk about opening any page of THE NAKED LUNCH and finding a stunning command of genre clichés, street talk and bitter parody which adds up to a rhythmic, often highly poetic prose, but in the context of this review perhaps I'd better stick to his science-fictional imagery.

Burroughs is constantly describing his characters and situations in terms of horrible '50s SF movies. Bradley the Buyer's contact habit turns him into a horror-movie blob, absorbing and digesting his helpless victims until he is destroyed by a flamethrower: Doctor Schafer (The Lobotomy Kid) unveils his Master Work, 'The Complete All American De-anxietised Man' whose 'flesh turns to viscid, transparent jelly that drifts away in green mist, unveiling a monster black centipede.' The amorphous international organisations and semi-nations such as Interzone (where did you think the word came from?) charted by Burroughs are all intent on reducing the universe to a virus-like system of parasitic control. Drug addiction, sex, bureaucracy, religion, are all versions of this control virus: just as a virus exists only to make identical copies of itself, so 'control can never be a means to any practical end... it can never be a means to anything but more control... like junk...'. There's plenty of semen ejaculated in THE NAKED LUNCH but nothing is fertilised. 'The planet drifts to random insect doom'.

Not that there isn't some wisdom in the wisecracks:

So Buddha says: 'I don't hafta take this sound. I'll by God metabolize my own junk.'

'Man you can't do that. The Revenooers will swarm all over you.'

'Over me they won't swarm. I gotta gimmick, see? I'm a fuckin Holy Man as of right now.'

'Jeez, boss, what an angle.'

As Anthony Burgess suggests, there's only one other writer to whom Burroughs can be compared for a mixture of disgust and comedy, and that's Jonathan Swift.

And some, of course, have claimed GULLIVER'S TRAVELS as a root of SF, which has some truth to it even if it isn't the whole picture...

THE SOFT MACHINE is even more dislocated than THE NAKED LUNCH, moving in and out of space and time and consciousness: a warning that SF imagery is only part of Burroughs' armoury and that claiming him as an SF writer is to limit him unless you carefully redefine your definition of SF. You can just as easily trace his use of Chandleresque 'private eye' modes. The difference is that we don't quite have the vocabulary to describe just what it

is Burroughs is doing without entering the realm of Higher Litcrit. In the end, I don't think you can call his work anything but science fiction. But that's like calling KING LEAR a story about a family quarrel...

And that's not a bad image to end with. LEAR is complex, at times non-linear, and often unpleasantly harrowing. I know people who refuse to see it because it's just too damned harrowing, just as people refuse to read Burroughs for the same reason. But it's also worth the trip. Even (especially?) if you think it's all pretentious twaddle, try and read a few pages and let the connections between the images and rhythms appear. You might find that you enjoy it...

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## REVIEWS

Bob Shaw - - - - - ONE MILLION TOMORROWS  
(Grafton, 1986, 176pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This book was first published in 1970 and this is a new paperback edition from Panther. The hero is a man called Will Carewe, a man of an age to make the change from Funkie to Cool, that is from functional male to a person neutered by the side effects of the longevity drug everyone uses. Certain that the absence of sex will destroy his marriage he has put off the treatment until the last moment, so when he is offered the chance of longevity without side effects he leaps at the chance; a decision which pitchforks him into events which put him near to death, force him to reassess his life and, in the absence of police help, make him confront the people attempting to kill him.

It is, like most Bob Shaw stories, a good read; a well plotted who-dun-it adventure story placed in a well thought out and well executed future world. The implications of the neutering of the male are interesting and give greater depth to an already good story. I recommend it. It's a good book.

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Raymond E. Feist - - - - - SILVER THORN  
(Grafton, 1986, 432pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley)

With a map at the front and the obligatory comparison to Tolkien in one of the reviews at the back, this is the second part of yet another Heroic Fantasy trilogy. All the ingredients of the genre are in the text, and Feist keeps the stew of received ideas stirred and the plot (a double quest to discover the nature of the Evil Power which threatens the Kingdom, and to find the cure for a poison administered to the bride-to-be of the hero) moving smoothly enough until the overrushed, ill thought out final confrontation. But there's scarcely one original notion here, and Feist all too readily lapses into cliché, while his characters are less than cardboard, are no more than the electron ghosts which flicker on your TV screen during DALLAS or DYNASTY, speaking the usual mixture of contemporary American and cod Olde English. Compared to Tolkien's writing, this stuff is as stale Coca-Cola to a good pint of English Ale.

Stupidest names: Lord Barry, Princess Anita, and a magician called Pug.

Dumbest quote: 'First, from the Border Barons and Duke Vandros of Yabon, we have reports of unusual goblin activity in the Western Realm.'

Unless you are a hopeless addict of this kind of stuff, avoid.

Katherine Kurtz - - - - - CAMBER THE HERETIC  
(Arrow, 1986, 506pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The oft-praised Deryni books are a series I've never read and I have to admit I found this book odd: a mixture of fantasy and historical modes in which the paranormal Deryni folk co-exists with 'normal' humanity in a land called Gwynedd (not, according to the map, the historical Gwynedd) and the religious impulse is catered for by the medieval Roman Catholic Church (or its equivalent: references to Jesus and John the Baptist, but no Pope).

My response suffers partly because the book is part 3 of a trilogy, partly because I do feel that the detail and ritual which is so much of the story papers over a void caused by a paradoxical lack of definition. It might have been a great historical novel of medieval Wales - perhaps it even should have been - but it patently isn't. So what is it? A rather excellent if slow-moving fantasy novel with a young king becoming the tool of an unscrupulous regency while a 'different' minority group are persecuted with graphic bloodlust. I still find the religious emphasis somewhat hollow and the opening scenes are not immediately gripping, but the story builds effectively and I found myself thinking about Kurtz's Gwynedd as the 'real' one by the end.

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Jack Vance - - - - - LYONESSE II: THE GREEN PEARL  
(Grafton, 1986, 360pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Mike Moir)

This is the second of Jack Vance's excursions into High Fantasy. I should state in advance that I am not a Vance fan, but I did read and begrudgingly enjoyed the first volume LYONESSE: SULDREN'S GARDEN. I agreed to review this book largely to find out what happened next, but did not really expect to enjoy it.

On the evidence of these two books Vance is a fine teller of tales, but not a careful plotter. SULDREN'S GARDEN irritated me for just going on and on and getting nowhere. The sole purpose seemed to be Vance enjoying his characters enjoying themselves. To a certain extent this is just his personal style, either you like it or it can quickly get very annoying.

THE GREEN PEARL is not really any different from the first volume. The only difference is that with a further 300 odd pages instead of getting more irritated I found myself beginning to get engrossed. I ended up enjoying the second volume much more than the first. He has a talent for communicating his sheer joy for writing tales, which once you are used to his quirks, makes his writing very enjoyable.

There is not much point in explaining the plot of THE GREEN PEARL it is amazingly convoluted and not very important. However for the uninitiated Lyonesse formed part of the mythical Elder Isles which in ancient times were situated somewhere south of England and north of Spain. Uther Pendragon, King Arthur's father, came from thereabouts. Vance's Lyonesse tales are all based roughly round the ancestors of Arthur.

I think the one crucial point is that 99% of all new High Fantasy is either 'Comparable to Tolkien at his best' or utter rubbish, quite often it's both. Here is the other 1%. This is high fantasy written by a very competent author in his own, slightly self indulgent way. If you're getting tired of the usual 'Tolkien-alikes' try this. I do not guarantee you will like it, but you might find it very refreshing. Meanwhile I am going to find myself some more Vance, which fortunately is abundant.

Nigel Frith - - - - -JORMUNDGAND  
(Unicorn, 1986, 210pp, £3.50)

Bernard King - - - - -STARKADDER  
(NEL, 1986, 245pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Debby Moir)

These are two quite different books on a single subject ie Norse Legends, or more specifically their Gods and heroes.

JORMUNDGAND is basically a retelling of the legend of the Norse God Frey and his quest for the unattainable ice maiden Hron. It is fleshed out with tales about his companions on the quest, which interweave and merge with the main tale. These include such well known stories as; the trip to Utgard in quest of the Utgard Cup and how it was won in spite of the trickery of the giants; a retelling of the battle of oneupmanship that was played out between the giants and the gods throughout the adventure; and the story of Thor's 'fishing trip' to catch the world serpent Jormundgand.

I found Nigel Frith's style of writing a bit stilted at first, but I was soon drawn into the narrative to such an extent that the style ceased to bother me. In my early teens I was a keen reader of all the myths and legends I could lay my hands on and I always had rather a soft spot for those of the Norse gods and heroes. I liked the way Frith wove several tales together to make a novel and also his addition of anachronisms thinly veiled as artifacts of the time. For example the 'aqualung' made of a giant cockleshell and a great bladder. This was used at various times throughout the book, without any necessity for refilling with air. I felt, however, that the visions of the future - our present were a bit out of place. For me they spoilt a good tale.

STARKADDER on the other hand, is more a retelling of a folk tale, made into popularised fantasy. It concentrates more on 'comparatively' mortal heroes than gods, although Odin does make the odd appearance. Basically it is the story of Starkadder, who is gifted by Odin with three lifetimes worth of life. The catch is that he is also cursed by Thor to end each lifespan by betraying those he serves. The novel deals with the tale of the third and last betrayal, and the events leading up to it. It begins with the killing of Angantyr by his cursed sword Tyrting which

then goes on, as if with a mind of its own, to play a major role in the unfolding of the plot.

The previous two betrayals are only sketched in and the whole plot is woven into a background of the decline of the ancient Norse gods. The final betrayal signifies the end of their rule and the beginnings of the rise of Christianity.

I have not heard of this particular tale before and therefore have no idea of how much is based on real ancient tales and how much is from the imagination of Bernard King. Therefore I was reading it as a new story set in the background of the Norse legends. In spite of that I found it a little bit predictable. However it was an enjoyable read even if it did get a bit violent and bloodthirsty at times. I will admit to looking forward to reading the sequel VARGR-MOON.

Both these books are written very much with a feeling of a modern day observer looking over the shoulder of the ancient bard or minstrel telling the legends. In places I find the feeling of *deja-vu* that this gives is a bit obtrusive and comes close to spoiling a good story.

However for people who like the Norse legends or just mythology in general, both give yet another angle on the old tales. Neither is what I would call great literature, but either would give quite a few hours of light entertainment.

Josephine Saxton - - - - -THE TRAVAILS OF JANE  
SAINT AND OTHER STORIES  
(The Women's Press, 1986, 194pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

I'm not going to attempt to describe or to categorise these stories, except to say that some of them are SF and some of them aren't; that 'The Travails of Jane Saint' is about half the book and the other five stories make up the rest. To go into more detail in such limited space as this is pointless because the stories are broader and deeper than could possibly be inferred from a one line plot synopsis.

They are a delight. They are funny, witty, pointed, thoughtful, clever, and very, very well written. I could raid the thesaurus for more laudatory adjectives but it would get a bit dull so I will merely recommend this book to you heartily. It has a combination of lightness and sureness of touch with a fundamentally serious subject which is rare, it is a book which proves that serendipity does sometimes work. Read it.

J.P. Miller - - - - -THE SKOOK  
(Arrow, 1986, 307pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Margaret Hall)

The Skook is the size of a dachshund, ivory in colour with emerald green legs, flipper-like feet and webbed fingers. Its eyes are on the ends of long stalks; it has big flappy ears, neat little horns, a long, wiggly, yellow nose, and it glows with its own inner light. It comes only in answer to the urgent need of the pure in heart.

Yeuch!!

I found it impossible to believe in the Skook. Span Barrman, the middle-aged failure, can't believe in the Skook either, when it appears to him in the cave where he has been trapped by an explosion and rockfall. After all, he invented the thing as the hero of the bedtime stories he told his daughters during his first marriage. I suppose the creature is the sort of thing a fairly unimaginative man might invent: a cutesy monstrosity, a cross between E.T., Dumbo, and Tinkerbell (Disney would have loved it), but as the key figure in a fantasy for adults, it fails dismally. When Span tells Yovi, his second wife, about how the Skook saved his life and sanity in the cave, she hints that he might not have really invented it; it might have existed somewhere before and he merely picked it up with his imagination. Well, as an eternal archetype of goodness and mercy, the Skook falls somewhat short, lacking the necessary grandeur and nobility to be convincing.

There is a lot I don't like about this book. I don't like many of the attitudes implicit in it, but mostly I don't like the fantasy. Miller has failed to grasp the fact that fantasy has to be inwardly consistent. Also it must not contravene known laws without offering some sort of explanation, even if that explanation involves magic. The presence of an extensive cave system in sandstone (geologically impossible), containing an underground ocean inhabited by coelocanths and giant, blind, aquatic cave bears is never explained - not even un-satisfactorily.

This should have been a straight adventure: a Robinson Crusoe type, survival-against-all-the-odds story. The plot hinges only on the fact that Span is buried alive, given up for dead, and then - to the chagrin of various people who are made wealthier by his death - escapes and returns to his wife. The fantasy is not only badly done, it is irrelevant to the story. I certainly wouldn't recommend this book to any lover of fantasy.

George Scithers and Darrell Schweitzer (eds.)  
 - - - - - TALES FROM THE SPACEPORT BAR  
 (Avon, 1987, 236pp, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Where best to hear stories than a bar - and where best to hear SF tall tales than Callahan's, or the White Hart, or the Draco Tavern, or the Billiards Club? These classic locales are included within this excellent and entertaining anthology, but there's also Roger Zelazny's ghost-town bar where a man and a unicorn play chess, Margaret St. Clair's San Francisco tavern where the reasons for the mess the world is in are extensively rehearsed and (my favourites) Henry Kuttner's bar where one of those freaks who know that we're really ruled by Martians tells his tale, and Avram Davidson's seedy inn where a once-celebrated entertainer is about to cobble together some old ballads he's picked up.

And it makes sense. If you'll get some pretty strange stories told in a normal bar, just think what weirdos hold court when you've got a galaxy or a space-time continuum to play with. Anyone wanting an hour or two's relaxing with a shaggy dog story ending in a well-set-up pun or a sudden twist will welcome this 'magnificent old cliché with chairs'. Perhaps even beer-barrels can be scraped: the inclusion of Schweitzer's limerick is a mistake, the R.A. Lafferty story is not one of his best and the concluding three-handed parody is a mess, but the overall standard is very high indeed. Most 'theme' anthologies are, it seems, cobbled together with a core of good stories and a greater number of makeweights: this one is built around a natural theme which lends itself to good basic story-telling and - to build upon a cliché of a slightly different kind - shows how inventive and entertaining light reading can be.

A good collection: pull up a chair, pour a drink, and join the crowd...

Jody Scott - - - - - I, VAMPIRE  
 (The Women's Press, 1986, 206pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

To understand and appreciate satire it is necessary to be familiar with what is being satirised, otherwise the jokes become meaningless and the satire is creative only of boredom or unease, never humour or sharpness. So when reading I, VAMPIRE I'm unsure whether the satire failed because I'm insufficiently familiar with what is being satirised or merely because it doesn't work anyway. The heroines are a vampire, Sterling O'Blivion, born in the Middle Ages, currently working in a dance studio in the U.S.A., and Benaroya, an alien wearing the body of Virginia Woolf (most of the time), and they are busy fending off an invasion by other aliens who are much nastier and less philanthropic than Benaroya's lot.

The plot is neither memorable or meaningful, the bits I enjoyed most were Sterling's interjected flashbacks of her personal history which were almost completely irrelevant to the plot, but were more complete in themselves than a lot of the rest of the book which I found wandered somewhat. It is an unsatisfactory book because despite being fluently written and very readable the characters and their concerns remained flat, subordinated perhaps to the humour which, in my case, worked not at all. I am uneasy about it because my lack of enjoyment may have little to do with the book and a lot to do with my own ignorance of the butt of the satire, but even bearing that in mind I can't wholeheartedly recommend it, because I found it rather dull.

Nancy Springer - - - - - WINGS OF FLAME  
 (Arrow, 1986, 252pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Margaret Hall)

There are basically two kinds of genuine folk tale or legend: there are myths, the stories of old gods, and there are hero tales, which tell mainly of human adventures. Most fantasy novels are fictional hero tales, but in WINGS OF FLAME Nancy Springer has attempted fictional myth - and it hasn't worked very well.

The book begins conventionally enough: an outcast girl is scratching a living as a servant at an inn, disguised as a boy so she will not be forced into prostitution. She is nameless, a shuntali, an un-person, because she was born the younger of a pair of twins. (Twins are considered evil because they are two where there should only have been one.) She meets the hero, Prince Kyrem, when he and his band of men stop at the inn for the night. The girl helps them escape when they are attacked, and Kyrem takes her along with him and gives her a name, Seda, which means echo in their old language. (All the names are heavily symbolic.) After various adventures, he and Seda arrive at King Auron's palace.

At the palace we learn something of the two contrasting societies. Both Devan's (Prince Kyrem's people) and Vashtins (Seda's) worship the same horse god Suth, but customs of worship and lifestyle vary considerably and behaviour acceptable in Devan society e.g. the riding of horses, is considered blasphemous by Vashtins. There are some good ideas, and Nancy Springer is obviously well read on religions and customs, but - sigh! - she doesn't really seem to be able to handle her material well enough to make the book a really good one.

It is the end which I found most unsatisfactory. The story is heavy on symbolism throughout, but in the final chapters, the symbolism dominates. The book begins to read like a treatise on The Dual Nature Of Everything. Everything has to have its light side and dark side, beauty must always be balanced by ugliness, sterility (the old King Auron) by virility (young Kyrem). The true god Suth, the horse of many colours, is seen in the final chapter to be the combination of the dark, demon-Suth and the beautiful, glowing gold, Suth of light. The story finishes with divine intervention and a mystical combining of two into one (which conveniently gets round the problem of Kyrem having married the wrong girl). It was readable, but frustrating, somehow falling short of what it could have been.

Cherry Wilder - - - - - SECOND NATURE  
 (Orion, 1986, 234pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

Human colonists crashed onto a world they call Rhomary 265 years before the book starts. (They confuse matters by having an irrational dating system in which the year their population reached 1000 was designed year 1000). In the dim past shortly after landfall, one of their families met a Vail, which is an intelligent, giant seaserpent, and had conversations with it (or rather with a small part which it extruded in order not to threaten the humans). The colonists live ordinary lives, but wait for the return of the Vail, who they idolise as wise, and also for the time when other humans will find them. They preserve civilisation by supporting the Dator, a keeper of records; a Doctor's College; and the Envoy, a descendant of the family who talked to the Vail. There are also a small group of shapechangers, just to make life more interesting, and this is a good read. Unfortunately it's the sort of book



which you start picking faults in afterwards. The thinking people of Rhomary are unhappy because they are diverging from normal humanity. How can they know this with no Earth-humans to compare themselves with? There are differences, but they are (presumably) unsightly rather than disabling (eg extra fingers), and there are problems, but none that are unknown here (the ones we hear about are giantism and hermaphroditism). There are also advantages: we meet one boy who can read auras, one woman who is clairvoyant, and many of the population have prophetic dreams. The people want the Vail back. Why? They were interested to talk to, but of no benefit. There are dolphins, but no-one ever talks to them just for enjoyment. Read this on a train.

Stephen Leigh - - - - - THE BONES OF GOD  
(Avon, 287pp, 1986, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Firstly, do not be confused by the cover. This book has nothing to do with STAR WARS, but is the story of Colin Fairwood, who may or may not be the Sartius Exori. The Sartius Exori is the prophesied messenger of the god MolitorAb, accessible to humans in the 'veildreams' of hyperspace travel. MolitorAb is the god of the Stekoni, an alien race who have willingly given humanity both their god and their hyperlight drive. None of these things are welcomed by the ruling (and anthropocentric) Zakkist church, which sets out to destroy Colin Fairwood and the myth of the Sartius Exori.

Colin Fairwood can do miracles. Some of the miracles have been set up by the Zakkist church, to build up the figure of the Sartius Exori before its final destruction. Some of the miracles may have been set up by the Stekoni, who may be using their religion as a tool to manipulate humanity. Some of the miracles, and all of Colin Fairwood's Veildreams, may be nothing more than hallucinations. He is, after all, a physically and psychologically scarred man, with a previous record of religious fanaticism and dissent. Or then again, he may really be the Sartius Exori, the Black Beginning signalling the destruction of the old order to make way for the new heaven and the new earth.

Under the veneer of silly names and SF cliches, this is a fascinating book, thoughtful and thought-provoking. I enjoyed it, and I'd recommend it as having a little extra something than the standard 'good book to read on the train'.

Joan Vinge - - - - - PHOENIX IN THE ASHES  
(Orbit, 1986, 280pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

This is a book of 6 short stories, each with an afterword and with perhaps the most exaggerating set of back cover blurbs that I've had the displeasure to see for a long time. 'A new hope rises from the ravaged earth' it says of the title story, which, though a readable sort of story, is simply a highly optimistic post holocaust love story. The sole effect, apparently, of the disaster was to divide America into a large number of village-states. Chance'd be a fine thing.

To some extent, sf is the fiction of the unlikely, but there's such a thing as taking it too far. I speak of 'The Peddler's Apprentice', apparently a pleasant rural tale in which we're expected to believe that a person would voluntarily live in suspended animation for about 9999 years out of 10000 in order to trade goods acquired in his previous waking with goods produced during the

present one. He would be completely alone in the world, as it would change so much between awakenings, and he wouldn't even make a lot of money, since currencies change fairly fast, and over such a long period of time even reliable standards like gold may fall into disuse.

'Psiren' is a sequel to her novel PSION, developing the story of Cat, who lost his psypowers after a traumatic experience. It's a fairly ordinary 'persecuted psychics' story, and that's about all I can say about it as I don't want to just write a plot summary.

'Voices From The Dust' reminds me that the time when we could use other major religions as 'colour' for our fiction has gone by. People who use an Islamic character in their fiction should, among other things, avoid having him accepting a boozing invitation. This story strikes me as a wasted opportunity. Vinge sets up a conflict of personalities based on religion, politics and sex in the first 5 pages of the story - and then does nothing with it. A disappointment.

There is, as Vinge mentions, a great deal of confusion over what constitutes sf as opposed to fantasy at the moment, but 'The Storm King' is definitely a fantasy of the morality tale type - beoming a better person through experience.

'Mother and Child' is the standout piece of this collection. Although the aliens aren't alien enough, although it makes unwarranted assumptions about human behaviour, although the conflict between hateridden man-god worshippers and lifeloving goddess worshippers is a little unimaginative this lively, 3-viewpointed story of life on a world where hearing is seen as a psychic power is definitely worth reading.

John Shirley - - - - - ECLIPSE  
(Methuen, 1986, 310pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

This is volume I of a trilogy entitled "A Song of Youth". In view of the fact that the cover depicts a man with his muscles bulging through his torn shirt, protecting a suitably submissive female in front of a decapitated Eifel Tower, it is perhaps just as well that "an important note from the author" informs us that "this is not a post-holocaust novel... It may well be that this is a pre-holocaust novel." The various 21st century settings are in fact beautifully created, even if all of them are reminiscent of settings we know and love: a war-shattered Amsterdam and Paris; a beleaguered L5 space habitat; a high-tech luxury city anchored off Morocco; the American HQ of the Fundamentalist religious leader who is behind the fascist (anti-Semitic, anti-Black) Second Alliance International Security Corporation. Many of the cyberpunk futuristic icons are here too. But it is much more obviously politically committed than Gibson or Sterling; its basis is a (plausible and frightening) extrapolation of the nuclear, racial and religious policies of the far right of the 1980s. Seen partly at least, ironically, through the eyes of a young guitarist (much more muscular on the cover than he is in the novel) who is attempting to recreate the rock music of the late 1950s and '60s. This part of the trilogy ends with an apocalyptic scene in which he and his amplified guitar defy and mock the SAISC thugs from the heights of the Arc de Triomphe, as they drive forward in their huge swastika-shaped demolition tanks ("Jaegernauts") to crush this last vestige of resistance in France. Overdone, undoubtedly, but highly effective in its symbolism and imagery. And that might stand as a verdict on the novel as a whole. It is overdone (to my taste) in its increasingly frenetic, and increasingly pulp and violent, action. But it does contain some extremely memorable characters and images, and it brings a sense of political awareness and commitment that is rare in sf. Will the rest of the trilogy relate the defeat and then eventual triumph of democracy, liberty and reason, or will Shirley's undoubted originality give us something unexpected?

Eric Frank Russell - - LIKE NOTHING ON EARTH  
(Methuen, 1986, 159pp,  
£1.95)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

I think that Eric Frank Russell (EFR) is one of the most underrated SF authors. He produced classic adventures such as SINISTER BARRIERS, based on the Fortean theme that we are owned, a novel which would undoubtedly have won the Hugo if such things had existed at the time. But the gift EFR had which most authors don't have was humour. For some reason humour fails to attract critical acclaim; there seems to be an assumption amongst critics that 'real' literature can't be funny (sad to say many writers seem to feel this way too). I can only feel pity for this (puritanical) view.

A number of themes run through many of EFR's stories; Fortean ideas, military attitudes (particularly based on those of the Axis powers in WW2) and the archetypal civil service mentality. EFR tends to isolate, exaggerate and then poke fun, sometimes gentle, sometimes severe. You'll find some of these threads in this book. EFR was one of the few British writers to be a regular contributor to John W. Campbell's 'Astounding' and these seven stories come from that magazine, from the '40s and '50s.

'Allamagoosa' is a classic and a Hugo winner. It is based on the civil service/military attitude that if the manifest says you've got something you'd better have it when the inspector comes. Whilst this is a punchline story and I know the ending it is still enjoyable. Although I say 'punchline' EFR plays with the readers and deliberately telegraphs the answer throughout the story, but I would guess few readers pick it up. 'Hobbyist'. Do you remember DANGEROUS VISIONS and the various stories about God, considered daring at the time? Well, this story beat them to it by about ten years. Like most EFR stories from 'Astounding' it's told in a light, humorous, folksy fashion even though it's a serious story (i.e. not intrinsically funny). This one still holds up well.

'Into Your Tent I'll Creep' is similar, it's really a serious story about the real masters of Earth (a Fortean theme) - dogs according to one character in the story. But it has the same easy style.

'Ultima Thule' is different, a serious story about a ship trapped in 'unspace' and the effect it has on the crew and it's told in a straightforward, perhaps melodramatic way. As such it is different from the humorous stories in this book and perhaps has more impact because of this.

Of the other three, 'The Mechanical Mice' is about a robot making lots of little robots while 'Nothing New' concerns the cyclic nature of history and some very long-lived beings and 'Exposure' is an alien invasion story with a joke ending.

So, the book gives us two classics, 'Allamagoosa' and 'The Hobbyist', two above-averages, 'Into Your Tent...' and 'Ultima Thule' and three average (but with the saving grace of humour). Not bad for a single author collection but I wonder why some of the other really good stories which appeared in 'Astounding' got left out, for example 'A Study In Still Life'.

I must moan about the cover. The artwork is a scene from 'The Hobbyist' and has lots of green monsters: add to this the title graphics and we have something which looks like a cover from 'Thrilling Wonder Stories'. I hope it doesn't harm sales.

If you've not come across EFR or you want to re-read these stories you remember with affection, read this.

Piers Anthony - - BATTLE CIRCLE (Avon, 1986,  
537pp, £4.50)

MACROSCOPE (Avon, 1986,  
480pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

BATTLE CIRCLE is SOS THE ROPE, VAR THE STICK, and NEQ THE SWORD in the omnibus volume first published 1978: probably the most sensible way to read the trilogy. While the book postulates an imaginative if far-fetched post-holocaust scenario and its treatment of ambition, heroism and revenge is well-structured and ironic, it is also heavy-handed and I certainly found it a chore to read. Kev McVeigh, in FI 59, was extremely complimentary about MACROSCOPE when reviewing Grafton's UK edition. The earlier abridged Sphere book completely baffled me, but reading the full text for the first time I have to say that despite occasional infelicities of language MACROSCOPE is actually very good and certainly rich in its sense-of-wonder quotient, from the unfolding of the identity of Schon (who is the only one who can overcome alien mindrotting transmissions) to the audacious use of Neptune itself as a spacecraft.

Fritz Leiber - - SWORDS IN THE MIST (Grafton,  
1986, 189pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Vol. 3 of the reissued series of Leiber's Fafhrd and Gray Mouser sword-and-sorcery books: an example of reprinting stories with added linking passages to produce a saga. It works in this instance (often it doesn't) although parts of 'Adept's Gambit', first published in 1947, do have a weird Tales - type crudeness in general absent from Leiber's work. The flavour of the Fafhrd/Mouser tales is delicious, ranging from sardonic wit to out-and-out farce. In this volume, 'Lean Times in Bankhmar' with its hilarious commentary on religious cults, is perhaps the best example. Our intrepid heroes have the usual S&S adventures but approach them with a mixture of devil-may-care amorality and bewildered philosophy which makes claims that these stories are the finest S&S tales ever seem pretty solidly underpinned. I enjoyed re-reading the stories and can only suggest, if you're reading them for the first time, that you savour them slowly - you lucky person!

Fritz Leiber - SWORDS AGAINST WIZARDRY  
(Grafton, 1986, 189pp,  
£2.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

This is the fourth in the SWORDS series, containing two stories the first of which considers the conquests and treasures to be had climbing a mountain, the second about two lords who each independently hire a champion to defend against the other - Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, bored with each other, are unaware they work for opposing forces. Harry Otto Fischer is credited as having written sections of the latter story.

This is a beautifully written fantasy, with a unique sense of humour, like the driest of sherries: 'The Mouser trod on him. He thought he heard ribs snap as Fafhrd did the same, which seemed a nice if brutal touch.' (p. 13) And you really sympathise with the Mouser's plight, stuck half-way up a mountain chimney because Fafhrd has abandoned him in favour of one of Stardock's enchanting maidens (p. 61).

I'm getting the whole series.

Ian Watson - - THE BOOK OF BEING (Grafton, 1986, 223pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

At last, the concluding volume of Ian Watson's trilogy. To say that this is a continuation of the story begun in THE BOOK OF THE RIVER and THE BOOK OF THE STARS would be misleading; nevertheless readers new to the series would do best by starting at the beginning. BEING attempts to draw together all the threads from the preceding volumes and provide an all-encompassing framework to the trilogy. Part three of BEING indeed suggests a model for the whole series: Yaleen's world and experiences as a tapestry, one of 'All The Tapestries Of Time'.

The world-view that eventually flourishes in BEING appears to owe much to modern physics. Watson describes a universe made of '...grains of choice. Grains of virtual existence'; he calls these grains 'electons'. Later, a character describes the act of perception in terms of waves of energy, 'image, echo, aspect, reflection.' Wave-particle duality? The repeated winding and unwinding of events, Yaleen's zipping back and forth in different forms along the time line all suggest the dances of modern particle physics, complicated paths on a Feynman diagram. For all that the fanciful events of the trilogy imply that the whole is a fantasy, throughout there are indications that THE BOOKS are rooted in science, albeit the fuzzy-at-the-edges realm of quantum theory.

I feel that Watson is trying to put reviewers and critics out of business, as the trilogy is its own best commentary. Every reader will see something different in it - I have myself only begun to see through some of the mythological references - but whichever way you look at it this trilogy is a masterpiece.

Cyril Joly - - SILENT NIGHT: THE DEFEAT OF NATO (Grafton, 1986, 304pp, £2.95)

Dennis Jones - - BARBAROSSA RED (Arrow, 1986, 366pp, £2.50)

Alan White - - BLACK ALERT (Grafton, 1986, 328pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Before both World Wars (so the histories of SF tell us) there was a veritable mini-industry of 'future-war' stories describing the forthcoming conflict.

These three books are enough to make you worry.

Mind, you'll worry just as much if all you're looking for is a good thriller, because not only do these books feel as if they've been written to order by a Ministry of Propaganda, they read as if they've been cobbled together by a computer with a headache.

When you're writing this kind of near-future book, you've either got to disguise real characters as fictional ones, invent a few fictional ones as bland as the real ones, or go ahead and use the real names and hope that they won't die by the time the book's published. Alan White, for example, is thus caught out by changes in the Russian leadership since he wrote the book: still, as most of his readers won't know who the Soviet leaders are anyway, it won't matter. A (male) British P.M. and U.S. President are unidentified by name. The central character is a British Minister of Defence who has to operate a plan to ensure survival of an elite

when the Russians target a nuclear satellite to land in London within hours. Naturally, the book is written from a stance of almost total support for the West.

BARBAROSSA RED is concerned with a West German Government which takes the country out of NATO. The Soviets walk in, just like the Daily Mail tells us they will. The novel does have some tension, though, in that the revelations about who actually is a Soviet mole don't let up until the end. In contrast, the very similar SILENT NIGHT (in which Russian-backed terrorists infiltrate Western Europe over Christmas and strike to destabilize and allow Russian military forces to intervene) is a lightly-fictionalised tract on the thesis that ever since 1917 the Soviets have aimed at expansion and the best form of defence is nuclear deterrence. Even supporters of the author's politics (Cyril Joly is a former SHAPE staff officer) ought to be alarmed by the book's wooden dialogue and lack of characterisation.

I suppose it's naive to be concerned about these books' apparent unwillingness to debate the issues concerned, or even that they are classic examples of the fact that propaganda (from whatever stance) generally makes bad literature. I cite them as examples of near-SF which make some of the attitudes expressed in genre-SF look like mainstream liberalism...

Andrew Chapman &

Martin Allen - - CLASH OF THE PRINCES (Puffin, 1986, 2 vols., £3.50)

Steve Jackson - - ROBOT COMMANDO (Puffin, 1986, £1.95)

Robin Waterfield - - MASKS OF MAYHEM (Puffin, 1986, £1.95)

Steve Jackson &

Ian Livingstone - - TITAN: THE FIGHTING FANTASY WORLD (Puffin, 1986, 128pp, £4.95)

Joe Dever & Gary Chalk - - THE MAGNAMUND COMPANION (Beaver, 1986, 96pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Something new, but quite a lot that isn't. CLASH OF THE PRINCES is a two-handed adventure (although it's also possible to play it solo) featuring twin brothers whose roles you take. One is a warrior, another a warlock and the prize is the throne of Gundobad. Ingenious; it shows the remains of life what's becoming a moribund genre. ROBOT COMMANDO has a science fiction scenario (robots herding dinosaurs) which reminds me of an early 2000AD story. MASKS OF MAYHEM is another fantasy adventure game set against the loose background of the world of Titan - explored and catalogued by Marc Gascoigne in Jackson/Livingstone's book of the same name. Like last year's OUT OF THE PIT, this is a glossy, large-format production. In style it's Tolkien-and-water stiffened with a good shot of horror-comic ghoulishness; essential, I'd say for FF fans and - although it's almost wholly derivative - worth a look at on its own account, being well-illustrated and comprehensive.

Aimed at a slightly lower age-group but filling a similar function is THE MAGNAMUND COMPANION which charts the world of the 'Lone Wolf' FRP games. Containing games and activities (such as a guide to constructing models of buildings or ships from this world) it's cruder than TITAN (I found the picture of a dissected Giak on pp. 66/7 quite revolting) but perhaps it may be a useful present for a younger sibling who's into gaming.

Timothy Zahn - - THE BLACKCOLLAR (Arrow/Venture SF 11, 1986, 272pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Confession time: although I normally disregard 'space opera', I've been buying all the Venture SF books. Not that I've read them all - they're bedside reading for insomniac nights - but I did get deeply into Timothy Zahn's 1983 thriller and I have to tell you all that I thoroughly enjoyed it.

The Terran Democratic Empire's many planets are all under the heel of aliens; the Blackcollars (highly skilled and chemically enhanced commandos) have gone underground, all Terrans in positions of authority have been conditioned to support the invaders, but revolution still lives in the hearts of men and we follow our hero across space to two occupied planets where all kinds of mayhem break loose.

It's not a conclusive story - that's why DAW has now published THE BACKLASH MISSION, a sequel, but it's well crafted, taut, intriguing, shows few incredible holes and those well cobbled over, and has the overwhelming advantage of heroes who behave with courtesy and forbearance, who kill only when necessary, and who perform that particular act with none of the psychotically titillating depth of description that we have come to expect from the genre.

Nobody asked me to review this book - I did it because I wanted to, and that itself, I feel, speaks more than any words of mine could do.

Isaac Asimov, C. Waugh, & M. K. Greenberg (eds.) - - THE TWELVE FRIGHTS OF CHRISTMAS (Avon, 1986, 263pp, \$3.50)

Ramsey Campbell's 'The Chimney' opens this anthology with a genuinely seasonal horror story, and Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Star' is, of course, an old friend (though not a chiller in the same way). But between these two obvious and excellent choices for a Christmas anthology is a ragbag collection of tired SF and worn-out ghost stories. Some interesting writers (Wells, Stevenson, Gaskell, Lovecraft, Bloch) and with more editorial matter this could have been passable, but as it is the stories are just plunked in front of us and in only a few cases are they really strong or relevant enough to catch the interest. (Andy Sawyer)

Larry Niven - - FOOTFALL (Sphere, 1986, 700pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

FOOTFALL might be compared to the 1812 Overture as performed by a technically competent music school orchestra: FOOTFALL is noisy, eventful, and although the rendering of the themes is competent it lacks the vital spark of originality that demarks the border between the technician and the artist. Indeed the aftertaste of FOOTFALL is similar to that experienced after such a performance. The reader is unable to muster any emotion from the event although he is able to admire the technical virtuosity. The experience is homologous with all such previous interpretations of the theme. FOOTFALL is not bad enough to condemn and yet I can find nothing in the novel to commend.

The plot describes the invasion of earth by aliens who bear a strong resemblance to

elephants with digits at the end of their trunks. The book details the struggle against these hordes of intergalactic pachyderms.

The story moves at the cracking pace expected of Niven and Pournelle. The characters are the colourless two-dimensional stereotypes inevitable in hard SF. There is some intentional humour lying mainly in the actions of the corps of SF writers that the President engages to assess the aliens' psychology but most of the book is dull and lifeless. A possible investigation of the herd instinct of the aliens, which the writers find analagous to communism, and the 'rugged individualism' of the Americans is missed.

No doubt FOOTFALL will sell in vast quantities. If, as has been claimed, the history of literature is moulded by best-sellers then a future historian might use FOOTFALL et al as marking the beginning of the end for SF.

Patricia Kennealy - - THE COPPER CROWN (Grafton, 1986, 512pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by David V. Barrett)

At first it seemed a brave idea to have a Celtic civilisation set in the far future in a far distant section of the galaxy. But Patricia Kennealy has blown it. THE COPPER CROWN ('the first bovel of The Keltiad, a stunning re-creation of Keltic myths, history -- and future') is just another space opera, except the characters have names like Aeron Aoibhell and Gwydion ap Arawn.

(Despite a very comprehensive pronunciation guide, Kennealy insists on this bastardised spelling to make sure her poor confused readers don't say Seltic.)

Many thousand years ago, Brendan led the Celts away from Britain to escape the new religion that was beginning to smother their own. The Celts, by the way, had come to Britain from Atlantis millenia before, and to Atlantis from space yet more millenia before that.

So now, far in the future, an earth craft meets up with a Keltic scout ship -- the first contact. What happens? High intrigue, plotting, betrayal, battles, love -- not a lot that's new. Why Ms Kennealy should expect us to believe that thousands of years from now there will be a great Celtic (sorry, Keltic) war chief, with a wife called Gweniver, whose exploits mirror so closely those of the mythic-historical Arthur... it's unnecessary, and it doesn't work.

What does work is the magic. It's not a case of muttering a quick incantation and your opponent will turn into a toad. Kennealy shows the long training of those skilled in magic, the psychic and physical exhaustion its practice can bring, the fact that it is never entered into lightly. Magic, as her characters practise it, is a person in tune with the ancient Powers and with nature. You don't play around with the gods, like Kennealy plays around with myths.

R.A. MacAvoy - - TWISTING THE ROPE (Bantam/Spectra, 1986, 242pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Judith Henca)

'Twisting the Rope' is an Irish folksong, a title aptly applied to this story as a handful of folk musos touring as 'MacNamara's Band', the strands of their lives thus twisted together into a plot. MacAvoy continues her adulation of fiddler Martha MacNamara and Mayland Long, introduced in TEA

WITH THE BLACK DRAGON. The story, suffused by MacAvoy's enthusiasms for Celtic and Eastern tradition and a gentle mockery of Californian 'mellow' dharma, is a murder mystery (naturally, it's the nasty guy who gets it) with obligatory romantic interest and an incursion of psychic horror. A clever enough story to keep me up past midnight to finish, but unsatisfying. One remains conscious that it's a 'made-up' story, the plot a clever peg for the display of the enthusiasms mentioned above. There's no requirement that a story should touch the reader's feelings or tackle the hard questions behind the ideals and conflicts it describes. But unless it does so it will be no more than disposable train or bed-time reading.

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Isaac Asimov - - ROBOTS AND EMPIRE (Grafton, 1986, 508pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

This is another attempt to connect the early Galactic Empire novels and the Foundation and Robot series - and hardly a page went by at which I didn't grind my teeth.

In it there are so many silly conversations, forced plot devices, inaccuracies, oversights and so much repetition that chapters 42 and 73, at least, and a hundred other pages could have been chopped. Robots Daneel and Giscard are emotional, something Asimov attempts at various points to excuse, and they think illogically too. What doesn't help are inappropriate stresses (why is Gladia's falling asleep important?), some bad phraseology and moments of such sentimentality they drip indigestible syrup.

A simple plot: the two robots develop the Zeroth Law of Robotics which they hope will help them save life on Earth. Despite my complaints, the pacing and characterisation are well handled, so I doubt fans will be disappointed.

Keep in the toilet for maximum enjoyment.

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M. John Harrison - - THE CENTAURI DEVICE (Unwin/Orion, 1986, 212pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

This is Harrison's third novel, first published in 1974, and now brought back into print to stand alongside his 'Viriconium' books. John Truck, loser, freighter captain, finds himself very much in demand when it is discovered that he is the last of the Centauran Race, the only man alive who holds the key to the untold power of the Centauri device.

In terms of content none of this is particularly new. Even some of the style rings a bell - a dash of Ballard, a hint of Ellison, a smattering of Bayley, more than a little Bester - but the voice is distinctive. It's a beautifully cynical presentation of a decaying galaxy, populated by pushers, priests, whores and anarchists, as well as a few odd characters, like Dr. Grishkin, 'that peculiar priest' - who has windows in his abdomen. I don't think this book can lay claim to any deep meaning; if there is any, it passed me by. But it is a damned good read. And what's so new about cyberpunk, anyway?

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Peter Valentine Timlett - - THE SEED BEARERS (Orbit, 1986, 282pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This reprint of an occult fantasy novel first published in 1974 is, according to THE

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE, the first volume of the inevitable trilogy.

The book opens with the multiple rape and murder of a thirteen year old girl, and continues with the mass slaughter of 10,000 peaceful villagers, the bizarre execution of male and female prisoners of war in a black-magic ceremony, and charming descriptions of the quaint customs of a race of fighting slaves (which include cannibalism and the use of rendered human fat as a kind of sun-tan oil). And we have just reached page 11.

The plot concerns the corruption and degeneracy of Atlantean society, and its consequent destruction by the Occult Powers (of Truth, Justice and the American Way, one assumes). Of course, there are a few chosen survivors; notably Helios, a hunk in priest's clothing, and Netziachos, the woman destined to be his mate.

In summary, a rather nasty book. Avoid.

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Richard S. McEnroe - - FLIGHT OF HONOUR (Orbit, 1986, 149pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

Hardcore SF's essential conservatism belies its apparently forward-looking idiom. FLIGHT OF HONOUR has the feel of an attempt to emulate the masters of hard SF although McEnroe has yet to develop the technical skill to fulfil his aspirations. As such, he is like an art student who passes his days at the Tate creating poor pastiches of Lichtenstein. FLIGHT OF HONOUR is a dire, thankfully short, book.

The action scenes are poorly handled and the characterisation is almost absent. The plot is so minimal that encapsulation for the purposes of review would ruin the book for anyone who may read it. However, McEnroe's description of the sociology of the alien culture and of the future southern hemisphere is competent and almost believable. In this respect, McEnroe shows potential and it is obvious that his strength lies in reflection rather than in the description of action. Notwithstanding the fact that McEnroe intends to divert rather than edify, the execution of the novel, especially in terms of plotting and characterisation, defeats his objective.

Portions of FLIGHT OF HONOUR were published in 'a somewhat different form' in IASFM and indeed it is best suited to the transient existence of a magazine. Although FLIGHT OF HONOUR shows some promise it does not warrant the dignity of being published as a novel.

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Seamus Cullen - - THE SULTAN'S TURRET (Orbit, 1986, 252pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

A semi-sequel to NOOSE OF LIGHT, although set several hundred years later, at the time of the conflict between Christian and Moor in Spain. The fantasy elements explore a tradition different from the Western European culture - namely that of the Islamic nations. However, it's very much a Western interpretation, full of 'colour' and silly bawdiness. Which is a pity, because there are some strong ideas in the actual story, which involves the adventures of Dinah, the granddaughter of Solomon, the Sultan's adviser, against the background of the Wars in Spain. I certainly liked it more than the previous book (particularly the interplay between Dinah and the Nubian Joseph), and possibly I just have the wrong sense of humour to recommend it, because the nearer it got to being a straightforward historical romance the more I liked it.

Tom Deitz - - WINDMASTER'S BANE (Avon, 1986, 279pp, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

When I pick up books by young American writers obsessed by Celtic myth I tend, more often than not, to cringe. WINDMASTER'S BANE is yet another Celtic fantasy in which the Sidhe/Elf-folk/Faeries impinge upon our world. David Sullivan becomes touched with the gift of second sight and views the Sidhe on one of their few paths which still touch the present earth, a path which runs by his family's farm. What is at first a dream come true for a boy who immerses himself in fantasy and mythology becomes great danger as David is caught up in rivalries among the Sidhe themselves.

But I don't cringe at this book. Why? Because Tom Deitz has a genuine sympathy with his sources, which means, as far as I am concerned, stressing the perilous beauty, amorality and other-worldness of the Faerie realm, and avoiding writing human concerns into it. He has also given us something more than ciphers for characters, with underlying concerns of their own. Thus, David is reminded several times in the story that he - as an American - has his own culture, neatly commenting upon the accusation which might be made of Deitz that he is slumming among Celtic lore for a mystical fix. Thus, David's father, Big Billy, is something of a Georgia redneck but is not depicted as the ogre his structure in the story suggests he 'ought' to be: a slight shift away from caricature, perhaps, but is it not true that good writing is so often a matter of slight and subtle touches? David finds himself shifting closer to his girlfriend Liz, away from his buddy Alec, as the story progresses, but this is neither obtrusive nor mawkish, merely a sign that David is a 'real' character.

The denouement rather too openly suggests a sequel or two, which I'm not sure is a good idea, despite the fact that I found myself wanting to know more about the intriguing universe which the Sidhe inhabit. WINDMASTER'S BANE seems to possess welcome imagination and intelligence in the writing: a far cry from the lightly-fleshed role-playing games we are increasingly given under the name of fantasy. Deitz's final 'historical note' suggests an interesting fusion of Celtic and Amerindian mythologies towards which I hope he will move; he has, I'm sure, the ability to create something stunning if this entertaining and promising first novel is anything to go by.

James P. Hogan - - THE PROTEUS OPERATION (Bantam, 1986, 407pp, \$4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

At last - an alternate history story written for people loving in a different universe!

I mean, surely the average SF reader knows, at least in more than adequate outline, the events that led up to World War II and the invasions that followed its outbreak? Yet I'd estimate at least 60% of this book is devoted to reporting, re-creating with a wealth of invented chat between famous protagonists, those same events.

Meanwhile, the two or more alternate universes are dismissed cavalierly with little historical justification, and that pretty unconvincing. So what we have here is two unbelievable universes providing the men who make our own world what we know it is anyway: surely hardly the material of which cliff-hangers are made?

The poor portraits of Hitler, Churchill and Einstein on the front cover are truly an indication of the poor attempts Hogan makes of characterising them in this fact-heavy,

slow-action thriller which is, I must stress, all the more disappointing to me because alternate history is my absolute favourite SF format. I suppose I should be even more sorry because Hogan is, albeit an emigre by choice, British by birth, and I must say that (unlike him) having actually experienced the years he discusses I can vouch for his historical accuracy - but surely that's not something an SF novel should be proud of? I'm sorry - I read every word with care, hoping all the time for something good to say about what that noted literary judge, the critic of the Chicago Sun-Times, described as 'a first-class thriller... his best book to date', and the equally famous Kirkus Reviews (the only other quote in the blurb) called 'an ambitious, expertly handled yarn.' Maybe they don't usually read SF?

James Blackstone - - TORCHED! (Grafton, 1986, 223pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

'She expired under her orgasm like an animal beneath a speeding car.' Is James Blackstone the D.H. Lawrence of pulp fiction? More likely he's just a failed Penthouse letter writer.

TORCHED is a tacky rip-off of Stephen King's FIRESTARTER with added sexism. The story involves two insurance investigators who stumble upon a series of seemingly unconnected fires. Eventually they decide that these fires were all started by examples of spontaneous human combustion, and begin to hunt the pyromaniac responsible. They suffer a minor setback when one of the bursts into flame on a jet in mid-flight, presumably in the smoking section.

The female characters all have 'pouting breasts' and the men all have grim expressions. Blackstone's feeble attempts at a scientific explanation for spontaneous human combustion is riddled with simple errors. This book is so bad that it has not even got a quote from Stephen King on the cover.

George C. Chesbro - - THE BEASTS OF VALHALLA (Grafton, 1986, 414pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Sometimes a book which sits neatly on the fringe of several genres merely succeeds in fusing the weaknesses of them all. But when the author does it well, as I think he has in this case, you've got a pretty explosive mixture.

Private Eye Mongo, once a circus dwarf and now a Professor of Criminology among his other talents, returns to the hick county where he was brought up to attend the funeral of a nephew. Was it really a gay suicide pact? And what is the secret of the Volsung Corporation? Horrific genetic engineering experiments and a knowing tip of the hat to THE LORD OF THE RINGS, plus one of the fastest-moving plots I've read for a long time, full of sudden reverses and hairs-breadth escapes, make this a book for anyone who ever thrilled to a Doc Savage adventure.

Take any one of its parts and it's by no means original: analyse its structure and you'll find it's suspiciously like one of those pulp serials which were made up as the writer went along. It's also compulsively readable and kept me hooked all the way through. THE BEASTS OF VALHALLA is the first I've read of the Mongo series, but it won't be the last.

Barbara Hambly - - THE LADIES OF MANDRIGYN  
(Unicorn, 1986, 329pp,  
£2.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

The UK edition of this excellent book sports one of the silliest pieces of cover art I've seen for a long time. That, however, is my only gripe about this book, and Barbara Hambly is blameless in connection with it.

If you're looking for a Thinking Woman's Ripping Yarn, look no further. THE LADIES OF MANDRIGYN is this year's model, and a thoroughly enjoyable read it is, too. Hambly has taken a good old-fashioned standard fantasy setting, and sharpened it up by being that much more thoughtful, that much more perceptive, and that much more realistic than your average mass-market fantasy writer.

The plot is simple. The city of Mandrigyn has been conquered by the evil wizard Altiokis; all its able-bodied men killed or enslaved in the mines. The women of Mandrigyn have traditionally taken no active part in business or politics, but in desperation they determine to hire a troop of mercenaries to free their men from the mines and lead a revolt against Altiokis. Unfortunately, their original plan is somewhat over-optimistic. What they actually do is kidnap one mercenary leader, Sun Wolf, who in the absence of men starts training the women as a guerilla force. He is forced to revise his opinion of women rather rapidly, discovering that although the ladies of Mandrigyn aren't much like the men he's used to training, neither are they much like the 'china-doll' stereotype of the role they've been forced into by society. Meanwhile Sun Wolf's second-in-command is scouring the country for him, believing him to have been abducted by Altiokis, the only wizard left in the world.

This is a thoroughly excellent book of its kind, absorbing, believable, and well-written. I urge you to buy it forthwith.

Robert Heinlein - - THE CAT WHO WALKS  
THROUGH WALLS (N.E.L.,  
1986, 420pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul Fernandez)

The book seems to fall into two sections. The first makes for better reading - an unaccountable death, a mysterious blood-brotherhood, an overtly hostile authority, and a woman who turns out to be Hazel Stone, from SPACE FAMILY STONE and THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS. After this, the narrative deteriorates. The characters are transported into one of Heinlein's other universes, and meet up with characters from TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE, and THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST. They are caught up in a plot to rescue Mike, the super-computer from HARSH MISTRESS. It seems that their chances of survival on this mission are very poor. This came as something of a relief to me as, by this point in the novel, tinkering with time by Heinlein's characters seemed to have rendered them virtually indestructible.

This half of the book is complicated, almost totally irrelevant to the preceding chapters, and meaningless to anyone who hasn't read the other Heinlein books. The book ends without explaining most of the action in the first fifty pages.

It is a shame that, having built up the elements of an excellent thriller in the first 200 pages or so, Heinlein should choose to transfer action into the much less credible universe of his former novels. By now, he should have the confidence to try new ideas, rather than relying on past successes.



## Capsules ...

Piers Anthony - - GOLEM IN THE GEARS (Orbit,  
1986, 326pp, £2.50)

More pun-ridden adventures in the magical land of Xanth. The plot, indeed the whole series, can be taken as tongue-in-cheek allegory or just as revelling in wordplay, so to detail it would be inappropriate. Light and playful if you like puns and in-jokes. Tedious if you don't. I incline to the former. (Andy Sawyer)

Isaac Asimov - - NINE TOMORROWS (Grafton,  
1986, 268pp, £2.50)

Nine stories from the mid-fifties, some awful poetry and a Chris Foss cover. I'm sure most of us read this many years ago and I can't think of any reason to recommend this reprint other than the fact that there are none of the Good Doctor's usual excruciating story notes. Anyone unfamiliar with Asimov's short fiction would do better to buy THE COMPLETE ROBOT or NIGHT-FALL. (Colin Bird).

Isaac Asimov, Martin Greenberg,  
& Charles Waugh (eds.) - - ASIMOV'S  
EXTRATERRESTRIALS  
(Dragon, 1986, 204  
pp, £1.95)  
ASIMOV'S MUTANTS  
(Dragon, 1986, 201  
pp, £1.95)

Uneven collections for children, mostly featuring young protagonists. MUTANTS has an excellent Frederick Brown, a good Brunner, and a poignant Bradbury. EXTRATERRESTRIALS has a typically off-beat Lafferty and James E. Gunn's oft-anthologised 'Kindergarten', but weak selections from E.F. Russell, Keith Laumer and Zenna Henderson. (Andy Sawyer)

Harry Harrison - - BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO  
(Avon, 1986, 185pp, £3.50)

Reissue of Harrison's classic 1965 send-up of militaristic skiffy nonsense. Deserves to be on the shelves of every right-thinking SF fan. Especially right-thinking SF fans. (Andy Sawyer)

Richard S. McEnroe - - SKINNER (Orbit, 1986, 198pp, £2.50)

'Neither particularly good nor particularly bad' was Helen McNabb's verdict of the U.S. edition (PI 58). McEnroe's story of forced labour, dragon-hunting, and wheeling and dealing is fast-paced and succinctly narrated but no more than an adequate SF thriller. If McEnroe could be given the opportunity to flesh out his 'Far Stars and Future Times' series it might be beneficial: his background is as inventive as more celebrated future-histories but doesn't surface enough above his rather routine stories. (Andy Sawyer)

R.M. Meluch - - SOVEREIGN (Orbit, 1986, 230pp, £2.50)

What starts as a diverting, well-written saga of the rite-of-passage of a young boy soon becomes a space opera as the youth proves himself in the intergalactic war that rages around his home planet. The familiarity of

the material in the latter half of SOVEREIGN cancels out some of the author's nice touches in the early section. The abrupt narrative style doesn't help the overly complex plot to develop in a linear manner. Competent. (Colin Bird).

Christopher Pike - - THE TACHYON WEB (Bantam, 1986, 197pp, £2.75)

Five youngsters steal a spaceship and take it beyond the forbidden boundary of known space, becoming involved with aliens fleeing from a nova which has destroyed their homeworld. Well-written, fast-moving space opera, often pure hokum but well suited to the 11+ audience at which it is aimed. (Paul J. McAuley)

Guy N. Smith - - CANNIBALS (Arrow, 1986, 208pp, £1.95)

Holidaymakers in a remote Scottish village discover a race of cannibals lurking in the mountains. Or cannibals discover a new food supply... (Andy Sawyer)

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