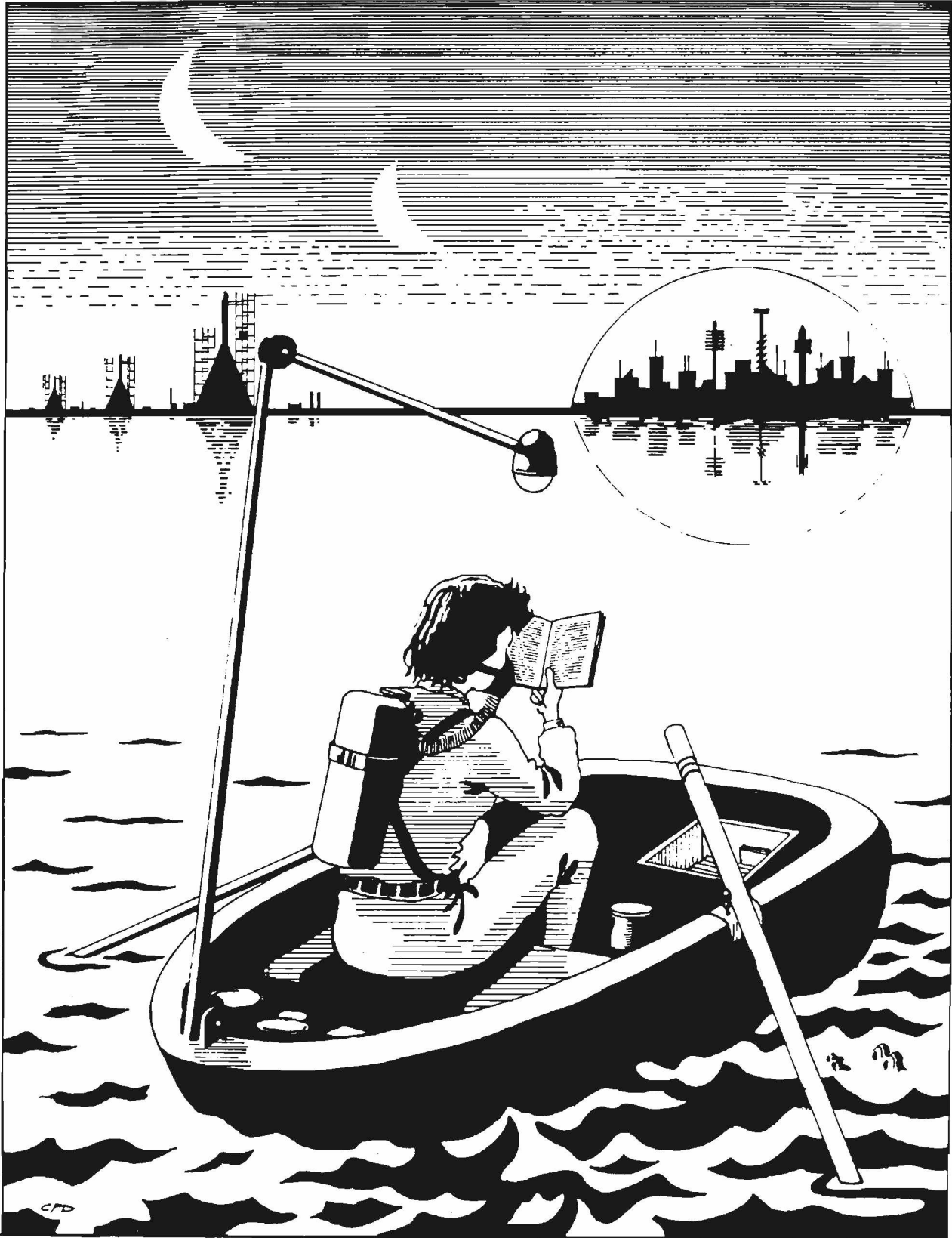


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Paperback Purgatory

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You may wonder why for this issue's CLOSER ENCOUNTERS column (which focuses on books which for some reason I think have special interest), I've chosen a book which has been reviewed before (PI 55) and two Robert A. Heinlein reprints, particularly as those of you who know my opinion of recent Heinlein will realise that I've hardly a good word to say about the overblown self-centred novels he's now writing. The second look at the Schulman is largely self-explanatory - the Avon edition comes with an appendix of laudatory essays inviting us to look at the book as a combination of poetic vision and social tract, while these Heinlein reprints remind us of times when he gave us more pure Story and - as both Ken and Graham point out these books have their flaws they are still, I believe, worthwhile and readable exercises in the art of storytelling.

But what do we mean by storytelling? I'm not one of those who believe that 'art' exists on its own separate from values, but if this were to be the case, perhaps the clearest instance would be the pure entertainment story where the emphasis is on what is happening in the fictional world itself. This often means plot emphasised to the exclusion of character and 'style': the purest instance of this is folktale where what we are after is, say, the story of Jack the Giantkiller. 'Jack' as a fully rounded character or 'Jack' and 'the Giant' as symbolic representations of the indomitable spirit of the people against the overwhelming rapaciousness of Church and State, or even 'Jack the Giantkiller' as a metaphysical touchstone for a contemporary story - all these come a long way down the line, particularly if we are hearing the story for the first time. Each storyteller does have his or her individual mode of telling: to one, the story is terrifying; to another, humorous: one might even retell the story from the Giant's viewpoint or make it 'Jill the Giantkiller'. This is what makes us prefer one version to another, and certainly knowing that other versions exist can do us nothing but good - but what draws us in is the pace and suspense of a tale to be told for our enjoyment.

The storytelling tradition represented by the two Heinlein books (the pulp-based SF tradition of the USA) has its dreadful side, well rehearsed by people with far more credentials to do so than I. Its modern heirs are positively sinister. But if you accept that a good story is one which reaches out to as many people as possible and uses conflict, suspense and invention to exercise their imaginations and leave them with an increase - rather than a decrease in sympathy towards others, then these are good stories. Writing 'good honest entertainment' for a mass audience is probably an activity which spawns more cynicism and sheer blather than any other bar religion and politics. But - while a 'big name' on the cover is no guarantee of success and it does us good sometimes to be reminded that some of SF's 'big names' are very small fish indeed compared to some of the whoppers out there in the lakes of bestsellerdom - some surprisingly good reads have come out of the pressure to make a sale and the call of the quick buck. Perhaps one accepts as naivities what in other contexts would be shoddiness or pretentiousness? Too often, I think, we accept second-rate because 'it's only a story - not meant to be art', but almost as often we overlook the ability of an author to produce inventive entertainment: a need which we all have. In re-reading DOUBLE STAR and ORPHANS OF THE SKY we can see at once two things - that Heinlein's current output is embarrassingly awful in comparison, and that when he was really exercising the storyteller's craft (of which barely a glimpse remains among the hypocritical essays into metafiction) he was

very good indeed at it. I'm less clear where I stand on THE RAINBOW CADENZA which Alan Fraser described as 'the definitive curate's egg - bad, but parts of it are excellent' and to which Ken Lake in this issue compares THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS to the latter's detriment. Perhaps this is the lesson: that where books set themselves out of the arena of pure story they become more problematical.

One or two 'Administrative Memos':

Next issue should see the appearance of Chuck Bodger in PI. Who? Come on, this is supposed to be a Teasing Trailer: do allow me my little attempts at suspense!

Chris Bailey has let me know that he is no longer able to produce F&SF magazine

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"Upon the rack in print"...

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, MID-DECEMBER 1986, JANUARY, FEBRUARY and MARCH 1987, and ANALOG, JANUARY, FEBRUARY and MARCH 1987

Reviewed by Edward James

I have been writing these reviews of the Davis magazines regularly for exactly two years now, and I have just received my first response from a reader. Feedback! At last! "It's my favourite part of the BSFA mailings", this admirable person said. It was Andrew Weiner, in fact, commenting on my review of his story "The News from D Street", in *Asimov's* for September 1986. I wondered whether it had been a conscious up-dating of Pohl's "The Tunnel under the World", and Weiner confirmed my guess: "I was puzzled when the *Asimov's* blurb writer described my story as 'original', but it's good to see someone who remembers." It's good to see someone who reads this column too...

I am able to review rather more issues than usual this time, because of the generosity of Davis Magazines, who are now sending me review copies of both, rather more quickly than Ken Slater was able to get them to me via his distributor. (Though remember if you want to buy a particular issue that I recommend, a letter to Ken at Fantast (Medway) Ltd., P.O.Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU, would get you a copy pretty quickly.) Two serials take up a fair amount of space in these issues. The first is Larry Niven's *The Smoke Ring* (the sequel to *The Integral Trees*), which began in the January issue of *Analog* and won't finish until April (so see next issue of *PI*), and Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers*, in *Asimov's* from Mid-December until February. Swanwick is the man who wrote a "User's Guide to the Post-Moderns" in the August issue, about the bewildering array of groups into which the new sf writers fit themselves or are fitted by others; here at least he shows himself fairly firmly in the camp of the cyberpunks. Much of the usual paraphernalia is there: low life and high(-tech) jinks, mostly in the L5 worlds near the Earth (although the heroine comes from a Dyson world). The computer gimmick this time is "wetware": chips which can change someone's whole personality as easily as changing clothes. The plot consists a series of escapades in which big business tries to get hold of a newly designed persona (a potential gold-mine for those who can mass-market it) from the woman in whose mind it is lodged. The potential of the idea is never fully realised, but it contains some memorable images, moves at a good pace, and is a clear improvement on Swanwick's first novel, *In the Drift*.

The Mid-December *Asimov's* contained *Asimov's* first robot story in ten years, "Robot Dreams": another brief and unexceptional chapter in the life of Susan Calvin. Much better is a visit to Bradbury country by Lucius Shepard, in "Dancing It All Away at Nadoka" (Professor Sombra's antique - and haunted - music machines); the yeti story with, amazingly, a new twist, by Pat Murphy ("In the Abode of the Snows"); and "Laugh Track", in which Harlan Ellison employs a good deal of well-researched background in a story about a woman's laugh, endlessly recycled in the canned audience response on sitcoms. (Spoilt slightly for me by his use of the name Bill Tidy for one of the characters; it means nothing in the US, presumably, but is fairly familiar over here.)

The first *Asimov's* of 1987 led with Orson Scott Card's "America", yet another story of the meeting between secular North America and the spiritual and magical world of central or (in this case) southern America. The dénouement is different (the recovery of the continent by "real" Americans after the holocaust created by the European colonists), and the writing is as sensitive as Shepard or Tiptree could have managed. The second novelette was not nearly so successful: Walter Jon Williams's "Wolf Time" showed once more that cyberpunk can be no more than old-fashioned space opera with the addition of microchips and rather more gore. Much more interesting were the three short stories; John Barnes's musings on the future evolution of rodents ("Digressions from the Second Person Future"); "Bringing in the Sheaves", a typical piece of entertaining nastiness from Rudy Rucker which (I take it) satirises religious enthusiasm; and Gene Wolfe's "The Peace Spy", a tale from the near future, in which the children of high placed personages in West and East go East and West to act as hostages against nuclear war, with renewed conventional war (in Europe and Asia) being seen as better (for Russia and America) than the possibility of the holocaust. A far-fetched scenario, I thought, until I read this week's *New Scientist* (last one in February, p. 30) and found an American scientist suggesting hostage-taking in all seriousness. Had he read the January *Asimov's*?

The February issue was not nearly so interesting. "Aurin Tree", A pallid fantasy from M.J. Engh; "Dutchman", a piece of vintage heroism and interstellar warfare from Jack McDevitt; and another excruciating Azazel tale from Isaac Asimov (can't Gardner Dozois do his duty as editor and save us from these?). Best things in the issue were "The Gift", a poem about electronically induced happiness from Joe Haldeman, and an entertaining and intelligent piece of whimsy from the eccentric James P. Blaylock, "Myron Chester and the Toads".

Asimov's for March was much more interesting. Orson Scott Card's novella "Eye for Eye" was a sensitive story of an adolescent with the ability to wish death on people, with, surprisingly, a nice line in humour centred on the sinister Bible-quoting figure who sees this gift to curse effectively as a gift from God. Harry Turtledove added another chapter to his series about an alternative Byzantium with "Images", which captured the theological atmosphere of the time very accurately and amusingly, and added further to our understanding of where his world differed from ours. (Muhammed became a Christian saint; monotheletism was never declared a heresy; iconoclasm had never arisen in the seventh century.) And in case this sounds too intellectual, there's plenty of action too. Tim Sullivan gave us "Dinosaur on a Bicycle", for which my belief never managed to be suspended; but if anyone wants to read yet another tale about an English dinosaur taking his Wells-like machine back into the past, there to meet the horror of advanced beings descended, by alternative evolutions, from apes, gerbils and others, then this is for you. Much more thoughtful is the Andrew Weiner novelette, "Waves", a presentation of an America in the depths of a future slump. Plenty of ideas - rather too many of them, perhaps, and sensitively written, but I couldn't quite believe in the existence of these people living apparently prosperous lives in the midst of an economy without any obvious means of support. A neat and

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Closer Encounters

Robert A. Heinlein - - - - - DOUBLE STAR
(Grafton, 1986, 189pp £1.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

I first read DOUBLE STAR in 19--, and I've always remembered it as being: (a) well-written; (b) blessed with a strong central character in a profession not often featured in sf, i.e. acting, and; (c) enlivened by some unusually 'realistic' interplanetary politicking. Now, after re-reading the novel, I've come to the conclusion that points (a) and (b) are still valid, but that point (c) has got to be ruled out of court - completely.

DOUBLE STAR (Astounding, February-April, 1956; Doubleday, same year) belongs to what Alexei Panshin has called Heinlein's 'Second Period' (1947-1958). The style is - on the whole - workmanlike, with the occasional telling phrase or unexpected metaphor. For example, I've never forgotten the very first sentence: 'If a man walks in dressed like a hick and acting as if he owned the place, he's a spaceman' (p. 5).

The plot, to get that out of the way, owes more to THE PRISONER OF ZENDA than THE NEW MACHIAVELLI, with an actor (Lawrence Smith/Lorenzo Smythe/'The Great Lorenzo') taking the place of an abducted 'Expansionist' political leader, John Joseph Bonforte. But the impersonation, originally intended to be a 'short term engagement', has got to be extended indefinitely until events force (let's call him) Lorenzo to become Bonforte.

Lorenzo, the selfish, apolitical, Martian-hating ham actor who turns into a hero despite - no, because of - himself, is easily the best thing about DOUBLE STAR. He is a (much) better man at the end of the book than he was at the beginning, even though, upon reflection, his change of character does seem a little too 'behaviouristic'. But at least he does change, unlike the egomaniacal Lazarus Long, who changes everything in the Universe - except himself.

The political set-up in DOUBLE STAR is a simple(-minded) analogue of the 19th century British parliamentary system ('honourable members', 'Loyal Opposition') and constitutional monarchy. Dutch, rather: the royal palace is located in 'New Batavia', and the sovereign hight 'Willem, Prince of Orange, Duke of Nassau, Grand Duke of Luxembourg, Knight Commander of the Holy Roman Empire... King of the Lowlands', etc. (p.134).

Bonforte (= 'good strength') is one of Heinlein's more likeable 'benevolent dictators' - someone who knows what he wants, why he wants it, and, more importantly, tries to get it by non-violent means. The official 'Bonfortite' philosophy can be summed up as follows:

I [Lorenzo] suddenly got a glimpse of what Bonforte was driving at. If there were ethical basics that transcended time and place, then they were true both for Martians and for men...The price of expansion was virtue. 'Never give a sucker an even break' was too narrow a philosophy to fit the broad reaches of space.
(pp. 126-7)

But Bonforte has a wolfish side to his nature: 'I am not a pacifist. Pacifism is a shifty doctrine under which a man accepts the benefits of the social group without being willing to pay - and claims a halo for his dishonesty...life belongs to those who do not fear to lose it' (p.127). Bring on STARSHIP TROOPERS.

Heinlein doesn't even try to reconcile

this dichotomy, or any of the others like it. Bonforte is a 'competent man', a la Jubal Harshaw, therefore everything he says or does must, by definition, be right - no matter how contradictory. But the last words of DOUBLE STAR belong to Lorenzo-become-Bonforte, and they are - for me - some of the best-ever last words.

But there is a solemn satisfaction in doing the best you can for eight billion people...Perhaps their lives have no cosmic significance, but they have feelings. They can hurt. [p. 189]

Robert A. Heinlein - - - - - ORPHANS OF THE SKY
(Grafton, 1987, 143pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

How can one review this book in 1987? I read the story in two instalments in Astounding Science Fiction in 1941 and was enthralled by it. Since then, probably over a hundred authors have used the same environment to frame their own plots - most of them, it must be admitted, inferior in suspense and craftsmanship if superior in literary quality.

Everyone has read Heinlein, so everyone knows what to expect of his style in 1941. With today's move away from hardcore SF, the Quest has become a mystical experience bedizened with gnomes, wizards and magic; when Heinlein wrote he used hard science, logical extrapolation and, let's not be mealy-mouthed, a pretty fine grasp of human psychology in conditions of stress.

We're on The Ship, mankind has forgotten its origins and does not even grasp the meaning of terms like Earth, Ship, planet, star; mythology has taken the facts of the past and turned them into rules for a new way of life.

What the new blurb refers to as 'upwardly mobile' Hugh Hoyland has an unconscionable amount of that dangerous quality curiosity, and it leads him into a web of intrigue, a mass of confusion and a series of adventures which even today, recalling my earlier fascination, I found gripping. However, I'm prepared to admit that if, as a seasoned SF reader, you come to it cold today, you'll probably regard it as hackneyed. In that case, can I remind you that it was Heinlein's successors who cliched the plot, and that many a young reader may find this an ideal introduction to our favoured genre where you as an adult are put off by its cornyness.

J. Neil Schulman - - - - - THE RAINBOW CADENZA
(Avon, 1986, 366pp, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

On the cover of this book Gregory Benford is quoted as saying that it 'raises questions that have not appeared in fiction before'; this seems unlikely, given the sheer volume of fiction the world has generated this far.

THE RAINBOW CADENZA is a reprint of a book which first appeared in 1983 (and was reviewed by Alan Fraser in PI 55); the new edition comes complete with a selection of essays by various American writers, academics and even entrepreneurs (Ivan Dryer, the founder of the Laserium company amongst them) which purport to testify to the book's classic status. Almost all the essayists are explicitly described as 'libertarians'; it is fair to say that the support for Schulman's book is not broad-based, but seems to come largely from this political sect.

Briefly, THE RAINBOW CADENZA is a sexual dystopia where men outnumber women seven to one; young women are conscripted for three

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years service in the 'Peace Corps' (whose motto is 'Make Love, Not War'), male and female outcasts - 'Touchable' - are hunted for sexual sport ('touchable for sexual satisfaction between sunset and sunrise, consent granted by the Federation'). The story concerns Joan Darris, a talented artist (a laser composer) and her rebellion against family and State. On the whole the book is well-written and often witty although the pleasures it has to offer are still largely the pleasures of tourism: the interest often lies more with the details of Schulman's 22nd century world, its slang, gadgetry and customs, than with his heroine; with the lifestyles of its people rather than the lives and fates of individuals. Perhaps this is always the case with stories set in invented worlds, that the world itself tends to be a more interesting 'character' than its inhabitants. Were it not for the ballyhoo that THE RAINBOW CADENZA seems to have generated in some quarters I would classify it simply as an entertaining (with the exception of those parts devoted to 'lasegraphy', which I personally found boring) piece of 'social science fiction'...however the essayists featured in the book's Afterword invite us to take it much more seriously, as a 'passionate testament to the sacred importance of every human being' (critic Michael Grossberg).

So how does Schulman's book stand up as a 'cautionary tale with a timeless message we ignore at our peril' (Grossberg again)? As a political tract it seems to me that THE RAINBOW CADENZA is rather naive. The novel exhibits a typically American infatuation with the lifestyles of the very rich - the Darris are the Ewings/Carringtons/Colbys of the 22nd century - and bluntly Joan Darris is as typical of her society as Christine Onassis is of ours; her rebellion would most likely have ended in disaster had she been in a less advantaged position, without the ability to gain the ear of the First Lady of Earth. Schulman stacks the cards in his heroine's favour, but nowhere comments on the fact. Individual resistance to authority is presented as something straightforward and relatively risk-free; Joan's final revenge on her tormentors is swift and complete, her escape plans proceed with a wholly unbelievable smoothness. This is a fairytale in which the wicked are vanquished with relatively little effort, and the virtuous live happily ever after. Yes, Schulman's novel does succeed in showing us the ugly side of authoritarianism, but it does not show the price people often must pay for their freedom. By giving his protagonist all the advantages of wealth and position (to say nothing of supernaturally good luck) Schulman devalues his libertarian theme, and undermines what could have been a much more memorable story.

And yes, the questions the book raises about self-expression, freedom and art have appeared in fiction before (and often to better effect).

Cont. from p.3

reviews, so if anyone would like to do so, could you please contact me. Thanks, Chris, for your help in the past.

Finally, a word of explanation as to why bits of this issue seem to be scattered throughout. Because of various commitments that I'd taken on for the month of March (when I'd normally be putting this issue together) I've had to work on PI 65 considerably earlier than normal, and for a longer period of time, in order to meet my deadline. It's been something like doing a jigsaw and I find that, once again, I've had to leave out one or two reviews I'd rather have included. Thanks to Phil Nichols and to Edward James for rallying round at short notice.

David Brin - - - - - THE POSTMAN
(Bantam, 1987, 321pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

The post-holocaust world must be the most frequently used setting in SF, but as this novel demonstrates, there is still potential left in the old cliché.

The story concerns one Gordon Krantz, an ex-soldier who has survived the sixteen years since the war as a loner. One day he discovers a long-dead postman, commandeers his uniform, and pretends to be a Postal Inspector from the 'Restored United States'. And this bluff works; he is accepted as what he claims to be, and people entrust him with their mail. And this is where the novel makes one of its major points: if enough people believe in a lie, does it become the truth? (There must be potential for a religious novel in there somewhere.)

As well as undertaking deliveries himself, Gordon establishes a network of sub-postmasters which serves to establish contact between previously isolated communities. And as this network grows, so does Gordon's importance as the instigator of all this. It is interesting to note that Gordon is not motivated by heroism or nobility, but rather by guilt. Once he has created this myth for himself, he needs to carry on in this self-appointed role simply because he sees that people do believe in him and have come to rely on him.

And this brings out the second major point. Many of us carp at and criticise officialdom at some time and yet, when it comes to the crunch, we depend on our Authorities, and would be hard pressed to get by without them.

This is my first David Brin novel, and so I am unfamiliar with most of his work, but it seems to me that, unlike some Hard SF writers e.g. James Hogan and Larry Niven, he does not concentrate on ideas to the detriment of characterisation, although it should be said that some of the minor characters are perhaps better portrayed than Gordon Krantz himself.

A well written novel, and I look forward to reading more of David Brin's work.

Michael Moorcock - - - - - BEHOLD THE MAN
(Grafton, 1986, 157pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

The term tour de force, which should mean 'a feat of strength or skill', has been applied to so many books - good, bad or indifferent - that I, for one, always hesitate before applying it to any book. But there is no better way to describe BEHOLD THE MAN. It is, to my mind, one of the few Michael Moorcock novels to be about anything in particular (other examples: GLORIANA, THE WAR HOUND AND THE WORLD'S PAIN, and that 'sleeper', THE TWILIGHT MAN).

The magazine version of BEHOLD THE MAN appeared in New Worlds 166 (September 1966), and it won the 1967 Nebula award for Best Novella. Allison & Busby published the full-length version in 1969. There was, at the time, a certain amount of shock-horror moralizing about 'the show must go on' crucifixion of Karl Glogauer/'Jesus Christ', but that need not concern us here.

BEHOLD THE MAN could just as well have been entitled GLOGAUER: A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT, because every possible humiliation is heaped upon the head, or whatever, of its hapless 'hero'. Glogauer's discovery that Jesus Christ was, in fact, a drooling idiot

leads him to 'ride the donkey into Jerusalem...' (quotation from the back cover blurb). KG is the martyr to end all martyrs, but he enjoys the process too much for my liking, and I certainly don't want to 'identify' myself with him.

For the most part, Moorcock employs a straightforward, even banal style that helps to keep the cross-cutting storyline from falling apart at the seams. For example: 'The sky was dark now, and the stars were out over the Mount of Olives. It had become cold. Glogauer shivered' (p. 144). In this novel - thank goodness! - 'content' comes before 'style' and 'form' follows 'function'.

There is a 'timeless' quality about BEHOLD THE MAN that raises it above most, if not all, 'New Wave' novels of the late 1960s. Karl Glogauer may seem to be just as lost in 'inner space' as any of Ballard's terminal beachcombers, but - unlike them - he does something significant with his dried-up life, even if only in extremis. And, as The Guardian once pointed out, the central idea is '...so dangerous and brilliant that scarcely any living writer could do justice to it'.

Michael Coney - - - - - GODS OF THE GREATAWAY
(Orbit, 1986, 278pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Martin Taylor)

'I'd like some more of that, please' - the understandable reaction which has caused the deluge of trilogies and decalogues, prequels and sequels, you name it. All too often the genius of later work exists in advertising departments rather than the work itself. Any given idea and set of characters only has so much mileage. Can anyone seriously claim FOUNDATION AND EMPIRE or CHAPTERHOUSE DUNE deserve mention in the same breath as their antecedents? When I read CAT KARINA I wanted more, thank you very much. I wanted more of that Mordecai N. Whirst moulded future. I wanted more of Coney's more than somewhat quirky storylines. Above all I wanted more of the sensibilities which informed that well received novel.

So, here we are, two books into a self proclaimed epic, 'Song of the Earth', which sets out to satisfy my request. How successful is it? Well, having been given this, the second volume, I put myself to some trouble to buy THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE, the first volume. Do I still want more? When I thought I'd lost the first book I went out and bought it again! More please? Yes, Mr Coney, I want all there is of this.

What is it about? It is 'about' the search of three oddly assorted characters for the meaning to their disintegrating societies. One is an old man, a ruler in a system which has long outgrown the rules handed down to him. One is a boy, a maverick, an artist driven by an impossible love. The last is a nameless girl, plucked from a dream existence and required to cope with, even control, a remorseless reality. To attempt to precis their tale is a hopeless enterprise. These books are dense with incident, with illuminating asides, with plot and subplot, with observation and character and wonder, above all wonder. Coney presents his strange new world and explains, rationally, every nook and cranny he shows us; from an entrapped God through psychic wolves who have quarantined Earth to compassionate gorillamen and on to multiple Marylins and a man who talks to God, and lets the local priest eavesdrop on God's replies. Yet despite the density of image and reference there is a lightness of touch, an airiness about the book which keeps it from ever becoming heavy going. This is an intelligent, provocative book which has that

vital element of compulsion to turn the page, much more so than many another more designedly thrill-a-minute book.

It would seem that this sequence of novels is going to be allowed to pass by without the salesmen's hype which has accompanied some other series, or the determined critical enthusiasm which greeted, say, 'The Book Of The New Sun'. Such an outcome would be more than a pity because 'The Song of Earth' is the real thing, a carefully and convincingly visualised future which is entirely fascinating. Do as I did. Go out and buy this book and its fellows. I guarantee you will be greatly impressed.

Robert Sheckley - - - - - OPTIONS
(Grafton, 1986, 156pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

The publisher's slip reads 'A UK Paperback Original'; there's a white slip stuck on the cover that screams A PAPERBACK ORIGINAL. Yet the colophon tells us 'First published in Great Britain by Pan Books Ltd 1977.'

I don't pretend to solve that problem: it's of a piece with the whole fabric of Sheckley's book, which is complex, intricately woven, almost-a-laugh-a-line, often witty, frequently infuriating, determinedly funny and ultimately quite, quite pointless.

We have our game, plucky, trusting, stupid anti-hero turned loose on a pretty illogical world in the company of a definitely crazy robot. Take it from there: as Sheckley has a talking control board say right back on page 15, 'It's a dreary premise.... but go ahead and play games if you want to.'

Play games Sheckley does. I recall making heavy weather of the book when I first encountered it; at first it's beguiling but it soon becomes boring. Maybe a bedside book for someone who falls asleep after a page or so? Maybe not.

In the end, Sheckley gives up. Unable to bring the story to any kind of conclusion, he embeds it in another story - yes, almost along the lines of 'and then I woke up,' I'm afraid. A cop-out. And a pretty pricey one, too. Sorry. Go back and re-read MINDSWAP to remind you just how really clever and amusing Sheckley can be.

Robert E. Vardeman - - - - - ECHOES OF CHAOS
(Berkley, 1986, 183pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Like Indiana Jones, the hero of ECHOES OF CHAOS is a Professor of Archaeology. His devotion to the pursuit of knowledge and distaste for University politics loses him a prestigious dig and he finds himself being sent to Alfa 3 with a bunch of educational misfits and dilettantes. Ironically, he makes 'the premier find of all time', a complete museum with telepathic diorama depicting the downfall of the planet's civilisation. Messages tell of the collapse of its society through riots and rebellion, and an abnormal increase of epilepsy amongst the planet's population. Ralston links this decline to the passing of a 'comet' mentioned in the dioramas; with the system's star due to go nova prematurely due to the malign influence of this device, the book ends with the Universe at threat, with Ralston and his trusty female sidekick the only ones who recognise the danger.

ECHOES OF CHAOS is a light read, perhaps more suited to a teenage than an adult readership. I enjoyed it, largely because it's kind to a tired brain, but don't expect too much from this simple adventure story.

THE WAR FOR ETERNITY by Christopher Rowley, Arrow £2.95 337pp)-----Review by Nik Morton

The planet Fenrille is harvested for the drug that keeps men forever young; Mother Fair's spies were everywhere: she was well aware of the power of legend and manipulated hers to the full; the Adept of the Wood, Izzyrna Taa (weel, rhymes with Yoda! - all sound familiar? Work began on this book in 1977 and it was published in 1983 - such a long gestation might reflect many influences...Some of them clumsy: viz the author lived in Essex and the book features a map of the Sx Coast. The mixture of words is rich, jarring at times, but undoubtedly much time and effort has been invested in creating a seemingly alien world co-inhabited by humans and bearlike fein. Words like gwassa, gzan, teosinte and glob-glob forest abound, without benefit of glossary...Why on earth do sf writers still persist in inflicting unpronounceable names such as Bg Rva and Mzsee? There are the inevitable joined words, like tumblemeadow and windsong...

Constant switching of character viewpoints lessens any possible tension, it is difficult to empathise with anyone. There are some interesting descriptions, however: "At last she slipped out of the narrow duct onto the top of the refrigerator like some newly born creature of the building, lathered in sweat like a saline placenta. She was the larva of revenge." But they are few...

The World Government of the Solar System wants to annex Fenrille and place a garrison on the planet, but the fein disagree... The scene is set for conflict. The reader is lectured to in order that the history of Fenrille may be gleaned.

Some of the speeches grate, straight out of B movies: "I hate to mention this, my dear, but we have company." when they are about to be attacked. Or "Hot bloody damn!" someone exclaimed. And "I know it sounds crazy...' It sounds crazy to me, too, she finished in her head." And "There you're wrong, my pretty" to the captured heroine...

Striving after effect is noticeable too: "he felt tears well deep within. Something wet was on his cheeks, he could barely see." The effect spoilt by actually mentioning tears!

There are two sequences well imagined, one involving the chitin insects and the harvesting of the drug they produce; a kind of prostitution by human minders to provide sensual delight in return for the drug: quite an eerie section. And the introduction of the woodwose, caretakers of the trees, whose appearance seems to resemble *Swamp Thing*.

The ending is a cop-out, reminiscent of Cliff Richards' *Time* where love prevails and saves the human race...

I found it heavy going, I'm afraid, which is a pity; I would like to be more positive about a first novel. It's not bad, but it could have been so much better.



War for Eternity.

Christopher Rowley - - - - -THE BLACK SHIP
(Arrow, 1987, 310pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

This is a sequel to THE WAR FOR ETERNITY. It is really two separate stories that run parallel to each other. The first is a rather average space opera set on the planet Fenrille, an arboreal Arrakis, where the spice worm has been replaced by a sort of giant woodlice. The planet is the scene of a continuing struggle between rival factions for control of the longevity drugs that are harvested from a species of the local insect life, the Chitin.

This story of war and treachery, intrigue and heroism espouses the usual elitist and militarist values that are generally associated with such one-dimensional tales. The war is straightforward comic book stuff: the loyal fein die in their thousands and seem even less concerned about this than the author. The characters are cardboard, even the insane villain, Young Proud Fundan lacks conviction.

Parallel with this mediocre saga, however, is another more powerful story that successfully redeems the book and makes reading it worthwhile. Chosen Fundan crash-lands in the forest and the story of his attempt to reach safety, his captivity in a Chitin hive and his rescue of the Arizel Divider is a series of superbly realised episodes that make for stimulating reading. Rowley achieves a certain grandeur in his account of the painful transformation that Chosen undergoes.

Graham Masterton - - - - - - - - - - - NIGHT WARRIORS
(Sphere, 1986, 410pp, £2.95)

Theodore Roszak - - - - - - - - - - - DREAMWATCHER
(Grafton, 1986, 384pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

Both of these novels depict an evil force manipulating people's dreams. In both, this force preys upon sexual urges, and the authors dwell upon the resulting scenes of depraved lust in lurid detail, degenerating into crude prurience. And in both, there are 'good' characters seeking to stop the evil force's activities. Masterton goes the whole hog, if I may use that expression, and has a beast-god inflict frighteningly real nightmare-rapes on its victims, in order to seed them with a nest of incubating demon-serpents. Throwing in some sword-and-sorcery for good measure, he takes some ordinary Americans, nominates them as the heirs of a lost magical Order, gives them fancy costumes, titles and weapons, and a guardian angel, then lets (psychic) battle commence. The result is a sound enough pulp thriller, and I don't imagine Masterton would make any other claims for it. In fact, he's at his best when his 'good guys' are back in mufti - the jaded, bibulous Professor Henry Watkins deserves better than to become an Arch-wizard. Roszak's book is described as 'a psychosexual shocker from the author of BUGS' which ought to put him in the same league as Masterton; but he's also written such snappy titles as PERSON/PLANET: THE CREATIVE DISINTEGRATION OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY and half a dozen other ecosociological works. I therefore expected more from him. DREAMWATCHER is a more subtle work than NIGHT WARRIORS and its dreams grow from its characters in a more credible way than Masterton's; it also makes less use of genre trappings, substituting a psychological project for Masterton's astral battle-pageant. But neither work succeeds in conveying the impression that these are real people's dreams or anything like, and it is frustrating to witness the confined way in which they handle the infinitely rich theme that dreams provide. Neither is there any attempt (for obvious commercial reasons) to replicate by prose experiments the incoherence and surrealism associated with dreams; the prose in both is workmanlike and bland, and neither risks abandoning the conventional linear narrative format. So, if you want a potboiler with all the usual ingredients by a slick, experienced purveyor, go for Masterton; if you want one with an intellectual veneer, go for Roszak.

Ben Bova - - - - - - - - - - - PRIVATEERS
(Methuen, 1986, 383pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Spend a fair amount of time absorbing all you can of modern space technology and the current orthodoxy about its application to such things as asteroid mining. Season that with some years in an SF editorial position, soaking up what all the other writers say.

Now spend time living in today's United States, studying the newspapers and Time magazine, political speeches and posturings. Add to this a fairly comprehensive absorption of Yankee anti-Communism, specifically distrust of Russia and its rulers (and no, I'm not entering into any arguments about the validity of such fears, I merely set out a pattern).

Spice this in turn with a good sampling of the sort of blood-soaked, anti-life, vicious attitude toward the indiscriminate use of weaponry, small and large, by the citizenry and the armed forces, which seems typical of much American philosophy today.

Now sit at your typewriter and, on the basis that nearly 400 pages are more saleable than the 150 pages the plot really deserves or at least needs, write and write and write, interpolating discussions, reports, ejaculations of pain, descriptions of mayhem, anything that will bulk it out to semi-blockbuster size. Before you, you will now have a manuscript remarkably like the book in question.

Add the words 'The Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author' below the writer's name, and you've got it. Keep the price down to £2.50 and it'll make a bomb. But not, I trust, from intelligent and informed SF readers.

Gordon R. Dickson - - - - - - - - - - - ANCIENT, MY ENEMY
(Sphere, 1986, 253pp £2.50)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

ANCIENT, MY ENEMY is a collection of old-fashioned SF stories. That was my first thought on opening up this book. My second was to wonder what makes one book 'old-fashioned' and another a 'classic'. Is Dickens 'old-fashioned'? No. Is Dickson? Yes. The nine stories mostly date from that long-ago time twenty years ago when men were real men...

He was lightheaded with exhaustion; but a berserk something in him snarled like a cornered tiger and refused to break like Wally and the others [p. 93]

...women were real women...

She did begin to cry at that, the tears running down her pale face inside her helmet [p. 44]

...and Man was the master of the universe. Nowadays these stories come across as naive, occasionally slightly embarrassing. Most hinge on a single idea or gimmick (such as the super-computer immobilised by a riddle in 'The Monkey Wrench') and such stories tend to date especially quickly. Many embody the idea (much favoured in Campbell's Astounding) that mankind as a species is uniquely gifted - because we have two sexes ('The Odd Ones'), are individualists ('Tiger Green'), have imagination ('The Friendly Man'), or animal cunning ('In The Bone'). This last story is easily the best in the book, with its portrayal of a man alone, literally and metaphorically naked on an alien world. It seems that Dickson is not really comfortable with, or wholly comprehending of, the intricacies of human society, and is at his best when his characters are as far away from civilisation as possible.

I realise I haven't answered the question 'what makes a book old-fashioned?'...if 'the past is a foreign country' then it just seems that some books travel well, whilst some - like this one - don't.

Peter Morwood - - - - - - - - - - - THE DRAGON LORD
(Arrow, 1986, 318pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Rarely have I been asked to review a book the appearance of which filled me with such dread. THE DRAGON LORD is in the middle of yet another swords and sorcery sequence - and I am no fan of that subgenre. It has a mock-Medieval introduction, and a vaguely Teutonic knight on the cover, posing against a backdrop of cliché-Faeryland. When I began to read my heart grew even heavier, as I discovered that the writer cannot distinguish between adjective and adverb, and sometimes dragoons a noun in to do service - 'Three heavy clanks of iron on stone; a blacksmith sound.' Even at

the end of the book Morwood maintains you can 'walk leisurely'. I wonder who was responsible for the genocide of the race known as 'editors'?

Fortunately for everyone concerned the weaknesses of Morwood's literary style - such as it is - can quickly be forgotten as he gets on with the telling of his story. It is testimony to the quality of that storytelling that, even after the inauspicious beginning, I wanted to discover just how the betrayed knight resolved his problem, and whether the distinctly odd wizard and disgraced captain of the guard managed to complete their quest. Aldric and Dewan, Gemmel and Voord aren't exactly Pintersharp but Morwood manages to make them walk and breathe, and generate sympathy and concern for them - he also creates a rather fine, if somewhat surreal dragon.

To a great extent THE DRAGON LORD is formulaic, but Morwood has at his formula with conviction. He doesn't cheat. The magic is. The heroics are. The politics disgust. The plot thickens. There is even some nicely steamy sex - which makes a change. This may not be great art, but it is conscientiously crafted for the most part, and it works. THE DRAGON LORD may not be the very best of its sort, but it is a long, long way from being the worst and if you are looking for this sort of tale you could easily do much worse. I wouldn't nominate it for a World Fantasy Award but, having finished it I was glad I'd read it, and I did not expect to be able to say as much.

James Tiptree Jnr - - - - - BRIGHTNESS FALLS
FROM THE AIR
(Sphere, 1986, 334pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

Literary criticism includes something called the Intentional Fallacy: that is the mistake of examining a book according to what the reader thinks was the author's intention, rather than judging the book by what it does or says. However, in searching for any moderation of my criticism I am perfectly prepared to be intentionalist: perhaps James Tiptree Jnr did not intend to write a load of old tosh, but she did. There's no getting away from it.

The plot is nominally elaborate. A planet devastated by past human cruelty is now, by chance, being irradiated by the remains of a star and its solar system also destroyed by humans. The three human guardians of the planet's peaceful, mistreated aliens receive a group of spectators. The group comprises a fine bunch of guilt complexes, perversions, cruelty and angst, and one or two people who are just misunderstood. The group then falls apart as several different attacks on the guardians, group members and the aborigines are made by aliens intent on vengeance for incidents in the long past war, and master criminals wanting superdrugs. In the end the villains die nastily as do a lot of the others until the space marines tidy everything up.

Do you recognise the story? Write on only two sides of paper listing the title of every film you know which uses a similar plot. But what is worse is that it's not well done - there's no tension, no pace, little characterisation. There is no interest in why these unusual or unfortunate people have had to come to the planet Damien. It is not just bad film material - it's bad made-for-TV-film material. Melodrama without the drama. I read to the end only out of a sense of obligation to critical standards.

Following up the film idea, I've a notion that the book fails because Tiptree imagined it visually but could not translate that vision adequately into words. The effect of

the star radiation is quite interesting, and includes a blurring of the time matrix. It may be that this was intended to be the treatment for a film (with special effects rather like LIFEFORCE). If so the film would have been satisfactory, the special effects might have carried it, but the book is without them, and without them it is nothing.

Kim Stanley Robinson - THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS
(Futura, 1987, 351pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Some time back I had the pleasure of introducing many fans to J. Neil Schulman's THE RAINBOW CADENZA, a marvellous tale with a musical background that revealed a very real understanding in the mind of the writer. Now 'winner of the World Fantasy Award' (it says on the cover) Kim Stanley Robinson essays a musical novel, and fails.

Maybe the pretension of the title tells it all. Certainly the chapter heads, which revel in such meaningless phrases as 'The exemplar of contemplation', give more than a hint. The poorly written opening paragraph (where 'life forces' is in fact a noun followed by an active verb, to my immediate confusion) with its bogus poetics nearly clinch the point.

But there's a lot of bad drama in there, stretching too often to melodrama and all cut through with what I can only call a very juvenile taste in music. Bach, Beethoven and a couple of other big names crop up again and again; there's the obligatory badly described work of hitherto unknown composers, but every musical reference is so obvious I rate them on a par of writing about SF and citing nothing more than Rice Burroughs and Heinlein characters.

Finally, the whole book hinges on his invention, the 'Orchestra', which is really little more than a Hammond organ! Anyway, the time is the 33rd century, people live on Uranus' moons and elsewhere but seem less organised and intelligent than 19th-century farmers and students, and we are taken on a Cook's tour of the solar system while our juvenile characters play out their parts to rote. If your musical tastes are totally orthodox and your literary pretensions just that, you may enjoy this book; if you know how to recognise good writing and musical expertise, you'll see through it at a flash. Sorry!

Robert Charles Wilson - - - - - A HIDDEN PLACE
(Bantam Spectra, 1986, 212pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

Robert Charles Wilson is not, yet, a name to conjure with. (Don't confuse him with Robert Anton *Illuminatus* Wilson.) One memorable story in *Asimov's* and three in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* is all I can locate, and now this, his first novel. It is always tempting to dismiss a book by an almost unknown author out of hand, however nicely packaged (with a Jim Burns cover), even when (particularly when?) the cover comes duly labelled with the phrase "reminiscent of vintage Theodore Sturgeon". But Michael Bishop, whose view that was, is right. It is a highly evocative novel, beautifully conjuring up the Steinbeck and Guthrie world, in which hoboes and freight cars bring unwelcome breaths of the outside world to a small and small-minded mid-western town. It traces the impact on this world, and on two of its more imaginative and rebellious young inhabitants, of the arrival of an eerily beautiful girl and the mysterious gangling hobo who seeks her out. No surprise that they're aliens (the publicity tells you); the joy is in the telling of the story. A quiet, unspectacular gem, but a gem all the same.

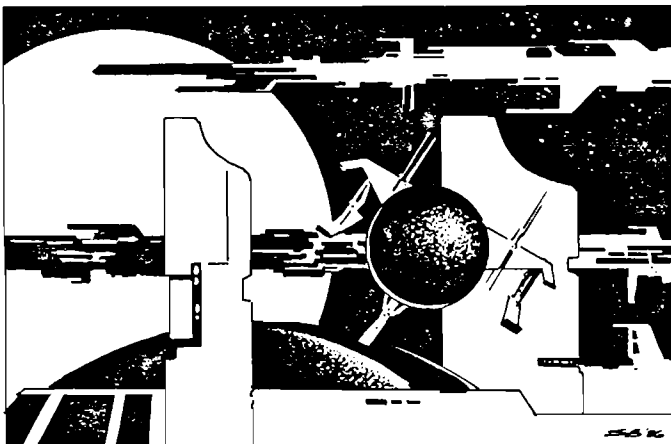
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unconventional variation on the vampire theme by Sharon Farber and all the usual sections complete this issue - well worth buying and reading.

I felt guilty about my occasional rudeness towards the magazine I've been reading on and off since the early 1960s, *Analog*, after reading Tom Shippey's survey of recent issues in *Black Hole* 24 (the Leeds University SF Society fanzine). It is one of the few places where you can be sure of finding competent stories which actually speculate about what near-future scientific change might bring, stories that still ask "What if...?", without, as Shippey points out, worrying about the market and the current writing fashions. It is only in *Analog* that you could find, in January, a British author (Ian Stewart) writing a factual article about mathematics and computing, and contributing a short-story about his long-running puzzle-solving galactic hero Billy the Goat (Jack-of-all-Trades). Here too, in addition to the Niven (see above), W.R.Thompson has a few timely worries about how terrorists could exploit decommissioned nuclear power stations, in "The Extremists", and W.C.Scotten thinks about computer personalities, in "A Matter of Condensation".

The February *Analog* continues the mixture of old-fashioned sf and musings about current problems, having Stephen L.Burns's "In the Kingdom at Morning", in which private enterprise battles with monopolistic capitalism to find freedom and wealth in the exploitation of the outer planets, etc etc, alongside "A Delicate Adjustment", a delicate investigation of the ethical problems of embryo research from the new writer and medic Elizabeth Moon, or "This Life and Later Ones", where the all-too-rarely-seen George Zebrowski thinks about the possibilities of storing dead personalities in a computer.

Finally, the March issue of *Analog*. The cover (by David Hardy) illustrated a novelette by Charles Sheffield, "Trader's Secret", which presented a not very plausible view of the altered power structures of a future Earth, although it did at least have an ending which surprised me, having been introduced at the beginning to a fairly typical charismatic *Analog* hero (cf the Burns story above). Eric Vinicoff offered another tale in his series about a solar system dominated by the Japanese, with some trenchant comments about Japanese male chauvinism; Bill Vaughan had rather too human aliens in the seas of Jupiter's moon Europa ("Here There Be Dragons"), and Rob Chilson applies the modern sf fascination with interfacing computers with humans to that favourite target of *Analog*, the bureaucracy, in "The Bureaucratic Brain". All in all *Analog* has started the year well - and I look forward to reading the Niven serial when its last instalment arrives next month.



John Tully - - - - - NATFACT 7
(Magnet, 1987, 208pp, £1.75)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Near-future dystopias are frequently marred by overdramatic emphasis on the division between controllers and controlled. John Tully's 'Futuristic thriller' postulates a Britain divided into Qualified Citizens and the have-nots, who are drafted into National Service and work (if they're lucky) in dead-end jobs. A revolutionary group, ACE (All Citizens Equal) is determined to overthrow the government, and recruits Skip, a cynical young petty criminal sentenced to corrective labour at National Factory 7. But they also recruit Brian, who is a police spy. The two discover new personal and political loyalties, particularly in their relationship with Steve, the beautiful but ruthless leader of their cell.

There are weaknesses in plotting - the plans for revolution are glossed over and the State Forces are curiously incompetent, but what's impressive about NATFACT 7 is the way the reader perceives that we're not viewing a far-off totalitarian regime but a realistic extrapolation of the way we live now, with much of the country actually comfortably off and a significant minority condemned to an endless round of schemes and the dole unless they're exceptionally lucky or single-minded in their drive to succeed. There's very little in Tully's picture of 'Two nations' which is alien to the philosophy of the Thatcher/Tebbit axis, and Tully is careful to point out that the regime is - in its own eyes - even benevolent.

The story is fast-moving and full of action while the moral point is raised - the nature of revolution, how far terrorist tactics can, or should succeed - arise naturally out of the plot. Some may find that the ending avoids real resolution, and the fact that the book is aimed at teenagers may account for the deliberate avoidance of concrete political discussion (one brief reference to 'The Labour Movement'). But the openness is part of an obvious intention to make the readers think for themselves, and NATFACT 7 is a welcome addition to that subgenre of SF which treats the near future in a relatively realistic fashion.

F.M. Busby - - - - - ZELDE M'TANA
(Berkley, 1986, 316pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Zelde M'Tana is the 15 year old leader of a gang of wild children, living outside the bounds of a North America run by the United Energy and Transport conglomerate. Captured by the UET, she is put aboard a ship bound for the brothels of a mining planet. Using her deadly fighting skills she plays a key role in a mutiny led by the ship's First Officer, Parnell; he becomes Captain, and she shackles with him. Step by step, she rises through the ranks to become the ship's acting Captain on Parnell's death.

Put baldly, ZELDE M'TANA sounds like a routine tale of mutiny on the spaceways, but it has much to recommend it. Unlikely as the plot may sound, Busby can engage the reader's interest by his (generally) good writing and judgement of pace. Its main strength lies in the skill with which he builds up his portrait of his main character, and actually made me suspend my disbelief in a 15 year old's capacity to assume command of a spaceship; this was partly to do with his characterisation, and partly due to his handling of the issues involved.

However, the background to the story is a little less convincing, largely because Busby

shies away from the political issues which are raised. It is not too difficult to imagine a powerful commercial company ruling North America (not too far off the present situation, some might say), but, in allowing the UET to conquer almost all of human occupied space, with only the odd pirate and an off-stage alien menace to contend with, stretches credulity. It is a pity that Busby fails to grasp the nettle of the more sinister aspects of capitalism, and fails to consider the roles of other Earth nations. This may not have been what he was striving for in his novel, but by failing to develop his background beyond a few sweeping comments, he devalues the main action of the story, which becomes deprived of a convincing context.

Not highly original or innovative, but worth a read.

Frederick Pohl - - THE MERCHANTS' WAR (Orbit, 1986, 209pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Having had cause recently to speak unkindly of Pohl's novel BLACK STAR RISING, I redress the balance with a few words about what may be the most delayed ever sequel to an SF book.

THE SPACE MERCHANTS appeared in 1952 (in book form in 1953); written in collaboration with C.M. Kornbluth, it was a success *de l'estime et de scandale* at the time, revealing the innermost machinations of the consumer society long before Vance Packard jumped on that bandwagon. I read it at that time, loved it, and it was only returning to it a decade later that I realised just how 'pulpish' and corny was its style - yet the message remained as strong as ever.

THE MERCHANTS' WAR is Pohl's single-handed attempt to emulate that success. Starring the wimp and failure Tennison Tarb, it takes the story forward logically, effectively, amusingly, enjoyably and - on the whole - grippingly. And yes, I did lie abed reading till 3 a.m. to finish it.

I confess my credulity floundered at two points: with the revelation of his on-off girlfriend Mitzi Ku's real identity, and with his final total volte-face, casting a lifetime of (as we have seen) complete dedication and conditioning to exert every sinew for the overthrow of the system. The motivation, while 'obvious' to the reader, is not adequately tied to Tarb's character, and - a common failing in novelists, I believe - the ending is far too rushed.

But it's a damn good book, destined without doubt to take its place alongside its antecedent as an all-time classic, and I must both congratulate Pohl for transferring the story to a late-eighties style, and express the hope that he'll keep this up with future novels.

Fred Saberhagen - - THE THIRD BOOK OF SWORDS (Orbit, 1986, 320pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

Although this is the third volume in a series it is possible to read it separately from the others as the essential information is included and occasional obscure references aren't too confusing. It is a sword-and-sorcery book being a quest for some magical swords by an assortment of people with varied magical powers and an assorted Pantheon of Greek and Roman gods (with Shiva thrown in for good measure.) I felt no particular interest in any of the characters and no desire to see what else had befallen them. However if you like S & S then this is a better book than many others I've come across; there is some characterisation and not too much gore and it is also an easy book to read, the prose flowing well in a workmanlike way. It's readable, but nothing too special.

Clive Barker - - THE BOOKS OF BLOOD (vols. 1 - 6) (Sphere, 1986, £1.95)

THE DAMNATION GAME (Sphere, 1986, 374pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The publication of Clive Barker's BOOKS OF BLOOD in 1984/5 made him something of a horror superstar. Ramsey Campbell wrote of Barker's stories, 'Their fertility of imagination recalls the great fantastic painters' and certainly I'm reminded more of the baroque horror of the middle Ages than the modern video-nasty. Does that mean, though, that I'm safely distancing Barker's grotesque creations with the dignity of 'art'? If they possess that dignity, do they become less threatening?

I mention that, because horror in itself (graphic descriptions of mutilation, grotesqueness and pain) does nothing for me. There's that in Barker, but what I see in him is an ability to blend that grossness with other levels. We see evocations of that blank, bleak urban horror Ramsey Campbell charts so well in 'The Inhuman Condition' (vol. 4) and 'The Forbidden' (vol. 5), while 'Human Remains' contains a startlingly poignant role-reversal at the end. Barker's use of humour ranges from the almost farcical THE YATTERING AND JACK (vol. 1) to the sardonic THE BODY POLITIC (vol. 4). Above all, he is a writer of original ideas. 'In The Hills, The Cities' (vol. 1) is built upon a wonderfully strange conceit, and in general his stories are far removed from the cliched spooks and backgrounds most people think of as 'horror'.

Yet there is a sense in which the BOOKS OF BLOOD are exercises in technical virtuosity in which he is exploring as many different ways of reaching (and tones he can tease out of) the climax of ripped flesh and spurting blood. Clive Barker's first novel, THE DAMNATION GAME, offers us the contrast we're looking for. Opening in war-shattered Warsaw, we see an unnamed thief seeking out a gambler who is reputed never to lose, who surrounds himself with dead acolytes. Then it shifts to the present day when ex-convict Marty Strauss becomes bodyguard to Joseph Whitehead, a reclusive millionaire and becomes personally involved in the conflict between Whitehead and his one-time benefactor who has lost none of his hellish powers.

The larger canvass of the novel enables Barkers to build up his storyline in a way he can't do in short stories, with the result that the sinister Mamoulian 'the last European' and his resurrected slave Anthony Breer 'the Razor-Eater' are vivid and dreadful. The impact of the novel is perhaps lessened by the fact that Whitehead is by far the weakest character in the book and we never get as fully inside him as we do the others (or even his earlier self as an anonymous thief) and the actual nature of his betrayal of Mamoulian thus loses its force. However, THE DAMNATION GAME reaches a fine conclusion with a most effective chill in the realisation of Strauss and Carys (Whitehead's daughter) that the evil they are fighting against does not - despite its supernatural powers - have its origins in a metaphysical Hell but is firmly based in the corruptions inherent in humanity itself. And in a twisted sense (not fully realised, I think, because of the above-mentioned flaw) even Mamoulian becomes an almost tragic figure while the appalling Breer, embodiment of almost every human physical and moral corruption, is allowed one pitiful moment, right at the end, to deny his nature.

The best horror is built upon the dynamics of tension and contrast as well as grand guignol imagination. Clive Barker has all these elements in great capacity.

Joanna Russ - - THE TWO OF THEM (The Women's Press, 1986, 181pp, £2.25)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

Once more, one confronts the dilemma of whether feminist SF does exist. As a rule of thumb, I ask whether the novel remains viable if either the feminist or SF element is removed. If both are necessary to the plot, fine, otherwise take care. In the case of THE TWO OF THEM I am forced to conclude that the issues discussed don't benefit at all from being set in an offworld future when it is patently obvious that Ms Russ is actually concerned with discussing the condition of women in modern Islamic society. I find myself wondering why she didn't do just that. No particular point is made by distancing the reader from current events and opinions and as the narrative stands, it could easily be stripped of its SF trappings and published as a mainstream novel.

The story concerns a diplomatic mission to a planet colony modelled on the Arabian Nights, including the attendant Islamic attitudes to women. Irene Waskiewicz experiences the colonists' prejudices, both firsthand (it is assumed that, as a diplomat, she is a man), and through the lives of the women colonists. Fired by her own ideals she forcibly adopts a girl to give her the freedom to pursue her poetry, something forbidden to women. At the same time, Irene is forced to consider her relationship with her companion, Ernst, in the light of these experiences, realising that female oppression can come in even the most well-intentioned guises.

The novel is well-written, the bigotry painfully observed, whilst Irene's dilemma is familiar to any woman struggling to make her voice heard. However, the problem still remains that this isn't SF. There is unresolved ambiguity in how Irene progresses from childhood in fifties America to an unspecified future, in the same way that much is left unsaid about Ernst, a far more interesting character, apparently from a parallel dimension. Had Ms Russ developed these points further I would have had no doubts about calling it SF. However, I hesitate to recommend this book to the purely science fiction reader although it is a must for any feminist.

Jane Palmer - - THE WATCHER (The Women's Press, 1986, 177pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

Quite why The Women's Press published Jane Palmer's first novel, THE PLANET DWELLER, mystified me. A breathless story of intergalactic invasion, marked by a messy plot and poor characterisation, it was puffed as being witty and fast moving. In reality it was embarrassing and not especially funny, except insofar as it demonstrated the impossibility of combining SF with a meaningful message about the menopause.

However, they obviously did not learn from their mistake, as we are now presented with THE WATCHER, in which Ms Palmer seeks to capitalise on her 'success' with more of the same. Admittedly, the invader this time is an Earth girl with a penchant for astral projection who is putting the wind up a distant planet by draining their energy pools, but the plot is still full of loose ends, and too many characters who seem unsure of their functions within the novel. They wander in and out at convenient moments, excuses to keep a very tired narrative on the move, the divorced single parent, her ex-android lover, her neurotic ex-husband, and an alien with a hyperactive child

and a nice line in bisexuality. The fictional and sociological cliches pile up while the story runs completely out of control. Humour is shovelled on by the barrowload, it's a shame that the story isn't remotely amusing.

I suppose it is an entertaining romp, if you like that sort of thing, so light it floats. On the other hand, if you like thoughtful characterisation and careful plot development, I suggest you try something else, THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, for example, which also has the merit of being funny.

William Burroughs - - THE TICKET THAT EXPLODED (Paladin, 1987, 160pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Myriads of voices in stream of dislocated consciousness. Gemini Sex Skins and Green Boy-Girls from the terminal sewers of Venus. Reality changed by tape and film, crossing realities, creating (sur)realities.

Grand literary pyrotechnics which sputter fitfully. Strange beauty formed from ugliness. Pornographic nihilistic Morality Plays. That's Burroughs' world. THE TICKET THAT EXPLODED brings SF imagery to closer focus among the images of faggot junkies and paranoia, taking explicitly from - for example - Barrington Bayley and Henry Kuttner (from whose FURY Burroughs quotes, sending me back to read it: and what a good story it is and how its brutal amorality and hedonism counterpoint Burroughs' own!)

THE TICKET THAT EXPLODED was first published in the UK in 1968 (an early version appeared from Olympia Press in 1962) and in many ways reeks of the sixties: 'Well splice your singing in with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Animals' and references to New Worlds magazine. OK by me. But Burroughs was an inimitable genius before he was discovered by the Underground and remains so long after the New Wave was swamped by the Tidal Wave of mediocrity. I stress 'inimitable', for many of the so-called excesses of the New Wave arose because lesser talents tried to write like Burroughs and produced at best parody and pastiche. But only Burroughs can write like Burroughs (which is perhaps the limitation as well as the genius of his style). His books are an essential part of the collection of anyone even the faintest bit curious about how the cliches of SF - and language itself - can be forced into new and unsettling shapes.

Colin Wedglock - - SHORT CIRCUIT (Sphere, 1986, 185pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is the book of the film and it reads like it. The plotting is sequential, active and shallow; it contains the prerequisite absent-minded genius-scientist, the independent-lively-unattached girl and the cute little robot. The cute little robot is armed with umpteen nukes but becomes both sentient and pacifist when an electrical short circuit (hence the title) gives it an extra boost. Fearing for its life it runs away pursued by the militaristic, gung-ho security chief, meets the girl so that they both run away from the baddies until eventually the girl and the robot and the scientist get the better of the baddies and ride off together into the sunset.

It's not an inspiring film plot, and it's an even less inspiring novel. It is light, predictable and forgettable, although it would occupy the eyes if you want to leave your brain in neutral for a while.

A.A. Attanasio - - ARC OF THE DREAM (Bantam, 1986, 262pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

The invasion of ordinary lives by the extraordinary is barely imaginable. The invasion of ab- and subnormal lives is more difficult to imagine but it has been done; just think of classics like THE HAMPDENSHIRE WONDER or MORE THAN HUMAN. Then try to imagine the addition of quantum physics to the super-powers gained by these unfortunate people. Then add a dash of existentialism and references to Inner Space in a medium of language like liquid. You get this:-

Inertia smeared through him like the tug of a fast elevator. Dound liquified, and astonishment gasped to fright as Dirk became aware of the alien's consciousness. It shivered with the sensation of I. It was inside him, watching him, like the still eye of a falcon hanging over everything.

The story concerns a being from a five dimensional universe trapped in this four dimensional vale of tears who indirectly communicates with a French schizophrenic, curing her; with a chinese peasant who learns to fly; with a middle-aged American gambler, who beats the mob at craps; and a punk hoodlum who decides to become a nuclear scientist. A lot of attention is given to the interface of the different universes and the effect on the feelings of the four people, and is described in language like the passage quoted, except that it can go on for pages. It does not convey the effect the author hoped.

Imagine someone given the job of making QUINCY respectable by writing posthumously the novelisation of the series (ie Quincy uses pathological skills and his deep insight into human nature to end an LA gang war) and then realise how crass the product would be, and you've got ARC OF THE DREAM. All the books I've read on this subject tend to be pretty awful (including Theodore Sturgeon), but the best and the one from which ATTANASIO could learn most is Colin Wilson's THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE. That at least makes some aspirations towards rationality. If you like QUINCY then the science in Attanasio will blind you. If you've got just a CSE in woodwork you'll leave it alone.

James White - - STAR SURGEON (Orbit, 1986, 156pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Alex Brown)

Originally published in 1963, this novel forms part of White's well-known 'Sector General' series which describes the problems encountered by a human doctor working in a gigantic space-station hospital. The majority of the patients and staff are exotic aliens, and in STAR SURGEON the hospital becomes involved in an interstellar war.

White's handling of the aliens is good: there is a bewildering variety of species with outlandish diseases. The problems involved in dealing with - for example - chlorine-breathing patients are cleverly solved.

However, the narrative style is poor, the characterisation almost non-existent and the interaction between the characters unrealistic. The principal human characters are exclusively male. The women are nurses who are described in terms of their physical attractiveness. The hospital's Chief Psychologist believes women have 'pretty little brains'. Frankly, the novel seems to have been written in the twenties rather than the Sixties and has little to recommend it.

So why have Orbit decided to reprint STAR SURGEON? Could they not have published a new novel by a new author...?

Alan Sillitoe - - TRAVELS IN NIHILON (Grafton, 1986, 331pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

It is quite a step from the 'fifties urban and psychological realism of SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING to this dystopian extravaganza, first published in 1971; though both novels, the one through realism, the other through satire, are humanistically oriented - pro the individual, anti the system-creation of machine-dominated ciphers.

The poet Adam is one of five travellers coming to the state of Nihilon to research for a guide book. The author, in guise of Chief Editor, asserts in a prologue that the only way to present these 'underground' experiences and findings is in the form of a novel. Adam enters by bicycle of which he is temporarily deprived by a frontier guard in exchange for a rifle. This, fired by Adam, precipitates the insurrection which contains the action of the story.

Nihilism, a term coined by nineteenth century Russian intellectuals, has since been applied to a variety of political contexts. Here it indicates the supposed path towards 'regimented chaos' along which, it is suggested, 'capitalistic freedom-loving nations' may be manipulated, against the grain of man's essentially non-nihilistic nature. Taking a leaf out of EREWHON, Sillitoe uses topsy-turviness as an instrument of satire. Thus, there are no trade unions, but when employers' unions strike for higher salaries the government compels the workers to pay them. Too often repeated, however, such boulversements tend to lose their edge.

The artificiality of Nihilon is symbolised by the way its place-names pun doubly on artifacts and ideology - nylon, nihilitz (its fire-water), Aspron (its medical complex), Tungsten (its industrial centre) and Fludd (controlling its dam). The climax of the story (involving two of the researchers, Adam and Jaquiline, in key roles) is the realisation of Nihilon's astro-project, a televised and legitimate copulation in space - which is symbolic, erotic, funny, impossible and successful. The travellers then leave Nihilon in circumstances as violent and traumatic as those of their entry. The narrative never lets up.

The strange and rather pleasant thing about this book is that, despite its breathless, hell's-a-poppin' succession of crises, and its at times somewhat strained satire, it often does convey the mood and atmosphere of a newly-encountered country - its landscapes, its food, its roads and towns. It is, in fact, a sort of guide book to a land of the sociologically speculative mind, just as Sillitoe's more recent (1984) novel DOWN FROM THE HILL (another bicycle tour) is a sort of guide book to a land of the past which might be called Nostalgia.

Anne Rice - - THE VAMPIRE LESTAT (Futura, 1986, 599pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Allan Brenner)

When I finished reading Anne Rices's INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE, perhaps as much as eight years ago, I found myself hoping for a sequel, but only if the author could do the first book justice. The wait was long but well worth it. THE VAMPIRE LESTAT is the finest vampire novel I have read in a long time, easily fulfilling the expectations left by INTERVIEW. It is well written, the writing style flowing easily from one scene to another as Rice takes the reader from twentieth century New Orleans back in time to Paris in the eighteenth century then, through other characters, to such times as ancient Egypt, the Rome of Augustus, Druidic France, and back to twentieth century America, all the time maintaining her spellbinding

narration in such a way that the reader does not miss the discarding of some of the more cumbersome trappings of vampirism that clutter most contemporary vampire stories.

In INTERVIEW, Lestat was painted by the main character, Louis, as a spiteful and hateful person, anile, arrogant and, perhaps, ultimately fey, unable to accept the changes of the twentieth century and clinging to what he had known since his creation as a vampire. Not so. INTERVIEW hinted at knowledge that Lestat was supposed to possess, but never revealed. In THE VAMPIRE LESTAT the knowledge is at last unlocked, as well as Lestat's reasons for keeping it hidden from Louis. And as Lestat awakens into the twentieth century it is revealed that he has become one of the powers among the vampire populace.

Rice also shatters some of the illusions that she had set up in INTERVIEW. The master vampire Armand is revealed as being petty and vindictive, for instance, and she also tells of the creation of the Theatre of the Vampires and shows Lestat's remorse at keeping Louis in ignorance, and of the making of the child vampire Claudia. The supporting characters are colourful and entrancing; his mother Gabrielle for instance, the innocent Nicholas, the captivating Marius who becomes Lestat's teacher, and Akasha and Enkil, the mother and father of vampires, all leave the reader wanting more.

THE VAMPIRE LESTAT is everything I look for in a book, more than just another vampire horror story. Ann Rice has promised a third book in the series. I only hope we don't have to wait another eight years.

James Morrow - - THE CONTINENT OF LIES
(Arrow, 1986, 274pp,
£2.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

A Cephapple is a genetically-engineered fruit which, when eaten, provides the eater with a programmed hallucination. An imaginative idea, perhaps, but my doubts as to its viability somewhat marred my enjoyment of the novel. Furthermore, whilst I was expecting a Philip Dick style treatment concerning discrimination between illusion and reality, we are presented with a thriller/space opera in which Quinjin, a Cephapple critic, sets out to destroy the noostree which spawned the Cephapple which made his daughter insane.

We meet some interesting characters along the way, there is a fair amount of description concerning the way in which Cephapples affect society, and no small degree of humour, and yet as a whole the novel seems unsatisfactory. Still, THE CONTINENT OF LIES has sufficient merit to suggest that future works by this author may prove to be more worthwhile.

Robert Sheckley - - DIMENSION OF MIRACLES
(Grafton, 1986, 188pp,
£2.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

If you enjoy this extract:-

I was still a small contractor then. I put up a planet here and there, and I got to do an occasional dwarf star. But jobs were always hard to come by, and the customers were invariably capricious, fault-finding, and slow in their payments. Customers were hard to please in those days; they argued about every little detail. Change this, change that, why must water flow downhill, the gravity's too heavy, the hot air rises when it ought to fall. And so forth. (p.73)

- then you'll enjoy the book.

(I did!)

Capsules ...

Piers Anthony - - STATESMAN (BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT 5) (Avon, 1986, 312pp, £3.50)

The first book I've read that includes bouts of soft-porn sex in which one of the couple has to be strapped down to stop his dialysis tubes working loose. This last volume in the series will not tempt me to read the previous four, but it is not overburdened with flashbacks and recaps.

The story of man's first attempt to journey outside the solar system, this is a readable book and better than I expected but still not highclass. (L.J. Hurst)

Campbell Black - - LETTERS FROM THE DEAD (Grafton, 1987, 317pp, £2.95)

A tense chiller about presences in a rented Virginia beach house where two divorcees and their teenage children plan to spend a quiet summer. The denouement is a horrifyingly ironical twist flawed, perhaps by too close contact with the 'small community hiding a shameful secret' cliché, and there are minor irritations in the writing, particularly in the early chapters. Nonetheless, a goodish supernatural horror if you're fond of the mode and don't mind a few loose ends. (Andy Sawyer)

Hugh Cook - - THE WIZARDS AND THE WARRIORS
(Corgi, 1986, 543pp, £2.95)

If you read epic fantasy avidly you'll read this: it has wizards, warlords, dragons, supernatural threats and some adequate shuffling of the pieces. But Hugh Cook's occasionally obtrusely humorous and hard-boiled style of storytelling is marred by frequent Fantasy Writer's Verbosity and lack of real dramatic focus upon his world and characters. (Andy Sawyer)

David Fickling/Perry Hinton - - HELMQUEST (Puffin, 1986, 32pp, £2.95)

Colourfully illustrated (Nik Spender) fantasy questbook. Each double page spread gives you a puzzle to solve, which will in turn help you decode part of the final clue to the whereabouts of the shattered Helm of Atlantis. Good fun for a wet Sunday. (Andy Sawyer)

Monica Hughes - - SANDWRITER (Magnet, 1986, 159pp, £1.75)

A juvenile novel whose heroine is a 16 year old Princess sent on a visit to a desert country with a possible royal marriage on the horizon. The plot is the fairly predictable one of Antia learning that her preconceptions were wrong and that the poor, dry country has much to offer those whose names are written in the sand. There is intrigue, romance, mystery some magic and mild humour. Competently written but lacking any particular originality or zing, it blends into a mass of similar books leaving no special trace behind it: an adequate time filler but nothing more. (Helen McNabb)

Steve Jackson - - CREATURE OF HAVOC (Puffin, 1986, £1.95)

One of the best of the Fighting Fantasy series, and one of the few in which you are genuinely a character in a story. More of a context than usual: more of a mystery. You awake as a deformed monster and have to trace a path of growing self-awareness through the usual adventures and battles. Good. (Andy Sawyer)

Dennis Schmidt - GROA'S OTHER EYE (Orbit, 1987, 295pp, £2.50)

Sequel to THE FIRST NAME (see PI63, p. 13). Voden meets Lao Tzu, drinks from Mimir's Well, and is hung for nine days upon the World-Ash. More plundering of mythology for a story with little connection between its parts and virtually no emotional resonance apart from that of mediocre sword-and-sorcery. (Andy Sawyer)

Meir Schneider - - SELF HEALING (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, 190pp, £4.95)

At first glance a crankish 'alternative medicine' book, this appears to be a quite sensible illustration of how exercise techniques and sheer determination can have some effect in improving the health of those whom conventional medicine holds little hope for. Either way, though, of little interest to SF fans. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Scot - - THE ICE KING (N.E.L., 1987, 252pp, £2.50)

A Viking ship discovered in a Yorkshire fishing village is the source of a resurrected pagan menace which has left faint traces in folk ritual. Wooden characterisation and failure to fully engage imaginatively with their sources mars this first collaborative novel from Michael Scott Rohan and Alan Scott: Rohan's solo THE ANVIL OF ICE is so much better. (Andy Sawyer)

Peter Valentine Timlett - - THE POWER OF THE SERPENT (Orbit, 1987, 246pp, £2.50)

Reprint of the 1976 theosophical fantasy, a sequel to THE SEEDBEARERS (PI 64, p.13). Noble Druids battle degenerate Wessex priests at Stonehenge, with help from Egyptian Adepts. For occultists with little historical knowledge rather than fantasy fans who go for imaginative reconstruction. (Andy Sawyer)

E.C. Tubb - - EARTH IS HEAVY (Arrow, 1986, 160pp, £1.95)

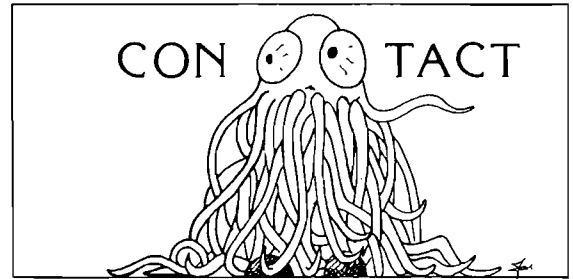
The 27th novel in the 'Dumarest' saga. Whilst it will undoubtedly appeal to confirmed followers of the series, it is unlikely to win any further converts. (Christopher Ogden)

Charles Whitmore - - WINTER'S DAUGHTER (Avon, 1986, 220pp, £3.50)

The main flaw with this post-holocaust tale is the directness of the narrative. There is too much statement and not enough description; thus there is too little reader-involvement, such involvement being one of the joys of reading. Still, a credible picture of this novel's world is presented as the heroine travels from Africa to America and finally to Norway, and an awareness of the fact that this is a first novel makes it easier to overlook some of the weak points. (Christopher Ogden)

Jane Yolen - - CARDS OF GRIEF (Orbit, 1986, 193pp, £2.50)

This book is labelled as fantasy but is more deserving of a place on the shelf next to the Mills & Boon. The story concerns a doomed romance between members of different races. The alien society in which the action takes place bears an uncomfortably close relationship to medieval Earth. The writer attempts to tackle a thin plot by using the multiple viewpoint technique but all the main characters are left as poorly sketched ciphers. For a novel intended as an escapist fantasy it lacks the essential ingredient - imagination. (Colin Bird).



JOY HIBBERT was moved to offer some thoughts arising from Andy Mills' comments on the possible ghettoisation of feminist SF (PI 63):

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, 'define your terms'. Feminism means all things to all people. Just because someone or something is labelled feminism doesn't mean it is, and the same for things that are not. And feminist fiction, of any kind, must often be the opposite of feminist philosophy, for reasons of plot. Feminism, to me, is about accepting that our society subjects woman and men to unnecessary and unpleasant sex role stereotyping and that something should be done about it, bearing in mind that bad characteristics are constructed by society and are not biologically inherent in the sexes. So everyone who agrees with this harmless, moderate view of the problem should find all feminist SF interesting and non-threatening? Well to start with there are the stories in which the sex role problem has been solved the easy way - by getting rid of the men (THE FEMALE MAN etc.). Then there are the stories which imply or state that men are bastards because they're born that way (WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD, MOTHERLINES etc.). Then there are the ones that don't really address the problem at all (PLANET DWELLER) or which only address a small section of it (BENEFITS). Basically, whereas an individual feminist can define herself according to one school of feminism, feminist SF runs from one extreme to the other, taking in along the way some stories (by Varley, for example) which treat the whole question of sexual politics as unproblematical and not worth a moment's polemic. SF with a feminist content is only to be read by feminists, but you can define both 'feminist' and 'feminist SF' according to taste.

Secondly, there's the problem that if you feel strongly opposed to the ideas expressed in a book, you will tend to be unable to read it without seeing what you want to in it. This is not the same as a highly subjective review, it goes deeper than that and makes the reader unable to see what's actually on the page. An example appears in VECTOR 135 where L.J. Hurst describes THE FEMALE MAN as utopian. They cannot afford the time to rest or do artistic work, except in their old age; they are only allowed (or compelled to have) one child each and five years to look after her; they fight duels constantly; their criminals and madwomen are murdered because they can't afford the womanpower to keep them locked up; they cannot choose the work they do; they still need a police force. I wouldn't see this as a utopia, and I suspect L.J. is simply assuming that since Russ is a feminist, and Whileaway is a woman-only society, it must be written as a utopia. It would be nice if reviewers were objective, but they're not, so you have to pick reviewers who will actually read the book first. (But don't fall into the trap of assuming that all feminists are women or that all women are feminists, and be aware of those feminist women whose fear of being perceived as feminist will make them bend over backward to trash a feminist story. No names, no libel suits).

PETER PINTO writes concerning a comment in Tom Jones' review of Eric Frank Russell's LIKE NOTHING ON EARTH:

The reason 'some of the other really good stories which appeared in ASTOUNDING got left out' of LIKE NOTHING ON EARTH is that they were never in this collection. Methuen took a chance on publishing this on my recommendation and against the established wisdom of the book trade. It has paid off well enough for them to consider commissioning me to assemble new (ie of previously unreprinted EFR collections. Tom Jones, or yourself - or, indeed, anyone - is welcome to suggest favourite EFR stories for consideration: preferably with enclosed photocopy as I have no pulp collection.

Finally, a note from KNAVE magazine's resident expert on Ozzie sexual habits (he says), DR. SID BLUE. "Dear Ratbag" he writes, in that amiable antipodean style beloved of millions since Barry Humphries appeared on these shores,

I'm writing on behalf of a bloody great mate of mine - the greatest little typewriter basher this side of Ayers Rock - Jimmy Blackstone, who has been deeply hurt by a review of his bloody marvellous novel TORCHED!... To

anyone with half a functioning brain cell, TORCHED! is obviously the best novel to come out of an Aussie's Olivetti since FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS, SPORT. As for calling TORCHED! a rip-off of some yank's piece of bulldust called FIRESTARTER that's an accusation as low as a snake's testicle!... I suppose this Bird drongo would claim that that great Australian classic TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UP THE CREEK was a rip-off of MOBY DICK just because both stories have a supporting cast full of fish!.

Dr. Sid also defends the scientific accuracy of TORCHED! (or!! or even !!!)(I'll have you dills know that Jim shat hot bricks doing the research... the number of wombats he experimented on in his microwave oven doesn't bear thinking about') vouches for the author's non-sexism, and points out that only one character in the novel has pouting breasts.

We understand that Jim Blackstone is currently 'doing a session' (as writer-in-residence?) in the Bob Hawke Alcohol De-toxification Unit at Hanging Rock, and will be pleased to review further novels by him.

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