PAPERBACK INFERNO 66

June/July 1987

The Review of paperback SF

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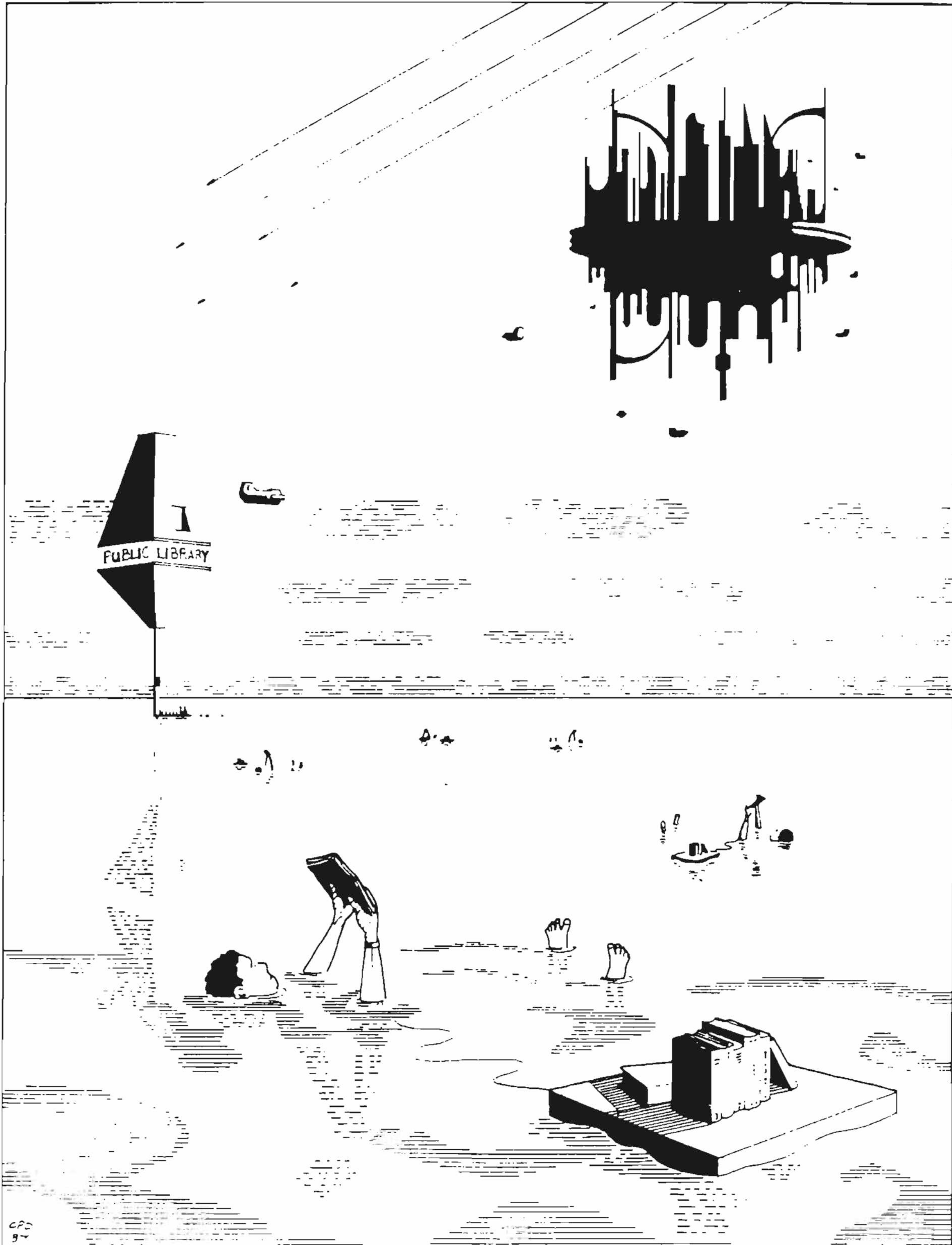

A British Science Fiction Association magazine

★ *PAPERBACK INFERNO* ★

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COLIN DAVIS (Cover)
IAN BROOKS (p. 6)
PATRICK LEE (p. 11: based on a scene from Richard Lupoff's SUN'S END.)
KEITH BROOKE (p.16)

Paperback Purgatory

You will most likely be reading this after June 11th, so anything I say is guaranteed not to influence you in the way you cast your vote. So why mention politics in the first place? Because, as I've said before, it's no use reading cute stories set a millennium or two in the future and not being interested in what's going to happen over the next five years or so. As most of you will guess, I shall be campaigning for a Labour Victory, so when you read this you'll know how I feel better than I do at time of writing. This is not a Party Political Broadcast, merely a meditation upon a kind of time travel.

Back to basics: we seem to be having something of an upsurge in paperback SF. Not only are Gollancz increasing their range of paperback titles with a new series of mass-market books, but also we must welcome HEADLINE BOOKS, who later this year will be publishing books by Ian Watson, Peter Beagle, and Michael Bishop, among others. Headline is the first new hardback/mass-market paperback house to be launched for a decade, and will publish about 60 paperbacks between June and the end of 1987. I hope to review some of the new Headline books in future issues of PI.

Penguin Books, too, seem to be revamping their SF line. What I've seen so far of their 'Classic Science Fiction' series seems to be a mixture of books which have been undeservedly neglected for years and highly acclaimed but out-of-print works such as Philip K. Dick's THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE: books which are essential reading for anyone with even a marginal interest in what SF can be. We'll be taking a closer look at some of these titles next issue; in particular, K.V. Bailey will be reviewing Olaf Stapledon's LAST AND FIRST MEN, perhaps the most ambitious and influential SF novel ever written.

In order to keep as many reviews as possible in this issue I've not run a 'Contact' column as such, but it's interesting that what letters I've had seemed to focus upon J.N. Schulman's THE RAINBOW CADENZA following last issue's review by Denise Gorse of the new Avon edition and Ken Lake's mention of the book in the context of another review. TERRY BROOME wrote "It's pleasing to read such opposing opinions on the same books - Ken Lake viewing THE RAINBOW CADENZA as a marvellous tale, Denise disillusioned by it. They have used different critical standards in approaching the book, and so their views can be equally valid. I know which reviewers come closest to matching my own standards and compensate accordingly when reading reviews further removed from them."

ALAN FRASER (who himself reviewed THE RAINBOW CADENZA in PI 55) "was very interested to read Denise Gorse's review because it echoes some of the points I made and confirms my own overall view of the book... Ken is a perstent champion of CADENZA, however, and is still plugging away for it. I do agree with his comments on CADENZA in his review of THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS. The creation and description of Lasegraphy is in my view (though not Denise's) a major success, and does show a thorough understanding of music. This framework makes CADENZA

((Cont. p. 12))

"Upon the rack in print . . ."

ANALOG, APRIL, MAY and JUNE 1987 and *ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE*, APRIL and MAY.

Reviewed by Edward James

The April issue of *Analog* completed the serial begun in the January issue: Larry Niven's *The Smoke Ring*. (And the May issue began Harry Turtledove's *The Report on Bilbeis IV*: see next *PI*.) Anyone who read Niven's *The Integral Trees* will remember that its concluding paragraphs cried out for a sequel - and here it is. The "hero" of the first book is the planetary system itself, a torus of human-breathable gases containing habitable trees, floating ponds of water a plethora of nasty life-forms reminiscent of Aldiss's Hothouse. The humans themselves were much less memorable than their environment. Here we learn rather more about the environment (in the company of Rather, among others - I wish I knew how to pronounce that: Rarther? Ratt-her?) In the company of the increasingly conniving computer-ship Kendy, we travel from the primitive tribal life on the trees to the much more complex society of the Admiralty. Unlike *The Ringworld Engineers* Niven does not pile on the marvels; he is content to extrapolate from the earlier book in a fairly leisurely fashion. Entertaining enough for those who don't like their action fiction to be too demanding. Those allergic to sequels will note that the conclusion of *The Smoke Ring* makes it equally plain that Niven is intending a trilogy, at the very least...

The April issue also contained Roger MacBride Allen's "A Hole in the Sun", a standard *Analog* tale of space exploration and heroism; Gregory Kusnick's "The Lesser Magic", in which a professional sceptic attempts to unmask an ESP performer with whom he becomes emotionally involved; and, rather less common for *Analog*, a professional sceptic is gradually persuaded of the reality of a "supernatural" phenomenon - quite neatly written story that, "Spectral Expectations" by Linda Nagata, set in a future Hawaii.

The long story in the May issue, Ian Stewart's "Displaced Person", would in its general ambience and tone not have been out of place in a 1950s *Analog* - say a story by Christopher Anvil - with its comic attempts of some Earthlings to survive in a totally different human environment. Though J.W.Campbell (or Miss Tarrant, Campbell's censor) would have removed the key element, which involves the unforeseen role of the male in the childbearing process. Lightweight, but quite fun. (I used to like Anvil's stories too...)

Another Brit who has become a familiar *Analog* contributor is Charles Sheffield, here with his short story "The Grand Tour", about racing in near-Earth space. And the third Brit in the issue, J.Brian Clarke (born in my own Birmingham) offers what may be his conclusion to an interesting series of stories about the meeting of human and alien with a story told from the viewpoint of the alien who made the contact. There are also a couple of pieces of *Analog* humour: Henry Melton's "Partly Murphy", in which you can listen to murphy reports on the radio - predictions of clouds of bad luck crossing the country; and James B.Johnson's brief "Conestoga History", on what would have happened to the good old US of A had the government banned the use of Conestoga waggons in 1796 after seven people had been killed in an accident to the "Prairie Challenger". The neatest story in the issue, though, from a purely *science* fictional viewpoint is W.R.Thompson's "Health Food", set in an America in which "evolution" is a banned concept - and in which it is discovered that humanity has evolved into a dependance on Coca-Cola. A witty story, making a number of interesting points along the way.

There was another Thompson story in the June issue of *Analog*, "Oracle", concerned with the problems and paradoxes implicit in scientific prophecy of the future, in which the only basic implausibility that one has to swallow is that the CIA is an institution devoted basically to the elimination of all those politicians and soldiers who believe that nuclear war is a rational possibility. I find dragons and elves easier to believe than that... Rob Chilson presented "Brain Jag", a follow-on from "Brain in a Pocket", back in May 1986, here looking at the effects of mind-computer linkage on the visual arts. Finally, the novella: Michael J.Flynn's "The Forest of Time". Flynn's "Eifelheim" (also with a strong German background) was an effective story, and was overwhelmingly voted by *Analog* readers to be the best novella and/or novelette of 1986. This is another alternative history tale: a very early response to *Analog* editor Stan Schmidt's plea in his May editorial for more carefully worked-out alternative histories? The Jonbar point here was in the very early days of the American Revolution; the United States never came into existence, and North America was split, in the twentieth century, into various independent and warring states. The story revolves around the reaction of the German-speaking Pennsylvanians to a time-traveller from another time-line, vainly searching for his own world through "the forest of time". Quite an interesting addition to the canon of what we are now supposed to call "allohistory" (see Gordon Chamberlain's afterword to *Alternative Histories*, an anthology edited by Waugh and Greenberg: Garland Publishing, 1986, $19.95).

The April issue of *Asimov's*, like the April issue of *Analog*, led with a story of research into solar phenomena: Lucius Shepard's "The Sun Spider". A nice example of the contrasts between the two Davis Magazines here. The Shepard story was beautifully written, in a much more "modern" idiom than Allan's, with few clichés. Together with interestingly implausible characters, almost no believable science, and no real concern with what research into solar phenomena might be like. A fine story, though, however regrettable it may be in *science* fictional terms. There was also Pat Murphy's "Rachel in Love", a very effective novelette (with a surprisingly up-beat ending), concerned with mankind's attitude to animals, and on the relationship between human and animals in all of us. (Rachel is a chimpanzee, with the mind of a young girl.) George M. Ewing's "A Little Farther Up the Fox" is an exploration of the application of future technology to rod-fishing, a story to intrigue all anglers who read sf (if any). The novella in this issue is Harry Turtledove's "Superwine", the latest in his series about an alternative history Byzantium. Don't start the series with this one; you could indeed start with his recently published book *Agent of Byzantium* - but beware: medieval historians are more likely to appreciate these stories than mere human beings.

The cover picture for the May *Asimov's* is for Bruce Sterling's "Flowers of Edo", a fantasy set in a nineteenth-century Japan. I suspect he has the atmosphere right - there's plenty of it - as it was apparently originally published in a Japanese sf magazine. I didn't take to it; indeed, I preferred almost everything else in what is a very good issue. There is "Cannibals" by Nancy Kress, concerning the biological tragedy affecting an alien race on a planet colonised by humans, and the way in which the human media exploit the issue. Equally pessimistic is Frederik Pohl's "The View from Mars Hill", his addition to the series (?) started by "Iriadeska's Martians" (November), in which again the discovery of the Martians acts merely as a backdrop against which to set another Pohlian tale of human greed and folly: the greatest scientific discovery man has made, viewed in terms of its impact upon real estate values and

tax-fiddling. Neal Barrett, Jr. offered "Perpetuity Blues", a tale of a sordid childhood in a future Texas, well told from the point of view of a young girl, and of the effects of the odd gift given her by a ship-wrecked alien spaceman; it could have been resolved better, but it had some excellent moments. Pat Cadigan's "Angel" introduced us to shape-shifting aliens living as exiled criminals in human society; banal in resumé but stylishly written. And finally an author new to me, Dave Smeds, with "Termites", a moving short story about the tragic effects of the ultimate food aid gift from the First to the Third World: a genetically altered form of *E. coli*, allowing humans to digest cellulose. This issue is well worth the money.

INTERZONE 19 (Spring 1987)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

After the disappointment of IZ18 I settled down to read IZ19 with a certain degree of wariness, a feeling which grew somewhat when I discovered that the whole issue is devoted to new, or at least newish, writers. 'Wot, no Big Names?' I thought.

I need not have worried. IZ19 provided me with the best read I've had from a magazine in a long time. To be sure, there's nothing wildly innovative - or even avant-garde, the usual label given to much of IZ's material - here. Christina Lake's 'Assyria' is the most ambitious, but her story of transference between dimensions unfortunately is the least successful of the bunch, perhaps because readers have to struggle through most of the story before the author lets drop what's actually happening. But still, it's an interesting first story. The other debut is by S.M. Baxter with 'The Xeelee Flower'. Very traditional space fiction, this, but nicely paced. In Neil Ferguson's 'The Second Third of C' read Winston and Julia for Roger and Sharon, the two protagonists. Like Orwell, however, the hope which runs through this bleak tale is extinguished at the end.

I found it very difficult to decide which of the three remaining stories was the best. In 'A Dragon for Seymour Chan' by Paul J. McAuley the rather amoral D'Amalfi tries to net himself both a dragon and a woman. Will he succeed? There's a time-honoured sf resolution at the end. I fancy that McAuley will have D'Amalfi put in more appearances in the future....Kim Newman's central character in 'The Next-But-One Man' is a thoroughly unpleasant right-winger, and you find yourself cheering at his downfall in this excellent story. But, by a short head, the best tale for me is 'Goodbye Houston Street, Goodbye'. It's another black comedy with arty characters who could have come from early Ballard or Brunner, and it includes delicious instructions, in four short paragraphs, on how to recognise and steal uranium!

It's always a brave move when a magazine eschews established authors and highlights newcomers. So it is particularly pleasing when it pays off. It certainly has done so here. And as a bonus there's an interesting and informative interview with Gwyneth Jones as well as the fiction. All in all, an excellent issue.

Closer Encounters

Rupert Sheldrake - - - - A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE
(Paladin, 1987, 287pp, £3.95)

Richard Grant - - - - - - - - RUMORS OF SPRING
(Bantam Spectra, 1987, 439pp, $9.95)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

The connection between science and science fiction is often vague and tenuous, but one thing the scientist and the SF writer have in common is the need to play the game of 'what if...?' The difference between them is that the scientist's flights of fancy must be trammelled by 'what *is*'; by the observable facts of nature. Straddling these two noble occupations is the pseudoscientist, whose imagination is unrestricted by such concerns as truth and accuracy, yet whose fictions are not intended to induce a temporary supension of disbelief for the purpose of mere entertainment. Of course, distinctions are not clear, and one man's scientific claim is another man's crackpot idea. Case in point: Rupert Sheldrake and his 'hypothesis of formative causation'.

A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE seeks to demonstrate the inadequacy of conventional biological theory, and suggests an alternative way of looking at the natural world. Sheldrake supposes that every material structure in the universe has associated with it a 'morphogenetic field', and that these otherwise undetectable fields exert, by resonance, an influence on the fields of other structures. As an example, a popular Sheldrake thought experiment holds that if rats in one place are taught a particular trick (running a maze), then rats elsewhere should find it easier to learn the same trick. A marvellous notion - and very useful, too, for accounting for all manner of psychic phenomena.

Unfortunately, A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE is a thoroughly incomplete work. Sheldrake does not claim to have proven his case, and therefore is not to be put in the same pseudoscience niche as Von Daniken or Berlitz; but neither has he carried out a single experiment to test his hypothesis. There is no shortage of suggested thought experiments, proposed tests, but not one jot of actual data. Were he *merely* suggesting a new model, take-it-or-leave-it, this might be acceptable. But it is clear that he sees morphogenetic fields as the basis of a whole new paradigm not just for biology, but for the whole of science:

> ...if morphogenetic fields are considered to be fully explicable in terms of known physical principles, they represent nothing but an ambiguous terminology superimposed upon... mechanistic theory. Only if they are assumed to play a *causal role at present unrecognised by physics*, can a testable theory be developed.
> [pp. 56-57; emphasis added]

For such a monumental upset to science as this, it is absurd that Sheldrake has not performed even the simplest of his suggested experiments.

Whether Sheldrake should be cast as scientist or pseudoscientist depends essentially on one's chosen philosophy of science. In the light of Thomas Kuhn's THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS - in which the history of science was characterized not as a continual advancement of knowledge, but instead as a succession of abrupt 'paradigm shifts' - Sheldrake appears to be in on a new

shift of perspective, suggesting a whole new system for interpreting the world we perceive. To the more extreme Kuhnians, for whom all points of view are equally valid, Sheldrake is most definitely a scientist.

But to the adherents of Karl Popper's principle that for a claim to be scientific it must be inherently falsifiable, Sheldrake borders dangerously close to pseudoscience. While he does indeed propose a number of tests of his theory, any or all of which may *confirm* his claims, he never states what (if any) outcome of these tests would constitute a *refutation* of the theory. When all is added together – absence of confirmatory data; absence of falsifiable claims; absence of any precise definition of morphogenetic fields; peculiar leaps of logic (although his fields are undefined, Sheldrake has no hesitation in declaring them non-energetic, and thence proceeds to draw dubious analogies with quantum mechanics) – the sum total is just inconsequential. Far from being a new science of life, what Sheldrake has posited is a new metaphysics which, as many of his critics have observed, is not even terribly new.

Enter Richard Grant, novelist. RUMORS OF SPRING is a tale of Earth's last great forest, which is running wild, swamping what little remains of civilisation. Amy Hayata has been experimenting with morphogenetic field control of the forest, but has died before completing her work. Years later, a motley selection of 'crusaders' ventures into the forest, hoping to unearth its secret.

Grant selects a cunning range of characters to explore human approaches to the unknown. There is Lord Tattersall, representing tradition, who is deaf when it suits him to be; his sceptical, sarcastic sidekick, who goes by the familiar name of Sheldrake; Groby, the practical man; Lorian, the inquiring journalist; and Vesica, a young innocent, as open-minded as is possible. However, despite this shrewdly chosen ensemble, Grant is at his weakest in handling a large cast. He tends to approach each scene with a forced sense of humour which is quite at odds with the more sedate, pastoral setting of the forest.

Though marketed as a fantasy, and indeed resolved in fantastic terms, RUMORS is undoubtedly a work of science fiction. Quite apart from deriving its central idea from Rupert Sheldrake's theory (never explicitly referred to, by the way), the novel shows an acute awareness of the creativity of science. Amy, seen through the remaining scraps of her manuscripts and computer tapes, equates her model of morphogenesis to a metaphor, hence making the connection between the 'artistic' and 'scientific' trains of thought; science is restrained by logic, but is propelled by imagination.

At the same time, Vesica begins to see the world as a story continually unfolding, although at any given time her choice of which story best fits the events surrounding her changes. Grant seems to be alluding here to the Kuhnian view of a succession of frameworks each seeking to account for an overlapping range of observations.

Unfortunately, for all the philosophical richness of RUMORS OF SPRING, most of which is to be found between the lines, its pace is most frustrating. As threads begin to pull together toward the end there is an annoying switch to a civilisation-based subplot, populated by unconvincing characters. The mystery of Amy's work unravels with a whimper, not a bang, as Grant pushes on to his conclusion.

Grant is to be congratulated – with reservations – for an impressive, thoughtful novel, whose richness is surpassed only by its moments of beauty. An uneven novel, and an overlong one, but nicely produced with some marvellous anthropomorphic line drawings.

Sheldrake is to be congratulated – with reservations – for an incisive overview of modern biology, and also for having the courage to include as an appendix an assortment of reviews (some of them very scathing) of the first edition of A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE.

If one saying were to be associated with morphic resonance, it should be 'an idea whose time has come' – although it's probably less resonance and more direct cause and effect which led Richard Grant to construct his novel. Though A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE is flawed as a scientific thesis, and RUMORS OF SPRING is flawed as a novel, the once-in-a-blue-moon process of science inspiring art has been fruitful in this case. Looking for an example of science informing fiction and producing an entertaining end result? These two books will do nicely.

Janet Morris (ed.) - - - - - - - REBELS IN HELL
(Baen, $3.50)

(A Cautionary Review by Mike Cobley)

Various books on the writing of SF (the best of them anyway) stress the importance of technical competence, and the ability to detect and build on a story seed in a manner as novel and free from cliche as possible. Such an approach demands a certain degree of honesty and integrity from any writer who believes in creating something of greater staying power than a piece of Kleenex in a monsoon.

It is with the word 'art' in mind that I turn to REBELS IN HELL, the second volume in this particular shared-world anthology. It contains nine stories; one each from Chris Morris, Bill Kerby, Robert Silverberg, Nancy Asire, Martin Caidin, David Drake, Janet Morris; and two from C.J. Cherryh. And I have to say that reading this book left me feeling dispirited, tired even. Why?

Well, there was 'Undercover Angel' by Chris Morris, the book's opening story which left a lot to be desired, being a kind of reader's obstacle course strewn with expository lumps. Yet it was a smooth ride compared to 'Hell's Gate' by Bill Kerby which, packed out with pointless slang and phony realism, tried to be laid-back cyberpunk and failed dismally. Silverberg's more recent work has been strangely lifeless, as if written by rote, and 'Gilgamesh In The Outback' is no exception. Table With A View' by Nancy Asire was torpid, wandering and thankfully brief.

Martin Caidin's 'There Are No Fighter Pilots Down In Hell', however, is so bad that the others are accomplished works of art in comparison. The character of his repellent protagonist possesses not a single redeeming feature, and revels in a gratuitous violence that has little to do with the story plot.

Caidin is a prose thug. So is David Drake – an educated thug, but a thug nevertheless. ''Cause I Served My Time In Hell' has little to recommend it save that at 18 pages it is 40 pages shorter than Caidin's charred offering.

C.J. Cherryh's 'Marking Time' and 'Monday Morning' are the only two bright spots in the turgid catalogue, but even they are beneath the level of skill she displayed in DOWNBELOW STATION. And by the time I finished the last story (Janet Morris' 'Graveyard Shift', a title of unintentional irony) I found I'd exceeded my yearly quota of cynicism and misanthropy.

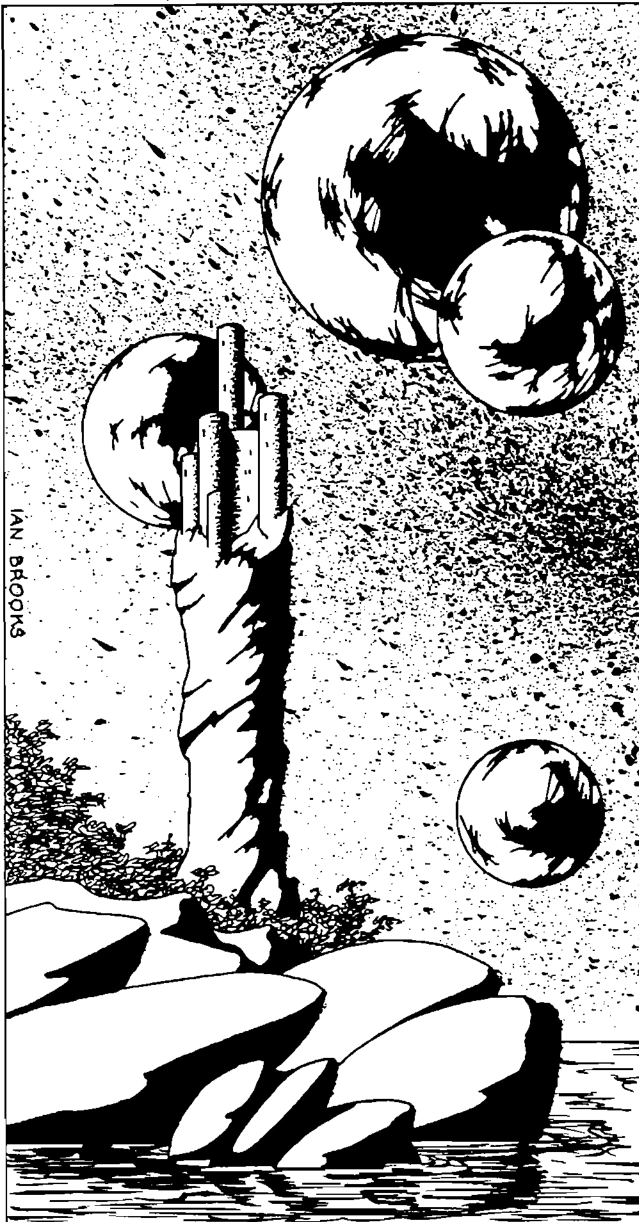
Why, when examined, did this book turn out to be so downright contemptible?

Was it the continual resurrection of those killed (RIVERWORLD passim), or the sight of Roman soldiers armed with automatic weapons (*Star Trek*)?

To my mind it goes deeper than that. It is *because* this is a shared-world anthology that it's so lacking in freshness and originality. It is no coincidence that the historical figures adorning Janet Morris' 'Hell' are unconvincing cardboard shells, or that the text is spotted with amateurisms like a fifth-hand car with rust. Or that the landscapes teem with faceless minions being wiped out almost casually by the various protagonists. Or that the overall plot thread is so tenuous as to be incidental.

The fact is that this volume, having at its core a corrupt concept, contradicts just about every principle of good writing, with said-bookism, vapid and transparent characterisations, and uninspired prose. I hope Silverberg and Cherryh will have second thoughts about contributing to any further volumes in this series because, to be frank, this one stank on ice.

And if any of these 'Hell'-books see publication in the U.K., we really will have hit a new low.



REVIEWS

Philip K. Dick - - - IN MILTON LUMKY TERRITORY
(Paladin, 1987, 213pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Bruce Stevens meets Susan Faine, who persuades him to give up his job as a buyer with a discount house to manage her ailing typewriter store. He seizes this opportunity to fulfill his boyhood dream to run his own business, and commits himself to the extent of marrying Susan. Their relationship is by no means easy, complicated by the fact that she was his fifth grade teacher, and her unpredictable moods. In an attempt to save the business, he sets off on the trail of Milton Lumky, a paper salesman who he believes can lead him to a good deal on some new Japanese electric typewriters. But the deal backfires, Bruce's hopes and his marriage are left in ruins, and the book ends with his fantasy (I think) of self-employed success.

Into this narrative Dick takes a penetrating look at the hopes of capitalistic America in the 1950s and presents a rather pessimistic view of the American Dream. Bruce is obsessed with the idea of business success to the exclusion of all else; Milt Lumky (whom I take to be Dick's mouthpiece, but I may be wrong) upbraids him for his lack of spirituality, his self-sufficiency and lack of concern for people. When he buys typewriters which have a foreign keyboard, his first impulse is to pass his failure on, but Susan refuses to compromise her sense of human responsibility and scuttles his attempt to con his ex-employers into buying them. In this, and her withdrawal from the business in favour of family life, acts as a foil to his cynicism. The end of the book is in the form of Bruce's school essay, 'How we made a killing with the Jap typewriters, And what became of us because of that', which seems to reduce the American Dream to a fantasy of self-gratification. This is a thought-provoking and literate book which I can highly recommend.

Mick Gower (ed.) - - - - - - -TWISTED CIRCUITS
(Beaver, 1987, 144pp, £1.75)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Eight stories for computer-mad kids. Jan Mark and Nicholas Fisk take the same theme of a lonely computer and treat it with irony and farce respectively. John Gordon's 'user-friendly' robodog gives a spiteful child her come-uppance, while in 'Krarg Enters', Dennis Hamley presents an amusing Tolkienian adventure-game breaking into reality. Phil Cartwright's 'The Computer Game' continues this theme with a clever look at the ultimate in realistic games. Marjorie Dark, Adele Geras, and Lawrence Staig contribute a love story in which a computer plays a part, a look at hi-tech teaching methods, and a fusion between the microchip and the occult. Take a look: Mark and Fisk particularly make it a bargain. Theme anthologies aren't to everyone's taste, but this is better than many currently available with bigger names on the front cover.

Bob Shaw - - - - - - - - - - THE PEACE MACHINE
(Grafton, 1987, 187pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

To all intents and purposes this is simply a 1980s version of GROUND ZERO MAN. *The Basil Brush Show* becomes *Grange Hill*, a Ford Director becomes a Ford Sierra and 1978 becomes 1988. The short and unimportant chapter seventeen of GROUND ZERO MAN is deleted and two extra sentences make things clearer in the epilogue. This doesn't really amount to much but makes enough difference to change your whole attitude to the story.

As the book opens, protagonist, Lucas Hutchman has realised he can make neutrons 'dance to a new tune' by building the Peace Machine of the title. Effectively this means it could simultaneously detonate every nuclear device on the planet. Coincidentally, on cue as it were, Damascus is nuked, an event of questionable significance to the plot and along with a later kidnapping is never resolved or explained. The first third of the book concerns the building of the Machine which is described in tremendously convincing terms. At the same time Hutchman's marriage is going down the drain as a side effect. His monster of a wife has made jealousy an art-form. For instance, she believes that if he takes his briefcase from the back seat of his car he has had a passenger. Small wonder then that cracks start to appear in Hutchman's sanity. He is dimly aware that he is no saint either and half-heartedly questions the course he has made inevitable.

Unfortunately, the plot starts to go a bit astray half way through as a number of absurdities pile up. As Hutchman kills time so the scene the reader knows to be inevitable is put off. The cover and prologue don't help matters in this sense and highlight the fact that the episodes in Bolton are unnecessary padding.

I was left with the feeling it might have been better as a novella. Despite its flaws it's a neat little page turner, a portrait of one man's nightmare.

Robert E. Vardeman - - - - - MASTERS OF SPACE: THE STELLAR DEATH PLAN
(Avon, 1987, 214pp, $3.50)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

Roll on the Plot,
No matter what.
Meet the hack,
He's got the knack.

Given the author, the cover and best (worst?) of all the blurb: 'Beginning a new action-packed SF adventure in the pulse-pounding tradition of E.E. 'Doc' Smith!', you can hardly say there isn't ample opportunity for the discerning reader to be warned. Then again, what is actually inside? There's nothing of the scale of the Lensman or Skylark series here but the plot summary does ring a few bells. Goody stumbles across the secret adequately explained in the title, is marked for murder (big surprise), continually cheats death by the skin of every extremity in the book (earth-shattering surprise) and even escapes an inescapable planet with the help of a scatter-brained nymphomaniac (what a surprise!). Despite this temporary set-back the plot rolls to its inevitable conclusion with all the baddies intact for the sequel.

It might be hilarious, escapist garbage but I enjoyed it all the same.

Roger Zelazny - - - - - THE DOORS OF HIS FACE, THE LAMPS OF HIS MOUTH
(Methuen, 1987, 271pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

This new edition of a 1973 publication includes among its fifteen items two classic novellas the Nebula-awarded title piece and the beautifully written, though dramatically formularistic, 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes'. 'Corrida' and 'Collector's Fever', are slight pieces expressive of a single concept; other stories, such as 'Love is an Imaginary Number' achieve startling syntheses through the combining of diverse elements - in the case of that particular PRINCES IN AMBER prototype, Taliesin-like metamorphoses and the myth of Prometheus.

Zelazny's imaginative net yields so miscellaneous a catch of meta-myths, allusions and literary fragments as sometimes to irritate or distract; but for all its cultural and stylistic bravura and occasional rather dated Village-speak dialogue, the Zelazny experience is a powerful one. For my money the best of the stories is 'The Moment of the Storm' - 'the rains came' to the nth degree, crossed with the Rip van Winkle syndrome of space flight. 'The Keys to December', which deals in a tortuous way with the ethics of planet-changing, contains what is probably the most poetically inventive description of an alien world ever to be set down in two or three hundred words - or for that matter in two or three thousand.

T.E.D. Klein - - - - - - - - - - - - DARK GODS
(Pan, 1987, 259pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

T.E.D. Klein is one of a few writers whose work may be cited as evidence that the horror genre today cannot all be dismissed as superficial or uninspired. His THE CEREMONIES, published in the U.K. last year, brought considerable respect. It established that Klein has an affectionate reverence for the past masters of the dark art, and understands the potency of the approach found in nearly all its classics; a subtle and allusive unfolding, mingling mystery with droplets (not outpourings) of the grotesque, allowing the reader to distill from the story's smouldering alembic the vital, poisonous essence. This collection of four novellas, not all new, reassures us of those qualities and also makes clear that Klein has strengths where horror is traditionally weak - his characters are credible and engaging, not mere ciphers, and his dialogue is similarly authentic. One gets the impression that Klein is fascinated by people, their background, habits and attitudes, and this respect for individuality informs his narrative. In 'Children of the Kingdom', an old theme of the malignant abhuman race existing around us is given new force in a New York slum setting, in 'Petey' a lunatic's misunderstood messages, a tarot deck with an extra card and some unpleasant pickling jars forewarn of the secret of a desolate house, and in 'Black Man with a Horn', a missionary retired from his work in the Malay jungles flees in terror from a John Coltrane album cover in an airport stall, and a fellow passenger feels he is being drawn into a fate straight out of his old friend Lovecraft's fiction. 'Nadelman's God', a World Fantasy Award winner, builds a frightful reality from an ad. executive's youthful poem of decadence and diabolism. I shall relish re-reading them all, and I recommend you find time for Klein soon.

Steve Rasnic Tem - - - - - - - - - - -EXCAVATION
(Avon, 1987,280pp, $3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Reed Taylor escaped from his father's brutality shortly before his family died in a violent flood. Now he's an archaeologist, with wife and children, but is becoming increasingly self-absorbed and listless. Aware of the effect this is having on his marriage, and alarmed by strange dreams and spooky phone calls, Reed decides to literally excavate his past and returns to his home village of Simpson Creeks where he starts to dig amid the ruins of his old house, exploring the memories of his unhappy childhood.

But Simpson Creeks is coming to terms with its own past guilts and horrors. On one level, the cause of the original flood - the failure of a coal company's dam - is still buried beneath a collective desire to keep quiet in case the company pulls out altogether; on another, a demonic force has been awakened in the woods around the old Taylor house. The climax is suitably horrific as Reed Taylor encounters part of his past which never left and the town suffers another deluge.

Steve Rasnic Tem's first novel is an exploration of several múrky areas of human nature. Like some of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories, it evokes the shadow which haunts the remnants of the great American forest, the sense of 'spirit of the place' which drives Reed's archaeology and which, we understand, is behind the manifestations which haunt Simpson Creeks. But in their aspects as Taylor's own past we see them as a more subtle horror, for Taylor is finally forced to ask himself 'What might he have become if he'd stayed behind with his family in Simpson Creeks?' The result of the excavation is a frightening picture of family violence, made more, not less effective by its interpretations through the modes of horror fantasy rather than realism.

Thomas Ligotti - - - - SONGS OF A DEAD DREAMER
(Silver Scarab Press, 1985, 166pp, $8 + $4 p&p - from 502 Elm S.E., Albuquerque, N.M. 87102, U.S.A.)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

As Ramsey Campbell points out in his brief but perceptive introduction, Thomas Ligotti belongs to 'the most honourable tradition in the field [of horror fiction] that of subtlety and awesomeness rather than the relentlessly graphic.' This American small press paperback collects 14 pieces by Ligotti. In several of the stories - 'The Frolics', 'Les Fleurs', 'Drink to Me Only with Labyrinthine Eyes' - amoral outsiders taste, test or trick, then discard, oblivious victims. There are signs that these sinister strangers are of supra-normal provenance. Other tales take place in a bizarre 'Elsewhere' parallel to M. John Harrison's 'Viriconium' work. Ligotti also explores - in 'Notes on the Writing of Horror: A Story' and another piece - the very nature of this type of writing, and its relationship to human realities. Many of the pieces seem shot through with a vein of century's end aestheticism, possessing those qualities of consummate poise, cool irony and sensitivity to style which the Decadents espoused; also something of their melancholy. (The photo-collage artwork, in its juxtaposition of objets d'art and distorted faces has the same lingering and baroque presence.) Ligotti gives the 'Dark Fantastic' new character, cogency and grace.

Piers Anthony - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - MUTE
(Avon, 1987, 440pp, $3.95)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

Once there was a Piers Anthony who wrote CTHON and OMNIVORE. That Anthony wrote with craft and art and promise. That Anthony went away: this is the 'best-selling author of BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT', craft yes, but art? Piers Anthony sells more SF and fantasy books in the USA than any other writer - did you know that? Okay, popular doesn't mean 'good', but nor does it mean 'bad' (as some critics would have us believe). Piers Anthony obviously gets through to a lot of people, perhaps MUTE will tell us why.

'Mute' means mutant. Mankind's galactic empire depends on the mutants, but only some mutants, mainly those with mental capabilities. The rest are consigned to enclaves. The Empire is managed by the Coordinating Computer (CC) whose agents search out mutants to make best use of them.

Knot is a mutant who does not agree with CC's policies but is eventually convinced that he should become an agent to track down those who are trying to gain control of CC. Knot is helped by Finesse, 'a sensuous, seductive imperial agent', a telepathic weasel and a precognitive hermit crab (the blurb gets this wrong, so much for copy-editing). The enemy turns out to be the 'lobos', mutants (usually criminals) lobotomized to remove their psi powers. Let battle begin.

Sounds pretty run-of-the-mill, doesn't it, and some sections are padded out, exclamations repeated, scientific ideas explained at length which most secondary school kids should have heard of. And some of the sections about the physical mutants read across to the physically disabled could be offensive. Given the benefit of the doubt perhaps Mr Anthony is trying to make points about physical disability/ deformity; a topic most of us do tend to shy away from.

The book also questions right and wrong. Is it okay for Knot to love Finesse even though she has left the husband and child she loves to become a sex object for Knot because she is willing to make any sacrifice to save CC? Knot ponders this question throughout the book although it is tied up too neatly at the end. Knot also finds that he sympathises with the main aims of the lobos and while disapproving of their methods finds he is forced to use them himself. Is Knot hero or villain?

Whilst it's good to see a book question the motives and methods of its characters within the context of an adventure story, it's laid on rather than integrated and detracts from the story. So while Mr Anthony tried to make his readers look at some of the issues involved I fear it was so heavy handed it would actually turn the readers off.

Colin Wilson - - - -THE ESSENTIAL COLIN WILSON
(Grafton, 1987, 336pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

I approached this selection of writings as a total stranger, and am probably the kind of reader it is aimed at. Its title seems to suggest that it is an attempt to be a definitive collection, giving a glimpse into the man's interests and the direction of his work. On reading it, I was aware of a logical and consistent development in Wilson's thinking - which is not to say that he never contradicts himself, but that such contradictions are a logical part of his development and something of which he is quite

aware. I was also aware of his rather obsessive and analytical mind. As someone who largely shuns non-fiction in the belief that the Truth is better expressed in the fictional form, I found myself rather drawn into these writings which are thought-provoking and imaginative. At the same time, it is rather a dissatisfying volume - although it gives an interesting broad, sweeping insight of the man's writing, such a selection is, by its very nature, unable to satisfy the reader's desire to see lines of thought properly developed and fully explored (having said that, even in this selection, Wilson is sometimes irritatingly repetitive).

The selection is lifted from Wilson's books on philosophy, psychology, criminology and the occult, and from his fiction. These are interesting subjects, but the reader is given little more than a taste of them - particularly dizzying is the broad sweep of the history of modern philosophy in extracts from 'Beyond The Outsider' and 'The New Existentialism'. Of interest to SF fans, perhaps, are his writings on the occult in which magic is seen as the science of the future, citing telepathy, telekinesis, and precognition as occult powers. Some may suspect him of gullibility, especially in his acceptance of the likes of Uri Geller, but I found a great deal of imaginative if not real truth in his beliefs. You may also note a mention of A.E. Van Vogt in his essay on violence, 'Report on the Violent Man'.

An interesting but rather frustrating read.

Jack Williamson - - - - - - - - - - -LIFEBURST
(Sphere, 271pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Mankind has constructed a literal web around the Earth using an immensely strong synthetic fibre. A technocratic race of space dwellers inhabit this web while making tentative explorations of an area outside the orbit of Pluto, known as the Solar Halo. Meanwhile contact is made with an alien species who are occupying the Halo while studying Man.

A lone 'starsider', from man's furthest outpost catches a glimpse of a fearsome new alien presence as it destroys a human spacecraft. It turns out to be a marauding cyborg war machine and the 'starsider' heads for Earth in an attempt to halt the cyborg before it damages the web. He is assisted by some of the friendly aliens and the mission is complicated by the rise of a sinister religious leader, called the Revelator, who thinks the alien menace is an invention of the space-dwellers.

There are many reductive methods of dissecting this kind of book into its component formulaic parts, but writers of Space Opera choose to operate within a set of rigid parametes which necessitate a more holistic approach. The book exhibits the required levels of over-developed plotting and under-developed characterization. The narrative is 'self-propelled', by this I mean all the information required by the reader is provided neatly and lucidly. The style is easily digestible, in fact the book could easily have been written fifty years ago, except for an irrelevant incursion by a black hole near the end.

For those of you who enjoy a fast paced, densely plotted adventure novel this is one of the best I have read since Niven passed his peak. Jack Williamson has successfully updated his 'Golden Age' style whilst retaining the narrative verve and sense-of-wonder evoked in his classic early work.

C.J. Cherryh - - - - - - - - - - -CUCKOO'S EGG
(Methuen, 1987, 319pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

C.J. Cherryh enjoys a reputation for literacy which many of her contemporaries would be hard pressed to emulate. Although CUCKOO'S EGG is a diverting, 'easy' read it is far from being her most accomplished work.

The plot is a simple, perhaps too obvious, analogy for the trials of youth, part of the evolution to maturity. Thorn is a human baby with enigmatic origins. He is raised by Dunn, a disabled master in the martial art of hatani. Dunn is reminiscent of the currently, commercially successful ninja. CUCKOO'S EGG is a chronicle of Thorn's attempts to discover the events surrounding his birth in a hostile alien world. CUCKOO'S EGG is written in a free easy style that is an asset rather than an encumbrance. It is an enjoyable novel which would be eminently suitable for that proverbial train journey. The plot would be improved if it rested on the stronger foundation provided by a more detailed background. The characterization is competent if uninspired. The greatest test for an sf writer is the detailed and believable characterization of an alien. Cherryh accomplishes this with what appears to be consummate ease. Many sf writers resolve the problem of characterization by creating 'humanoid' creatures whose alien nature is only skin deep. Cherryh, on the other hand, portrays Dunn in a manner which evokes an appreciation of his alien nature while retaining him as a sympathetic character. However Cherryh's deployment of Dunn's disability borders on the melodramatic and the psychology underlying Dunn's decision not to undergo restorative surgery is never fully explored. This oversight significantly weakens what is otherwise an excellent character study. Thorn is described in less detail. This may be deliberate allowing the reader to colour Thorn with his own experiences. However I feel the book would have been improved by a deeper examination of Thorn's character.

On the whole CUCKOO'S EGG is a pleasure to read and while it is not among Cherryh's better books, it is a competent novel worthy of your attention.

C.J. Cherryh - - - - - - THE FADED SUN TRILOGY
(Methuen, 1987, 756pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Despite several attempts, I've never really enjoyed C.J. Cherryh's books, but after reading Patricia Monk's essay on Cherryh and alien contact in *Foundation 37* I made a start on THE FADED SUN and found an epic novel on the grand scale with some interesting contrasts built into it.

The human-regul war is over. The mri (a mercenary nomadic race who fought for the regul) are few in number and their temporary homeworld Kesrith is ceded to the humans. An act of regul treachery reduces the mri to just two, Melein and Nuin. Sten Duncan is a forerunner for human occupying forces. Caught up in the regul action against the mri, he forges a bond with Nuin and joins with the mri on their quest to their half-forgotten homeworld. But racial survival for the mri is also a threat for the other races, haunted by the warlike ethos of the mecenaries.

Altogether, this is a long novel of intrigue, loyalties to and the differing mental constructs of the three races, and it is sometimes confusing as all novels of intrigue must be. How far Duncan renounces his

human heritage, for example, is hardly clear even to himself. Ironically, perhaps, Cherryh is at her weakest in plumbing the human racial psyche - whereas the regul (who lack the capacity we call imagination) and the mri (bound by honour and ceremony) are fine creations, Cherryh never quite makes the imaginative leap to creating a vision of humanity *for the reader* in such discrete terms. (We do see humanity's alienness through regul and mri eyes, but this is not, quite, enough.) Perhaps this is inevitable: perhaps it shows the looseness of the concept of 'racial psyche'. A more serious flaw - yet also the reason I enjoyed the book so much - is the way THE FADED SUN is reminiscent of DUNE, with much of the action set on desert-worlds and the mri - ceremony and robes and all - so much like the Fremen with the semi-sentient dus beasts playing a similar symbolic role (although their function in the story is different) to DUNE's sandworms.

Fritz Leiber - - - - - -THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR
(Grafton, 1986, 222pp, £2.50)

- - - - - - -SWORDS AND ICE MAGIC
(Grafton, 1986, 189pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR maintains the high standard of the series with many ribs at the fantasy genre. The book begins with Fafhrd and the Mouser returning to Lankhmar to confront every type of low-life in the city. This leads to a high-seas adventure and the saving of Lankhmar from an invasion of miniature warriors. It is, without doubt, one of the most amusing books I've read.

SWORDS AND ICE MAGIC, the last book in the series, is terribly disappointing. The two heroes have another brush with Death, upset the Gods, and hunt for treasure on the Sea of Stars. Good fun so far, but then Rime Isle buys their services and from p.63 doom and gloom set in. Totally lacking in humour and not very thought-provoking: I had a hard time keeping my eyes open. A poor end to an otherwise excellent series.

Viido Polikarpus & Tappan King - - - DOWN TOWN
(Orbit, 1987, 293pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul J McAuley)

Every so often a book comes along that is more than just a text, that is, somehow, bigger on the inside than the outside, written not for the bottom dollar but out of care and craft and true love of creation. DOWN TOWN, a fantasy and the first novel of Viido Polikarpus and Tappan King, is such a book. Its hero is 12 years old Cary Newman, living unhappily in New York with his mother after her separation. One day, after an argument with her on the subway, Cary somehow finds himself on a deserted platform, and when a bag lady passess by he follows her, like Alice after the White Rabbit, into Down Town, which, according to one of its inhabitants:

> ...is the place for all the people and things, real and imaginary, that the Uptown world no longer has any use for. The place where all the folks who can't, or won't, keep up end up.

No brief resume can do justice to Cary's adventures as, with Allie, erstwhile leader of a gang of street children, he searches for a way home, only to discover that he possesses the secret that can save Down Town (and Uptown too) from the designs of Grand Kobol Van Damm - provided he can stay out of the clutches of Van Damm's lieutenant and his army of Badmashers. Tender and witty and touching and crammed full of insight and imagination, ably supplemented by Viido Polikarpus' illustrations (not always reproduced as well as they might be), DOWN TOWN is recommended without reservation, not only to the young audience for which I suspect it was written, but for anyone who likes fantasy, books about New York, or simply a good read.

Piers Anthony - - - - - - - - - - - -ANTHONOLOGY
(Grafton, 1986, 432pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Alex Brown)

Despite its uninspiring title, this is not a run-of-the-mill anthology. Anthony has chosen 21 stories which were written, roughly speaking, between 1962 and 1972, and has arranged them in the order in which they were written. Pretty unoriginal,I thought, but I soon revised my opinion...

The stories in this collection fall into two distinct parts. One, and this is admittedly the larger of the two, consists of mundane stories. 'In The Jaws Of Danger' describes the problems of a dentist kidnapped by aliens and forced to work inside the mouth of an enormous whale-like creature on a twelve-foot tooth. 'Hurdle' is about an obstacle course race for 700mph fusion-powered cars. 'The Ghost Grabbers' describes an experimental spaceship travelling at a truly colossal speed. This is imaginative stuff, and it's written in a very readable style. There is a lot of humour and the stories are always entertaining if not outstanding.

The other part of this collection consists of four stories which are absolute stunners. 'In The Barn' is centred upon the use of women as dairy cattle, while 'On The Uses Of Torture' is vicious in the extreme. 'The Bridge' and 'Up Schist Creek' are in a similar vein, although the emphasis here is upon sex and excreting. If there are any members of the Moral Majority out there, do not read these stories. Although the sex and violence which they contain is not gratuitous, they will upset you. If however you like your fiction to be aggressive, taboo-breaking and thought-provoking, read ANTHONOLOGY.

Finally, here is a quote from the introduction to 'On The Uses Of Torture':-

> My main frustration about the matter is the fact that Harlan Ellison wrote a story about the same time I wrote 'Torture', but his was much milder. Thus his 'A Boy And His Dog' was able to make it into print...People thought that was the most brutal fiction the genre had to offer; they never got to see mine.

Well, folks, now's your chance...

Cherry Wilder - - - - - - - -THE SUMMER'S KING
(Unwin/Unicorn, 1987, 244pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

In PI62 you can see my ambiguous reaction to the previous two volumes of this trilogy. I disliked this volume until about half-way through, when I realised that I was gripped.

Unlike most other fantasy sequences this is a trilogy. Not a three-decker novel, or a serial, but a trilogy: taking one story and viewing it, or parts of it, through different viewpoints. This is a continuation of the overall theme of the previous two novels, but

taking up the story of Sharn Am Zor, co-ruler (with Aidris, whom we met in A PRINCESS OF THE CHAMELN) of the Chameln lands.

The machinations of the evil magician Rosmer reach a conclusion, yet at the same time Rosmer himself seems as shadowy a character as he was before; a point which reflects much of Wilder's world, which seems to be a mixture of dreamlike ambiguity and acutely realised invention. We have here the story of the king who must marry and goes on a quest to choose a magical bride. But Sharn actually fails in this quest, which makes it a much more interesting story, and grows and matures as a result of his experiences in Eildon. Yet there are clumsy elements as well. We find characters drinking 'kaffee' and one lady declaims 'I am of the Shee'. Surely Wilder is too mature a writer for these cliches?

Success or failure? The RULERS OF HYLOR trilogy just manages to avoid breaking new ground in the fantasy genre, but its failure lies in the fact that it is so much better than most. It is very well written and the oblique approach of the three volumes to the central events, combining with the delicate understatement of Wilder's world-creation, means that readers who like their 'i's dotted and 't's crossed may find it not to their liking. There is no map.

I found myself thinking of E.R. Eddison at times throughout the book, possibly because of its undercurrent of intrigue and an Eddisonian sense of opulence. If Zimiamvia rather than Middle Earth is your touchstone for fantasy, then you'll enjoy this trilogy. But read it all, or not at all.

John Lee - - - - - - - - - - - THE UNICORN QUEST
(Orbit, 1987, 381pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley)

The plot of THE UNICORN QUEST is that of a hundred or more recent fantasy novels: a magical kingdom is threatened by evil forces which can only be averted if the chosen hero or heroes can retrieve/destroy the McGuffin... In this case, the kingdom is called the Strand, walled off by a giant Causeway from the poisonous atmosphere and hostile inhabitants of the Outlands. When these breach the Causeway with machinery and decimate the armies of the Strand only the magical power embodied in one creature, the unicorn, can possibly turn the tide...that is, if such a creature exists. Fairly standard stuff so far, but what makes the book different is the level of writing (when it isn't straining to be 'poetic'), which is far above the average for this kind of fantasy. Mr Lee describes the mostly feudal societies of the Strand with none of the sentiment of all too many other writers, and the working of magic here is no casual thing but a chancy, exhausting affair. The characters of the callow magician, Jarod, and the Lady Marianna, are well drawn, and everything does not simply resolve upon completion of their quest. If only the plot (despite a few neat twists) was not so predictable! Still, recommended to anyone who likes fantasy and doesn't give a damn about plot originality, and to anyone who is thinking of trying out the genre. Oh, and THE UNICORN QUEST is *not* part of a trilogy.

Walter Jon Williams - - AMBASSADOR OF PROGRESS
(Orbit, 1987, 432pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley)

Walter Jon Williams attracted some interest in U.S. SF circles last year with the publication of his cyberpunk novel HARDWIRED, but AMBASSADOR OF PROGRESS, first published in 1984, is very much an apprentice piece, firmly in the sub-genre of Swords&Spaceships. The plot is straightforward. Fiona is one of many ambassadors dropped onto a long-lost colony world divided amongst warring city-states (why do writers of this sort of stuff always assume that the best a colony world can achieve after losing contact with Earth is a perpetual feudalism of the kind that has never existed save in the realms of fantasy?). Fiona's task, along with the other ambassadors, is to make the colonists aware of their history and to introduce them to technology that will eventually allow them to join the new alliance of human worlds, but the arrival of people from another world precipitates a variety of power struggles. Fiona becomes caught up in a war on the side of the mercenary Brodaini; and in particular, with a poet in their employ. For a central character she is curiously passive, and because the rules of her mission don't allow her to interfere with the wars she is very much in the background for most of the book. This leads to an unfocused feeling not helped by writing that is all too often careless and inflated; Mr Williams rarely uses one word when two or three can be used instead. All in all, this is a fairly derivative muddle, and anyone picking it up because of HARDWIRED is going to be disappointed.

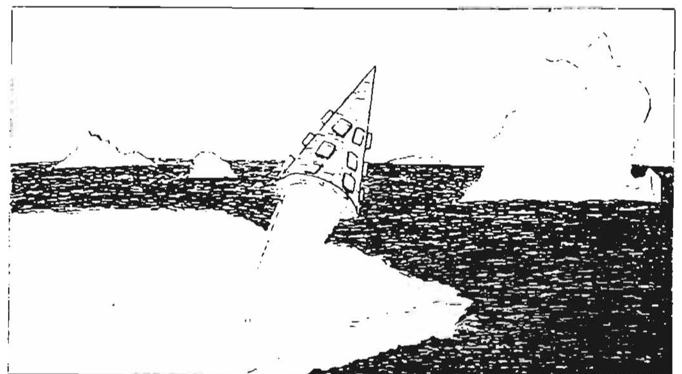
Richard Lupoff - - - - - - - - - - - - SUN'S END
(Grafton, 348pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Can a bionic survivor from the 20th century save the Solar System? The answer to this teasing blurb will not be found in SUN'S END. The novel's inconclusive ending is just one of the major flaws in this botched attempt at an epic space opera (in scope if not in length).

26 billion humans face extinction because of an increasingly unstable sun. Our hero, a nuclear-powered version of the six million dollar man leads the race to Zimarzla, a recently discovered planet orbiting perpendicularly to the plane of the other Solar planets. After discovering mysterious alien 'sculptures' on Mercury it is believed that emissions from Zimarzla are of alien origin. The novel ends with the hero just about to confront a giant alien edifice.

Either this is a carefully diguised part of an unpromising trilogy, or the author had a contract to fulfill and dragged out an old manuscript for which he could never think of a suitable ending. Some imaginative attempts at describing a future world are spoilt by the obnoxious characters with which Lupoff populates it. Anyone looking for another SWORD OF THE DEMON or SPACE WAR BLUES (both over-rated books in my view) will have to wait for the author's next novel.



Frederik Pohl - - - - - -THE YEARS OF THE CITY
(New English Library, 1987, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Mark Greener)

THE YEARS OF THE CITY is a collection of four stories set in New York in the not too distant future. The book spans many years beginning with the start of construction of a huge dome which encloses the city and ends with its opening. The passage of time is marked by changes in the socio-political structure of the city. These are a result of a synthesis of an utopian video-age democracy which allows the citizens a direct input into the political process and the elected aristocracy a legacy of the 20th century. These political innovations, although naive, could have provided the basis for an excellent novel examining the basis of our 'democracy' and its possible future manifestations. This is especially relevant as one of the stories concerns a corrupt union official. Yet Pohl rejects this in favour of a sentimental melodrama that is reminiscent of soap opera rather than sf. The sf content of the stories is totally superfluous. SF requires the idea to be fundamental to the story and hence to examine either the reactions of people to or the consequences of the idea. This fundamental idea must have a fantastic element and a superficial gloss - be it of a futuristic city, an alternative universe or an alien planet - cannot translate melodrama into science fiction.

The protagonists, who link the stories are very poorly defined. They are totally devoid of humanity and one gets the impression that Pohl would have dispensed with them altogether if he were able.

Although set in New York THE YEARS OF THE CITY gives no real feel of a city. Pohl seems to lack a real understanding of city life and he resorts to cliches such as 'the hooker with a heart of gold' and the Serpico type cop who is honest in the face of corruption.

THE YEARS OF THE CITY is written in a style reminiscent of the pulps and, indeed, would have been at home in the sf magazines of the 1950s. Yet it lacks the authority of pastiche and is stale and dated. THE YEARS OF THE CITY is lifeless, colourless, dull and boring. I doubt if even a Pohl completist will enjoy this.

Stephen Volk - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -GOTHIC
(Grafton, 1987, 222pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Although GOTHIC is 'the new Ken Russell movie', the screenplay is by Stephen Volk who has also produced this novelisation - which (in an interview in *The Guardian*) he appeared to be unnecessarily modest about. Not having seen the film, I can only read this *as* a novel (or novelisation), but it quite obviously possesses more positive features than those of the average film script adaptation. Perhaps paradoxically, among these are a highly cinematic sense of visualisation and composition by scenes, and the exaggeration (some would say, distortion) of fact which comes about when the extravagant imagery of cinema is allied to the meticulous verbal representation of fact which is supposed to be the novel's distinguishing attribute. But of this, see later.

GOTHIC takes us into the most celebrated evening in literary history: that night when Byron, Shelley, Mary Godwin and Dr Polidori determined to write ghost stories and FRANKENSTEIN and (if we are to believe Brian Aldiss) SF were born. What we see is an exploration of the sexual and supernatural cliches of the Gothic mode. Have they raised the dead or are they just decadent romantics trapped in a parody of their own fantasies? In that same *Guardian* interview, Volk is quoted as saying that he 'wanted to show the cliches getting their own back on the characters'. I had intended to close this review by commenting upon how visions of madness, dream and the unconscious can best, perhaps, be gathered from imaginative reconstruction and parody rather than historical accuracy. Then, looking at E.F. Bleiler's introduction to Polidori's THE VAMPYRE I find that

> One evening, while Byron was reciting lines from Coleridge's 'Christabel', Shelley suddenly shrieked and ran from the room...[later, he] then told of envisioning a woman...with eyes instead of nipples.

This scene occurs in GOTHIC (pp. 69-70). The core of fascination in the book is not least of all built upon the fact that this group, imaginations fuelled by loves and hates, sexual tensions, drugs and macabre tales, in many ways itself resembled the cast of a Gothic novel. Stephen Volk has now written that novel and a fine one it is, too.

Guy Gavriel Kay - - - - - - - -THE SUMMER TREE
(Fionavar Tapestry Book 1)
(Berkley, 1986, 323pp, $3.50)
(Also available as Unwin Unicorn, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

As is almost inevitable with an epic fantasy, THE SUMMER TREE is being announced as comparable to Tolkien. This rather poor critical habit has been turned into a marketing tactic which does as much to detract from a proper evaluation of a book's worth as it does to guarantee sales to the brand of fantasy reader who likes nothing better than to consume rip-offs of their favourite author. In my view, THE SUMMER TREE bears no more than a generic similarity to Tolkien's LORD OF THE RINGS, and has little of the Professor's literary skills, imaginative scope, or ability to weave folklore and legend convincingly into the fabric of his story. He tries hard to capture some of these qualities and succeeds in presenting a reasonably interesting story of an epic struggle between good and evil. But his efforts are poor beside those of Tolkien as it is all too apparent that he is trying.

The story is a simple one. The book's five protagonists are transported from the University of Toronto (where they are attending a Celtic conference) to the parallel world of Fionavar, where they are destined to play a significant part in the defeat of Maugrim the Unraveller, who is bent on vengeance after being trapped below a mountain for the past thouasnd years. THE SUMMER TREE does little more than introduce the characters into this world and to their heroic roles. Herein lies the basic flaw of the novel; as a novel it simply does not work on its own terms but can only be read as an introduction to the trilogy - which might be good salesmanship, but certainly is not good writing. I would not recommend it to anyone who was not a glutton for epic fantasy, and would advise them to wait until the full set has been published so that they can read the whole thing in one sitting.

((Cont. from p. 2))

a better book than it would otherwise have been, but still not a good one."

((WAHF Joy Hibbert & Kev McVeigh))

Michael Scott Rohan - - THE ANVIL OF ICE (Futura, 1987, 352pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

Another magic sword, another imperilled land, another hero. Just another fantasy? Scott Rohan's novel is not entirely typical of its genre: its hero is the sword's maker, not its wielder; the menace to the land comes ulitmately not from some evil empire but from the advancing ice sheet which threatens 'The Winter of the World'.

THE ANVIL OF ICE, which is the first of a trilogy, tells the story of Alv ('changeling') from the destruction of his home village by Ekwesh sea raiders, through his apprenticeship to the mysterious Mastersmith and forging of a powerful 'mindsword' (during which he inadvertantly kills a fellow apprentice) through his subsequent guilt and self-imposed exile, the loss and restitution of his powers (after which he takes the name Elof 'the one alone') to a final confrontation with his former master amid the wreckage of another Ekwesh raid.

Like THE LORD OF THE RINGS, this is the story of a quest not to find something but to lose/destroy it, in this case the mindsword which Elof creates and which the Mastersmith weilds to destructive ends. Scott Rohan would appear to agree with Tolkien about the corrupting effects of power; it is interesting that the weapon that Elof forgers to confront the Mastersmith is not another sword but an object whose 'virtue' is essentially passive, a gauntlet with the ability to reflect back the force of an opponent's attack upon him.

Although THE ANVIL OF ICE certainly contains elements reminiscent of other popular fantasies (and of Norse mythology, which appears to be a particular enthusiasm of Rohan's) it also has a flavour of its own. Its landscapes are sufficiently familiar to ensure a wide readership but they are well realised, contain some imaginative touches, and are inhabited by characters who are something more than stereotypes. Looking around for things to quibble over, I would probably pick on Scott Rohan's decision to locate the story in some past geological era. This only becomes apparent in the appendices, but I think it is a mistake. Stories which bend the known laws of physics are fine so long as there's no way to get from here to there (where is Middle Earth?) but if they are placed anywhere in the 'real universe' (past, present or future) one's credulity becomes gravely strained.

On the whole I would recommend this book. It won't convert confirmed fantasy-haters, but fans will find a 'good read' with some pleasingly original touches.

Chris Ould - - ROAD LINES (Grafton, 1987, 303pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

Not the most impressive debut novel I have ever read, ROAD LINES describes a near-future Britain in which the unemployed are confined to containment zones -'conzos' - which are sealed-off areas of towns. The inhabitants are known as 'conzies'.

Carl is a Breaker, a mercenary who tracks down 'runners', conzies who have left their conzos in order to pursue a life of crime. Carl undertakes a private contract to find the killer of a businessman's son. He discovers that the victim was involved in supplying arms to the conzos in order to start a revolution, but the motives behind this turn out to be very sinister indeed.

I found the premise of 'apartheid for the unemployed' to be somewhat untenable - at least I hope it is! - and thus the novel as a whole has little basis in reality. Furthermore, although the blurb refers to 'the great MAD MAX tradition, it seemed to me to be closer to DIRTY HARRY.

Not really a bad novel, but I came away thinking 'So what?'.

Jonathan Wylie - - SERVANTS OF ARK: BOOK ONE - THE FIRST NAMED (Corgi, 1987, 349pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Laurence Scotford)

SERVANTS OF ARK is a compelling fantasy trilogy, set in an island world threatened by the reawakening of an ancient evil.' Sounds familiar? It should do, because it reads more or less the same as the blurb on the back of hordes of other 'compelling fantasy trilogies' that have emerged during recent years. And on opening the book up, suspicions are confirmed. There are the compulsory maps, and (oh joy!) a poem, but, thank heavens, no glossary.

This one concerns the fate of three deposed princes of Ark (one of the islands) and their struggle, with the help of various wizards and familiars (including a telepathic cat!) to rid the island of the evil power that has taken over the capital Starhill.

All pretty standard stuff. But it is written quite competently, in an easygoing, lighthearted style that may well appeal to adolescent readers.

John Fowles - - A MAGGOT (Pan, 1986, 460pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Laurence Scotford)

In his prologue to this novel John Fowles says that 'This fictional maggot was written very much for the same reason as those old musical ones of the period in which it is set: out of obsession with a theme.' And this is a novel which is, to a certain extent, about obsession; an obsession that the reader soon shares, reading onwards, anxious to reach the revelation in which the superbly tangled web that Fowles weaves is unravelled.

To give away any of the plot would be unfair to the reader who has yet to discover the intricate storyline and fully fleshed and believable characters that the author has created in this work. Suffice it to say that most of the book concerns an inquiry into the activities and disappearance of the youngest son of an anonymous peer. In the course of this inquiry we are led on a suspenseful journey through a labyrinth of deceit and half-truths, in which we are constantly turning up dead ends and having to pick up the pieces and retrace our footsteps, ever hopeful that a solution will be found.

The whole is an elegantly crafted work, constructed by an intriguingly imaginative novelist. And, although Fowles says that it is not strictly a historical novel, he has clearly been painstaking in his research and his recreation of Eighteenth Century England. Highly recommended to those looking for some refreshingly inventive reading.

James White - - MAJOR OPERATION (Orbit, 1987, 183pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

This book has been assembled from five 'Sector General' novelettes of the late 60s/early 70s. The five stories, which appeared originally in Carnell's NEW WRITINGS IN SF, are linked by their common background and characters, and describe the Federation's involvement with the bizarre planet Meatball, from first contact ('Invader') to the 'Major Operation' of the title, in which Drs Conway, Prilicla, et al have to contend with a patient the size of a subcontinent.

This is old-fashioned 'ideas SF': the strength of the stories lies in their inventiveness and wealth of technical detail. The human characters, though affable, are on the whole less interesting than the aliens, and there is no doubt that the star of the stories in the planet Meatball itself. The Sector General stories are in fact SF puzzles of a traditional kind, concentrating on providing ingenious solutions to perhaps rather contrived problems; the difference here is that the problems are in the realm of extraterrestrial medicine rather than engineering or physics. The Sector General stories also differ from most comparable hard SF in their tone of voice, in their explicit opposition to xenophobia and 'human racism'. It's a pity that White falls down in the area of characterisation; his protagonists are really at best only two and a half dimensional. I also felt the book could have been better edited - some background information is unnecessarily copied over from story to story (sometimes couched in precisely the same words) and this is irritating. On the whole, though, I enjoyed this book, and found White's humanitarian stance a pleasant change from thud-and-blunder.

Harry Harrison - - INVASION EARTH (Sphere, 1987, 150pp, £1.75)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

I couldn't decide whether this book had been written seriously or as a spoof. I think from the fact I wasn't sure that it was written straight, but aliens called the Oinn and Blettr sound spoofy, as do a lot of the lines. It's a straightforward enough adventure, Earth invaded by aliens leads to the Hero (American) and Heroine (Russian) and their countries working together to fight the greater menace. The cover blurb successfully gives away the basis of the plot and so deprives the story of most of its suspense. Even so it reads like a potboiler. It has none of the depth of character, plot or storyline or the humour which Harrison can produce in his better works: it is slick, readable but less than enthralling. As a pot-boiler it is competent and very much better than something written by a lesser writer, but I can't recommend it, there are better books about.

Megan Lindholm - - WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS (Corgi, 1987, 245pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Laurence Scotford)

There are not many wizards left in the world. A few of them live in Seattle. One of these is simply known as Wizard. On the surface he is just another one of the street people, but beneath he is much more. His life, and that of the other wizards, is disrupted by a grey presence known simply as Mir, and to Wizard befalls the responsibility of dealing with it.

These days fantasy seems to be working itself into an ever deepening rut, with nothing but seemingly endless commercialised Tolkien or Donaldson clones appearing. Megan Lindholm, in this novel, provides fresh hope for the genre. She superbly integrates the idea that even in the modern world there is magic in something as simple as a jump rope song, and amongst the millions of ordinary people there are a few who can use t that magic, with a fascinating and intricately drawn picture of Seattle. The novel is also written in a refreshingly simple and eminently readable style.

So if you are tired of ploughing through three volumes to discover how Gandelfin the Warlock produced the magic sword 'Son of Excalibur' so that Conan Baggins and his fair lady could defeat the dark lord Saurfoul then try some of this instead.

Michael Lindsay Williams - - FTL: FURTHER THAN LIFE (Avon, 1987 327pp. $3.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

This is the sequel to MARTIAN SPRING, but fortunately there is sufficient background material in the text to allow FTL to stand as an independent novel.

MARTIAN SPRING chronicled the discovery and revival of a race of Martians who periodically enter suspended animation to escape the Martian Ice Ages. In FTL, a joint Human/Martian expedition travels to Tau Ceti to ascertain the fate of a previous Martian expedition. They discover the descendants of the original crews, but all is not well...

Williams is obviously a hard-core SF writer who, whilst not being as extreme as James Hogan, nevertheless enjoys ramming science down his readership's collective throat. It is therefore gratifying to note that he does not lose sight of the human element; indeed he makes much of the meeting of minds among telepaths. His aliens, unfortunately, are alien only in physiology; psychologically, theydiffer little from the human characters. However, despite a few apparent inconsistencies, this is the novel's only flaw.

On reflection, it might be fairly suggested that few of the ideas employed are entirely original, but it would be equally fair to suggest that it is not ideas per se which matter, but the treatment accorded them. Certainly the climax, in which a gestalt entity journeys to the quantum level of reality, is unparalleled in my experience. Mr Tompkins was never like this!

Recommended.

CAPSULES...

Poul Anderson - - PAST TIMES (Sphere, 1987, 212pp, £2.50)

This collection, cunningly disguised as a novel, contains seven stories and one essay all tenuously linked by the theme of time

travel. The stories are mostly from the fifties and Anderson's craftsmanship is clearly visible in WILDCAT - the best of the bunch. Fans of irony will note that these tales now seem terribly dated. (Colin Bird)

Elizabeth H. Boyer - - THE WIZARD AND THE WARLORD (Corgi, 1987, 332pp, £2.50)

Fourth of the 'World of the Alfar' novels: a routine sword-and-sorcery novel totally devoid of originality, charm, characterization, literacy and intelligence. (Mark Greener)

Kenneth C. Flint - - CHAMPIONS OF THE SIDHE (Bantam, 1987, 277pp, £2.50)

Retelling of the Irish saga of the Tuatha de Danann and the Fomor in appallingly drab semi-skiffy form. (Andy Sawyer)

Richard Ford - - MELVAIG'S VISION (Grafton, 1987, 446pp, £2.95)

Reprint of the post-holocaust sequel to QUEST FOR THE FARADAWN in which the clever device of making the first volume a part of this story is nullified by the fact that it's such a dumb book in the first place. See Sue Thomason's piece in PI 54 for further details. (Andy Sawyer)

Esther M. Friesner - - THE WITCHWOOD CRADLE (Avon, 1987,241pp, $3.50)

A fantasy sequence which slips away as you read it. This is the third: there are nine to come, each focussing on one of the 12 witchborn sisters and their struggle with Morgeld. Not very gripping. (Andy Sawyer)

Harry Harrison - - TWO TALES AND EIGHT TOMORROWS (Sphere, 1987, 157 pp, £1.95)

If you don't possess 'The Streets of Ashkelon' then this is a must. As well as his bitter swipe at religion, this reprint of the 1965 anthology highlights Harrison's parodic gifts in 'Captain Honario Harpplayer, R.N.', while 'According to His Abilities' could, uncannily, be a bang up to date comment on the Ramboesque hero. 'I Always Do What Teddy Says' is a deceptively simple parable about mental conditioning vs. free will to commit evil. Good SF doesn't date, possibly? (Andy Sawyer)

Brian Lumley - - DEMOGORGON (Grafton, 1987, 333pp, £2.95)

In 1937, Dimitrios Kastrouni witnesses the reincarnation of Antichrist. In 1957, he sees the horrific rape of three drugged women. In 1983, the cycle comes round again, with the spawn of these rapes gathered together. But one of these, cat burglar Charlie Trace, has other ideas. Good horror scenario marred by some unconvincing character dynamics but an ingenious final twist. (Andy Sawyer)

John Malcolm - - THE TESLA TRINITY (Grafton, 1987, 496pp, £3.95)

The 'Trinity' - a model which points the way to an impenetrable force-field - is less a science-fictional device than the McGuffin for this fast-paced, witty, and entertaining thriller. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Moorcock - - BREAKFAST IN THE RUINS (Avon, 1987, 172pp, $3.50)

Moorcock explores the character of Karl Glogauer in eighteen different guises in different times and places in what the blurb describes as 'a scathing indictment of the human condition'. Even if you're not entirely convinced of Moorcock's worth as a writer, this is certainly one of his better efforts; it is entertaining and poses some interesting moral questions - I enjoyed the interludes between chapters in which the reader is asked 'What Would You Do?' in a series of moral dilemmas. (Steven Tew)

Michael Moorcock - - THE CORNELIUS CHRONICLES vol. 3 (Avon, 1987, 341 pp, $3.50)

Omnibus edition of THE ADVENTURES OF UNA PERSSON & CATHERINE CORNELIUS and THE ALCHEMIST'S QUESTION.(The latter is also available in Grafton's THE OPIUM GENERAL.) Moorcock at his best and that is the best. Stunningly good fusion of 'literary' and 'popular' forms. (Andy Sawyer)

Tim Stout - - THE RAGING (Grafton, 1987, (256pp, £2.50)

A pagan statue is a psychic reservoir for bloodlust and battle rage, as photographer Martin Chandler finds when it comes into his possession. Old theme brought up to date quite well. (Andy Sawyer)

Peter Valentine Timlett - - THE TWILIGHT OF THE SERPENT (Orbit, 1987, 210pp, £2.50)

Romans annihilate Druids, but Joseph of Arimathea's Christian colony in Glastonbury survives with the seeds of a new Age. Drab occult-fantasy trilogy concluded. (Andy Sawyer)

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - THE LURE OF THE BASILISK (Grafton, 1987, 224pp, £2.50)

S&S part-one-of-four involving a non-human hero and a quest for a basilisk. Mostly mediocre, but the possibility of something richer to come emerges from the last few pages. (Andy Sawyer)

Jennifer Westwood - - ALBION: A GUIDE TO LEGENDARY BRITAIN (Paladin, 1987, 567pp, £6.95)

Succinct but comprehensive description of legends attached to particular localities in England, Wales and Scotland. Sources for the tales are given, with variants and relationships and, where appropriate, details of how to get to the site. Very useful for the folklore/fantasy enthusiast who wants to follow up their interest: the bibliography and notes on sources give a wealth of background. An excellent reference book and a good holiday guide, too! (Andy Sawyer)

Roger Zelazny - - LORD OF LIGHT (Avon, 1987, 319pp, $2.95)

Reissue (out here last year from Methuen) of Zelazny's 1967 classic retelling of Hindu/ Buddhist myth in a far-future SF mode. One of the few examples of this sort of thing really working: a model of its type and a must on your bookshelves. (Andy Sawyer)

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