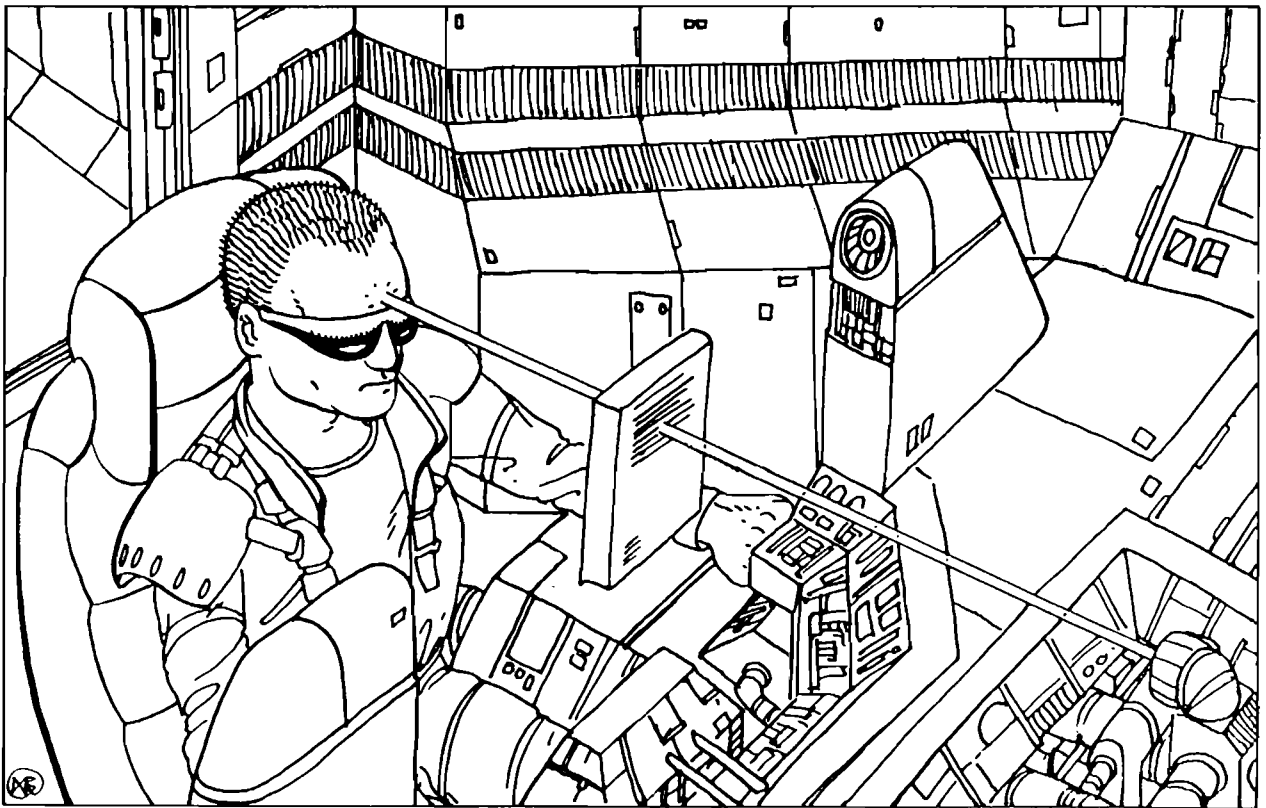


# PAPERBACK INFERNO 67

*The Review of paperback SF*

50p.

*August/September 1987*



*A British Science Fiction Association magazine*

## ★PAPER BACK INFERNO★

## PAPERBACK PURGATORY

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ARTWORK this issue by

Matt Brooker (Cover)  
Keith Brooke (p.4; p. 16)

**APOLOGIES:**

To Colin Davies for consistently misspelling his name despite his enjoyable cover art - which will appear again soon.

To Elizabeth Boyer and Corgi for getting the title of THE WIZARD AND THE WARLORD wrong. Oh, the perils of producing indentikit fantasy!

The good news, I suppose, is that if it had been my right shoulder which had seized up and immobilized my arm, you'd not be reading this at all... however, one-handed last-minute typing and paste-up is not to be recommended if the alternative to screaming up the nearest wall is to dope yourself up with parkkillers. If anything is upside down or back to front I hope you'll take those lurid pink capsules I've been swallowing into consideration. Let's talk about SF instead...

According to INTERZONE we're seeing a boom in paperback SF, with various publishers consolidating and expanding their output. According to my postman, INTERZONE is right. Certainly, there's been a lot of books through my door over the past few weeks (just the thing when you're kept awake at nights by the above-mentioned shoulder) and the upsurge I briefly mentioned last time has been maintained.

VGSF is, of course, Victor Gollancz Science Fiction, the new paperback imprint from Gollancz, but it could also mean Very Good Science Fiction - not quite reaching the 'classic' stage and 'B' format status, but good enough to be snapped up by anyone interested in state-of-the-art entertaining SF. Gollancz promise that 'Backed by all our experience of publishing in this field, the series will include exciting young writers alongside some of the greatest names of the genre.' The first dozen are already available and are WITCH WORLD (Andre Norton), THE MASKS OF TIME (Robert Silverberg), HEGIRA (Greg Bear), THE FACELESS MAN (Jack Vance), NIGHT WALK (Bob Shaw), ANGEL WITH THE SWORD (C.J. Cherryh), MISSION OF GRAVITY (Hal Clement), THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY (Arthur C. Clarke), WEB OF THE WITCH WORLD (Andre Norton), EYE AMONG THE BLIND (Robert Holdstock), STAR GATE (Andre Norton), and TO LIVE AGAIN (Robert Silverberg). I've not read all the titles in question, but I've read enough over the years to suggest that Gollancz are quite right in promoting their list as examples of good, thoughtful, well-written SF. Gollancz are particularly stressing their featuring of Andre Norton: 'one of the most popular and influential figures in modern SF and fantasy, yet a writer curiously neglected by British paperback publishers'. I'll be saying more about this next issue, but it would be good to see some of her excellent SF for young people brought back into circulation. Meanwhile, you may note Ron Gemmell's review of Cherryh's ANGEL WITH THE SWORD (in the DAW Books edition: Gollancz have (wisely, I feel) dropped the role-playing game associations which Ron refers to in his first few lines.)

All this publishing activity is perhaps not unconnected with the Brighton WorldCon (August 27 - September 2). In fact, several launch dates have obviously been planned with

this in mind: Unwin Hyman mention WorldCon in their publicity for OTHER EDENS - 'the start of a new series of anthologies to act as a showcase of British talent and to encourage new writers in the field,' while The Women's Press are also publishing Joanna Russ's WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO and Lisa Tuttle's short story collection A SPACESHIP BUILT OF STONE to coincide with Conspiracy '87. I've also received publicity material, though not, at time of writing, review copies, from Orbit, covering their annual Futura SF extravaganza, also promising a presence at the Convention.

I hope those of you who may have picked up PAPERBACK INFERNO for the first time at

(Cont. p. 4)

## "UPON THE RACK IN PRINT"

ANALOG, JULY and AUGUST 1987 and ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, JUNE, JULY and AUGUST.

Reviewed by Edward James

I found the fiction in the Hugo nominations this year a fairly dispiriting collection. The novels contained a collection of sequels (*Speaker for the Dead*, *Black Genesis*, *Count Zero*, *Marooned in Real-Time* - the last two originally serialised in the two magazines under review), with only Bob Shaw's *The Ragged Astronauts* being a real original. (Let's do all we can to make it win.) The novellas (all of which were published in these magazines) were none of them so memorable as last year's nominations ("Green Mars", "Sailing to Byzantium", "24 Views of Mount Fuji"). Well written ("Escape from Kathmandu"), entertaining ("Gilgamesh in the Outback"), powerful ("R&R"), maybe, but none of them, save perhaps the outsider, Michael Flynn's "Eifelheim", really adding very much new to the canon. And the majority of the novelettes and short stories were even more dismal, again compared to last year's nominations - with some appearances ("Thor Meets Captain America", "The Barbarian Princess", "Robot Dreams") surely to be explained largely on the strength of the popularity of the authors' other works.

Whatever happened to Gregory Benford's "Of Space-Time and the River" (*Asimov's*, February) Michael Bishop's "Alien Graffiti" (June) or "Close Encounters with the Deity" (March), George R.R. Martin's "The Glass Flower" (September), Ian Watson's "Windows" (December), Cherry Wilder's "Dreamwood" (also December), Kate Wilhelm's "The Girl who Fell from the Sky" (October), etc etc? There were stylish and original stories in these magazines last year, though you wouldn't think it from the Hugo nominations. Anyway, this peroration was primarily intended to underline that the two Davis magazines, here reviewed, seem to be dominating the Hugo and Nebula scene even more than before - and that *Analog* has three nominations this year (two for Vernor Vinge, one for Flynn) - up on its resounding zero for 1986 (although admittedly well down on its high of 9 for 1985). It'll be interesting, but possibly rather depressing, to see what wins...

How about this as a scenario? A powerful government agency learns something that is to its discredit, and resorts to burglary, murder, and the erasure of tapes and computer-files in order to stop the truth coming out. Add a student determined to get the truth out (who has to have some spine put into him by two successive girl-friends (one is murdered) - almost the only strong people in this story are women); have him run around trying to hold onto the floppy disc in his pocket, which contains information which will sabotage the agency - and you have the makings of a good plot. Put all this tens of thousands of years in the future, in a not very plausible Galactic empire, and it somehow seems to creak much more than it should. The story is the *Analog* serial (May to July), *The Report on Bilbeis IV*, by Harry Turtledove (emerging, with Vernor Vinge, as the most popular of the *Analog* writers). It's a sequel, set some 1500 years later, to Turtledove's "Noninterference" (published as Eric Iverson, July 1985), and a direct sequel to "Second Survey" (July 1986, as Turtledove), featuring one of the latter's female protagonists. The dread secret is the result of the Survey Service's interference into a primitive planetary society's development; problems arise in the context of the Survey Service's political enemies. How many stories have there been on that theme? How many more stories are going to be rewrites of our own imperial past, with dollops of Irangate thrown in? Turtledove is much better with his alternative histories than with his space opera; he is, after all, (he said, dismissively, but with fellow feeling) a professional historian.

To continue with *Analog*, then. The July issue led with a story by Robert R. Chase, "The Changeling Hunt", a ordinary enough tale of contact with a very alien race on a planet about as friendly as Harry Harrison's Deathworld. Rather more interesting was Charles Sheffield's "Trader's Partner", the continuation of a series which began with "Trader's Secret" back in August 1985. Living on a world organised into a number of large conglomerates, the Traders are a highly trained group of diplomats/bargainers who work for the highest bidders. Here a pair of them go to the Andes, where a sinister dealer in pain and pleasure waits for them - with (bizarre note) his intelligence-enhanced capybaras. A reasonably intelligent thriller; little more. Apart from part two of Ben Bova's guide to life on the Moon in the next century (cf. Greg Benford's guide to life in the Jovian system in the August *Asimov's*, useful scientific background to his novels *Against Infinity* and *Jupiter Project*), this issue also offered two political shorts: Timothy Zahn's, in which someone steals "The President's Doll" (this is a world in which voodoo has a scientific basis), and W.T.Quick's "All the People, All the Time", where the moronic Presidential Candidate, a cross between Kennedy and Max Headroom, is plugged into a computer in order to have personal interactive telephone conversations with every member of the electorate simultaneously. Not well written, perhaps (nor was my last sentence), but the neatest example of a traditional sfnal extrapolation in the issue.

The August *Analog* was without a serial, so had more than its usual complement of stories. A rather nondescript Effinger, "So Shall ye Reap", about the original Dionysus sacrificing the original sacrificial king. Another story from W.R.Thompson about his cyborg heroine Inga Cardiff; here she is resident in Luna Colony. And, another familiar setting, an old lady copes with life on an L5 colony, in Jerry Olition's "The Love Song of Laura Morrison". Charles Sheffield tries a new angle (not easy) on the story of someone influencing the past so that World War I finishes early, there's no Treaty of Versailles, no Hitler, no Holocaust, no rapid technological advance... But the best story, for me, was old *Analog* stalwart Ray Brown's "Cobwebs". His telepaths have been forced to migrate to another world, where they are threatened by aliens, who seem to be able to attack their colony with impunity; the story is about the weaknesses of a society whose sharing of minds allows them to have an agreed image of the world which diverges more and more from reality. Neatly rendered, who-dunnit style, with no more than a hint of the deep symbolism, relevance etc., which is presumably intended to be there.

The June *Asimov's* had a cover illustrating the long novella "Glass Cloud", by James Patrick Kelly. It's a story of the obsession of an artist with a great work (a mobile "glass cloud") which he is building at the instigation of an alien visitor to Earth. Too long, I thought, but intriguing and (if Kelly is thinking of the cloud as a metaphor for his writing) somewhat depressing. "Between the idea and the reality falls the Shadow." Turn instead to Walter Jon Williams' "Dinosaurs", a jolly little tale of genocide. It is fun, actually, and an interesting musing on the possibility of a race relying solely on instinct. Drill, the dinosaur-like aggressor, arrives to make peace with the inoffensive Shar and their ambassadors. "There were six in all, with titles like... Minister for the Dissemination of Convincing Lies, whose title Drill suspected was somehow mistranslated, and a Secretary-General for the Genocidal Eradication of Alien Aggressors, at whom Drill looked with more than a little interest." Williams is rather better when he is being less than wholly serious. In addition we had Charles Sheffield's "Traplandia", where his blind protagonist finds a portal to another universe in South America. (Wow! Where have we heard that before?!); a nice little fantasy from Jane Yolen (the start of her novel *Sister Light, Sister Dark*, I take

it), in which the story is juxtaposed tellingly with the Myth, the Legend, the scholarly historical explanation, the ballad; and Orson Scott Card's sequel to Hugo nominee "Hatrack River", called "Runaway", set in his magical 19th century America. I confess: I couldn't finish it.

In July Asimov's led with the sequel to Silverberg's "Gilgamesh in the Outback", called "The Fascination of the Abomination". The fascination of the setting (Hell, with all the thugs of past history reborn; a sort of downmarket Riverworld) is beginning to wear a bit thin, and I found Herod Agrippa almost as tedious as Gilgamesh did. But fun, in a nasty sort of way. Much more gripping was the late James Tiptree's "Yanqui Doodle". After two or three pretty duff over-sentimental stories, this is the powerful and fierce Tiptree of the '70s back again. (It makes one regret her tragic death even more.) The plot: a wounded soldier in a future Central American war (of course), in hospital recovering from the withdrawal of the killer drugs with which he has been fed on the frontline. He finds a cache of pills; he escapes... In addition, another finely written and scary story about the boundaries of reality from Andrew Weiner: "Rider"; and "High Brow", by Neal Barrett, an invigorating short about the community building/sculpting the largest statue in the world, on the California coast.

But it was the August Asimov's that was the high point of these five issues. It contained a nice short from Lisa Goldstein, where a man is given some photos showing scenes from his future life; his life is wrecked as he tries hopelessly and pointlessly to make his life fit his expectations. Alexander Jablovsk's "At the Cross-Time Jaunter's Ball" is a splendidly complex romp in a world in which the major art-form is the creation of worlds via the creation of alternative time-lines (involving perhaps the slaughter of billions) for the amusement of some mysterious Lords. The protagonist is an art critic, whose job it is to explain the aesthetic merits of these worlds to the said Lords; the plot, inescapably, involves the discovery of the creator of the world he lives in. The issue leads with Lucius Shepard's "On the Border", about an amoral Mexican, living just south of the shimmering "electric fence" which keeps Mexicans out of the US, and his strange relationship with an American girl. The magic and sorcery of Mexico (yes, again, as in other Shepard stories) are accepted as normal, as real; it is the hi-tech world of America north of the border which appears unreal and fantastic. A story full of depth, which alone would make the issue worth buying and reading. But it is

paired with one of the best stories of this year (surely, he said, despairingly, addressing himself to next year's Hugo nominators), Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Blind Geometer". Rarely has a story so movingly conveyed the idea of what it is to be blind; rarely has a story shown how technology can change that world. But the story is a thriller; a spy story, yet paying homage (consciously) to the great stories by Ernest Bramah about the blind detective Max Carrados. (Even the final scene, to my memory at least, extrapolates from the ending of one of the Bramah stories.) A rewriting, then, in a sense, but a rewriting that shows how far "popular fiction" has moved from the wooden insensitivity of so much of pre-War pulp. This really is thriller-as-art. Give it to some literary snob who regards sf as beneath contempt. And nominate it for a Hugo.

(Cont. from p. 2)

Brighton enjoy it, find it useful, and come back for more. I also hope that it's an enjoyable convention: I won't be there (perhaps next time...?) but I'm sure that won't stop everyone having a good time. For those who aren't used to the idiosyncratic classification I use, the 'Closer Encounters' pages try to emphasise books which for one reason or another are worth emphasising. This issue,

INTERZONE 20 (Summer 1987)

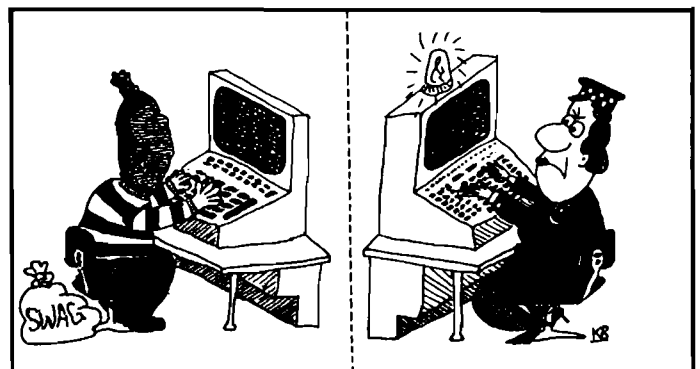
(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

After the acclaim 'The Unconquered Country' received, it is hardly to be wondered that INTERZONE should grasp the opportunity of publishing another Geoff Ryman story. What is rather a gamble is that 'Love Sickness' is to be published in two parts. This is the first time that IZ has tried this, and whether or not it is a good move for a quarterly magazine is debatable - after all, three months is a long time to wait to pick up the threads of the narrative. I'll reserve judgement on Ryman's novella until IZ 21 comes along and all I'll say for now is that it contains the usual Ryman touch of mixing the strange and the familiar and that I'm definitely keen to read the conclusion!

Apart from the usual features and a somewhat incoherent interview with Rudy Rucker (who would appear, on this evidence, to be quite manic himself) the length of the Ryman piece leaves room for only three other short stories. The best of these is Brian Stableford's 'Sexual Chemistry', which is about how the unlovely genius Giovanni Casanova uses his talents in biology and genetics to improve his personal as well as his professional life. It's a delicious tale with - for these days - an unusual yet appropriate ending. The other two stories are worth reading but are nowhere near as memorable. Iain Banks's 'A Gift From the Culture' (surprisingly, the first short story of his to see print) is, when stripped of the science fictional elements, the old story of a moral dilemma: will or will not Wrobik destroy the spacecraft and kill hundreds of people and thus save his indifferent lover? It's well-crafted, however, and is presumably set in the same universe as his latest novel CONSIDER PHLEBAS. In 'Foresight' Michael Swanwick asks what would happen if memory were to run forward, not backward. It's a bold attempt to answer that question which for me doesn't quite come off, partly because I found his method of exposition, original though it may be, a trifle wearying.

All in all, an interesting issue, but non-subscribers ought to be warned about the increase in the cover price - up 45p to £1.95. Is inflation really running at 30%?

we focus on slightly more books than usual, partly because a lot of essential books seem to have appeared (I could have put more in there, believe me!) partly because Terry Broome and Edward James - although they're talking about different books - represent the two fundamental reactions to Isaac Asimov's non-fiction: an interesting topic for debate, perhaps?



# CLOSER ENCOUNTERS

Olaf Stapledon - - LAST AND FIRST MEN  
(Penguin, 1987, 327pp,  
£3.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

To see Stapledon's classic in print again is splendid, but attempting this review is daunting - rather like being invited by a theological publication to review the Bible. I say that not from any uncritical Stapledolatry, but in realisation of the scope, intricacy, and lastingly diffused influence of the book.

The fictional framework of LAST AND FIRST MEN is one in which a doomed individual consciousness on Neptune two billion years in the future, knowing that with the approaching end of the solar system the race of man, in its Eighteenth manifestation, must, even though its seed is sent outwards to the stars, become extinct, reaches back telepathically to beget within the brain of a 1920s writer the long history of man. Stapledon's near-horizon future now reads as naive, off-beam 'prophetically', and excessively tainted by his anti-American prejudices. It is only after 'The Fall of the First Men' that the book really strides out. Tens of millions of years are the scale of the evolutionary rise and disappearance of human sub-species; astronomical and climatic catastrophe motivate their interplanetary migrations; alien-occasioned strife, genocide and symbiosis operate as evolutionary checks and spurs.

In this perspective individuals, civilisations, whole races are seen to disappear like sparks winking out in a gale. What significance is there in effort, acts of courage, aesthetic achievements, even perfected utopias, which end in oblivion, to which the stars are indifferent, which arbitrary forces soon annihilate? Stapledon's answers are subtle, tentative and ambiguous. In his philosophical works he indicates a dialectic of 'moods': moral zeal, disillusion, and ecstasy. The last-named involves a certain acquiescing 'admiration' of all that exists, triumph and failure merging, good and evil transcended. Phases and events of LAST AND FIRST MEN reflect all of these moods, as the narrative moves towards what resembles the coda of a tragic symphony.

Particular themes and images embody insights which at one level are speculative as to how one strain of evolving life may be related to other life, and all life to planetary environments. At deeper levels they resonate metaphysically and archetypally: the Patagonian 'Divine Boy', whose charisma bridges a gulf between the First and Second Men; the Martian 'cloudlets', fluctuating between individuality and multiplicity, obsessed by the concentration of light in the crystalline hardness of diamonds; the Holy Empire of Music of the Third Men; the Flying Seventh Men of Venus, whose ecstatic perceptions give way to mechanical materialism with the loss of their wings.

Such creative interplay of intellect and imagination is carried further and soars higher in STAR MAKER, another Stapledon classic in search of print; but congratulations to Penguin on this present 'rescue' so admirably produced and introduced. As to the cover illustration, however, while thematically not irrelevant, its technicolour parade of horror, 'superman' and stellar stereotypes may seriously mislead the unsuspecting escapist.

Philip K. Dick - - RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH (Grafton, 1987, 286pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Some of Dick's books have a complicated publishing history: characters and events are rewritten in various books subsequently printed out of the order they were written. RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH (first published in 1985) was finished under the title VALISYSTEM A. According to the P.K.D. Society, Dick was going to revise the novel with new plots overlaying the existing material and to this end made thousands of pages of notes later to be called the EXEGESIS. However, he broke off work on the revision to write a new novel based on VALISYSTEM A which was published as VALIS. VALIS had a sequel, THE DIVINE INVASION, which was also published (a second 'sequel', THE OWL IN DAYLIGHT was never written).

RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH is set in an alternative America just after the McCarthy era. (Secret Communist) Dictator, President Ferris Fremont and his Friends of the American People are encouraging citizens to report on themselves and each other under the pretence of squashing Aramchek, a subversive communist organisation. Opposed to this rule is Valisystem A working through the satellite Albemuth, by brainwashing individuals like the main character, Nicholas Brady, into offering resistance. The events are seen through his and his friend Philip K. Dick's eyes as Brady attempts to make known Fremont's political ideology.

ALBEMUTH contains a great deal of autobiographical detail, including the FBI and 'pink beam' experiences Dick claimed to have had, so that the writing is obsessive and perhaps slightly self-indulgent. It's his obsessive style, ability to provoke a sense of paranoia and exploration of philosophical concerns which make his work so riveting. The characterisation is good and historical parallels well-illustrated, making ALBEMUTH an excellent read. The book is full of twists and well deserves Michael Bishop's evaluation of it as being among the top ten or twelve P.K. Dick SF novels.

Edwin A. Abbott - - FLATLAND (Penguin, 1987, 91pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

FLATLAND, first published 1884, is a book I've frequently read about and tried (unsuccessfully) to track down, taken by its nature as a mathematical jeu-d'esprit and its reputation in histories of SF.

Is it worth the £2.50 I've just paid for this 'Penguin Classic' edition? It's a slim volume, certainly, and there have since been other science-fictional speculations about other-dimensional existence since (try Borges or Rucker) while the exploration of life in a two-dimensional plane was perhaps more fully explored a century later in A.K. Dewdney's THE PLANIVERSE. The Victorian social satire is dated and frequently unpleasantly reactionary. And I'm too much of a duffer at maths to assess its value from that viewpoint. But still and all the book manages to be entertaining even in its occasional awkwardness and naivety, a speculative fantasy of the kind which gets classed as SF because there is nowhere else to put it; worth reading for its singularity. Its very brevity is, I think, a virtue; the ideas it suggests are left with you rather than thrust at you at length. Fundamental classic status, with the bonus of being fun to read.

## TWO OPINIONS of The Good Dr. A.

Isaac Asimov - - - - - THE ROVING MIND  
(Oxford University Press, 1987, 350pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

Whatever one may think of Asimov's gifts as a science fiction writer (and I think rather more highly of him, I suspect, than most reviewers for *Vector* or *PI* - even if only for reasons of nostalgia), one has to grant that he makes a very good populariser of science. Not as literate as Stephan Jay Gould, perhaps, or even Carl Sagan, but nevertheless clear, entertaining, forthright and, above all, rational. This book offers 62 non-fiction essays, "none of which have been included in any previous collection". (Those words were no doubt accurate when Asimov wrote his introduction in 1983, but it is somewhat disingenuous of OUP to reprint them unchanged now, since some of these essays certainly have been collected together - the very first essay, "The Army of the Night", for instance, appeared in *X Stands for Unknown* (1984).)

As the title suggests, these essays rove around. There are speculations on the future, general essays on science (a very nice attack on Sherlock Holmes's credentials as a chemist), on population, and on astronomy. There are a few autobiographical pieces, notably on his initiation on the Word Processor. And, my favourites, the various pieces collected in the section on "The Religious Radicals". He attacks censorship; he attacks the "Reagan Doctrine" that the Soviets cannot be trusted because they are atheists; he offers some sound advice to scientists tackling creationsists: "He should not bother defending evolution; he should move to force his opponernt to present the evidence for creationism. Since there isn't any, the results could be humorous." And he offers some blistering attacks on the Moral Majority. "It is these ignorant people, the most uneducated, the most unimaginative, the most unthinking among us, who would make of themselves the guides and leaders of us all; who would force their feeble and childish beliefs on us; who would invade our schools and libraries and homes in order to tell us what books to read and what not, what thoughts to think and what not, what conclusions to accept and what not. And what does the Bible say: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall in the ditch" (Mat.15:15)." Amen. Keep preaching, Brother Isaac - we need you.

Isaac Asimov - - THE SUBATOMIC MONSTER (Grafton, 1987, 288pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

The 17 essays in this collection (taken from *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, June '83 - )ctober '84, are unevenly written.

Anyone capable of understanding the essays on photosynthesis and force/energy would be sufficiently literate to know the meaning of the word 'photosynthesis' and not have to be told Newton was a great scientist. But we're told anyway. Furthermore, the essay on Force doesn't make clear the distinction between mass and weight, and doesn't explain the meaning of the phrase 'per second per second'.

In the section on biology he spends 16 pages waffling about 'zorking' and 'grotching' to say artificial intelligence is not a contradiction in terms. His points are simple-mindedly speculative, his argument revolving around semantic quibbles rather than his stated issue.

He is at his best when dealing with the history of his subjects: his article on our solar system's satellites is fascinating for the myths behind some of their names, and the effect on society of the first autopsies is avid reading. However, writing about Sinope, who was approached by Zeus, he comments of her wish to remain a perpetuel virgin, 'there's no accounting for tastes' and on p. 275 he states 'It may be that there is a Gentle Reader somewhere who secretly believes no-one in the world enjoys these essays as much as he (or she) does. If so, that Gentle Reader is wrong. I enjoy them more'. Asimov's simple self-interest and humour would only appeal to pre-pubescents, and he seems unaware of how his self-indulgence comes across to older, more literate readers. So, is he aiming for a younger audience? There aren't many people that age interested in porphynns, pyrroles, gevs and newtons - let alone who know what a quark-is - who don't know the poles of a magnet are called 'north' and 'south'.

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## REVIEWS

William Burroughs - - THE PLACE OF DEAD ROADS  
(Paladin, 1987, 269pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Although we're informed that this is Burroughs' 'long-awaited foray into the western' (and so far as it's set in any locale it is the late 19th-century Mid-West, with the main character, Kim, a gunslinger or 'shoot-ist') how many Westerns are there with a preface from the author saying that 'the only thing that could unite the planet is a united space programme'? Paladin have switched their attention from 'classic' Burroughs to more recent writing (this is '80s rather than '60s material) but the main difference is an intensification of the libertarian polemic which underlies Burroughs' satiric flaying of all controlling forces - States, Churches, women, literature; tools of the unseen 'they' who destroy human potential. Against this, Burroughs grapples with a way of expressing his thoroughly pessimistic vision.

This appears as science-fiction imagery; alien parasitic viruses, cloning, extraterr-

estrial landscapes, and sudden shifts of space-time. The best short review of this book might, in fact, be for me to quote extracts from this 'antimagnetic artifact that cuts word and image to fragments' (p. 107) because Burroughs is at his best where his writing takes off into meditations on the banal, whether it be mock sci-fi infused with homosexual visions, or sardonic pictures of Britain's 'flabby, toothless facism'. (p. 175) 'Planet Earth is by nature and function a battlefield' he writes (p. 108) and Burroughs like all great satirists is less interested in creating something pretty than in charting the conflict like a corrupt old raven who's seen it all. Like all great satirists, too (Swift, yes, but to me especially the Elizabethan Thomas Nashe) he's a master of the grotesque. THE PLACE OF DEAD ROADS has its share of humour so low it's six feet under, and episodes of sheer disgust. (Burroughs, by the way, cites Nashe's THE UNFORTUNATE TRAVELLER in this book.)

People who know Burroughs' work (whether they like it or not) will need little more here. If you don't, I urge you to read him.

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David Langford & John Grant - - EARTHDOOM!  
(Grafton,  
1987, 303pp,  
£2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The trouble with EARTHDOOM! is that you really have to grope through a host of books with titles like TAPEWORM! and SLUDGE! and plots like - well, like episodes of EARTHDOOM! to appreciate just what Langford and Grant are sending up. By then, of course, either your brain has rotted away from disuse or you're so paranoid that the next time the gerbils nip your finger you come down with psychosomatic rabies and infect half the neighbourhood.

Even if you forego the study of literary influences, however, you'll still enjoy EARTHDOOM! You won't, of course, be able to read another Disaster Novel without giggling (but don't you, anyway?) as what we have here is a scenario for just about every end-of-the-world novel possible, starting with the earth tilting on its axis and taking in Hitler cloning himself on a Devonshire farm, the Loch Ness Monster, comets and Horrible Slimy Aliens on a collision course with earth and sub-critical-mass bits of plutonium doing likewise in the London Underground - and I won't even mention the lemmings and the superglue save to say that you'll probably never want to go to the lavatory again. It's all held together with a plot line involving Death, the Antichrist, various sets of incompetent scientists as two-fistedly gung-ho as any Doc Smith character (but randier) and various knock-knock jokes. If you're a Big-Name Fan or a Famous SF Writer, moreover, you can have the added pleasure to see if your name (suitably distorted) is among the dramatis personae.

There are currently various contenders for the title of Great SF Humourist, but for sheer sly wit and sendups it's Langford: listen, when my wife laughs at his fanzines then we know the man is funny. If you don't get a copy of this for your collection of skiffy blockbusters there isn't much hope for you...

Vonda N. McIntyre - - STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME (Grafton, 1987, 274pp, £2.50)

ENTERPRISE: THE FIRST ADVENTURE (Grafton, 1987, 371pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

ST IV is Vonda McIntyre's third ST novelisation (ST:TMP having been written by Alan Dean Foster) and continues the style of her previous two in that she fills in gaps in the film and takes the opportunity to explore the characters. However, it seems somewhat lightweight in comparison with its predecessors, largely, perhaps because of the absence of Lieutenant Saavik. The author had virtually made Saavik her own creation, much of ST II and III being concerned with Saavik's relationships with, respectively, Peter Preston (Scotty's nephew) and David Marcus (Kirk's son). As Saavik retires from the proceedings fairly early on, one of the most appealing aspects of the ST film series is denied us. Nevertheless, this is still an enjoyable souvenir of the film.

From the latest ST story to ENTERPRISE: THE FIRST ADVENTURE, a title which is something of a misnomer, as the 'Enterprise' made its maiden voyage some twelve years

previously. This is, however, the tale of Captain Kirk's taking over the command of the starship from Captain Christopher Pike. In many ways this is a Rite of Passage for Kirk; not only does he have to prove himself worthy of his command, but he must also gain the trust and respect of his crew, many of whom, having served under Captain Pike for years, are wary, even resentful, of this 'interloper'. Trekkies will no doubt regard this as a must, although I found it a trifle overlong for my taste; it's far from being the worst book I have ever read, however.

One item which ties both these novels together is the 'Lydia Sutherland', apparently the young Lieutenant Kirk's first command. This is mentioned briefly in THE VOYAGE HOME and more fully described in THE FIRST ADVENTURE. This begs the question, will THE FIRST ADVENTURE come to be regarded as a definitive work - i.e. an 'official' adventure in the manner of the Film/TV episodes, and if so, will its events ever be referred to in future episodes? Time will tell.

One final point: why does Vonda McIntyre constantly refer to the 'Enterprise' as a Constellation Class Starship, when I was always led to believe that it is a Constitution Class vessel? Is she on a different time-line to the rest of us?

Doris Piserchia - - STAR RIDER (The Women's Press, 1987, 219pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

STAR RIDER is the story of Lone, a girl who is in telepathic contact with, and is pair-bonded to, her mount. Like others of their kind they can teleport themselves through space - in fact, Lone and her ilk are planetary nomads, free of ties and responsibilities, their goals merely to enjoy themselves and hopefully find the mythical planet of Doubleluck, the El Dorado of space. However, Lone meets with a series of adventures which both bring her to maturity and give her a real mission in life - to save the galaxy from itself.

The teleportation sections of the book are original. Other aspects are not so pleasing. The plot meanders and explanations are contradictory or downright unbelievable: for instance the idea that air trapped within a personal force-field which surrounds and almost touches the skin can last the inhabitant for ten hours seems dubious to say the least. The nomenclature (the galaxy is peopled, it seems, by jaks, dreens, varks and gibbs among others) is grating as is the Western-style dialogue which permeates the first part of the book ('Lone, sweet doll, little gal, you ain't dead like I figured. Should have known nothing could get the best of you.') STAR RIDER was originally published in 1974; this is its first British publication. I can't honestly see why this rather routine adventure novel deserves the attention of the Women's Press and, while it is reasonably entertaining, it isn't worth paying four pounds for.

K.W. Jeter - - DR ADDER (Grafton, 1987, 252pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

According to Philip Dick DR ADDER is a masterpiece shamefully unpublished because of its concern with sexual perversion. Hmm. The great man did say some odd things at times.

First off, DR ADDER is no masterpiece. Its central theme of power broking and hypocrisy on the formalised interface between



the straights of Orange County and the (literal) underworld which provides their kicks at a price is interesting enough but hardly original. Jeter's SF trappings of surgically altered whores, genetically developed animals and a biochemical killing machine add little to the core concern and bring echoes from Woody Allen to Arthur Clarke. If you haven't read anything but popular SF all this might be novel but otherwise...

Then the book isn't really concerned with sex or perversion, and it has to be said that the perversions presented would shock only those who are shocked for a profession. They are like the SF trappings, decorations draped over the body of the theme.

Not that there is anything amiss with that theme, which is a youthful anger and contempt for the corruption of the business world, the dichotomy between public words and private (and not so private) deeds. The trouble is that it is by no stretch of the imagination original, and even the vigour of Jeter's writing cannot hide the fact that there are several too many coincidences necessary to tie all the plot ends together in the end. A Philip Dick in his prime might, just might, have carried it off, but not Jeter, at least not the Jeter he was when he wrote this some 17 years ago.

That said, the book has its moments. There are some vivid descriptions and, as I say, the writing is vigorous. Of perhaps archaeological interest are the cyberpunk pre-echoes here, given Jeter's present status. Interesting, as Arte Johnson used to say, very interesting, but I don't think I can recommend this book as anything but interesting.

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James White - - ALL JUDGEMENT FLED (Orbit, 1987, £2.50, 215pp)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

James White's 1968 First Contact novel, reprinted in a less sensationalist cover on better quality paper. An alien vessel drifts into the solar system and doesn't respond. The American authorities, in their infinite wisdom, sends five astronauts, untrained in other fields, to make contact, together with the doctor from whose viewpoint the story is told. The first time I read this, it was about the first novel of White's that I'd read, but since then I've read the entire 'Sector General' series more than once and the similarities show. The main character is a doctor who solves problems in the same manner as Sector General's Conway, i.e. by brilliant intuitive leaps, and after they've solved all the intervening problems they find an alien who bears a remarkable similarity to a Kelgian (who is assumed to be female because it's the more emotional of the alien pair, but that's another quibble). Not one of White's better novels: read DARK INFERNO instead.

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Robert Silverberg - - TOM O'BEDLAM (Orbit, 1987, 320pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

Tom, a man prone to visions, born of an irradiated mother, who pretends to be a nutter for his own safety, lives in a post-holocaust world in which America is divided into small nation-states. (It gets around the question of the nuclear winter by postulating a 'Dust War' in which clouds of radiation, rather than bombs, cause the damage). His dreams match the tenets of a new religion 'Tumbonde', which believes that alien gods will come and save us. Then the visions spread, first to the inmates of a mental hospital, then to the staff, then more widely and the Tumbonde set off on a pilgrimage to

the north pole to meet the aliens. The visions are incredibly detailed and attractive and cannot be ignored. 'All about her moved the delicate crystalline people, bowing, smiling, stroking her. Telling her their names. A crystalline cat sauntered among them... when she looked down she saw that her leg was crystal too. Someone put a drink in her hand. It tasted like flowers; it erupted in a thousand brilliant colours as it made its journey through her body.'

This is a richly written and multifaceted novel, of the type in which the various characters all meet up at the end and show how they're connected. Is it mass insanity? Is Tom radiating hallucinations? Are aliens coming to get us? Read it and find out. And yes, there are connections to the song, but it's not a retelling as such.

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Clifford D. Simak - - GOBLIN RESERVATION (Methuen, 1987, 190pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

I enjoyed reading this book enough to forget I was reviewing it. It is fluent, readable and entertaining, and for anyone who likes Simak I recommend it unreservedly. Simak has a reputation as rural, old-fashioned, folksy; almost a whimsical writer which in these days of cyberpunk puts him out of the mainstream. As with many reputations that is too simplistic; Simak does not just retell folk tales, even when he uses the elements of folk tales he tells his own story, and his books are more varied and more complex than his reputation implies.

In GOBLIN RESERVATION Earth is a giant galactic University, time travel has been perfected, there are reservations set aside for the 'little people' - fairies, goblins, trolls, banshees etc. - where they may live unmolested by humans. Peter Maxwell, the hero, who studies the supernatural and is a friend of the little people, discovers that he has been duplicated in a wave transport and his other self has been killed. Along with some friends - a Neanderthal man, a Ghost, and a girl with a sabre-tooth tiger - he is trying to organise the purchase, by Earth, of incredibly detailed knowledge belonging to an ancient race. Into this come some baddies (suitably disgusting) and the scene is set for confrontation, and in the end victory. It treads a thin line between effectiveness and whimsy but because of the earthy nature of the characters, their concern with food and drink and living, I think effectiveness wins. It is not new (first published in 1969) but it's well written, very readable, and although fans of high tech aggression would do well to avoid it, those who like softer SF and fantasy would probably like it.

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Carl Sagan - - CONTACT (Arrow, 1987, 431pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

CONTACT finishes where most SF books start. At 100 pages this wouldn't be a drawback, but if you have to plough through 2 - 300 pages of padding, most of which involves some very trite religious issues and an amazingly stupid delegation, then it's one enormous drag.

Ellie Arroway's development from gifted child to astronomer makes involved reading, and the deciphering of the messages from Vega (hard to find amongst all the padding) is well-handled.

Sagan is sometimes condescending: do we have to be told Unidentified Flying Objects are abbreviated 'U.F.O's, or what prime num-



bers are (one astronomer telling another) with a list of the first dozen? He also makes some strange goofs - Lunacharsky, Arkhangel'sky and Valerian are the names of three characters, and he has the woman U.S. President say of the messages, 'Does this have anything to do with flying saucers?' The President, with odd reasoning, orders Arroway to hold discussions with a popular religious fanatic (it fills pages, but is otherwise redundant to the plot) and there is generally far too much attention to too many trivial details.

The messages from Vega include instructions for a space/time machine (proposed on p. 146, built by p. 279 and launched by p. 324). The books stops being interesting between pages 146 and 324, where it briefly picks up again by way of a lot of gosh-wow images as the machine is relayed to an alien holiday inn between two black holes.

CONTACT has many of the trappings of a first novel, a best-seller and a book written by a scientist for a general, non-SF oriented readership. SF fans will find it a big tease which fails to deliver. People who read best-selling fiction may be more easily pleased.

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Peter Tremayne - - NICOR! (Sphere, 1987, 211pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Peter Tremayne seems to write novels with titles like ZOMBIE! and KISS OF THE COBRA, but an epigraph from a poem by W. H. Hodgson (about whose sea stories Tremayne has written interestingly in Ian Bell's recent booklet WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON: VOYAGES AND VISION) suggests that he would prefer to have an affinity with the brooding atmosphere of 'weird Fantasy' rather than 'horror' as such. Indeed, in that same essay he condemns what he calls the 'blood, gore and vomit' school of horror.

NICOR! belongs to the stereotype of 'monster fiction': the drilling of an off-shore oil rig disturbs a gigantic dinosaur which wreaks revenge upon its tormenter. But it is more subtle than most. The creature only appears in full focus quite late in the story, and for much of the book the main thread involves a murder mystery; which of three men on board the oil rig, cut off from the outside world by a radio failure, is the murderer? There is more concentration on the personalities and motives of the characters than I've seen in many examples of such fiction, and the revelations of monster/killer gives a pleasing sense of counterpoint to the story.

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Anthony Burgess - - ENDERBY'S DARK LADY (Abacus, 1985, 160pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This has only recently come to my attention, and a definite curiosity it is. It's in three parts, the first being a historical fantasy with Shakespeare and Ben Jonson as main characters: a story which, we learn, was written by the poet Enderby who features in the second part as scriptwriter to an American musical on the life of Shakespeare (which at times sounds suspiciously like Burgess's own novel NOTHING LIKE THE SUN. Enderby - who died of a heart attack in the last novel about him - is an aging, pathetic figure in an absurd environment, trying to convert his vision of Shakespeare as sublime artist into doggerel. His own muse has long deserted him. However, April Elgar, a black actress who is playing the

Dark Lady unexpectedly reinvigorates Enderby's creative (and sexual) juices, and the progress of the play towards its inevitable catastrophic, er, climax is very funny. And this leads into the final third of the book.

'The Muse' - allegedly a story written by Enderby after these events - is why I'm reviewing the book here. If you didn't come across the story in the Hudson Review in 1968 you might have seen it in Harrison and Aldiss's 1970 edition of THE YEAR'S BEST SF and only hoary pedants like Your Reviewer may quibble at neither publisher nor author pointing this out. 'The Muse' is an excellent SF tale involving a temporal adventurer visiting an alternative Elizabethan Earth to find out if Shakespeare really wrote his plays. But no space-time continuum is quite like another and there are chilling differences as realities defend themselves against intrusion. We find out why the Bard never blotted a line.

Not necessarily wildly original, perhaps (there are only two Shakespeare SF stories and this is the other one) but it works damn well in the context of ENDERBY'S DARK LADY as an illustration of the novel's theme. As Enderby puts it, 'Leave Well Alone, or Leave Will Alone' or, if you want it more coarsely, don't bugger about with Shakespeare or he'll bugger about with you.

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Charles L. Grant (ed.) - - SHADOWS (Headline, 1987, 216pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Mark Valentine)

This collection of 17 new horror tales was first published in the USA in 1981 as SHADOWS 4. It is welcome that Headline have now made it so readily available in the UK. The first and last stories, by Stephen King and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro respectively, are in an avowedly traditional form, being set within an after-dinner circle of gentlemen, one of whom has a fireside yarn to tell. Both authors handle their material in a smoothly accomplished manner and the stories make congenial reading just sufficiently suspenseful to beguile the curiosity, but without any great claim to originality. Far more austere and unnerving is Ramsey Campbell's 'Hearing is Believing' in which a respectable, solitary office worker picks up the sounds of rain, falling rubble, slow breathing, screams on his stereo. Is the equipment faulty, is it his imagination - or is it real? John Shirley and William Gibson's 'The Belonging Kind' is equally eerie. Linguistics lecturer Coretti sees the same woman, though attired entirely differently, in bars and clubs of widely different types, from the lowest back alley joint to the discos, hotels, gay bars and smart-set rendezvous'; gradually he realises she, and others, are not quite all they should be. What begins as a relatively straightforward obsession ends with a sardonic twist.

As is perhaps inevitable, a number of the stories are rather one-dimensional, the almost dutiful rendering of a single idea; Alan Ryan's 'A Visit to Brighton' (heavy-handed in its depiction of an 'ordinary' bank official so stuffy that the character is not credible), Tabitha King's throwaway 'The Blue Chair', Tanith Lee's unexceptional were-cat tale 'Miaow', and the mawkish, juvenile 'Waiting for the Knight' by Beverley Evans, and others. From the point of view of a quick read of something clever, crisp and nicely twisted, the collection cannot be faulted. But apart from the four stories first mentioned above, and Lisa Tuttle's 'Need', whose brooding melancholy is betrayed by a somewhat forced ending, the collection does lack substance or

innovation, and is insufficiently trenchant in character or landscape to be anything more than superficially stimulating.

Gregory Benford & David Brin - - THE HEART OF THE COMET  
(Bantam, 1987, 477pp, £2.95)  
(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

A prefatory note to the 1985 hardback recognised that 1986 probe-research of Halley might validate or negate certain of the authors' presuppositions. By 1987 Giotto has endorsed the envisaged size of the comet's nucleus, but has given the novel no more than a sort of semi-solid foundation for its action, which involves a mission boarding Halley during its 2061 apparition to ride its orbit, and, after aphelion, so to adjust this that the comet can be captured for planetary exploitation. The nucleus harbours cosmically ancient infective and destructive life-forms, but bio-engineering enables the mission to develop a viable cometary ecology. Earth, fearing pollution, forcefully inhibits return, and compels 'Cometary Man', after the 2133 perihelion, to eject Halley, and himself, towards the Oort Cloud - and the stars.

Such a crude outline cannot do justice to a novel of this complexity, sophistication and imaginative beauty. Its authors weave themes technological and astronomical, political and 'tribal', heroic and erotic, into a narrative spanning eighty years, during which various members of the mission (its course followed through the minds of three key characters) experience 'slotted' sleep, cloning, holographic and stimulated environments, and symbiotic and biocybernetic transformations. Only rarely, and that in the earlier pages, does one mode or focus of attention seem to interrupt or detract from another (e.g. personal/technological); later their integration is compellingly effective.

Gregory Benford has contended that the alien is perhaps SF's most fundamental theme. Here adaptation and experiment result in Cometary Man achieving a modus vivendi with alien life-forms; and Biocybernetic Man virtually constitutes a new phylum. Speculation on their relationship to Planetary Man opens up the equally fundamental theme of evolution and leads to philosophically significant questions of identity, consciousness, autonomy and mortality, yielding insights which are as much poetic as scientific - the subtler dimensions of 'hard' SF.

Kurt Vonnegut - - GALAPAGOS (Grafton, 1987, 269pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

The events of the book span a million years and yet those of the very first day are singled out as all-important as that is the time of the happening of most of the pivotal events which lead to the survival of the human race.

The world's financial system is collapsing as all but the richest countries starve to death.

The ancestors of the survivors of the human race one million years hence are the passengers of the tourist ship, the 'Bahia de Darwin' which grounds itself on the Galapagian island of Santa Rosalia. On this, soon to be mankind's only home, the surviving characters start a chain of evolution which results in smaller, less troublesome brains to replace the big brains which are the main object of the satire. In effect Vonnegut, through his narrator - the ghost of Kilgore Trout's son - is pointing out

that it is yet to be proved that our so-called intelligence is a survival trait. The satire is like a can opener to the narrowest of minds, showing that we're sitting at the top of the evolutionary tree being self-congratulatory, complacent and just plain stupid.

The doom of the human race as we know it is made to seem mundane as if it were an expected and unremarkable occurrence. The beauty of the book lies in the mountains of wisdom the satire reaps and its spine-chilling ring of truth.

Ramsey Campbell - - COLD PRINT (Grafton, 1987, 365pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Although fellow Merseysider Clive Barker is hot on his heels, Ramsey Campbell is without doubt the contemporary master of horror, a distinctive mapper of the underside of urban decay who has taken the Lovecraftian tradition and applied it to the inner city, sending his readers screaming to the suburbs. COLD PRINT is perhaps of greatest interest to convinced Campbell fans or Lovecraft completists, for it's very much Campbell's homage to Lovecraft's influence upon him. Many of the tales, such as 'The Horror from the Bridge' and 'The Insects From Shaggai' are taken from Campbell's own early exercise in the Cthulhu Mythos, THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAKE, in which the Severn Valley becomes Campbell's equivalent of Lovecraft's haunted New England ports. Others, such as 'Cold Print' and 'The voice of the Beach', show Campbell finding his own voice, reviving the Mythos within urban Britain with an altogether more sophisticated interpretation of the viewpoint characters: the former, particularly, shows Campbell's ability to create convincingly squalid characters and let the horror develop from there.

Robert Silverberg - - THE MAN IN THE MAZE (Avon, 1987, 192pp £2.95)

(Reviewed by Ron Gemmell)

One of a trio of early Silverbergs reprinted by Avon, THE MAN IN THE MAZE first appeared in 1969.

The human race is living under threat of extinction by the 'hands' of incomprehensible aliens, and only one man out of the billions stands between oblivion and peaceful co-existence. The only problem is that this could-be saviour has exiled himself in a city-wide labyrinth of horrors left behind by another race of incomprehensible aliens on the planet Lemnos. Up until recently, the billions didn't really want to know the man of the moment. Muller's last mission left him a changed man, literally - the aliens that he was sent to on that occasion cleverly rearranged the human being into something more acceptable; something that didn't do much for any human friends he cared to make. Ironically, it is this 'something extra' of Muller's that makes him so invaluable - but the man sent to get him is the same guy who'd offered Muller his previous mission. Understandably, Muller might well prove a trifle difficult to coax out of the maze and give Earth his best again.

On the face of it, this storyline might convince you to put the book back and look for something else. Don't - you'll be missing out. The tale might seem a little bland, but there's nothing wrong with Silverberg's characters - they may not always come over as real 'flesh and blood' but they're a better imitation than most.

Jack Vance - - - - -THE BLUE WORLD  
(Grafton, 1987, 208pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

This book is a reissue of a 1966 novel, expanded by Vance from his 1964 story 'King Kragen'. The Blue World consists entirely of water, with no land masses of any kind. Eleven generations after their starship foundered, the descendants of Earthmen live in a temperate climate on an archipelago of floating lily-pad-like islands. They signal to one another with a sophisticated lamp system from the top of high towers in the centre of each float.

Their peaceful existence is spoilt only by the lobster-like but sentient sea-monsters called kragens who prey on their fish stocks and underwater sponge gardens. King Kragen is the largest and most intelligent of these, and the People of the Floats keep him well fed so that he will keep the other Kragens away. Only one man, Sklar Hast, resents this custom of enforced protection, and vows to kill the creature.

Vance is at his best when inventing and describing bizarre human societies, and in THE BLUE WORLD he has created one which equals any of which he has written. The colonists are organised in rigid castes, each honouring the original occupations of their revered ancestors from Earth. The names of their clans, unfortunately, reveal the true purpose of their ill-fated starship: Embezzlers, Forgers, Arsonists, and Hooligans, for example! Sklar Hast the signaller, spends his life raising and lowering the hoods of his lights to wink messages to the other floats, and is of course a Hoodwink. A new caste of Intercrossers has risen to form the priesthood of this society and to worship King Kragen. They denounce Hast's plan as heresy and vehemently obstruct his efforts to free his people from the tyranny of the kragens.

The outcome of the story is, however, never in doubt, and the plot in this stretched version is spread rather thin. When I first read the book more than ten years ago, I became bored, and skimmed the pages until I reached the finale. This time, however, I took the book at a more leisurely pace, and enjoyed the way Vance pokes fun at the ossified and comical society of the Blue World, and through it at our own. The People of the Floats have a society which is founded on a complete falsehood, but which works well in its own

way. They are, however, forced to change it irreversibly in order to defend it, and in that sense Sklar Hast's victory could be seen as ultimately Pyrrhic.

Characterisation is not one of Vance's strong points. Just as I read through five books of the Demon Princes series without really getting to know Kirth Gersen, Sklar Hast and the other characters remain incomplete figures. Even so, if you like Vance, you'll find in this book more of what you like about him, and it is far from one of his worst.

Christine Brooke-Rose - - - - -XORANDOR  
(Paladin, 1987, 211pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Dave Langford)

XORANDOR comes bristling with warnings against frivolity. Frank Kermode says menacingly that Brooke-Rose is the only serious practitioner of narrative who's writing in English; other critics invoke Fowles, Burgess, Hoban, Hofstadter, Derrida and Enid Blyton...

Certainly there are plenty of artful narrative devices surrounding the conventional

SF core wherein a sentient rock/natural computer/radionuclide-eater causes world complications. (Best not to think too hard about the unlikely conjunction of ultra-high-density logic circuits and hard radiation.) The narrators - two mildly repellent child computer-freaks - enmesh this in argumentative meta-narrative about the best order to report the facts...clouded by amusing computerspeak, studded with tape transcripts (complete with pause timings, P 4.36 sec) and chunks of pseudo-program: REVIEW DEC 1 'PAGES OF BLOCK CAPS NUMB THE MIND' ENDEC 1 ENDREVIEW.

All this trickiness, this game of distancing the actual events, gives them more force than straight narrative might have. Much of it is funny, too. A demented rock, stoned on radio-caesium, lurking in a reactor with a view to nuclear detonation, is hung up (in more than one sense) on MACBETH. ACKN...AND OFTENTIMES TO WIN US OUR HARM THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS TELL US TRUTH...LOOP.

It's the computerspeak that provoked the RIDDLE WALKER comparisons, and indeed lots of it is witty and well researched. There must be a lurking joke in 'eproms' for 'school holidays', and one needs no degree in computer science to savour the expletives 'Booles!' or 'Debug!' But there are false notes. Isn't 'diodic' ('triffic') a bit out of date? Mentions of 'erased ROM' (the state of having forgotten something) induced carpings: Read-Only Memory doesn't get erased, and human memory (which is written to as well as read) is more like mass storage - disk or WORM. Then comes technobabble about whether the computer/rock has a 'mass memory and a scratch pad memory and a dynamic memory and an EPROM and...did he do his type-checking at runtime or completetime.' The assumptions are absurdly question-begging, as though one's thoughts on encountering an alien were (a) the location of its vermiform appendix, and (b) whether it attended divine service on Saturday or Sunday.

XORANDOR (the name comes from the logic operators XOR AND OR, the most inspired SF nomenclature since that early spaceship called 'A-star-go') is a thoroughly researched, cleverly written and intellectually titillating fake. Brooke-Rose's cerebral antics with computers have everything except the conviction that comes of genuine experience. Yes, I know they said much the same about the English language and Joseph Conrad....

Philip K. Dick - - -THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE  
(Penguin, 1987, 249pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

With the belated release of Dick's non-SF, I'm sure someone is writing a book showing the range of this extraordinary author. Even at his most sciencefictional, Dick remains hyperrealistic in many ways: one recognises the typical Philip K. Dick character and situation in SF and mainstream alike, the small, unimportant individuals who make up his worlds are emotional cripples who can nevertheless feel and even, sometimes, articulate what they feel. Whether the background is small-town '50s USA or the entire space-time continuum, we sympathise with these heroic puppets who can only dimly discern their strings.

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE deservedly won its 1963 Hugo and its elevation to an imprint designated 'Classic Science Fiction'. It is, perhaps, Dick's most coolly balanced novel, told with a care for language, rhythm and mood which is rare in any mode and full of vignettes which you realise afterwards are probably Zen parables: compassionate humour in

which you smile ironically at the world and yourself rather than the characters. The picture of Japanese conquerors as collectors of American trivia is both farcical and serious, leading as it does to one of Dick's most effective images of our inability to 'distinguish the forgeries from the real.' This image of objective/subjective realities lies at the core of the book as it becomes clear that this world in which the Axis powers won World War Two is not the real world. But what is the real world? It's clear also that the 'fictional' alternative depicted by Hawthorne Abendsen in his banned novel departs from our version of reality in several points. And in the end, moral choices still have to be made. Even within the total evil of Nazi Fascism, it matters who is to be the new leader.

Simply one of the best post-war American novels in any field.

W.A. Harbinson - - - - - THE LIGHT OF EDEN  
(Corgi, 1987, 440pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

Glastonbury Tor disappears, carried off by a mysterious pillar of darkness, who knows where, and is replaced by an expanse of swamp ground. This dramatic event opens a novel with enormous pretensions but that nonetheless manages to remain remarkably inconsequential. Why is this?

For a while the whole earth seems threatened by this menace that is swallowing up chunks of real estate, people included. In the company of the two main characters, Frances Devereux and Michael Phillips we discover the reason. Although the theme of the book is extravagantly large, indeed of cosmic significance, it left this reader altogether unaffected.

The reason seems to lie with Frances and Michael. They are not very convincing characters and any serious attempt at developing them is sacrificed by the author's decision to make sex the dominant element in their lives. The book is interspersed with erotic passages, often unintentionally comic in effect, that are obviously intended to boost sales. Unfortunately they involve the two characters approaching the changes that are underway from a point of view that is to say the least eccentric.

Frances is possessed by an overpowering sex drive, complicated by the fact that she can only achieve orgasm by means of bondage. Her lover frees her from this slavery at the same moment as the change is consummated and they become a new Adam and a new Eve: 'the earth actually moved'.

Well, it didn't move for me. A disappointing 440 pages that does not really inspire me to rush out for any of Harbinson's other dozen or more best-selling novels.

C.J. Cherryh - - - - - ANGEL WITH THE SWORD  
(Daw, 1986, 295pp, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Ron Gemmill)

At first sight, a few things about this book worried me. Little things like the cover title having a MEROVINGEN NIGHTS (TM) prefix and the way that the inside blurb welcomed me to an 'action, intrigue-and-adventure-packed series' that Cherryh will be creating along side such writers as McCaffrey and Asprin. Add this news to a fifty-page, gift-to-the-role-players appendix and you can understand why my brain needed some convincing that it was safe to let my hand loose and get a copy.

I wasn't disappointed, gumph aside (and

even this turned out to be vaguely interesting) I found ANGEL WITH THE SWORD an enjoyable read; not her best admittedly, but far from the bottom of the growing stack of Cherryh novels on my bookshelf.

The story takes place in the low-life quarters of the city, Merovingen - a large Venice-like place built on islands and living under the threat of going submarine some time in the future. As you would expect, there's quite a lot of bridges in Merovingen, and it is in the immediate vicinity of one such bridge that our two protagonists first meet. Tall, blond and handsome Thomas Mondragon; and Altair Jones, recently waiting with her skip for a bit of smuggling work, now attempting to rescue a tall blond man who probably didn't really want to be thrown naked from the bridge.

She's successful. Mondragon spends the next few days on her skip, and although it's obvious that he's in deep trouble, he refuses to talk about its nature. The young canaler - a career amongst the lowest of the low in Merovingenian society - becomes quite attracted to her passenger, who by his manners and speech betrays himself as a member of some unfamiliar high society family. His attempts to convince Jones that she doesn't want to know anything more about him fails miserably; the girl won't let him leave her life, and subsequently she finds herself up to her armpits in more than a fair helping of all that action, intrigue and adventure that the blurb was telling us about.

C.J. Cherryh is developing her art well. The 'something extra' that she provides in this novel is in the well-crafted appearance of Altair's mother as some kind of pseudo-ghost; I say 'pseudo' because I was never quite certain as to whether the ghost was 'real' or Jones was simply talking to herself. This need of the lonely's 'to talk to someone' in times of crisis is a very real and very human feeling. It is an indication of Cherryh's skill that she has recognised, and successfully used this 'humanity' to her advantage.

Frederik Pohl - - - - - BLACK STAR RISING  
(Futura, 1987, 282pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

I must confess to a problem when reading new Pohl novels, and I am sure I am not alone. His early work includes WOLFBANE, a collaboration with C.M. Kornbluth, which I regard as one of the major contributions to Science Fiction. Unfortunately, anything he has written since seems to suffer from comparison with this masterpiece, no matter how interesting and enjoyable it may be in its own right.

What about BLACK STAR RISING? It is a superb novel, a finely crafted satire of a post-holocaust America where the Han Chinese are now the benign rulers of a Communist satellite. Chinese colonial rule is portrayed with a sensitivity and wit that is a stark and shaming contrast to the gung-ho mentality of the run-of-the-mill America Occupied novel and film. Pohl writes in a relaxed, unstrained style, creating interesting characters whose fate it is easy to become concerned about. Among the Chinese is one of his most impressive inventions, the scientist 'Manyfaces'.

The Chinese domination of America is suddenly threatened by the arrival of an alien spacecraft which orders them to evacuate or face the consequences. The intruder is from a lost American colony that Larry Niven would be proud of: a planet of ultra-patriotic, militaristic American supermen eager and ready

for a war of liberation against the 'Chinks'! For every one of these red-blooded males there are over 170 obliging females!

Pohl carries off this marvellous satiric exercise without any apparent effort. It is the work of a master craftsman and can be unreservedly recommended. Moreover it has all the appearances of preparing the way for a sequel, although it is difficult to see how this standard can be maintained. And as for any comparison with WOLFBANE, well, such comparisons are invidious anyway.

Joan Slonczewski - - - - - A DOOR INTO OCEAN  
(Women's Press, 1987, 403pp, £4.95)  
(also Avon, \$3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Shora and Valedon are twin worlds. Shora is a water-world whose inhabitants - adapted human females - live on floating natural rafts. Their culture is based on 'sharing' and genetic manipulation. Valedon's culture is based upon war and trade. Neither world fully understands the other and the novel details the clashes between them as Valedon embarks on a process of colonial domination. Two Valedonians - Berenice, a noble (wife of Realgar, the Valedonian general) and Spinel, a young commoner, are accepted into 'Sharer' society and play pivotal parts in the relationship between the two worlds: complex, at times equivocal parts.

The richly detailed ecosystem of Shora is one of the book's strengths. The 'Sharers' live in natural harmony but it is a harmony they exploit through their biological tailoring (lifeshaping), which is looked upon with suspicion by the Valedonians and the Patriarchal confederation of which Valedon is a part. (This background is well drawn even when seen through the eyes of characters like Spinel who know as much about the Patriarch as a mediaeval peasant about the Pope: the occasional lack of clarity adds to rather than takes away from realism.)

Possible weaknesses are the closeness of the whole concept to THE DISPOSSESSED and the direct oppositions which form much of the book's structure. Nevertheless, this is good SF with a strong fusion of science and sociology and characters who are more than puppets in the hands of the author. As good SF should, it suggests much about the social fictions which shape our lives, and leaves you wanting to know more about the universe in which the author embeds her story. There is one minor character who is deeply intriguing!

Philip K. Dick - - - - - GALACTIC POT-HEALER  
(Panther/Grafton, 1987, 192pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

This book dates from 1969, and was originally published here in 1971. The title and plot scenario of the book would initially lead you to believe that a novel of Clifford D. Simak's had accidentally been attributed to Dick. In fact, though comic in its framework, and laced with a good deal of wry humour, the tale is ultimately deeper and darker than a Simak pastoral romance.

Joe Fernwright is a pot-healer. He does not repair pots as you and I do, with Superglue, nor as a professional does with the ceramic equivalent of 'invisible mending' used on valuable antiques or archaeological treasures. With 21st Century technology Joe actually 'heals' the pots by making them as whole as if they had never been broken. Unfortunately, in the plastic world of 2046 there is not a great deal of work about for

pot-healers. So, when Joe is offered a job as part of the team raising the submerged cathedral of Heldscalla on Sirius Five, Plowman's Planet (after the tale of Piers Plowman, perhaps?), he naturally accepts. The cathedral was built by the 'Fog Things', the now-vanished indigenous race of Plowman's Planet, and has been underwater for centuries.

The undertaking is being organised by the Glimmung, a powerful being who now lives on the planet. He is regarded in some Galactic quarters as a deity, although he does have some curious failings. Glimmung has assembled a rag, tag, and bobtail collection of Galactic misfits to help him achieve his aim of bringing the cathedral to dry land and restoring it and its artifacts to its former glory.

When Joe reaches his destination he soon becomes aware of a complicating factor. On Plowman's Planet a race of mysterious creatures called Kalends publish a kind of bible that records all events that take place on the planet, and also predicts the future. The book is said to predict that the venture will fail, and that those who take part in it will perish. Joe learns that the Glimmung considers the Kalends and their book his antagonists, and is planning to raise the cathedral and its artifacts to prove them wrong and undermine their authority. A quasi-arachnid member of the band provides Joe with more insight into Glimmung's motivation: he is deliberately re-enacting the Faust legend, and playing God with the planet and his employees. 'But Faust always loses' says the arachnid, convinced that Glimmung is inevitably doomed to failure. Joe is, however, reminded by another participant of Goethe's or Thomas Mann's versions of the tale (based on Lessing's lost 1759 drama), where a more modern and tolerant spirit prevails, and Faust finally receives redemption.

What the book of Kalends really says, when translated correctly, is that 'there will be a failure after the Undertaking', and that 'those who take part will receive a blow that will permanently change them'. What actually happens, how the Glimmung achieves Faustian salvation, and how the others are also changed, is an excellent and satisfying plot-twist. Joe is given an opportunity to demonstrate his pot-healing skills to us, and also to play a critical part in the resolution of the affair. He finds through it a new role for himself and purpose in life, even if the expectations that he starts the enterprise with and builds during the book are never fulfilled. Mind you, Dick reserves the final punch for the last line, in which he skilfully deflates any pompous ideas Joe and the reader may have acquired about his ultimate destiny!

It would be a pity if people were put off by the rather twee title and BEM-style cover into rejecting GALACTIC POT-HEALER: it may not be one of Dick's major works, but it is far superior to the work of many writing in the field today, and deserves to be read.

A supplementary note not part of my review:

On page 34 of this paperback Joe receives a secret message from the Glimmung, which he reveals by heating a sheet of paper. Unfortunately, the actual message is omitted from the text of this edition, and I found the rest of the chapter confusing till I turned up the original edition of the book and checked it. The message, critical to the tale, is

WE SHALL RAISE HELDSCALLA

Ru Emerson - - THE PRINCESS OF FLAMES (Unwin, 1987, 327pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is a very difficult book to review because it is impossible to discuss the plot without giving too much away and thus ruining the suspense and effect. It's a fantasy set in an imaginary world, in a kingdom named Darion, where Sedry has usurped his father's throne, casting out both his father and his bastard half sister Elfrid, beginning a tyrannical reign of oppression. Into Darion comes Gespry, a fighting archbishop, to aid Sedry against the Fegez, non-human invaders. It is against this background of war and fighting that the bulk of the book is set.

There is magic in the book, although only royalty and priests have magic powers, which are relatively minor but do turn out to be crucial to the plot. Religion is left vague, references to 'the two' and monasteries add colour but little substance to the story. So do the powers of the Tarots reader who can accurately predict the future with the special Tarot cards - it is from the Tarot pack that the title comes: the Princess of Flames is both a card and a person who will influence the future.

There is a great deal of depth in this book, especially concerning the planning and fighting. Gespry wins battles because he is a master strategist; his battles are carefully planned beforehand, a rare event in fantasy fiction. There is some very credible characterisation, especially Sedry and his crazy brother Hyrcan. In fact, one of the flaws of the book is that the actions and motivations of the baddies are more involving than those of the goodies; nevertheless Emerson handles the activities and differentiation of a large cast of characters with skill. The plot, if you guess the twist, is otherwise fairly predictable with no other great surprises, but is told with fluency making this book a pleasant way to pass the time.

John Brunner - - THE COMPLEAT TRAVELLER IN BLACK (Methuen, 1987, 234pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

This book consists of five linked fantasy novellas, the first two of which appeared in the Sixties in 'Science Fantasy' (later 'Impulse'), the sister magazine of 'New Worlds'. They are set in a Moorcockian universe similar to that of the Eternal Champion, where Law and Chaos contend, and the Traveller in Black is the only champion of Law against the forces of Chaos. These first two stories, together with two from the US magazine 'Fantastic' from the early Seventies, were revised by the author and published as THE TRAVELLER IN BLACK in 1978. A fifth story, set chronologically between the third and fourth, appeared in 'Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine' in 1979, and is also included in this 'Compleat' edition. All the stories have again been extensively revised by Brunner for this new volume.

I have compared the original text of one of the first stories with the text in this book, and found the revisions to be essentially concerned with style rather than plot. But, if my memory is correct, the last story has been altered to provide a completely new ending, more in keeping with today's climate than the 1971 version.

The tales that make up the book are all enjoyable, with more than a suspicion of wicked fun mixed in with the Traveller's ultimately serious purpose. Amongst his powers is the often involuntary ability to grant a person's innermost wishes, which he does absolutely literally, thus usually bringing about the complete opposite of what they really want. For example, in the story 'Break The Doors of Hell' the people of a city wish their 'glorious' ancestors could come to life to put an end to the once-proud city's problems. The ancestors that reappear are evil sorcerers, contagious plague-victims, and blood-crazed mass murderers, who solve the problems of the present populace by wiping them out! 'The Wager Lost By Winning' uses essentially the same plot idea: if the book has a flaw, it is that too much of it is concerned with this aspect, and the stories have a 'samey' feel when taken together.

Even so, readers who have enjoyed individual stories in the series will be pleased to have them together in this version, and those with the earlier collection may also wish to own this one for completeness and the revised text. Where it stands for newer readers I am not sure, because often few of one's early favourites have travelled well into the Eighties. Brunner is always worth reading, however, even if this book is not typical of his mainstream SF work or his innovative novels such as STAND ON ZANZIBAR SHOCKWAVE RIDER and THE SHEEP LOOK UP.

## Capsules

Karen A. Brush - - THE PIG, THE PRINCE AND THE UNICORN (Avon, 1987, 216pp, \$2.95)

Twice quest-fantasy in which the hero is a cuddly white piglet. (Andy Sawyer)

Simon Ian Childer - - WORM (Grafton, 1987, 189pp, £2.50)

Someone's breeding giant mutated tapeworms in people: can a drunken private eye stop them? The author signals the tone of his book in his initials... (Andy Sawyer)

Louise Cooper - - THE OUTCAST (Unwin/Unicorn, 1986, 301pp, £2.95)

Book 2 in the Time Master trilogy. Magic, Adepts, mental chat, revelations realised with lots of exclamation marks and worlds explode in oblivion. If you've read THE INITIATE when you may feel inclined to try this one followed by THE MASTER. Then again, you may not... (Nik Morton)

Louise Cooper - - THE MASTER (Unwin/Unicorn, 1987, 249pp, £2.95)

...my opinion exactly. (Andy Sawyer)

Kenneth C. Flint - - MASTER OF THE SIDHE (Bantam, 1987, 248pp, £2.50)

Fourth and final volume of the 'Sidhe Legends': mediocre retelling of Irish tales for a science-fantasy market. (Andy Sawyer)

Paul Hazel - - THE FINNBRANCH (Sphere, 1986, 594pp, £4.95)

YEARWOOD and UNDERSEA reissued together with WINTERKING to make up the trilogy in one volume ranging from mythological Celtic times to what appears to be 20th-Century USA in such an oblique, almost incomprehensible fashion that it defies summary. A good encyc-

lopedia of mythology is necessary, I feel: the narrative sweeps in and out of the consciousness of the characters without really affirming who or what they are, although we are clearly in the world of the Celtic selkie legends. The non-linear, imagistic construction may offer rewards to those willing to persevere: one for the committed. (Andy Sawyer)

Kathleen Herbert - - GHOST IN THE SUNLIGHT  
(Congi, 1987, 335pp,  
£2.95)

Apart from a little spell-casting this is a conventional historical novel set in post-Arthurian Britain, well worth reading, however, for its vivid dramatisation of the intertribal warfare of the 7th century. Lovers of the 'Celtic thing' would find this more rewarding than many recent SF/Fantasy plunderings. It sticks firmly to the Stewart/Sutcliffe tradition of having good magnetic characters and not playing about too much with historical fact while offering tantalising speculations about the seeds of later mythologies. (Andy Sawyer)

Stephen Laws - - GHOST TRAIN (Sphere, 1987,  
243pp, £2.95)

Why are so many brutal crimes associated with the stretch of line from King's Cross? Mark Davies finds the answer in his own mind as an entity of ancient evil seeks to break its chains and feed. A fitting climax on a runaway express, but a few too many horror-writer's clichés. Dare I say 'a good read for a train journey'? (Andy Sawyer)

Ian Livingstone - - CRYPT OF THE SORCERER  
(Puffin, 1987, £1.95)

Perhaps the best way to realise how good some of these fighting fantasy things are is to read them after a diet of undistinguished 'proper novels'. This is standard capers in the FF universe but at least you can conceive of the players enjoying themselves. Convincingly creepy. (Andy Sawyer)

Atanielle Anyn Noel - - MURDER ON USHER'S  
PLANET (Avon, 182pp,  
£2.95)

An important letter has possibly fallen into the wrong hands. Two 'intergalactic sleuths' have been employed to recover this sensitive document and save the Empire from a potentially embarrassing situation. It is believed that it has been taken to Lord Roderick Usher, an incurable Edgar Allan Poe fan who lives in a huge gothic mansion out on a desolate moor where, naturally enough, the murder takes place... This is a novel which must have been written as a send-up. As a joke it does boast some feeble merits, but not many. (Ron Gemmell)

J.F. Rivkin - - SILVERGLASS (Orbit, 1987,  
186pp, £2.50)

Superior heroic fantasy in the 'Red Sonja' mould. Mercenary swordswoman Corson is hired by the aristocratic Nyctasia to protect her from warring factions seeking her life. Not quite as amusing and colourful a partnership as, say Fafhrd and Gray Mouser, but a nice line in hedonism and amorality. A lively romp, as they say. (Andy Sawyer)

William Irwin Thompson - - ISLANDS OUT OF  
TIME (Grafton,  
1987, 270pp, £2.95)

This 'metafiction of Atlantis' is prefaced by an essay of stunning banality, even for American 'New Age' intellectuals. The actual plot is by Peter Valentine Timlett out of

ILLUMINATUS! and may well be interesting to take as 'parody-of-identity' and 'metaphoric description of scientific post-history', but that says nothing about the story itself - a mishmash of end-of-Atlantis/evil scientific priesthood/Sex Magick/Lovecraftian Old Ones clichés made worse rather than better by the author's pretensions to create symbolic significance. (Andy Sawyer)

Patrick Tilley - - IRON MASTER (AMTRAK WARS  
3) (Sphere, 1987, 405pp,  
£3.50)

Difficult to follow without a knowledge of its predecessors, this is a struggle for power in a Balkanised USA a thousands years hence, set in the North-Eastern states ruled by descendants of Japanese boat people who act like guards in a WW2 prisoner-of-war camp. Occasional reminders that this is SF fail to hide a poverty of imagination. Is the racist language meant to be irony? (Andy Sawyer)

Robert E. Vardeman - - THE ALIEN WEB (MASTERS  
OF SPACE 2) (Avon, 1987,  
166pp, £2.95)

The story picks up where it left off with the goody fleeing and the baddies lusting for sight of his corpse. Most of the action takes place on Web, target of phase one of the Stellar Death Plan (a plot to kill off every alien in the galaxy). Key scenes are being rationed giving the impression that this is going to be a very long series. (Nicholas Mahoney)

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - THE SEVEN ALTARS OF  
DUSARRA (Grafton,  
1987, 270pp, £2.95)

Garth the Overman goes on another quest for the Forgotten King. More bloodshed and sorcery, and a clue to the King's identity. A faint tinge of Elrician angst, but not enough to raise the series sufficiently above the ordinary. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael D. Weaver - - WOLF-DREAMS (Avon,  
1987, 186pp, £2.95)

The sword-and-sorcery saga of Thyri Eiriksdattir, Viking heroine and werewolf, narrated from a very odd standpoint. (Andy Sawyer)

Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman - - TIME OF  
THE TWINS (Penguin, 1987,  
398pp, £2.95)

Start of a new Dragonlance fantasy whose novel idea (heroine in love with villain: wants to reform him) fails to revive a flabby monotony. (Andy Sawyer)

Colin Wilson - - AFTERLIFE (Grafton, 1987,  
301pp, £3.95)

An assessment of the evidence for life after death, covering near-death experiences, clairvoyance, spiritualism and reincarnation, concluding that there is a strong argument in its favour. But he also stresses the subjectivity of the evidence and the banality of spiritualist 'contact', including a clumsy fraud which was attempted on him. Interesting, occasionally shaky when he's attempting conclusions, but worth reading if you're at all interested in the paranormal. (Andy Sawyer)

Roger Zelazny - - UNICORN VARIATIONS (Avon,  
1987, 249pp, £3.50)

US edition of the collection published last year by Sphere and reviewed in PI 60. Includes the Hugo-winning 'Home is the Hangman' and some rarities and 'variations' for Zelazny completists. (Andy Sawyer)



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