# PAPERBACK INFERNO 68

October/November 1987

The Review of paperback SF

50p.

A British Science Fiction Association magazine

★ PAPERBACK INFERNO ★

Issue 68, October/November 1987.
A publication of the british Science Fiction Association, edited by Andy Sawyer.

ISSN 0260-0595.



*Editorial Address:*

1, The Flaxyard
Woodfall Lane
Little Neston
South Wirral
Cheshire L64 4BT
(Tel. 051-336-3355)

Printed by PDC Copyprint, 11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4AF.

Production Assistant: Phil Nichols.

Membership of the BSFA costs £10 per year and is available from JOANNE RAINE: 33 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW.



# CONTENTS



Good to see so many people at the BSFA AGM even though I didn't get the opportunity for as long talks with as many people as I would **have** liked: I seemed to have spent the rest of the day failing to track down people I said 'Hi' to at the AGM, including many PI reviewers. Still, even I didn't know I was going to be there until not so long before the event... but that's another story.

# Paperback Purgatory

PAPERBACK INFERNO isn't my fanzine. Just as well, really: if it were, you'd be treated to a complex account of what's been happening to me this summer. I'll spare you most of it... but some of it bears a direct relationship to this issue, last issue and (probably) the next one. Those of you who believe, no doubt rightly, that those little complications of production which drive editors to despair aren't terribly interesting can skip a bit. I won't mind. Honest.

Much of this issue was organised under similar circumstances to the last one, but by now - the paste-up stage - my frozen shoulder is virtually better, with only the slightest of twinges when I overload the activity. Enough on that: I seem to have developed an annoying habit of talking at length about how much mobility I had last month to all who care to hear. But thanks to everyone who wished me well. More to the point, the strange custom found in these Isles of taking holidays during the summer months caused havoc to the smoothly running operation which results in these pages and the gathering of the tribes in Brighton seemed too to have its effect. Phil Nicholls' trusty word-processor decided that if everyone else was going on holiday it would too, and engineered a little breakdown. Fortunately, Phil saved me from a big one by some swift manual typing. This explains the variety in typefaces which you are about to experience.

The major effect of all this coming and going is that Edward James was unable to supply magazine reviews for this issue, but he'll be back next time. I hope also to be able to run reviews of Fantasy and Science Fiction, which have been missing from PI for a while. This is now in hand.There are also a few reviews which I had hoped to run this issue but which now are held over to the next. My apologies to all concerned; but life wouldn't be such fun without these little hiccups, would it?

KEV McVEIGH writes with a correction: I took the word 'conclusion' on the back of MASTER OF THE SIDHE to mean that the whole thing (not just that particular legend) was finished. Not so: Book 5, CHALLENGE OF THE CLANS is due shortly. Kev also takes issue with the comments on sequels with which Edward James opened his magazine review: "A bock, or a story, is not good or bad merely because it's a sequel to a good work." This needs more space than I can give it now, but I took Edward's remarks as suggesting that originality is one of the qualities we look for when nominating for an award and by definition a sequel - even an indirect sequel like COUNT ZERO - isn't original in the sense that however good it is, we know something of what we're going to read. Not having read many of the Hugo nominations I shouldn't really comment, but I feel disappointed that Bob Shaw didn't win for THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS. Awards, though, as Kev points out, are"merely a point to what (usually) is amongst the best."

OUT NOW/FORTHCOMING REVIEWS

As well as the books mentioned on p.4, PI 69 will contain reviews of Gene Wolfe's SOLDIER OF THE MIST, William Gibson's COUNT ZERO and Lucius Shepard'S GREEN EYES; Graham Dunstan Martin's THE DREAM WALL and the Gollancz classic reissue of DANGEROUS VISIONS; Joanna Russ's WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO... and Lisa Tuttle's A SPACESHIP BUILT OF STONE, as well as the new Women's Press 'Livewire' SF title for teenagers, Melisa Michael's SKIRMISH; the World Fantasy Award-winning SONG OF KALI, by Dan Simmons; Jane Yolen's TALES OF WONDER, and others.

# "Upon the rack in print . . ."

INTERZONE 21 (Autumn 1987)

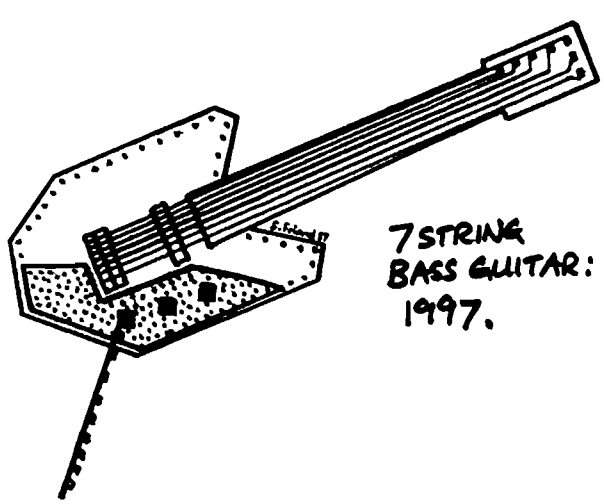
(reviewed by Andy Mills)

In this issue you can find the concluding part of Geoff Ryman's 'Love Sickness'. I'm afraid my fear for the story - that the gap between issues would prove to be too long - was realised and I found that the synopsis which preceded this second part to be vital; nevertheless, the feel of the tale was somewhat lost. Overall, as I said before, the story is full of Ryman's almost throwaway inventiveness. His future is depressing in its depiction of ordinary life, a life which is shorter than today's and where personality, talent and education are acquired through viral infections. The story centres around one girl's love for a genetically-altered songstress and though the narrative does tend to drift aimlessly in places, it's a tale worth reading. But I must say again that its effectiveness was diminished by being split between two quarterly issues. However, were IZ to go bi-monthly, as has been hinted...?

Regarding the rest of the fiction: well, if there is nothing particularly outstanding, still I found it to be highly entertaining. With Krash-Bangg Joe and the Pineal-Zen Equation' Eric Brown makes an impressive debut. It's an unashamed pastiche, mainly of Gibson, but afficionadoes will also spot Dick, Stableford, Bishop and others lurking within this cyberpunk tale of a telepathic detective. 'Dop*elgan*er', by Garry Kilworth, also pays homage to the genre; this time, however, the references (to Poe) are overt, and Kilworth's expert usage of the conventions of the scientific romance make for an eminently readable short story. Ken Wisman's 'The Philosophical Stone' is a humourous account of an alchemical experiment, and Brian Stableford's witty observations on the grand design of life (as revealed to a curate eating an egg: presumably 'The Curate's Egg' was too obvious a title!) are contained in 'Layers of Meaning'.

On to the non-fiction, then. Being keen on Ian Miller's work, I was disappointed with the feature on this artist, which consisted of a handful of illustrations along with the sparsest of biographical information. On the other hand, I'm not myself a John Crowley fan but for those who are the interview with him is informative, particularly on his publishing history.

I'm still dubious about the serialisation but, that apart, IZ 21 is an enjoyable read.




# Closer Encounters

((Closer Encounters this issue highlights Bob Shaw's THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS, winner of the 1986 BSFA award for the best novel of the year. For a fuller review, and Bob Shaw's article in which he describes the genesis of the book, see VECTOR 134 (Oct/Nov 1986). The second feature looks at Robinson Publishing, producers of the Mammoth anthologies.))

Bob Shaw - - THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS (Orbit, 1987, 310pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This says on the cover blurb that it is the 'first volume in an epic adventure.' What, another one? Well, yes and no. It is volume one in a series, but not just any volume one; this one is by Bob Shaw.

Bob Shaw writes original, well thought out novels and this is no exception. He has created a world which had no metal and has to use a hardwood, the brakka, instead. The invention with which he carries the premise through is both thorough and beautifully understated: at no time does the author draw attention to his own cleverness but allows the reader to assimilate its depths for himself. Land, the world, shares a common atmosphere with its sister world Overland, so that when a plague sweeps across the world the desperate remedy of using balloons to escape to Overland is suggested.

All the characters, even minor ones, have lives of their own. There is complex interaction between all the major personalities as the complexities of the plot are slowly laid out. There is tremendous depth in plotting, background information subtly sketches in a diversity of cultures of which we see only one, Kolcorron, where all the protagonists live.

I can't find any faults in this book. It has everything. All I can say is read it.

## *Enter the Mammoth . . .*

One of the more interesting developments of the past year has been the appearance of the aptly-titled 'Mammoth' anthologies from Robinson Publishing. It was almost exactly a year ago that THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF SHORT SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS and the companion SHORT FANTASY NOVELS (edited by Asimov, Greenberg and Waugh) came out (see reviews in VECTOR 134 by L.J. Hurst and Tom Jones, and Matthew Dickens' review of FANTASY NOVELS in PI 63). Since then, the list has expanded to include some very well-received books, with the promise of more in the future.

Robinson is a small house which has been publishing for about three years, although the 'Mammoth' books were their first excursion into SF and fantasy. They also produce similar books in crime and horror, as well as a small general literature and non-fiction list. (Fans of H.E. Bates should take note.) Nick Robinson is a firm believer in producing quality literature at a good price and the 'Mammoth' idea of bringing out short novels and novellas in one thick collected edition is one way of doing this. What we have here - to repeat what I say later on in my review - is a bargain package of fiction which is otherwise only available (if at all) in expensive editions. Even granted that in any such anthology you will

have, or not like, some of the stories, four or five tales which you know you want collected together at £5.00 is worth more than four or five separate editions at £1.50 or £2.00. (And would any publisher wishing to stay in business more than five minutes bring out individual mass-market editions of Johann Ludwig Tieck's THE ELVES or Henry Hasse's HE WHO SHRANK?)

The ethos of 'value for money' has been maintained by bringing over from the USA various anthologies.COSMIC KNIGHTS, GIANTS, and BEYOND ARMAGEDDON are reviewed below, together with THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF CLASSIC FANTASY. The latest 'Mammoth' is Gardner Dozois' MAMMOTH BOOK OF THE BEST NEW SCIENCE FICTION, which was published to coincided with the recent World SF Convention in Brighton. A review of this will appear next issue, so I'll just say for now that it is available, contains what Dozois considers 'state-of-the-art' 1986 SF, and at £4.95 for over 600 pages is well worth the money. (For the record, it's a UK edition of his 'YEAR'S BEST SF COLLECTION' brought out, until their demise, by Bluejay.) It also provides a useful corrective dose of new material to set against the resurrection of classics and semi-classics which is the anthologies' strong point up to now.

There is also a new series of 'Dark Fantasy' titles, the first four of which consist of two short novels by Shirley Jackson, THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE and WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE, the 1954 classic Vampire/SF story I AM LEGEND by Richard Matheson, and a collection of short stories covering most of his writing career by Ramsey Campbell entitled DARK FEASTS. Reviews will follow, but this is certainly a well-balanced mixture with which to launch the series. It looks promising.

At present, Nick Robinson is assembling a list of original novels and anthologies, hoping to continue bringing over some of the better American anthologies, but also to generate his own. If he succeeds, we could look for something very good indeed: certainly it's difficult to fault his choice so far. Without wishing to pre-empt other reviewers' opinions (or even my own: the only trouble with fat collections is that they take a long time to get through!) I certainly feel that Robinson Publishing have done as great a service to the SF/Fantasy community in terms of providing accessable editions of classic, or at least 'important' works as more major publishers.

Thanks to Penguin and Gollancz, reprints of many good SF novels are in the bookshops, while there are some interesting new books in the pipeline from Headline, but the short-story/novella field has not been as healthy as the number of anthologies produced might suggest. The Robinson books have tended to stress those anthologies which move away from reprinting the same old classics and towards a more adventurous selection policy. Anyone with a taste for good fiction and obscure gems or even that wonderful category of story which is almost a success or not quite a failure would be well advised to skim through these books.

Cary Wilkins (ed.) THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF CLASSIC FANTASY (Robinson Publishing, 1987, 472pp, £4.95)

Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, Charles G. Waugh (eds.) GIANTS (Robinson Publishing, 1987, 351pp, £2.95)

" " COSMIC KNIGHTS (Robinson Publishing, 1987, 339pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

George MacDonald's PHANTASTES and William Morris's THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD are central to the 'MAMMOTH BOOK' in more ways than one. Undoubted fantasy classics, they also have much in them which may alienate a modern reader who might find the archaic styles ans sentimentality hard going. Check out, however, the powerful eroticism under the surface of both tales, especially MacDonald's terrified embarrassment about sex, and you may find them less escapist tosh than ways in which the authors expressed feelings difficult to expose in more 'realistic' fiction. They really are essential for any serious fantasy reader and to have even these two together for £5 is a bargain.

Before modern 'adult fantasy' crystallised as a mode, we had that of legend and fairy-tale and this book shows something of how, through translation and adaptation, one became the other. Morris is represented again as co-translater of the Icelandic 'Story of Sigurd', while Mrs Andrew Lang re-tells 'The Quest of the Holy Grail'. The medieval romance PALMERIN OF ENGLAND supplies 'The Enchantment of Lionard', while the influence of German folk-tale is shown by Tieck's 'The Elves' and Ruskin's 'The King of the Golden River'. The 20th century is represented by L. Frank Baum's 'The Master Key', an amusing allegory about the drawbacks of scientific invention, and H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Doom that Came to Sarnath', R.E. Howard's 'Swords of the Purple Kingdom', and Ursula LeGuin's 'The Rule of Names'.

The balance is thus firmly 19th century and earlier: only LeGuin's sardonic comedy and to some extent Baum's 'electric fairy tale' have a modern ring. Further - there's no such thing as an unalloyed pleasure - the paper is pretty cheap-looking and the print small and not very attractive. I would certainly have liked a fuller introduction and more bibliographical information about the stories. So this series has its drawbacks. But this only brings me back to my first point: that if you are interested in fantasy's roots in Victorian fairy tale and earlier romance but unsure about how you'd react to the somewhat daunting image of the texts, buy the book anyway and look for more attractive editions of the stories later.

GIANTS and COSMIC KNIGHTS are more conventional theme anthologies, containing a dozen and ten novellas and short stories respectively. GIANTS' theme is self-explanetory, covering fantasy - an Asgardian murder-mystery from Theodore Sturgeon, for instance - to straight SF, sometimes giving you the feeling that the story is included just because there happens to be a giant oojumaflip mentioned in the third paragraph. You'll like some, dislike others: I found David Drake's 'giant shark' story particularly nasty and sadistic, but was taken by Henry Hasse's 1936 'He Who Shrank' and Murray Leinster's even earlier (1920) 'The Mad Planet' even though both are essentially conventional tours of wonder set in submicroscopic realms or a far-future earth where man competes with giant insects. Both, in different ways, 'wondrous' and at times moving. Asimov's 'Dreamworld' ends with one of his excruciating puns - but could not the same be said of the last sentence of Knight's 'Cabin

Boy' with a most imaginative space travelling life form? Read and find out for yourself!

COSMIC KNIGHTS contains little that immediately screams for attention apart, ironically enough, from Kenneth Grahame's 'The Reluctant Dragon', although L. Sprague de Camp's 'Divide and Rule' is an amusing tale of an America turned into a pseudo-feudal society complete with armoured knights by a successful alien invasion - both older stories ( 1899, 1939) which confirm my inkling that these anthologies are at their most interesting and valuable when they're resurrecting rather than reprinting. Robert E. Young's 'A Knyght Ther Was' is an overlong (and over predictable) time travel tale covering one of the fundamental questions of Arthurian study. Zelazny's 'The Last Defender of Camelot' (also available in a recent col ection) offers a new insight to the 'return of the hero' motif, while Poul Anderson's 'The Immortal Game' is a classic example of how SF writers can occasionally ruin a perfectly good story by insisting upon a sciencefictional explanation.

---

Walter M.Miller jr./Martin H. Greenberg (eds.) - - BEYOND ARMAGEDDON (Robinson Publishing, 1987, 386pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

Despite a misleading cover ( a Jim Burns hash combination of MAD MAX 2 and THE CARS THAT ATE PARIS which has no relation to the contents of this book), BEYOND ARMAGEDDON is a good study of many of the areas that are so disturbing in nuclear war. Walter M. Miller has written an introduction and notes to each story. He comes over as a serious opponent of gung-ho Reaganism and his introduction to Stephen Vincent Benet's 'By the Waters of Babylon' has a good critique of SDI. Miller, though, does not have a consistent position and in a few cases seems to have misunderstood the stories (Ballard's 'Terminal Beach', for instance). He also seems to like Ellison's 'A Boy and his Dog', which I have always found to be mainly pornographic and not reasonable, an abuse of politics in using the nuclear holocaust as an opportunity for violent sexual content. However, as a whole, this is a high value volume; much of it unknown (although by well known authors), yet some of it dating back to the thirties. An imlicit question of this book is - if people have been displaying the horrors and threats of Megawar (Miller's term) for so long, why does anyone persist in perpetuating its possibility?

Some of the stories present the reality before the war - Lucius Shepard's 'Salvador' and Spinrad's 'The Big Flash', for instance. War in central America will be Vietnam with the troops on psychtropic and somatropic drugs, 'Salvador' reasonably suggests. People's moral resolve back in the USA will be no better according to Ward Moore's 'Lot'. Then there will be the war. Then struggle for a long time.

Afterwards civilisation will have disappeared with many people who will not or cannot restore its physical and social standards. Robert Abernathy's 'Heirs Apparent' represents this well (despite its obvious anti-communism), as he describes the Slav's return to a nomadic existence on the Steppes- a culture that cannot support a civilisation. William Tenn's 'Eastward Ho!' describes a similar resurgence of the Amerindians in a more humourous vein, while Michael Swanwick's 'The Feast of Saint Janis' suggests that the inability to recover a civilisation in inherent in that which collapsed into war.

Carol Emshwiller's 'Day at the Beach', Rog Phillips' 'Game Preserve' and Poul Anderson's 'Tomorrow's Children' deal with mutation and radiation-induced suffering. Anderson's story is perhaps most disquieting as it suggests what could have to be accepted, but I doubt if most readers would also see that it challenges them to reconsider their present attitudes to disablement and disability. Perhaps Anderson himself did not.

Some of these stories are adventures, some not, some satire, some straight. Overall this is, thematically, one of the best anthologies I've read. I would not agree with some of the arguments it presents but everything in it deserves to be known.

---

# REVIEWS

Jack Vance - - - - - -THE FACELESS MAN (206pp, £2.50)
Robert Holdstock - - -EYE AMONG THE BLIND (219pp, £2.50)
Robert Silverberg - - TO LIVE AGAIN (231pp, £2.95)
Hal Clement - - - - - MISSION OF GRAVITY (203pp, £2.50)
(VGSF - A Gollancz Paperback, 1987)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Here we have the first four of the eagerly awaited normal-format Victor Gollancz paperback series, four good-value books of good-to-high literary and SF standard with excellent cover designs and clear, readable type. I regret the inclusion of a part-trilogy among them, though I understand the commercial considerations that led to the decision, so let's look at this first.

Vance displays his accustomed facility with invented words (tipple and tringolet for musical instruments are nice) and the choice of names (Frolitz, as the leader of a troupe of strolling musicians, is particularly felicitous) in this adventure story set on a planet under total dictatorship - yet with plenty of basic freedom in some ways. The political and social overtones are well thought out and logical; the behaviour of the protagonists less so, which makes sense, for who among us acts normally in situations of stress and perplexity?

The story is adequately gripping, the characters believable, the style is interesting, with argument replacing the dreaded 'refresh my memory' ploy of the inadequate writer - and the ending is totally inconclusive. In other words this is not a 'novel set in a trilogy' but a mere segment of a single three-book novel, a pity.

Holdstock does not reveal his Englishness in his writing any more than Vance indicates his American status, but the style is drastically different - discursive, enigmatic, perhaps needlessly long-winded and tentative in its slow, agonised progress. This is no book for browsing; it needs your attention and your thinking to wend your way through its complexities.

Basically, it's a biological tract disguised as a novel - and none the worse for that, so long as biology, teratology and alien sociology attract you. For the Ree'hdworld is really alien, no question about that despite the sexual relationship that develops between a Reeh'd and the protagonist's wife. This is SF for the specialist, for the reader keen to involve himself in an environment and a chain of events that must by definition fall right outside anything that could possibly occur in mainstream literature. Where Vance is for the beginner and the lazy reader, Holdstock's appeal is to the already committed fan.

Collecting a headful of dead personalities 'as another man might assemble a portfolio of common

stocks,' consulting a guru who quotes from the Bardo Thödol, wearing spray-on business suits, squirting 'drinks' with an ultrasonic spray direct into the bloodstream, Silverberg's Jewish characters throw themselves and us into a 21st-century California that's just enough like today's to maintain our full belief.

From here on in it's violence, sex and treachery, a ruthless power game that entraps the reader while keeping him/her on tiptoe with suspense and still enthralled by the technical and scientific aspects of this civilisation - which has much in it to appeal to the reader's own fantasy desires. Coming from 1969, the year of Silverberg's full flowering as the most inventive and intriguing writer of his age, this is a must for any fan who has yet to read it, and a welcome reminder for those who've set it aside for nearly two decades and followed the author through his later and, to many, less attractive years. Of course the style is American, but it's polished and literate and a pleasure to dive into again.

Clement takes us right back to 1953 when his magnum opus appeared in the pages of Astounding along with an explanatory article, decked with diagrams and by no means hard to follow for the non-specialist. Re-reading the book, I found my recollections stirred easily, but I wonder whether the newcomer to this fascinating alien world might not find that same old article useful to help grasp the intricacies of a planet that was shaped like a pancake, and on which the horizon appeared always to hover above the line of sight so that its inhabitants believed themselves to be living in a saucer.

This is the 'hardest' of hardcore SF, and it's been done superbly. But it's 'a man's book,' like most SF of the fifties, and its story of struggle against an almost impossibly bleak environment has all the suspense of the Argonauts' periplum around the Mediterranean, aided by the technical brilliance of the Earthmen who guide and advise the almost medieval seafarers on Mesklin's frightening oceans.

The cover refers to the book as 'the all-time SF favourite,' and despite the complaints of those who have come into the field in the days of sociological speculative fiction it remains just that - an epic of the golden age, extremely well written in the style of the period, gripping and challenging and never dull. Nothing Clement has written since has managed to come up to this standard, and when one considers the high standard of many of his later books that's a pretty proud boast.

How to compare the four books? You can't, nor should you try. Each is a fine example of its type; for me, two - the Silverberg and the Clement - are immortal while the Holdstock is a tour de force and the Vance a charming pastime for a train journey. Buy them all, buy all the VGSF series, replace your battered old editions, revive old memories or give yourself a new thrill. But don't miss them, whatever else you may overlook in this boomtime for paperback SF in Britain.

---

Andre Norton - - WITCH WORLD (Gollancz, 1987, 222pp, £2.50)
WEB OF THE WITCH WORLD (Gollancz, 1987, 192pp, £2.50)
STAR GATE (Gollancz, 1987, 192pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Although I've seen the occasional snotty remarks concerning Gollancz' reprinting of Andre Norton's books in their new VGSF mass-market paperback imprint, it makes sense: not just because they obviously appeal to the McCaffrey/Bradley fans and should sell a lot of copies, but because they are rattling good yarns in that mould of soft SF/hard fantasy (which Norton was very much a former of, in any case).

The first two 'Witch World' books cover the adventures of soldier-of-fortune Simon Tregarth, escaping through the dimensions to a world of age-old magic and warring tribes. But other beings are using this world as a bolt-hole, and Simon is soon involved in combating their particular foulnesses. The stories are no more but no less than fast-moving romances, a touch old-fashioned (but perhaps less so in the early 60s, when they were first published), and worth picking up if you're sympathetic to heroic fantasy with a touch of high-tech science to give a glossy feel to the villainy.

STAR GATE (1958) is in some ways the reverse - on the surface SF, but taking a 'Fantasy' slant on its subject matter with a strong religious angle, a magical talisman, and a young hero who is predisposed by his cultural background to see advanced science as magic anyway. As the Star Lords evacuate from the planet Gorth, half-breed Kincar travels through a 'gate' to a parallel world in which the largely benevolent Star Lords took a path which made them brutal rulers posing as gods.

Andre Norton's books were largely written for a teenage market, and it's this as much as her subject matter which has resulted in less attention being given to her pacy adventures than they deserve. There's nothing wildly original in these books, but good story-telling is always welcome. I particularly hope though, that Gollancz will reprint more of her SF.

---

Margaret Elphinstone - - THE INCOMER (The Women's Press, 1987, 229pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

The incomer of the title is Naomi, an itinerant musician who decides to winter in the tiny village of Clachanpluck. Through her we are introduced to the village's closely knit inhabitants and to the knowledge that there is a 'secret' held by these inhabitants. The time, by the by, is The Future, when the effects of the Holocaust (it is presumed) are just about over - the Earth has repaired itself and all is well with the land once again. What Margaret Elphinstone presents with her first novel is another back-to-nature utopian community, ostensibly affected by and affecting Naomi. Unfortunately, except on the purely personal level between Naomi and her lover, and some of the other relationships too, the book fails. The secret and the power the women of the village possess remain ambiguous to the end; the economics of the village's prosperity fail to convince; and, to return to the title character, Naomi's music is never really brought to life by the author and in any case she is not the catalyst for the chief dramatic event of the novel, the rape, which itself seems a contrived plot device. In fact, this incident apart, my main criticism of THE INCOMER is that it suffers from a surfeit of niceness. The village is nice, the countryside is nice and the people (almost) without exception are nice. This may be utopian but it doesn't help to sustain a reader's attention - mine certainly flagged. On the plus side, Elphinstone can be an adept writer: her descriptions of the Scottish countryside are at times powerful and her method of introducing the reader to the village's unique social structure is effective. Overall though, this novel is for fans of bucolic utopias only.

---

Marge Piercy - - WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME (The Women's Press, 1987, 381pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

At 37, unjustly locked inside a mental hospital, Connie Ramos hasn't a lot going for her. Then she discovers that she has a marvellous and hitherto unsuspected talent: she can time-travel, her spirit able, with help, to visit the future. Most of her future-time is spent in the company of Luciente, who lives in a utopian society. Here men and women are truly equal and live in harmony with both nature and technology. However, she also tastes another possible future, one where women are sex-slaves and the poor merely organ-bank fodder. Eventually Connie comes to realise that her present is a crux in time, whereby the actions of her and others like her - the great mass of down-trodden, impoverished people - will determine which of

these futures will occur. At the same time she has to resolve her own personal crisis, which is that she is to be used as a guinea-pig in a crude experiment in treating mental illness. The dramatic conclusion to the book deals with Connie's solution to the two problems.

If the dystopia described by Piercy is too exaggerated to be effective, her utopia by comparison is very finely drawn indeed; it appears feasible because it isn't perfect. And if the author's description of this society tends to the didactic, we can forgive her because of the humour. When Connie asks about the government of this Brave New World, one of its inhabitants replies, 'Government I think I grasp. Luciente can show you government, but nobody's working there today.' Yet, for all her sure touch concerning her created utopia, Piercy is most effective when portraying the inhumanity of the mental hospital, a portrayal reminiscent of ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST. Originally published in 1976, WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME is a powerful book, both a savage indictment of a society which oppresses its poor and a pointer to a far more civilised way of living. Highly recommended.

---

John Gribbin - - IN SEARCH OF THE BIG BANG (Corgi, 1987, 413pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

John Gribbin cites Isaac Asimov as one of the writers who fired him with enthusiasm about science, and his own writing is clearly aimed at passing on the torch of inspiration. To someone like me, proud possessor of an 'O' level physics and having been persauaded to drop out of the post-'O' level Additional Maths class to concentrate on something more productive, Gribbin's popular science books are ideal texts. Readable, carefully attributing ideas and offering scope for follow-up reading, even cracking the occasional joke, they have just enough mathematical speculation to allow me the illusion that I just might understand it all if I try, without pretending that the concepts dealt with are actually easy.

This book is concerned with the search for a workable explanation of the origin and development of the universe - a search, by the way, that Gribbin suggests may be all but over with the current speculations of people like Stephen Hawking. Be that as it may, Gribbin gives a comprehensive account of how cosmological theories developed and interacted, with particular emphasis on Einsteinian relativity and quantum physics which, when taken together, lead to some wild ideas indeed. What I found particularly interesting was the way Gribbin pointed out the cultural relativism of some of the cosmologies suggested: much of what was theorised about the nature of the universe could have been theorised earlier if the people involved had been able to overcome fundamental but erroneous preconceptions. He also points out opportunities missed because, although certain ideas were developed and available, people didn't make the vital connections which brought them together to form a full theory.

IN SEARCH OF THE BIG BANG becomes a fascinating detective story with real people as the actors and the Ultimate Answer as the prize. Of course, it's deliberately structured this way to lead you on: if the mark of a successful science popularisation is that it leaves the reader thirsting for more then this is a success.Need I say that if it's good ol' sensawonder you want from your reading books like this are far better value than the two volumes of one-man-versus-the-Slime-Aliens-of-Aldebaren-IV you'll get for the price.

John Crowley - - THE DEEP (Unwin, 1987, 176pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley)

THE DEEP was John Crowley's first novel, and this is a very welcome reprint. It tells of a world founded atop a vast pillar that rises out of the darkness of the Deep, a world where warring factions ceaselessly struggle and intrigue for power. The Just pursue a guerilla was of assassination in an attempt to overthrow the Protectors, and the Protectors are themselves divided into rival Reds and Blacks. Into this comes a stranger borne in a silver egg, a sexless inhuman Visitor. Hurt upon landing, his memory lost, the Visitor is pitched into the middle of a civil war as he searches to discover why he was sent there and who made him. His pursuit, in the end aided by one of the Just, takes him to the edge of the world and beyond, and the answers to his questions are bleak indeed.

Like much of Crowley's work, THE DEEP is at once fable and parable, a sparely and beautifully written work. My only criticism is that sometimes it is difficult to keep track of the various and similarly named Reds and Blacks - but that is perhaps a point Crowley intended to make. The world of THE DEEP is a gaming board, its people replaceable, interchangeable pieces. It is a dark vision of the human condition, yet towards the end there is a little redeeming light, an intimation that soon men may learn of the true nature of their world, and how they came there, and perhaps end the ceaseless round of wars. Ursula Le Guin is quoted on the cover as saying 'This is an extraordinary first novel. It has genuine beauty.' What better recommendation?

---

Bob Shaw - - NIGHT WALK (VGSF, 1987, 188pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

NIGHT WALK was Bob Shaw's first published novel (Banner Books, New York, 1967), although SHADOW OF HEAVEN (Avon Books, New York, 1969) was actually written first. It is not only a better book than SHADOW OF HEAVEN, which - after all - wouldn't be much of an achievement, but an almost infinitely better one. The hero, Sam Tallon, is one of Bob Shaw's few 'mean, moody, magnificent'- type heros, in that he is basically a loner, concerned with staying alive and gaining revenge for a crippling injury. Tallon does end up by saving the human race from itself, but only as a kind of side-effect. And Shaw has been careful not to turn him into a Van Vogtian irresistable farce, able to do six impossible things while making his breakfast.

Most of the action takes place on Emm Luther, a human-colonised world ruled by a neo-Puritanical oligarchy, which reminds me of Belfast on a wet Sunday afternoon. Tallon is a not-so-secret agent from Earth who is deliberately blinded by Lorin Cherassky, the number two man in the Emm Luther security executive. But, with the (self-seeking) help of warden Helen Juste, and the technical expertise of two fellow prisoners (Ed Hogarth and Dr. Logan Winfield), Tallon regains his sight, if only by electronic proxy.

NIGHT WALK is, at heart, a melodramatic revenge saga, helped along by the kind of heaven-sent coincidences that everyone pretends not to notice in - say - A TALE OF TWO CITIES. But it's a good 'melodramatic revenge saga', well-written without being over-written, and the coincidences tend to get lost in the fast-action shuffle.

M.John Harrison - - THE PASTEL CITY (Unwin, 1987, 142pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Heroic Fantasy comes in mammoth sized multi-volumes, packed to the covers with maps and made up lamguages consisting mainly of glottal stops. Blood and magic flow as dynasties rise and fall at the whim of ancient forces. Don't they? Not according to M. John Harrison, at least, but he always was an odd one. For a start, THE PASTEL CITY is an epic masquerading as a slim volume, rather than vice versa. Then his sword-wielding aristocrats battle at the end of time. rather than before it, which neatly evades the necessity for a 'magic' rationale to technology. Not only that, if you prick these men they bleed, real red blood. There is not a map to be found, nor more than five syllables of any made up language. Harrison doesn't need them any more than he needs excerpts from fey poetry. There is poetry enough in his vivid descriptive prose to obviate any of that baggage, and power to match his imagination and mystery. He expects his readers to bring their own imagination half way to meet him, and it is worth the modest effort.

The Pastel City is, of course, Viriconium, Harrison's chameleon fantasy arena and barely recognisable as the setting of IN VIRICONIUM. Yet the roots can be discerned by anyone who wishes to do some archaeology. It makes for an interesting subsequent commentary upon the nature of fantasy, and a comparison with those other writers who choose to make their common settings coherent. Not that any such debate is necessary to enjoy this book purely as an economically written adventure story.

It is, of course, a reprint, in company with A STORM OF WINGS. Somebody at Unwin must like us, because having these books available in the shops again is akin to a public service. They are good. Buy them. Enjoy them. Then read them again just for the hell of it. Those who remember them will hardly need the invitation. Those of you who don't remember I urge to take advantage of this opportunity. You won't regret it.

Isaac Asimov - - FOUNDATION AND EARTH (Grafton, 1987, 510pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

Having decided that the future of humanity lies in its evolving into a Galactic being, into a single entity that will incorporate into its vast consciousness the planets themselves, Golan Trevize finds that he cannot rest until he finds out why(!) he made this particular choice. The answer, he is convinced, is to be found on Planet Earth, and this latest episode in the Foundation saga is an account of his search for the lost planet from which humanity originated. He is accompanied in his search by two others, Pelorat and Bliss (who is, of course, a woman!).

For 510 pages we share a cramped spaceship with three of the most boring, annoying, insufferable characters in the annals of the Galaxy. Only a 'world maestro' of science fiction like Asimov could keep such cardboard characters standing upright for so long. Only a 'world maestro' would have the nerve!

On the planets they visit in search of Earth, they encounter a variety of rather mundane problems (the planet Solaria is an exception here and this episode would have made a decent novella): there is one attempt to steal their ship and they have four attempts made on their lives. Why such hostility? If these three characters boarded a bus, they would require only half a dozen stops to convert otherwise innocent and mild-mannered passengers into murderous assailants.

The reader is subjected to page after page of the most banal pseudo-dialogue, much of it obviously padding. Asimov is clearly in the business of educating his readership and contrives Pelorat as the inoffensive ship's idiot to whom the insufferable prig Trevize has to explain everything. The trouble is that Pelorat is such an amazing prawn and Trevize is so condescending that the reader finds his or her intelligence being insulted time and time again.

Much of the writing is positively embarrassing. This clumsy attempt at eroticism is one of my favourite passages. The Comprellion Minister of Transportation, for reasons best known to herself, seduces Trevize:

> The bodice flipped down, along with its sturdy reinforcement at the breasts. The Minister sat there, with a look of proud disdain on her face, and bare from the waist up. Her breasts were a smaller version of the woman herself - massive, firm, and overpoweringly impressive...

This is real schoolboy stuff.

When the intrepid trio finally find Earth, Trevizefinally tumbles why he took his momentous decision. And lo and behold! it is because only a Galactic being will be strong enough to confront the alien menace from other galaxies that might threaten humanity. Presumably this sets the scene for the next volume. Personally, I hope the aliens wipe the floor with them.

How are the mighty fallen! A terrible book.

Isaac Asimov - - THE ALTERNATE ASIMOVS (Grafton, 1987, 349pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

This volume contains Asimov's novellette versions of PEBBLE IN THE SKY and THE END OF ETERNITY, written for magazines in the fifties but rejected then, and the short story 'Belief' with the conclusion Asimov wrote to please John W. Campbell and the conclusion he had written originally. 'Belief' is the most interesting of the three because it shows Asimov able to write two conclusions from the same introduction and theme and make both of them seem as appropriate.

Asimov wrote about the history of PEBBLE IN THE SKY in THE EARLY ASIMOV, but there are major discrepencies between what he describes there and the manuscript reprinted in THE ALTERNATE ASIMOVS. For example, the original title was 'inspired by Robert Browning's poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and was a misquotation' - it is referred to as 'Grow Old With Me' but it is printed as 'Grow Old Along With Me' in THE ALTERNATE ASIMOVS even while Asimov in his foreword to the story says 'here it is as originally written for Startling except for the correction of typos and minor infelicities' and does not mention this major, silent correction.

Asimov has also said that he can remember no detail of the original story but in 1974 he said he thought PEBBLE IN THE SKY was practically a new novel, retaining only Joseph Schwartz and the Judeao-Roman background (according to Joseph Patrouch in his SCIENCE FICTION OF ISAAC ASIMOV). Actually the novellette and the novel are very similar. This is worrying, since it suggests that Asimov's recollection is untrustworthy, andin turn throws a lot of bio-bibliographical doubt on his other recollections of working in the Golden Age. Now

that we have what he has claimed to describe we can see that his statements were misleading. What else might be?

THE ALTERNATE ASIMOVS as is usual comes with the Doctor's running commentaries. I think in one of them he should have corrected his past statements, or at least mentioned the disparities. He would have appeared more trustworthy and consistent. Against this criticism, as Asimov says of the rejected story 'I think Startling could have done lots worse than to have accepted and published it.' It was work of Asimov's recognised standard. People might like to take up the other question, though.

---

Robert Silverberg - - THE MASKS OF TIME (VGSF, 1987, 252pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

It is December 25, 1998, and the twentieth century is running out of time - in more ways than one! Earth is beset by an apocalyptic conviction that the world will end with the forthcoming turn of the century. Then a creature calling himself 'Vornan-19' comes to rest in Rome, near the Spanish steps, and he claims to be a visitor from one thousand years in the future.

'The world is indeed ready for a sign, an omen. But is Vornan-19 truly the new Messiah; or is he, rather, an instrument of wanton... malice' (from the back cover blurb). Leo Garfield, a specialist in the time-reversal of subatomic particles, is assigned to Vornan-19's oddball 'honour guard', andhe soon finds himself in an emotional maelstrom set up and manipulated by Earth's futuristic 'visitor'. And yet there is nothing for him to 'put a finger on' - no definite pattern that can be divined.

THE MASKS OF TIME (Ballantine, New York, 1968: Coronet, London, 1970 - as VORNAN-19) is one of Silverberg's most unjustifiably neglected novels. It is, in the final analysis, much more a novel of character than a novel of ideas - Leo Garfield's character: '...I was the man, I was there, I suffered' (p. 9). Gollancz are to be congratulated for reprinting this compassionate man's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND.

---

Sharon Baker - - JOURNEY TO MEMBLIAR (Avon, 1987, 247pp, $3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This book is probably the middle volume of a trilogy - the jacket advertises both a previous novel (QUARRELING, THEY MET THE DRAGON) and a forthcoming one (BURNING TEARS OF SASSURUM) set on the same world. JOURNEY is a lively, sympathetic and independant tale straddling the debatable ground between Non-Magic-Using Fantasy and Soft Adult Space-Opera. The plot is an interesting braid of sex, politics and religion in which Cassia the bond-slave, Jarell, sometime musician and prostitute, and Tadge, a wilful youngster in Cassia's charge, have sundry adventures while slowly discovering their true identities as abducted heiress, golden-hearted cynic, and insufferable proto-genius/bad guy who nearly drove me to book-abandoning distraction (I HATE smark-alek kids). There's a wealth of inventive small-scale incident, description and interesting background life-forms; nearly all the characters act from more or less impure or muddled motives and nobody is even slightly heroic. The book's only real flaw lies in its lack of a satisfactory resolution, and heavy hints of problems stacked up for solution in the forthcoming sequel.

Camilla Decarnin, Eric Garber, & Lyn Paleo - - WORLDS APART (Alyson Pubs., 1986, 488pp, $7.95)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

This describes itself as an anthology of gay and lesbian SF, containing 11 stories, an introduction and biographical notes about the editors and contributors. Most of the stories are interesting in their own way, many have been anthologised elsewhere, but the problem as I see it is that most of the stories are about homosexuality either under circumstances where there is no option ('Full Fathom Five My Father Lies'), as an unavoidable part of some other erotic minority ('Lollipop and the Tar Baby'), as a negative thing ('Find the Lady'), or not at all ('To Keep the Oath'). For example, we have 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' by the late lamented Tiptree, which portrays a society in which the men have died out. Is it any wonder that all the somen are lesbians? There is a vast difference between homosexuality of choice, and as a substitute: in a single sex society it is difficult to see which is which. Or John Varley's 'Lollipop...', in which a woman who spends several decades at at time in a spaceship makes a clone of herself for company. Whether you want to call this incest, childmolesting or just plain masturbation is a matter of personal taste, but I would hesitate to call it homosexuality, especially since she only made a girl-clone because she'd accidentally gone into space without the equipment to make a boy. More interesting (though simply because it's new to me) is 'Full Fathom Five...' by Rand B. Lee. A group of colonists had arrived on a new planet without their women, who had died out. Fortunately, they already had a device, a 'pool' for cloning, and it became a tradition that a father would have sex with his son, and lower him into the pool for the next generation to be cloned. Sex happened at no other time, which is where the conflict would naturally arise, and a man only had one son. If I had read it anywhere else, I would have assumed it was about the force of unreasoning tradition.

'To Keep the Oath' tells the story of how Camilla joined the Free Amazons. In other stories it is made clear that Camilla is a lesbian, but not in this one. 'Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones' is a well-written, much anthologised story, and I suppose a gay SF collection would not be complete without a story by Delany and two of the male characters did have an affair long ago, but you could hardly call the memories of that affair a central part of the story.

Three of the stories are straightforward love stories in an SF setting. 'Harper Conan and Singer David' by Edgar Pangborn is a pastoral tale of a blind man and his devoted lover, and their search for sight. 'The Gods of Reorth by Elizabeth Lynn tells of a 'goddess'from another planet, her lover who is killed by invaders, and the revenge she takes. My favourite is 'No Day Too Long' by Jewelle Gomez, a warmly written tale about a vampire who finally finds the woman of her dreams. The remaining stories are 'The Mystery of the Young Gentleman' by Joanna Russ, 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Love?' by Walt Liebscher, which I didn't get the hang of at all, and 'Find the Lady', a nasty bit of stereotyping from Nicholas Fisk.

A rather disappointing collection, and I hope that next time Alyson commission stories for their collection, rather than digging for what is available for reprint from the straight press.

Arthur C. Clarke - - THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY (VGSF, 245pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY (Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1958: Victor Gollancz, 1961) was the fourth short story collection by Arthur C. Clarke to see print, following EXPEDITION TO EARTH, REACH FOR TOMORROW, and TALES FROM THE WHITE HART. It has been paperbacked at frequent intervals, by Signet in the USA and Corgi in the UK.

The above bibliographic information proves, if proof were needed, that THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY is not exactly an 'unclaimed treasure'. It contains two deservedly 'classic' stories that have appeared in other Clarke collections and innumerable anthologies: 'The Nine Billion Names of God' and 'The Star'. Readers might like to compare the original, 12,500-word short story version of 'The Songs of Distant Earth' (If, June, 1958: Science Fantasy, June, 1959) with the recent 'novelization'. (To my mind, at least, the economical short story is far superior to the attenuated novel).

The remaining full-length stories are, for the most part, readable but uninspired, while the two 'series' written for the London Evening Standard in 1957, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY and VENTURE TO THE MOON, consist of little more than quaint vignettes. Ho-hum. I can't really recommend this book to new readers, but if some old-timer out there needs a replacement copy...

Bradley Denton - - WRACK AND ROLL (Headline, 1987, 406pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley)

When asked to define cyberpunk in a recent interview, Bruce Sterling likened SF to a mountain road; traditional SF warns people about the potholes and precipices, he said, while cyberpunk strikes out on a new path. Well, Bradley Denton doesn't give a damn about warnings or detours; he simply drives straight across the potholes at about 200 mph. WRACK AND ROLL is an alternative history in which Roosevelt choked on a chicken bone and the USA entered the Second World War early, invading Russia and atombombing Berlin and Tokyo. Thirty years later, the world is divided between the USA and a Sino-British Alliance, the latter in ascendence because the US space programme was destroyed by rioting Wrackers when their leader, Bitch Alice, died in an abortive publicity mission to the Moon. The Wrackers are an antiestablishment movement which grew out of the philosophy of a common foot soldier of the Russian Front, sort of a cross between the Wobblies and heavy metal freaks, united by the Music. Now the superpowers are headed towards a nuclear confrontation - unless the Wrackers latest superstar, Bitch Alice's daughter (a.k.a. the Bastard Child) can shake the Wrackers out of their current apathy and bring down the system...

Of course, none of this stands up for a moment when you stop to think about it, but that isn't the point. Denton writes with all the volume controls turned up LOUD, and when you're barrelling down the wrong side of the M1 with Black Sabbath blasting from the stereo and the brakes burnt out, you aren't too worried that the cigar lighter doesn't work either. The style is streetwise and laced with black humour and plenty of in-jokes (here, the USA has to rescue medical students stranded on a Caribbean island after a British invasion) and although it won't be to everyone's taste, I think it's pretty good entertainment. And if you like the writing of, say, Phillip K. Dick and Tim Powers, and know what the Beatles were originally called, you will too.

Robert Silverberg - - NIGHTWINGS (Avon, 1987, 190pp, $3.50: Orbit, 1987, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Ron Gemmell)

NIGHTWINGS originally came as three separate novellas - the title story has appeared in countless anthologies since its first publication in 1968 - and in novel form a year later.

On reading it, I wasn't surprised to read that the title story won a Hugo award. I wasn't very impressed.

Set some time in our distant future, it shows the Earth preparing for the long-awaited 'invasion' by its new owners. Invasion, perhaps, isn't the right word. The Earth, after all, was bought and paid for: still, the humans don't actually intend to complete the deal. 'Humans' perhaps isn't the right word either, for though most people have the usual two arms and two legs some of them have supplemented these with wings, horns and fangs: many thanks to the ancients' advanced genetic science, its secrets long since lost.

The main protagonist is a Watcher - a member of a world-wide guild that maintains a round-the-clock search for the enemy. Each watcher has a machine that he pushes around on a cart. With the aid of this machine he can project his mind throughout the universe; the trick is to get through your 'watch' with nothing to report and just enjoy the experience. Our Watcher os the one who runs out of luck. He sounds the alarm; the massed enemy fleets arrive and proceed to take over the world.

It's all done with the minimum of fuss, death and destruction - quite an anti-climax really. Our Watcher, like the rest of his guild, is left wondering as to what he can do with the rest of his life. I suppose it's here that the story is supposed to get interesting. It doesn't. Everything keeps rolling along at its leisurely pace, our Watcher becomes more saintly, the enemy more friendly - a more uneventful book would be difficult to find.

Walter Jon Williams - - KNIGHT MOVES (Orbit, 1987, 317pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Two chapters after I started this, 3 o'clock one morning when my arm (see last issue's editorial) was feeling like hell, I gave up in disgust. The story seemed inventive enough, but it was all too much like some of Zelazny's novels: wealthy immortal hero, homages to Classical mythology and all that.

Then I read Williams' HARDWIRED (recently published by MacDonald) in similar circumstances and found its stimulating hi-tech-and-street-sleaze formula (note how I avoid saying c*b*rp*nk) gripping enough to keep me sane for another hour or two. So three weeks later I returned to KNIGHT MOVES...

The plot is, as George R.R. Martin points out, one of those elegaic plots used by Roger Zelazny. Mankind has achieved interstellar travel and control over aging, thanks, indirectly, to Doran Falkner, who is now buying up a depopulated Earth and overseeing the cultural development of a race of centaurs - products of an era of genetic manipulation. (Other more sinister hybrids lurk in remote areas.) A twilight of decay is settling on Man, until on a distant world a race of teleporting animals is discovered. Quickly, it's surmised that these 'lugs' are less 'teleporting' than 'being teleported' and Falkner joins the search for the secret, which can provide instantaneous travel and prevent the cultural fission of the human-controlled worlds.

Williams is clearly an imaginative writer. He has grafted some ingenious cosmological ideas on to the plot and given us some added extras. We have a horrific example of a neurosis feeding on itself over eight hundred years, and an alien archaelogist with a taste for cultural trivia. He's not yet, though, a writer you can discuss without bringing other writers into the conversation - Gibson in HARDWIRED, Zelazny here, and here again we end up with something which for all the world reminds me of a section from THE HITCHHIKERS' GUIDE TO THE GALAXY! There are problems of definition with the characters - at the centre of KNIGHT MOVES is a poignant reunion between the hero and an ex-lover who has become a Diehard - that is, who has rejected immortality. This works, yet Williams also dismally fails to bring to life one secondary character who should be larger than life, as if he's not quite sure what to do with him in this context.

I'm still not quite sure whether to praise KNIGHT MOVES for the way it reinterprets its elagaic mood through different aspects of human and alien ennui or to criticise it for setting up situations which are actually funny and then avoiding the belly-laughs. I'm glad I gave it that second chance, though.

---

Geoffrey Household - - ARROWS OF DESIRE (Penguin, 1987, 136pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

When I read a book for review I try to become one of its intended readers. Sometimes it isn't easy. Sometimes it is. Sometimes, though...

Penguin tell us this 34,000 word volume is 'A superbly satirical novel of adventure.' Adventure implies action, suspese, drama and conflict. There are actions in this return of the English natives from their North African Babylon, but Household's somnolent style eradicates any semblance of excitement. We have a storming of a Bastile as breathless as 'The Dictionary of Huntingdonshire Cabmen'. Satire implies humour, and understanding of the object of the satire and a loving knowledge of that which has been perverted by said object. To say the humour in this story is club-footed is to pay it the highest compliment; nonexistent would be closer to the mark. Mr Household was writing 50 years ago. Even then, I suspect, his patronising partiality would have been risible. In a novel essaying 'the problem of the English'... 'what do their manners hide...? he contrives to ignore almost the whole gamut of cultural diversity which has existed, does exist and I hope will continue to exist in these tiny islands. On this evidence Mr Household does not know the English, and it comes with mother's milk that a writer must know his subject.

I tried to like this novel, appreciate it, see it as the publisher intended. I confess my failure. I believe almost any SF writer would have found it easier to create a good book from Mr Household's (unoriginal) idea than one as empty and weary as this. Shallow, vapid, patronising (that word again), racist and so feebly written as to be ennervati ng, I suggest you ignore it.

---

Tim Powers - - DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE (Grafton, 1987, 300pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Amid the ruins of our empire on Earth, Gregorio Rivas sings in Spirks Bar of a long-lost love, trying to forget that he once redeemed souls from the religious cult of Norton Jaybush. He is persuaded to come out of retirement to do one more redemption: that of his lost love. His obsession with rescuing her takes him into the dreaded Holy City at Irvine, from which only the Shepherds of Jaybush re-emerge, and from there - at the invitation of its omnipotent host - to the even more terrifying and sinister Deviant's Palace.

This is an odd book. I couldn't shake the impression I was reading a film script for another Harrison Ford movie, with Ford playing Rivas as Indiana Jones and Stratford Johns playing Norton Jaybush as Jabba the Hut. A vaguely Gollum-like vampire called a hemogoblin, an alien, a drug culture and an encounter with an inefficient tin-man keep the pot boiling pleasantly. The plot turns along some unexpected and half-expected points, giving a richly concurrent impression of airy familiarity and uniqueness.

The style is simple with moments of horror and wit making the book great fun to read as the following quote should illustrate: '"But be careful. Knowledge is a toxin. Why, just the fact of your having spoken my true name means that quite a number of these people must die tonight." A smile widened the huge pumpkin head as Jaybush looked around at the many rafts. Rivas was a little surprised that none of the diners did anything more than look unhappy at this news.'

The ending is clever and predictable, though I do bite my nails at the thought that an inferior sequel may one day be written...

---

Ian Watson - - SLOW BIRDS (Grafton, 1987, 224pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Short story collections are often patchy. So, are a couple of excellent stories worth the cost of a book, or does the variety of vision make the short-story collection better value than the novel?

The two excellent stories in this collection are 'Slow Birds' and 'The Width of the World'. 'Slow Birds' is about two brothers who become prophet-leaders of two opposed forces on a parallel world. Missiles glide over the landscape, sometimes exploding, turning the land into glass, and it is around this extraordinary mystery that the story revolves. 'Mistress of Cold' and 'Cruising' are also about nuclear war, and 'In the Mirror of the Earth' is an entertaining tale set on another parallel world where the people who do sleep are visionaries, psychically connected with our world(?) and drawing inspiration from it.

In 'The Width of the World' the Earth expands and half the people disappear. For Alan Roxbury, who has just completed a software package mapping the whole world, finding out why becomes a tragic obsession. 'Universe on the Turn' also involves gigantism: women metamorphosise into giant slugs into whose wombs men re-enter to be rejuvinated. Like many of the stories in this collection, it shows a remarkable imagination.

'Ghost Lecturer' is about a TV company which brings scientific pioneers forward from the past, and 'The Bloomsday Revolution' also involves time, but in the afterlife, taking Heaven to be one day that was best-loved by the individual in the living world, repeatedly relived for all eternity.

The other three stories are unimpressive, routine horror which seem out of place in this collection.

In my opinion, two excellent stories and six good ones make this worth buying. Not uniformly brilliant, but very entertaining.

Pat O'Shea - - THE HOUNDS OF THE MORRIGAN (Puffin, 1987, 469pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The hardback edition was enthusiastically reviewed in VECTOR 131, and Puffin are making great claims for this as 'the cult book of 1987'. The press release which comes with this copy makes comparisons with WATERSHIP DOWN, THE HOBBIT, and the Narnia books.

I'm inclined to agree. This is Pat O'Shea's first novel, but it shows a lightness of touch which many experienced authors would envy, particularly in fantasy where the besetting sin is overemphasis and plodding portentiousness mingled with - if we're lucky - facetiousness.

Ten-year old Pidge unwittingly releases the serpent Olc-Glas from his bonds, offering the Morrigan - the Irish goddess of Death and Destruction - a chance to regain her domination. Only the Morrigan's blood can destroy the serpent, and so Pidge and his sister Brigit volunteer to find the pebble with which the hero Cuchulain once wounded the Morrigan. But finding the pebble is also important to the Goddess, and so the children, on their quest which starts in present-day Ireland but ends up further into the Ireland of mythology, find themselves trailed by the Morrigan's hounds, which can shift shape into human or dog form at will.

There are two ways in which the author avoids the traps I've hinted at above. First, she incorporates a kind of double vision into her characters and stories. The strange and colourful people the children meet, offering help and homespun advice along the way are of two natures: at once blarney-Irish road people and Heroes out of legend. This gradually becomes clearer until it's made explicit in the wonderful climax, but I m not giving anything away by saying so now because it's obvious that much Celtic folk-lore is incorporated into the story. As one character says to the children, 'You are still in Ireland, but you are in Faery too.'

Secondly, we have Irish fantasy not of High Celtic myth but of - well, perhaps Spike Milligan is the best way to put it. The book is wonderfully funny! A whole range of comic minor characters inhabit it, from a good-hearted but dense frog (epitome of every Irishman-in-wellies stereotype without being offensive) to a Garda sergeant totally at a loss with the situation trying to interview two aspects of the Morrigan, to an earwig who thinks he is Napoleon.

A third feature of the story - which makes it more than just a very good fantasy but something which is ultimately more satisfying - is the way we have the sense of a vast expanse of cultural space and time appearing through the perceptions of the two viewpoint characters.

In a sense, the whole book is the children's experience of 'being Irish': the best example I can think of being an episode, early in their quest, where they find themselves in Galway. But it is not the Galway they know, rather a Galway which changes: the people and streets are different and Pidge realises, as they approach O'Brien's Bridge, that they are seeing the Galway of different times:- 'Who built this bridge anyway and who was O'Brien? It's a funny thing that I don't know really, he thought. And all these people! How often I've walked over and thought - this is Galway; this is my town - just like anyone would. And all these hundreds and thousands of people from the past; they thought this very same thing, I shouldn't wonder...He studied the faces passing him by; all different, all human. And he suddenly realised, all beautiful in a special human way.' (p. 144)

The above was written on holiday, rapt with the book and away from BSFA files. On checking the number of the VECTOR in which the original review appeared I find that Maureen Porter found very similar things in the book: I see that I've picked some of the same examples as she. I don't think that we're making too great claims in our enthusiasm for a children's book: to me, it really is that good, one of those books for which the overused adjective 'beautiful' can justifiably be used. THE HOUNDS OF THE MORRIGAN is - I'd go so far as to say - actually better than the books to which it is compared above; well imagined, well constructed (the penultimate appearance of the Sergeant manages to be a ludicrously funny interpolation and essential to the plot at the same time) and well deserving of being a classic.

---

Kim Stanley Robinson - - THE PLANET ON THE TABLE (Orbit, 1987, 241pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

'One of the finest short story writers around', it says on the back of this collection, and it's difficult to disagree on the evidence offered by these eight stories. From the very first page you know that you are in the hands of a master storyteller. With his fluent prose Robinson can transport the reader to a variety of evocative settings.

The stories themselves vary from atmospheric pieces to densely plotted whodunnits. We visit the snowbound Sierras and face up to the inscrutable nature of reality in 'Ridge Running'. We enter a convincing alternative universe where the bombardier deliberately misses Hiroshima with the first A-Bomb in 'The Lucky Strike'. In the best of the bunch, 'Black Air' we are on a ship in the Spanish Armada and witness supernatural events in the midst of battle. It's a vivid tale which won the World Fantasy Award.

The only disappointment is a story called 'The Disguise' in which the author tackles an ambitious theme of a play within a play. It's too cleverly plotted to be convincing as anything other than a five finger exercise for the writer.

A fine collection for anyone who likes a break from cyberpunk occasionally.

---

Bernard King - - THE DESTROYING ANGEL (Sphere, 1987, 272pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

A couple of mysterious gas explosions and some dead sheep are linked to an ancient conspiracy involving a pagan faith and a white toadstool. The various indigestible elements of this plot eventually combine to reveal a paranoid's wet dream. The powerful kingdom of Thule attempts to subvert its way to the dominance that it enjoyed in prehistoric times.

This is the first book in a projected trilogy that borrows its central premise from the 'Illuminati' series. THE DESTROYING ANGEL begins with a series of vignettes from different historic periods and then reveals their significance in terms of the present day crisis. It suffers from the author's desire to tie up all the loose ends at the end of this volume, giving it a cluttered resolution. The introduction of flying saucers and wood nymphs stretches credibility far beyond the limit.

On this evidence there is no sign that this trilogy will amount to anything and at £3.50 a volume it hardly merits exploration.

Jack Vance - - TRULLION: ALASTOR 2262 (Grafton, 1987, 229pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

Jack Vance isn't one of those authors I go out of my way to look for even though he is the author of one of my favourite fantasy novels, THE DYING EARTH. It has been said that Vance is more interested in the worlds and societies he creates than the characters and stories and I think there's some truth in that. Vance is also known for his use of archaic words of which manse (house) is one of his favourites; sure enough it first appears here on p. 35. But he is also known as a craftsman: he is not slipshod, thus to find the line 'Glinnes looked around with a slack jaw.' (eyes being the usual sensory organ) was something of a surprise. Fortunately there was nothing else as obvious.

Trullion is planet 2262 in the Alastor cluster, mainly water, and the story takes place in the Fens (map provided) a cluster of islands and waterways. The original inhabitants of Trullion are the Merlings, aquatic creatures apparently intelligent who live in an uneasy state with humans.

The story is simple. Glinnes returns to Trullion after serving in the Whelm, a space police force cum militia. He finds he has inherited the family lands but some have been disposed of by his brother. This is the story of how he gets them back.

Much of the story deals with the sport of hussade, a sort of American football played on walkways over a swimming pool, and Fanscherade, a 'philosophy'. Trullion is a fertile world providing virtually everything the Trill (Human inhabitants) need and Trill society thus seems a combination of libertarian and hippy. Fanscherade teaches that a person should set goals and strive for them, thus it is alien to the normal way of the Trill. Whilst they are dealt with at some length neither are actually central to the plot. In summary, this is a simple and standard tale surrounded by 'things' meant to interest us and which obviously interested Vance. As such it falls into the framework of a 'typical Vance novel' as discussed at the start of this review.

Having said all that the book is easy to read and you do want to know what happens next.

Tanith Lee - - SABELLA (Unwin, 1987, 157pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Lee beautifully weaves together a dozen myths in this story of Sabella, a vampire who is hunted by the brother of one of her victims. The mythic scenes are sometimes intrusive, so that it occasionally reads too derivatively, but the book's power lies within its sympathetic characterisation of a woman who despises herself for the crimes she commits to survive.

SABELLA's main strength and weakness is that it's in the first person. This means we get inside Sabella's head, seeing the events from her point of view, but robs the book of some suspense as we know she won't be killed. Despite this, there is still plenty of suspense as Lee grippingly reinterprets the myth, distinguishing the metaphysical symbolism of the vampire from the physical - a vampire casts no reflection in the sense that it has no soul, for example, not because it can't be seen in mirrors. However, Lee turns even this on its head by showing that her vampire does have a soul - and that, guilt-racked.

The vampire symbolism, itself, is usually sexually symbolic - and it is in SABELLA. Peel off the layers of myth and reinterpretation, and redefine Sabella's feelings in purely human terms and you are left with a novel about the pain of growing up and of being a woman in a largely callous, man's world. Or alternatively, a novel about sexual awareness and true love.

Gwyneth Jones' cover somehow conjures it all up accurately. Don't let the book's title dissuade you from buying it.

Patricia McKillip - - FOOL'S RUN (Orbit, 1987, 252pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

FOOL'S RUN is a straight SF novel from the author of the Riddle-Master trilogy, keeping to the rulesof the genre but retaining the fey atmosphere of McKillip's fantasy work. The plot centres around the uncommunicative and dubiously sane criminal Terra Viridian, serving a life sentence in an escape-proof prison satellite for her apparently motiveless murder of 1509 people with a laser rifle. And around the Magician, talented musician and empath, who begins to find that the coincidences linking him to Terra are, well, more than just coincidences, and who therefore begins feeling his way towards an explanation - THE explanation - for Terra's bizarre behaviour. It's a book about obsession, music, and communication, images and their reflections. It's a delicate, over-wrought book, and I very much enjoyed it. Please ignore the more-than-usually misleading cover art and blurb, and read it for yourselves.

Nigel Frith - - DRAGON (Unwin Hyman, 1987, 305pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley)

In these days of gold-embossed triple deckers shoving aside everything else in the SF sections of bookshops, I feel a tendency to praise any fantasy which is not a pale ill-written echo of Tolkien. Actually, DRAGON (a generic title if ever there was one) deserves some praise anyway, although not without reservation.

The setting is ancient China, apparently a mixture of myth and the real events of AD 383, when barbarians were massing beyond the borders and the new religion of Buddhism was threatening the old order. The story concerns two lovers, the poet Xie Nai, and a sleeve-dancer, Ling Xiang, who are (unknown to themselves) incarnations of the Celestial Cowherd and the daughter of the heavenly Jade Emperor, who has been searching for them ever since their elopement and escape to Earth. At last, the Emperor sends the Dragon of the Stars to search for them, but the Dragon has his own plans. He stirs up a civil war and kidnaps Xiang, so that the Emperor's rage throws Heaven into as much confusion as China. At the same time, two lesser Gods have made a wager concerning Nai and the new religion of Buddhism, and set off with him on a quest to find Xiang even as the Emperor threatens his own revenge.

Now, what I know about China's history and myths could be written on the back of a postcard of the Great Wall, but Nigel Frith (who has also written ASGARD, KRISHNA and JORMUNGAND) has skillfully blended the earthly and celestial plots, and DRAGON has the consistent feel of well-imagined settings founded on good research. Unfortunately, I can't recommend this unreservedly, because Nigel Frith has chosen to tell his tale in a kind of Victorian mock-biblical style in which every other sentence begins with but, and or so, lending the smallest action (making a pot of tea, for instance) a ridiculous sense of importance. Those of you who thought that the best bit of LORD OF THE RINGS was 'The Siege of Gondor' will find nothing to complain about, but sometimes I found

DRAGON hard going indeed. And this is a pity, for otherwise it would be the perfect entertainment for a summer afternoon.

Joy Chant - - - - - - - - - - THE HIGH KINGS
(Unwin, 1987. B format. 200pp. £3.50)

(Reviewed by David V Barrett)

At last Unwin have published a paperback edition of THE HIGH KINGS. I never felt I could justify paying £12.95 for the glossy, heavily-illustrated coffee-table hardback that appeared in 1984; the paperback has lost the illustrations (perhaps no great loss) and had its text restored from the unauthorised (by Chant) publisher's alterations in the original.

Now, for sheer value for money, it's the best thing I've read for a long, long time.

Set within a framework of Arthur travelling around Britain, seeing nobles and warlords, are tales told by bards for entertainment after a feast or inspiration before a battle: tales of the high kings of the Island of the Mighty, from Brutus the Trojan, the founder of Britain, up to Vortigern the Traitor, who allowed the Saxons Hengest and Horsa to dominate the South and East coasts, just before Arthur's own day.

The nine tales include "Leir and his daughters" (a somewhat different version from Shakespeare's); "The Children of Lir" (not to be confused; these were Bran, Manadan and Branwen); "The Two Queens of Locrin", which includes the naming of the Humber and the Severn; "The Blemished Prince", about Bladud being swine-keeper for the Ever Young of the Living Land, and his ill treatment at their hands; "The Mighty Brothers", Belinos and Brennios, and their rivalry over Britain; "The Sovereignty of Britain", about the joint rule of Maxen, emperor of Rome, and Elen, Queen of Britain; and "The Sons of Troy", about Julius Caesar's attempted invasions of Britain (the ending shows the strong Romano-British sentiment in Arthur's day, that was the basis of his power:)

> Thus met the two races of Trojan descent and the divided heirs of Aeneas were united, and found in one another the equals they had not found before in all the world. While the earth endures that alliance shall be remembered; and while Britons and Romans are one, none shall overcome them.

As an epilogue, Chant tells some of the stories that were later told of Arthur: his mysterious birth; the gaining of his sword, here called Caledvolc; the blessing and curse of Morgen; the slaying of the giant Ogran to gain his daughter Gueneva (the same story as the slaying by Cassivelaunos of Ugnach the Giant to gain his daughter Flower, told in "The Sons of Troy"); the coldness, barrenness and infidelity of Gueneva; the battles and exploits of Arthur; and his taking back into Avalon by Morgen.

In addition, Chant gives us a baker's dozen of very useful mini-essays on aspects of Celtic life, including the bard, the place of women, the warrior, druids, religion, marriage and (the content and structure of this book) story-telling.

True, there's nothing in this book which you couldn't find in Geoffrey of Monmouth's "History" or in *The Mabinogion*, or in the early 20th century collections, Rolleston's *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* and Squire's *Celtic Myth and Legend*. The beauty of Chant's book, though, is that some of the best of these stories are retold in the way that 6th century bards might have told them, and are set in the context of Arthur's time.

Buy it, read it, and enjoy it -- and get a pretty good flavour of Romano-British days in the Island of the Mighty. •

Bernard King - - - - - - - - - - - VARGR-MOON
(NEL, 1987. 244pp. £2.50)

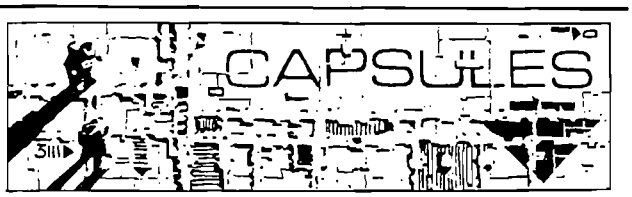
(Reviewed by David V Barrett)

This is a direct sequel to STARKADDER, which I haven't read. That's a shame; I doubt if I will now, because King refers back to its events so often that I know the story inside out. In part it's necessary, because this book is in part about the loss and recovery -- and use -- of Starkadder's dwarf-forged sword Tyrfing, but it demonstrates clearly the problem that faces the author of a sequel: how much does the reader need to know of the first book for the sequel to make sense; or can the second book stand firmly on its own feet?

*Vargr* is "a word that raised goose-flesh upon the skin of the most hardened listener. It meant murderer, and wolf, and shape-shifter, and strangler, and sexual monster and oath-breaker. It signified carnage and madness." It's definitely not something you'd want to meet, on a dark night or at any other time. But I'd have liked to discover that in the story, rather than be told in an author's note. "Show, don't tell" is a maxim every writer should have tattooed on their brain; by telling me before the story even starts King robs the story -- and the vargr -- of much of its power.

Hather Lambisson is asked by Omund Olisson, King of Sweden, to lead the hunt for the vargr that is ravaging the country. Having had enough of adventures in STARKADDER, he quite naturally (but unheroically) says no -- until he finds his own homestead laid waste and his son captured by the vargr. Then begins a hunt across Sweden, with acts of evil barbarism matched only by the acts of selfless heroism. There's blood and battles aplenty before Hather reaches his goal, in a denouement which took me by surprise (even hero Hather, despite nagging half-memories, only fits everything together at the very last moment). There's betrayal and treachery too, as in all good Norse tales, and Odin and Mother Skuld, one of the Norns, have a deal on the side, just to complicate things.

VARGR-MOON is an enjoyable heroic mythic fantasy, on the whole well enough written. King has left the way open for further sequels, and I think we're likely to see quite a bit more of him in the future.




Piers Anthony - - WIELDING A RED SWORD (Grafton, 1987, 368pp, £2.95)

Book 4 of 'Incarnations of Immortality' covering the tale of Mars, incarnation of War. Like much symbolic fiction, weakened because the actual story is flabby and the setting merely silly. (Andy Sawyer)

Steven Bauer - - STEPHEN SPIELBERG'S AMAZING STORIES (Futura, 1987, 234pp, £2.50)

11 short stories based on episodes from Spielberg's TV series: the one about the homicidal toupee is perhaps the most extreme example of the dated Hollywood/schlock-comic air about them. As heartwarmingly refreshing

as a stale MacDonald's. (Andy Sawyer)

Hans Bemman - - THE STONE AND THE FLUTE (Penguin, 1987, 855pp, £4.95)

Weighty fantasy in the German folk-tale rather than the Tolkienian tradition. Interspersed with poetry and tales, this story of Listener and his precious stone and magic flute moves at a pace too leisurely for all except the most committed reader. In short, tedious. (Andy Sawyer)

F.M. Busby - - STAR REBEL (Orbit, 1987, 216pp, £2.50)

Echoes of Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS as Bran Tregare survives highly detailed, brutal Space Academy training. But he does the sensible thing and rebels to turn his killing-machine talents on the Empire and give the bastards what they deserve. Excellent start of what could be a good action-adventure SF series. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Bentine - - LORDS OF THE LEVELS (Grafton, 1987, 302pp, £2.95)

Updated Dennis Wheatley-type occult thriller about Satanist drug smugglers on Romney Marsh. Like Wheatley, Bentine manipulates an exotic group of characters who lecture rather than talk to each other. Pure cardboard, without even the Master's dashes of kinky sex and idiosyncratic historical essays. (Andy Sawyer)

Charles L. Grant - - THE PET (Futura, 1987, 343pp, £2.95)

A lonely kid with home and school problems turns his imagination towards the animal pictures which decorate his room. He becomes a hero when a psychopathic killer is battered to death in an attempt to murder him: but what exactly has he raised...? Complicated relationships among too many flat characters and a confusing central horror-figure mars a good picture of family tensions. (Andy Sawyer)

Paul Kirchner - - THE BUS (Orbit, 1987, £2.95)

Collection of surreal cartoons originally from Heavy Metal magazine: witty, wacky and often startling fantasies using buses to contemplate urban life. An unusual choice for Orbit's annual SF promotion, despite the strong elements of the fantasic but, anyway, too good to miss. (Andy Sawyer)

THE ORBIT POSTER BOOK (Orbit, 1987, £6.95)

Large-format, glossy collection of covers from 16 Orbit fantasy/SF titles including Joe Haldeman's WORLDS APART and James White's ALL JUDGEMENT FLED (both by John Harris), Robert Silverberg's TOM O'BEDLAM (Mark Salwowski) and John Varley's TITAN trilogy (Peter Goodfellow). Very much a souvenir publication, it to some extent shows the cliches of book-cover illustrations in our field but stresses some good work too. I particularly liked Mike van Houten's pastoral cover to Richard Cowper's THE ROAD TO CORLAY and loved his landscape and silhouette of ships in sail for the two-panel cover of Jane Gaskell's ATLAN 3. Steven Lavis's intricate dragon-filled designs for Jane Yolen's TALES OF WONDER and Fred Saberhagen's EMPIRE OF THE EAST could be set in the same world as each other, but are, too, a cut above the usual. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Shea - - IN YANA, THE TOUCH OF UNDYING (Grafton, 1987, 332pp, £3.50)

Tubby, ambitious Bramt Hex throws over the life of a scolar for the chance of immortality in Yana: if he can get there with the contents of Shea's sardonically inventive and sometimes bawdy imagination ranged against him! Baroque fantasy which fans of Jack Vance's THE DYING EARTH should enjoy. (Andy Sawyer)

Robert Sheckley - - VICTIM PRIME (Methuen, 1987, 202pp, £2.50)

A rundown, decayed America, slowly disintegrating as its natural resources disappear and a Caribbean island where men kill each other for the enjoyment of TV viewers worldwide. These are the two ingredients in Robert Sheckley's new novel. The book contributes little new to the development of either theme. A slight read. Disappointing. (John Newsinger)

Susan Shwartz - - BYZANTIUM'S CROWN (Pan, 1987, 254pp, £2.95)

An alternative history where Anthony and Cleopatra won the battle of Actium and founded a dynasty based on Byzantium. The hero Marric, heir to the Empire, is cheated of his inheritance and sold into slavery, where he meets friends, helpers and his true love, learns the value and use of magic, and returns to recapture his crown. Better than many with some thought and consideration in it: Marric is changed by slavery, brought to face and reject his former self, although what he does with his power and popularity remains to be seen in the next two volumes. Readable if rather pedestrian: you could do a lot worse. (Helen McNabb)

Thomas Tessier - - FINISHING TOUCHES (Grafton, 1987, 253pp, £2.95)

Sex 'n' murder horror story about mad cosmetic surgeon with prisoners in his basement. A tour around the murkier lusts and fantasies. (Andy Sawyer)

Patrick Tilley - - FADE-OUT (Grafton, 1987, 541pp, £3.50)

Revised and updated reprint of Tilley's 1975 First Contact novel, partly contemporary Cold War thriller, partly SF with a touch of occult speculation. An alien artifact lands in Montana: Who sent it? Why? What are its intentions? Not many of these questions are answered by the end, despite some teasing suggestions. It's more readable than the dreadful AMTRAK WARS series, and Tilley handles the squabbling between different factions of the White House military/intelligence/scientific community well without letting us really inside his characters. Given the subjective nature of some of the events this is the book's main flaw: it lacks the speculative awe with which Arthur C. can invest a similar theme. (Andy Sawyer)

Sydney J. Van Scyoc - - DROWNTIDE (Orbit, 1987, 220pp, £2.50)

Set on a seaworld where human and whale-descendants can communicate telepathically. Keiris must find his long-lost father and twin sister and on his quest discovers more about his planet and his people's place on it. Neither world nor characters, though, are really portrayed deeply enough to stay on the memory once you close the book. (Andy Sawyer)

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - THE SWORD OF BHELEU (Grafton, 1987, 301pp, £2.95)

Will the dark god's sword take over the mind of Garth the Overman? Third of disappointing S&S series. (Andy Sawyer)

# INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED