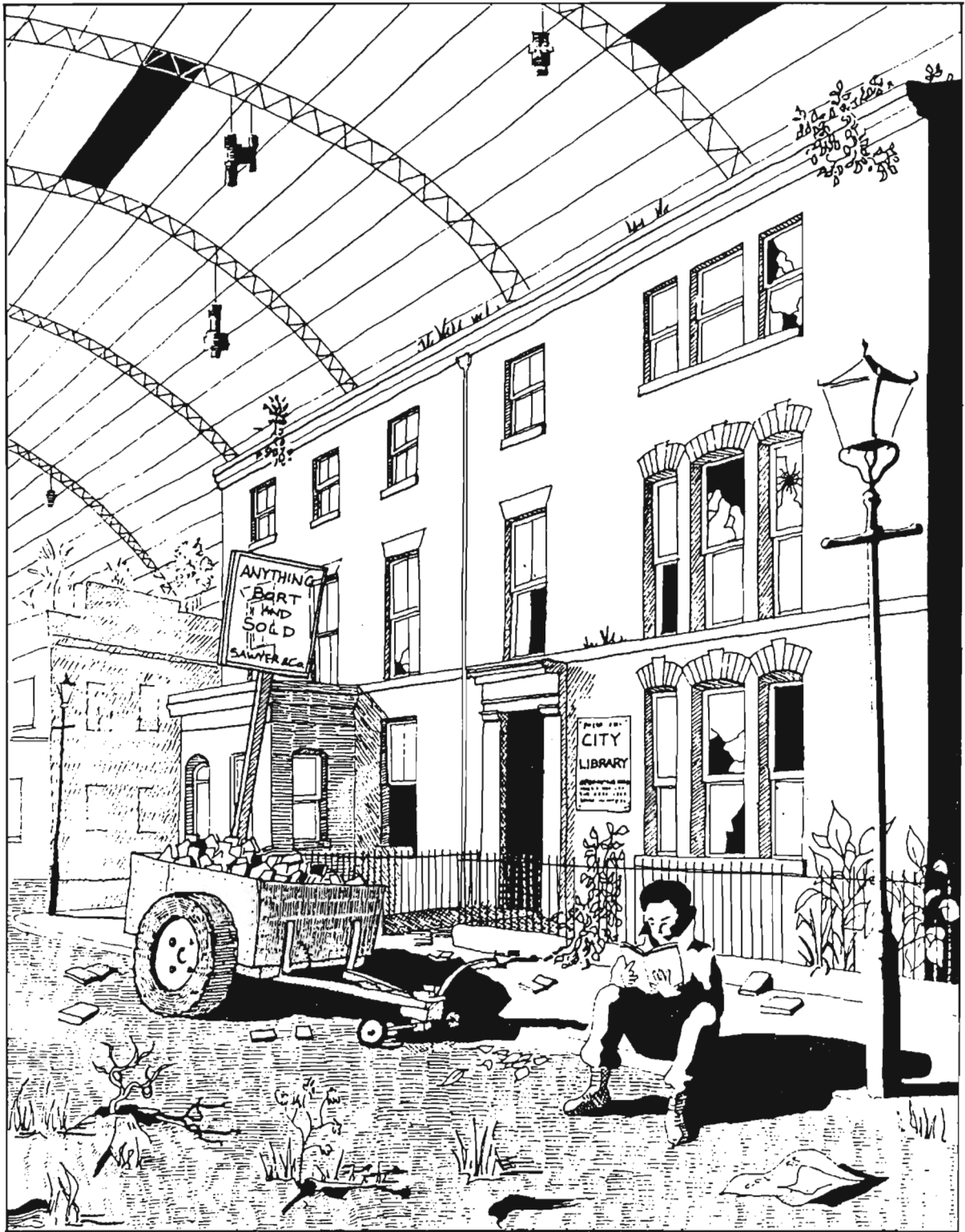


Paperback Inferno 72

The Review of paperback SF

June/July 1988



A British Science Fiction Association magazine 50p.

PAPERBACK INFERNO

Paperback Purgatory

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CONTENTS

Editorial (Paperback Purgatory)	p.2
CLOSER ENCOUNTERS:	
Spirrad's BUG JACK BARRON	
Stapledon's STAR MAKER	
Watson's QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC	p.3
REVIEWS	p.5
'UPON THE RACK IN PRINT'	
Magazine reviews by Andy Mills and Edward James	p.14
CONTACT	p.15
REVIEWERS THIS ISSUE: K.V. Bailey, David V. Barrett, Colin Bird, Lynne Bispham, Terry Broome, Alan Fraser, Edward James, Paul Kincaid, Ken Lake, Helen McNabb, Brian Magorrian, Nicholas Mahoney, Nik Morton, Andy Sawyer, Laurence Scotford, Martyn Taylor, Steven Tew, Sue Thomason.	
ARTWORK: Colin Davies (Cover)	
Steve Bruce (p. 3)	
Les Clewlow (p.4)	
Keith Brooke (p. 12)	

((STOP PRESS))

While pasting-up this issue, the deaths
of Robert A. Heinlein and Clifford D.
Simak were announced. No doubt fuller
notices will appear elsewhere in the SF
press (I was pleased to see obituaries
in The Guardian, April 29th and May 12th)
but this is my personal tribute to these
two writers. I see no reason to gloss over
my intense dislike for most of Heinlein's
later work, but his earlier novels and
stories are far above the standard of
most of his contemporaries. As for Simak,
WAY STATION (1963) was one of the first
SF novels I read. If Heinlein's 'All You
Zombies' showed me SF's powerful possi-
bilities for frightening paradox, WAY
STATION still moves me for the way it
suggests that the alien is not necessar-
ily the enemy. (Andy Sawyer)

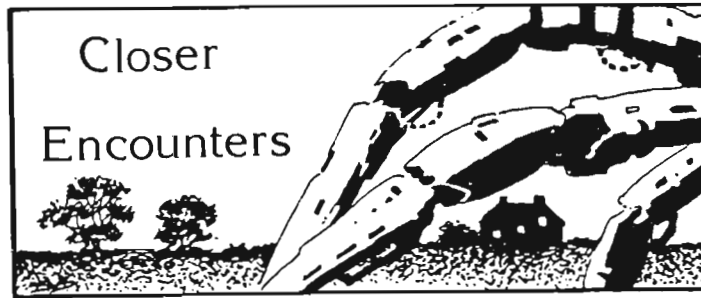
Sometimes it's the little things that annoy
me. The Big Things - the ever-present threat
of VAT on books and magazines, the quickly-
denied rumours of privatising library serv-
ices (I have summaries of the government's
Green Paper which everyone who makes regular
use of a public library should read and will
supply for a s.a.e.: or contact your own pub-
lic library) - all these need more space than
I can give them. And in any case, my stance
should be perfectly obvious. So here's a min-
or irritation to throw at you.

Most books which come my way have blurbs
and covers and claims which can be taken for
granted as reasonably accurate. True, no sec-
ond rate adaptation of someone else's origin-
al theme is complete without an adulatory
word or two from some Big Name (usually not
the writer from whom said theme is cribbed.
But you take this as standard nowadays, even
if it's perhaps a sad reflection on the state
of things that an enthusiastic reception by
your favourite writer may not mean very much.
Where, and when (and for how much?) were
these paeons penned? That's not the point.
What is really irritating is the half-decep-
tion on the covers of some books. Perfectly
accurate statements, misleading for the un-
wary reader.

Take Orson Scot Card's WYRMS (Legend)
which, as Terry Broome points out in PI 71,
contains the words 'Nebula Award Winner 1985/
6' on the front. Legend are perfectly in ord-
er to puff WYRMS like this, but the awards
were actually won for ENDER'S GAME ('85) and
SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD ('86). Don't you some-
how get the subliminal suggestion that WYRMS
won the award? This isn't the only case I've
seen: am I pedantic in suggesting that Books,
not Authors (except in special cases) win
awards, and that it would be more accurate to
specify for what the award has been won.

That's a borderline case. We're normally
aware of how much we're persuaded that if
author X has written an award-winning novel
we'll therefore enjoy others from that auth-
or. If a publisher can shift a few copies of
a book on the basis of an award, good luck.
What I do feel is happening which ought not
to, is the occasional practice of selling
collections of short stories as if they were
novels. Jack Vance's PHANTASMS AND MAGICKS
(Grafton), reviewed in PI71, is a case in
point. If you read the back cover blurb you
will see a synopsis of the plot of one of
the half-dozen stories. Ah, a Vance novel,
you cry. Wrong... Now this again may not be
so bad: Graham Andrews in his review wrote
that Vance is an underrated short story writ-
er, and who really would buy a book without
opening it and flicking through, checking the
contents page, etc.? Yet why don't the pub-
lishers say that this is a collection? Why
the coyness? Is there some secret government
plan afoot to classify short stories along
with 'gay content' as somehow morally corrup-
ting? Make 'em read real novels, say I - this
short story stuff isn't proper literature! Or
could it be just that short story collections
don't sell very well?

Do people buy such books and feel disapp-
ointed because they aren't novels? Does the
Trades Descriptions Act apply? Ben Bova's
ESCAPE PLUS (Methuen) is another example,
'blurb'd' on the strength of the novella
'Escape' but actually 'plus' (oh dear - sub-
tle pun, eh?) ten short stories. Are you
pleased because you've got a bonus or fed up
because it's not a full length novel? Caveat
emptor, I suppose, but this practice seems
shoddy marketing to me.



Norman Spinrad - - - - - BUG JACK BARRON
(Grafton, 1988, 384pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Is this a review or a history lesson, I ask myself? Review BUG JACK BARRON? The book is a legend. Back in the sixties, I was a *New Worlds* subscriber, and had every issue from No 151 (May 1966) until the very last, No 201, in 1969. I did have quite a lot of earlier ones between 1959 and 1963, too, but lost those in 1964 when my parents moved house while I was away at university.

New Worlds, of course, was edited by Michael Moorcock, and at that time supported by an Arts Council grant. With writers like Harlan Ellison, Thomas Disch and John Sladek breaking new ground in the States, Moorcock and his team tried to make *NW* the British centre of a new school of modern SF writing. 'pop-surrealistic literature for the Space Age', as Moorcock called it. They had got into some trouble with their serialization of Disch's *CAMP CONCENTRATION*, and then Spinrad's *BJB*, with all that explicit sex and expletives 'notably undeleted', was the last straw. W.H. Smith refused to distribute *NW*, the grant was withdrawn, and the magazine folded soon after.

Unfortunately, I foolishly lent issues 162 onwards (the large-page *Interzone* format ones) out to someone, and now all that remains of my *NW* collection are the paperback format issues 151-161, ending in March 1967. Consequently, I had not read *BJB* since those days, and was keen to see how it matched up to my memory of the serial.

The story: Jack Barron is a TV presenter in 1994 who specialises in righting wrongs on his nationwide TV show ('That's Life, 1990s style' as it says in the blurb). You phone up, 'bug' Jack with what's bugging you, and he puts the person who's doing it on the spot. The Foundation for Immortality is an organisation that charges \$50,000 a head to put terminally ill people in cryogenic suspension until a cure is found for their illnesses. A black man phones in with evidence that the Foundation for Immortality won't accept him on racial grounds, and Jack takes up the case. When they try to kill him, Jack realises there's more to the Foundation than the business of freezing the wealthy sick. He uncovers a horrifying conspiracy, but finds the price they're prepared to pay to keep him quiet is one even he is tempted to consider.

The verdict: *BUG JACK BARRON*, though an extremely good book in many ways, is as firmly a child of the Sixties as *Carnaby Street* and *Flower Power*. The coarse language and sexually explicit writing seem here a self-conscious addition to what is basically a straightforward SF yarn. The setting is an extrapolated Sixties (legalised pot and acid, Black Muslims, ex-hippy party replacing Republicans, etc.), and the imagery is all JFK-Dylan-Beatles, as fixed in time as the breathless writing style. The more recent Cyberpunk, with its natural street-profanity,

has an intrinsic hardness that Jack Barron's world didn't possess.

That conflict with the authorities notwithstanding, this isn't really an experimental novel like the ones Ballard, Aldiss and Moorcock himself were writing at the time. It's ironic that some of the 'mainstream' SF Moorcock was trying to get away from when he published *BJB* has managed to age better. Spinrad was trying too hard to be shocking for the book to be entirely successful. Despite that, *BUG JACK BARRON* is still a head taller than the crowd, with a strong plot, and its heart in the right place. Spinrad moved us on, and he deserves credit for a good try. Buy this, if you were there, to show you still support the team. Buy this, if you weren't, to get a strong sense of what it was all about. Read *THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION* (Ballard), *BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD* (Aldiss), *BREAKFAST IN RUINS* (Moorcock), and *DANGEROUS VISIONS* (ed. Ellison) for the rest.

Olaf Stapledon - - - - - --STAR MAKER
(Penguin, 1988, 267pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

'Judged by the standards of the Novel, [STAR MAKER]... is remarkably bad.' Thus: who? The author himself, in a preface which also seeks to defend his work against charges of being 'considered as a distraction from the desperately urgent defence of civilization against modern barbarism.'

Inadequate as *STAR MAKER* may be as a novel, it's not as a conventional novel that it ought to be read, but as a speculative discussion of philosophical ideas arising from the spiritual and social dissatisfaction of a mind seeking meaning. The narrator, alone on a hill, tasting the bitterness of personal dispute as well as the overpowering threat of totalitarianism (*STAR MAKER* was published in 1937) mentally travels through time and space, seeking the presence of the 'Star Maker', the creative spirit. His journey prefigures most subsequent science fiction, and rarely has it been surpassed; we see alien beings, artificial worlds, genetic manipulation, catastrophes and Empires at war. The penultimate section of the book is a fascinating speculation upon alternate created universes. Throughout, we observe the differences and similarities - some exotic, some pointedly banal - between species and societies in a universe teeming with life.

SF as 'literature of ideas' can be an excuse for getting away with bad writing, but Stapledon remains readable because of his pessimism; the same force which leads to the self-deprecating statements above. This sounds perverse, I know, but if his writings were only the alien worlds and races, astonishingly well imagined as they are, all we would have would be an equivalent of the gosh-wow pulps. But Stapledon's universe is not one of easy

comfort. 'It must not be supposed that the normal fate of intelligent races in the galaxy is to triumph,' he writes. The destiny of intelligence, Stapledon suggests, is to struggle to understand its place in and relationship with the vastness of the universe, reaching for the 'spiritual' even while suggesting that the world has been debased by religions, and resolving the conflict between yearning individual and apparently impersonal universe in tending 'our little glowing atom of community'.

At all levels, from the intelligent nautaloids to the symbiotic arachnoids and ichthyoids to the stars themselves, is the conflict between the individual and the collective. The staggering science-fictional imagination which pervades the book is not more important than the picture it gives of this eternal conflict.

Does this mean that STAR MAKER is a moral tract? Well, yes, if when using that expression you try to avoid the image of grubby handbills exhorting you to forswear the Demon Drink or earnest political essays strong on dialectic but weak on accessibility. But SF has often been used to make a moral point (or should I say that many writers wishing to present philosophical or moral issues will turn to SF?) You'll have to decide for yourself whether you find Stapledon's moral stance nobly stoic or verging too closely upon sub-Marxist determinism for comfort, but it's unarguable, I feel, that it not only adds a piquance to his visions but is, also, the very reason for their existence in this particular form.

STAR MAKER is yet another classic SF novel it's good to welcome back in print. I have only one slight grumble, which is that this could have been an opportunity to reinsert Stapledon's 'Glossary' which was left out of the original (and subsequent) editions of the book, as this was discovered and separately published by Harvey Satty in 1986. Dare we be greedy, and ask for paperback revivals of some of Stapledon's lesser-known novels?

Ian Watson - - - - - QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC
(Grafton, 1988, 240pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

I must confess to having been somewhat put off Ian Watson by his early novels such as THE EMBEDDING and THE JONAH KIT, which I found difficult and offputting. However, I have recently read several of his later books including SLOW BIRDS, and these I have found to be much more accessible and enjoyable. In the preface to SLOW BIRDS Watson described himself as a 'gardener of words', but here we see him as a gamesmaster.

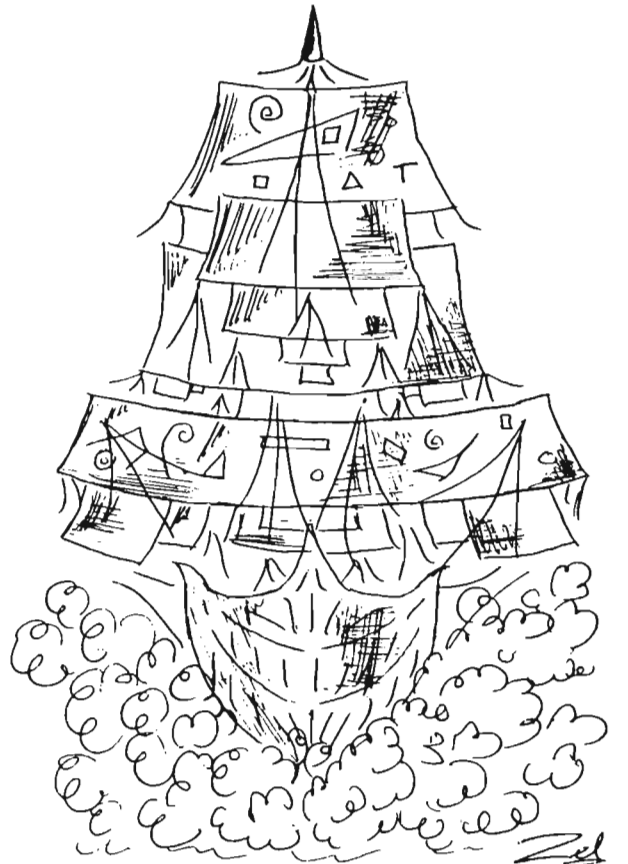
This novel reminded me of Gene Wolfe's THE DEVIL IN A FOREST, because that book was on the surface a simple tale of a conflict in a medieval woodland village, but underneath a powerful allegory of the struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC is superficially even lighter, a fantasy about the Slavic-flavoured kingdoms of Bellogard and Chorny (names inspired by the Russian words for White and Black, incidentally), who are at war with one another permanently. The war is fought only by the Court, not the ordinary citizens, strictly according to laws that we quickly recognise as those of chess. Each fighter (player) has his or her predefined magical moves to make. However, legend tells that if one of the kings is killed their world will disappear.

Pedino is the Bellogardian (White) Queen's squire (pawn), who is sent on a dangerous mission to discover a Chornian (Black) spy.

The spy, one of the Chornian bishops' squires, turns out to be a beautiful girl, Sara, with whom he falls in love. Even though he manages to kill (take) the Black bishop, Pedino finds himself involved in an unfamiliar series of moves that will threaten his whole world with extinction (the Endgame?).

However, Pedino is able to use his own unique magic to evade death for himself and Sara when a king is killed (checkmated). They find themselves visiting a series of strange new worlds, each of which bears a striking resemblance to a popular family boardgame, and progress through the whole compendium to an intriguingly circular conclusion. On the way Pedino speculates, naturally enough, that there must exist a world where people play the games that control the lives of the inhabitants of his own world, and the worlds he and Sara visit. Of course, that world could in its turn be controlled by players in a still higher world.....

I enjoyed QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC very much indeed, taking it straight as an updated version of THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS. If you want to read deeper spiritual significance into it, you can, but it works well on any level you like. Perhaps, in the opposite way to that in which John Fowles played with his characters in THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN, while You the Reader are enjoying the book because you know the rules of what's happening to the characters, Watson the Author is being even more amused by the way he's playing with Your head!



R E V I E W S

Terry Bisson - - - - -WYRLDMAKER
(Headline, 1988, 176pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Terry Bisson's WYRLDMAKER is published for the first time in GB, and follows hard on the heels of the later written TALKING MAN. It is being marketed with the usual trappings of heroic swords and sorcery fantasy. The cover picture is of a macho hero wielding a two-handed sword, and the words 'The Magical Sword was a Treasure and a Curse' announce the sword as the real protagonist of the story. In short, it is the kind of book that I avoid, certainly not one that I would have got for myself despite enjoying TALKING MAN. On the face of it, the story itself seems to confirm these suspicions, involving the usual adventurous journey, sword battles, strange creatures and magic. The (human) hero of the story is Kemen, the ruler of a tiny kingdom at the bottom of the wyrlldwall. He forgoes his regal duties in order to seek Noese, a mysterious white haired woman who rises from the sea long enough to conceive his son and leave behind the sword Wyrlldmaker. He travels through the wyrllds seeking her, pursued by the evil Mone who, instead of dying each time he's hacked into pieces, simply grows duplicates of himself from the severed parts (which makes me wonder why Kemen persisted in hacking him into pieces!). It would not be fair to reveal the end of the story which explains the significance of the sword; suffice it to say that, while not entirely unexpected, it makes sense of the story and makes it more interesting than the run of the mill fantasy.

WYRLDMAKER is full of strengths. Bisson's imagination is fertile and his writing is vivid and intelligent. But I have my reservations. At times the imagery is strained and, to my mind, meaningless: '... they sat and talked until they could read each other's voices like faces.' The obsession with blood and killing, decapitation and the eating of brains goes beyond a legitimate exploration of violence as a valid subject for fiction. However, I am prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt on that score, and would recommend this even to those who share my dislike of heroic fantasy.

Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg
& Charles G. Waugh (eds.) - - - - ENCOUNTERS
(Headline, 1988, 399pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Perhaps the editors should ask themselves that by producing so many anthologies they are spreading themselves thin, sacrificing quality for quantity. Theme anthologies offer so much scope for the inclusion of excellent work and as retrospective showcases illustrating the development of that theme over the years. Instead, the team opts for a more economical approach, selecting mainly old and often hoary chestnuts from the '40s and '50s, arranged in no discernible order and taken from a spectrum so broad as to strain expectations.

Many of the sixteen tales in ENCOUNTERS are only superficially about contact with aliens and few of them rise above simple adventure stories. There are two thinly disguised and dated scientific essays which tell, rather than show (Hal Clement's 'Proof

and Asimov's 'Not Final!'), mermaid and fairy stories (fantasies with sf veneers), a Vietnam war story, where the sf element is tacked on, and a tacky two page joke by Elizabeth Morton.

Why was Sheckley's satirical, but lightweight 'The Victim From Space' chosen over Harry Harrison's deeper, serious, 'The Streets Of Ashkelon'? Or the execrable Chad Oliver, Michael Shaara and Murray Leinster stories chosen at all?

There are two excellent tales - the longest and the newest - the longest being William Tenn's cynical 'Firewater' and the newest J.A. Pollard's 'Final Contact', an amusing and intelligent satire on sf writers, fans and ideas about first contact (it may also be unique to the anthology). In addition to these there are several routine tales by Simak, Bob Shaw and Poul Anderson, the latter set in the Polesotechnic League of Nicholas van Rijn.

Many of the stories will have already been collected, so the only value I can see in this volume will be for those author-devoted fans who haven't yet read them, or young adults new to sf.

Walter Tevis - - - - THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH
(Abacus, 1988, 202pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Written in the early sixties, Tevis' THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH has worn remarkably well, and does not seem to suffer from the usual outdated feel that accompanies many near future novels with which time has caught up. Thomas Jerome Newton comes to the Earth of the 1980s on an almost hopeless mission; he is a finely crafted picture of loneliness and desperation in the face of the insanities of the modern world, and there is a fundamental irony in the way he attempts to use the weapons of capitalism to carry out his plans. Nathan Bryce, a chemical engineer, is fascinated by Newton, seeing him for what he is, and joins his project. Bryce is the human reflection of Newton, pointing to Tevis' theme of isolation as the basic human condition. The despair, in part, comes from frustration at the immaturity of human politics, and the story's background of the trivial and the evil uses of science underlies this. But, in the end, this sense of 'quiet desperation' is born from a more fundamental alienation which is the heart of the novel.

Stephen Leigh - - - - - THE BONES OF GOD
(Headline, 1988, 289pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Spengler in THE DECLINE OF THE WEST speculated that what he called a late 'Second Religiousness' might with us take the form of 'something of the type, for example, of Adventism and suchlike sects'. That is a fair description of what Stephen Leigh escalates space-operatically to galactic dimensions in this novel of strife between theocratic and hieratic beliefs and regimes.

There are books in which the chapter epigraphs rival or surpass the text. Here some of them are in the top class - they are from the O.T., the N.T. and the Koran. Others, the sayings and writings of 26th century messiahs

and apostles, are pretty good pastiches of apocalyptic and prophetic literature. These, in fact, more or less tell the story, and certainly define the novel's mood and content: jihads in space, cosmic missions and crusades. The nomenclature takes a bit of mastering. Creeds and schisms, gods, demons, exarchs and acolytes rejoice in names and titles such as MolitorAb and the MulSendero. Is a Stekoni a heretic, or a hairy, technologically innovative, marsupial-pouched, musk-impregnated female alien? (Actually it is both.) Once all this is sorted out, the story moves at a great pace and from planet to planet. Demotic religiosity is mixed in with post-Einsteinian physics to make a heady brew, above which the cursed/inspired/possessed main protagonist and miracle-man tries to keep his torture-disfigured head.

Troubles experienced by sf written at this high and humourless pitch become acute in dialogue. Tightroping between the realistic and the fantastic, between the 'political' and the intimate, it can, and here sometimes does, topple towards the sentimental, the hysterical or even the bathetic. But among its credits the book can rate inventive planetary descriptions, persuasive accounts of alien emotions, erotic and otherwise, and a continuity of action, both physically violent and psychically intriguing, that carries the reader with it quite remorselessly.

Thomas R. McDonough - - - - - THE ARCHITECTS
OF HYPERSPACE
(Avon, 1987, 265pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

SF - 'the literature of ideas' - in which a 'good' idea can overcome all and any literary failings - a proposition to which I do not subscribe - the better you express the idea the better it is communicated. THE ARCHITECTS OF HYPERSPACE is almost archetypal SF, constructed from low rent received literary notions, the cliches archly incestuous, and begins thus:

Twenty years later and many light-years away, the battered old two-man starship Shillelagh entered the atmosphere of planet VII of the star Luyten 789-6. The Shillelagh was piloted by Sean O'Shaughnessy and Pelham 'Plum' Chalmondeley III, who were visiting for the second time a frigid, alien world where only a dozen humans had ever walked.

They landed by the shore of a lake of lox - liquid oxygen - and emerged from their battered starship in cryosuits that protected them from the star's cosmic rays and from temperatures that made the coldest winter night of Antarctica seem tropical.

This is the beginning of the story, the words over which every author sweats blood. If you cannot see what is wrong with the above... McDonough's comic Paddy and chinless wonder are neither funny nor true to stereotype - not even the greenest wellied Hooray Henry would want their son called 'Plum Chumley' - and no one with any real knowledge of this sceptred isle would describe his accent as 'British': it affects to being Home Counties English. Of course this may be intended as broad comedy, but the laughs seem too few and far between - and accidental - for that. Either that, or our senses of humour exist in different continua.

That said, a book does not have to be technically good to be enjoyable reading, and I did enjoy THE ARCHITECTS OF HYPERSPACE in a

rather pallid way. I wanted to know the secret too dangerous for humankind to know, although I was disappointed in the end. Like so much of this book the end referred me to other books, those 'classics' which are the substance of the genre. An interesting book rather than a good one, and a note to Mr McDonough - I'd like to read you, not your influences.

Charles Sheffield - - - - -BETWEEN THE STROKES
OF NIGHT
(Headline, 1987, 342pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

The book starts with an intrigue: the Prologue consists of a page of the diary of a Charlene Bloom from a day in 29872 AD, and mentions a Wolfgang, long dead. Part 1 of the novel (the first 120 pages) is set in 2010 AD, and introduces two characters, Charlene Bloom and Wolfgang Gibbs. Can this be the same person, nearly 28000 years earlier? Charlene writes in her diary that she has heard that a way to travel faster than light has been discovered on Beacon's World. She doubts it, as 25000 years of research have so far not broken through the light barrier, and she believes it to be a universal limit.

In 2010 Charlene and Wolfgang are members of a UN research team working in New Zealand, trying to find a way to put humans into a reduced life state. Their team is invited by a wealthy industrialist to move into space, to a station in orbit round the Earth. There he is building an 'arcology' - a huge self-sufficient ship intended to carry thousands of people, capable of visiting the stars, provided they can put most of the colonists into 'cold sleep' for hundreds of years.

Because of the worsening political, economic, and climatic conditions the team accept, but they have only just transferred to the space station when thermonuclear war devastates the Earth. It leaves them and the crews of the other stations the only survivors of humanity.

Part 2 then jumps to 27968 AD, on Pentecost, a planet of the star Eta Cassiopeiae, colonised by the arcology ship 'Eleanora' after fifteen thousand years of searching for a new home. Peron Turcan comes third in the planet-wide games, and qualifies to go off-world for further trials upon one of the more inhospitable worlds of the system. It is possible that he and his fellow winners may meet some of the 'Immortals', who are reputed to live forever, and have the power to travel between stars in a few days. These Immortals visit Pentecost every twenty years or so, exchanging scientific information from other human-colonised planets, and providing rare materials that are in short supply in the Cassiopeian system. However, they never land on the planet itself, and have been seen only by a very small number of people. Apart from the visits of the Immortals, there is no other inter-system contact at all.

After a disastrous and near-fatal accident on the first off-planet trial, Peron's wish to meet the Immortals is granted. He finds himself rescued by them, and on a ship bound for their Sector Headquarters, a light year away. His friends are all in cold sleep. The ship is travelling in what is called 'S-Space', and will make the journey in only two days.

Curiouser and curiouser. Everything we've read so far conflicts with the Prologue. How can Sheffield resolve the contradictions?

Sheffield is essentially working with the well-worn material of hard SF, combining it with the 'gradual discovery' plan of plot

construction. However, he keeps the reader's interest in the story alive as he sets up and resolves scientific and technical paradoxes, revealing the facts about the universe in which his protagonists find themselves a little more in each chapter. There aren't really any new ideas in BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT, but the book is well thought out, with its scientific background coming across as being possible rather than fantastic. Also, the characterization is better than you would expect for novels of this genre. The feel of the novel reminded me of Poul Anderson or Larry Niven, and if you like the work of those authors, then you'll like this.

Pat Murphy - - - - - THE FALLING WOMAN
(Headline, 1988, 287pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

A brilliant tale of two cultures and two women. The two cultures, both overlying Amerindian sub-strata, are: the Californian, with foci at L.A. and on the Berkeley campus; and the Mexican, with foci in Yucatan at Merida and the nearby Maya/Toltec site of Ozibilchaltun. In this culture-mix involving the archaic and the contemporary, it is the Maya past of Ozibilchutan which begins to take over.

The two women are Elizabeth and her daughter Diane, both sensitive but disturbed products of west-coast mores. The older of them, Elizabeth, is an archaeology lecturer leading the Berkeley-Ozibilchaltun summer dig. Diane, divorce-abandoned in childhood, rejected in love, and now father-bereaved, flies to Yucatan in search of her mother and the secrets of both their pasts.

The novel's powerful fantasy element lies in the intrusion of a ritualistic past into Elizabeth's, and later Diane's, experience in the form of usually shadowy, sometimes seemingly substantial, revenants from the thousand-year-distant period of Maya/Toltec conflict. Elizabeth sees them, just as she saw the shades of long-dead Californian Indians on the Berkeley campus. Their messages of fate and their calls for sacrifice both parallel and challenge the psychological pressures of the two twentieth century protagonists, who are probing their own past along with that of the artefacts and skeletons they exhume. The reader recognises these 'ghosts' as hallucinatory projections, but their interactions with events and landscape, and with the Mexican cultural present, are so graphically depicted that it is not difficult, empathising with mother and daughter, to imagine them veridical.

First person narrative changes from mother to daughter in alternate chapters. These occasionally give place to notes for Elizabeth's book, City of Stones which provide briefings on such vitally relevant matters as the Maya cyclic calendar, thus freeing the story to develop its own compelling momentum towards terrifying climax and effective catharsis.

Richard Burns - - - - - KHALINDAINE
(Unwin, 1988, 268pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

The empress of Khalindaine is dying and her cousins, the Gyr Orland and the Gros of Weir, plot to take the kingdom by disposing of her illegitimate son. Since all they know about him is that he is sixteen or seventeen and the adopted son of a fur-trader, confusion and tension arise when three such characters are

revealed. To add cliché to confusion, only the true heir can defeat an army of the inhuman Agaskan!

The novel does have its flaws. It is obvious from the beginning the one the cousins suspect is the heir is not, but clever narrative technique keeps the identity of the real heir a mystery until the end. Burns also occasionally reduced the story to cliché, and his female characters are given surprisingly short shrift. These two faults are most strongly revealed in the denouement when Lara, the chief female protagonist, is expected to wed the true heir, despite recently witnessing the death of her loved one and having more in common with her other companions.

KHALINDAINE is compulsive reading, but the pace is set at the cost of the characterisation. I felt little sympathy for the good guys even when nasty things happened to them. However, this is a first novel, and because of its intelligence and wit, a real joy to receive. Richard Burns is a name to watch for in the future.

Judith Tarr - - - - - THE HOUNDS OF GOD
(Corgi, 1988, 363pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The 'Hound and the Falcon' trilogy is brought to a fittingly poignant close as the elf-monk Alfred is forced to face an old enemy. The Church's inquisitors swoop on the elven kingdom of Rhiyana and Alf's lover Thea - who has just given birth to their two children - is abducted. Behind this standard genre plot is a fascinating theological debate dramatised with vivid power. There are many books which bring to life the Elves/Fair Folk and the speculation concerning whether such beings had souls was, apparently, a live issue among medieval theologians. Judith Tarr makes her characters real and her medieval background (certainly to a layman like me) authentic and writes very well. Consequently the speculation becomes a genuine and necessary one and its consequences potentially tragic.

One fantasy trilogy I can unreservedly recommend.

Simon Hawke - - - - - THE PIMPERNEL PLOT
(Headline, 1987, 211p, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This is the third in the Timewars series. The research concerning the France of the Revolution is good, and the introduction of Blakeney and other characters from Baroness Orczy's immortal adventure yarns was an inspiration. The time travellers, with names like Delaney, Priest and Lucas are less realistically drawn than the other fictional folk; but it is a well written adventure yarn with a limited amount of mind-boggling temporal physics. I wonder if the series is by a number of writers using the house-name Hawke and that the allusions to SF writers is intentional: the deceptively easy writing style reminded me of Priest or Holdstock...? The storyline? Simply put, an interfering time traveller killed off Blakeney before he could actually become the Scarlet Pimpernel! Our heroes have to impersonate the deceased hero and ensure that 'history' continues on its intended course... One of the greatest problems with this kind of storyline is that any emotional involvement can be negated by timejumping or utilising 27th century technology to impart memory loss: reader-involvement is diminished as a result. But recommended as a good, intelligently written read with fond echoes of the Orczy books.

Pamela Zoline - - BUSY ABOUT THE TREE OF LIFE
(Women's Press, 1988, 187pp,
£4.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Each of the five works in this collection is an assembly of short sections of writing - a paragraph, a line, a couple of pages - exploring the associations of a core image or idea.

'Busy about the Tree of Life', the only previously unpublished work, is framed by two views of Gabriel, a blond boy-child raised in a walled garden under constant observation. The central sections describe Gabriel's family tree from great-great-grandparents on, a catalogue of conceptions in bizarre circumstances, unusual lives, and disasters in which the parent dies and the child is (miraculously?) saved. It reads like a New Testament Infancy Narrative, the 'begats' of a child who embodies an unclear Messianic Hope. The story closes with Gabriel's brief disappearance and reappearance; shadow of a death and resurrection?

'The Heat Death of the Universe' is perhaps Zoline's best-known work, a classic study of domestic/universal despair. The Macrocosm tends towards disorder, so does Sarah Boyle's circumscribed world, the Housewife Trap from which madness, a personal disintegration into chaos, is the only exit.

'The Holland of the Mind' examines the intricate associations of a cluster of images, incidents, relationships and objects: sex, flowers, canals/water, an American couple and their child in Amsterdam, tulip fields, Dutch painting, the sea, sex, mortality, the finger in the dyke, unsatisfied hunger, cut flowers dying, photographs of water... the narrative and associative threads intertwine to create a complex non-linear whole.

'Instructions for Exiting This Building in Case of Fire' is in some ways the simplest story in the collection. It describes an attempt to prevent global war by kidnapping large numbers of children and relocating them in 'enemy' countries, thus destroying the simplistic concept of 'enemies' as baddies, fit only for destruction.

'Sheep' is a mosaic or network of pure dream-logic. Starting points are the fact that adult sheep do not dream, 'counting sheep' jumping over the fence as a sleep-inducing mental exercise, the literary form of the Arcadian shepherd-pastoral, and the conflict between shepherds and cowboys in the American West. It's a piece about borders, boundaries, pursuit and capture, masks, deceit, sex and death.

Reading this book, I found that I needed to give Zoline's work time to be absorbed before it would nourish me, time to sink down before the dreams dreamed themselves through me. Now I see a wealth of connection and meaning in each piece. BUSY ABOUT THE TREE OF LIFE is not easy reading, but neither is it inaccessible. I am glad to have read it, and I strongly recommend the stories as subjects for meditative reflection.

S.P. Somtow - - THE SHATTERED HORSE (Headline,
1988, 464pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The Trojan War has had almost as many significances as retellers of the legend. S.P. Somtow (better known to SF fans as Somtow Sucharitkul) has seen it as the sunset of the Bronze Age and the dawn of the Iron, and in this story of Astyanax, son of the Trojan hero Hector and King of the shattered ruins which are now Troy we have an epic of two versions of reality.

Magic is opposed by rationality, the worship of Snakemother by that of Skyfather. The glory of the Trojan War is relived and parodied as Astyanax lives out his mythic role, along with other legendary figures caught up in Fate's tangled web. But is the simple duality suggested above the real conflict, or (as Astyanax comes to suspect) is it itself made irrelevant by the new age?

Other influences - from Mary Renault's novels to Robert Graves' poetic theories to Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' are apparent here, but Somtow has created his own version of these wonderful and dangerous myths. Only at the very end does the tone falter with some arch wordplay concerning some (to us) well-known names, although Orestes, torn between the twin impossibilities of revenge and matricide, is perhaps rather too obviously a Hamlet-figure. For the most part, THE SHATTERED HORSE is an unusual mixture of symbolic re-creation and bizarre reference to Bronze Age cults based upon some of the greatest stories of all time. The Illiad means much to me, but even so I think I would have enjoyed this book anyway.

Dilwyn Horvat - - OPERATION TITAN (Lion, 1983
rpr 1987, 125pp, £1.75)

ASSAULT ON OMEGA 4 (Lion,
1986, 128pp, £1.50)

Fay Sampson - - SHAPE-SHIFTER (Lion, 1988,
126pp, £1.95); PANGUR BAN
(Lion, 1983 repr. 1986,
124 pp, £1.50); FINNGLAS OF
THE HORSES (Lion, 1985, 112
pp, £1.50); FINNGLAS AND
THE STONES OF CHOOSING
(Lion, 1986, 128pp, £1.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Lion Books are publishers of fairly evangelical Christian material, of very mixed quality. The Horvat books are 'Star Wars' clones with Empire (Bad) versus Church (Good). Their run-of-the-mill plots are distinguished only by their god-centredness. The only real distinction between goodies and baddies is that the goodies pray a lot and carry out the will of god, but then a lot of outright villains could claim that. The only faintly interesting character is the saved-at-the-end bounty hunter Devo in the second volume, and there is even a genuine miracle at the climax of each book. What else can you do but cheer on the Empire?

Is the fantasy mode any different? PANGUR BAN is in fact a delight, first because it has a really meaty story - the cat Pangur Ban is inadvertently responsible for Niall the monk slaying his friend Martin in a fit of misdirected rage. The princess Finnglas tries to avenge her brother, but the result is the death of her favourite horse. Each character has to atone for their actions, and the second plus is the strong but convincing moral sense which arises naturally from the plot.

PANGUR BAN was justly shortlisted for the 1984 Guardian Children's Book Award, although the climax of the book does perhaps owe overmuch to that of C.S. Lewis's THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE and the existence of an Aslan-like 'symbolic Christ' in a world (based on Celtic Britain) in which Christianity already exists seems theologically dubious. Fay Sampson creates good characters and writes their stories well. There are further moral testings in the succeeding volumes, while SHAPE-SHIFTER, the latest in the series,

is a prequel showing how Pangur came to be the Abbey cat. The monks, including a younger Niall, face witchcraft and a newborn white kitten is a central part of the witches' spell. Based upon traditional folklore of transformation in which the kitten here becomes a hare pursued by a hound, a trout pursued by an otter, etc., the story is simple and effective, with the ring and resonance of an old ballad.

Greg Bear - - HEGIRA (VGSF, 1987, 222pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

Greg Bear's first novel, originally published in 1979 but revised for this first British publication, has all the hallmarks that have become familiar in his later work. First, as in EON, there is the obsession with size; Hegira is 249,000 kilometers in diameter, with a circumference of about 780,000 kilometers. Dotting the surface of this vast planet are obelisks 1,000 kilometers high. Then there is the concern with revelation, with the discovery of great knowledge from an alien or ancient source. The obelisks are engraved with all the knowledge of the First Born, and the technological and social heights scaled by the various civilisations of Hegira are just that, measured by how high up the flanks of the obelisks they are able to climb. Finally, there is the over-riding belief in the end of things. In BLOOD MUSIC, EON, and THE FORGE OF GOD this was explicitly millenarian, linking his visions of doom to the turn of the millenium. In HEGIRA the scale is broader, but the awe-inspiring appearance of the stars in a previously starless sky, the fall of the obelisks, the death and destruction that punctuate the novel's central odyssey, all presage some greater end, which is revealed when his travellers reach the great wall that divides the entire world. We are talking about the end of the universe, no less, but typically with the promise of racial survival, of continuation, if we accept transformation.

Bear's strengths lie in his visualisation of his world, in the fluid ease with which he handles ideas, in the vigour with which he handles the mechanics both of his creation and of his plot. If his characters tend to be somewhat routinely drawn figures there simply to serve the purpose of humanising the ideas, then he can still generate enough excitement to make the hard core SF fan sit back with breathless admiration.

Tony Richards - - THE HARVEST BRIDE (Headline, 1988, 279pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Because both books deal with Kali and the Thuggee cult, this might be overshadowed by K. Dan Simmonds' SONG OF KALI, but Tony Richards' first novel is altogether different, a tough thriller reminiscent of the Fu Manchu books with a boozy American journalist caught in a series of apparent suicides of former colleagues. As London's streets flame with riots, Auden tries to understand the significance of his memories of Vietnam. There's a quest for a lost talisman and vicious conflict among London's Vietnamese community while the trail leads to a reincarnation of the goddess of death. I actually preferred this to SONG OF KALI: it's not a horror-fantasy in the same way, more a traditional pageturner in a contemporary setting with a dash of the occult. Positively reeks of suspense - you can hear those resounding chords at the end of every chapter!

Lisa Tuttle - - - - - GABRIEL
(Sphere, 1987, 216pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by David V Barrett)

I find this one very difficult to review. What I've read of Lisa Tuttle's work I've really enjoyed, particularly A SPACESHIP BUILT OF STONE and FAMILIAR SPIRIT, and I found GABRIEL compulsive reading; but...

Ten years ago Dinah's husband Gabriel threw himself off an apartment balcony and died. Now she moves back to New Orleans, where they had lived, and meets Ben, a child of about nine who looks like Gabriel, calls himself Gabriel, knows things about Gabriel, and herself, that he couldn't be expected to know - and is in love with her in a very adult way.

Is Ben a reincarnation of Gabriel? Or possessed by Gabriel? Does he really believe he *is* Gabriel, or is he tricking himself and Dinah? What does *she* believe? Does she want Ben to be Gabriel? Do she still love Gabriel through Ben? Does she love Ben as Ben, a child young enough to be her own, or as Gabriel, adult, lover, dead husband? How do I, the reader, cope with the love between Dinah and Ben/Gabriel?

This is the problem. This is why, compulsive reading or not, I didn't like this book. It made me feel uneasy, unclear; there is something unwholesome about the whole thing. Because Lisa Tuttle is so skilled at reaching into the hidden parts of my psyche, the distaste I feel at the Dinah-Ben/Gabriel relationship gets turned inwards, in the same way as the current publicity about child sexual abuse is making many adults feel troubled about the fondness they might have for a child.

But I cannot deny that the book is well-written, compelling and fascinating, partly for the development of the relationship, and partly for the depth of Tuttle's insight:

I could remember how Gabriel had seemed to me, and how I had felt about him, but what had seemed romantic then... would simply turn me off today...

...Maybe it wasn't Gabriel I really missed, but my own younger self. I missed the way I had loved him, and the person he had loved, and the endless possibilities life had held for her.

I didn't like my life now...

Lisa Tuttle's stories disturb because she isn't afraid to tackle emotional and psychological areas most writers shy away from. GABRIEL is good, damn good - but I don't like it.

Gordon R. Dickson - - - - - WAY OF THE PILGRIM
(Sphere, 1987, 529pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This book is double the length it needs to be for the amount of story it has to tell. It is sprawling, verbose and becomes very dull to read.

The story takes place on Earth not far into the future, after the planet has been taken over by the Aalaag, humanoid giants with a technology far in advance of Earth, so far that they regard humanity as cattle, call them beasts, and use them as domestic animals. One of these 'beasts', Shane Evert, a linguist, one of the very few able to speak Aalaag fluently, is much favoured by his master, the head of the Aalaag.

On a mission for his master he witnesses an execution, he scrawls the symbol of a pilgrim on the wall; a symbol which becomes a

potent symbol of rebellion, as later on he will himself become The Pilgrim and the leader of the resistance against the aliens.

All of this has some possibilities for a fairly ripping yarn, very few of which are realised. The plot, if aided by good writing and adequate characterisation, might have made a decent book, but the characterisation is poor, none of them has a spark of life and all Shane's internal agonising is extremely unconvincing, while the writing itself is dull and repetitive. I have read many worse, it does have a certain competence, but no flair or originality. I can't recommend it.

Patricia Geary - - - - - LIVING IN ETHER
(Bantam, 1987, 214pp, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

LIVING IN ETHER doesn't rely on plot to keep you turning the pages. It feels like a privilege to peep in at, medium, Deirdre Gage's life. Customers come and go and she keeps herself to herself most of the time. An enigmatic male customer arrives on the scene trying to contact a Japanese novelist who died by a bizarre suicide. He makes a profound influence on her but she can't make her mind up whether it is attraction or revulsion. Interspersed throughout the novel are flashbacks to her, in some ways, rather unpleasant childhood. In these episodes her brother Robert is still alive. By the time of the later episodes he is long dead and has taken to tormenting Deirdre with cryptic messages. He progresses to the odd act of sabotage, eventually interfering with Deirdre's life to such an extent that she has to abandon her routine and look for ways of solving her problem.

Always, there is an air of anticipation as to what will happen next. I didn't see the finale coming but it is the perfect end to a compelling book.

Alan Dean Foster - - - - - SENTENCED TO PRISM
(NEL, 1988, 273pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

Prism is a world where silicon based lifeforms are dominant, although they coexist with carbon based ones (I have no idea if this is feasible). Evan Orgell is sent to Prism to see what has happened to the survey team left there by his Company. His only help is Mobile Hostile World suit which can do almost anything - except survive on Prism, its designers not having the cunning of the life forms on that world.

Evan abandons his suit and with the help of a local silicon scout called Azure (they all speak telepathically of course) not only lives but is introduced to an Associative - a collection of intelligent specialist beings - who adopt him quite happily. They then set off to find the sole remaining human survivor and uncover the truth of what became of the rest of the survey team.

Bits of this book are quite clever, the silicon beasts are inventive, and the world well enough thought out, but the rest of the plot is unoriginal and the writing less than exciting. The main problem is Evan himself, whose transformation from self-centred prig to unselfish altruist is too far-fetched to be credible, and as his point of view is also that of the reader the whole story lacks conviction. It has its moments, the pun of the title is amusing, but at best the book is average, no more.

Jack Vance - - - - - ARAMINTA STATION
(NEL, 1988, 480pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

This is one of those great 'trade' paperbacks, with large type that will photocopy down later on to make a normal-size book. As so frequently these days, it's to be a trilogy, but at least it stands pretty well in its own right as a readable, enjoyable but somewhat longwinded story.

You have to take it easy, especially at the start when the scene-setting involves a lot of names and places. Then we're off into plot and counterplot, a veritable Sherlock Holmes of a plot in fact.

Vance's speciality is the creation of totally believable worlds and future societies, in which all the actions of the protagonists are explicable in terms of the creation - if not from the viewpoint of mankind today. But as so often, Vance fails by attributing to everyone the simplest and most ignoble of motives, as though the grand spread of mankind throughout the galaxy had left us all with late-19th-century hangups and a relish for the typical Vance static society with its rituals, its simplicities and its basically stupid officials, its inward-looking village hierarchies and its interminable preoccupation with minutiae of status and dress.

Then, too, there's the steady measured tread of Vance's speech forms, echoed by all the characters and augmented by an equally measured and imperturbable literary style when events are described. Yes, we are taken among strange peoples and across unimaginable depths of space, yet we are left with the feeling that it could all have happened in someone's English country garden, and we remain as untouched by violence and death as the very people he delineates with such skill and lack of inspiration.

Don't get me wrong: this is an enjoyable if undemanding read - but the inertia militates against that thrill of absorption and involvement that made early Vance books so gripping. Like so much of modern American SF: there are just too many words.

C.J. Cherryh - - - - - THE KIF STRIKE BACK
(Methuen, 1988, 299pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

This is the second book of a trilogy and one of four books detailing the adventures of the lion-like race of Hani. Cherryh links her stories together by setting them all in the same future history and this book is the tenth novel from the same series. THE KIF contains a map, a resume of the plot and lots of unpronounceable names like Sikkukktin. The book is almost entirely composed of dialogue which keeps the narrative moving despite a tremendously complex plot.

Unfortunately the characters, despite the silly names, show little sign of being anything other than humans with manes and tails. The to-be-continued tag at the conclusion leads me to recommend that Cherryh fans buy the whole trilogy when it is released, since the author herself admits that this is one story split into three, and not three linked but separate novels. Anyone interested in exploring Ms Cherryh's universe should be directed to her Hugo winning DOWNBELOW STATION and leave this undemanding trilogy to her loyal fans.

John James -- NO! FOR ALL THE GOLD IN IRELAND
(Bantam, 1988. 348pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by David V Barrett)

If I'd read this before VOTAN (*PI71*) I'd have been bowled over; but like most sequels it has to live in the shadow of its forerunner.

Photinus the Greek, fresh from his travels through Europe as Votan, the Germanic/Norse god, takes the name Mannanan as he travels through Britain and Ireland in his quest to gain a monopoly on the gold trade with Ireland.

In a story very loosely based on one of the tales of the Mabinogion, Mannanan makes shoddy shoes, shields and saddles with his companion Pryderi, sups merrily with both Roman soldiers and British fighters, matches wits several times with Gwawl, sees the God, the Muse, the Awen come upon his scruffy mate Taliesin the Druid, meets and marries Rhiannon... and all this (and much, much more) before he even sets foot on the Island of the Blessed. Where things don't go quite according to plan...

Like VOTAN, this book is an irreverent romp through 2nd century AD history and legend, and where one starts and the other leaves off, or where the author casts both aside and lets his imagination run wild, is never easy to spot and doesn't matter a fig anyway. John James knows his period, and knows how to have fun with it.

If you don't like your myths mucked about with, don't read this book. But if you like a book that has you chuckling throughout, and laughing aloud in places, well — I wouldn't have missed it, not for all the gold in Ireland.

Ben Bova - - - - - ESCAPE PLUS
(Methuen, 1988, 285pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Another misleadingly packaged anthology disguised as a novel, containing one 90 page novella and ten short stories.

The novella is 'Escape!' concerning a rebellious youth who attempts to break out of a computerized reform centre but eventually resigns himself to his punishment. This story provides an interesting contrast with ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, here the protagonist is broken down by the system and thereby becomes fit to re-enter society. In Bova's staunchly conservative world this is seen as a triumph for the Liberal Ideal!

The stories collected here, covering a span of two decades, suffer from an overdose of conformity. Even his attempt at a groundbreaking story for Ellison's DANGEROUS VISIONS, featured here but rejected for that anthology, lacks the potency that its inherently subversive message requires. Bova's ability to sketch a believable future finds better employment in his epic novels like COLONY.

If you see science fiction as essentially a medium for crystal ball gazing, then you can enjoy picking out the predictions from these stories which have since come true, although Bova is not slow to point out his successes in his slightly self-laudatory forewords. Ben Bova has done commendable and important work as an editor and the worst thing I can say about these stories is that they lack imagination but in science fiction that is the worst thing.

Freda Warrington - - A BLACKBIRD IN AMBER
(N.E.L., 1988, 437pp,
£3.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

Oh dear, this is a sequel to the second book A BLACKBIRD IN DARKNESS which actually had all the plot details apparently sewn up; the latter had been a satisfying conclusion to a two-book fantasy epic. But, inevitably, Freda has been inveigled into writing at least two more books - TWILIGHT follows this one.

The story takes place 25 years after the events in the last book. Briefly, Ashurek and Silvren are encountered; but the story is of their daughter, Mellorn who enters Earth to investigate the state of Gorethria. The title is something of a misnomer, for the blackbird Miril is not seen, barely mentioned.

The most interesting character is the evil Duke Xaedrek, ruler of Gorethria. He is attempting to regain the lost dark powers and is employing the demon Ahag-Ga, the only survivor after the death of the great serpent M'gulfn. He seems thoroughly vile, determined the further the cause of the empire at any cost, to make Gorethria great again; yet, strangely, he balks at some of the unspeakable practices of Ahag-Ga. His gradual adoption of dark powers is interesting, vying with Mellorn renamed Melkavesh whose own sorcerous powers are oddly muted whilst on Earth.

There is a love interest, though the lovers are obviously star-crossed and at the end of this book they do not find each other. Coincidences abound, after the Edgar Rice Burroughs fashion; the Guardians have their hand in events thus manipulating people and denying the characters much reader interest. Melkavesh is a powerful young wilful lady who has been delineated well; she and Xaedrek are well-drawn, yes, but the others less-so. This is nevertheless an interesting story, though annoyingly incomplete and there are a number of visually arresting scenes, a few quite grotesque ones too: in fact, not for the squeamish. At least the writer was not trying to be precious, she was simply telling a story, unlike some other fantasy writers! And in this task she has succeeded. If you've read the previous volumes, then this is recommended; if not, then you could begin here with no problem.

Loren J. MacGregor - - - - - THE NET
(Ace, 1987, 225pp, \$2.95)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

First off, fabulously wealthy Jason Horiuchi meets up with Alecko Papandreou, son of her biggest industrial rival. He challenges her to steal a ruby from his heavily guarded museum. She cannot resist this illicit challenge but takes her time going about it. She meets up with a couple of old friends on the backwater planet nearly all the action takes place on, then the reader is subjected to an extremely slow build-up. This, at least, gives the author plenty of time to characterize half-a-dozen characters but also to somewhat over-indulge in description. I have to admit that I found this middle bit of the sandwich quite boring. The net turns out to be a sort of artificially created hive-mind using the senses to cut down on the necessary crew for the inevitable FTL jiggery-pokery. Each crew member contributes a sense and the captain controls the result. After a few setbacks Jason decides to go through with the challenge with vengeance in mind. In many ways it soars above the average for space opera but I expected more from #8 in the Ace Science Fiction Special Series.

Leo A. Frankowski - - COPERNICK'S REBELLION
(Del Rey, 1987, 202pp,
£2.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

I first encountered the author in his identically priced and published THE CROSS-TIME ENGINEER, Book One of the Adventures of Conrad Stargard, which I found fascinating because it showed an honest grasp of history, a strong plotting line, believable adventures and just as much pseudo-science as a 'historical' time-travel novel needs. Waiting for the two subsequent parts, I discovered the present book which is quite different.

In part it is sheer farce, in part almost believable near-future history. We have tree-houses, we have a somewhat mad inventor, we have power politics, a bit of psychology and sociology ('For thousands of years the doctors have been helping the weak to survive while the politicians have been sending the healthiest young men out to be killed in wars'.) and a plot that still managed to keep me up till 1.30 a.m. to reach the denouement - yes, it could have gone either way.

The best, or worst, thing about this book is that it crams into its short length enough plot, and enough scientific ideas, to fill the normal trilogy. A pity - Frankowski could have tripled his income had he followed the example of his still-tautly-written earlier work, and I for one would not have complained.

When you are in the mood for relaxation and fun, do try this book - the author's tongue must be half-way through his cheek by now, yet you are still left with things to ponder.

D.G. Compton - - RADIO PLAYS (Kerosina, 1988,
62pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

It came as some surprise to me that D.G. Compton - whose thoughtful, literate SF novels such as THE CONTINUOUS KATHERINE MORTENHOE I've long admired - is the author of twenty-odd radio plays. Kerosina Books (27 Hampton Rd Worcester Park, Surrey, KT4 8EU, in case you have difficulty getting hold of this) have printed two of these plays for distribution with the special editions of SCUDDER'S GAME, Compton's new novel, but this paperback edition is also available separately.

The radio play is nowadays a minority art, but it has its own distinct strengths, notably the fusion of dramatic representation - actual voices in dialogue, sound effects, with print's appeal to the reader's imagination. Anything can happen, and in particular the line between reality and fantasy can be effectively blurred. Both plays here - 'A Turning Off the Minch Park Road' and 'Time Exposure' could only really work on radio. In the first, a suburban commuter returns home after a day at the office. Only it's the wrong home. And he can't actually remember where it should be. After all, when lives are governed by the workaday routine down to identical conversations with the lavatory attendant, what's the difference between them? The second play 'replays' a turning point in the life of an elderly spinster: the pivot is a photograph of a departing lover and the implications of that scene are examined through Henrietta's conversations with Flora and 'Bamford'.

Each play is structured around a slight element of the Fantastic, making its point through the faintly surreal workings of the mind; each is a comedy, but of the wry, almost painful kind offering insights as much as guffaws. They are the work of a very fine writer and - to fans of his SF - offer an interesting addition to his published work, of which we currently have far too little.



Sarah Lefanu: IN THE CHINKS OF THE WORLD MACHINE:
FEMINISM AND SCIENCE FICTION
(Women Press, 1988, 231 pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

"What women do is survive. We live by ones and twos in the chinks of your world machine", explains Ruth in Tiptree's story "The Women Men Don't See". This book is about how some women have survived in the male world-machine, and helped others to survive, by writing sf. It explains, perhaps largely to non sf-addicts and presumably largely to women, how sf is the ideal medium for feminists, since (as we all know) it allows for the total dissolution of the normal conventions of society, and even of that society's male-dominated language and literary assumptions. But if a male member of the BSFA such as myself was not intended as the primary audience of the book, there is no doubt that I learn a very great deal from it. It is the only book-length guide to feminist sf (much of it, of course, now available in the Women's Press sf series, which Sarah Lefanu edits); it is highly readable, containing much valuable comment, not only on the four writers who figure in Part Two (Tiptree, Charnas, Le Guin and Russ), but also on many other women writers and, indeed on the nature of sf itself. And compared to the only other two original and important critical works on sf to appear in the UK in recent years (Greenland's *Entropy Exhibition* and Stableford's *Scientific Romance in Britain*) it has the fire and relevance of being about a movement that is still going on.

Arising out of a living movement brings its problems too. Some readers, while admiring for instance the devastating dissection of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Ruins of Isis* as an anti-feminist work, might well wonder about the validity of a literary approach whose main criterion is that of political correctness. Male readers may well feel excluded when they find that they are totally barred from the possibility of ever being correct: Lefanu excludes even Delany from the small band of feminist writers, though Joanna Russ (who otherwise can do no wrong) would be prepared to admit him. Perhaps all I am doing is wondering (with Brian Stableford, whose worries I am going to publish in the "Forum" section of *Foundation* 43, in the summer) what the male response to this book is supposed to be. I don't think Sarah Lefanu worries about this, however, and, for the most part, while reading the book, neither did I. I just delighted in the wit and in the wealth of insights, made notes of books to read or reread, and got new awareness into why Tiptree and Russ are two of my favourite authors.

Chris Beebe - - THE HUB (Orbit, 1988, 249pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

Is this cyberpunk or an SF adventure with glitter and sex? Who cares? You gotta have the pigeon hole, you gotta have a deaf, deaf, definition. Get the idea?

There's an adventure story in here but intermixed with flash. The purpose is to give an atmosphere, a feel of this high tech, information filled world where the 'leisured classes' are stacked in the stacks, apathied. And out at L5 on the Cipola space station the New Society strives to become more than a name.

Time for the plot. There are three strands. Strand one: Frank Turner reclaims people who've been sucked into the various weird sects which abound. Frank finds he's suffering from organ implosion, the latest disease to replace those we've conquered. It certainly changes his view of life and the way he plans to treat his next 'client'. But plans have a way of being changed.

Strand two: The Pranksters, an anarcho-terrorist group, have got their hands on a Modell Conjecture probe, which opens any and all information doors.

Strand three: out in space at Cipola's hub there's a strange gas cloud coming.

Naturally all the strands come together and the world is saved, maybe.

The story is actually pretty straightforward; it's the form which is interesting. Apart from the cyberpunk trappings each chapter has a date/time/place header (I kept thinking of 'Captain's log, stardate...') and a quote from sources as various as THE MABINOGION, Sonny Boy Williamson, and 'New Riders of the Purple Wage'.

And to explain some of the background there are indented bits like this.

I kept thinking of John Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR, not that THE HUB is anywhere near as good but it has many of the same trappings.



F.M. Busby - - THE ALIEN DEBT (Orbit, 1988, 226pp, £2.95)

Another story about a war caused by an accidental misunderstanding between species, which is stopped by a youngster from each side. Has a particularly tedious tramp through jungle and swamp. The aliens are distinguished in dialogue by taking a normal sentence and swapping the words around. (Brian Magorrian)

L. Sprague de Camp - - THE CLOCKS OF IRAZ (Grafton, 1988, 191pp, £2.50)

Sequel to THE GOBLIN TOWER, with Jorian, the 'reluctant King' caught in more tangles before he can rescue his wife from Xylar. Slight stuff with witty digressions from the storyline making more amusing than it would seem at first glance. (Andy Sawyer)

Garry Douglas - - THE STREET (Grafton, 1988, 236pp, £2.95)

A suburban street with a malevolent will of its own and a coven of Satanists in high places feature in this rather predictable horror story. (Andy Sawyer)

Stephen Gallagher - - VALLEY OF LIGHTS (N.E.L., 1988, 191pp, £1.95)

Excellent crime-horror fusion in which a traditionally hard-bitten Arizonan cop comes across brain-dead but still breathing bodies, and discovers a link between them and a series of brutal murders. Builds to a spinechilling duel between Volchak and a convincingly ageless predator. (Andy Sawyer)

Monica Hughes - - THE DREAM CATCHER (Magnet, 1988, 171pp, £1.95)

Sequel to DEVIL ON MY BACK, by one of the top children's SF writers. Ruth, of the enclosed community of Ark Three, picks up telepathic messages from Ark One, perverted into a master-slave society. The final conflict lacks tension, but the initial picture of misfit Ruth and her 'rogue' Esper gifts is good, though it's a stock situation with this author. (Andy Sawyer)

Angus McAllister - - THE KRUGG SYNDROME (Grafton, 1988, 218pp, £2.50)

When Arthur Montrose wakes up after a mysterious illness he discovers that he is, in fact, the vanguard of an alien invasion. Set against a well-drawn background of seedy bedsits and a decaying solicitor's office, THE KRUGG SYNDROME combines a send-up of the 'alien invaders' genre with a convincing picture of Glasgow in the 1960s. Entertaining. (Steven Tew)

J.F. Rivkin - - WEB OF WIND (Orbit, 1988, 202pp, £2.95)

The sequel to SILVERGLASS, which I haven't read, but this didn't affect my enjoyment of a reasonably interesting fantasy remarkable only in that the butch warrior, Corson, is a woman. The plot consists of the searches of Corson and Nyctasia, an exiled sorceress for a 'fantastic treasure'. (Brian Magorrian)

Michael Scott - - DEMON'S LAW: TALES OF THE BARD II (Sphere, 1988, 294pp, £3.99)

Middle volume of a trilogy by an editor of a collection of Irish folk and fairy tales. Their influence is strong in this doom-laden epic. Paedur the Bard, champion of the Old Faith against the New Religion stalks the Plane of Death and fights gods and men, while the Weapon Master masterminds a parallel conflict to help a usurper gain a throne. 'Hard epic fantasy' is perhaps the label; certainly somewhat above the run of the mill. (Andy Sawyer)

Sheri s. Tepper - - THE BONES (Corgi, 1988, 238pp, £2.95)

A predictable horror yarn, a la Stephen King in which reluctant witch Mahlia Ettison tackles a family of immortals and their voodoo magic. Ms Tepper has a clean, competent style but this sequel to her earlier book, BLOOD HERITAGE, is sadly maimed by a wholly unoriginal plot, and redeemed only by excellent characterisation. (Laurence Scotford)

Jack Vance - - THE KILLING MACHINE (Grafton, 1988, 206pp, £2.50)

Reprint of vol. 2 of the 'Demon Princes' series, this is in form a conventional space opera as Gerson tracks down another of the criminals who massacred his world, undergoing institutionalised kidnapping and finding a lost planet on the way. In style it's a baroque fantasy, full of terms like 'hormagaunt' and 'dnazd' and delightfully inventive background details which make it one of the most attractive works of this sub-genre. A welcome reprint. (Andy Sawyer)

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - DENNER'S WRECK (Avon, 1988, 199pp, £2.95)

Bredon the Hunter, descendant of Earth colonists stranded on the planet Denner's Wreck, discovers that the gods and goddesses of his primitive world are in fact human visitors from Terra, and becomes involved in their attempt to prevent one of their number building an interplanetary empire. Unexceptional and unconvincing rediscovery of long-lost colony yarn in which advanced technology is mistaken for supernatural powers. (Lynne Bispham)

Allen Wold - - V: THE CRIVIT EXPERIMENT (N.E.L., 1988, 181pp, £1.95)

The alien Visitors are breeding sand-dwelling life forms of unimaginable ferocity. But what is their purpose? Undemanding but adequate thriller (based on the TVSF series) which is not bad, but not original either. (Andy Sawyer)

"Upon the rack in print"

Interzone 23 (Spring 1988)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

A mixed bag of short stories in this issue, in terms of style and content rather than quality which is - I'm glad to say - high. Two of these take topical themes - violence in the case of Greg Egan's 'Scatter My Ashes', AIDS in David Brin's 'The Giving Plague' - as the basis for the story. Egan's is a powerful and (rightly) disturbing piece in which he examines the effect of media exposure of explicitly violent acts. Like his earlier IZ story, 'Mind Vampires', 'Scatter My Ashes' can make for unpleasant reading, but whereas the former was obscure in the latter Egan if anything over-explains his case. 'The Giving Plague' has an even higher death rate, albeit off-stage, as Brin details some possible successors to AIDS. It's almost, though not quite, a parody, taking as its theme the personalisation of viruses.

Paul J. McAuley has a talent for creating worlds which make you eager to explore them further. 'Karl and the Ogre' is at first glance a 'typical' fantasy, but tantalising clues that all is not typical (the ogre of the title wears manufactured shoes, for instance) lead on to the revelation that the story is actually in a near-future setting. Kim Newman's 'Famous Monsters', an autobiography of an alien film star, is also enjoyable. Newman has a sure comic touch and mixes film

stars and sf characters together delightfully. Back to the serious stuff, in 'Artefacts' by Christopher Evans an artist kills his mentor. No doubt about the how - but why? Evans skilfully tells us, both through clues at the beginning of the story and through the interrogation of the artist's wife. I liked the way Evans eschewed a 'clever' ending in favour of the one he used; the objets d'art in the story - chimeras, creations of the mind - are also appealing. S.M. Baxter's 'Something For Nothing' is the only weak story in this issue, a traditional sf space tale with very cardboard characters. (Tell me, can coffee percolate in zero-gee?)

Of note on the non-fiction side there is an informative interview with new rising star Karen Joy Fowler and Charles Platt gives a very personal account of the latter part of Alfred Bester's life. Whether or not you are a Bester fan the article makes for painful reading and alone makes this issue of IZ worth searching out.

ANALOG, APRIL 1988, and ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, APRIL and MAY 1988

Reviewed by Edward James

Analog has for many years had a penchant for stories with strong charismatic military leaders (many of Dickson's Dorsai stories first appeared there), and the April issue led with another of them, W.R.Thompson's "Second Contact". The military hero concerned is trying to bring some order back to a part of the States after a total collapse of civilisation following contact with an alien ship: the scenario is quite interesting, but the plot predictable, and the final dénouement implausible in the extreme. Much more effective as a story was Michael A. McCollum's "Man of the Renaissance", in which a charismatic hero (a doctor, on a military-style mission) is trying to bring some order back to a part of the States after a total collapse of civilisation, following... Almost as predictable as the Thompson, actually, but with more interesting characters, even if one of them does decide to end the story in good Campbellian style with a three-page lecture on history and technology.

The other stories were, sadly, hardly better. Two were gimmick stories: Rik Cook's "Seance", about a gadget which apparently got in touch with dead souls, and Shirley Weinland's "Chicken Little and the Acme Little Giant", not the first story Analog has published about the consequences of inventing cheap, self-contained power-plants. And the last was P.M.Fergusson's "I Ain't No Hero!", a snappy but unoriginal little yarn about the rescue of a crashed shuttle from the ocean floor. Dr Schmidt, the editor of Analog, reckoned when I met him in Brighton last summer that my comments on his magazine were unfair. Well, I'd like to like it (I've been reading it on and off for nearly thirty years), and there have indeed been some very good stories over the last few years. But recent stories rarely seem to have had any spark. All too often they are merely reruns or updates of stories that have appeared time and again already. Is Dr Schmidt rejecting good stories, or are good stories of nuts-and-bolts sf simply in short supply? If there are any writers of good old-fashioned classic-style sf out there in the BSFA, I strongly recommend you submit your stories to Analog. Surely you can do better than what we have had over the last year or so?

The contrast between the two mags can be seen when turning to the lead story in the April Asimov's: Walter Jon Williams's "Surfacing": some fifty pages, chock-full of intriguing ideas, some powerful writing, an interesting portrait of scientific obsession, a suitably enigmatic alien or two, all thrown together in something of a pot-pourri (as so often in Williams's stories), but providing more cerebral entertainment than the past six issues of Analog together. The protagonist is a marine biologist, who has imported some Earth whales to another planet in

the hopes they will communicate with the vast sea-creatures who live in the depths: a story full of wondrous implausibility that is actually told with conviction: who needs more?

The other longer stories were less good. Charles Sheffield yet again takes us to mysterious parts of Earth in the company of eccentrics, like a latter-day Rider Haggard, this time to "The Courts of Xanadu". Readable, but totally unconvincing. John Barnes's "Under the Covenant Stars" was a post-holocaust with a (slight) difference: the full holocaust had been diverted by the Canadians throwing up an enormous barrage of micro-junk into space, which destroyed most of the US and USSR missiles. The problem: how to get back into space again? Quite neat, but I'm not scientist enough to know whether the main premise is plausible. Last of the longer stories was Jack Dann's "Tea": a moving and effective tale about an old Nazi war-criminal living in the States, that had not the slightest tinge of sf or fantasy about it. Nor, indeed, did Pat Murphy's "Goodbye Cynthia", unless one chooses to interpret it so. However, the pick of the bunch in this issue were the real shorts: Rick Wilber's "Suffer the Children", in which we follow a patriot/terrorist as he follows his nasty course planning to free America from the (benevolent) aliens; and the sf poet Robert Frazier's first prose story, two perfect pages in which an interviewer learns about the realities of high-tech warfare. A lesser writer would have taken 20 pages over the basic idea; it takes a poet to distill the essence.

The May issue of *Asimov's* has (yet another) of the last stories by Tiptree: one she wrote ten years ago as Raccoona Sheldon, and never published (probably because of its very explicit sexual content). "The Earth Doth Like a Snake Renew" is about a young woman who, from childhood, was convinced that she had a special relationship with the Earth God, and was destined to mate with him. For a long time into the story we could be content with the idea that she was nuts — but then the omens start... For my money Tiptree was the most important sf talent of the '70s, and for the most part (with recent exceptions like "Yanqui Doodle") her work in the '80s was not so powerful. It is marvellous to know that there is vintage Tiptree coming out for the first time.

The Tiptree is not the only excellent story in this issue. Ulster author Ian McDonald (surely the brightest new British sf talent of the last five years), now busily publishing volumes in the States (but not here), offers "King of Morning, Queen of Day", a finely crafted story set in Ireland in 1909. It weaves an astronomer's discovery of what he interprets as an approaching space-craft with the faery visions of his daughter, told in a series of letters and extracts from diaries or reports that beautifully recapture the style of the period. Judith Moffett, currently hot property in the States, presents "The Hob", which is equally convincing: an American walker in the Yorkshire Moors comes across a group of dwarfish elf-like hobs. No, it's not fantasy, but sf, as we gradually learn. The Yorkshire background is surprisingly well-drawn (he said, writing this to the sound of York Minster's bells), and, if accurate, would, on internal evidence, date the events to between 1978 and 1984. (The heroine consults the Departments of Archaeology in York and Leeds: the former was founded in 1978, and the latter fell victim to Keith Joseph's Thatcherism in 1984...)

The cover story was Alexander Jablov's "Many Mansions", an amusing enough time-travel romp without an ounce of seriousness in it. The shorts consist of an Asimov "George and Azazel" story, and Lisa Goldstein's effective tale of a charismatic religious leader, "Follow the Master". And least, in terms of word-length, a thoughtful and amusing poem by Jane Yolen: "Sir John Mandeville's Report on the Griffin — Persia, Twelfth Century". All in all, an excellent issue: if you haven't tried *Asimov's* before, buy it (from, as I think Harry Harrison once said, all good specialist sf book shops and Andromeda). (That's a joke, Rog!)

CONTACT

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Some response to the comments on the reviews in last issue's 'Purgatory' column. First, ANDY MILLS:

"I think that the average word-count in PI gives the reader a reasonable picture of a book... if it's merely a case of having to say 'This is terrible' the review can be contained within a capsule, but other than that even a very positive review has to give the reader sufficient information to enable him or her to form their own opinion. Perhaps ones which could be omitted or summarised are those which deal with books already reviewed in other editions; I've noticed you've often done this. One the other hand, reviewers who take the opposite tack to previous reviews (in *Vector*, say) may wish for more space in which to develop their case... The editorials are important, especially if there is to be a letter column. Editorials can provide the basis for discussion perhaps better than the reviews themselves; I personally find that if I've already read a book under review it's probably been years back and I've largely forgotten it; likewise, it may be months before I get round to reading one which has been recommended, in which case it's rather too late to respond to the review."

JOHN BRUNNER writes this time with two corrections and an explanation: "Ask Christopher Ogden to read the books he reviews more carefully. Keith Winton edited Surprising Stories — not Startling — in the Fred Brown novel. The origin of cop/copper goes back to root c*p- take as in Latin capere (cf. captive) and relates to Cheapside, Chipping (Norton, Campden), Norrkoping etc., markets where one could get hold of things. Thanks for saying not enough of my work is in print — I agree and am taking steps — but, please, there is no word guage!" ((The typewriter has been taken outside and shot.))

PHIL NICHOLS comments on Colin Davies' covers for PI: "The dogged persistence of the book reader in all manner of bizarre settings is just beautiful! In real life, I've seen people read books in cars, trains, buses, while walking, eating — I even once saw someone read a book while riding a bicycle. I can quite believe in the reader depicted on the cover of PI 71, oblivious to the imitative aliens that surround him. But then, we know that our immediate surroundings are seldom as interesting as what we find between the cover covers of a good book."

Now KEN LAKE:

"It's not easy to distinguish between annoyance at an author for his ineptness, and annoyance because he uses perfectly acceptable practices that annoy you. But to review a book without mentioning (or even apparently knowing) that it's the second part of a trilogy cannot be right. Nor can complaining about an author who perforce uses an invented language because it is upon the distinctions between that invented language and one more easily accepted by mankind that the plot hinges.

It's not easy to review a book with which you are totally out of tune. Refusing to admit the fact is dishonest, for you lead the reader to believe your prejudices are value —

(Continued overleaf)

Index of books reviewed

ASIMOV, I./GREENBERG, M.H./WAUGH, C.	ENCOUNTERS (Headline)	p. 5
BEAR, G.	HEGIRA (Gollancz)	p. 9
BEEBEE, C.	THE HUB (Orbit)	p. 13
BISSON, T.	WYRLDMAKER (Headline)	p. 5
BOVA, B.	ESCAPE PLUS (Methuen)	p. 11
BURNS, R.	KHALINDAINE (Unwin)	p. 7
BUSBY, F.M.	THE ALIEN DEBT (Orbit)	p. 13
CHERRYH, C.J.	THE KIF STRIKE BACK (Methuen)	p. 10
COMPTON, D.G.	RADIO PLAYS (Kerosina)	p. 12
DE CAMP, L.S.	THE CLOCKS OF IRAZ (Grafton)	p. 13
DICKSON, G.R.	WAY OF THE PILGRIM (Sphere)	p. 9
DOUGLAS, G.	THE STREET (Grafton)	p. 13
FOSTER, A.D.	SENTENCED TO PRISM (N.E.L.)	p. 10
FRANKOWSKI, L.A.	COPERNICK'S REBELLION (Del Rey)	p. 12
GALLAGHER, S.	VALLEY OF LIGHTS (N.E.L.)	p. 3
GEARY, P.	LIVING IN ETHER (Bantam)	p. 10
HAWKE, S.	THE PIMPERNEL PLOT (Headline)	p. 7
HORVAT, D.	ASSAULT ON OMEGA 4 (Lion)	p. 8
HORVAT, D.	OPERATION TITAN (Lion)	p. 8
HUGHES, M.	THE DREAM CATCHER (Magnet)	p. 3
JAMES, J.	NOT FOR ALL THE GOLD IN IRELAND (Bantam)	p. 11
LEFANU, S.	IN THE CHINKS OF THE WORLD MACHINE (Women's Press)	p. 12
LEIGH, S.	THE BONES OF GOD (Headline)	p. 5
McALLISTER, A.	THE KRUGG SYNDROME (Grafton)	p. 13
McDONOUGH, T.R.	THE ARCHITECTS OF HYPERSPACE (Avon)	p. 6
McGREGOR, L.J.	THE NET (Ace)	p. 11
MURPHY, P.	THE FALLING WOMAN (Headline)	p. 7
RICHARDS, T.	THE HARVEST BRIDE (Headline)	p. 9
RIVKIN, J.F.	WEB OF WIND (Orbit)	p. 13
SAMPSON, F.	FINNGLAS OF THE HORSES (Lion)	p. 8
SAMPSON, F.	FINNGLAS & THE STONES OF CHOOSING (Lion)	p. 8
SAMPSON, F.	PANGUR BAN (Lion)	p. 8
SAMPSON, F.	SHAPE-SHIFTER (Lion)	p. 8
SCOTT, M.	DEMON'S LAW (Sphere)	p. 13
SHEFFIELD, C.	BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT (Headline)	p. 8
SOMTOW, S.P.	THE SHATTERED HORSE (Headline)	p. 8
SPINRAD, N.	BUG JACK BARRON (Grafton)	p. 3
STAPLEDON, O.	STAR MAKER (Penguin)	p. 3
TARR, J.	THE HOUNDS OF GOD (Corgi)	p. 7
TEPPER, S.	THE BONES (Corgi)	p. 13
TEVIS, W.	THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH (Abacus)	p. 5
TUTTLE, L.	GABRIEL (Sphere)	p. 9
VANCE, J.	ARAMINTA STATION (N.E.L.)	p. 10
VANCE, J.	THE KILLING MACHINE (Grafton)	p. 14
WARRINGTON, F.	A BLACKBIRD IN AMBER (N.E.L.)	p. 11
WATSON, I.	QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC (Grafton)	p. 4
WATT-EVANS, L.	DENNER'S WRECK (Avon)	p. 14
WOLD, A.	V: THE CRIVIT EXPERIMENT (NEL)	p. 14
ZOLINE, P.	BUSY ABOUT THE TREE OF LIFE (Women's Press)	p. 8

judgements he can share; admitting it and then still attacking the book is pointless because it's tautological and thus unhelpful - if I know you hate furry aliens, why should I accept your condemnation of the furry aliens in the book?

I have in the past returned books sent to me for review, because the philosophical, moral or emotional bases on which they were constructed were anathema to me, and because the whole consideration of the book's meaning and effectiveness HAD to be predicated upon acceptance of its 'givens'. I have reviewed other books with which I was not in tune, making it clear that I would restrict my comments to those aspects on which I felt safe to comment...

...Since everyone's pleasure's differ, all reviews are ultimately 'partial'...But if they actively mislead, or needlessly hide things

from the potential buyer, or attack the author for things which have to be integral to the development of the plot, then you betray the purpose of reviewing. I plead guilty to this on more than one occasion: how, then, do I suggest that the public be protected from my own and everyone else's partiality?

That's easy: the editor should have enough knowledge of the field to be able to spot gross errors and fatal bias in any review. To publish it then becomes an error of judgement on HIS part, and that's far less forgivable than the blindness of the reviewer. I've often thought it unfortunate that an editor cannot devote the space to give TWO reviews of every book that merits serious discussion. It does happen occasionally, and in every case I find the contrast and the off-setting prejudices enlightening and valuable!"