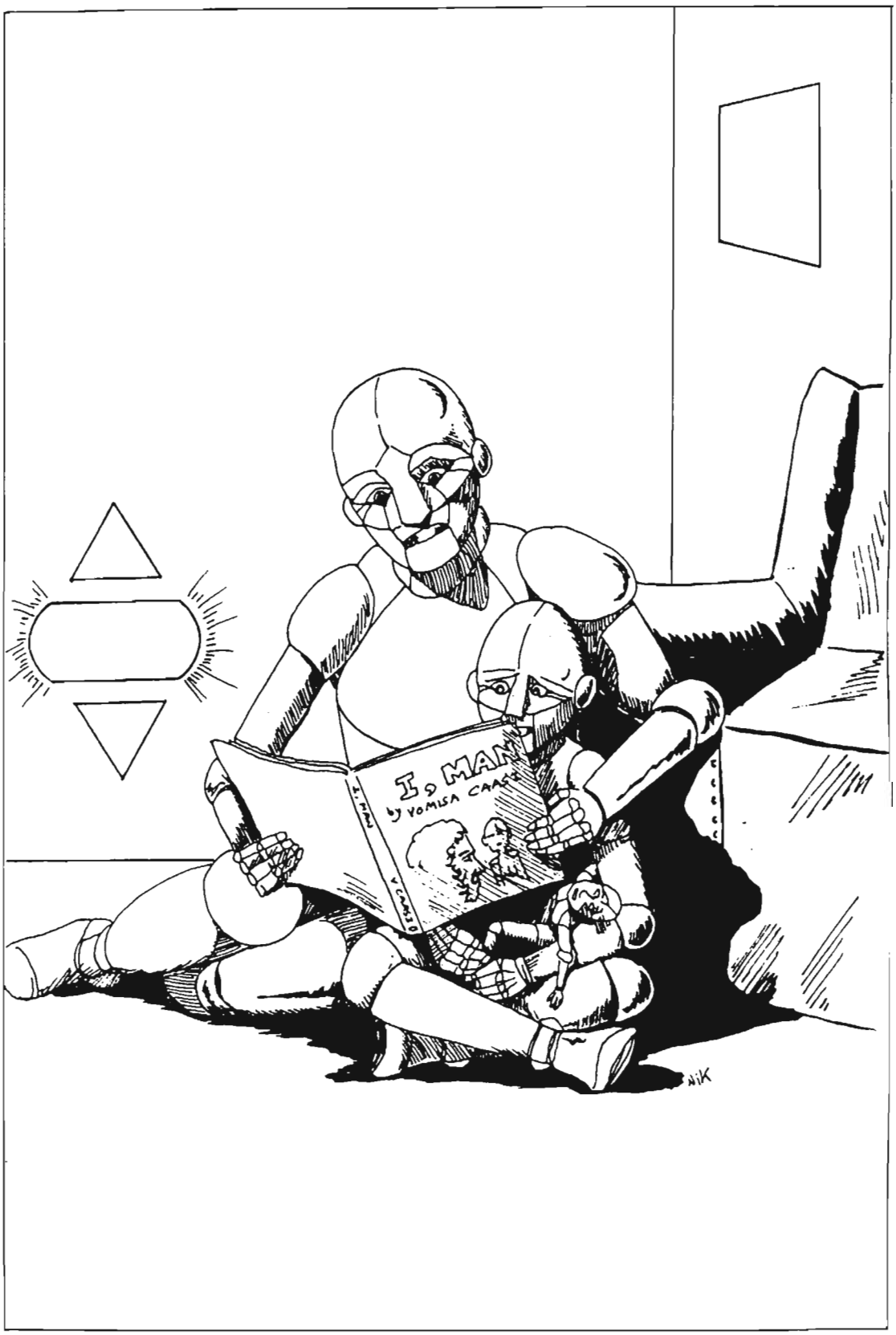
Paperback Inferno 73

The Review of paperback SF

August/September 1988



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Paperback Purgatory

Ah, the summer - raspberries and strawberries for the picking, old Undertones songs jerking at the memory, eager anticipation of holidays, the sun, the seaside, the... PI deadline.

A lot of important reviews to go in this issue, so who knows what will be squeezed out to make room? At the moment I'm not sure if the Contact column will make it (though only a few people have responded to last issue) and the Capsule section may be truncated.

This isn't exactly a review, but the new FEAR magazine may be worth a look. FEAR - as you might suppose - is devoted to horror, about which I have a very ambivalent reaction. I like some horror fiction very much indeed, but I'm not interested in horror films and things which involved various lower forms of the invertebrate persuasion oozing around nubile bodies. Fortunately FEAR covers the genre in a particularly comprehensive manner, nodding to SF and Fantasy as well as generic horror and taking in an interesting range of fiction from Shaun Hutson to Ramsey Campbell as well as an odd story from new writer Nicholas Royle.

FEAR remains my side of the complete gross-out so while I'm sure that a lot of people will find it tame, it'll do for me.

Talking of magazines, congratulations to INTERZONE for making it to bimonthly status. I see that the latest IZ has a story by Eric Brown (whose 'Crash-Bang Joe...' was nominated for last year's BSFA short story award), and of course previous issues have contained stories by S.M. Baxter, Garry Kilworth, Kim Newman...among others. The day before I got my copy of IZ 24 I recieved another magazine containing a story by Eric Brown and which has also featured S.M. Baxter, Garry Kilworth, Kim Newman...among others. A kind of retrospective deja-vu, perhaps? This was OPUS, featuring Brown's 'The Karma Kid Transcends', which, apart from a possibily too obvious ending, is another of his punchy, readable tales in a convincing post-cyberpunk environment. (And I only make that comment on the ending because I've seen it postulated in a book I read on the subject, and no, I won't tell you what I'm talking about; you'll have to read for yourself.) OPUS offers (small) payment to contributors and is better described as 'small press' rather than 'fan-fiction'. Apart from the slightly predictable artwork, this issue has interesting work by writers with a solid professional background, although David Vickery's first published work, 'Still Reading' is perhaps the best after the Brown. OPUS is available from Michael Hearn, Staff House 2, Broxbournebury, Broxbourne, Herts EN10 7PY; £1.50 per issue or £5.50 for a four-issue subscription.

Finally, the luxury of a personal message. If you, dear reader,have sent me a fanzine recently, I probably haven't responded. A select few have received the acolade of a few scribbled sentences. Please don't take this as meaning I didn't think your 'zines were wonderful and I don't want them any more. I do, and I do. Time for letters-of-comment for fanzines, however, is getting mighty squeezed. I'll do my best to send the odd postcard - do keep sending the 'zines!

GOLLANCZ: CAN DO BETTER!

an overview by Ken Lake

Arthur C. Clarke - - RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA (Gollancz, 1988, 256pp, £2.95)
Christopher Priest - - THE SPACE MACHINE (Gollancz, 1988, 363pp £3.50)
Arthur C. Clarke - - THE DEEP RANGE (Gollancz 1988, 224pp, £2.95)
Cordwainer Smith - - NORSTRILLIA (Gollancz, 1988, 275pp, £2.95)

When the first 'Gollancz Classic SF' paperbacks arrived, I greeted them with joy, as I am sure did most fans keen to see fine works immortalised in a superior-format series. The restrained elegance of their cover artwork set in chaste white surrounds, the equally elegant white paper and clear, well-displayed type, all went to provide us with books that looked good on the shelf and cried out to be 'collected' as well as read. The books felt good to hold and to read, and promised us the ongoing creation of a truly representative all-time classic SF library.

OK, so the first 20 books were overladen with Pohl, and the four books by British authors comprised two by Clarke, one each by Priest and Shaw; we assumed these to be minor inequalities soon to be ironed out, and the inclusion of the trail-blazing blockbuster DANGEROUS VISIONS, edited by that bad boy of the medium Harlan Ellison and brilliantly condensed without loss of text into 544 well-bound pages, augured well for the future.

Now the dream has fallen apart. We've been summarily reduced to normal paperback size, cheaper paper, muzzy typesetting, and covers to make any fan cry. The obvious aim of the first score of books was to attract a new, sophisticated and literate readership to our field by studied modernity and casual good taste; the latest four books throw us back to the bad old days of pulp corn. Even the title of the series has been changed to 'VGSF Classics' to match the publisher's ordinary 'VGSF' and obviously non-classic series, although the number sequence has been continued - with an initial glitch that numbers RANGE as 24 on the spine, 23 inside; hardly encouraging.

We are given <u>two</u> more Arthur Clarkes to add to the initial two, a second Priest, and fortunately the superb and undoubtedly immortal first novel of 'Cordwainer Smith', one of the field's most original and appealing authors. However, even here we find a boob, and one that will surely confuse many, for this edition closes with a reprint, totally unchanged, of the J.J. Pierce notes from the 1978 third printing of the Ballantine/Del Rey edition of 1975, which still proclaims this 'the first appearance anywhere in its original form', and promises us THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH as a forthcoming release while making no reference to THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF MANKIND or QUEST OF THE THREE WORLDS which together with BEST OF make a virtually inseperable grouping of all of Smith's writing, in four internally consistent volumes.

NORSTRILLIA, combining THE PLANET BUYER and THE UNDERPEOPLE with some linking paragraphs, takes us into mankind's far future where cat-people, dog-people and others eke out their servile existence for the good of Man's Instrumentality. In pellucid yet idiosyncratic prose we are shown their hearts and souls, we learn of their lives and sorrows, and we go ever deeper into the spell Smith's words weave around them. The cover artwork is realistic and attractive, and it's a book every fan should own.

Neither of the 'new' Clarkes has any artwork at all, relying on shiny blue or silver and white to catch the eye - a great pity, since both have plots that cry out for pictorialisation. RAMA is straightforward: alien spaceship enters solar system, what shall we do, what shall we learn? RANGE takes us into the depths of Earth's farmed oceans for another tautly plotted story, again with Clarke's usual impeccable scientific background (given the dates of creation of the works - 1973 for RAMA, while RANGE came first as a short story in 1954 with novelisation in 1957).

My personal choice from Clarke's works would certainly have included RAMA along with the already-published THE CITY AND THE STARS, but to be given four Clarkes out of 24 books in a series avowedly dedicated to an all-time compilation of classics seems to me excessive unbalanced, and unfair to many other worthy British authors whose works are available for reprinting and whose claims are at least equal to Clarke's. Similarly, while nobody could sensibly argue that Chris Priest's superb INVERTED WORLD did not deserve its place among the first releases in this series it has to be admitted that THE SPACE MACHINE, with its all-too-apt corny pulp-style cover artwork, is at best an engaging, light-weight parody of the SF works of H.G. Wells who, indeed, appears as a character in this spoof novel with its deliberately dated and sometimes infuriating 19th-century stilted prose and plotting.

To be fair, I tried on several occasions to reach Malcolm Edwards, the man responsible for this series, explaining that I intended to be unkind about the changes made in his former grand design, and begging him to contact me urgently to argue, justify or explain the background to this new policy. I heard nothing, and venture to guess at a few of the possible factors involved:

1. We got Arthur Clarke as a job lot cut-price, he's a 'name' whose books will always sell on sight so we didn't need to commission artwork, most of his books are out of print, and he can write updated introductions that will turn these new editions into instant collectors' items.
2. The b-format classy styling didn't sell, proving there is no real market for quality SF paperbacks.
3. Gollancz had never produced normal-format paperbacks when we launched the 'Classic' series, so we were using existing technology for the first 20 books; now we have the ordinary 'VGSF' series running, it makes economic sense to standardise, even if this leads to confusion among readers.
4. The new books are cheaper to produce and easier to sell, their prices are lower, and they fulfill the normal image of paperback SF as disposable, pocket-fitting, journey-filling pulp literature, so we expect to

sell far more, and so sneak the classics into the hands of people who think they are getting run-of-the-mill 'VGSF' fiction.

5. We never promised you THE CLASSICS, merely those titles available to us on the right terms, and we view these four new books as falling into the 'classic' group rather than the ordinary 'VGSF' series. In any case, sampling over just 24 titles is unfair - wait till we've been running the two series for a decade and then perhaps you can judge them.

There may be truth in any or all of these suppositions; perhaps Malcolm (for whom I have the highest respect as an informed and crusading fan for all aspects of printed SF) will now permit himself the luxury of a reasoned response.

But I have to say that while the b-format books gained an immediate and welcome place on my shelves, earlier editions being ruthlessly pruned to make way for them, I have seriously considered closing down the section with no. 20 and simply slotting into my normal alphabetical collection such subsequent books as I may wish to keep for their own sake. A great pity: even though I account two of these four latest books 'classics', I'd have hoped the inclusion of the others was a momentary aberration and not the indication of a complete volte-face in the planning of this entire publishing venture.

((Malcolm Edwards' response to Ken's article should appear in the **next** issue of PI.))

John Brunner - - - - - - - THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER
(Methuen, 1988, 288pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Alvin Toffler's FUTURE SHOCK appeared in 1970 and THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER, avowedly patterned on its extrapolations, in 1975. RIDER's main action takes place somewhere between 2010 and 2020. So here we are with this 1988 reissue only 12 years away from the twenty-first century. The novel's asteroid mining and packaged moon trips still seem well over the horizon, but its most significant technologies - electronic communications, and what John Brunner calls conditioned 'plug-in' living - are the more with us, and escalating. The former technology subverted to exploit the latter is here associated with 'absolute evil', defined as 'treating another human being as a thing', evil's converse being the operation of free will and 'the uncertainty principle'.

This dichotomy implies the opposition of mechanism and holism: of the 'usable' and the 'self-fulfilling' person. A single heroic protagonist, the multi-role 'shockwave rider', assumes the task of switching America from an 'evil' to a 'free' condition. He, Nicky Haflinger, escapee from an 'evil' elitist conditioning institute, is a hacking and programming genius. The setting is post-catastrophe: not nuclear (there is an arms pact), but the Great Bay Quake, in destroying the West Coast, has destabilised America's economy. 'Mafioso' elements gain governmental power and through the electronic communications-net manipulate and defraud the community. Partly outside the net are scattered post-catastrophe Californian settlements, and one of these, Precipice, scene of utopian renaissance, provides both the operational base and the technological lever with which Haflinger, computer saboteur, by precipitating crisis through the freeing of information, turns society around. ('The whole continent on the brink of one precipice' is the relevant chapter title.)

Although somewhat of a tract for our times, RIDER is by no means prosily tract-like. Brunner's narrative, fast and often suspenseful, is presentationally varied: recall, dialogue, authorial interjection, questionnaire, print-out, proverb, precept, etc. make a lively mosaic. His punning and word-play (occasionally overworked) wittily title many of the 'chapterlets'. Brief or sustained metaphors continually illuminate: e.g., dolphin as bow/shock wave rider; ice hockey as microcosm; 'the tendril ears of federal computers'. There is a sub-stratum of Gibbonesque analogy - the 'Roman holiday'; the gladiatorial combat; even a straight half-page quote from THE DECLINE. And there are touches of the mythic in Haflinger's electronic 'winged boots' and 'cloak of invisibility'; in the heroine's panther, Bagheera, and the great communicating and protective dogs of Precipice; in the double-take titles of certain climactic chapters - 'Siege Perilous', 'Night Errand'; and in the hero's search for 'wisdom'. That search, and what is described as Toffler's Law ('the future arrives too soon, and in the wrong order'), are the novel's dominant themes. It's still a tract for our times, and a very readable one.

Margaret Mahy - - - - - - - - - THE CHANGEOVER
(Methuen Teens, 1987, 214pp, £1.95)

- - - - - - - - - THE TRICKSTERS
(Penguin Plus, 1988, 266pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Margaret Mahy is very highly regarded in the children's book world, and up to 1981 had been chiefly known for her picture-book texts and original fairy stories. Then in 1982 she began a cycle of full-length novels, possibly responding to her own daughter's adolescence. THE HAUNTING (1982, now in Magnet paperback), a shortish book with an 8-year-old hero, is nevertheless sophisticated enough to intrigue older readers. Barney starts to receive telepathic messages from his magical great-uncle, banished from the family years ago, and thinks he is developing magic powers too.

THE HAUNTING won the Carnegie Medal, and so did THE CHANGEOVER, a genuine young-adult fantasy. Also set in Mahy's native New Zealand, its heroine is Laura Chant, who has latent psychic powers. When her small brother becomes the prey of a lemure who is sucking out his life to prolong the demon's own, Laura has to undergo a magical ritual to develop these powers and save her brother by taking the demon by surprise. It is also a love story, for Laura's divorced mother finds a new boyfriend (a librarian), and Laura discovers a strong attraction for the male witch who initiates her. The book is outstanding for its real, differentiated characters, and for Mahy's fantastic powers of description, especially in Laura's initiation rites.

THE TRICKSTERS is another superb teen fantasy with romantic elements - rather more of a ghost story than the others. In New Zealand, Christmas is celebrated at midsummer, and as a family of seven arrive at their beachside holiday home they retell the strange story of the house's previous owner, Edward Carnival, and his drowned son Teddy. The heroine, Harry, is secretly writing a slushy fantasy novel, and the power of her thoughts and the incantations of the two youngest children summon up Teddy's ghost - in the form of three mysterious brothers. They disrupt the

family holiday with their charm, their magic tricks and the knack of revealing family secrets at awkward times, not only Harry's hidden book, but father's adultery. Each contains part of Teddy Carnival's spirit: two of them are amoral, but the third, responsible for his heart and moral judgement, becomes Harry's lover for a brief time before they all disappear.

Yet again Mahy's imagination creates unique pen-portraits. Here is a fancy dress beach party:

> Harry, descending into magic land, had discovered a marvellous company, centaurs and griffins, all half-resembling people she knew. She might almost have been invisible, able to walk up to them, to look *into* them, to turn their skin to glass with her gaze and study the regular crimson clockwork of their hearts, while her own heart remained quite unseen.

Mahy has continued to write for younger children, with, apart from short stories, the novel ALIENS IN THE FAMILY (Hippo, £1.50). There are two aliens: a stepdaughter visiting her father and his stepchildren; and a real alien from outer space, who seeks the children's help to hide from his pursuers. The alien is training to be an information-gatherer (a librarian of the future) and has been set an initiative test, to find a hidden item and return to a certain place where he may be beamed up. The story was originally devised for a New Zealand film or telefilm: when all this fell through the book was published anyway, and was made for British TV and shown last year. The New Zealand setting with its volcano and sacred Maori places was replaced by - Dartmoor!

Although each of her four supernatural novels have original plots, there are obvious common elements, beginning with the disruption of family life by an outsider with magic powers. Then, there is much about creativity, the power of the writer; and several compliments paid to the librarian's profession (Mahy has been a children's librarian most of her writing career). Collectors of her work will also want her non-magical teenage novels, THE CATALOGUE OF THE UNIVERSE (Magnet, £1.95) and MEMORY (Dent hardback, £7.95) winner of the 1987 Observer Teenage Fiction Award, and shortlisted for the 1987 Carnegie Medal.

Ursula Le Guin - - - - - - -ALWAYS COMING HOME
(Grafton, 1988, 525pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Once upon a time, when the world was so much younger, there was a 'movement' among some SF writers who held that not only could SF essay any topic and social system but could also be written in such a way that the reader could be assumed to be able to find their way through a 'proper' literary work. One of the principals of that movement was Ursula Le Guin, a writer unafraid to tackle 'difficult' topics, whose works had the intellectual bite of a man-trap and who wrote like an angel.

I guess that Ursula Le Guin is the same Ursula Le Guin who wrote ALWAYS COMING HOME, a future history of the people calling themselves 'Kesh', living in the Na valley (Northern California) at some time after a major catastrophe which has left the obligatory wastelands elsewhere but not totally disrupted commerce. The Kesh are a utopian matriarchal people who have not only absorbed the entire Red Indian culture wholesale but are really too good to be true. I was not convinced by this highly detailed work of fictional anthropology. I did not believe this future for a moment - and the fragmented nature of the 'narrative' - interrupted by cultural history, poems, songs, diagrams, maps and other assorted asides - did nothing to increase the suspension of my disbelief. The pastel coloured whimsy of THE EYE OF THE HERON and much of THE COMPASS ROSE seems to have been taken to its extreme here.

I wanted to enjoy this book - after all, Ms Le Guin gave us THE LATHE OF HEAVEN and THE DISPOSSESSED - but I found myself utterly disappointed. Of course the writing is still that of an angel, and there is too little of that around to ignore any, but that is not enough in this instance. I don't mind having to work at a novel, I like to find some substance at the end of my labours. I did not find any substance here, just something I would have categorised as weak wish fulfilment had this book come from a lesser author, something written after the suspension of critical faculties, for an audience which wants its preconceptions reinforced rather than challenged. I found this book a labour, and the love required to follow through to the end is less now than it was before I began to read.

Terry Pratchett - - - THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN
(Corgi, 1988, 159pp, £2.50)

- - - - - - - - - - - - - STRATA
(Corgi, 1988, 192pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

In THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN, Dom Salabos is heir to a fortune, but according to Probability Math, is destined to be murdered. When he fails to die, another prediction seems certain to occur - that he will find and establish contact with an ancient race euphemistically called Jokers, whose impenetrable towers have caused much wild speculation throughout the universe.

The Discworld series may be very funny, but on the whole the humour in this early novel falls flat, the exception being the scene on pages 105-106 where Pratchett's satirisation of the Three Laws of Robotics is splendid. The style is reminiscent of Sheckley's poorer stories, but lacks his many sharp moments.

It fulfills the criteria of a space opera well, despite some confusion and inconsistencies (both Probability Math and Dom's final discovery are never satisfactorily explained, even in satirical terms). A pleasant read, but a poor return for the price.

STRATA, first published in 1981, five years after THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN, shows a more sophisticated and sure grasp of sf.

Kin Arad works for a company which builds worlds. One day she is approached by Jago Jalo, a man with a cloak of invisibility and a bottomless purse, who claims to have visited a Flat Earth.

Curiosity takes Arad, with two others, to the Flat Earth, which turns out to be a disc inside a transparent sphere. There is a more overt connection with Pratchett's Discworld books which may indeed have been the germ for them:

> 'Some humans used to believe the world was flat and rested on the back of four elephants,' said Silver.
>
> 'Yeah?' said Kin. 'What did the elephants stand on?'
>
> 'A giant turtle, swimming endlessly through space.'

> Kin tasted the idea. 'Stupid,' she said. 'What did the turtle breathe?' [p.58]

Pratchett's attempt to mislead by having his characters put forward the theory that the disc was built by humans is the only element of the novel which fails to work - and that because of their ill defined conviction.

The film *Forbidden Planet* is honoured both implicitly and explicitly - apt, because STRATA evokes the same sense of wonder, something which becomes progressively more difficult to find in sf as one grows older.

The novel is also witty, with sharp and gentle humour, keenly reflecting Pratchett's enthusiasm for the genre.

In STRATA, Pratchett has woven an imaginative, enjoyable novel of wild cosmological speculation, with ideas enough to fill a dozen other books. It is to his credit that he wields them so well they do not overload such a short work. Kin's final discovery concerning the universe, unlike Dom's, is at once stunning and absurd - a difficult and ambitious effect, successfully executed.

R E V I E W S

Marion Zimmer Bradley (ed.) - - - - -SWORD AND SORCERESS 1
(Headline, 1988, 255p, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Theme anthologies always run the risk of subjecting a reader to the feeling of deja vu, and possibly this risk is greatest in that sub-genre of fantasy which is sword & sorcery, a sub-genre notorious indeed for being formularistic. This anthology is, unfortunately, no exception: on more than one occasion we meet magicians with warrior sidekicks, engaging thieves and evil sorcerers whom we know will meet their deserved doom.

I say 'unfortunately' because Marion Zimmer Bradley has a laudable aim, which is to present stories which have strong, believable female leading characters (hardly the norm for sword & sorcery). And as she says, that she has chosen 'stories about both men and women, and written by both men and women, is.... a sign of the times, and a hopeful outlook for the future of heroic fiction.' More than this, for she has not been afraid to use stories by little known, even unknown, writers. Yet I suppose if six or seven of the fifteen stories failed to impress me, whether through weak plots, or stereotyped or cardboard characters, then that still leaves over half that did. In the main, these were from those writers who eschewed 'imaginary' (read 'derivative') backgrounds in favour of more familiar, if still exotic, locations. Notable amongst this group are Glen Cook's 'Severed Heads' (Arabia), Robin W. Bailey's 'Child Of Orcus' (Ancient Rome), Charles Saunders' 'Gimmile's Songs' (Africa). Other fine pieces include Michael Ward's reworking of fairy tale material in 'Daton and the Dead Things', Diana L. Paxson's powerful 'Sword of Yraine' and 'The Rending Dark', a horror story by Emma Bull.

All in all, a mixture of very good, fine and indifferent stories, with a generous word-count for your money. Dip into it, pull out the gems.

Iain M. Banks - - - - - - - - CONSIDER PHLEBAS
(Futura, 1988, 471pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is a space opera. Well, no, not quite. This is a novel which takes the format of a space opera as its basic structure before deciding to do something different with it.

The hero is a man in the middle of a war. A war between the Culture (human and humanoid, technophiles and sybaritic) and the Idirans (non-human giants, deeply religious who see war as a jihad) which is detailed in the Appendices and becomes clear by allusion throughout the book. Horza, the hero, is a changer, one of a race who can wilfully change their external appearance and who are thus at an advantage when acting as spies as Horza does. On the side of the Idirans. His task is to retrieve, from a planet guarded by the Dra'azon (an extraordinarily powerful entity), a 'Mind' belonging to the Culture. A Mind is a super computer with free will and capable of thought beyond man's reach. The novel follows his attempts to do so.

In the hands of Doc Smith the super hero would saunter through hair-raising events, breaking bonds with a single jerk in a linear and episodic shallow narrative. Banks doesn't do that. The universe he has created has a past and a future, we are just seeing one section of it (the dating of it in earth years at the end of the book is a nice touch) and it is an impressive creation with invigorating and exciting originality. The situations Horza gets into can border on the macabre and in one instance, the nauseating, there is darkness and cruelty, allusion and allegory as well as humour and life in this book.

There are some weaknesses in bits of the characterisation which sometimes loses consistency, most especially in the crew of CAT who are initially cool murderers but by the end are almost pacifist, although Horza himself works, his complexities and inconsistencies make him a rounded person. The writing is impeccable, the language fluent and completely convincing, it makes the conclusion believable, even Horza's almost irrational decision not to kill the Idiran which brings the end upon them is acceptable. It is riveting reading.

Ann Livia - - - - - - - - - - BULLDOZER RISING
(Onlywomen Press, 1988, 188pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

BULLDOZER RISING, in the best dystopian tradition, describes a future which is recognisably derived from our own present, and uses it to comment on aspects of our own society. A set of interlinked characters, incidents and scenes examine the cult of youth, health and strength; the way that people who don't conform to the stereotype are labelled 'old', 'disabled', or 'unattractive' and treated as non-persons. In this book, the illegal oldwomen (for legal life ends at forty) pull plastic bags over themselves and sit in the streets, perceived/ignored by the young as piles of rubbish. Their existence redefines the term 'bag ladies'; they are survivors, planners, women who act to change their society.

And for 'people', read women, and for society, understand society-as-experienced-by-women. I enjoyed reading a book in which women's experience was taken for granted as

normative, I enjoyed recognising incidents and motifs in the book that reflect my own life, my own experience. I found this book rich, rewarding and thought-provoking; it's one of the very few recent straightforward future-fiction books that I am truly and unreservedly glad to have read.

Ann Halam - - - - - - - - -KING DEATH'S GARDEN
(Puffin, 1988, 128pp, £1.75)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

KING DEATH'S GARDEN is subtitled 'A ghost story', but there's a curious tension in the book between interpretations of what that means. It becomes obvious fairly early on that Moth, the strange wild girl whom lonely, asthmatic Maurice meets in the cemetery behind his great-aunt's house, is supernatural, but of what order? Is she connected to Maurice's visions of the past? And are they vivid dreams, or real glimpses into other memories?

Maurice tries to make sense of his experiences, although those detailed in the diary written by Professor Baxter, who once owned Great-Aunt Ada's house, are apparently even stranger. Ann Halam (better known to those who don't read children's books as SF writer Gwyneth Jones) has written a ghost story which tries to avoid the implications of that term only to have them at last revealed when they cannot be fled from. Up until the final pages after the climactic scene in the cemetery, with the shadows coming almost into full views and Maurice clinging desperately to the idea of 'vibrations... chemical patterns', unable even to *articulate* the word 'dead', KING DEATH'S GARDEN is a subtle, complex story, full of almost cinematic allusiveness. Maurice experiences the inexplicable, which leads to a horror he can hardly cope with but which is, in the end, cathartic, a healing rather than a scarring. From our privileged standpoint as readers we see an isolated, self-centred semi-invalid shown on more than one level that other minds, other people, are as real as he.

Don't be fooled by the 'Puffin' label; this is a very powerful ghost story indeed.

Hugh Lamb (ed.) - - - - - - GASLIT NIGHTMARES: AN ANTHOLOGY OF VICTORIAN TALES OF TERROR
(Futura, 1988, 358pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Rosemary Pardoe)

There was a time in the 1970s when Hugh Lamb's ghost and horror anthologies appeared at frequent intervals and had an enviable reputation for including rare, previously unreprinted tales. Then came the fashion for 'nasties', and the publishers lost interest in the more old-fashioned type of supernatural fiction. GASLIT NIGHTMARES, the fifth of Hugh's selections of stories specifically from the Victorian era, was actually put together in 1979. Only now, amid welcome signs of a small revival in the traditional ghost story, has the book finally found a publisher in Futura. The contents are an interesting bunch of twenty-two tales, none of them very familiar though one or two are fairly easily available elsewhere, which is rather a surprise since Hugh specialises in digging up forgotten rareties. The inclusion of a tale from Robert W. Chambers' THE KING IN YELLOW, for instance, is puzzling; and while Jerome K. Jerome's pieces are the highlight of the anthology, both of them (his hilarious essay on Christmas ghosts and the story 'The Haunted Mill') are from TOLD AFTER SUPPER (1891) which was recently reprinted in paperback.

Most of the tales, however, are harder to find, their authors ranging from the famous (Harriet Beecher Stowe, Joel Chandler Harris, Charles Dickens) to the obscure. Some of the latter deserve to be better known, others definitely do not. Wirt Gerrare's 'Mysterious Maisie, for example, is melodrama of the most grotesque variety, and not a good way to conclude the book.

For a Hugh Lamb-edited anthology then, GASLIT NIGHTMARES is a litte disappointing, but judged by more general standards it is a well-above-average selection, especially when Hugh's valuable background notes on each story are taken into account.

Storm Constantine - - - - -THE ENCHANTMENTS OF FLESH AND SPIRIT
(Orbit, 1988, 318pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This book is not at all what I expected. The picture on this paperback edition has a fairytale/Arabian castle, some trees, a path and a pretty young man wearing a wig (it *looks* like a wig). It is 'the first book of the Wraeththu' which, coupled with the cover and the blurb prepared me for yet another formula fantasy.

It is fantasy, but that it is not at all formula in writing, concept or plot is quickly apparent. The introduction says that this 'may become a history book; but remember, it is only my history'. Pellaz, the first person narrator, sketches in his peasant life in the first few pages and through clever use of hindsight indicates the great changes to come.

The author is always in complete control of the novel, although never appearing to act as deus ex machina to swamp the action, both in plotting which is meticulous giving enough of the future to intrigue without ever revealing too much; and in writing which is fresh and sometimes extremely powerful. The Wraeththu are a mutation, the race which will overcome humanity, they are hermaphrodite but retain the appearance of males - beautiful young men and use the pronoun 'he'. There is one brief discussion of the use of 'he' but that seems contrived and generally one of the failings of the book is that the characters remain male, they are never a male/female mix, that relationships seem homosexual with the added bonus of the possibility of procreation (perhaps an element of a kind of wish fulfilment?). As an attempt to create a genuinely different sexual ethos it fails, not completely, but in part certainly, which is a shame.

Generally I was impressed and absorbed by the book. I wanted to find out more about Pellaz and what happened to him, I still do because the book reaches no conclusion, just a convenient stopping place but one with a multitude of questions unanswered. It is a good book, one where the adage of not judging it by the appalling cover holds particularly true.

Raymond Harris - - - - - - - THE BROKEN WORLDS
(Headline, 1988, 248pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

This novel has virtually all of the ingredients required of conventional space operas: a universe threatened by a ruthless enemy, a band of intrepid heroes seeking the means to destroy this threat, a series of exotic worlds to serve as a backdrop for their adventures, and a quasi-mystical victory at the end. There are some classic lines: one of the female characters somewhat predictably has

'the body of a warrior goddess' while on another occasion all the heroes are described as 'old hands at midnight raids and death-defying rescues'. And yet within the often stale conventions that govern this sort of literary exercise Raymond Harris has in fact managed to produce an interesting and accomplished piece of work.

The book is written with sensitivity, humour, economy, and (until the final confrontation) admirable restraint. The broken worlds are superbly portrayed: the decadence of Parmenio, the zombie planet of Leoi, the harsh deserts of Ynenga and the ocean paradise of Phra Viharn. They excite the imagination in a way that many authors hope to but few manage.

Another advantage that the book has is that Harris has managed to dispense with many of the rightwing macho attitudes that often seem inseparable from this particular kind of writing. His main protagonist, Attanio Hwin, is bisexual, unselfconsciously in love with both male and female members of the band of adventurers. Moreover the universe is refreshingly free of the descendants of either Anglo-America or Russia still acting out the Cold War! On top of this the good guys are allied with a race of super insects! What more could one ask for?

Altogether an excellent read. Highly recommended for jaded palates. Raymond Harris is a writer I shall watch out for.

Esme Dodderidge - - - THE NEW GULLIVER OR, THE ADVENTURES OF LEMUEL GULLIVER JR IN CAPOVOLTA
(Women's Press, 1988, 247pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Whilst flying in an airship on a secret scientific mission, Lemuel Gulliver Jr is cast ashore, in some unknown manner, in the land of Capovolta. This land is similar to our own, the major exception being that here women are the dominant sex. Unlike his illustrious forebear Gulliver's experiences seem prosaic enough: he marries and takes a menial job on top of running the household, then gets divorced and has to bring up his children alone. Prosaic indeed, but these are sufficient adventures for Gulliver. A man in a woman's world he finds out, through the inequalities of Capovoltan society, just how unfair our own society is. 'Each society was inclined', concludes Gulliver, 'to regard its own status quo as the manifestation of an inflexible law of nature. I was a living proof in my own person of the fallacy of this axiom, and of just how 'flexible' such 'laws of nature' really are.

THE NEW GULLIVER is a wonderful satire on sex-roles and is a highly entertaining and thought-provoking read throughout. Written somewhat anachronistically - though effectively - in the style of Swift's original (despite this Gulliver being a modern man) the novel tells of a society which for the most part is a mirror-image of our own yet also has its own peculiarities, so our interest in it never wanes. Through her hero's trials and tribulations Esme Dodderidge reveals the iniquities of our society; if occasionally her targets are obvious ones, then they are not unimportant for that and sometimes she can score with humour (chapter four is hilarious regarding male attire in Capovolta). Her Swiftian inversion of the male/female situation, with a male narrator, is especially ingenious; by the end of the novel Esme Dodderidge has made a strong case for true equality of the sexes.

Terry Brooks - - - - - - - - THE BLACK UNICORN
(Orbit, 1988, 286pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This B-format sequel to MAGIC KINGDOM FOR SALE/SOLD! virtually begins where the last book left off, with Ben Holiday having served a year as King of Landover, the magic kingdom. Here we meet his three loyal friends again, the incompetent court wizard, Questor Thews; the court scribe, Abernathy, a talking dog though once human, thanks to Thews, and the lovely Willow, who was sometimes a tree. They each have powerful dreams: Ben believes his former partner in the law-firm, Miles, is in grave danger; Questor dreamed of finding the lost books of magic; and Willow's night-vision was of a mythical black unicorn...

The obligatory map is badly drawn and is unrevealing. Brooks tends to have Ben recapitulating on his predicament every 50 pages or so; but perhaps this is the writer's law training seeping through. To quote the prism cat, a kind of handy safeguard creature who just happened to be nearby when Ben needed a friend, with a nice brand of humour: 'This rather boring recapitulaion is leading somewhere, I trust?'

The quite enjoyable humorous badinage between Thews, Abernathy and Ben was less in evidence in this book, which is a pity; sadly, the cynical approach of the dog-scribe was supplied by the prism cat, with only a mild

concession to different characterization.

The mystery that entrapped Ben in a vagabond's guise was revealed very close to the end, and it was no surprise. The book uses the image of a unicorn to draw the reader but the unicorn does not appear in more than two dozen pages.

So this is yet another quest story, searching for the truth; and of course it was under Ben's nose all the time... The potential directions for the story, of having Ben appearing different, of being an outcast, were to my mind not taken advantage of fully. Indeed, little is revealed of Ben's accomplishments during the year. Background fleshing of the land is sparse - perhaps he is using the inadequate map at the front of the book?

Brooks writes easily and it is a relatively quick harmless read, though lacking in the very magic it attempts to reveal. A lacklustre effort: wait to buy the mass-market edition, if you must.

Robert Holdstock - - - - - - - - IN THE VALLEY OF THE STATUES
(VGSF, 1988, 223pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

This short story collection was first published in 1982 yet this is, I believe, its first appearance as a mass-market paperback (a re-emergence due probably to the deserved success of MYTHAGO WOOD). Hence we have a representative sample of Holdstock's work from 1974 to 1981, a sample which amply demonstrates both his progression as a writer and his preoccupations with the themes of time and pre-history.

Some of the earlier stories do suffer from a rather self-conscious style of writing, though that is not to say they are without interest or impact. 'The Graveyard Cross' (the weakest story in the book because of its rushed ending), 'Ashes' and 'The Touch of a Vanished Hand' all fall into this category. However, the remaining pieces demonstrate a greater sureness on Holdstock's part. 'A Small Event' and 'Travellers' are both set in the far future and both use time travel as the basis for the plot; in their different ways they are effective tales. But for my money the best three are the title story, 'Earth and Stone' and 'Mythago Wood'. Swinging now from sf to fantasy, each one of these excellent stories is highly atmospheric and strangely convincing. 'In the Valley of the Statues' is subtly menacing whilst the time-traveller in 'Earth and Stone' meets a weird destiny in neolithic Ireland. 'Mythago Wood' is the highly original story of the creation, by Man's consciousness, of mythic figures or mythagos. Those people who have read the novel will enjoy seeing how the longer work incorporated and expanded upon the shorter. Others who have yet to sample Holdstock's novels will find this collection a good introduction to his writing.

Garry Kilworth - - - - - THE SONGBIRDS OF PAIN
(Unwin, 1988, 187pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

An excellent gloss on this collection is the author's own Introduction, where he considers reality's subjective/objective reflexiveness, and offers a one-paragraph account of science fiction. While recognising that, as he says, these stories exhibit recurring themes and connecting threads - immortality, and the nature of the psyche - my purpose will chiefly be to classify them descriptively, to group by difference.

The thirteen stories, as dreams and nightmares various and unpredictable, are intriguingly sequenced. In the opening ones ('The Dissemblers', 'The Rose Bush', 'Blind Windows') the background has anthropological associations - merging into those of folklore, history and war with 'The Lord Of The Dance', 'Let's Go To Golgotha' and 'Sumi Dreams Of A Paper Frog'. Stories occupying the middle pages ('Scarlet Fever', 'The Man Who Collected Bridges', 'The Invisible Foe' and 'Almost Heaven') portray incidents and backgrounds close to those of traditional science fiction - future societies, alien infiltration, planetary exploration and colonisation; but don't expect any banal scenarios or cliche situations. As Gary Kilworth's Introducion has it, sf props 'allow a greater and deeper journey into the world of the imagination.'

The final three superb stories, 'God's Cold Lips', 'Oubliette' and 'The Song Birds Of Pain', with their man-into-beast-into-man and bodily transformation motifs, belong to a Circe/Moreau sub-genre, but in common with much else in the collection they have at their heart the human soul's encounter with what is alien to it, yet is also vibrantly, ambiguously, relentlessly responsive to it. An omnipresent sado-masochistic vein is not gratuitous: it delineates certain extremes of living which may be points of entry into experience of such encounters. Stories exemplifying this most inventively, most aesthetically, are 'Blind Windows', 'The Man Who Collected Bridges', 'God's Cold Lips' and the title story. Jim Burns' powerful cover illustration says it all.

Katherine Kurtz - - - - - -THE DERYNI ARCHIVES
(Legend, 1988, 325pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Katherine Kurtz's 'Deryni' books consist of three trilogies and THE DERYNI ARCHIVES, a book of short stories, and are set in the kingdom of Gwynedd and its neighbouring lands whose social structure, culture, religion and technology are roughly parallel to medieval England, Scotland and Wales. The Deryni are a race of sorcerers - they look human, but have magical powers - and are regarded as evil by Gwynedd's human-dominated 'medieval' Church.

The eight stories in THE DERYNI ARCHIVES take place in the years between the *Legends Of Camber Of Culdi* and the *Chronicles Of The Deryni* trilogies and elaborate on the novels, recounting in detail incidents mentioned briefly in the other books or describing episodes from the early lives of major characters. Admittedly, the standard of the stories ranges from very good to not-so-good, but Katherine Kurtz's fans will find much to interest them, and copious notes make the stories accessible to anyone unfamiliar with the novels. Amongst the better stories are 'The Priesting of Arilan', which describes the attempt of a Deryni to infiltrate the hierarchy of the Church, and 'The Knighting of Derry' which reveals how the human Derry first met Alaric Morgan, the central character in the *Chronicles*. Not-so-good is 'Healer's Song' which is little more than a description of Deryni magic ritual.

THE DERYNI ARCHIVES do contain the familiar fantasy elements of swords and feudalism, but Gwynedd and its inhabitants have unusually detailed histories. Deryni magic is logical and has its limitations, and the atmosphere is convincingly High Middle Ages rather than 'Conan'. Confirmed 'Deryni' fans and fantasy enthusiasts wishing to sample the Deryni universe without embarking on a whole trilogy will find this book an enjoyable read.

Alan Moore & Brian Bolland - - BATMAN: THE KILLING JOKE (Titan, 1988, £1.95)

Jon Heitland - - THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. (Titan, 1988, 271pp, £7.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

There'll probably be a backlash against the new wave of comic books but it's not starting here. Rarely have I seen such a marvellous combination of artwork and text; rarely have I experienced such a masterly handling of suspense as here, where Batman and the Joker confront each other - and their pasts. Violent and occasionally disturbing, this is not just another 'episode' of the Batman saga, but a different look at the concept of the superhero and a much less innocent examination of the psychological motives driving the caped vigilante.

This is brilliantly economical storytelling, where every word, every image counts. Narrative progresses through wordless sequences of frames - as in the first four pages - or cinematic parallel images to suggest shifts of scene. The final frame is a reprise of the first; a reflection, but a reflection of darkness. THE KILLING JOKE achieves the almost impossible in forcing the reader to take this world seriously, but it does so by using the methods and techniques of comic-book art, and that's Moore and Bolland's greatest achievement. They're not High Artists slumming. They are first-class creators coming from a popular tradition.

Although U.N.C.L.E's SF links are tenuous (mostly a reliance on futuristic gadgetry and Harlan Ellison's involvement in several of the scripts) it's a show many look back on with affection. It had an air of stylish innocence and was particularly notable for the rather daring concept of using David McCallum to play a Russian hero at a time when Russians were definitely baddies. Like most of the other kids in my class I carried an U.N.C.L.E. card and fell in love with Illya Kuryakin and although I've not thought about the show for years this retrospective is a welcome publication, crammed with information about the programme, its conception, its rise and fall in popularity, how it was made, and contains synopses and credits for all the episodes, including the spin-off 'Girl...' series. Its main appeal will be to die-hard fans, but those who've been introduced to it since, and anyone interested in how TV programmes are made, will enjoy it too.

Michael Scott Rohan - - THE FORGE IN THE FOREST (Orbit, 1988, 406pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Laurence Scotford)

The first novel in this series (THE WINTER OF THE WORLD) charts the fortunes of Alv, subsequently known as Elof, as he struggles to become a mastersmith, then use his new found skills to defeat his former mentor and the hordes that threaten his homeland. In this much the plot is similar to countless other works of fantasy. The book does, however, differ from the run of the mill in this genre in two aspects. Firstly the arch enemy in this series is not organic but geological - an ever growing ice cap, which threatens to consume the whole of the land. Secondly, Rohan uses his maps and appendices to mythologise his subject matter, making it all the more believable and interesting.

THE FORGE IN THE FOREST takes up immediatly where THE ANVIL OF ICE left off. Having saved the city of Kebryhaine from the Ekwesh hordes, Elof and his friends journey eastwards into uncharted lands in an attempt to find some long term solution to the encroaching ice. Elof also seeks his lost love Kara, who disappeared at the end of the first book, in which he promised he would travel eastward to find her.

Because the sequel is so closely linked to the first book it would be close to meaningless if read alone, and even having read the former, I found this one disappointing. It contains half as much as the first in as many pages. However, if you have read ANVIL, which I do recommend, then it is still worth putting up with the occasional lapses here.

M. John Harrison - - THE ICE MONKEY (Unwin, 1988, 144pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

'M. John Harrison is the finest British writer now writing horror fiction...' (extract from blurb by Ramsey Campbell).

It's all a matter of opinion, but - although Harrison is undoubtedly one of today's finest writers (British or non-British) he is not really a 'horror writer', despite stylistic affinities with M.R. James, John Collier, and - for that matter - Ramsey Campbell.

THE ICE MONKEY proves - to my satisfaction - that the quality of Harrison's work increases with its distance from science fiction and fantasy. Stories such as 'The New Rays' (concerning elemental life-forms which might, or might not, have some theraputic value) and 'Settling the World' (which deals with 'the discovery of God on the far side of the Moon...' come closest to being conventional SF/Fantasy, but their central notions remain just that - notions.

Harrison himself is aware of this problem (if, in fact, it is a problem): 'All the stories in THE ICE MONKEY move... towards a fiction totally empty of science fiction... (In) THE ICE MONKEY (about sympathetic magic?) there are only three sentences ...which make it a fantasy. They could very easily be lifted out...(to) leave a story about climbers' (from an interview conducted by Paul Kincaid, Vector 135, pp. 9 - 10).

My favourite story is 'Running Down', with its genuinely chilling account of a man whom entropy seems to have singled out for personal attention. Not 'entropy' in the strictly scientific sense of the word; Harrison uses it as '... a metaphor for the human condition' (Vector interview). The equally metaphisical 'Egnaro' (about 'a secret known to everyone but yourself') runs it a close second, while the remaining stories, 'The Incalling' and 'The Quarry' have their own idiosyncratic attractions.

If you like 'exemplary fictions of unease shot through with poetic insights' (Angela Carter, in a refreshingly accurate blurb), then you'll enjoy reading THE ICE MONKEY. If you don't, well, read it anyway - you're likely to be in for some pleasant surprises.

Chet Williamson - - ASH WEDNESDAY (Headline, 1988, 372pp, £3.50)

In the small town of Merridale the blue glowing forms of the dead suddenly appear, frozen in their last seconds. A story of fear, guilt, almost literally 'skeletons in cupboards' which lacks too much logic to be realistically terrifying and not enough to reach that nightmare frisson it seems to aim at. However, the immobile, accusing figures of Merridale's dead are unusual additions to the stock horror story motifs. (Andy Sawyer)

Anthony Coburn - - - DOCTOR WHO: THE SCRIPTS: THE TRIBE OF GUM
(Titan, 1988. 125pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by David V Barrett)

It terrifies me to think that it's damn near a quarter of a century since I dashed through from the kitchen, where I was doing my homework to radio accompaniment, to tell my parents President John F Kennedy was dead (in fact, at that moment, he wasn't; the first reporter to file the story had jumped, so to speak, the gun); and the following evening watched the first episode of a new children's series which was intended to fill the gap between *Grandstand* and *Juke Box Jury*. It was hardly an auspicious start: television schedules were in a turmoil; *everything* on TV was overshadowed by the events in Texas. But at about 5.30 on the evening of 23rd November 1963 I saw the inside of a police phone box for the first time.

Reading the scripts of the first Dr Who story brought back other memories: I distinctly remember being impressed by the idea that the Tardis could chameleon itself ("It's been an Ionic column and a sedan chair...") — though lack of BBC funds ensured this *didn't* actually happen. I also of course clearly remember William Hartnell as the tetchy old Doctor and Carole Ann Ford as his schoolgirl niece Susan, a couple of years older than me and so godlike and unattainable, though still fanciable.

Her schoolteachers, Barbara Wright (Jacqueline Hill) and Ian Chesterton (William Russell) are a little less clear, and I'd forgotten just how often Susan and Barbara screamed at the slightest opportunity (a tradition nobly kept up by Bonnie Langford to this day). I'm still irritated (as I was then) at the great cop-out of not explaining (or even pondering the question) how stone age man, and in later stories an assortment of aliens including the daleks, come to speak 20th century English.

The story itself, in the second, third and fourth episodes, I remember being disappointed in: rival leaders of a stone age tribe want to discover how to make fire; the first episode, with the futuristic interior of the Tardis, yet firmly rooted in the present day, was far more exciting.

For all Doctor Who viewers over the last (ahem!) quarter century, especially those in at the start, but also, I think, younger viewers who want to examine the series' beginnings, this book is a must. Titan say this is "the first in what we plan to make a long series of Doctor Who script books"; I can't see the whole series being successful, except to diehard fans who'll buy every one — but this first one is a significant, and nostalgic, historical milestone.

Suzette Haden Elgin - - - - - - - - - - THE JUDAS ROSE
(The Women's Press, 1988, 363pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

Anyone who enjoys Elgin's frankly lightweight Coyote Jones stories, such as *Yonder Comes the Other End of Time*, and moves to the "Native Tongue" novels, is in for a shock. They are highly serious, committed, intelligent and moving (none of which adjectives could possible apply to Coyote Jones adventures...).

Native Tongue (Women's Press 1985) introduced us to a future in which women, in the States at least, are legally treated as second class citizens; it is also a world in which the linguist clans have considerable power, because it is only they who have developed ways of communicating with the scores of alien races who have contacted Earth, by means imprinting and training their infants. The women of the linguist clans are beginning to develop their own secret language, Láadan, which liberates them from the male-dominated aggressive languages of the past.

The Judas Rose (subtitled *Native Tongue II*) carries on the story after some fifty years. Láadan has by now spread through the linguist clans; this is the story of how it was carried outside that privileged circle into the world of women outside. It ends on an optimistic note, not only in the musings of one of the prime movers in the women's plan, but in the words of a report from the alien Council of the Consortium, which suggests that the linguist women are beginning to change human society — possibly just in time. The first volume was criticised for some of its science-fictional shortcomings, for its political naivety and so on. I still found it a moving critique of our society, and *psychologically* convincing. The second volume carries on the story satisfactorily, and equally competantly, deepening our knowledge of this world and indeed plugging some of the more obvious gaps. Well worth reading if you already know *Native Tongue*, but probably somewhat perplexing if you don't. *If* you haven't read *Native Tongue*, then do. Immediately.

I have to conclude by remarking that the US edition (DAW), from which this is photographically reproduced, costs only $3.50 — less than half the price of the UK edition. A feminist student of mine argues forcibly and angrily that the decision of Women's Press to move their sf series to large format and to double the price is scandalously exploiting an economically weak sector of British society. Comments, please?

James White - - - - - - - - -THE ALIENS AMONG US
(Orbit, 1988, 217pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

This 1969 collection contains seven stories, including two set in the Sector General universe: the first is 'Countercharm', which follows immediately after STAR HEALER; the second is 'Tableau' which comes before 'Accident' (coll. SECTOR GENERAL).

The back cover blurb contains two errors: 'Occupation: Warrior' is not about cute, cuddly teddy bears whose instinct is to batter humans to death - this is 'Tableau'- but about a war where the troops, all cowards, are hand-picked by the enemy. This happens to be the description given to 'The Conspirators', which is actually about an animal insurrection on board a spaceship. It is a wonderful, amusing, anti-vivisectionist tale.

Two other stories, 'Red Alert' and 'The Scavengers' are almost identical tales of a threat to technologically advanced races by what at first seem to be invading alien task-forces. The former story raises delicate ethical issues more obviously than the second (which features the same alien race mentioned in 'Occupation: Warrior').

Several of the stories show their age and give away the endings too soon, but they are all of them compassionate, poignant and witty tales. 'Occupation: Warrior', however, is of particular interest because it concerns itself with the darker side of human nature, an unusual departure from White's previous stories, but even here the character concerned eventually comes to see the wrong in what he is doing, and learns that a more caring, gentle approach to life is always better than a belligerent thirst for power. Space opera rarely does this, and it isn't just because so much of it concerns the military - because these stories do. In a sub-genre where fascist concerns are so predominant, it is encouraging to read that humanitarian concerns have not entirely fallen by the wayside.

Neal Barrett Jr - - - -THROUGH DARKEST AMERICA
(NEL, 1988, 275pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

Quickly glancing at the cover I decided this was another Isaac Asimov anthology as it's his name which gets the biggest billing. Only when I opened it did I realise it was a novel by Neal Barrett. Asimov's name obviously sells books; perhaps someone should do an article on the Asimov effect.

This is a rite of passage story set in post-World War Three America. Civilisation is at a level roughly equivalent to the pioneering days of the American West. Howie is a farm boy who becomes embroiled in the war between Loyalists and Rebels, a war which initially seems so remote. He is driven by circumstance, he reacts to the actions of others; in particular Col. Jacobs and Pardo.

Frankly, most of this book could have been a western. The main SF element is the supposed destruction of most types of animals and the introduction of an animal which is the only one man is supposed to eat. These animals are referred to as 'stock' and in form they are human but appear not to be intelligent. An interesting twist, but hardly used until the end. For most of the book you could substitute cattle without any effect on the plot.

This book is violent. There is bestiality, rape, attempted sodomy, lynching, mutilation, castration, massacres, torture and just plain old-fashioned killings. I don't want to get into an argument about censorship (basically I'm against it) and sex and violence obviously are often necessary parts of a story, they're even necessary at times in *this* story, but not all the time. I could even make a case out for a logical progression of some of the violent acts, and Mr Barrett could claim he was demonstrating that violence leads to violence and that the civilian population cannot escape the effects of war. We'd probably agree on both points but the book is about as subtle as a sledgehammer.

Michael P. Kube-McDowell - - - - - - - EMPRISE
(Legend, 1988, 304pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

The prologue tells us how the world has fallen back into small low-tech communities. The scenario is unrealistic, though I'm sure the resulting society could be arrived at in any number of ways. This doesn't matter, the rest of the book stands by itself.

A message from the stars is received by one of the last active astronomers. He manages, with some difficulty, to inform another astronomer who then becomes the second of a long succession of main viewpoint characters, none of which are particularly well characterised. Convincing a few friends of the message's authenticity turns out to be the easy bit. Trying to get authority to take the idea seriously is a different matter. The group is sentenced to hang and appeals for clemency to King William (Prince Wills? - The same). One thing leads to another and the emprise of the title materialises.

Emprise n. *(archaic)* a chivalrous or daring enterprise; adventure.

The big question is, is it to be an emprise dominated by xenophobia or trust? The book asks relevant questions about world unity, religion, militarism and, of course, xenophobia.

On the debit side, there is an annoying habit of taking contrivances too far. ENIGMA and EMPEREY are to follow. The second volume seems to have been well named. I'll look forward to it.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman - - - -THE MAGIC OF KRYNN
(Penguin, 1988, 350pp, £3.50)

- -KENDER, GULLY DWARVES AND GNOMES
(Penguin, 1988, 364pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Weis and Hickman's 'Dragonlance' books, *Chronicles* (DRAGONS OF AUTUMN TWILIGHT, DRAGONS OF WINTER NIGHT and DRAGONS OF SPRING DAWNING) and *Legends* (TIME OF THE TWINS, WAR OF THE TWINS and TEST OF THE TWINS) are being heavily promoted by Penguin. Review copies of all these titles have arrived with folders, stickers, competitions etc., and I've certainly noticed that the books are popular among young teenagers who are into fantasy games. But while gamers could find these books suitable 'souvenirs' and I for one am pleased that in some cases they're being read by people who would otherwise not have attempted books of that length, they really are not very good. Vivid, yes: individual, no. There's little to distinguish the 'Dragonlance' world from that of any other similar game. Reading the books as novels is a depressing experience as turgid, derivative plotting mingles with attempts at wit which are sentimental and leaden by turns.

The two latest volumes are tangential to the previous trilogies, collections of stories written by Weis/Hickman or other hands. Perhaps the best item is, significantly, the fannish exegesis of the poems to be scattered throughout the epic, Michael Williams' 'Into the Heart of the Story' in KENDER, although 'Definitions of Honour' by Richard A. Knaack, from the same volume, manages to ask a moving question about chivalry. Other than that, we've read it all before, mostly in fiction-fanzines.

But partly the problem is seeing the books through the wrong eyes. The 'Dragonlance' stories are essentially children's books, despite publication under the 'adult' Penguin logo, and children's books of an essential but undemanding nature. Like Enid Blyton and the like they're 'readable rubbish', a fantasy equivalent of the 'Sweet Dreams' romances for girls. In fact, simply because I've found no single equivalent of 'teen romances' for 12-14 year old *boys*, I've introduced 'Dragonlance' books into my library, and it seems to be working. If you've read a lot of fantasy literature, chances are your route has come through other books - myths and legends, Tolkien. I suspect that the 'Dragonlance' audience have entered the field through gaming, or perhaps the *Transformers*, *He-Man*, *Thundercats* TV cartoons and comics. Maybe the charge of 'lack of originality' is to some extent mitigated. These books are new to their readers.

Such a defence shouldn't overlook the fact that to anyone who has read more than one or two books in their lives 'Dragonlance' is irredeemable mental sludge, but let whoever has read no 'Doc' Smith novel cast the first stone...

Gregory Benford &
Martin H. Greenberg (eds.) - HITLER VICTORIOUS
(Grafton, 1988, 397pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

Alternative histories have always given science ficion writers the scope they like to play with reality. After all, practically the whole genre is based on the question 'What if?', and there can be few more satisfying variations on that question than 'What if the

world was not as we know it?' So, we have had writers examine worlds in which the Catholic Church triumphed over the Protestant, in which Moors were victorious over Christian Europe, in which the South won America's Civil War, and so on. Writers have devoted considerable ingenuity to discovering hinges which allow history to be flipped to a greater or lesser degree. But when all is said and done the hinge to which writers turn again and again happened in the 1940s. It speaks volumes for the fear and fascination provoked by the Third Reich, for the profound extent to which Hitler affected the whole of this century, that writers find they have to nag away time and again at the same irritating question: what would have happened if Hitler had won?

It is a question that has already provoked a host of novels, from Katherine Burdekin's SWASTIKA NIGHT to Sarban's COME BLOW YOUR HORN to Len Deighton's SS-GB. And it has provoked an even greater number of short stories, eleven of which are collected here. Five were written specially for this volume, including David Brin's Hugo award nominee 'Thor Meets Captain America' which attempts to wrest something new from the formula by introducing Nordic gods. It is a clever tale, but like the other new stories it fails somehow to rise to the challenge of finding fresh depth and insight in a too familiar subject. They too readily try to meet the challenge by simply slipping in a genre device: ghosts, time travellers, psi, mythic creatures made flesh.

It is in the reprints that this collection is at its strongest, and with two stories in particular. Hilary Bailey's 'The Fall of Frenchy Steiner' and Keith Roberts' 'Weihnachtsabend' are both classics precisely because they confront the issue that all the other stories dodge: the appeal, and the psychology, of Nazi rule. The Roberts story has been reprinted many times, the Bailey, though just as famous, is rather less readily available. But it is these two stories, over and above all others, which earn this collection a place on everybody's bookshelf.

Harry Turtledove - - - - -THE MISPLACED LEGION (Legend, 1988, 323pp, £2.95)

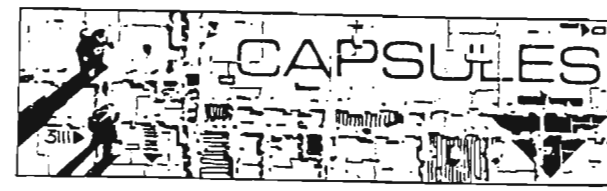
(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

I started this book with misgivings, the cover speaking for itself: 'The Videssos Cycle, Book 1'. It didn't even have the decency to limit itself to a trilogy. My misgivings worsened when I got inside the cover; I found myself confronted by... a Map.

The Misplaced Legion in question isn't a legion - it's three cohorts - a 'reconnaissance in force'. The Romans, headed by one Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, are transported by magic to a world which has most of the attributes of the byzantine empire. There they settle in as mercenaries for the empire of the Good Guys, and presently march off to fight the empire of the Bad Guys, as represented by a necromancer/prince called Avshar who has all the usual nasty habits. Cue massive battle, partial defeat, and lead-in to Volume Two.

In his favour, I can say that Turtledove really knows his military history. This book could serve as an operating manual for an infantry unit circa 200 AD, were it not for the large chunks of religious politics and the rather feeble attempts at magic that litter it. The characterisation takes a back seat (being determinedly wooden), and for some reason the officers of the 'legion' put me in mind of *Star Trek* - the crusty doctor, loyal second-in-command, over-intellectual chief honcho etcetera.

I found myself reading this book as much to finish it as to enjoy it, but nevertheless it didn't actually defy assimilation; it's a slickly done military fantasy - Jerry Pournelle meets THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE - without the more gross aspects of that sub-genre. It will be interesting to see what Turtledove does with the sequels.



Sharon Baker - - BURNING TEARS OF SASSURUM (Avon, 1988, 280pp, £3.50)

Sequel to JOURNEY TO MEMBLIAR, reviewed in PI 68; an inventive science fantasy involving gods, an evil priest, superior technology indistinguishable from magic and three oddly assorted main characters. The plot and characterisation are hardly memorable, but some of the incidentals, from the custom of 'life-sharing' to the vast but largely implied canvas against which the events take place, are expertly imagined. (Andy Sawyer)

K.M. Briggs - - KATE CRACKERNUTS (Canongate Kelpies, 1987, 224pp, £1.95)

This classic fairy-tale first written for adults in 1963 and revised for a children's publisher in 1979, is now published in paperback after being unavailable for several years. The tale came out of Joseph Jacobs' ENGLISH FAIRY TALES and the setting is 17th-century Scotland at the height of the witch-cult, whose rites are authentically reconstructed by K.M. Briggs, folklore expert. The cover design shows a girl bewitched by an imaginary sheep's head, as in the book, but because of that we have lost the gorgeous wrap-around Pauline Baynes picture for the 1979 hardback, which showed the fairy hill and its revellers. Other classics reissued in this series recently are THE LIGHT PRINCESS by George MacDonald and THE BIG HOUSE by Naomi Mitchison, both at £1.95(Jessica Yates)

L. Sprague de Camp - - THE UNBEHEADED KING (Grafton, 1988, 208pp, £2.75)

Sprightly conclusion to the 'Reluctant King' trilogy which begins with adventurer but would-be honest burgher Jorian trying another attempt to rescue his wife by means of an ensorcelled bathtub and ends with a helpful ghost sorting out a legal tangle. Frankly, de Camp is coasting, but even so he raises a few smiles. (Andy Sawyer)

Eileen Dunlop - - ROBINSHEUGH (Drew Swallows, 1987, 203pp, £2.25)
A FLUTE IN MAYFERRY STREET (Drew Swallows, 1987, 187pp, £2.25)

Publisher Richard Drew has started a new list of quality paperback reprints for older children where the well-known imprints like Puffin and Fontana haven't stepped in. ROBINSHEUGH is an old house on the Scottish borders where the heroine goes to stay with her aunt who is researching its history, and finds that she can go into the past to become a girl who lived there 200 years ago. Gradually she falls under the spell of the girl's wicked elder brother who tries to use her mind to travel into our present.

A FLUTE IN MAYBERRY STREET is a different

kind of fantasy - a family ghost story. Colin and his disabled sister Marion live in poverty in Edinburgh. They discover an old letter which sets them on the hunt for a stolen trunk, guided by ghostly fluteplaying. The climax when Marion overcomes her paralysis to the music of the flute will bring tears to the eyes of all old-fashioned sentimentalists. (Jessica Yates)

P.C. Hodgell - - CHRONICLES OF THE KENCYRATH (N.E.L., 1988, 608pp, £4.50)

The Haunted Lands where animated corpses dwell: from there flees Jame, one of the Kencyrath (a race created to fight primal evil) in search of her twin brother. Master thieves, dying gods, a poetic werewolf. A race (the Kencyrath again) split into three kinds of beings, one of which is in giant feline form. Good meaty ideas for the fantasy genre, but few of the inventions are explored other than as devices for a fairly tedious plot which only uncritical devotees will really enjoy. (Andy Sawyer)

Philip Jose Farmer - - A FEAST UNKNOWN (Grafton, 1988, 255pp, £2.95)

Reprint of the controversial 1969 pornographic pulp-hero fantasy, in which the originals of Tarzan and Doc Savage battle under the manipulation of the 'Nine', a secret society of immortals. A brilliant exposure of the sexual neuroses underlying this sort of power fantasy, but not very pleasant reading. Probably too clever by half. (Andy Sawyer)

Bernard King - - SKYFIRE (Sphere, 1988, 239pp, £3.50)

Conclusion of the trilogy begun in THE DESTROYING ANGEL and carried on in TIME-FIGHTERS. A potentially powerful mixture of Lovecraftian horror and thriller, but the 'third reality' idea (transcending subjective and objective) is too confused to carry the plot, and the conflict between good and evil doesn't carry as much weight as earlier episodes seem to suggest. (Andy Sawyer)

Dean R. Koontz - - WATCHERS (Headline, 1988, 507pp, £3.50)

Two experimental animals - a dog and an artificially-mutated killer known as 'The Outsider' escape from a research centre, and transform the lives of the people with whom they come into contact.

The 'intelligent dog' idea has been used a lot (notably in Stapledon's SIRIUS) and Koontz' treatment is a touch sentimental. However, he weaves several strands of suspense into a powerful braid to create an impressively entertaining variant of the 'Frankenstein'theme. (Andy Sawyer)

Marc Laidlaw - - DAD'S NUKE (Grafton, 1988, 284pp, £2.95)

The title and blurb accurately reflect the absurdity of the story within the covers. It's a satire all right, the bizarre future setting being a caricature of the present. The obvious targets are satisfyingly full of holes by the end as a result not so much of accuracy as unlimited amounts of ammunition sprayed hither and thither. Unfortunately, Laidlaw doesn't seem to know the difference between a blank and a dumdum, much of the book being too daft to laugh at. (Nicholas Mahoney)

Stephen Leigh - - SLOW FALL TO DAWN (Headline, 1988, 165pp, £2.50)

'The Guild of Death fights for its life' says the front cover blurb, and that just about sums it up. We have death cults, assassins, guilds, all the paraphernalia of a Gray Mouser world but without the humour.Our Hero starts out nearly assassinated, escapes through a meaningless ritual though his wife is killed, and from here on in it's death and mayhem in all directions. The organisation of the society may appeal to neos, but it's all been done before and better; perhaps the nicest touch is the naming of this sink of iniquity 'Neweden', which seems to indicate that Leigh could produce something quite pleasant if he gave up the gore. (Ken Lake)

Andre Norton - - SORCERESS OF THE WITCH WORLD (VGSF, 1988, 222pp, £2.95)

Reprint of the 7th (1968) volume of the 'Witch World' series. Much better than most contemporary fantasy series, zapping her heroine between worlds, Norton convincingly

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"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 24 (Summer 1988)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Pete Lyon was the artist responsible for IZ's first full-colour cover, so it's appropriate that he has produced another striking scene for the last of the quarterly INTERZONEs. From issue 25, IZ is to go bimonthly, a promising step for British SF.

Alas, according to Charles Platt ('Destination: Gloom', an essay on Britain, its people and its SF) the only future for British SF writers, purveyors of pessimism, is for them to emigrate. This is a quite remarkable piece of expatriate vitriol which one has to read to believe it could exist. It's the sort of invective which demands a response - presumably why it was commissioned. But on to the fiction ...

Brian Stableford's excellent 'The Growth of the House of Usher' is a curious amalgam of Neo-Gothic style and bioengineering premise. The title is literal, its horrors traditionally rendered, the Usher doomed, but this, by the end, is not a downbeat story by any means. Charles Platt, please note. In 'The Time-Lapsed Man' Eric Brown uses the same space-faring background as his previous IZ stories as well as exploring a similar theme to Aldiss's 'Man in His Time'. Brown's spaceman's senses live in the past, however, and his decline is effectively charted. The third superior story in this issue is by Phillip Man. 'Lux in Tenebris' sheds light, both literally and metaphorically, on the darkness cast by ignorance and fear. The science fictional element in the tale is used by Mann as a device to explore the reactions of an ordinary man to extraordinary events in the Middle Ages.

Best of the remaining three stories is by Karen Joy Fowler. 'heartland' is a brief introduction to the American award winner and is a cleverly-wrought, if slight, attack on the domination of one culture by another. Alex Stewart's 'Animator' is an easy read but unfortunately each plot turn is signalled well in advance. In 'Salvage' Julio Buck Abrera, like Egan in 'Scatter My Ashes' (IZ 23), examines the effect on people of exposure to violence. In his debut as a short story writer Abrera displays a sure touch as regards creating tension, but not in supplying a satisfactory conclusion. Finally, back to the non-fiction, there's an interview with Thomas M. Disch bringing us up to date with his current projects, and the only really favourable review of the film EMPIRE OF THE SUN I have come across.

ANALOG, MAY to AUGUST, and *ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE*, JUNE to AUGUST 1988

Reviewed by Edward James

I always write these reviews at the same time of the month, every two months, so theoretically I ought to be looking at four issues at a time. It doesn't happen that way, though. I had two issues at hand for no. 71, three for no. 72, and now seven. To avoid my garrulity spreading across half of *Paperback Inferno*, I shall try to restrict myself to the most memorable items in each issue.

The lead story in the May *Analog* was "Hunting Rights" by P.M. Fergusson and G.L. Robson, in some ways an up-date of Van Vogt's "Black Destroyer", published nearly 50 years ago in this same magazine. We have an intelligent, horrifyingly dangerous cat-like alien; we have the mayhem it causes when a survey ship lands on its home planet. The up-dating relates to the ecology and alien biology of the planet; it's an ingenious and enjoyable tale. Roger MacBride Allen's "Thing's Ransom" looks at how a modern kidnapper might exploit modern banking technology: it all looks terribly plausible — I only hope not too many would-be kidnappers read *Analog*. "Fradero Goes Home", by Kevin O'Donnell, continues the story begun in the October '87 issue: an effective story of the return to Earth of a man whose entire subjective working life has been passed in 24 Earth hours. Eric Vinicoff's "Trauma" examines, in a workmanlike way, the social consequences of the appearance of automatic doctors. And, finally, a short by Stephen Kraus, "Frame of Reference" looks at what might have happened if it had been Albert Einstein back in 1925 who had been tried in Kentucky for teaching a theory contrary to the Bible (that the Earth was over a billion years old, among other things): "The influence of fundamentalist scientific doctrine might have lingered to the present day if Einstein and Darrow had not come to Louisville during that extraordinary summer and crushed it forever". All in all one of the most interesting issues of *Analog* for a long time.

In June *Analog* had another intelligent story about medical ethics from Elizabeth Moon : "Gut Feelings". The sort of story which *Analog* has always done best, in which someone who actually knows his or her subject extrapolates it into the near future. Poul Anderson had an enjoyable tale about an immortal searching for others of his kind, set in Bordeaux around the year AD 400, which *just* managed to avoid the trap of so many historicals of trying to fit in every bit of local colour possible. W.T.Quick's "Pie in the Sky" is yet another *Analog* tale about the commercial benefits on space exploration, usefully twinned with the month's fact article, Patrick Collins's piece on space tourism (which David Hardy illustrates on the cover). The other novelette was Michael F.Flynn's "The Steel Driver", set in the same world as his interesting serial *In the Country of the Blind* (Oct.-Nov. '87), introducing a certain J. Henry, a steel-drivin' man...

The July *Analog* had yet another Flynn story, "The Longford Collector", a brave and largely successful attempt at an old-fashioned whodunnit — but with an expert program on a computer as the unlikely detective. Plenty of internal references to fictional detectives; ideal for those who cross the genre boundaries every now and then. The other longer stories — a standard space adventure from Pauline Ashwell, "Fatal Statistics", and a standard Joseph H. Delaney story from Joseph H. Delaney — were not so memorable. But a couple of the shorts were entertaining: A.J.Austin's "Siren", about a very odd alien, and Rowland Shew's witty "Grave Reservations", in which a future tourist guide takes some rather critical foreigners (from other parts of the States) around the New York Reservation.

The most recent *Analog*, for August, came in only a couple of days ago. It has the first part of a four-part serial from Charles Sheffield, *Proteus Unbound*, which I shall ignore until (quick calculation) November. The longer stories were Stephen L. Burns's "The Reading Lesson", a thoughtful tale about the disadvantages of artificially implanted literacy, dramatised through the conflict between a writer and his wife, the director of a high-tech research company. There was also "Love Song", the latest in J. Brian Clarke's series about the partnership between Earthmen and the alien Phuili, which began four years ago: it started well, but is getting more and more tired — just as I am gettink pwetty fed up of the Phuili and their inability to pwonounce English pwoperly. Of the short stories only W.R.Thompson's "A Visitor to the Village", a neat twist on the old routine of travelling back in time to interview a great personnage — in this case an sf writer whose post-holocaust novel inspired the survivors of the holocaust — stood out at all.

The lead novella in the June *Asimov's* was the third in Silverberg's stories about Gilgamesh in Hell (the first of which won a Hugo last year): "Gilgamesh in Uruk". The garrulous Herod is still there, but we also meet Pablo Picasso, and Gilgamesh finally finds his beloved Enkidu. All good clean (?) thoroughly readable fun. There was other good fare here too, from which I single out just three from at least half-a-dozen interesting stories: James Patrick Kelly's "Home Front", a quietly chilling story about how the war affects the lives of high school kids back home: Jack McDevitt's "Last Contact", full of striking images, of how the memories of a star-faring past are finally lost and destroyed; and the cheerfully unpleasant satire by Eileen Gunn, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management", where executives are bioengineered into more suitable forms.

The July *Asimov's* was, for me, not nearly so interesting. A routine (not in the Peter Nicholls *Encyclopedia* sense of totally mindless, but simply somewhat dull and uninspired) story of planetary survey/ extraterrestrial biology from John Barnes, "The Limit of Vision"; a finely written piece of nothing from Connie Willis, "The Last of the Winnebagos"; and so on. However, I did enjoy the short "Vacuum States", from Geoffrey A. Landis (I still well remember his "Elemental", from *Analog* back in 1984) -- good old-fashioned sensawunda, about an experiment to harness the energy of the Universe, or to end it; and Hillary Rettig's "Through Alien Eyes" suggests she is an author worth watching. This issue actually had two first publications in it: that's getting quite a rarity for *Asimov's*.

Finally, the August issue, which was a whole lot more interesting. The novella was Frederik Pohl's "Waiting for the Olympians" — presumably a science fictional working of Cavafy's famous poem "Waiting for the Barbarians". As with Cavafy, the real disaster was not the coming, but the fact they did not come -- and what this would mean for Earth. No ordinary Earth, either, but a beautifully created alternative history, in which Jesus had never been crucified, Christianity never happened, and the Roman Empire never fell. In addition there is Howard Waldrop's "Do Ya, Do Ya, Wanna Dance", in which a very nicely portrayed reunion of the Class of '69 goes very wrong; a moving story of a reunion of a different kind from Stephen Leigh, called "Evening Shadow"; Eric Vinicoff's "The Great Martian Railroad Race", about the commercial exploitation of Mars and the jolly shenanigans of sly capitalists (a story almost more suited to *Analog*...); and a short short from Andrew Weiner — the last word on the familiar time paradox, "The Grandfather Problem". And a touch of class was added by Avram Davidson, in a typically erudite and amusing account of a wildboy on a South Atlantic island, "El Vilvoy de las Islas". A very readable and varied issue, well worth getting hold of. Given the huge preponderance of *Asimov's* in the big award stakes — in this year's Hugo nominations, four out of five nominations for best novella, four out of five nominations for best novelette, and four out of six for best shory story — we may well see three or four award contenders out of this bunch. My bets are placed on Pohl, Waldrop and McDevitt.

((Cont. from p.14))

fuses conventional 'Light-versus-Dark' fantasy modes with science-fictional technology and alien races. (Andy Sawyer)

Charles Sheffield - - THE NIMROD HUNT (Headline, 1988, 401pp, £3.50)

A poorish imitation of the Clarke/Niven/Clement format, whose 401 pages could usefully have been halved to present this scientifically ingenious but stylistically dull tale of interstellar conflict. The words 'before they destroy the universe' appear in the blurb and indicate just how over-the-top this work is, while in likening it to Kornbluth and other traditional writers, Spider Robinson really implies that it's dated and corny. OK for an evening's entertainment, but no depth or subtlety. (Ken Lake)

Clifford D. Simak - - THEY WALKED LIKE MEN (Avon, 1988, 256pp, $3.50)

Newspaperman Parker Graves discovers that an alien race is buying up homes and businesses, closing down Earth's economy to sell it off as a tourist resort. Not one of Simak's best, but this 1962 novel now seems uncannily prophetic! (Andy Sawyer)

Jack Vance - - THE PALACE OF LOVE (Grafton, 1988, 236pp, £2.95)

Third of the 'Demon Princes' reprints in which Kirth Gerson tracks down the debauched Viole Falushe. Typically inventive, but lacks pace, becoming in the end just another space quest. Vance can do much better. (Andy Sawyer)

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - THE MISENCHANTED SWORD (Grafton, 1988, 332 pp, £2.95)

From the author of the 'Lords of Dus' series, an amusing fantasy about a sword whose possession guarantees immortality and victory (but for just one combat at a time). And the spell will run out after 100 warriors have been slain. Attractively bourgeois hero, undercutting many S & S conventions. (Andy Sawyer)

Index of books reviewed