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The Review of paperback SF



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ARTWORK: Colin Davies: Cover and PI logo. Steve Bruce: p. 3; p.12. (Apologies for dropping this line last issue.)	

Paperback Purgatory

AND SO ANOTHER YEAR draws to a close and
editors with white paper to fill think about
what happened during the past twelve months.
Certainly more books arrived at PI HQ than
ever before, and quite honestly, fashionable
cynicism aside, it's not been a bad year. For
me, perhaps, it's been the year when some of
my favourite books (Aldiss's MALACCIA TAPEST-
RY, Brunner's SHOCKWAVE RIDER, Roberts'
PAVANNE and Smith's 'Instrumentality' novels
(to name but a few, and even then I've missed
out Hodgson's THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND))
came back into print. So smiles in the dir-
ection of Methuen, Penguin, Gollancz and
Robinson. But this doesn't take into consid-
eration the fact that there have been some

good new paperbacks this year too. I'm par-
ticularly glad that Gollancz have swiftly
brought out the softcover edition of John
Crowley's AEGYPT... but I shall refrain from
listing.

Instead, what can we hope for from next
year? Well, your guess is probably as good
as mine, but sometimes, late at night in
front of a hot typewriter, I must admit that
I offer a fervent prayer for:

FEWER half-famous novels (ignored by pub-
lishers, critics, or readers when originally
written) reprinted as 'the legendary cyber-
punk classic'.

FEWER novels about a street-wise punk
called Johnny who gets involved in a scam
concerning drugs, software, or both, set in
a near-future in which American culture is
being swamped by Japanese domination.

FEWER of the above, but with added voo-
doo.

FEWER of the above, but with all the
main features artfully translated into a
late-Victorian London mode.

FEWER postal strikes which cause a com-
plete mess in the finely-balanced review
sequence: not a few reviews included in this
issue are in fact next issue's reviews in-
cluded because books and/or reviews and/or
final copy scheduled for this or the previous
issue were delayed in a temporal maelstrom.

FEWER novels set in the world of some
major 'Golden Age' writer. But I have a sad
suspicion that this form of licensed plagiar-
ism has yet to hit this country in its full
horror. May it never do so.

FEWER fantasy trilogies of virtually any
description, but especially the ones featur-
ing lightly-disguised Dark Lords and enchanted
weapons. Anything featuring Elves and Half-
lings, 'Dragonlance' chronicles, maps, long
and involved descriptions of the imaginary
world without maps, front-cover endorsements
by major authors, back-cover blurbs contain-
ing the words 'in the great tradition of...'
will be reviewed by the Mafia.

A couple of corrections to PI 73 sent in
by eagle-eyed readers: DAVE LANGFORD writes,
"Terry Broome's comments about an extended
satirization of the Laws of Robotics in Terry
Pratchett's DARK SIDE OF THE SUN sound like a
slip of the mind. The book has a mild gag
somewhat earlier ('Eleventh Law of Robotics,
Clause C, As Amended'), but the cited passage
is surely meant as a pastiche of the robot
class system in Brian Aldiss's 'But Who Can
Replace A Man?'. Mistaking Aldiss for Asimov
is actually a fairly rare occurrence..." PAM
BADDLEY corrects David Barrett in his review
of the Dr. Who script THE TRIBE OF GUM: "Sus-
an was the Doctor's grand-daughter, not niece
- something clearly established in the first
episode (and she did call him grandfather
right the way through). I wouldn't say Bar-
bara screamed very often considering the dram-
atic conventions of the time...on the other
hand Susan was really strange and 'alien' in
the original plot but this was felt to be too
radical and in the re-shot episode she had
transformed into the slightly hysterical
'normal' teenager with whom the production
team felt their young audience would more
readily identify - and so she did scream all
the time. Incidentally, there was an attempt
to explain why everyone, stone-age to aliens,
speaks English, in the Tom Baker story
'Masque of Mandragora'. There, the hypnotised
Sarah who has been programmed to murder the
Doctor asks him why she can understand the
Renaissance Italians around her and he ex-
plains that it is a Time Lords 'gift' which
he can extend to his companions. In fact this
sudden curiosity...alerts him to the fact
that she's not herself!"

Many thanks to everyone who wrote, inclu-
ding those who commented on my editorial last
issue. Have a good winter solstice and see
you next year!



GOLLAN CZ CLASSICS:

Why the change?

Malcolm Edwards replies.

((In PI 73, Ken Lake reviewed four 'Gollancz Classics' - RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA and THE DEEP RANGE by Arthur C. Clarke; THE SPACE MACHINE by Christopher Priest, and NORSTRILIA by Cordwainer Smith (which I consistently misspelled throughout the review: sorry.) Ken criticised the change of format of the 'Classic' series, and queried the selection policy behind the choice of books. I asked Malcolm Edwards of Victor Gollancz Ltd. to respond to Ken's comments, and his reply is below.))

Thanks for sending me an advance text of Ken Lake's review. I should point out that while Ken did indeed try to be fair by attempting to contact me in advance, so far as I am aware these attempts consisted of (a) a phone call to my office while I was in a meeting and a message that told me he had gone out for the day by the time I emerged and (b) a phone call to an address where I haven't lived for a year and a half, which I only found out about a week later. I say this not in any way to criticize Ken - few reviewers would even have bothered with one call - but to counter any impression that I was ignoring his attempts.

Ken ventures a number of speculations for the change in format of the Classics series. The truth is quite simple. When we launched the Classics we were not mass-market paperback publishers, and we were indeed hoping that by packaging the books in a more 'up-market' style we might reach out beyond the hardcore SF market. However, last year we did start publishing mass-market paperbacks and it quickly became apparent that we could sell them in a wide range of markets (particularly overseas) that were not interested in larger formats. As a result, a VG SF title by author A was substantially outselling a Classic title by the same author - a daft situation, it seemed to me, when the Classics were supposed to represent an author's best works. Hence the change. As for production standards: the books are typeset or offset as appropriate, just as they always have been, and the paper (while bulkier) is no cheaper than before. I'm sorry Ken doesn't like the Arthur Clarke packaging, but I can assure him that putting foil across the entire front of a jacket is not a cheap way of doing things! it is in fact extremely costly.

People must make up their own minds about the choice of titles. I'm personally happy to have all of them in the series (and they were all lined up long before the decision was taken to switch formats). The other titles for this year include two more by Cordwainer Smith, THE REDISCOVERY OF MAN and THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF MANKIND, Cecelia Holland's FLOATING WORLDS, another Clarke (IMPERIAL

EARTH) and Christopher Priest's THE AFFIRMATION. On the stocks for early 1989 are CRYPTOZOIC! by Brian Aldiss (the first of a number of Aldiss titles), DYING INSIDE by Robert Silverberg, THE COMMITTED MEN by M. John Harrison and DREAMSNAKE by Vonda McIntyre. As before, there's a mixture of household names and unjustly-neglected ones, and I still retain the hope that the series may lead people into a few discoveries. Much as I loved (and still love) the original design and format, it became clear that it wasn't selling well enough to justify persisting with it, and the fact that each one of the four books Ken is reviewing has already sold more copies than any one of the twelve Classics published last year suggests that the decision to change was the right one.

Ken ventures a couple of further criticisms of us as publishers in PI 74. Perhaps I can answer these at the same time. As regards changing the title of THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH to THE REDISCOVERY OF MAN - it seemed to me that as we were publishing the entire Smith oeuvre, all four books of it, it was absurd to retain that title, which seems to suggest by implication that the other three books were THE DREGS OF CORDWAINER SMITH - which I don't think they are! The title THE BEST OF... was designed to fit a series which Del Rey/Ballantine published in the USA; I don't see anything sacred in it.

More seriously, Ken says in his review of GREAT SKY RIVER - a good novel, incidentally, in my view! - that we are guilty of 'sharp practice', being 'determined not to tell anyone that their purchase is just the open-ended first part of a trilogy...' But look at the blurb on the back cover, for Heaven's sake: 'In the tradition of Arthur C. Clarke and Larry Niven, GREAT SKY RIVER is the first of three novels...' (my emphasis). Not guilty, your honour.



((Another response to Ken's piece came from CHRIS BAILEY: I print his comments here rather than in a separate 'Contact' column because it makes sense to keep this discussion linked together.))

"The magazine was positive in tone, with the exception of Ken Lake's piece. It contained very little assessment or appreciation of the four books being reviewed. He even judged them by their covers. And he is seriously fixated at the anal stage; his main grouse against Gollancz seems to be that they have spoiled his shelf arrangements. But generally, do you feel that consideration of marketing should be part of PI's brief? Obviously fans like to make their feelings known to the publishers. At the same time, their criticisms are going to be misinformed at best. Underlying such criticisms is often a fond belief that SF editors are actually masters of their own destinies, invulnerable to market forces and corporate decisions. (And do fans seriously imagine that any sane editor is going to put his career on the line by attacking such decisions in public?) Ten years ago, the monotonous plaint of BSFA publications was that publishers did not care for SF, scarcely any was being published, first novels and collections were non-starters, etc. etc. Now bookshops seem to be swamped with the stuff but I still feel humbly grateful to see any at all, even with muzzy type. And let's face it, the covers are always awful. That's one of the joys of SF."

((Yes, I do think that PI should be interested in the marketing of SF, if only because some publishers don't seem to be particularly good at it: good novels are treated with an apparent lack of care and attention and med-

iocrity is hyped up to the heavens. But having said that, I take the point that publishers are not in business to please the elite of Fandom. Here's a moral problem, for instance: forgetting all this wicked, sinful stuff about publishing being a business, having to make profits - if twice as many people have the experience of reading a book by your favourite author because its published in a format cheap enough for them to buy with a cover lurid enough to notice, is that a good or a bad thing? Or what about the semi-accurate cover blurbs I discussed in PI 72? Granted we don't know why publishers make particular marketing decisions, I think criticisms are still valid even if there turns out to be a good reason for these decisions: I can think of at least three logical and contradictory answers to the questions I've just posed, for instance...))



John Crowley - - AEGYPT (Collancz, 1988, 390pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

There are things that cannot be spoken plain; the Mysteries. It was never forbidden, it is simply impossible. So to talk about such a subject, one must approach obliquely, spiralling in around the unspoken word...

Humans are patterners; inventors/perceivers of ordered structures. We see patterns in history as our minds pattern the art of memory. We pattern reality as fiction. We discover patterns of time and individual destiny in the patterned macrocosmic space of the stars. Patterns are like names; they hold meaning, fix significances and relationships; as the past and future stand in fixed relation, as the stars are fixed to their crystal sphere... That's what I see in this book.

Life is a tension between Becoming and Being. Fixed/fluid; if something might exist; (say in) the world, or (in) myself, what is it being? What might it become? Is a world more or less than a world-picture, is becoming greater than being? Perhaps all art, all pattern, exists nowhere if not in the mind; the Uncut Block spawns Ten Thousand Things... This book is so full of a number of things, I'm sure it should keep you all happy as kings.

When I first looked into this book I saw angels in the glass, two four six many of them... All their names begin with A: astrology, ars memoria, Aegypt, anagrams, algorithms, asps, altar boys, acolytes, Adocentyn. Some fictional characters from the book(s) are: William Shakespeare, Doctor John Dee, Spofford (whose first name should be Cuddy or Corin), Pierce Moffett, Giordano Bruno, Rosa Mystica/Rosa Mundi aka Rosie Mucho, and so on and so on...

Fictions within fictions. Wheels within wheels. Spheres within spheres, that set one another ringing with their music. Truths within truths. I didn't really understand LITTLE, BIG; I was too busy watching him folding and unfolding the plan on his huge piece of paper. This time, I see the original origami Phoenix fly...

- But what's the book ABOUT? I don't understand a word of this review!

- Well, it's about Everything, I guess. A gibberish review usually means it's the best thing I've read in years. Let me try borrowing someone else's description...

'Whenever the world turns from what it has been into what it will be, there is a brief moment when every possible kind of universe, all possible extensions of Being in space and time, are poised on the threshold of becoming, before all but one pass into nonexistence again.

This is the story of one such moment and about those men and women and others who recognised it. They dwell in the same world we dwell in: it had this sun and these stars. Yet when we look back on their world, we glimpse a shadow of still another story and another world, symmetrical to it, though as different from it as dream is from waking.

This world; this story.

Aegypt.'

John Clute, David Pringle
& Simon Ounsley (eds.) - - - -INTERZONE: THE
SECOND ANTHOLOGY
(NEL, 1988, 274pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

It has been a criticism of *Interzone* that its stories are a triumph of style over content, and when I read the magazine, I am more often than not left with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction arising from this. Re-reading the stories in this anthology (from issues 8-19, three of which are from issue 16 and three from issue 14), I was able to identify some of the reasons for my dissatisfaction. Three stories in particular come to mind.

In Neil Ferguson's weak dystopian cliché, 'The Second Third of C', which opens the anthology, too much is unexplained in a story of a doomed and illicit love between a prostitute and an etymologist. Rachel Pollack's 'The Protector' tries and fails to mix religious mysticism with a reality-distorting plague, and Ian Watson's 'When the Timegate Failed' is an overlong and confusing story of stardrives, time travel and interspecies sex.

Interzone at its best, however, publishes stories of stunning depth and originality, in which style and content are inseparably fused. Six of the stories in this anthology achieve this synthesis, whilst three stories come close.

Among the excellent ones not referred to in Mike Moir's review (*Vector* 143), Michael Blumlein's 'The Brains of Rats' is an enthralling study of a doctor with a sexual identity crisis on a powerful and frightening crusade, and Scott Bradfield's 'Unmistakably the Finest' is just that, an ambiguous and unusual ghost story about dishonesty, the avoidance of responsibility and a child's search for comfort.

This a stimulating anthology where even the failures offer food for thought.

Brian Aldiss - - - - -THE MALACIA TAPESTRY
(Methuen, 1988, 292pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

This is Aldiss' alternate history novel, first published in 1976. It is set in a city south of the Alps, organised much like one of the Italian Renaissance city states, with a murder rate just as high. Perian de Chirolo narrates the tale, and partly by accident he becomes

involved in the struggle of innovators against conservatives. Malacia's government is opposed to change, and the people accept the status quo.

Perian has a job as an actor, which brings him into contact with a photographer trying to promote his new process, but Perian's interest is mainly in his love affairs. He is modelling for a potential photostrip, with his leading lady the daughter of a wealthy burgher who could introduce him to the good life. Perian's life is shallow but he is touched by intrigue and treachery before the city subsides into rest again.

In the background, though, is Malacia, unchanged for Millennia - it has lizard boys, flying people, satyrs, and still has dinosaurs - slobbergobs, snaphaunces, mangonels, devil-jaws and tyrant-greaves. Part of the interest of this book is to see how Aldiss brings things in and then lets them fade from view, when they would be climaxes in other people's work - it actually takes some close reading to decide which animal is being referred to by so homely names. When I first read *THE MALACIA TAPESTRY* some years ago I missed many of his tricks and references, this time I don't think I have. Like previous editions this one comes with eighteenth century illustrations, and has a new nice cover by John Higgins. A lot of attention has been paid to putting this book together and it deserves it.

Robert Holdstock - - - - WHERE TIME WINDS BLOW
(VGSF, 1988, 286pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

It is neatly significant that in this multi-dimensional novel the protagonist is Leo Faulcon, while Robert Faulcon is Holdstock's occult-novel pseudonym. Science-fictional dimensions here embrace the planet Kamelios: its technological/agricultural polarities; its six moons determining procreative cycles; its rift-valley electric storms. Occult dimensions involve 'tolpari', those 'phenomena...created by concentrated thought and given substance'; the life-death-life time wind cycling of rift explorers; the vast time-free consciousness that commandeers psycho-physically (as does the planet's lesser fauna organically) creature-vehicles to effect insemination.

If this seems a strange imbroglia - then so it is. But as with the author's *MYTHAGO WOOD*, readers at first seeing only trees, may sense at last a mega-myth emerging, still lacking clarity but patently relevant to the depths, dramas and traumas of inner experience. In *MYTHAGO WOOD* it is in a primal forest that the lost, the past (and their futures) are obsessively sought: here it is in a planetary rift-valley. One has its 'mythagos': the other its 'tolpari'.

Although to compare *TIME WINDS* with Lem's great sf-fantasy *SOLARIS* may over-heighten expectations, they are genre-kindred. In both the mysteries of being and memory permeate a planet. In both the exploring characters are equally exploited ones. In *TIME WINDS*, for all their introspections, agonised decisions and freedom-seeking, the characters barely escape a puppet subservience to the planet's six dancing moons and to its destructive/creative hyperphysical entity - powerful symbol of that which Prospero projected for Miranda as 'the dark backward and abysm of time'.

Cynthia Voigt - - - - - JACKAROO
(Collins, 1988, 284pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Cynthia Voigt is a highly acclaimed US author for teenagers who came to prominence about five years ago when she won the Newbery Medal

for her second book, *DICEY'S SONG*. Concentrating on a series of long novels, six so far, about an orphaned family winning through, she asserts traditional moral values and attacks the racialism of US society. Specialising in realistic, family fiction, she has surprised her admirers by choosing a medieval setting for *JACKAROO*, I suspect as a deliberate attempt to widen her range by seeing what she could do in the same field as another Newbery winner, Robin McKinley.

So painstaking is she in establishing her land's social and political setting, with such domestic details as bread-making, the location of the privies, and even the heroine's monthly periods (omitted by McKinley, even when her heroine spent six weeks in the desert training to be a warrior), that it is not until page 105 that Gwyn, the Innkeeper's daughter and a misfit among her community, discovers a hidden pile of clothing and a mask, left by the legendary outlaw, Jackaroo; and not until page 163 that she actually performs her first heroic deed in disguise.

This is a land of harsh winters and crop failures, oppression, unjust taxes, bandits, and strict sexual taboos, where a child dead is simply a mouth less to feed. The people are kept in illiteracy, and tales of Jackaroo are barely whispered for fear of the Lords' displeasure. Gwyn, who rejects the system of arranged marriages, welcomes the excitement of riding the land as Jackaroo.

But this masquerade brings danger. It's all very well to benefit the common people, who stand goggle-eyed as she rides by, but when she comes up against the Lord's soldiers she needs to be able to fight and ride well, to escape. If she is caught, she will be publicly hanged. And when she is in danger, another Jackaroo, in another set of hidden garments, steps forward and draws the hunt away. Could this mystery man be an unknown suitor for her hand?

There is something of an American fashion in medieval, non-magical fantasy (cf. Betty Levin's *THE ICE BEAR*, reviewed in *Vector* 140), a nostalgia for a past which didn't exist in the USA - but in the Europe whence some US immigrants came. (Lloyd Alexander's *WESTMARK* trilogy, more Ruritanian than medieval, with guns as weapons, hasn't even found a British publisher yet).

JACKAROO completely absorbs you into its secondary world, but will be a difficult read for most teenagers, more likely than adults to come across it. Perhaps Voigt's fans who enjoy her realistic books will try it out, and follow up with a look at magical fantasies for young adults - *JACKAROO* could be an important bridge for young readers who are normally resistant to fantasy as a genre.

Ian Watson - - - - - WHORES OF BABYLON
(Paladin, 1988, 302pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

WHORES OF BABYLON begins with an apparently straightforward scenario: America, fearing that it will go the same way as other great Empires (Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc.), builds a duplicate Ancient City of Babylon, complete with a Tower of Babel and a perpetually dying Alexander the Great. It is to act as a sort of super-computer to chart the progress of a civilisation. Our hero is Alex (not the Great, but a sociology drop-out), who is assimilated into the city, absorbing its culture and language through a computer interface. It is forbidden to refer to the 'future', and Alex becomes the victim of some unfortunate adventures when he discovers a cassette. But this is not a simple adventure story, but one of struggles for material wealth and power, the mechanics of survival (of individuals and

of states), and the nature of reality and illusion. Watson creates a convincingly real Babylon, at the same time reminding the reader that this Babylon is the creation of the modern world. Alex, we soon discover, is the narrator, and, although absorbed into Babylon, he remains linked to the 'future' - a future which the city and its people will not openly acknowledge, and, indeed, by the end of the novel, forget. By this time the physical reality of Babylon is seriously in doubt.

WHORES OF BABYLON is one of the best books I have read recently. Watson tells a good story, draws his characters convincingly, is interesting about his subject; he puts his own and the reader's intellect to work. What more can you ask?

Nigel Frith - - - - - OLIMPIAD
(Unwin, 988, 224pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

This is not quite a straight retelling of Greek myth. Liberties are taken, chronologies loosened, characters and actions remoulded - Meleager is (properly) the leader of the Kalydonian Boar hunt, but improperly the golden apples trickster. Atalanta is (properly) the Boar's first wounder, but lacks her leonine metamorphosis. Never mind: myth is malleable, and here, embodying Nigel Frith's theory of epic, it cradles a great world-culture. Its focus is Heracles' foundation of the Olympic Games; and all is observed or disturbed by the looming gods. It makes a compelling story, told in an alliterative, rhythmic, epithet-rich prose which with its archaisms and inversions, moves serenely through concord and discord, while often reaching towards high poetic pitch. Seasons and landscapes flare and flower in colourful succession, exemplified in the imagery that creates the setting for the gods' Olympic migration:

Beyond the deep Aegean where the heat-haze hovered
and the dolphins cruised with warm
backs in the morning,
there hung a line of mountains, blue-
grey with iron clouds,
eternal and silent in the ocean.

At four points original verse in English uses Greek quantitative metre. Although the appended contention that these 'could open up a new road for English poetry' seems strangely ambitious, the Pindaric pastiche is a tour de force, the Sapphic lyric is charming and the Homeric hexameters shape such splendidly evocative pastoral lines as:

Home, enough of browsing, fat goats,
run home from the hillside;
on broom and nutty-flavoured gorse,
and heath ever-purple
you've fed enough.

There is much in this book that is sheer enjoyment; and, in the context of its author's perspective of 'Pangaia', much that is also of wide significance.

Cecelia Holland - - - - - FLOATING WORLDS
(VGSF, 1988, 542pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

It is not surprising that FLOATING WORLDS has attracted the description of 'neglected masterpiece'. Not surprising - but is it justified? Certainly, the book is ambitious, dealing with important political themes, ranging from political movements such as anarchism and fascism, to the level of personal political ambition. These themes are interwoven into a story concerning Paula Mendoza's negotiation and maintenance of a truce between the Middle Planets and the Styth Empire of Saturn and Uranus. The Styths are mutant descendants of human colonists, and Holland's portrait of a self-opinionated, power-obsessed, male-orientated 'Master Race' is a wholly convincing portrait of a fascist society. Convincing, too, is its exploration of such themes as Man's Inhumanity To Man, the cynical manipulation of human beings, racism and sexism; particularly refreshing is the way in which the author avoids contemporary sloganism. All this is done without abandoning a concern for constructing a good plot, and the characterisation (of the protagonist, at least) is excellent. One of the difficulties I had was in not knowing exactly what to make of Mendoza, a professed anarchist (in the 'real' meaning of the word) and pacifist, with a strong sense of personal loyalty, she is nonetheless politically manipulative and amoral. But for all the abstract political theory and at times seemingly amoral ethos of the novel, it remains a novel which affirms the fundamental humanity of people: Mendoza makes friends and family within the Styth Empire, and it is this which prevails.

K.W. Jeter - - - - - INFERNAL DEVICES
(Grafton, 1988, 283pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Subtitled 'A Mad Victorian Fantasy' this novel almost defies description.

George Dower has taken over his (recently deceased) father's business, but he cannot match his father's genius with clockwork. Puzzled by attempts to steal one of his father's strange devices, brought in for repair by the Brown Leather Man, and the even stranger mystery of a coin bearing the twisted visage of Saint Monkfish, he sets out to investigate.

From the much reveiled London Borough of Wetwick to the Hebridean Island of Groughay and back down to Lord Bendray's Dampford Hall, Dower finds himself in one life-threatening situation after another.

A mythic creature, two rogues who have seen into the future, a clockwork Dower posing as a womanising violinist and Lord Bendray's project involving Cataclysm Harmonics all go to make this novel a pure delight.

The only fault, if it could be said to be a fault, is that we cannot share in the reassurance given to Dower that Bendray's project is harmless, but since the novel is a romp, the predictable ending forms part of the cosy, familiar style which makes this such a joy to read.

R E V I E W S

Donald Kingsbury - - - - - THE MOON GODDESS
AND THE SON
(Grafton, 1988, 544pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

A stupid title, a ludicrous cover illustration, and a strong recommendation from

Locus ('A grand experiment and a major book') bring us to two almost totally separate stories.

Yes, it's another word-processor creation. The 'moon goddess' bit has Diana, Byron McDougall, his wife and son, his varied mistresses and other unpleasant Americans interacting in a 21st-century society that is

about to take in the moon. There's a lot of corny psychological claptrap, a great deal of behaviour that makes one wonder how Americans can ever manage to live together anyhow, and of course a happy ending.

But the other story - ah, that's 'essential reading'. Soviet Communism and Marxism are examined through the medium of gaming - and it's done both seriously and with great insight. It also involves the participants not merely dressing as Russians from all periods of that country's history, but being treated (and mistreated) as if they were those they mimic.

In fact I was so taken by this separate story that I listed the pages on which each of the relevant chapters begins, because I fully intend to re-read them while ignoring the corny tale of American mores. Anyone who wants to do the same can write me for the page references - you'll cut about a third off the length and lose nothing of the sheer thrill that the gaming story provides.

There's a third skein to the plot that concerns an Afghani whose family is killed by the Russians and who plots a terrible revenge which plunges the world in World War III or, as it's rapidly named, The Accidental War. This is tangential to both other stories, and frankly I found myself wishing over and over that Kingsbury had stuck to his gaming tale and kept the rest for quite another book.

I have just one request to make: would readers of the book who are better informed than I on the minutiae of Mongol and Russian history and culture please take up the author's theories in the pages of a BSFA magazine; if the facts are as depicted here, they are important to us all.

Michael Moorcock - - WIZARDRY AND WILD ROMANCE
(Gollancz, 1988, 237pp, £2.95)

- - - THE DRAGON IN THE SWORD
(Grafton, 1988, 283pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

WIZARDRY AND WILD ROMANCE disappointed a few people when it first appeared, partly because much of it had appeared in earlier form elsewhere, partly because it wasn't the definitive work on epic fantasy by a master practitioner (albeit one who writes 'my own taste is primarily for the likes of George Eliot, Meredith and Conrad') but rather the opening stages of a debate than its conclusion.

Perhaps it's best regarded as an entertainingly written but partial and partisan view (how can it be complete if it avoids Moorcock's own work?) which occasionally suffers from too much quotation and not enough analysis. Moorcock stomps effectively enough on some of the anodyne gunge which makes up much epic fantasy, slashing at the middle-class English whimsicalities inherent in Tolkien, Richard Adams and the like. As he's remarked elsewhere, it's odd how the so-called 'counter-culture' looked for icons and symbols in writers who, whatever their other merits, were totally opposed to any kind of left-libertarian values. Where he disappoints, I think, is where he praises writers such as William Hope Hodgson and Clark Ashton Smith and then quotes extensively from them without any attempt to show why this is so good. It's not always self-evident (particularly in the case of Hodgson whom I've certainly underrated but whose THE NIGHT LAND is so idiosyncratic that it's beyond questions of 'style'). Nevertheless, WIZARDRY AND WILD ROMANCE is an essential book which (albeit indirectly) sheds light on Moorcock's own fiction.

THE DRAGON IN THE SWORD reads like another attempt to say goodbye to the Eternal Champions series, combining elements from the

tangential 'von Bek' stories and including a scene involving Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels in which Moorcock dramatises the mystical fantasy and perversion of the imagination which underlies fascism (another swipe at the uncritical epic-fantasy cliché). Here the Eternal Champion finds peace only by renouncing heroism and recapturing his mundane self as John Daker, free from the chains imposed by childish demigods. The adventures are standard stuff; what makes this book much more readable and interesting than usual is the way the main character reflects upon the adventures, allowing the reader to embrace the passionate anarcho-humanism which is there underlying this particular wizardry and wild romance.

Marion Zimmer Bradley - - - - - LYTHONDE
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(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

Thieves World was a concept worked out by a number of writers who created the world and the basic idea on which it worked and then let all the writers involved use the concept as they wished, making allowances for others' characters and not making fundamental changes to the world itself. Lythonde is Bradley's character and contribution to Thieves World.

LYTHONDE the book is a series of short stories by Bradley, with a foreword written to each one and a final story by Vonda McIntyre using Lythonde as the central character. There are a number of problems with these. One is that Bradley consistently gives away the point of the stories and loses all the tension in them: the 'forewords' should be 'afterwords' because she kills all the stories before they are read, so I strongly advise against reading them till after the stories are finished. The problem with the McIntyre story is that I thought it was much better than any of the Bradley ones; the character of Lythonde came more alive, the plot had more complexity and the characters more strangeness and depth than in Bradley's stories. Bradley does not seem altogether at home in the short story format, which considering the length of her novels is not surprising, and she functions awkwardly, not finding the balance between plot and character in such a short space, so that the writing is clumsy in places. She also repeats descriptions of Lythonde in each story so that by the third the reiteration of the same things is getting fairly boring.

However, despite all the above negativeness, the character is an interesting one and the situations not dull. Lythonde is a mage. (Do not read on if you wish to be surprised in the first story.) All mages are male. Except that Lythonde disguised herself as male, won her wand (so to speak) and then got her come-uppance in the form of her secret. All mages have a secret which they dare not reveal to any other soul or they may lose their power, Lythonde's secret is to disguise her womanhood. She must always seem a man, she must never eat or drink with a man, yet cannot remain with women. It is a good idea which never seemed as interesting as I hoped at first. Perhaps the completely male world of Thieves World means the tension between a male and female is less, in that world where women are just objects any woman with some guts would be better off disguised as male. One of the reasons McIntyre's story was more effective was that she introduced women who were characters in themselves, women for Lythonde to react against, women who could make her think.

All in all I found the book disappointing and even boring in places, it was a missed opportunity, and perhaps also the wrong format for the author.

Michael Weaver - - - - - MERCEDES NIGHTS
(NEL, 1988, 240pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

K.W. Jeter and I have not been reading the same book. According to the back cover blurb, he found MERCEDES NIGHTS 'sharp, funny and cordially dirty-minded'. I found it vague, padded, mildly amusing in parts, and really rather clean.

The prologue, despite the many cliches drawn from the SF lexicon, is impressively economical. In a brief, cinematic mosaic, a sedated woman is exchanged for a cache of drugs upon which one Nathaniel Redman overdoses. Thus begins the process in which vidstar Mercedes Night finds herself illegally cloned, and inextricably tangled in a conspiracy of the highest order. So much action is crammed, understated, into the first two pages that it comes as a disappointment that this short-lived economy doesn't extend to the rest of the book, which takes an age to get anywhere.

Weaver constructs his tale from multiple viewpoints, focusing his attention on a succession of characters who (one hopes!) will eventually be linked together into some grand scheme. In this respect (and in one other, to be mentioned shortly) I was reminded of Philip Dick. Except that whereas Dick's characters are intertwined in relationships of often tragic complexity - relationships that cause the tensions that drive his plots - Weaver's characters merely co-exist, brought together only as the result of a slowly revealed conspiracy. Further, his characters seem to me to be falsely motivated: Christie's announcement that she is off into space, pp. 58-61; Mercedes begins to cry, p. 82 - it's not so much that these people are incapable of the behaviour shown, as that they do these things so suddenly. One wonders, too, why Presidential candidate Warren Keyes is so afraid of being seen in public with Mercedes - we're told that it's not the done thing, but we're never told why.

The other Dick-like feature of the novel is a group of drug-crazed characters who paravitate about Arthur Horstmeyer, whose weird paranoia/conspiracy theory concerning 'vacuum fish' recalls Dick himself. Unfortunately, Horstmeyer has no depth and serves merely to give this novel of the 80s a feel of the 60s and 70s; references to LSD, Pink Floyd and David Bowie abound. Far from being the forward-looking post-cyberpunk novel one expects, MERCEDES NIGHTS is ultimately backward looking in both its style and content.

That said, I still can't forget the prologue which, with a few other moments, convince me that Weaver is someone to watch out for in the future.

L. Neil Smith - - - - - THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE
(Grafton, 1988, 511pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Serifs were developed because, by 'framing' each letter, they made reading easier. Thus a 511pp book entirely in sans-serif type, albeit infant-school large and well leaded, is by definition harder to read.

The author has attempted to overcome this disability by spreading his tale through interminable descriptions and repetitious conversations, to create a rambling tale that may appeal to a Survivalist American but regrettably holds little to grasp the attention of the average English reader unless he be interested in religious inventiveness.

For here we have the world 'as it might have been' had most of Christendom been wiped out by plague in AD 1349 - but a world where for some reason Smith has had to jump into the

21st century (1400 AH, i.e. 'in the year of the Hijira', from the beginning of the Islamic calendar) to show us a Saracen Caliph ruling in Rome, the Arab Mughal Empire battling in the East, and on America's West Coast 'The Crystal Empire', a Sino-Aztec kingdom whose priests enforce the oppressive doctrines of 'The Brotherhood of Christ in Hell'.

It may be that in 'born again Christian' America this tale has some moral for the readers; over here, it reads like Rambo with religion. A final warning: I have the nasty feeling it's the first part of another trilogy!

Donald Moffitt - - - - - THE GENESIS QUEST
(Sphere, 1988, 341pp, £3.50)

- - - - - - - - - - SECOND GENESIS
(Sphere, 1988, 329pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

Although set millions of years into the future, the initial premise of these books has already been started. Man, seeking other life forms, sends out a message which describes the race and our culture. It is intercepted by the Nar who decipher it and use the secrets of DNA in the signal to reproduce Man. That's the prologue, come the actual story things have progressed to the point that young Bram wants to know why he is different, he wants to travel to old Earth but Nar technology has no FTL or similar. Meanwhile others are planning a revolution to wipe out the benevolent dictatorship of the Nar. Bram gets caught up in this. He is now a respected bioengineer and has found out a few things from the original Message, such as DNA-encoded immortality.

The revolt comes, and in good old Heinlein fashion, it fails but the Nar are persuaded by Bram and others to compromise. Hence a large number of humans set off in search of Earth using a relativistic drive discovered by a friend of Bram, and the immortality Bram has revealed. The ship is a giant, world-sized tree - promptly called Yggdrasil and shortened to Iggie. Surprisingly, this idea isn't silly, but there are bits that Terry Pratchett might have rejected as too silly - the recreated violin for instance which is an electronic instrument with a flywheel bow.

SECOND GENESIS details the voyage of the Humans and the discoveries they make at the end of it. On Earth Humans have been succeeded by Dragonflies, but the old Nar galaxy has been destroyed by the twin black holes at its core.

That is a very skimpy outline of these two tightly packed novels, there is a lot of very hard SF ideas in here, a lot of general scientific detail on all subjects. Moffitt has a manner like Orson Scott Card but where the latter spread his ideas too thinly Moffitt has gone deeply into everything and slotted it all together well. The characters are a step or two up from cardboard and the action is maintained. Nor is there the Thick character Arthur C. Clarke uses to prompt his scientific expositions. These are good, well informed hard SF. Moffitt knows his science but he also knows his Science Fiction and his not always original concepts are integrated smoothly. I enjoyed these as I thought I wouldn't. Pity about the awful covers though.

Pat Murphy - - - - - THE SHADOW HUNTER
(Headline, 1988, 223pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

As soon as I began to read this book I realised that it was much better than I'd supposed from the cover. The cover illustration and the back caption are both inaccurate. The story is not a new one but

told with an interesting new slant. A warrior from a Stone Age tribe is brought to the near future by a time grab owned by a millionaire of dubious intentions. After the law steps in, the Hunter is allowed to live on the millionaire's reservation, according to his own ways. He comes to know a few people of the time - a couple of technicians, his lawyer, a film director - lives happily stalking deer and bear and ends even happier eventually.

The success of THE SHADOW HUNTER comes from Pat Murphy's ability to show everything from the Hunter's point of view. This has two results - firstly, the Stoneager is not stupid, things may be strange to him but they are not intolerable. He judges things by his own standards, and as a result he is a well rounded character. The second result comes from his beliefs - he believes in magic and animal powers. He sees spirits of dead animals when they have been shot without being at peace, and he is a practicing shaman. This again is credible in the book.

Now, of course, you could argue the opposite belief to the simple Hunter. You can see him as a proof that men have always ruled the natural world by imposing an ideology, such as the idea that putting animals at peace in their spirit before slaughter makes your Sunday roast or its Neanderthal equivalent a morally better dinner. I don't think that it was Pat Murphy's intention to raise this, but like all good books this one raises matters beyond their author's intentions. I enjoyed reading it and thinking about it.

Charles Grant - - - - TALES FROM THE NIGHTSIDE
(Futura, 1988, 228pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

A collection of fifteen stories with an embarrassing foreword by Stephen King, whose praise for Mr Grant is somewhat devalued by his apparent willingness to eulogise on every book jacket he can find.

Grant has a distinct style and his clear prose gives a cutting edge to these tales of otherworldly children, rural psychosis and conventional bugbears. The stories are told economically - a welcome change from some modern horror fiction which is drenched in Gothic imagery. Grant's stories are relatively short and most involve pragmatic modern characters confronting the dark truths lying behind illusory facades. His use of doom-laden atmosphere and small town settings invite parallels with the aforementioned Mr King's work, but Grant approaches his supernatural forces as part of the milieu whilst King introduces them as foreign intrusions into ordinary people's lives.

Nine of the stories are set in two locations; Oxrun Station and Hawthorne Street, the others occupy a miscellaneous third subdivision. The stories set in Oxrun Station and Hawthorne Street attain a delicate mythic quality which belies their apparent conventional form. Many of the conclusions seem inevitable yet creep up on you all the same. A collection of simple horror/fantasy stories which add up to more than their sum as stories in any worthwhile anthology should.

George R.R. Martin - - - - -TUF VOYAGING
(VGSF, 1988, 374pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

As I write, I have beside me both the VGSF edition, and the original Baen books 376pp paperback which retails at \$3.50 and which I bought in Britain for just £2.95, giving the importer a sensible profit and myself a sizeable reduction on the cost of the home product. Surely something wrong somewhere? The Gollancz edition is fractionally larger but with smaller, more widely leaded type; both

share the same basic cover artwork, but the title and other typesetting superimposed on the VGSF version are grossly inferior - I wonder why they went to the trouble to spoil it?

I trust I will not offend American readers if I say that Martin's style persuaded me he is English - there's a lack of obscenity, of gratuitous violence and of what is for me obscure slang that makes for clear, pleasant reading; his plotting, while suitably complex, is realistic and ingenious, and his characters engage all the right emotions.

Tuf is an interstellar trader who, through processes outlined in the first story (for this is a fix-up, and a skilfully engineered one in that so far as I can trace no adjustment has been made to the chapters (apart from one rewritten and expanded) since first publication in various magazines, a sign of careful writing in the first place), comes into possession of a 30km-long spaceship of awesome power and menace. But Tuf's a nice guy - he loves and cherishes cats, for a start - and his apparently invincible niceness leaves all the conniving, scheming hoodlums and sharks around him constantly flouted, defeated in their nameless and vicious plots to take what is not rightly theirs.

This is good basic technological-and-adventure SF in the traditional form, and damned good reading too. Its shortcomings are those of the medium - SF magazines impose a certain sparseness and conciseness that I feel the untrammelled Martin would cast off were he writing this as a novel from scratch. Only his over-adjectival descriptive passages incur criticism; the action is sharp, cleanly visualised and clearly described with a minimum of waffle. Recommended to all 'straight' SF fans - but save yourself 55p by getting the US edition, unless you want to keep the book permanently when undoubtedly British stitching will make for a longer life (no, I've not tested either to destruction).

Lyndan Darby - - - - - CRYSTAL AND STEEL
(Unwin, 1988, 340pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

This opening volume of yet another fantasy trilogy has a somewhat predictable storyline: the exiled Prince Eider, accompanied by a small band of friends, is out to reclaim the blighted seelie realm of Rhye from the Dark Lords. To have any chance of success he must obtain three occult objects, the Triad, and wield them at the propitious moment or else be doomed to defeat and death. Despite many trials and tribulations, nothing gets Eider down.

Whether intentionally or not, Lyndan Darby has written a novel that is essentially juvenile in its concerns. The view of the world that informs the book is completely naive with good triumphing over evil and everything coming right in the end. The Heroes are all cardboard while the villains tend toward the ludicrous. Certainly as far as story, character and attitude go this is a mediocre work.

On the plus side, however, Darby's prose does have a certain ability to hold the reader. The book has a descriptive richness that goes a little way towards compensating for its other weaknesses. While the writing is sometimes too mechanical, too self-consciously archaic and too ponderous, for much of the time it nevertheless manages to convey a convincing impression of a wild magical landscape. Appearance is much more interesting in this book than either character or narrative.

CRYSTAL AND STEEL is an easy read, mildly entertaining, but there are much better fantasy novels around.

David Drake &
Bill Fawcett (eds.) - - - - -THE FLEET: BOOK I
(Ace, 1988, 280pp, \$3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Anne McCaffrey, Poul Anderson, Gary Gygax, John Brunner, Janet Morris, Jody Lynn Nye, Robert Shekley and Margaret Weis join the two editors in putting together another of those multi-author-with-connecting-bits books that seem to be all the rage today, and apparently Book II will be with us in December.

This one has The Fleet, an Earth-based navy that's spread thinly over the man-inhabited and allied races-dwelling areas of Space to protect them all against the hideous Khali pirates, a race of rodent-like marauders who burn and destroy all they see, though they do take 'slaves'.

Even at this basic level the story fails to convince, for we are never told how such slaves can be useful to them - in fact their own planet and lifestyle seems to make the idea ludicrous. Furthermore, they wilfully murder captured 'slaves', which makes no economic sense, and the one story that shows a Khali-owned planet has the 'slaves' being eaten by other humans, who in turn seem to provide no useful service to their owners.

Furthermore, The Fleet is almost totally incompetent, and I have no compunction in admitting that I was not far into the book before I decided that for some as yet undisclosed reason Earth is condoning and conniving at the rape of the worlds: for certain unexplained reasons they never attack the Khali homeworld (in one story unknown, in another known and mapped), and they seem to turn up late for well known encounters with the enemy.

There's plenty of blood and gore here. There are some nice touches in a few of the stories. And there's the undoubted attraction of seeing how this or that famous author tackles this pretty hoary plotline. Having said that, I think I've said it all.

Isaac Asimov,
Martin H. Greenberg &
Charles G. Waugh (eds.) - - - - -MYTHIC BEASTS
(Robinson, 1988, 343pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is a collection of thirteen short stories, although to judge by the tone of the introductions I would guess that Asimov merely lent his name and the choosing was done by the others. It is a pleasant collection on the subject, ranging from Anderson's 'Little Mermaid' through to the present, varying in length from five pages to over seventy, each dealing with a different beast in a variety of ways.

I never read reviews which list all the stories in a collection, so I have no intention of writing such a list. The ground covered is great. 'The Little Mermaid' is traditional fairy tale while Lang's 'Prince Prigio' (a fire-drake) is delightfully tongue in cheek. Tanith Lee's 'The Gorgon' is chilling while others are amusing or touching or thought provoking in the way that Thomas N. Scortia's Phoenix in 'Caution! Inflammable!' succeeds in being. They are all well written, although I found 'The Kraken' by Jack Vance palled and became more like hard work than enjoyment. However, that was the only story about which I would say that. All in all it is a well chosen, well balanced and well presented anthology, which although entertaining will never do more than collect a number of previously published stories together because they happen to fit the theme. It is a pleasant way to pass the time but it is unlikely to set the world alight or raise passions in anyone.

Michael P. Kube-McDowell - - - - -ENIGMA
(Legend, 1988, 355pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Nicholas Mahoney)

At the end of EMPRISE we were left wondering how come the approaching 'aliens' had turned out to be human. In ENIGMA this hoary old plot is brought to life, it eventually comes up with good explanations for the existence of the colonies that are being searched out and why we didn't know of them.

Merritt Thackery has a mystical experience at the start of the book which dramatically changes his career plans. His new aim is to be a contact specialist on a survey ship. He makes it of course but then there is a mixture of predictable and unpredictable events.

His life spans hundreds of years in much the same way as the hero of Haldeman's THE FOREVER WAR. No one you know will be met again unless you're on the same survey mission.

He is promoted after each of his missions despite personal disappointments in his own performance as a contact specialist. His final mission is an unconventional appointment with destiny which ties up all the loose ends into a satisfying bundle whilst also springing implications that set up the final book in the series (EMPEREY).

The characterisation is better than in the previous book, mainly because there is only one viewpoint character this time. On the other hand the characters often get involved in cardboard conflicts of personality where the keys in their backs show through.

The author has a good feel for the wider implications of his tale, for science and conveying the off-stage scale of the story. Again, he has taken contrivance too far for us to take his book too seriously; nevertheless I found it an uncommonly enjoyable one.

Melissa Scott - - - - -FIVE-TWELFTHS OF HEAVEN
(Gollancz, 1988, 339pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Silence Leigh is a star pilot. Being a woman she has difficulty obtaining gainful employment outside her (dubious) family in a galaxy which makes ours seem positively egalitarian. Legally screwed out of her inheritance, she is taken under the wing of brave, handsome Denis Balthazar who has a ship but no pilot. Even then, to get out into space Silence has to marry him, and his engineer, Julius Chase-Mago who happens to be black. Then follow a number of adventures, improbable and arbitrarily resolved, the result of which is that Silence is not only going to be an All American girl pilot in the sequel, but also a magus.

Ms Scott won the Campbell award for New Writers which made me disappointed to find this a formulaic fix up of other people's ideas and editor's suggestions - her idea that space travel might be achieved by a variation on the 'music of the spheres' is totally unexplored. It is very calm, very competent and very boring. My wife eventually threw this book back at me, crying 'I'm not interested in how many cups of coffee she drinks!' Sensawunda? You've got to be joking. Excitement? Ms Scott herself does not seem excited by regurgitating cliches old and new - Dear Lord, how many more times must we wade through 'plucky girl making it in a man's world' tomes? - and if she isn't excited why should we be?

This is literary Muzak. You've heard it all before, played better.



Gardner Dozois - - BEST NEW SF 2 (Robinson Publishing, 1988, 678pp, £5.95)

Mike Ashley - - MAMMOTH BOOK OF SHORT HORROR NOVELS (Robinson Publishing, 1988, 518pp, £4.95)

Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles G. Waugh - - SPELLS (Robinson Publishing, 1988, 350pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

More Robinson anthologies, the most important of course being the second British edition of Dozois' annual survey of the best in the field. Anthologies like this are essential for people (like me) who more often than not miss the magazines but with 28 stories and a brief overview of 1987's SF scene, there's no way I'm going to list and evaluate everything in it. Still, it's good to see Paul McAuley included with 'The Temporary King', and fans of Ursula Le Guin will welcome 'Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight?', her best story for ages.

I seem to discern more variety than in the last volume, with fewer stories about street-punks and cyberspace (even the Japanese setting of Bruce Sterling's 'Flowers of Edo' is different from the neocolonialism we've had over the past few years. US WASP guilt is perhaps still in evidence in the number of stories which, in some way or another, use the history or mythology of America (the Le Guin, Orson Scott Card's 'America', Michael Flynn's 'The Forest of Time', or Karen Joy Fowler's 'The Faithful Companion at Forty'.) War stories still cast obvious shadows - Bruce McAlister's 'Dream Baby' and possibly Walter Jon Williams' 'Dinosaurs'. As with the previous year's offering, I think the range outside conventional SF is a positive rather than negative factor, although perhaps the 'speculative fiction' elements are less this time round. Still, we'll all have our personal opinions about individual stories, but that doesn't stop this being one of the most authoritative anthologies around, and the best six pounds' worth you'll spend on SF in a long while.

Mike Ashley's anthology will attract a more specialist audience, but it would be a shame if only people who respond to the word 'Horror' bought it. With ten novellas by authors as disparate as Arthur Conan Doyle and Lucius Shepard, it's another bargain, especially noted for A.C. Benson's 'The Uttermost Farthing', one of those gorgeous English classic ghost stories which makes one almost inclined to forgive the author for writing the words to 'Land of Hope and Glory'. Russell Kirk's 'There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding' is a deserved award-winner which perhaps might make you quibble about the dividing line between 'horror' and 'supernatural' fiction. John Metcalf's 'The Feasting Dead' is certainly more conventional (a vampire-like demon with a taste for children) and T.E.D. Klein's 'Nadelman's God' is a sardonic look at the Satanism of heavy-metal lyrics (though see the new Skipp/Spector novel, THE SCREAM for another treatment of the same theme). Collections such as this need variety: this is certainly apparent. This isn't horror of the 'gruesome' variety (though some of the images, if you dwell on them, are unsettling) but rather disturbing stories with a supernatural element. In many ways, the most interesting is Algernon Blackwood's 'The Damned' - a slow revelation of an existential horror in which very little actually happens but in which the 'supernatural as metaphor' idea is perfectly crystallised.

SPELLS is very much the kind of book you need to check carefully in case you've read the stories which don't (despite their app-

earance here) really have much in common save that they involve magic. The jokiness which infests some of the stories for good (Henry Slesar's 'The Candidate') or ill (Frank R. Stockton's 'The Christmas Shadrach') extends to the introduction... will a toad appear out of this typewriter when I finish this sentence? ... No. What luck. There are good if not particularly rare stories by Fritz Leiber and Stephen King, but Jack Vance fans especially might care to look at SPELLS for his 1958 novella 'The Miracle Workers', set in a world where magic is the practical science but in which the old superstitions can still be of use against a non-human enemy.

Roger Zelazny - - SIGN OF CHAOS (Sphere, 1988, 214pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

This is not a good book. But it is part of a good book. TRUMPS OF DOOM is described in its own blurb as 'the mind-blowing beginning of a new Amber trilogy'; BLOOD OF AMBER follows; SIGN OF CHAOS is the third, but not final, book (too many of its plot-twists lie unravelled, and the last page is a cliff-hanger if ever I've read one!)

SIGN OF CHAOS chronicles the continuing saga of Merlin Corey, son of Prince Corwin of Amber. And that is all this book is: a continuation. Merle is trapped somewhere in the middle of a confusing mess of backstabbing, assassinations and betrayals - and this is only his relatives! Most of this revolves around him, but he can't understand why. And neither could I. I don't doubt for a moment that this will all be explained in the last book of the trilogy that is very much starting to look like a series (assuming that there is a last book).

In order to enjoy SIGN OF CHAOS, a knowledge of the background of the novel is highly recommended. However, having become familiar with Amber and its environs, the principal characters and the myriad machinations (as detailed in TRUMPS OF DOOM and BLOOD OF AMBER), I found the book worth the effort.

Overall, I like this series. I like its tongue-in-cheek style. I like Merle Corey. And I look forward to reading book four (and five and six and seven...)

Brian Aldiss - - EARTHWORKS (Methuen, 1988, 126pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

This novel was first published in 1965, and in some ways it was ahead of its time. Although most of the story is set aboard robot controlled supertankers, in factory farms run by slave labour, and in the bedrooms of a decadent elite, it is a 'green' novel.

Knowle Noland is an ex-convict who has escaped from a prison farm and been helped to get a job aboard the tanker 'Trieste Star'. The wrecking of the boat on the African coast leads Noland to join a group of ecologists engaged in what might seem an odd mission. Africa has been united under a powerful President and is at peace. The ecologists want him out of the way so that civil war will break out, bringing a continental scale Biafra. Reduction in population pressure will relieve many of the other problems they perceive, such as high-intensity farming and the associated chemical pollution.

The pollution affects Noland directly - he suffers from fits and hallucinations. He's a flawed hero and I'm not sure that we're meant to agree with his decision, but this book was prescient in some ways. In America there is, apparently, a 'deep' ecological movement who hold that things like AIDS are good because they are a new and natural culling which will bring the population more into

balance. Rats in overpopulated cages fight to the death, rapid growth of rabbit populations encourages the breeding of foxes who will devour them.

'Earthworks' may mean ramparts, a metaphor for protection against the problem, or it could mean the Earth working its problems out in a natural way. 'Natural' sometimes means 'unconscious', and what could be more natural than people responding to the population problem by genocidal war, unconscious of a better way?

Keith Roberts - - KITEWORLD (Penguin, 1988, 288pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

There is a tendency to judge an author from whom much is expected by criteria other than those used with an unknown or mediocre writer. I expect Roberts to produce intelligent, literate work and take for granted that it will be so, so criticisms are relative. There are many authors - far too many - who will never achieve Roberts' worst efforts, thus despite any flaws this remains a better book than most.

This is a good idea neither fully exploited nor completely thought through. By inference the reader discovers a post-holocaust world, the healthy land guarded from mutants by men who observe and guard the boundaries from the cradles of huge, multiple kites. Each section focusses on an individual whose life is bound up with the Kites - flying them, servicing them, absorbed by them in some way - so that a picture of the society is built up in small pieces, like a jigsaw, each small piece a significant moment in the life of that character. The effect is of intersecting short stories which have nothing, except their locale, in common. It is a technique which can be very effective but in this case the joining of the stories at the end seems very contrived. Roberts enjoys the individuals with whom he is involved, but I got the impression that he only tied all the ends together because he was required to. As short stories they mostly have good characterisation and effective plotting, but uniting them into a whole, transforming them into a novel, fails; partly, I think, because the author has no sincere compulsion to do so.

Roberts writes well, his ideas are imaginative and original but there are details, for example when the mutant helps Raoul, left hanging unexplored. It feels like a book which has been badly edited, although whether the blame for that can be justifiably laid at the author's door or should be attributed to the editor or publisher is a point it would be interesting to have answered.

John M. Ford - - HOW MUCH FOR JUST THE PLANET? (Pocket Books, 1987, 253pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

If you have never read a STAR TREK novel before, read this one. It ranks as one of the funniest SF novels I have ever read, yet its humour is offbeat and far from the expected - in fact, the nearest I can come to it is the inspired lunacy of the parody SPOCK IN MANACLES so admirably performed (and videoed) at a recent convention.

I really am not going to tell you one word about the plot, but I will say that John M. Ford stands revealed as a writer with a wicked sense of the absurd and a fine literary touch at this level of slapstick farce.

I too may never read another STAR TREK novel but I wouldn't have missed this one for worlds of dilithium.

Nancy Springer - - CHAINS OF GOLD (Orbit, 1988, 230pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

No greater love for Arlen hath Lonn than he die in his stead. Lady Cerilla is betrothed to Arlen, the chosen Winterking of the Sacred Isle: the Winterking's fate is to wed Cerilla, enjoy the love of his bride for but a single night, and then to offer himself as a sacrifice to the island's goddess: flayed alive, eyes plucked out, and quartered... and she would join the religious order, forsaking her sexuality.

But Lonn took Arlen's place and suffered the terrible death, while Cerilla and Arlen fled the island. Yet Lonn's presence did not depart them, not entirely...

This is Cerilla's story, about the power of love, of how they escape only to be trapped, haunted. Some of the scenes are quite chilling: Nancy Springer uses unpleasant gore where necessary:

'I split his head open, and I stood on his body and continued to pound at his head...I ground my heel in what had been his brains.' Nice lady, this Cerilla! She needs to be strong-willed to overcome the magical powers that haunt her, however.

The magical elements are understated in the most part, and better for that: there are no dire black villains - this is a fantasy about character, and about how Cerilla's and Arlen's enlarge as they face the tribulations ahead. Scenery, tender emotions and powerful action scenes are all depicted with a deceptively easy, sure touch. This is a complete story, with no loose threads for a trilogy to take up. A worthy addition to the fantasy genre.

Lois McMaster Bujold - - THE WARRIOR'S APPRENTICE (Headline, 1988, 315pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

SHARDS OF HONOUR was average; it certainly didn't prepare me for this.

Miles Naismith Vorkosigan is the crippled son of the two central characters of the previous novel. His ambitions to join the Barrayan Imperial Service thwarted, he visits his mother's home, Beta Colony. And - well - things happen. And Miles manages to improvise his way out of one situation into another until the kid who manages to bluff a redundant pilot out of hijacking his ship ends up an Admiral in a totally fictitious mercenary organisation! Come the crunch, he's on trial for treason and still gets to steer things his way. Yet the story follows and concludes the threads of SHARDS OF HONOUR, making me wonder if I missed an equally rich vein of throwaway humour in the latter.

Ms Bujold has got it all so wonderfully right here that I can only stand back in amazement. Action, intrigue, romance and love lost, lost relations found, reputations regained and a hero who's not much more than half a pace beyond the reader in wondering what the hell is going to happen next. I don't think I've read a better action-romance since BEAU GESTE.



Lynn Abbey - - CONQUEST (Avon, 1988, 262pp, £6.95)

Sequel to UNICORN AND DRAGON, continuing the story of Alison and Wildecant as England

awaits the Normon Conquest and Old Magic haunts the forests. (Andy Sawyer)

Richard Carpenter - - ROBIN OF SHERWOOD: THE TIME OF THE WOLF (Puffin, 1988, 149pp, £1.99)

Based on Carpenter's excellent S&S TV series: action, comedy, romance and poignancy as a prophecy is unravelled. Entertaining and energetic Robin Hood for the '80s. (Andy Sawyer)

Tom Deitz - - WINDMASTER'S BANE (Orbit, 1988, 279pp, £3.50)

I reviewed the Avon edition of this entertaining fantasy in PI 64 and I'm pleased that it's at last available in the UK. A young teenager is touched with second sight, and is able to view the Sidhe on one of their paths which runs by his father's farm in Georgia. David, however, becomes caught up among rivalries between the Sidhe - the Fair Folk - themselves. Not an original plot, as I pointed out, but Deitz imagines his Elfworld well and his human characters are strong and subtly underlined by Deitz's intelligent conception of their roles in the story. Not a mere rewrite of Celtic myth, but a novel which uses its sources with love and respect and a touch of irony to illuminate the growth and maturation of its protagonist. A Good Read, which leaves you wanting to know more. (Andy Sawyer)

Carole Nelson Douglas - - KEEPERS OF EDAN-VANT (Corgi, 1988, 382pp, £2.99)

Battle between the sexes in a sword and sorcery setting with much swords, much sorcery and much over-flowery prose. Definitely one for the fans of the author only. (Ian Sales)

David Drake - - HAMMERS SLAMMERS: AT ANY PRICE (Legend, 1988, 288pp, £2.99)

A violent mercenary space opera primarily concerning a war against aliens who can teleport. Two shorter stories fill it out a bit more along with a surprising afterword which, unlike the rest of the book, is worth reading. (Nicholas Mahoney)

James Herbert - - SEPULCHRE (N.E.L., 1988, 372pp, £ 3.50)

Considering Herbert's stature as a top horror writer, this story, of an organisation devoted to protecting a top company's psychic, and an evil surviving from Sumerian times, is disappointing, taking a long time to build and never focussing long enough on one aspect of the story to allow the author to convince the reader. (Andy Sawyer)

Stephen King - - THE RUNNING MAN (NEL, 1988, 219pp, £2.99)

Originally published in 1982 as by Richard Bachman, now a film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as the subject of the televised manhunt. By no means the first use of the idea, but by no means the worst. (Andy Sawyer)

Tanith Lee - - COMPANIONS ON THE ROAD /EAST OF MIDNIGHT (Beaver, 1988, 122pp, 175pp, £1.99 each.)

Welcome paperback issue of two stories intended for juveniles but of great interest to adult admirers of Lee's work. The shorter format encourages a pared down style which complements uncompromising plots. Highly recommended. (Maureen Porter)

Adrienne Martine-Barnes - - THE RAINBOW SWORD (Avon, 1988, 213pp, £3.50)

A hero with strong paternal yearnings and an off-beat slant on European gods marks this sometimes amusing alternate-medieval fantasy,

marred by its reliance on the genre-fantasy series conventions for much of its plot. (Andy Sawyer)

Andre Norton - - SPELL OF THE WITCH WORLD (Gollancz, 1988, 220, £2.95)

Seventh 'Witch World' book: Not a novel, but three separate and fairly undistinguished short stories. (Andy Sawyer)

R.A. Salvatore - - THE CRYSTAL SHARD (Penguin, 1988, 333pp, £3.99)

A TSR('Dragonlance' etc.) novel of little originality (halflings/elves/dwarves/barbarians: choose your own piece) but fair vitality, suggesting that the writer cares for his characters and is doing his best to present them effectively. (Andy Sawyer)

Susan Schwartz - - QUEENSBLADE (Pan, 1988, 275pp, £2.99)

Third of 'Heirs to Byzantium' trilogy (why is Byzantium currently so fashionable?) set some time later than the previous volumes. Focuses on the children of Emperor Marris as they prepare to succeed to their parents' roles, particularly Gwenlliant who must watch her mother Olwen sacrifice herself to bring fertility back to the dying land. A disappointing conclusion: only occasionally do the ironies of alternative history become alive. (Andy Sawyer)

Roger Taylor - - THE CALL OF THE SWORD (Headline, 1988, 280pp, £2.99)

A first novel, first volume of the inevitable fantasy trilogy. Perfectly ordinary, save for the hero's companion, a raven with a wooden leg. (Andy Sawyer)

E.C. Tubb - - MELOME and ANGADO (Legend, 1988, 317pp, £2.99)

Two-in-one edition of nos. 28 and 29 in the 'Dumarest' saga. Tubb's space-operatic quest may be unfashionable, but these episodes are slickly written page-turners and considerably more honest in their lack of pretension than many a blockbuster. Indeed, ANGADO, with its relationship between the eponymous rich prodigal and the macho Dumarest, touches on areas most space opera avoids. (Andy Sawyer)

Jack Vance - - THE BOOK OF DREAMS (Grafton, 1988, 268pp £2.99)

Reprint of the 1981 conclusion to the 'Demon Princes' series, in which Vance adds a distinct flavour to the space-operatic 'quest' convention. Here, Gerson tracks down Howard Alan Treesong; not only is Treesong a most unconventional villain but Gerson's last words possess a melancholy ambiguity. Ignore cover and blurb, and savour Vances's universe footnotes and all. (Andy Sawyer)

Colin Wilson - - SPIDER WORLD: THE DELTA (Grafton, 1988, 352pp, £3.50)

Sequel to THE TOWER, in which the origins of the spiders and a clue to the way their tyranny could be overcome are given. An odd mix of pulp SF and Wilson's personal metaphysics. A hint by the author that this is a children's book may explain the flatness of some of the writing, the drab characters, and the concentration on fairly genre-standard 'marvels'. Whether that's an excuse is another matter. Oh, and AAAARRRGHHH! (See PI 74, p. 13). (Andy Sawyer)

Timothy Zahn - - COBRA STRIKE (Legend, 1988, 344pp, £2.95)

'Venture' 17. Written equivalent of 'Battlestar Galactica'. (Nicholas Mahoney)

OUT NOW

Because of the need to catch up with delayed reviews, I'm only briefly noting - for those of you still to buy something for Great-Aunt Agatha - some of the important books received for review and some of the glossy 'fringe' material which just happens to get published at this time of year. Titles marked (*) will be reviewed later.

Most controversial nonfiction title of the year is the Aldiss/Wingrove collaboration TRILLION YEAR SPREE * out from Paladin at £6.95. Novels worth looking for are Ken Grimwood's REPLAY * (Grafton, £2.99) and James P. Blaylock's THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN * and HOMUNCULUS* (Grafton, both £3.50). Ian Watson has a new short story collection from Grafton; EVIL WATER* (£2.99). Also look out for Terry Pratchett's MORT* (Bantam, £2.95) and M. John Harrison's revised VIRICONIUM * (Unwin, £3.95) Highlight from Women's Press is Gwyneth Jones' teenage SF novel THE HIDDEN ONES * in the 'Livewire' imprint (£3.50): also from WP are Octavia Butler's KINDRED* and Carol Emshwiller's CARMEN DOG* (both £4.95)

Winter is traditionally time for ghost stories and they're certainly out in force this year. Robinson Publishing have continued their excellent revival of Dark Fantasy classics with W.H. Hodgson's THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND* and Shirley Jackson's THE LOTTERY* (both £3.50). Out for Yuletide chills are two offerings from the man for whom the term 'dark fantasy' might have been invented, Robert Aickman: the collection COLD HAND IN MINE* (£3.50) and the first UK publication of the short novel THE MODEL* (£2.95). Definitely for the shadows around the dying embers is the Kathryn Cramer/David Hartwell-edited collection CHRISTMAS GHOSTS* (£5.95) and something not for the stockings of the nervous is William Schoell's examination of the 'shocker film' phenomenon, STAY OUT OF THE SHOWER. Although Schoell attempts a critical approach to the field, it doesn't work for me because producing or consuming movies simply because of their violence seems a particularly debased way of going about things. Occasionally he touches on interesting points such as the values suggested by the sanitised violence of the Hollywood western, and he's not afraid to condemn what he sees as junk.

Penguin add to seasonal chills with Alan Ryan editing the BOOK OF VAMPIRE STORIES* (£4.95) and those without a copy should note the Puffin edition of Arthur C. Clarke's OF TIME AND STARS (£1.99). Wealthy addicts of 'Dragonlance' will welcome the 'Collectors edition' of the first 3 'CHRONICLES' (£7.99) and two large format albums on THE ART OF THE DRAGONLANCE SAGA (Mary Kirchoff: £9.99) and THE ATLAS OF THE DRAGONLANCE WORLD (Karen Wynn Fonstad: £9.99): interesting if you like that sort of thing.

Finally, (and this is a review) Titan have various graphic-novel and unashamed comic-strip reprints for your stockings. Perhaps the least sciencefictional of the major superheroes (though much of his detection is based on scientific principles) is Batman. BATMAN & ROBIN, BATMAN VS THE JOKER, and BATMAN VS THE PENGUIN are digest-sized paperbacks at £2.95, originally published by N.E.L. in 1966. These stories date from the early '50s: the art is crude, the stories likewise but they have an energy lost to the character until recently. More sfnal, and also more satirical is Judge Dredd, perhaps Batman's equivalent for the '80s. JUDGE DREDD VS THE DARK JUDGES (also £2.95) is the first of a new series of paperback reprints. Here John Wagner's horror-film script is

ably aided by Brian Bolland's detailed, sombre art, which loses nothing by being in black-and-white. In fact, colour in comic-strip is often garish rather than atmospheric, and the cutsey elves of the 'Elfquest' series aren't helped by the colours. The storyline of FIRE AND FLIGHT (£8.95), the first in the sequence, isn't bad, but emotionally and artistically we're in the world of He-Man and She-Ra rather than Conan. On the other hand, perhaps the work of Jodorowsky and Moebius, in THE INCAL:3 (£5.95) wallows too much in its own metaphysical quality. It's a heady mixture of cartoon slapstick, cynicism and transcendence with a delightfully shiftless reluctant hero (the aptly-named John Difool) who at one point nearly ends up with his balls snipped off. You really need the first two volumes as well, but even if you think the whole thing might just be Tintin on acid that's not a bad recommendation.

"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 26 (November/December 1988)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Eric Brown's short stories in IZ are becoming a high point of whatever issue they appear in, and 'Big Trouble Upstairs' is no exception. The plot (Killer-on-the-loose) may be well-worn and the story is so fast-paced as to be rushed, but too it is rivetting and has a genuinely surprising finale. Whatever your feelings on cyberpunk, it's a good read; this is more than can be said for Charles Stross's 'In the DreamTime', which managed only to send me to sleep. Bob Shaw and John Sladek are the big names providing fiction in this issue and both pieces are typical of these writers. Sladek's 'Stop Evolution in Its Tracks!' is perhaps more accessible than much of his previous work and is genuinely funny. 'Dark Night in Toyland' has the archetypal Shavian elements - a family with young son and an imaginative scientific advance. The ending is signaled from the first yet this does not destroy the grotesqueness of the climax. Susan Beetlestone's 'face Lift' does make a valid comment on today's beauty-oriented society, but is rather superficial itself as well as being overly sentimental. 'The Agony of Suburban Knowledge' by Johnny Black is much better. Reminiscent of some of Card's work, it is about a man who accesses - and then forgets - knowledge about everything.

Sometimes extracts from novels work as short stories in their own right. (e.g. the Peter Preuss chapter in the last issue of IZ). Sometimes they don't, leaving the reader unsatisfied by being pitched into, and then dropped out of, a larger vehicle. Such is the case with the extract from Terry Pratchett's WYRD SISTERS. I enjoy Pratchett's work, but combining this extract with the IZ cover (the cover art from WYRD SISTERS) makes this issue a glorified ad for the novel which is, I feel, rather unnecessary. Finally, there's a reply from Chris Priest to Platt's 'anti-Brit' article, and an interview with Leigh Kennedy.

FANTASY TALES vol. 10 No. 1

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Stephen Jones and David Sutton's award-winning semiprozine is now a twice-yearly paperback style magazine published by Robinson Publishing. The first relaunched issue is a mixture of horror (Guy N. Smith's "Sabat" short story, 'Vampire Village', Chris Morg-

an's 'Touching'; and Dunsanian fantasy (Lin Carter's 'The Thievery of Yish', Darrell Schweitzer's 'A Vision of Rembathene'). There are also a few less classifiable supernatural tales such as Charles L. Grant's 'Now and Again in Summer' and J.N. Williamsen's love story 'Fancy That'. Perhaps best of an entertaining mixture is David Riley's slightly sardonic 'Writer's Cramp', an Awful Warning to all editors tempted to plagiarise from the slush pile. Writers who bombard down-market horror magazines with 'bad Lovecraftian cliches of the worst type' may, after all, know more about their subject than you might think...

If you know FT, you'll know that the editors' heads and hearts are firmly with the old Weird Tales atmosphere. I suspect, however, that in many cases the stories they come up with are superior - take a look at the hardback THE BEST HORROR FROM FANTASY TALES (also published by Robinson at £11.95) which contains stories from Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Robert Bloch, Fritz Leiber, Steve Rasnic Tem and many others. FANTASY TALES has consistently deserved wider circulation than the 'small press' field and Robinson have done us all a favour in lending the magazine their support. Give it yours: you'll even get change from a pound!

ANALOG, SEPTEMBER to DECEMBER, and ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER to NOVEMBER 1988

Reviewed by Edward James

In the August issue of ANALOG a serial began, which finished in November: Charles Sheffield's PROTEUS UNBOUND. Of the various British émigré writers of hard sf (Arthur C. Clarke, James Hogan), Sheffield is probably the least stylistically competent, and although he does often have the ideas, he still has problems wrapping them up convincingly. His last ANALOG serial, BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT was, however, well worth reading (it's now published in book form). This, sadly, isn't. The leading character, Beyrooz Wolf (Bey Wolf, Beowulf, geddit?), is a specialist in body form changing (hence the "Proteus" of the title), who temporarily joins the Cloudlanders (inhabitants of the Oort Cloud, in distant orbit around the sun). He gets mixed up in implausible inter-system politics, with a fairly standard set of characters -- wily female politician, young mathematical genius, and so on. It would be nice to think that some of it stands as a parody of some space operatic clichés, but...

There was little else in the September ANALOG to draw interest. It featured Reginald Bretnor's "The Taste of Blood", concerning a Svengali-like musician-cum-politician of the far future in a predictable plot in which the upright space captain wins the girl. Elizabeth Moon's short tale about rejuvenation, "The Generic Rejuvenation of Milo Ardry", was slick and entertaining. Gustav Stephens's "Hey, Diddle, Diddler, the Cat and the Fiddlers" (yes, really), with its wise-cracking young physicists who knock up this really neat teleportation device, could just be a parody of innumerable 1950s ASTOUNDING stories, but...

October, however, was better. Michael F. Flynn, the most interesting of the newish ANALOG writers, had a competent enough sf-version of a traditional whodunnit, in "The Case of the Laughing Clone", which starts with an identification parade in which the murder witness is faced with five identical clones. Jerry Oltion and Lee Goodloe, in "Sunstat", use a fairly conventional but perfectly readable adventure plot to look at an idea new to me (and to them: they credit the University of Washington scientist responsible for it): a space station suspended in orbit around the sun by its solar-wind sail. Gail Schnirch (yes, really), in "A Cat for Katie", offers an ingenious enough twist on the old plot-idea that a young child's imaginings may actually be real.

From the next two issues I mention only two stories, both standing out from the rest of the issues, and both concerned with first contact. November (whose cover's menacing robot, from Sheffield's PROTEUS UNBOUND, was an uncharacteristic artistic regression to the 'fifties) had "Emissary", by Stephen Kraus, where, satisfyingly, all the answers were not given and some sense of mystery remained. No mystery in "Sanctuary", by James White, in the December issue. Rather more wooden and predictable than White's best, but still a compelling account of how a community of nuns on a remote site on the coast of Northern Ireland becomes the obvious point of contact between Earth and its first alien visitors: the unusual setting is what makes it stand out.

The cover story for the September ASIMOV'S is Lucius Shepard's "The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter". Anyone who remembers the cover of the MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION for December 1984 will be strangely disorientated. The artist, Bradley Clark, seems to have put James Gurney's cover for that, an illustration of Shepard's "The Man Who painted the Dragon Griaule", up against a mirror and repainted it. The same setting, anyway, as the earlier story, a mountainous immobile dragon, mined and exploited by the communities which cluster around it. "The slightly po-faced Marchen terrain" of the earlier story, as John Clute calls it in the latest INTERZONE (he means Märchen, but presumably INTERZONE can't cope with umlauts), is given much greater depth and life here: as Clute says, it is stunning -- a truly original fantasy, which we will surely see (as we did with "Griaule") among the nominees for science fiction (?) awards. It wasn't the only stunning tale in September, however. Ian Watson's "The Flies of Memory", in which alien visitors begin to remove portions of the Earth, just as tourists symbolically remove the landscape as they photograph it, is equally haunting; as is Kim Stanley Robinson's vision of the coming of the new Ice Age to North America, in "Glacier". Just three fine stories in one issue of ASIMOV'S, better than anything that has been published in ANALOG all year.

Lucius Shepard leads in the October issue too, in a very different vein, but visiting the same New England coastline that he did in "How the Wind Spoke at Madaket", one of the most memorable novellas on 1985 (published in ASIMOV'S, April of that year), "these legended waters, where every minor shoal is the subject of a dozen supernatural tales". "Nomans Land" is impossible to describe, or to forget: read it. The other long story of the issue is Robert Silverberg's "We Are For the Dark", where, just as in "The Secret Sharer", he seems to be setting out to revive an old-fashioned sense of wonder in a new setting, by combining the two essential ingredients -- scale and mystery. Here we have an acolyte of a messianic religious leader travelling hundreds of light years away from Earth in search of answers. Glorified space opera, perhaps. But glorious. There are some good shorts too, notably an intelligent time travel story from Geoffrey A Landis, "Ripples in the Dirac Sea", and a memorable investigation of alien reproduction methods, Tim Sullivan's "Father to the Man".

The last issue of ASIMOV'S to reach me was not so impressive. A rather dull cover story from Sharon N. Farber, "The Last Thunder Horse West of the Mississippi" (though it has a couple of rather well-portrayed nineteenth-century fossil-hunters). There is another George and Azazel tale from Asimov (he tries to defend such frivolities -- his word -- in this month's editorial); an over-the-top cyberpunk extravaganza from John Shirley, called "Shaman"; and a fairly over-the-top vampire story by Somtow Sucharitkul, set in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, called "The Madonna of the Wolves". Of the shorts, by far the most effective was D. Alexander Smith's "Dying in Hull", about a tough old woman surviving on the watery fringes of civilisation in 2004, as the sea-level rises to engulf Hull. Hull, Boston, that is, not the one just down the road from me; it will form part of a shared-world anthology of Future Boston stories. I haven't read Smith's two novels, MARATHON and RENDEZVOUS, but clearly I should look out for them.

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