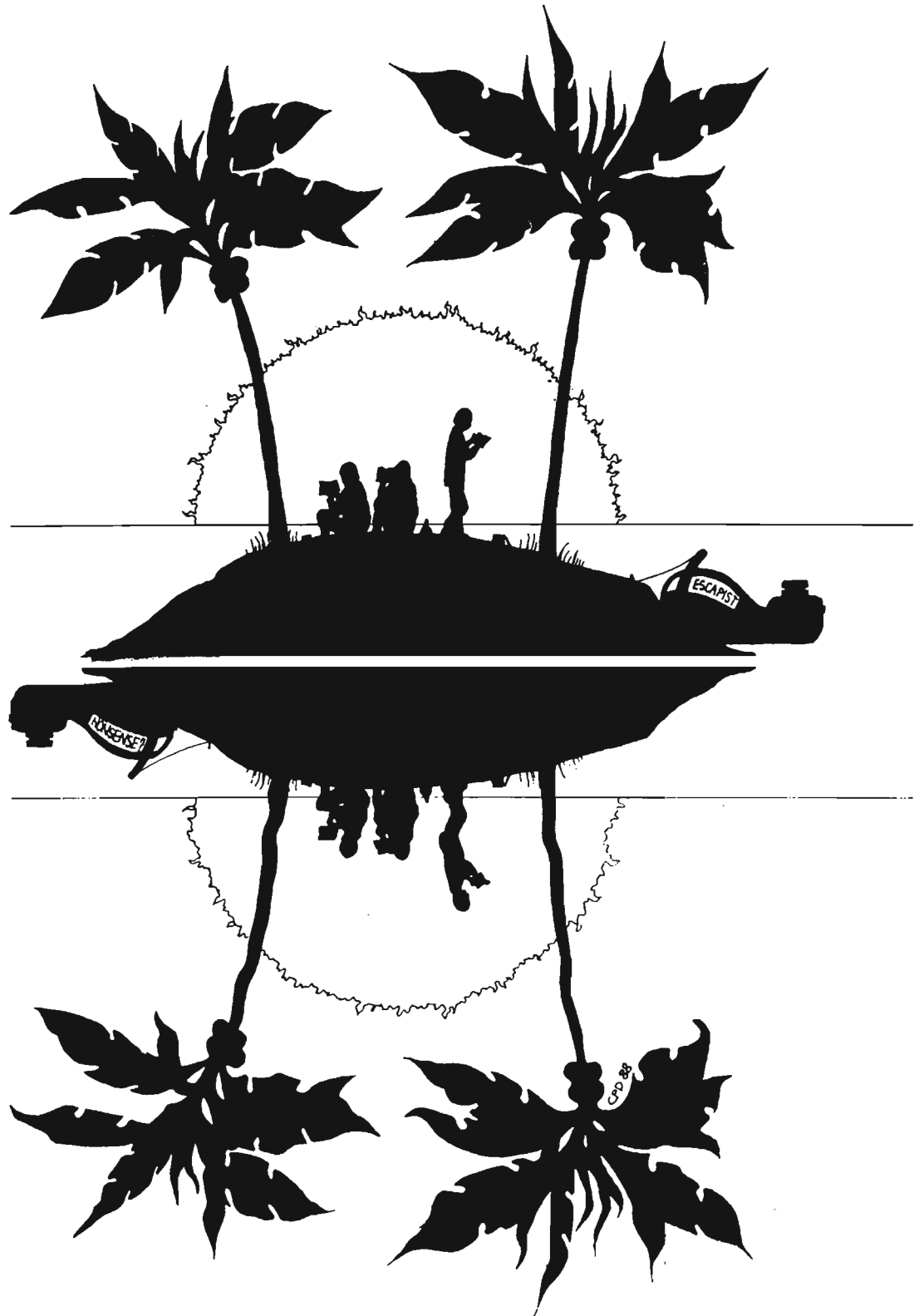


Paperback Inferno 77

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The Review of paperback SF



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Paperback and Hardback! Purgatory

The 1988 Arthur C. Clarke Award has now been won by Rachel Pollack, for *UNQUENCHABLE FIRE* (Century), a book which on each re-reading seemed to improve. Magical archetypes collide with the clichés of everyday America in a way which just has to be read to be believed. Pollack manages to handle this transformation by the forces of dream and myth with a mixture of shamanistic symbolism and wonderful wit; miracles erupt on street corners, gardens grow according to sacrificial ritual and the government announces its latest plans to bring down inflation. A lovely book.

The runners-up were Brian Stableford's *THE EMPIRE OF FEAR*, his best novel so far - a fusion of vampire story and scientific romance - and Richard Grant's *RUMOURS OF SPRING*, which cleverly combines Shakespearian imagery, ecology, and morphogenetic resonance. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the judging, but probably the fact which showed the strength of the entire shortlist, was the difference between the books. They all showed their merits in ways which made direct comparison between them not the easiest of tasks, but it's this difference which makes me optimistic about the SF field. It's still possible to write well within it, to push at the boundaries, and to end up with a shortlist of books which can be defined as the category 'SF', but which do not read like clones of each other.

Last issue, I mentioned that I was asking PI reviewers to suggest their own tips for the award. Interestingly, the most popular books seemed to be Michael Bishop's *PHILIP K. DICK IS DEAD*, *ALAS* and Lucius Shepard's *LIFE*

DURING WARTIME, but many people commented (quite naturally) that they had not read all of the shortlist (or any of it, in some cases!). Now, only millionaires, masochists and Arthur C. Clarke Award jurors can possibly hope to keep up with the books submitted for the prize, and I wonder if the lack of mention of what is a fairly 'fringe' book by a writer who is perhaps the least known within the SF readership of all those shortlisted (I had previously read no other Rachel Pollack than a couple of stories in *INTERZONE*) comes down to the fact that few people had read *UNQUENCHABLE FIRE*. If so, then I hope people will seek it out. I think you'll find you're in for a treat.

Certainly, a lot of big names published during 1988. And what kind of books did they publish? Well, as with any judgement, because seven books were judged 'best' doesn't mean that non short-listed books were necessarily bad. What I could have done without (publishers, please note) was the deluge of second and third volumes of obscure fantasy trilogies and paperback reprints. There were novels which - even bearing in mind the subjective nature of response to fiction) had no chance of winning a prize in any field except possibly Most Frequent Submission for a Science Fiction Award. (Nice try, New Era.) Much more difficult to deal with, though, were the books by writers I enjoy from publishers who are really committed to a wide variety of good SF. In truth, there was an awful lot of good, but not great books; books I marked xxx(x)?? and wished I liked a lot more, wondering, was this it? Is this really outstanding?

However, at the end of the year, despite having complained bitterly to anyone who

would lend even half an ear that my brain, my critical faculties, and my postman's bad back were being seriously overstrained by a deluge of gunk which made the latest Ladybird 'Transformer' story the most likely winner, the number of books which I found I was genuinely pleased to have read suggests that it was a strong year after all.

Hodder made up for a lot of insult to the tree population by publishing ARAMINTA STAFIGN, the best Jack Vance novel for years, footnotes and all, and Judith Moffett's PENTERRA.

It surprised a lot of people that there were no books from Gollancz on the shortlist. There were certainly strong contenders from William Gibson (MONA LISA OVERDRIVE), Robert Holdstock (LAVONDYSS) and Bob Shaw (THE WOODEN SPACESHIPS). What weight should be given to the fact that these were all three sequels? Philip Mann's PIONEERS was good solid traditional SF, Richard Kadrey's METROPHAGE and Pat Cadigan's MINDPLAYERS good solid avant-garde SF. It was also good to see Paul McAuley live up to the promise of his short stories with FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS. Scoop of the year from this publisher for me, though, was Robert Cormier's stunning FADE, which may have suffered because of the similarity of its theme with one of last year's shortlist, H.F. Saint's MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN.

Grafton achieved three on the shortlist with Bishop's PHILIP K. DICK IS DEAD, ALAS, Shepard's LIFE DURING WARTIME, and Ian Watson's WHORES OF BABYLON. Other books worthy of note were Isaac Asimov's PRELUDE TO FOUNDATION (yes, I know, but I thought the picture of the young Hari Seldon was honestly quite interesting), and Raymond E. Feist's FAERIE TALE which is considerably more fun than his fantasy trilogies, has an original (SFnal) slant on Faerie, and explains what happens to Titania's 'Indian Boy' in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' to boot. 1988 seemed to be the year of James Blaylock, even though I found myself getting very confused when K.W. Jeter's INFERNAL DEVICES came along and Morrigan published excellent hardback editions of HOMUNCULUS and THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN. (When is a paperback original not a paperback original? as Matrix commented at the time). Morrigan also published R.A. Lafferty's EAST OF LAUGHTER, another of his superbly unclassifiable mixtures of religious symbolism and barroom humour. Back to Grafton, whose publication of LINCOLN'S DREAM, by Connie Willis, is another landmark, I feel.

Century came up with a good list this year, too. As well as Rachell Pollack, they also published Jonathan Carroll's SLEEPING IN FLAME and Ramsey Campbell's THE INFLUENCE with more traditional SF from Nancy Kreuss (AN ALIEN LIGHT). Another interesting 'cross-over' novel was Christopher Fowler's ROOF-WORLD whose fascinating setting made up for its rather predictable plot.

The Women's Press published Suzette Elgin's THE JUDAS ROSE, the sequel to NATIVE TONGUE, and Octavia Butler's angry and powerful KINDRED. I also thought a great deal of Gwyneth Jones' THE HIDDEN ONES, published in their Livewire 'teenage' imprint.

Possibly the most impressive set of submissions, though, was the one from Unwin Hyman, whose covering letter actually said "...we are proud to publish them." It was this package which contained Gwyneth Jones' KAIROS, and I still regret that Graham Dunstan Martin's HALF A GLASS OF MOONSHINE and Garry Kilworth's ABANDONATI didn't make the final list.

This makes over 25 books as well as the shortlist which I thought had considerable merit, and by no means everything I've not mentioned is also not worth reading. So it must have been a pretty good year. Best of luck to next year's judges... don't forget the speedreading course!



Michael P. Kube-McDowell - - - -ISAAC ASIMOV'S
ROBOT CITY BOOK ONE:
ODYSSEY
(Orbit, 1988, 212pp, £2.99)

Charles Platt - - - - -PIERS ANTHONY'S
WORLDS OF CHTHON:
PLASM
(Grafton, 1988, 236pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

Apart from the proofreaders and printers I can think of no one who comes out with any credit from the production of these books. On almost any scale they are awful. Piers Anthony probably comes out least worst because he has not contributed an introduction to his book (although he has kept the copyright a la Robert Maxwell), but the writers, illustrators, conceivers - they all deserve censure, and Asimov does as well.

Charles Platt has written a John Norman style woman-abusing fantasy with some scientific trappings and a preface that says 'The reader is asked to remember that this is a science-fiction adventure containing characters who should not be seen as role models in the real world'. Unfortunately, the adventure is not very exciting and he happened to use the same plot feature as Kube-McDowell: both these books have a hero waking up in amnesia who then chases a woman. This chase is not finished at the end of ODYSSEY but that is no reason why the series should not be aborted.

Ignoring the sickness of PLASM, if that's possible, ODYSSEY is a worse production.

Essentially, Kube-McDowell has been allowed to take and use positronic robots and quote the Three Laws of Robotics, and set his story roughly in Asimov's future history. Asimov's role was from the first to have been 'answer questions, make suggestions, veto infelicities, and provide the basic premise'. The book is illustrated, although all the illustrations are grouped in a few pages at the end. Asimov says, 'I am pleased with what I've seen, including the captivating artwork of Paul Rivoche'. Now, either Asimov had not seen the artwork when he wrote that or he did not do the job he claimed to be doing of vetoing infelicities. The illustrations do not illustrate the text.

Derec, the hero of ODYSSEY, wakes up in a survival pod, where he is sleeping laying on the floor - but the pod illustrated on page 209 only has a seat and no room to lay down. Later, Derec builds a robot from parts - he uses an arm described on page 82 - 'the arm had no joints. Not at the elbow, not at the wrist, not at the knuckle'. This robot is shown on page 211 - it has the arms the wrong way round, the unusual arm was fitted to the right - and it has joints at the wrist and in the hand, which does not look like a hand. Who could have let this pass? Who is to blame?

As people have pointed out before, Asimov wrote a number of future histories although in the past decade he has tried to make them merge. In some ways ODYSSEY fits into none of these - it introduces sentient non-human

lifeforms, for instance, which Asimov never allowed for (or rather, he did, in 'Victory Unintentional', only to then ignore them), and then Kube-McDowell's literary style is nothing like Asimov's - Asimov wrote detective novels, ODYSSEY has no detective elements, it is episodic, boring and not well plotted. It is not Asimov's world.

When John Gardner took over James Bond he kept the same atmosphere and style, even while making changes. Bulldog Drummond remained constant from Sapper to Gerald Fairlie; Carter Youngman kept up Albert Campion. Why should SF have to suffer this lack of care?

Whatever the answer, ODYSSEY, like PLASM, is worthless. Are the men and women who would write this rubbish so hopeless that they could not refuse, did they not recognise how bad their production was and put it in the waste bin? Charles Platt has written pornographic SF before and he must know that it's never been widely regarded, although he is recognised as a good critic. Why has his critical faculty abandoned him, or was this book ghosted for him by some other wretch in turn?

I honestly do not see how people can be expected to tolerate this standard. If the BSFA is to mean anything, should it not issue a warning that if a member of the public complains and a trading standards officer brings a prosecution against the bookseller and publisher that the book is 'not of merchantable quality', that the BSFA will support the prosecution? Things are that bad, and publishers' announcements threaten an increase.

Michael Bishop - -PHILIP K. DICK IS DEAD, ALAS
(Grafton, 1988, 411pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Here is not the heelmark of Dick's victorious Third Reich, but that of Bishop's Nixon, who has won in Vietnam. In the 1982 of the

subsequent repressive regime, as Dick dies, Nixon bestrides his fourth term, Billy Graham and Reagan in his Cabinet, and NASA's Von Braunville an operational moonbase. Ex-cowboy Calvin Pickford, who works in a Georgia pet shop, on his much-censored idol's demise writes:

Philip K. Dick is dead, alas,
Let's all queue up to kick God's ass.

When his Southern Baptist reared wife demurs, Calvin says: 'Existential outrage, not irreverence, powers that line.' Plenty of such outrage continues through a novel which intertwines variations on Dickian motifs to create what is less a pastiche than a highly original and humorous, though essentially serious, celebratory analogue.

Philip may be dead, but his perservering soul marches on. More precisely his 'resurrection body', as messenger of the sub-deific demiurge responsible for current reality, impinges on a succession of humans and animals, including a tame boa constrictor thus made to be ventriloquially informative: the purpose to muster and guide a squad that will effect the switch to a time-line rather less calamitous. Dickian resonances abound: Calvin works in the Happy Puppy Pet Shop; Horsy Stout is a dwarf negroid stable-hand whose 'body of glory' is commandeered by Kai (i.e. ghostly Phil) to get him to the moon; the causal agent of that transportation is a runaway stallion named 'Ubiquity'.

The climactic lunar scenes of exorcism are a fine mixture of farce and metaphysics culminating in a spectacular Dickian transformation, all in the Pauline 'twinkling of an eye'. Expecting perhaps a world with Reagan as 1982 President to appear, we find that Bishop is juggling with not two but three real/unreal universes. His 'Coda' is so surprising, so ironic, so science fictionally parodic, that it must be left for readers delightedly to encounter it for themselves.

R E V I E W S

Bruce Sterling - - - - - INVOLUTION OCEAN
(Legend, 1988, 175pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

One of the attractions of SF is the way it examines the most traditional of humankind's stories, looking for new wrinkles on old faces. Man's contest with Leviathan, and the sea itself, is one such story. Sterling's sea is one of dust, and its whales give a low rent hallucinogen among their by-products. Into the basic Melville stew Sterling has tipped some Ballard - a nothing planet with its only attraction a sea of dust, how's that for entropy - and just a hint of Dick's sheer strangeness. Then there is Delanyesque sado-masochistic alien sex. Finally there is Sterling's proto-cyberpunk sex'n'drugs'n'rock-'n' roll outlook, an energy which creates a hell of a dynamic tension when set beside his steady state plot.

The story is simple, a junkie signs on a whaler to amass one last stash before it becomes unattainable. He makes his fortune, stares the unyielding cosmos smack in the eye, has it off with a fair, who burns when he touches her and returns home to find his friends slaughtered for no apparent reason. Saying that everything rather falls apart at the end pays the story an undeserved compliment. Sterling simply allows the threads to unravel - which may be deliberate (this is an artful book, after all) but I don't think so.

Whatever its faults the merits outweigh them and INVOLUTION OCEAN is a welcome restoration to the shelves. It also happens to be the best thing Sterling has written by a long, long way. Seriously recommended.

Helen Wright - - - - - A MATTER OF OATHS
(Methuen, 1988, £3.50, 283pp)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

A mysterious webber appears just as Commander Rallya is seeking a new First for her spaceship. He is Rafe, an Oath-breaker and is suffering the effects of a memory wipe as punishment. Rafe is given the job and Rallya finds his mystery deepening as she attempts to unravel who he was before his memory was erased. As his past begins to haunt Rafe he realises that he was an important pawn in the continuing struggle between the Two Emperors. The uneasy balance of power between the two Emperors and the Guild of Webbers (who own the spacefleets), becomes threatened when a conspiracy is exposed and Rafe is the key.

Wright develops her narrative painfully slowly and much of the first third of the book strikes me as padding. When the story begins it is a pleasing galactic diplomacy scenario with the characters behaving in a consistent relationship with the pervading Oaths which underpin the novel.

I find the use of third person narrative gives an unfocused quality to the character of

Rafe who should be more directly related to involve the reader. The reader is denied a 'point of entry' into what is a keenly imagined, but skimpily described future universe. There is some promising writing towards the end and the characters' casual sexuality gives the personal interplay a resonant sensuality. A modest debut which suggests that the author may develop into an interesting writer.

Greg Bear - - - - -BEYOND HEAVEN'S RIVER
(Gollancz, 1988, 256pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

I keep feeling I should like Greg Bear's books; others write complimentary reviews, readers buy the books and nominate them for awards. I just find them ordinary. Perhaps this book will change my views.

Yoshio Kawashita, a Japanese World War 2 airplane gunner is abducted by aliens and becomes the centre of a strange experiment where he has to relive periods of Japanese history, on a planet where he is the only human.

Suddenly the experiment ends, people arrive to investigate the planet and Yoshio comes under the care of Anna Nestor, a rich entrepreneur. The story then follows Yoshio's attempts to understand what has happened to him and why, during which time his relationship with Anna grows.

Other characters have little character of their own, although it is their actions which create the only real dramatic events at the conclusion of the story.

You will have gathered by now that I felt about this book much as I did about other Greg Bear books.

Actually some things were well done, the character of Yoshio was complex and changed as some events became clearer and others more perplexing, all leading to his increasing obsession with his captors.

Greg Bear also sketches in this universe, the ftl ships, the alien races, the trading consortia and the importance of the central trading commodity - information, in such a way that most of it is shown rather than told.

But it seemed that little happened for most of the book and we switched from trot to fast gallop right at the end. I feel that this may have been deliberate as Greg Bear invested some measure of Japanese flavour into the book, so I'm probably criticising the story for a feature the author built in.

I'm sure Greg Bear fans will enjoy the book but it didn't change my mind.

Arthur C. Clarke - - - - -IMPERIAL EARTH
(VGSF, 1988, 287pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Duncan, sent from Titan to Earth to grow up and bring back a cloned son, discovers his old friend, Karl, is living with a woman who came between them several years earlier. He believes Karl is smuggling to Earth a large quantity of titanite, a gem made in zero gravity. Suspicious of his motives, Duncan's investigations lead him to 'Cyclops', a radio telescope project which listens for signs of alien life.

The thin story is formed from a patchwork of lacklustre detail substituting for characterisation, scientific exposition, flashbacks and pseudo-political content that are forced together into a woolly semblance of plot. It finally gets off the ground on page 180 where the element of intrigue is introduced, only to be scuppered later on in favour of a domestic rationale.

Karl's vision is revealed a little too soon and Clarke's ideas about the behaviour of

clones seem terribly out of date in light of current knowledge concerning how experience alters the development of the maturing brain.

Duncan is hard to like. He is revealed again and again as a cold-hearted opportunist, especially in the many ways he takes advantage of Karl's death. This impression is reinforced by the apparent shallowness and moral duplicity of all the major characters. It is, therefore, hard to believe in Duncan's remorse for a murdered Spiney Sea Urchin, a central image of the novel.

There are signs of talent, but the climax doesn't live up to the build up and the novel now seems rather naive.

John Skipp & Craig Spector - - - -THE SCREAM
(Bantam, 1988, 422pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is the new horror. What Fear magazine describes as 'splatterpunk'. Sex'n'Drugs'n'Rock'n'Roll'n'Violence'n'Satanism. Video-nasty prose. Howling riffs in a thunderous gut-wrenching story.

On one side is The Scream - ultimate heavy-metal band who really mean all this occult shit. On the other are Christian fundamentalists to whom rock and roll really is the Devil's Music. In the middle is the Jacob Hammer Band, led by a Vietnam Vet-turned Geldof figure who organises a benefit concert to support bands attacked by the 'Knock Rock' organisations. But even he is worried by The Scream, whose followers are certainly more than metaphorically the Livin' Dead.

This is the new horror. For speedmetal and thrash freaks who really do play records backwards to catch the messages from Satan? For Rambobimbos or Vietniks? Or for freshly scrubbed kiddies wanting a cheap thrill? Or, their parents who holler 'Mindless violence' and support the Contras in Nicaragua? Behind the Cock-Rock image is a simple moral lesson. Don't let other people do your thinking for you. (For the God Squad.) Don't let other people do your feeling for you. (For bliszed-out rockers.) But the image can obscure the moral conflict - the Jacob Hammer Band can only exist as the good guys in the sense that they're the coke-snorting sexist macho mother-fuckers who don't rape and torture their fans. Well thank goodness for that, my dears!

Still, there are some nice touches. Of one HM/Occult band's performance: 'It was about as dangerous as a Conan the Barbarian strip... Boneheaded adolescent simplification has its place, after all, in the scheme of things.' And don't write off the fanatical anti-rock preacher as totally irredeemable. THE SCREAM is not pleasant reading at times, but although Tolstoy it ain't it's more subtle than some of the gorier pages might suggest.

Hal Clement - - - - -STILL RIVER
(Sphere, 1988, 279pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Yes, it's a new Clement, which means hardcore SF at its tricksiest. Locus calls it 'yet another formidable intellectual exercise', while Kirkus Reviews pronounces it 'ingeniously constructed'.

I confess I got a great deal of pleasure out of Clement's earliest books, forty-odd years ago, but this one seems to lack the agreeable personalities that made his earlier aliens fun to follow through their problems.

What we have are five students, assigned to Enigma 88, a strangely anomalous planet where they must work out the practical side of their Respected Opinion degrees. The plot comes from facing five dissimilar young people, each with his/her inbuilt failings and misconceptions, with a planet that appears

both dangerous and impossible.

Unfortunately, Clement is into coy chapter headings like 'Of course I see it's gone' and 'Of course I expected that'; such tweezeness militates strongly against reader suspension of belief, which is made yet harder by the amateurish aircraft depicted on the cover. The first chapter is a scientific listing of the personae, confusing because inconsistent and boring because we are given no actual personality traits at this crucial introductory point. The subsequent chapters are spoiled somewhat by clumsy speech patterns, and the whole book gives the impression of having been knocked off at high speed as soon as the author had worked out the technical data to make it tick.

I'm disappointed. I'd hoped for a lot better from the Old Master. Maybe I'm too old for science-detection and derring-do-through-ignorance. Try it - you may find it a lot more rewarding than I did. Somehow I doubt it.

Patrick Tilley - --THE AMTRAK WARS: BLOOD RIVER
(Sphere, 1988, 362pp, £3.50)

Patrick Tilley &
Fernando Fernandez - - - - - DARK VISIONS:
AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE AMTRAK WARS
(Sphere, 1988, 64pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

Patrick Tilley's THE AMTRAK WARS novels have obviously been a commercial success, so much is demonstrated by the ILLUSTRATED GUIDE that has accompanied publication of the fourth volume in the series. What of its critical reception though? As far as I am aware the books have either been altogether ignored or conceded mere casual acknowledgement, generally hostile in nature. This is a serious mistake, because despite its pulp title, Tilley has produced an accomplished adventure story of considerable merit.

His tale of the conflict between totalitarian Amtrak Federation and the Mute tribes that inhabit most of post-holocaust America, of their struggle for control of the Overground works superbly, although within clearly defined limits. The plot concerns the working out of the Talisman prophecy which offers the Mutes some hope of victory in their war with the hightech Federation. The plainsfolk, one can only hope, will inherit the Earth. The agents of the coming catastrophe are the two Mutes, Clearwater and Cadillac and the Federation pilot, Steve Brickman and his sister Ros.

Tilley's portrayal of the ruthless totalitarianism of the Federation regime, of its total control over and cynical disregard for the lives of its subjects is by and large convincing. Not so successful is his treatment of the rival Ironmasters, a Japanese samurai regime addicted to cruelty and torture. None of the Ironmasters have an ounce of humanity, they are totally unsympathetic without any redeeming features whatsoever. All this is clearly intended to establish the reader's sympathy with the Mutes, but of course we will have to wait for the last volume before making a final judgement. All in all this is one of the best adventure stories I have read for years and is certainly worth a look.

One criticism: at one point in the book Cadillac is engaged in group sex with a number of young women whom Tilley cannot resist naming 'Tight-Fit' and 'Afternoon Delight' etc. This sort of casual sexism really pisses me off. Where are the male characters called 'small Willie', 'Limp Penis' and 'He-Whose-Balls-Have-Not-Dropped'? Apart from that, the book does have women characters who are central to the story and who are, one suspects, likely to become more so in the next volume.

Judith Tarr - - --THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING
(Pan, 1988, 278pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Those who attended the World Fantasycon received a copy of this book inside their bag of freebies; presumably the publishers believed this outlay worthwhile if it persuades us to buy the remaining two parts of the Avaryan Rising trilogy. Yes, it's the first volume of a trilogy - it also has a map and a pronunciation guide!

I really enjoyed the Hound and the Falcon trilogy of Tarr's, so I was disappointed to find that THE HALL didn't grip me as a story - which is one main reason for reading epic fantasy. Ms Tarr seems too involved in describing background history and religious rituals to get on with the plot and deploy interesting characters (by the end of the book she has killed off several leading names, so will have to start again in volume 2).

The cover is helpful - for a change. Here is the mountain king on his throne, with the rival claimants beside him: his bastard son Moranden, and his part divine grandson Mirain, son of the Sun and the king's exiled priestess daughter. The plot of this first volume concerns Mirain's surprise arrival at the king's court. The king names Mirain as his heir, and is murdered by Moranden's mother; Moranden and Mirain eventually slug it out in single combat. The story is told through the eyes of Vadin, a squire assigned to be Mirain's bodyguard, who develops a love-hate relationship with him.

Perhaps there are hints of Aztec and Babylonian culture in Ms Tarr's fantasy world. The duel between Sun and Moon, patriarchy and matriarchy, is familiar from Celtic fantasy. If Ms Tarr can introduce some strong, believable new characters including a heroine, into volume 2, and get on with the plot, I'll probably stay with her.

Michael Coney - - - - - --FANG, THE GNOME
(Orbit, 1988, 345pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

Oh dear, the third volume of an 'epic fantasy series' with gnomes and a front cover picturing a dragon, warrior and sword appearing from a lake. At least no one was likening it to Tolkien. This seemed to combine all of those features I dislike in modern fantasy, how wrong can you get.

I enjoyed this book, the plot moves along, the characters have a spark of life and the writing has a touch of humour, a truer reflection of life than those novels of continuous gloom.

As for being the third in a series where I hadn't read the other two, that did not detract from my enjoyment. Michael Coney was obviously skilful enough to include sufficient background without detracting from the story.

I would argue with the word fantasy. This story uses the sf plot of parallel worlds. Every decision by an intelligent being results in a different 'happentrack', this infinite set of happentacks forming the 'Greataway'. On an Earth very similar to our own in the Middle Ages, Avalona, a sort of sorceress, is trying to save Starquin, a sort of 'god', from being killed in the future. She uses her son Merlin and her young helper, Nyneve, to introduce the concept of chivalry to this world, which they do by creating the myth of Arthur for the locals.

On a nearby happentrack live the gnomes who try to co-exist with nature rather than manipulate it except for their ability to use a beast called the Sharan to create animals to their own design. Nyneve is taught how to visit the gnomes' happentrack and becomes friends with them, especially Fang, so called

because he is apparently a courageous gnome.

Although I would not claim this is great literature it is certainly one of the most enjoyable books I've read during 1988. I shall now have to go and spend money to buy the first two volumes.

Samuel R. Delany - - - - - TALES OF NEVERYON
(Grafton, 1988, 335pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The world of Neveryon is similar to that of Conan's Hyborian League. This is heroic fantasy: slaves rebel, characters go on quests. There are dragons. This is literary writing: epigraphs from structuralist critical texts, a mock(?)—scholarly preface and appendix. This is Delany, whom people absorb effortlessly and enthuse over, or struggle with vainly, annoyed by the way he forces them to take heed of themselves experiencing the text they're reading.

There are five tales in this book. Like Joanna Russ' 'Alyx' stories, they use the conventions of heroic fantasy to question the writer's own activity as well as some of the conventions of social relationships outside the world of fantasy texts. The most escapist of literary genres becomes a fragmented mirror of our own reality. In 'The Tale of Gorgik', for example, we see signs apparent in rhymes, obscenities, behavioural patterns: the almost meaningless but in fact highly charged and utilitarian messages between individual and groups. 'The Tale of Old Venn' contains Socratic discussions on money, the transitions from a barter to a money economy. As the stories progress, characters meet. Plot and pattern reveal themselves, and some of the more iconic connections become visible. Other relationships will be explored in the next three volumes of the series.

Remember the way fans of Robert E. Howard or J.R.R. Tolkien produce long essays on the customs and deep structures of their books? Forget sentences like 'Delany deconstructs social lubricants by examining them in the light of heroic fantasy', if they make you unhappy, and read a rich, fascinating book in which an author details aspects of his invented world which most heroic fantasy writers don't simply because they don't even think about them. But you'll get the most out of this dazzling book if you read it with an eye for ironies and reflections, how texts and history (is there any difference?) are created. The stories impinge, build, and coalesce, and as the plot moves towards resolution the meaning of small things become the image of great just as massive historical forces often seem to result in almost trivial manifestations. Carefully woven, intricately crafted, beautifully written, NEVERYON is the culmination of heroic fantasy - and more besides.

Katherine Kerr - - - - - DAGGERSPELL
(Grafton, 1988, 528pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

For 400 years this tragedy has been in the making. Long ago Prince Galrion in the kingdom of Devery was suborned by a magician: they sought the dweomer, a kind of mystic power over land and air. He thought he loved the power more than his betrothed, Brangwen. Unfortunately, circumstances conspired against him and he was disowned by his dweomer-hating father. Only then did he realise how much he loved Brangwen. But tragedy stalked the land and she was lost to him. He became cursed, a nobody, no-one (Nevyn) was his name, and he would haunt time to repay debts of love, to finally take Brangwen's soul to the dweomer.

For with the exception of Nevyn, souls are

reborn, unaware of their former lives yet playing out their fate as a consequence of former lives. And through time Nevyn finds the soul of Brangwen in other bodies, only to repeatedly lose her. It reads like a tragedy, with threads intertwining, characters surfacing and influencing the future souls.

This is volume one of a saga, but the ending's satisfying in its own right. Granted, Nevyn does not accomplish his quest - to bring the Brangwen soul to dweomer - but there is hope. The magic is handled with a sure hand; particularly effective were the astral journeys Nevyn and his accomplices embarked on. There is a dark dweomer too, barely touched upon and clearly to figure in another volume. Honour is important to these people: 'He was nothing without his honour, just a bit of mud on the road, not even a man at all.' This same obeisance to honour is shown in various lights, chivalrous, insightful: it causes the ruin of lives, creates much distress, yet is like a beacon too. The characters tend to be distinct; the childhood of Jill was all too short but was effectively conveyed. The appearance of Wildfolk, little gnomelike people only she can see boded ill for the reader, yet they were wisely kept in the background, proving their worth towards the end; they weren't twee or trite, however, but quite amusing.

So, although I faced yet another first volume of a fantasy saga with some trepidation, I was rewarded with an interesting read, people with characters about whom I cared. The twists and turns, the interweaving of their fates was fascinating. Clearly, much tragedy has yet to befall them - and whether Nevyn will succeed in their present reincarnation or have to go on, only time and the next volume will tell. For now, though, this one is recommended.

Robert Sheckley - - - - - HUNTER/VICTIM
(Methuen, 1988, 238pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

Whee! Splat! Aargh! - the language of cartoon violence has a peculiarly onomatopoeic charm of its own. However the sentiments behind the syntax are usually grim, blood-drenched nastiness. This book reads like an outline for a gung-ho cartoon strip/Saturday morning serial, without any of the charm of the real thing. It's the third in the series by Sheckley, who once wrote some extremely funny books but seems to have lost his ability to tell the diamonds from the dross somewhere along the way. The humour falls flat, and what we're left with is an inelegant piece of hackwork.

We have a hero. We know he's meant to be the hero, because he's described in excruciating detail; the fact that he's completely characterless is beside the point. His wife is killed by terrorists, for no obvious reason, so he enlists with the Hunters, a kind of hybrid of the Men from UNCLE and Murder Incorporated. With their help he learns about killing, and goes on to do a lot of it. There's some meaningless sex along the way, and a lot of cartoon colour but very little substance. We also have some alarming sociological insights; a 'liberal' is a man who favours legalising murder (so long as it's of some approved victim - a foreigner or a criminal, perhaps, or a dissident). Women exist to be drooled over, and as a convenient motive for revenge killings. The illegal Hunter organisation is actually heroic... I could go on.

I disliked this book intensely. I used to be a Sheckley fan, but HUNTER/VICTIM has put me off him for good. This sickening farrago of evil prejudices and depersonalised nastiness is not worth reading, and I advise you to avoid it like the plague.

SWAMP THING 9/10 (Titan, 1988, £5.95 each)
 NEMESIS THE WARLOCK 8: PURITY'S STORY (Titan, 1988, £4.50)
 BAD COMPANY 4: THE KROOL HEART (Titan, 1988, £4.50)
 JUDGE DREDD VS. THE FATIES/JUDGE DREDD IN MONKEY BUSINESS (Titan, 1988, £2.95 each)
 JUDGE DREDD IN OZ 2/3 (Titan, 1988, £4.95 each)
 BROUGHT TO LIGHT (Titan, 1989, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Somehow it seemed appropriate that I should read SWAMP THING and listen to old Peter Hammill tapes: the lyrical horror of ST hits you like classic Van Der Graaf Generator songs with prettiness, evil driving riffs and voices searching for love in the darkness. Bedsit angst, maybe, but real enough for me.

ST 9 explores the nature of a love that can destroy a city:

My vegetable love should grow
 Vaster than empires and more slow...
 ('To His Coy Mistress')

... Annihilating all that's made
 To a green thought in a green shade
 ('The Garden')

(So that's Marvell not DC? Well, synchronicity doesn't work all the time.)

Primal jungle erupts over Gotham City as the Swamp Thing tries to force the authorities to release his lady-love. Alan Moore and artists Alfredo Alcalá, John Totleben and Rick Veitch bring the story - which also involves combat with a shadowy, sinister Batman) to such life I want to spend hours re-reading it. It's one of the few examples of comic art which overcomes the episodic nature of the medium, creating a unity rarely experienced in the field.

ST 10 shows Moore's ability to write different kinds of comic book while remaining his own man. 'My Blue Heaven', part illustrated prose-poem, part extended pun, is here marred by lack of colour, but the text is strong enough to carry it. The saga extends to classical science fantasy (Adam Strange appears in an adventure which emphasises the genre's sexual subtexts) and Stephen Bissette contributes a partly successful of gruesomeness and poignancy, all rotting flesh and loose eyeballs, in a return to Abigail Cable picking up the pieces of her life (and her father) after her lover's 'demise'.

This is all immensely good.

Almost as good, but different, is the Nemesis story from 2000AD. This album boasts a stunning cover from Bryan Talbot and a Pat Mills plot (illustrated by David Roach) explaining Purity Brown's devotion to Nemesis and how she became his lieutenant in the war against Torquemada. Like ST 9, you can read this as a single chapter in a long work, rather than a collection of serial episodes. BAD COMPANY 4 - another 2000AD strip - explores similar questions of good and evil and the nature of simplistic moral labels, but less successfully. Pat Milligan's scripts rise too much to climaxes and cliffhangers, or perhaps this tendency is underlined by Ewins/McCarthy's violent and cartoony artwork. The story undoubtedly undercuts any idea of romanticising its heroes, but does so by too nihilistic means for me. I prefer the use of characters the reader can identify with, and the ironic, erotic approach of 'Purity's Story'.

The two small-format Judge Dredd volumes are thematic collections of stories published over various issues of 2000AD, and stress the wacky side of life in Mega-City One as JD combats flabby felons and criminal chimps. There's some amusing satire - as when Dave the orang-utan runs for Mayor and wins - and grotesque farce.

JUDGE DREDD IN OZ: 2 is the second part of the 'skysurfing' saga which also sees Dredd in action in the outback HQ of a tribe of rogue Judges: slambang action and black humour in the shape of a homicidal roboshief. Dredd has now reached classic status: John Wagner and Alan Grant's scripts are always full of barbed observation of the way we live now. The concluding volume sees the competition under way, but win or lose, Dredd is waiting for 'Chopper' Shakespeare. There's one of the best climaxes I've read in comics for ages, with a coda which returns to the more sombre side of life in Mega-City One: more paranoid than parodic but with an undercurrent of feeling which makes the series more than violent exchanges of combat.

Social comment has always been part of the visual narrative/comic strip/cartoon media, and BROUGHT TO LIGHT is perhaps a new development in the field, a showcase of different artistic and writing styles brought to bear on the same subject.

In May 1984 a bomb exploded at a press conference held by Nicaraguan Contra leader Eden Pastora, a former sandinista who refused to ally with the CIA-backed FDN rebels. Eight people died, twenty-eight were badly injured. One journalist, Linda Frazier, had her legs ripped off by the explosion. She remained conscious all night, and died in a boat on the way to hospital.

Reporters Tony Avirgnan (himself a survivor of the blast) and Martha Honey started to investigate the bombing, and uncovered a trail leading back to the CIA and, probably, the White House. 'Flashpoint' is their story, translated into graphic form by Joyce Brabner and Thomas Yeates, culminating in the (still pending) legal action against named conspirators, backed by the Christie Institute.

Turn the book over and you get 'Shadowplay', a darker, more explicitly angry vision in which a drunken eagle in a riverside bar spews out aggressive and maudlin justification of CIA involvement in drugrunning and terrorism throughout the 'Free World', setting the La Penca bombing in the context of a much longer tradition of covert operations and interference with government. This is not 'comic book', but a cross between old-fashioned political caricature and modern TV journalism (or, as they say, 'graphic docudrama'). Alan Moore (again!) and Bill Sienkiewicz (who is also the artist for the JUDGE DREDD IN OZ covers) use sinister surrealism to make their point: no punches pulled here. Meanwhile George Bush, now President, calls for a 'kinder, gentler America'.

It almost goes without saying that this book (which also contains a more conventional but equally telling political cartoon by Paul Mavrides) is a masterly mixture of graphic and textual narrative styles. Whether this emphasises the message or relegates it to a great plot for a comic book is for you to decide. It is speculative, but there's enough circumstantial evidence to keep you jumpy. As the Company Salesman says, "All we're askin' is your indifference. Just turn away and pretend it ain't happenin'!"...

Ian Watson - - MEAT (Headline, 1988, 246pp, £2.99)

EVIL WATER (Grafton, 1988, 222pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

MEAT is another of Ian Watson's recent excursions into the horror genre, and this is its first published edition. Often in Ian Watson's novels the plot falls victim to his ideas. In MEAT it is the ideas that suffer from the exigencies of the plot.

Diane and Saul, both vegetarians, save a rabbit from the clutches of a hungry weasel in a quiet country lane. Unfortunately for them this turns out to be the Weasel King, a symbolic manifestation of the carnivorous spirit, and he comes seeking revenge. As Diane pushes Saul into escalating the fight against animal exploitation by joining the active local cell of the Animal Liberation Front, so the carnivorous spirit seeks ever more violent, bloodthirsty retribution. The dramatic climax centres around the couple's own home where a century before the Weasel King, revealed as an ancient force, had last surfaced to wreak his carnivorous havoc.

The novel begins promisingly. The introduction of the Weasel King, archetypal animals, and the ancient spirit of meat-eaters sets up a potentially fascinating story. However, the plot demands the Weasel King quickly becomes absolutely evil (an ambiguous villain would have been far more interesting) and the story degenerates into a straight fight to the death and the ideas remain undeveloped.

The plotting is at least fast and effective but it never achieves the depth that is potentially there. I was left feeling that the subject matter had somehow been sold short. It's just a throwaway read, to be consumed and forgotten.

The ten stories collected in *EVIL WATER* reveal a far more assured Ian Watson. He writes more effectively over the shorter distance, where the ideas remain diamond hard and the writing is tight and more polished.

Even his horror writing is more effective: 'Evil Water', the title story, is, like *MEAT*, a tale of the surfacing of ancient forces in a modern context but more controlled and ultimately more chilling than the novel. 'The People on the Precipice' I read as an allegory of life in the straitened circumstances experienced by the forgotten underclass in Thatcher's Britain (I could be wrong), and very evocative it was too. My favourite story is 'Windows', an SF tale in the classic mould. But you could turn to any of these stories and find a good tale well told, bursting with ideas.

The stories in this collection (which first appeared in hardback in 1987) were all published in magazines over the past four years. It provides a good short introduction to the best of Ian Watson's work over that time. Recommended reading.

Joel Rosenberg - - *THE SLEEPING DRAGON*
(Guardians of the Flame: I)
(Grafton, 1988, 303pp,
£2.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

A group of American college students who gather to play a fantasy role-playing game (very like 'Dungeons and Dragons') is magically transported into the world of their fantasy campaigns - and into the bodies of their game characters, which some of them find preferable to their real selves. The adventures and tribulations which befall them are those commonly encountered in D&D: they are given a quest (they must find the Gate Between Worlds which can transport them home), they acquire gold and magic spells, and they fight assorted assailants - in this parallel world swords and magic can kill, not merely inflict 'hit points'.

Whilst 'adventuring' of this kind makes for a satisfying game of D&D, it does not necessarily make engrossing fiction. Fantasy role-playing is briefly explained at the beginning, but a reader who has no prior knowledge of the basic rules and conventions is going to find this novel somewhat lacking in background detail. If you ask no more of fantasy than a D&D-type adventure complete with

wizards, thieves and swordsmen, then this book can while away a few hours, but I can't see myself rushing out to buy the rest of the series.

Julian May - - *INTERVENTION* (Pan, 1988,
663pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This is a linking novel between the four *Saga of the Exiles* books and her forthcoming trilogy, *The Galactic Milieu* (*JACK THE BODILESS*, *DIAMOND MASK*, *MAGNIFICAT*).

I haven't read the *Saga* and did not find too many references to the previous books so this can be read in isolation. Apparently the first volume of Rogatien Remillard's memoirs written in 2113, the events related occur between 1945 and 2013. Although he writes of himself, his friends and family, they in fact prefigure the forthcoming books and one Jon Remillard (aka Jack the Bodiless) whose coming followed the *Intervention*: Jon was destined to be the First Mental Man. Rogi relates how the first humans with higher mind-powers come to terms with their gift/curse and how they become accepted by 'normals'. Stated like that it seems pretty flat, bland almost; but the enormous cast of characters, the switching from continent to continent, to almost grow with the new operant adepts presents many contrasts and plenty of interest. While it could have been a thinner book, it is still a fascinating insight into the emergence of super-minds - quite detailed reference is made to Stapledon's *ODD JOHN*.

Power-dealing is in evidence. A secret operant, Kieran O'Connor manipulates the Presidential candidate on an anti-operant ticket; operant globalness threatens fanatics and dictatorships all over: they would expose chicanery; peace isn't profit-generating for arms-dealers, drugs-traffickers and the like. Always there is the balance on a tight-rope - to avoid alarming the 'normals', not to use the remarkable powers to kill. Often, operants fail, pushed, goaded beyond measure. But if they do fail then they become pariahs, condemned as a race apart, a monstrous minority, to dangerous to be permitted to live.

Fear of the unknown, of people who are different; these emotions come across well. Remillard's nephews lock in a battle of wills, one inevitably good and the other evil. Some of the scenes where minds are raped were quite chilling.

INTERVENTION is a plausible exposition on super-mind emergence and First Contact. A comprehensive four-page family tree neatly wraps up the story - but don't study it before you've finished or you're likely to know who died before the author intended!

Louise Cooper - - *INFERNO* (Unwin, 1988,
241pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This is book 2 of 8 in the *INDIGO* series. Unfortunately it fails to maintain the standard of its predecessor *NEMESIS*. In *INFERNO*, Anghara Kaligsdughter (known as Indigo) meets (and vanquishes, natch) the first of the seven demons/plagues she has loosed upon the world. One down, six to go. One per book for the remainder of the series!

The plot is adequate, and some of the 'business' quite tolerable (there are some fine fire-elementals), but the fatal flaw is the pace of the writing. Action-adventure moralistic fantasy is only fun to read if *THINGS KEEP HAPPENING*; if the glittering surface of description and event is so engaging that one never notices (the lack of) anything

beneath it. This book drags. The surface felt thin and stretched. Indigo repeatedly fails to see the obvious, doesn't ask questions, spins out episodes that don't advance the action. I found this unsatisfying, uninteresting, and eventually profoundly frustrating.

John Rowe Townsend - - KING CREATURE, COME
(Swallow, 1988, 187pp, £2.25)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Set on Earth at some time in a future in which our world has been taken over by a race of decadent superbeings whose preoccupations are mainly with music, mathematics, and the Dimension Game (which makes chess look as demanding as ludo), this tale is told from the point of view of a teenage alien called Vector. Vector forsakes the luxuries of civilisation in order to be cast out of the alien precinct into the squalor of the ordinary world, in which the Earth people - 'Creatures' - await the overthrow of their masters by the King Creature. And all to be with his girlfriend, Harmony. While the aliens - 'Persons' - play their games, the Guards, who quisling-like underpin the system, plan their own takeover. The people, of course, get the worst end of this power play, but they do get their own back in the end.

KING CREATURE, COME is obviously aimed at the teenage market, and has its share of adolescent problems, discovery of self, girls and all that jazz. I scoff not, for these themes are handled with insight. It also tackles broader issues, such as the political and social ramifications of Imperialist behaviour, the use of poverty and deprivation as a means of keeping power, etc. While some aspects of the book take some suspension of disbelief (the Persons seem to rule little more than one of the Home Counties, for example), this is an intelligent and thought-provoking book, and worth a read.

Richard A. Lupoff - - COUNTERSOLAR! (Grafton, 1988, 319pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Brian Magorrian)

Billed as 'the riotous countersequel to CIRCUMPOLAR!' this book is about the race between good and bad guys to the far side of the sun to, guess where, Counterearth.

In 1942 teams headed by Albert Einstein (always referred to as 'the savant' and Sir Oswald Mosley battle for first to Counter-earth and control of the second planet's resources.

Counterearth was created a few decades ago, by some Egyptians who lived in pyramids in the moon, until they messed up some experiment, so making a second identical Earth. The book follows the two sets of protagonists in alternating chapters, which became an irritating feature very quickly. A series of seemingly nonsensical episodes followed one another: I kept wondering if, due to some lack of humour and/or insight on my part, I was missing a great book.

I don't think I did.

John McLoughlin - - - - - TOOLMAKER KOAN
(Orbit, 1988, 344pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Craig Marnock)

After a probe is destroyed beyond the orbit of Uranus by forces unknown, the two Superpowers each send a ship to investigate. Caught up in the political crisis, the two ships cripple one another, and the four survivors face death till the being calling itself Charon intervenes. Made by a long-lost civilisation, it introduces the four to an alien race, in the hope that they will be able to avoid their fate, that of all toolmakers: the Toolmaker Koan.

A koan is a paradox to stimulate the mind; the Toolmaker Koan is that, once a species ceases to evolve, evolving instead through its tools, its extinction is assured: the species will eventually destroy itself with its own ability. The fulfilment of the Koan can only be avoided by Meta-stasis, a quantum leap in the condition of the universe.

The author is a professional evolutionist, and has followed the well trodden path of writing in his own speciality. Perhaps his 'soft' science background has something to do with it, since his characters' strings are not as blatantly pulled by the plot as one might expect for this type of science fiction. The plot itself follows the well established pattern for the subgenre; logically and smoothly moving through a series of revelations whilst retaining plenty of action. What distinguishes this book from the hard-on sf it appears in its earlier stages to be is its scope and the depths it acknowledges whilst piling on the pulp.

A solid example of trad sf.

Connie Willis - - - - - LINCOLN'S DREAM
(Grafton, 1988, 256pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

This is probably the best novel I've read this year so far, although I'm not sure how much I really liked it. It didn't give me the same instant thrill as, say, THE ANUBIS GATES, but I think it's going to be a book I will remember and remember with affection. It's not the sort of action packed book you can't put down and yet I found myself reading it into the early hours of the morning. If this book doesn't feature amongst the award nominees there's something wrong.

Plot: Jeff Johnston is a historian specialising in the American Civil War, he acts as a researcher for Thomas Broun, successful writer of Civil War novels. They have a close, virtually father/son, relationship. Richard Madison was Jeff's roommate at Duke University and is now a psychologist in a sleep institute, Annie is a patient and lover and seems to be dreaming the wartime experiences of General Robert E. Lee. Meanwhile Thomas Broun has become fascinated by the prophetic dreams of Abraham Lincoln and is travelling the country discussing them with every supposed expert on dreams he can find. Jeff meets Annie and falls in love with her, he is able to explain what some of her dreams are about and eventually she leaves Robert. Jeff and Annie visit some of the Civil War battlefields on a research trip and this seems to accelerate the dreaming.

The plot is multi-layered but could be taken on the simple level of a kind of 'detective story' to discover the meaning of the dreams. On another layer Annie transposes the people around her for the historical characters when she dreams and the people themselves seem to reflect those characters in their attitudes and actions. This plot is original, as far as I'm aware and manages to avoid the 'worlds within dreams' themes which

can be found in other sf stories.

Annie and Jeff are well developed characters. Broun also comes over well but I found Richard a little too plot driven rather than having a character of his own, this is usually the case with minor characters who are often there just to keep the plot moving along but I felt Richard was a sufficiently major character to deserve more than this. I think I'm being very hard, Richard certainly isn't a cardboard cut out and I probably wouldn't be making these comments if Annie and Jeff weren't so real.

Whilst the ending is open to interpretation it is none the less satisfying and I don't intend to say anything more about it. Indeed, although I seem to have told you a lot about the plot in fact I've told you very little.

The form of the book is interesting, Jeff and Annie's journey is interspersed with Annie's dreams, stories from the Civil War and parts from Broun's novel, 'The Duty Bound', the interlayering is exceptionally well done.

I know little about the American Civil War but assume the facts are correct, either Connie Willis is an expert or did a lot of research, or has a good researcher and certainly I feel I've learned something.

Please read this book, it's different and it's well written and it's easy to read. I look forward to more from Connie Willis.

Alan Garner - - - - - -ALAN GARNER'S BOOK OF
BRITISH FAIRY TALES
(Collins, 1988, 160pp, £4.95)

- - - - - - - - - - A BAG OF MOONSHINE
(Collins, 1988, 144pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Here are two welcome reissues in paperback (a little larger than trade size) of books which were rather pricey in hardback. For his BOOK OF BRITISH FAIRY TALES Garner went back further than Joseph Jacobs to the collections from which Jacobs drew, and has re-introduced some of the dialect terms which Jacobs left out. However, in 'Tom Tit Tot', surprisingly, he does not use the well known 'that' for the imp, e.g. 'that laughed and twirled that's tail'; Garner writes 'it laughed and twirled its tail'.

Garner includes such well known regional tales as 'Yallery Brown', which he retells in the first person; 'Kate Crackernuts' and 'Mr Fox' (an earlier version of 'Bluebeard'); and three of J.F. Campbell's Popular Tales of the West Highlands. He does not strictly transcribe his source, but rewrites in order to provide a storyteller with material for telling aloud. The less well known tales, especially those collected from gypsies, come over as much wilder, more episodic, and irrational, compared to their analogues in Grimm and other 19th-century versions. Superb primitive woodcut illustrations by Derek Collard.

The companion piece is A BAG OF MOONSHINE, selected and retold for younger readers, and illustrated by Patrick James Lynch, in a manner similar to Arthur Rackham. This book was reviewed by Maureen Porter for Vector 137, and (can it be a coincidence, or just grounds of expense) the colour illustrations she complained of have been omitted from the paperback!

Hardly any tales are well known to the general public, and sources are not given, so I am led to wonder how far they are transcriptions from folklore collections, how far translations of other versions into the Cheshire dialect by Garner himself - providing, as it were, the authentic Cheshire version if it had been collected in the 19th century.

But when is Garner going to publish an

original novel again? It's twenty-one years since THE OWL SERVICE, and fifteen since RED SHIFT; he has had a new novel in progress for several years, according to newspaper reports.

Robert Silverberg - - - - - -STAR OF GYPSIES
(Orbit, 1988, 400pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

Silverberg has done it again. Gone back to his roots, that is... and this reviewer didn't like it. It seems to be an occupational hazard among big-name authors that when they near their retirement age they regress into the plot devices of their childhood; as witness the witless robotic scriverings Asimov has been churning out of late, or the twilit terminus into which Heinlein painted himself.

This book is scintillatingly told, competently constructed, and has a plot right out of some forties pulp magazine. My suspended disbelief crashed to earth under a few tonnes of degenerate matter before I'd got through ten pages. Galactic empires - okay. Gypsies as the only people capable (for congenital reasons) of piloting starships - hmm. A war of succession - fair enough. But the gypsies as an alien, humanoid race exiled from a world of their own, waiting for the third in a predicted series of solar flares before they can return home from their exile on Earth (and latterly in the rest of the galaxy)? The mind boggles.

Now the novel can be read as a cunning allegory or a fine travellers' tale; and on either of these levels it's brill. But as SF it has certain deficiencies of structure, and as a book it suffers from an arbitrary temporal intercutting that the author uses to jerk his characters - and the reader - about on strings of rosy plotting: 'look what I can do, ma!' Silverberg alternates the reminiscences of the gypsy king, Yakoub, with semi-digested slabs of Romany folklore and bare-faced lies (of the character, that is). And then he expects the reader to swallow it! This kind of literary sleight of hand is not only unnecessary; it is intensely irritating. So if you think you can stand a penny-dreadful plot in return for a display of space-operatic pyrotechnics, buy this book; but avoid it like the plague if you are a fan of the serious, thoughtful Silverberg of DYING INSIDE or THORNS.

James P. Blaylock - - - - - - - - - - HOMUNCULUS
(Grafton, 1988, 301pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

HOMUNCULUS, like K.W. Jeter's INFERNAL DEVICES, mixes pseudo-science and fantasy archetypes in an anachronistic Victorian London setting which is sometimes misleadingly described as 'steampunk'. The implied connection with cyberpunk is hard to fathom, these novels belonging more to the scientific romances made popular by Wells and Verne than to any notions of frontier technology and hip-culture, which the term 'cyberpunk' implies.

HOMUNCULUS has a complicated plot, with a cast of dozens, which makes it less accessible than Jeter's novel. The kaleidoscope of ideas and characters that swamp the beginning are overwhelming, so that it is only towards the latter half of the novel, when Blaylock carves the characters up into more manageable groups and the reader has become familiar with a few of them, that it begins to make sense.

It concerns the efforts of the members of the Trismegistus Club to foil the evil designs of various groups of unscrupulous lunatics who, besides raising the dead, want possession of a spaceship and of four identical Keeble boxes, one of which contains a priceless emerald and another the tiny figure of a homunculus, an alien which has caused havoc

wherever it appears. Confusion and mayhem traditionally characterise the events, at the end of which I was still wondering how the skeletal Birdlip managed to fly the dirigible without the presence of the homunculus to keep him going.

Despite these faults, it was still a delight to read.

Charles Sheffield - - - - - SIGHT OF PROTEUS
(NEL, 1989, 246pp, £2.99)

- - - - - - - - - - - PROTEUS UNBOUND
(NEL, 1989, 267pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Eric Brown)

Two hundred years hence: the world, population fourteen billion, pushing fifteen, is ravaged by drought, famine, crop failure, energy shortage, global economic collapse... Do-it-yourself form-change is all the rage.

Behrooz Wolf, Investigator in the Office of Form Control, is on the trail of Dr Robert Capman. Capman has uncovered evidence of an extinct race of super-intelligent aliens, the Logians, who inhabited a tenth planet in our solar system sixteen million years ago, before a cataclysm destroyed their world. Capman's experiments are designed to bring about a new breed of space-faring humans, utilising form-change and Logian DNA.

SIGHT OF PROTEUS is a leaden rendering of a Golden Age sense-of-wonder epic - without the wonder. The characters are cardboard, often given to 'I-know-you-know-this-but-I'll-repeat-it-for-the-benefit-of-the-reader' speeches. Pulp clichés abound. Wolf even thinks in italics.

Despite New English Library's claim that this book was 'First published in Great Britain in 1989 by NEL paperbacks', it was in fact first published in the UK by Arrow in the early eighties. It sees the light of day again due to Sheffield's having committed a sequel, PROTEUS UNBOUND.

Bey Wolf, jilted in love and hallucinating The Dancing Man, is enticed to the Outer System Federation by the promise of psychiatric help. The (Oort) Cloudlander's form-change devices are malfunctioning, and Wolf is the man for the job. Political intrigue follows, plus a lot of indigestible hard-science. The characterisation in the sequel is a little better than in the first book, merely clichéd instead of cardboard. The frequent quoting of Shakespeare is affected, and serves only to invite comparison to the author's own lacklustre fiction.

Perhaps this does Sheffield a disservice: he clearly didn't set out to produce lasting, well-written literature. He had a few Hard SF ideas to put over, and he did this in a way that I suppose a scientist, or an avid reader of the works of Asimov or Niven, might find intriguing. I lost sympathy with these books very early on because that was all he was attempting to do.

(A note on the cover art: it's eerily beautiful and evocative - and the artist, of course, goes uncredited.)

Phillip Mann - - - - - THE FALL OF THE FAMILIES
(Grafton, 1988, 416pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

In MASTER OF PAXWAX Phillip Mann constructed a highly impressive universe in which mankind had spread through the galaxy, subjugating any alien race they encountered and generally lording it over all and sundry. In this sequel, THE FALL OF THE FAMILIES, this impressive creation is utterly destroyed as the aliens wreak their long awaited revenge and bring about the downfall of humankind.

The opening of this volume finds Pawl more or less securely installed as the Master of

the Paxwax family empire. The remnants of the conquered aliens have engineered Pawl's rise from their base on the refuge planet Sanctum. Now they set about using Pawl and his newly won power to bring down the whole of humanity. Odin, his most trusted alien adviser turned reluctant traitor, murders Pawl's beloved wife Laurel Beltane and the blame is laid firmly at the door of the other families. Pawl, now in active cooperation with the aliens, takes his own revenge on the families and the human hegemony collapses amidst violent conflagration.

Mann's writing is effortlessly stylish and his ability to create credible characters, particularly aliens, is superb. As in all great tragedy the characters carry the seeds of their own destruction, and they work out their own fates with a tragic inevitability.

You know from the opening page of the book that it will all end in tears, but somehow that doesn't matter. Phillip Mann carries us along so effectively that all this doom and destruction is a joy to behold.

Bruce Fergusson - - THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS
(Grafton, 1988, 333pp,
£3.50)

(Reviewed by Brian Magorrian)

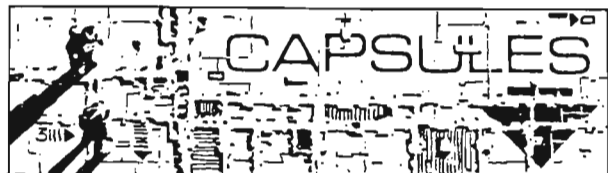
The kingdom of Myreia comes under attack from the savage Skarrian army. The Skarrians are made more formidable by a variety of horrific creatures which they control and send against their enemy. Fergusson describes the fear of people facing horrible deaths quite well!

The Myrcians have a great ally of their own in the form of an immortal winged creature, the Erseiyr (who said dragon?) which has helped them, for tribute, over the centuries. The hero, Lukan Barra, sets off to enlist the aid of the Erseiyr.

There are numerous diversions, as always in fantasy books. In this case, however, they tend to add to the story. For example, there is a deliciously disgusting portrayal of a prison which Lukan ends up in for a short while.

It's not part of a series, which is a pleasant change worth encouraging, but doubtless given sufficient sales - it will be!

The fact that this book comes recommended by Orson Scott Card doesn't necessarily mean anything, but in this case THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS is pitched at about the same level as OSC's novels. SHADOW is a degree better than most fantasy books I've come across recently.



Isaac Asimov - - THE MOONS OF JUPITER (Lightning, 1988, 142pp, £1.99)

'Sands of Mars, Lucky, there's a spy on Jupiter Nine who's giving the Sirians the secrets of our new speedy spacecraft!'

'I know, Bigman, you mental retard. Can't you see the solution? It has to be a robot!'

Fifth in a six-volume children's series from the '50s aimed at American Eighmen.
(Terry Broome)

Greg Bear - - EON (Legend, 1988, 504pp, £3.50)

Now available in this mass-market edition, EON was the book with which Arrow launched their revamped SF section under the 'Legend' imprint as a trade paperback dubbed 'the greatest SF novel of our time'. (See L.J. Hurst's review in PI 70.) Unfortunately, the

hype is still there on the front cover, which doesn't do much for SF. Undoubtedly dazzling on the 'ideas' front, EON is too full of structural flaws and downright stupidities to be called 'great'. Buy it and judge for yourself: I still prefer BLOOD MUSIC. (Andy Sawyer)

Herbert Burkholz - - STRANGE BEDFELLOWS (Headline, 1988, 310pp, £2.99)

A well crafted political thriller concerning a group of telepathic agents saving the life of General Secretary Gorbachev amidst a web of intrigue the day before important peace talks at the UN. Burkholz uses contemporary references to make the plot more plausible but mixes in enough good old-fashioned 'swash-buckling' to make this an entertaining read. Well worth a look if you like your thrillers laced with a little SF. (Laurence Scotford)

Tom Deitz - - FIRESHAPER'S DOOM (Orbit, 1989, 306pp, £3.50)

UK edition of the novel whose US edition (by Avon) I reviewed in PI 71: the sequel to WINDMASTER'S BANE, it shows more of the relationship between American teenager David Sullivan and the Sidhe of Celtic legend. An excellent fantasy, suffering a little from 'sequelitis' but nevertheless well-imagined and strongly characterised. If Celtic-based fantasy stirs you, this is highly recommended. If not, try this anyway; you might enjoy it! (Andy Sawyer)

William C. Dietz - - IMPERIAL BOUNTY (NEL, 1988, 278pp, £2.99)

Top-of-the-head writing, rushed, fast-paced concerning the 'interstellar bounty hunter' McCade. The Emperor was dead, so Long Live the Emperor. Except that the new Emperor was nowhere to be found and a lot of people liked it that way. So McCade was to find him - or die in the attempt... 'Much to his amazement they didn't even hit him. They just looked at each other and shook their heads in amazement. Could do with a competent sub-editor, I fear. (Nik Morton)

Ru Emerson - - IN THE CAVES OF EXILE (Headline, 1988, 310pp, £3.50)

This is the second novel in a trilogy concerning the adventures of the young queen Ylia of Nedao and her exiled people. A very superior fantasy, well-written, strong characterisation. I enjoyed both the first two volumes and look forward to the third. Essential reading for fantasy fans. (John Newsinger)

Rose Estes - - THE DEMON HAND (Penguin, 1988, 314pp, £3.99)

Disappointing conclusion to another pointless TSR trilogy. The main characters spend most of the book hanging in limbo. You know how they feel. (Andy Sawyer)

Sheila Gilluly - - GREENBRIAR QUEEN (Headline, 1989, 310pp, £6.95)

Trade paperback 'glorious fantasy epic'. Dark Lord...missing heir...wizards...dwarves... little people...magic crystal... wake me up when it's over. (Andy Sawyer)

Deborah Turner Harris - - THE GAUNTLET OF MALICE (Orbit, 1988, 334pp, £3.99)

Book 2 of 'The Mages of Garillon', a defeat-the-evil-mage fantasy set in a world reminiscent of Katherine Kurtz' *Deryni* books, but not as well visualised. Readable, sometimes very much so, but adds little to its influences. (Andy Sawyer)

Simon Hawke - - THE NAUTILUS SANCTION (Headline, 1988, 196pp, £2.99)

This book seems intended for high school kids rather than adults, as it contains pages of historical and scientific explanations. The evil temporal terrorist Drakov has stolen a 1990s Russian nuclear submarine, intending to wreak mayhem through the ages, and Major Lucas Priest of the U.S. Army Time Commandoes enlists the aid of novelist Jules Verne in order to thwart his rascally scheme. Undemanding, simplistic, and jingoistic certainly, but THE NAUTILUS SANCTION is well plotted, full of swashbuckling action, and may even teach some history along the way. (Alan Fraser)

Shaun Hutson - - VICTIMS (Star, 1988, 288pp, £2.99)

An eye transplant gives ace special-effects-man-with-a-guilty-secret Frank Miller the ability to see the auras of potential murder victims, and draws him into even more psychopathic violence than he's already involved in. (Andy Sawyer)

Richard La Plante - - TEGNE: WARLORD OF ZENDOW (Sphere, 1988, 354pp, £4.99)

An oriental-influenced epic fantasy, which apparently started life as a rock video and is now 'soon to be a major movie' starring the remarkably dishy La Plante in the title role. If it had stayed a video it would presumably have been over in three minutes, which is really all it deserves, but kung fu fans and New Age occultists might persevere longer. (Andy Sawyer)

Mercedes Lackey - - ARROWS OF THE QUEEN (Legend, 1988, 320pp, £2.99)

Young Talia runs away from drudgery and forced marriage to become a Herald, chosen by Rolan, one of the equine Companions. You've read it before, unless you're a 13-year old girl graduating from pony books to fantasy (and my daughter returned it after 30 seconds). (Andy Sawyer)

Louise Lawrence - - CALLING B FOR BUTTERFLY (Bodley Head, 1988, 159pp, £2.95)

A space-ship of 1200 Earth emigrants about to leave the solar system and enter warp drive for an intergalactic voyage is rammed by an asteroid. Four teenagers, a small girl and a baby are the only survivors, and take refuge in a life ferry. The Earthmen posted on Ganymede Base try to save the ferry from crashing into Jupiter, but an alien force of a light and spirit nature takes over one of the teenagers, and has its own plans for saving them - to take them on a voyage beyond the stars... Well-written SF for teenagers with lots of character analysis, but probably not for adult readers unless you are a fan of this author. (Jessica Yates)

Tanith Lee - - THE WINTER PLAYERS (Beaver, 1989, 104pp, £1.99)/THE DRAGON HOARD (Beaver, 1989, 169pp, £1.75)

Good to see these two Tanith Lee juveniles finally in paperback. THE WINTER PLAYERS is typical of her eerie and delicately wistful fantasy writing, whilst THE DRAGON HOARD is a delightfully funny reworking of fairy-story motifs. Both highly recommended. (Maureen Porter)

Graham Dunstan Martin - - GIFTWISH (Swallow, 1989, 200pp, £2.25)

A fantasy for children by a writer whose adult books (TIME-SLIP, THE DREAM WALL, HALF A GLASS OF MOONSHINE) have received much praise. More influenced by the Tolkien of THE HOBBIT rather than LOTR, with Dragon, Wizards

and Necromancer (though, thankfully, no elves or halflings), it's still more readable than most excursions into the genre and would make an entertaining afternoon for the diehard adult fan as well as a worthwhile recommendation for a young reader looking for 'more of the same' after Tolkien. (Andy Sawyer)

Andre Norton - - TREY OF SWORDS (Gollancz, 1989, 180pp, £2.99)

The 8th Witch World book: three connected stories of swords, sorceries and transhuman Powers. Slickly told, but very much 'more of the same' by this time. (Andy Sawyer)

Clarence Paget - - 29th PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES (Pan, 1988, 238pp, £2.50)

13 horror stories, mostly of the 'gruesome' variety, but a tense exercise of will from Stephen King ('The Ledge') and Gee Williams' story about a sad Applied Geneticist and his attempt to impress his sexy niece ('Beastie') stand out above the others. (Andy Sawyer)

Alan Ryan (ed.) - - HAUNTING WOMEN (Avon, 1988, 210pp, £3.95)

Worth looking for at your local import specialist if your taste in horror fiction is for stories where the chills come from situation rather than predictable 'shock' tactics, as in the tales by Shirley Jackson, Muriel Spark, and Tanith Lee here. 14 excellent stories of psychological terror by women writers, many of whom - though well-known - aren't usually found packaged in this genre, and including the classic 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. (Andy Sawyer)

Eric Sauter - - PREDATORS (Sphere, 1988, 360pp, £3.50)

Man and wolf embark on a quest for revenge in this powerful story of bloodlust. (Andy Sawyer)

Harry Turtledove - - SWORDS OF THE LEGION (Legend, 1988, 394pp, £3.50)

Vol. 4 of the adventures of a Roman legion in Turtledove's 'alternative-Byzantium' Videssos Cycle; a series somewhat wooden in characterisation and concept but full of vivid detail. The series seems to get better as it goes on, which is a rare achievement. (Andy Sawyer)

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman - - FORGING THE DARKSWORD (Bantam, 1988, 391pp, £3.50)

Start of a trilogy set in a world where life (magic) is the source of power and technology is shunned. Various factions are at work, and the Darksword is fashioned out of a magic-absorbing mineral. An interesting world, showing some imagination, if not precisely original. (Andy Sawyer)

Chet Williamson - - LOWLAND RIDER (Headline, 1988, 342pp, £3.50)

An urban horror tale set in the New York subway system. LOWLAND RIDER takes too long to develop, Williamson is not adept enough to build an atmosphere of menace and the finale fails to liven up a dull novel. Hats off, however, to the blurb writer who must be a moonlighting Sun headline composer: 'Jesse Gordon has descended into the dank, darksome depths to find his destiny' is a classic of modern alliterative literature. (Colin Bird)

Bari Wood - - AMY GIRL (Sphere, 1988, 346pp, £3.50)

A well-written horror-drama with believable

characters and a spry narrative which fails to turn any unpredictable corners. Nevertheless an enjoyable read for fans of relatively gore-free horror. (Colin Bird)

Jonathan Wylie - - DREAMS OF STONE (Corgi, 1989, 363pp, £2.99)

The start of a new trilogy from the author of 'Servants of Ark'. After the Destruction, Gemma is compelled to travel to the mysterious newly-appeared Southern Continent and finds people to whom her Northern isles are an equal anomaly. Conventional fantasy told with bravura: I liked the implied idea of the 'Unbalanced Earth' in flux between different dimensions, but I disliked all the loose ends. (Andy Sawyer)

"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 28 (March/April 1989)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

In the past I've quibbled about author interviews in IZ for two reasons: first, in early issues they tended to be too brief; secondly, they often stood in isolation, with no accompanying short story as a reference point for the reader (a particular shortcoming in the case of little-known interviewees). IZ have set this situation to rights this issue with a lengthy interview with, along with a new story from, Ramsey Campbell. It does then seem somewhat churlish to warn Campbell fans that the interview suffers from bloomers by the printer. The story - 'Meeting the Author' - is a horror story about a horror story or, what can happen when you give a book a bad review. I liked it... honestly, Ramsey! There's another (comic) horror story from Kim Newman. 'Twitch Technicolour' is one for film buffs, especially those who dislike the colourisation of b&w films. Well, you ain't seen nothing yet! The ending is signalled, but satisfying. Rudy Rucker and Marc Laidlaw's indescribable 'Chaos Safari' also signalled its ending - in quite a unique and oddball way. Its West Coast street-talk is worth wading through. William King's 'Visiting the Dead' contains far too many good ideas to be adequately explored in this length of story. About a space habitat dweller's brief trip to Earth, in it King avoids taking a simplistic view of change being either good or bad. Lyle Hopwood's 'The Outside Door' is a jolly little tale set in a giant building where the concept of "outside" (as in NON-STCP) is alien to its inhabitants. SM Baxter's 'The Jonah Man' is a story of survival in space and is the best of his I've read, with one genuinely memorable character. Altogether, an entertaining and generally light mix of fiction. Also of note amongst the non-fiction is an extract from Brian Stableford's THE WAY TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION. This book looks like being a must for any aspiring SF writer, with pertinent, personal advice from Stableford.

Finally, how about this for irony. As I write, the Rushdie affair has erupted into an international crisis. William King's story contains the following passage: "The work of Satan is no longer to be tolerated by the believers (of the Moslem faith). The godless and all their works are to be overthrown. This is the word from Tehran... The believers think they shall win because they fight against Satan and for God. I believe the outcome will be different." I for one hope he is right.

Isaac Asimov's *SF Magazine*, March and April 1989, and *Analog*, January and February 1989

Reviewed by Edward James.

The March *Asimov's* is the high-spot of these four issues, and well worth buying -- primarily for the Silverberg novella, but also for the stories by Ellison, Kelly and Robinson. Robert Silverberg's "In Another Country" I am unable to appreciate properly -- even though I think it is one of the most interesting stories I have read in months -- because I haven't read (or perhaps I have, but I can't find) C.L. Moore's "Vintage Season" (1946) on which it is based. "Vintage Season" apparently told of the appearance of exotic foreigners in an American city, who turn out to be time-travellers, morbidly curious about the coming destruction of the city by a meteor; it is told from the point of view of one of the late twentieth-century inhabitants of the city. Silverberg's story is, he tells us, "set in the same few weeks as [Moore's], and builds towards the same climax. I use many of the same characters, but not as major figures; they move through the background, and the people in the foreground are mine... a kind of Silverbergian commentary on Moore's concepts." Silverberg has a fascination for jaded fin-de-monde aristocrats -- viz. "Sailing to Byzantium" -- and the whole portrayal of the twentieth-century through the eyes of the far future -- although hardly a new theme -- has hardly been done better than here. The *Locus* reviewer dismissed it as a rather ordinary time travel story ("albeit classily told"): unfair -- it is a stunning performance, with a fine unpredictability. My only criticism was the way in which time travel technology was manipulated (in an unexplained way) to produce the necessary plot twist. But Silverberg (like any author, I hasten to add) is God: why not?

The other stories in March included another bitter story from Harlan Ellison about the horrible realities that lie behind the unthinking propaganda of war: "The Few, the Proud". Janet Kagan's "The Loch Moose Monster", set on a world of appalling genetic mutability, is slight but kinda fun. James Patrick Kelly's short "Dancing with the Chairs" is a haunting and finely observed allegory/fantasy about human relationships. Kim Stanley Robinson's "Remaking History" (which appeared in *Other Edens II*) is a piece of alternative history, where *Escape from Teheran* is a well-known film, and Lennon gets a Nobel Peace Prize: neat wish-fulfilment. And, to round the issue off, a typically thought-provoking review article by Norman Spinrad, "Cyberpunk Revisited".

The April *Asimov's* has a number of high-spots too. Nancy Kress's "The Price of Oranges" is, in one way, just another standard time-travel story, but, like Silverberg's, done in a highly effective and original way. The contrasts between 1938 and 1988, the reaction of the 1938 man (a young Jewish populariser of science -- no, not called Asimov) to the world of 1988, the ambiguity of the moral issues which are raised, are all beautifully handled. Richard Paul Russo's novella "More than Night" offers an atmospheric (that, when you read the story, will appear as a pun) and somewhat confusing (like my last aside) story about an alien race using humans for mysterious purposes: well-written but basically rather unsatisfying. "Well-written but basically rather unsatisfying", in that I can't work out what is supposed to have happened, is a suitable epitaph for Jack Dann's "Kaddish" too, about (I think) the attempted suicide of a Jewish businessman (a Kaddish is a Hebrew prayer for the dead). Victor Milan's "The Floating World" is another visit to the by now familiar world of enormously powerful computers, orbiting space stations, and feuding Japanese potentates. I enjoyed much more Gregory Benford's alternative history, "We Could Do Worse", about the seedy political violence of the early '60s in a world in which Joe McCarthy and Nixon are President and Vice-President. Sage Walker's "Indian Giving" is about a nicotine addict's encounter with a shape-shifting coyote (OK, it's not nearly as bad as it sounds) and Deborah Wessell's "The Last One to Know" is a wry little story of a world in which women (and men) get

together in three-some marriages; Eve and Natalie get walked out on by Maureen, the one they leave behind to do the housework.

The leading novelette in the January *Analog* was Timothy Zahn's "I Pray the Lord My Soul to Keep", an effective investigation of the possible result of a research programme which worked out how to capture the soul of a dying person. The other novelette was the latest in J. Brian Clarke's long-running "Expediter" series, which started very well but has long since run out of steam. The novella, "To Give Them the World", is from Rick Shelley, and is a sort of sequel to "The Worlds I Used to Know", from *Analog* in January 1988. But if you hadn't read that complicated alternative history story, it doesn't matter; *this* complicated alternative history story can be read on its own. Our hero arrives in a world which, he eventually discovers, escaped the Russian Revolution and consequently had a much lengthier World War I, and a much delayed, or much less advanced, technological revolution. After, not unnaturally, being taken to a mental hospital, and then to an FBI prison, officialdom finally recognises that our hero has knowledge of much more advanced science. He doesn't give them the H-Bomb; he gives them travel to the Moon. *Oh boy... Corn city*, to quote our hero. But it is interesting corn, solidly written and logically worked out, in the best *Analog* tradition. I also enjoyed some of the shorts, notably the amusing ones: Arlan Andrews' "Indian Summa", in which the impressive holographic effects produced by Cherokee Technology Inc turn out to be Cherokee magic (punch-line, all together: "Any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology!"), and Rob Chilson and William F. Wu's "Diogenes's Lantern", concerning a wily (oriental, of course) criminal.

The February issue of *Analog* is the latest I have to hand (*Asimov's* comes airmail, but not *Analog*). It leads with Cordell Scotten's "The Hijacking of the Pony Express" -- no, it is not as you think: the pony express is a means of instantaneous transmission of inanimate matter from star to star. It is an ingenious First Contact story, with some ingeniously devised aliens. The three main characters -- the unimaginative bureaucrat, the all-competent mine operator, the efficient pony express troubleshooter -- are all straight out of '50s *Astounding*; but not the xenobiology. The same is true for Paula Robinson's "This Generation"; another xenobiological puzzle, but more subtly treated than Scotten's. Joseph Green and Patrice Milton's "With the Conscience of the New" is a somewhat simplistic investigation of the possibilities of genetic recreation: the plot involves the plan of a protest group to slaughter a herd of recreated mammoths. "Big Two-Sided River" by Jerry Oltion is a carefully imagined story of fishing alien creatures in the rings of Saturn, and a tribute to Hemingway at the same time; Lou Grinzo's "Listen to the Children" is quite an interesting variant of the First Contact story, though this time First Contact via a race deliberately engineered by another to make the Contact on their behalf. My favourite story of the bunch, though, was Michael F. Flynn's "Soul of the City": a brief but significant episode in the long war between the graffiti artist and the New York authorities. The background seems well done (I speak as the joint-owner of two copies of Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfont's graffitiists' Bible, *Subway Art* -- one British edition and one US, both inscribed by Martha, whom my wife and I knew very well when we were at Oxford), and the extrapolation into future paint technology seems perfectly plausible. The issue is rounded off by an interesting fact article of the sort that only *Analog* could publish: Stephen L. Gillett's investigation of the possible role of government in future space exploration, in the light of the experience of the Transcontinental Railroad, the Grand Coulee Dam and so on. All in all, one of the more interesting *Analog* issues for some time; worth a look at.



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