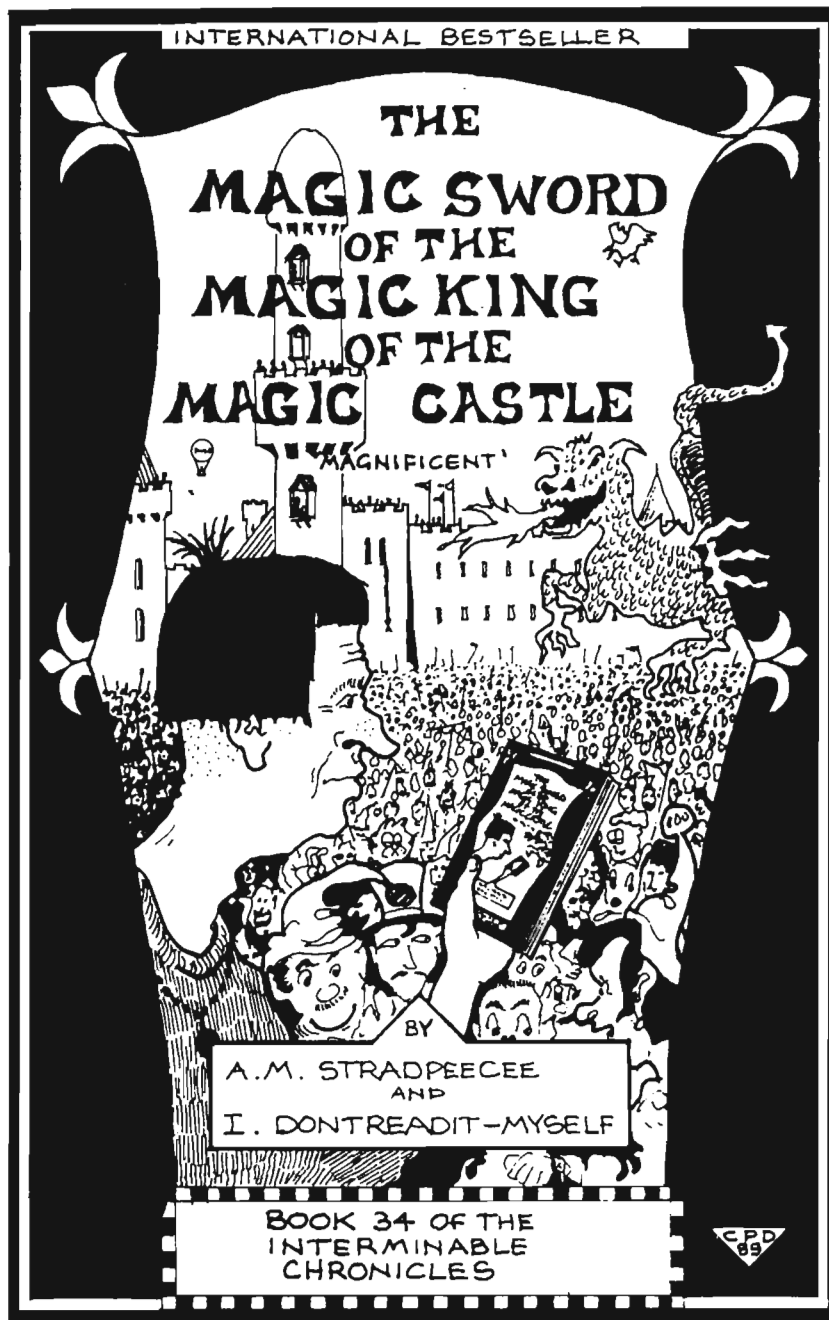




Paperback Inferno 79

The Review of paperback SF

August/September 1989



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Contributions of cover art, interior art and fillers are especially welcome. Please contact the editorial address.

Special Thanks to Colin and Phil for rallying round during my time of incapacity.

Paperback Purgatory

Last issue I tossed aside a few despairing comments about role-playing-game fantasies, with a specific reference to Penguin's affair with the TSR group.

I had - still have - my doubts following this up. Embroiled in the middle of the Rushdie affair, Penguin Books don't really need a critical voice piping up, to add insult to injury, 'and their SF's not up to much either!' Particularly were I to add defensively 'but some of my favourite books are Penguins anyway.'

But it's true. Penguin is not so much a publisher, more an institution, and it's true to say that if you were to prepare a list of Fifty Great Books, a high proportion of them would have Penguin editions. If you're aiming to cover the entire cultural spectrum, it's quite a juggling trick to make sure all genres are represented at any one time, and Penguin have never been a specialist SF publishing firm. Nevertheless they do publish SF and sometimes very good SF too. On my shelves I have Penguin editions of, among others, Ballard's TERMINAL BEACH, Pohl & Kornbluth's THE SPACE MERCHANTS, Bester's TIGER! TIGER!, Bernard Wolfe's LIMBO '90 (albeit the 1961 abridged version), Stapledon's SIRIUS and the King Penguin edition of Lem's SOLARIS.

What have these books in common besides being classics of the field? Simply, they are no longer available in their Penguin (or any) paperback editions.

Instead, we have a seemingly endless flow of 'Dragonlance' or 'Forgotten Realms' fantasies (if I'm the first to observe that these Realms should remain Forgotten I'll be very surprised) which have long ago passed the stage of being clones of each other; detailed but never deep stories in which nothing surprising at all happens and the despairing reviewer clutches at the occasional flash of colour or flush of vitality to convince himself that these books might not be as bad as they appear. Apparently based on games, they are slightly less interesting than playing the games themselves. They are considerably less fun than the interactive game-books such as Steve Jackson and Ian Livingston's 'Fighting Fantasy' books - equally stereotyped in form but very inventive within their limits - which are also published by Penguin under their 'Puffin' children's imprint.

Virtually everything I've received for review from Penguin recently has been of this nature. To take a few recent examples, R.A. Salvatore's STREAMS OF SILVER throws away the sense of attachment to his characters I thought I discerned in THE CRYSTAL SHARD and ends up as the kind of story in which people say 'I know not' instead of 'I don't know', everything 'hinge(s) upon the action of one brave young woman' and the author doesn't appear to know the meaning of the word 'maw'. But then again, neither does Richard Knaak in THE LEGEND OF HUMA, set in the 'Dragonlance' world of Krynn. Do these people not possess dictionaries or thesauri? Altogether now:

'the stomach of the lower animals; in birds, the crow.'

[Collins New English Dictionary]

HUMA and its companion volume, STORMBLADE (by Nancy Varian Berberick) are both reasonable stories as standard quest-fiction goes, but there's nothing in either to really recommend. Why bother to spend money on all these different titles when you can buy one and re-read it? The effect's the same. Non-stop action leaves little space for development, for exploration of world, of character. The Krynn population may be called elves, humans, dwarves, but deep down they're just good old folks. Even the amoral kender are merely cutely mischievous kids. There are similar Tolkienish figures in Ed Greenwood's SPELLFIRE (I won't comment on these titles: Alex Stewart's generic SPELL OF THE DRAGONSWORD quip in Vector 146 says it all) but the author just uses these characters as figures on a board game. Which I suppose is what they are. The heroine Shandrill is the stock 'lowly orphan who becomes a heroine' and that's all. Apparently the Wise Mage Elminster is a character used by Greenwood himself in D&D games. If this boring old fart is a persona the author escapes to, then Toronto must be a city to avoid at all costs.

Irony of ironies, however.

Someone at TSR does possess a sense of humour, and this is made manifest in the existence of Sharyn McCrumb's BIMBOS OF THE DEATH SUN, also a Penguin/TSR book. No, I have not made this up.

At first glance, this is as ropey as the rest. It's the kind of book which appears every so often when someone thinks, how about a murder mystery set at a fantasy convention, then we can appeal to both markets? First-novelist James Mega, slightly wimpish but dead cuddly author of a hard SF novel which really is pretty good but which his publishers insist on retitling BIMBOS OF THE DEATH SUN attends a convention at which someone snuffs the odious Appin Dungannon, author of 26 heroic fantasies (or one h.f. re-written 26 times). BIMBOS gets most of its laughs by sending up game-players, costume fans, and fanzine publishers, and I suspect that most people who haven't heard of fandom will find it puzzlingly opaque. Jokes involving detailed knowledge of SF writers and their works won't necessarily mean much to crimefans, and despite a lovely HAMLET-style unmasking of the villain through an RPG orchestrated by the hero and his mentor Marion, a teacher of SF, there's no real puzzle about the murderer's identity. It's all very ideologically unsound and perpetuates the image of SF fans as obsessional inadequates and I loved every minute of it. One to buy.

One amusing send-up, though, doesn't prove much. It doesn't make the current state of Penguin's SF list anything other than appalling. Apart from a few Robert Asprins and Jack Chalkers Penguin SF is more or less at the state it was 10, 15, 20 years ago. There was some attempt at updating with the 'Penguin Classics' line but this brought little if any new material and precious little essential 'neglected' work bar E.A. Abbot's FLATLAND. There's still John Wyndham, but only a smattering of other authors' works: THE DEMOLISHED MAN but not TIGER! TIGER!; only two Olaf Stapledon books. 'New' SF is represented by Bruce Sterling's SCHISMATRIX and Brian Aldiss' PENGUIN WORLD OMNIBUS OF SF. Many of the titles which Aldiss persuaded Penguin to publish in the early '60s are either out of print or with other publishers. The only newish novel in Penguin's current SF/Fantasy stocklist which arouses much enthusiasm is Pat O'Shea's THE HOUNDS OF THE MORRIGAN. And that's a fantasy and a children's book.

In fact, the Puffin and the teenage 'Plus' lines contain far more literate and

challenging and enjoyable SF, on average, than does the 'adult' imprint. John Christopher, Arthur C. Clarke, Nicholas Fisk, Ann Halam (Gwyneth Jones), Douglas Hill, H.M. Hoover, Robert Westall, Jan Mark... the list is a long one. Why's this? It has been suggested to me that schools and libraries will buy these series as a matter of course. You know a Puffin or a Plus will achieve a certain level of interest and literacy. Publish the rubbish as adult books! (Even though in my own library experience it's people under the age of fourteen who read TSR fantasies.) It'll sell anyway.

I think, frankly, it's partly that. It also must be partly a lack of commitment to adult SF as a genre. Penguin's crime list is larger and healthier, more representative both of the genre and the works of its major authors - Chandler, Leonard, Highsmith, McBain, Allingham. There are certainly major authors not published, but there are currently few SF writers comparable in their field to those crime ones I've mentioned.

There's certainly a lack of imagination in evidence. When I asked about future plans, I was quoted for 1990 publication THE BEST OF MODERN HORROR and Jack Chalker's LORDS OF THE DIAMONDS and SOUL RIDER series.

Hardly the cutting edge of modern SF.

This from the publishing house which discovered Stapledon and once had a stylish uniform edition of J.G. Ballard.

There are, of course, certain difficulties I've glossed over. Major firms chasing major authors have to compete with other organisations doing likewise. Buying budgets are tight, good books few. Then again, everyone is in the same boat. And Penguin do have a lot of 'modern' fiction which would appeal to the SF readership. They publish Borges, Angela Carter and, for example, Michael Moorcock's MOTHER LONDON (which isn't SF) and H.F. Saint's MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN (which is) in their non-generic 'Fiction' line.

But by and large, what Penguin call SF is the remnants of a once-solid selection, and fantasy role-playing games, and manifestly second-rate stuff. It's a great shame. Penguin's strength is their 'quality' classic lines of whatever genre. If I want a good, readable edition of a 19th-century novel or a 17th-century play, I'll look to see if there's a Penguin edition. Why can't I find consistently worthwhile Penguin SF?

It's perhaps arguable that Penguin's 'up-market', institutional image works against the sleazy street-cred of SF, but I don't argue it, if only because you can't get much more mass-market than 'Dragonlance' and Penguin do go successfully downmarket in other areas. The cover of the current stocklist proclaims Laura Gilmour Bennett's A TIME AND A PLACE as 'this summer's hottest read' and displays a young lady in obvious need of a cold shower and a lie down. Penguin have also done well out of Shirley Conran's LACE (aka TEACH YOUR GOLDFISH EXOTIC SEX and please don't write for an explanation).

No, the point seems to be that SF is a funny old genre which isn't mass-market enough. The fact that it contains a lot of books tailor-made for that 'intelligent reader' which the organisation used to pitch its books at seems to be being quietly forgotten.

By restricting the quality and range of what they publish as SF, Penguin have marred their reputation and narrowed the choice of those many SF/Fantasy readers who prefer imaginative stimulation to slow brain decay. It comes to this in the end: I don't even really mind the publication of junk reading which sells well and - as I've known it to do - encourages reluctant readers to tackle a book. But surely there must be something else, as well?

- Richard A. Knaak - - - - -THE LEGEND OF HUMA
(Penguin, 1989, 379pp, £3.99)
- Nancy Varian Berberick - - - - -STORMBLADE
(Penguin, 1989, 347pp, £3.99)
- R.A. Salvatore - - - - -STREAMS OF SILVER
(Penguin, 1989, 342pp, £3.99)
- Ed Greenwood - - - - -SPELLFIRE
(Penguin, 1989, 382pp, £3.99)
- Sharyn McCrumb - - - - -BIMBOS OF THE DEATH SUN
(Penguin, 1989, 219pp, £2.99)



- Iain Banks - - - - -THE BRIDGE
(Futura, 1989, 288pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

After crashing his car, a comatose civil engineer with a broken education in geology retreats into the world of the Bridge, an amnesiac significantly given the name of Orr. The Bridge is, at once, an apparently endless super-structure with its own self-supporting community replete with restaurants, offices, homes and farms - and a deeply symbolic, scrambled matrix of Orr's memories.

To appease his psychiatrist on the Bridge, Orr is initially forced into inventing dreams, but when he begins to be troubled by real dreams, chiefly involving an immensely stupid Scots barbarian in a delightful parody of Conan-type fantasies, and visions of a man in a hospital bed, the psychiatrist loses faith in him, triggering Orr's decision to reach the end of the Bridge and regain his memory.

Interlaced with this story are episodes recounting the real Orr's life leading up to the crash, of the sexual tensions his girlfriend's love of a terminally ill Parisian have created within him, tearing him apart with jealousy and indecision. Banks ably avoids the sentimentality and cliché into which it could so easily have degenerated.

The whole novel is structured like a bridge. The tensions, indecisions of Orr's life are symbolised in the Bridge itself, the ends of which he at first believes he can never reach, in the tensions and connections between his fantasy world and the real one, in the description of a man going through a change, caught between the person he used to be and the one he wants to become.

The novel is superbly crafted, breathing in its complexity, a delightful literary puzzle which only lapses its tight structure in the hilariously funny chapters involving the barbarian, a section of which he read, minus the proof-reading errors, to the obvious delight of the revellers at Novacon 17's Halloween disco in 1987.

- Pat Cadigan - - - - -MIND PLAYERS
(VGSF, 1989, 276pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

MIND PLAYERS, Pat Cadigan's first novel, is a

rite of passage taking Allie Haas from adolescent mind-junkie through to responsible adult Mind Player. It takes her through a search not just for her own identity but for the very meaning of identity itself. As such, MIND PLAYERS has all the makings of a minor cult novel: that Cadigan narrowly fails to fulfill this promise is only because the plot doesn't quite support the story she is trying to tell.

The story is set in a well realised cyberpunk world where technology has made direct access to people's minds an everyday commonplace. Having been picked up as a mind criminal (possessing a psychosis without a licence) Allie is trained as a Mind Player - a cross between a psychoanalyst and a mental agony aunt. She is trained to enter the minds of her clients and resolve their psychological disorders.

As her mental experience grows she increasingly questions her own identity, and especially the effects of her continued entry into other minds in breaking down the integrity of her individual personality and polluting it from without.

The story gives Cadigan plenty of scope to put her heroine into interesting situations and she exploits this opportunity to the full. However, she concentrates on Allie's developing consciousness to the exclusion of all else and the plot suffers as a result. Supporting characters make their brief entrances when needed to aid Allie's development and are then discarded when their job is done. Consequently there is little left in the way of plot beyond the central theme and this becomes particularly obvious in the second half of the book.

I still enjoyed this book greatly, though. Cadigan writes well and her innate good writing taste prevents her from falling for the excess of the regular cyberpunk stereotypes.

At a time when politicians of all sides are telling us this is the age of the individual it is important to ask just what an individual is. MIND PLAYERS both entertained me and made me think - and isn't that what SF is all about?

- Stanislaw Lem - - - - -FIASCO
(Futura, 1989, 322pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

This bleak, densely textured novel contemptuously reverses the traditional notions of alien Contact. After long centuries of disappointment, Earth SETI detects radio emissions from far-off Quinto and mounts an expedition. The journey is itself a marvel of FTL ingenuity but allows time for discussions on the ethics of Contact, with a Papal delegate to give a religious dimension. The Quintans, their planet festooned with military satellites, appear totally absorbed in global conflict and resist attempts at communication by the approaching Earth vessel. After a show of force, which goes disastrously wrong (Dale Carnegie would never have recommended selenoclasm), the Earthmen consult their supercomputer (called DEUS) and analyse the debacle in stupefying depth, but are unable to escape the bias of their human assumptions; nor do they ask whether, if they're not welcome, they perhaps ought to go quietly away. All tactics chosen lead to further disaster, till on the very last page of catastrophic fiasco, we for the first time catch a brief enigmatic glimpse of the Quintans themselves - which suggests that all previous speculation was appallingly off target.

The novel is packed with future science, much of it fascinating; like Stapledon's books (which it somewhat resembles), FIASCO will be mined by other authors for plausible tech-

nology. Occasionally the description of strange landscape attains a bleakly impressive eloquence. But to underline the savagery of his thesis, Lem includes quotations from pre-space adventure stories. Sadly, these only remind us by contrast what a hard slog most of FIASCO is: no concessions, nothing trimmed or skipped, few felicities of phrase or elegance of thought, and worst of all, no real people. An important book, as a contribution to the SETI debate: a novel I expect to read again and keep handy on my shelves; but not an artistic success and certainly (if that's what you look for) no fun read.

Brad Linaweaver - - - - - - - - - - MOON OF ICE
(Grafton, 1989, 319pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

There's a time-honoured tradition of books set in alternate universes where Hitler's minions won The War. Luckily this book has nothing to do with that tradition; it's too good. In a nutshell, this is the best 'what if...' novel about a Nazi future that I have ever read. This novel redefines the benchmark. It's better than THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE, better than anything else that comes to mind.

The novella at the core of this book was originally nominated for a Nebula award, and may be familiar to some readers from the HITLER VICTORIOUS anthology. It's largely told in the form of diary entries; the diaries, in particular, of Paul Joseph Goebbels, Nazi minister of propaganda, and those of his daughter Hilda, a libertarian anarchist revolutionary. Structurally the novel has some problems, but the logic from which it constructs the future is bizarrely consistent and Linaweaver uses it as a loom on which to weave a mesmerising dialogue on the nature of absolute evil, truth and falsehood, and even the eternal conflict between libertarianism and totalitarianism. Particular delights are to be gleaned by reading between the lines of Goebbels' diaries; to talk of the banality of evil would be to descend to the level of cliché, but the chapter in which Goebbels confronts the film director Schellenberg reduced me to tears of mirth; his lack of insight is itself illuminating enough to read by.

This book defies summation in such a short space. It's a multi-levelled construct, one for which re-reading is mandatory; not a snack but a five-course feast. First novels aren't supposed to be this good - it's indecent! If this book doesn't get nominated for a BSFA award, you'll know the judges have been sleeping on the job.

Buy it.

Robert Silverberg - - - - - - - - - - DYING INSIDE
(VGSF, 1989, 188pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

This latest VGSF Classic is more than worthy of the 'Classic' label. It is a deeply moving book that affects this reader on several levels and shows signs of other levels to be reached by others.

David Selig can read minds, but his power is fading as he reaches middle age, he is 'dying inside'. As he comes to terms with this, he remembers incidents from his life, and attempts to survive in a harsh present. His income is from writing essays for students, his divorced sister is involved with several men on and around campus, and so David is linked with the extremes of student life: drugs, black politics, and sex parties alongside essays on Aeschylus and Kafka's THE TRIAL. It is all he has left. The power is portrayed in a way that makes sense without any attempt at a pseudo-technical accuracy, or

woolly writing around the concept. As a portrayal of mental powers it stands alongside Joanna Russ' AND CHAOS DIED, and Leigh Kennedy's JOURNAL OF NICHOLAS THE AMERICAN as the very best in the genre.

However, it goes further, delving into the Jewish sexual repression and guilt, by the way of failed relationships for both David and his sister. These passages bite hard into the subject and reveal a characterisation that walks around long after the book is closed. Like Portnoy's Complaint, Silverberg is open and explicit, balancing humour, bitterness and David's self-pity very skilfully.

DYING INSIDE is full, too, of literary references: Selig describes himself as a living Eliot poem, at one point. All of this means that this is a novel I am excited about reading again, and very probably more than once. So should you. Neither SF nor the mainstream produces anything as good as this regularly. They need treasuring.

Jim Starlin, Jim Aparo
& Mike DeCarlo - - - - - - - - - - BATMAN:
A DEATH IN THE FAMILY
(Titan, 1989, £2.50)

Jamie Delano
& John Ridgeway - - - - - - - - - - HELLBLAZER: VOL. 1
(Titan, 1989, £6.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

A DEATH IN THE FAMILY is the should-we/shouldn't-we saga in which readers held the balance of life and death over Robin and decided by a slim margin that the explosion he was caught in while searching for his true mother was a fatal one. Originally published in four issues, it suffers from that perhaps necessary but still fatal flaw of the periodical medium, the recounting of the story so far in each issue until the final one. Having said that, the storyline is tense and though I'm not giving away any secrets in saying that the Jason Todd Robin is now no more, his murder by the Joker moves on to a sardonically shattering climax at the United Nations General Assembly Chamber which I had better not reveal in the interests of the creators' lives. DEATH is very much the new Batman: not as suffocatingly psychotic nor as self-contained as THE KILLING JOKE but also exploring the ambiguous relationship between Batman and the Joker. There's also plenty of the traditional comic-book hooks - escaped super-villain, anguished teenager, search for origin, threat to world peace - even a cameo appearance by Superman. It comes published not on the glossy pages of the usual 'graphic novel' but on the cheaper paper of the monthly comic. Presumably it's this which brings the price down to £2.50, but I can't say I mind this at all.

Currently my favourite comic-book character, however, is John Constantine, that cross between the Duc de Richlieu and Philip Marlowe. Black magic and urban realism feed unholy on each other. All three stories in HELLBLAZER are in some way about those particularly '80s phenomena, greed and need. The first and longest is about addictions, with a nod to William Burroughs. A 'Hunger Spirit' is let loose in New York and can only be defeated by the sacrifice of Constantine's childhood friend, now a weak and pathetic junky. I admit to totally uncritical love for the concept of the Demon Yuppies from Hell which appear in the second story, set around (and a comment on) Margaret Thatcher's election victory in 1987. The third story is in some ways less self-contained (it introduces a new character and a hint of a new 'evil force'), but has some interesting things to say. Constantine's niece is kidnapped by a psychopath. We see her initially, unhappy

because her parents are involved in and working for one of those mindless fundamentalist cults. But as Constantine's sister says: 'Don't knock it, John. It's kept me and Tony together. It's hard times being out of work in the city these days.'

Why do I like Constantine? Because he's glamorous - by which I don't mean he's attractive or stylish (though he is that) but that he's charming and dangerous, a mixture of romantic and cynic who is most of the time not deliberately untrustworthy but is nevertheless a born survivor whose friends frequently end up seriously dead. 'The heart of a banker... but the soul of a gambler.' He's probably a typical comic-book hero (see my comments on the Batman book above) and if you think there's too much made about how wonderful and significant comic-books are nowadays, you may well be right - but show me work of comparable quality among the garbage that's churned out in other media. Popular art doesn't have to be particularly original, even particularly 'deep', but if it isn't romantic, energetic and subversive of something then it's nothing. Through Constantine's eyes we can see the nasty, shabby squalor of so-called evil (the current craze for creating lots and lots of wealth for a few people who are screwed up by the process in the first place is directed by the Lord of Flatulence). And if what claims to be upright and moral doesn't come off too well either, maybe we should look at that a bit more closely too.

George Turner - - - - - THE SEA AND SUMMER
(Grafton, 1989, 427pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

THE SEA AND SUMMER takes us into a future of economic collapse and social stratification in the lucky country. The Haves are Sweet and the Have Nots are Swill. Sweet have jobs, live in the suburbs, have schools for the kids and mentally drive BMWs still. Swill live 70000 at a time in giant towers, presided over by vicious bosses who help the State maintain its benevolent care while the waters literally rise. Turner's story concerns two fallen Sweet who are both plucked from the limbo of slow decline because of their abilities. That the noble savage of a local tower boss quickly becomes their bereaved mother's lover doesn't harm their chances either. Teddy becomes a copper, Francis becomes an 'accountant' (Turner shares my opinion of that species...). They divide and then everything comes together as Kovacs and Teddy cooperate to thwart Kovacs' nightmare of the final solution - sterilisation of the Swill.

This novel won the Clarke Award and has been hailed as a classic. In many ways it is - created on the grand scale, yet keeping its feet on the human ground, and its warning is awesome. The characters are well drawn, rounded, real people. And this is where I think the fabric begins to unravel. Do 'real' people best tell the epic tale of historical forces unfolding? Is classic SF the proper place for literary realism where none are heroes and none are villains, just plain folks doing their best to bear the unbearable?

Now there is a question. Perhaps it might be if Turner's grasp of those historical forces and social structures (not to mention economics) were as firm as he obviously thinks it is. The sterilisation drug comes from 'outside' yet we are never told how it is imported from Australia's impoverished neighbours who are quite some way away (according to my map...). There are enough of these nit picks to make THE SEA AND SUMMER a failure, and achievements enough to make it a magnificent failure. It belongs alongside the likes of THE SHEEP LOOK UP and only a little way behind NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR. Read it.

Jack Vance - - - - - ARAMINTA STATION
(NEL, 1989, 480pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

ARAMINTA STATION is the first episode of a new Vance Gaean Reach series, entitled 'The Cadwal Chronicles', about the planet Cadwal, which has been preserved in its natural state for the Naturalist Society of Earth by the Conservator, or warden, of Araminta Station and his hereditary staff. This is one of those stories in which Vance revels: the creation away across the cosmos of a rigidly hierarchical and stratified human society that lives by increasingly pointless outdated rules and patterns. However, as Ken Lake rightly stated in his review of the trade format version of the book in PI 72, June/July 1988, Vance persists in filling the universe with '19th-century hang-ups', transferring the Austro-Hungarian Empire into space instead of building a society that shows progress in social as well as scientific development. For that reason, a book like Samuel Delaney's STARS IN MY POCKET LIKE GRAINS OF SAND, though by no means as accessible, offers a more perceptive visualisation of what galactic society could perhaps be like.

That having been said, I found ARAMINTA STATION engrossing, and am looking forward as greatly to the next episode in this series as I am impatiently awaiting the next Lyonesse book. This novel is set at a time when the protected status of Cadwal is under threat, because of the decline of the Naturalist Society, the desire of nearby planetary governments to colonise its empty continents, and because of the growing ossification, weakness, and politicking of the families who run the Station. On Cadwal itself, the Yips, who are the descendants of the servant of the staff of the Station, live in extremely crowded and aromatic conditions in Yipton, an archipelago of offshore islands of uncanny resemblance to Hong Kong. The Yips are continually trying to colonise the coast of the continent off which they live, but are always turned off by the police patrols from the Station, so consequently bad blood exists between them and the Station.

Our hero is Glawen Clattuc, a member of Bureau B, the police force of Cadwal, run by one of the six families of Araminta Station. He is continually having to battle for his status in the Station against the jealousy of his aunt in her endeavours to elevate her own dull-witted son. When Glawen's beloved Sessily Vader is abducted by persons unknown, he is forced to journey offworld in his official capacity as an affiliate of the IPCC (well known from the 'Demon Prince' series) to search for her. His investigations uncover a frightening conspiracy that will change Cadwal forever if unchecked. At the end of the book, with Sessily still missing, Glawen returns home to find his father has been abducted also.

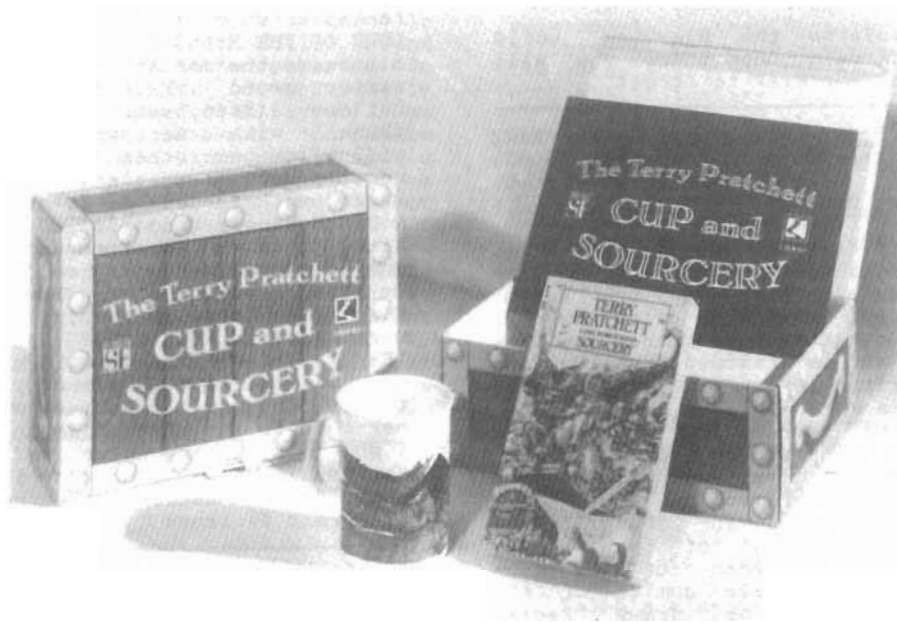
ARAMINTA STATION is not one of Vance's best books, mainly because it contains rather more words than plot can support. Despite this, Vance's humorous depiction of life on Cadwal and the weird societies of the nearby planets is worth reading, and I recommend the book. Besides, I think his footnotes are as funny as Terry Pratchett's!



Competition Time

Now's your chance to be the envy of all your friends! Be the first one on your block to drink coffee out of a 'Discworld' mug!

Yes, you too can be the subject of serious assault from your partner - ("Andy, I hate people who giggle while they're reading." "Look, I've not even started the book yet. This is the blurb!") Enter the first PI competition!



Transworld Publishers have kindly set aside five of these 'Cup and Sourcery' sets comprising a Discworld mug and a copy of the latest Corgi Discworld paperback, SOURCERY, to be given to the five lucky people who can answer the following ei... er, seven plus one questions on the Discworld books:

Send your entries to the PI editorial address, marked "Discworld Competition", by September 1st. In the event of a tie, the first five correct entries drawn out of my hat will win.

So YOU have an equal chance with everyone else. Send in those entries, or the LUGGAGE will come a-visiting...

- 1) How many Discworld novels has Terry Pratchett written?
- 2) Which Discworld character SPEAKS LIKE THIS?
- 3) What is the colour of magic?
- 4) What's the name of the turtle on which the Discworld rests?
- 5) According to Cohen the Barbarian, what are the greatest things in life?
- 6) From what wood is the Luggage made?
- 7) Name one way in which the Librarian of Unseen University is different from most other librarians.
- 7a) Oh yes, and name a novel by Terry Pratchett which isn't a Discworld novel.

R E V I E W S

James P. Blaylock - - - THE DISAPPEARING DWARF
(Grafton, 1989, 319pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Fantasy sequels may prolong an adventure or simply re-access a familiar world. THE DISAPPEARING DWARF, sequel to THE ELFIN SHIP, does the latter; thus requiring a new adventure. It starts repetitively with Cheeser Jonathan and companions setting off again down Oriel River, not now to sell cheeses in Seaside, but on holiday - an undemanding prospect. Soon, however, by 'magic portal' device, they are switched to voyage down the Tweet River to Landsend on a treasure hunt for goblin gold, and, better still, on a

predictably successful quest (aided by the evil and constantly disappearing dwarf Selznak: a quest which subsumes some of the mini-quests of the previous book, and ends not without a hint as to the direction of the trilogy's conclusion.

It is, however, not quite the mixture as before. The Tweet is vaster than the Oriel: Landsend less cosy than Seaside; its environs more sinister. Magic throughout is more macabre, has sometimes truly horrifying Lovecraftian, even Boschian dimensions, with its entities from the depths and shape-changing goblins; but all is tempered by a sustained jokiness ranging from the knockabout to the surreal: humour that is an acquired taste, but one easy to acquire.

Blaylock has a talent for settings which, while fantasy operates within them, retain the sensual appeal of realistic landscape. Here are the bridge-crossings of the Tweet's estuarine tidelands:

The rising and falling of the gray stones looked like nothing so much as the back of a great serpent or dragon humping up out of the ocean. Jonathan counted the bridges he could make out, but somewhere around the tenth everything faded and dulled into the salty haze of the sea.

That encapsulates the Blaylock world which, Philip Dick said, once there, you will not wish to leave, nor ever to forget.

Alan Moore & Jim Baikie - - - - -SKIZZ
(Titan Books, 1989, 96pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

SKIZZ is Moore and Baikie's homage to E.T., but despite the similarities in the plot line (alien finds himself stranded on Earth, enlists the help and friendship of the young, is pursued and eventually captured by the baddies, escapes and is rescued by its own kind) the parodying is surprisingly light-handed. When it is more obvious, it grates, disrupting the comic book's flow. The subtlety of the approach may in part be due to the fact that the creators hadn't yet seen E.T. when they embarked upon the project.

Originally serialised in 2000AD (1983) Baikie's artwork is typical of that comic, whilst it is also reminiscent of the more traditional British juvenile comics of the time, both in the way he draws facial expressions and in the viewpoints he gives to the scenes. Although that detracts from its appeal, Moore's script never falls short of excellence, providing some truly comic moments, as in the scene where Skizz and his friends approach Spaghetti Junction.

Spielberg's films are set in a never-never romantic glossland, something which could never be said of urban disaster Birmingham - the gritty, realistic setting for SKIZZ - complete with the seriously character-deficient and gangs of drunken thugs. Where SKIZZ cannot make the story of E.T. more realistic, it sends it up, though perhaps the xenophobic American berserker is too much of a cliché to be effective, even in 1989's 'democratic' Britain.

Strangely enough, Alan Moore decided Skizz's face would look more expressive with small, heavily lidded eyes, whereas Spielberg decided greater expressiveness could be achieved by doing E.T.'s eyes like car headlights.

SKIZZ doesn't go far wrong with its use of parody and satire, two forms of humour particularly suited to the comic format.

Judith Tarr - - - - -THE LADY OF HAN-GILEN
(Pan, 1989, 310pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

As I predicted, volume two of the Avaryan Rising trilogy introduces a strong heroine, depicted on the cover in quasi-battle gear which disguises little of her curvaceous body - and thus goes against the text, as she goes into battle in man's gear, and with her gender secret. Elian, the Lady of Han-Gilen, the prince's youngest child, has been educated in both the arts of a prince and princess. She cannot forget Mirain, the son of the sun, who was fostered in their court and went back to claim his kingdom in the north some years ago, as was told in volume one, THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING.

In this book Elian, 'mageborn and magebred', runs away from the court of Han-Gilen, and from a persistent suitor, finds Mirain's army and persuades him to take her into his guard disguised as a youth, so that she can fulfil the vow she made as a child, to fight with him as he set about conquering the world. Mirain makes her his squire and the two live entirely platonically (in one tent!) until they realise they were born to be mated, body and soul...

The book is in fact an erotic odyssey, of foreplay rather than four-letter explicitness, a conglomeration of the wish-fulfilment fantasies which a teenage girl sold on THE LORD OF THE RINGS might dream up. Soldiering alongside the man of your choice, wielding a perfect sword - 'Each fit well into her hand. But one, lifted, settled as if it had grown there' - with a mare who reads your mind and will allow no other rider... Tarr's style recalls Mary Renault's Theseus and Alexander sagas, with echoes of Tolkien, Le Guin and Robin McKinley, and is of the high Celtic kind: 'this was her time and this her season, springtide of her womanhood, when blood sang to blood, and fire to banked and shielded fire'. Yet there is nothing too explicit to worry parents - after 200 pages of foreplay 'Her laughter broke into a gasp, half of startlement, half of piercing pleasure!' And that's it! With such comments as 'She lifted her chin to its most maddening angle' perhaps I should also name Heyer and Cartland among Tarr's literary influences? I enjoyed it no end - but how seriously can we take this style of heroic fantasy?

Andre Norton - - - - -FLIGHT IN YIKTOR
(Methuen Teens, 1988, 251pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

A book which is aimed at teenagers, with a juvenile hero, and which features telepathic animals, does not sound very promising. However, the fact that FLIGHT IN YIKTOR is written by Andre Norton puts it in altogether a different light. What the novel lacks in sophistication it makes up for in imagination and Norton's gifts as a storyteller.

Farree, a crippled orphan, ill treated by his master, the Beastmerchant Russtif, is rescued from his miserable existence by two off-worlders, the Lady Maelen, one of the mysterious and powerful Thassa from the planet Yiktor, and the Lord-One Krip, who are intrigued by his ability to communicate telepathically with themselves and the various animals in their charge. Farree is greatly in awe of his rescuers. Having always been treated as worthless, he cannot believe that these wonderful beings regard him as an equal, especially as their telepathic powers are so much greater than his own. During his and his companions' subsequent struggles against the Thieves Guild, however, Farree comes to understand his own worth - and by the end of the book his true, extraordinary nature is revealed.

Young teenagers will enjoy this book, but I suspect many adults looking for some light reading will enjoy it as well.

W.T. Quick - - - - -DREAMS OF FLESH AND SAND
(Orbit, 1989, 301pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

It had to happen sooner or later.

What you do is take this big, mean computer. You hook up a text-input system and dump the complete works of William Gibson onto its hard disc drive. Then you add a bit of Walter Jon Williams and maybe some vintage Bester for seasoning, until said disc drive begins to sizzle and smoke. Then you sieve the

mixture through your style analysis software, stew lightly, and hack it to a pulpy consistency with your word processor. What do you get?

Cyberjunk.

It's bandwagon time. We've already seen a second wave of cyberpunkoid detritus washed up on these Interzone-infested shores in the form of HARDWIRED, DOCTOR ADDER, and so on. This is the harbinger of the third wave, and it stinks.

DREAMS OF FLESH AND SAND follows the word processor formula to a byte. We have villainous multinationals, mad billionaires trapped in their own hallucinations in cyberspace, a pair of hard-boiled (and divorced) hackers who jack in and power up in a bid to do something or other deeply significant with a billion-dollar pay-off. We have roly-poly Japanese hit-men, corporate warfare, and a hero whose pharmacopoeia should induce a splitting headache at best and a heart attack at worst - if only the author knew what he was bullshitting about.

Unfortunately he doesn't.

Now don't get me wrong. DREAMS OF FLESH AND SAND might just be some vastly subtle piece of tongue-in-cheek parody; and I might just be missing the point. . . but I doubt it. If you distrust my word, go ahead and read this book. But otherwise, be warned:

Quick he may be, but Gibson he ain't.

Diane Duane - - - - - - - - - -THE WOUNDED SKY
(Titan, 1989, 255pp, £2.95)

D.C. Fontana - - - - - - - - - -VULCAN'S GLORY
(Titan, 1989, 252pp, £2.95)

Jean Lorrah - - - - - - - - - -SURVIVORS
(Titan, 1989, 253pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by Eric Brown)

In THE WOUNDED SKY (#19 in the Star Trek series) the USS Enterprise is chosen to test the first engine capable of intergalactic travel - the Inversion Drive. The first side-effect of its use is that the crew experience their colleagues' memories for the timeless 'duration' of the journey; the second that the Drive ruptures the fabric of space, allowing anentropic space to seep through into the universe, with potentially catastrophic consequences. It falls to the Enterprise stalwarts to save the day.

The physics in this novel might have been tolerable if leavened with an attempt at plot, characterisation and drama. Sadly, all three requirements were missing and the result was a stupefyingly boring read replete with all the twee cliches, and more besides, of Star Trek the tv series.

VULCAN'S GLORY (#20 in the series) follows Spock on his first mission aboard the Enterprise, in search of the eponymous Vulcan emerald, the symbol of that race's metamorphosis from warlike tendencies to peace and logic. The stone is found, and there follows an action-adventure episode on the planet Artemis (which has nothing at all to do with the rest of the book). Meanwhile, murder is committed aboard the orbiting Enterprise. Spock's love of fellow Vulcan T'pris ends in tragedy, and we see him change from the almost-human he was to the emotionless dummy we all know and love. . . It really is as silly and superficial as this synopsis makes it sound. Devotees of Star Trek might find VULCAN'S GLORY mildly interesting, but readers in search of an entertaining space opera will be sorely disappointed.

SURVIVORS is by far the best of the bunch. The first 120 pages are quite readable, as they chart Tasha Yar's climb from the status of a feral child in the ruins of the planet New Paris, to her position of Lieutenant in

Starfleet. Her relationship with Darryl Adin, the security officer who rescued her, is portrayed passably (if sentimentally), as is his treachery aboard the starship Starbound. At this point the novel descends into pulp action-adventure: Yar and the android, Data, arrive on the planet Treva, whose President requires Starfleet aid to suppress a revolution. Things are not what they seem, however, and the Trekkies soon find themselves on the side of the revolutionaries. The politics of SURVIVORS is simplistic to the point of farce: Treva is analogous to Earth in the 20th century, yet has a planetary government - the Dictator subjugates the citizens by means of a Suggestibility Drug in the water supply. . . The novel comes to a head with the obligatory *deus ex machina*.

This is book #5 of the spin-off from the New Generation tv series which, if this novel is anything to go by, will offer much the same as the original Star Trek.

Robert Westall - - - - - - - - - -URN BURIAL
(Penguin Plus, 1989, 157pp, £1.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

The title of Westall's 1987 novel, published on a juvenile list but definitely of interest to adults, is taken from 'Urn Burial', the meditative essay on death written by the 17th century author Thomas Browne. The plot expands Westall's short story of the same title about a seventeen year old Pennine shepherd who finds beneath a cairn on Fiend's Fell the embalmed body of a six-foot tall cat in a coffin - left there with his helmets and blaster-gun.

Ralph's discovery, and curiosity to try out the weapons and other gear, brings down from space the ships of the dog-people, at war with the cat-people and searching for the entombed cat in order to find the treasury of weapons and space-ships buried beneath the fell after a great battle 2000 years ago. However, the skill of the author takes you into the story for nearly 100 pages before Ralph, and the readers, are informed of the whole background to the space wars. In the beginning the Creator assigned each world to the rule of a different species. Not surprisingly, the other species hold 'apes' - i.e. humankind - in contempt. Even the dog-people do not harm their own kind as we do.

In this novel, one of his best, Westall keeps in balance his gift for storytelling, his concern to warn the young about the way the world's going, and his passion for cats - to produce an original work of SF (with a touch of horror). Westall's comment, via Ralph, is even more telling today: 'The arrogant apes, who never guessed how thin was the crust of safety they lived on; a crust they nibbled away at, every day. . .'. For teenage and adult readers.

Tanith Lee - - - - - - - - - -WOMEN AS DEMONS
(Women's Press, 1989, 272pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Most anthologies contain some dud stories - not so WOMEN AS DEMONS. The first tale in this volume, the haunting, atmospheric fantasy 'The Demoness', draws the reader into a book of short stories, each very different from the others, and yet each sharing the same high quality of imaginative writing. The whole spectrum of speculative fiction is found in these stories, from the futuristic science fiction of 'Discovered Country' which tells of the obsessional and destructive relationship between a woman and her son, to the historical fantasy of 'The Lancastrian Blush' set at the close of the Wars of the Roses; from the sword and sorcery of 'Northern Chess', to the horror

of 'The Unrequited Glove' and the fury of a woman scorned, to the wicked humour of 'The One We Were'. What links these stories thematically is that they all feature a woman of Power among their central characters, whether that Power be true sorcery or psychological power gained through the force of personality, or power gained through 'The Male Perception of Women Through Space and Time' - the subtitle of the book. In her introduction Tanith Lee writes:

'...there has been built about the female a mythology of darkness, corruption and the uncanny... By retelling the myth it seems to me I have tried to investigate and pinpoint the issue, rather than uphold the sham...'

Ms Lee allows 'the issue' to emerge from the plot of the stories themselves - there is no hectoring to alienate the reader, simply tales well told that linger in the mind long after they have been read. The majority of the stories have been published before, but not together, and I highly recommend this book as a collection of superior SF and fantasy.

Christopher Hyde - - - - - JERICHO FALLS
(Headline, 1989, 501pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

The production of bacteriological weaponry, and the transportation of such, can be an emotive subject and this is obviously the case for Christopher Hyde. It's also promising material for a horror-thriller and it is this which Hyde has attempted to write - unfortunately, without total success. The plot is simple: a van carrying a deadly bacteria crashes in the small New Hampshire town of Jericho Falls. The poor inhabitants not only have this to contend with (and the disease in its early stages is spectacularly deadly) but also the US Army, whose contingency plans to deal with the situation are straightforward - secretly isolate and then wipe out the entire town!

There's carnage and tension enough, to be sure, but Hyde cannot bring off telling the tale from multiple viewpoints as well as, say, Frederick Forsyth; in particular the 'baddies' hardly rate even as cardboard characters (and Hyde makes no attempt to understand their thinking) whilst the 'goodies' are too good to be totally believable. There are also several dubious plot turns and devices, starting with the mode of transportation of the bacteria. Yet despite all these adverse comments I found JERICHO FALLS to be a very readable, pacy book and one which I would recommend for that long train journey.

M.J. Engh - - - - - A WIND FROM BUKHARA
(Grafton, 1989, 365pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Copyrighted in 1976, published in the U.S. as ARSLAN, spoiled here by a needlessly simplistic cover by Luis Rey, and blurred as 'a terrifying, totally convincing masterpiece of political science fiction', this is a book which you will want to finish.

If, like me, you find yourself cheated by a petering out that leaves you wondering what happens next, the joys of reaching that conclusion should more than compensate: Engh plots immaculately, and all his characters are believable given the conventions of smalltown America.

The auctorial trick of changing the 'I' from one character to another still disconcerts and disorients me, but here it is used to good effect, for the major protagonist

is a solid school principal who becomes the de facto leader of the invaded and raped populace, while the alternate voice is that of the 13-year-old publicly raped catamite of Arslan, the Turkestani conqueror of the world. Thus our two viewpoints are that of the dispassionate observer and the poetic sufferer, and both grow and develop with the passage of time into heroic personalities capable of standing alongside the monstrous but driven Arslan who is truly one of the great creations of our time.

In line with American taste there is a constant sexual titillation while overt violence is almost taken for granted; as might be expected, the action centres around Kraftsville, Illinois - one longs for more novels of this crusading type to be set in Britain among characters with whom we could more easily empathise, but of course that 'wouldn't sell'.

A vagrant passing thought - was the name Arslan consciously chosen to mimic C.S. Lewis' Aslan, and was the disciplinarian commander's name Nizam selected because of its similarity to Nazism? I for one found both names constantly evocative, heightening the novel's effectiveness. And one closing thought: why are American female authors so keen to portray homosexuality as an integral part of their plotting?

Mike Ashley (ed.) - - - - - ROBERT E. HOWARD'S
WORLD OF HEROES
(Robinson, 1989, 424pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Robert E. Howard wrote considerably more than the 'Conan' stories. These ten adventures each feature a different hero. Ashley has cleverly arranged the stories in historical order, starting with 'The Valley Of The Worm' (a prehistoric adventure which claims the archetype for all 'George and the Dragon'-type adventures. It's unfortunately one of the most racist of Howard's stories, but more later) and ending with the twentieth-century middle-Eastern adventures of Kirby O'Donnell and Francis X. Gordon. On the way Kull, Conan, Bran Mak Morn, Solomon Kane and others are visited in this volume's hint of a cycle of an 'Eternal Champion' - without, it has to be admitted, Michael Moorcock's sense of irony.

And that's the problem with Howard. His plots are often little more than accounts of slayings and demonic Threats From Beyond, his heroes are ferocious men of action whom I would not invite to tea with Aunt Abigail, and the racism and bigotry inherent in many of these stories cannot wholly be excused by the fact that Howard was a Texan writing in the 1930s. Yet within these limits, he could write. I got through these essentially similar stories without being bored. Howard had a gift for vivid action-adventure which many attempt, but few achieve. And there are touches of something extra, something which may or may not have blossomed into something more subtle if Howard had lived. There's an oddly stirring conclusion to 'Hawks of Outremer' in which the conventionally ferocious Norman-Celt Cormac FitzGeoffrey meets Saladin himself, to discover the true nature of his own barbarism and the saracen's chivalry.

Howard fans will probably find this a useful collection even if - and this will probably be the case - they have one or two of the stories already.

Gregory Benford - - - - - IN ALIEN FLESH
(VG/SF, 1989, 280pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

IN ALIEN FLESH is a collection of thirteen short stories (and one poem) from an author who, on this evidence, is not a natural writer

of short stories. There are ideas aplenty and the stories abound in intriguing situations. but they lack the cutting edge and tight disciplined writing which makes the short story form such a positive force in SF.

Some of the stories feel more like outlines for novels than complete stories in their own right. For instance, 'Of Space/Time And The River' rushes through the stealing of Egypt by alien visitors; while 'Nooncoming' establishes a convincing future society struggling to cope with the impact of technological change, but fails to do anything with the characters that populate it. When he does allow himself greater room to develop a story, as in 'To The Storming Gulf', he brings the story to a satisfying conclusion.

He is at his best, though, when he forgoes the wide panoramic sweeps. My favourite stories were 'White Creatures', an emotional raging against the reality of growing old; and 'Doing Lennon', a story of an impostor Lennon revived to life in the 22nd century taking the opportunity to live the life of his hero.

A feature of this book is the 'Afterwords' in which Benford describes how and why he came to write each story. Unfortunately, I often found the Afterwords more interesting than the stories themselves.

Overall, Benford's first collection of short stories is entertaining without being particularly impressive. For Benford at his best stick to the novels.

Jerry Pournelle &
Roland Green - - - - -CLAN AND CROWN
(Orbit, 1989, 383pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

This is the sequel to Pournelle's appalling JANISSARIES, apparently published as long ago as 1982 in America, but only now arriving over here. First of all, the plus side: it is not as bad as JANISSARIES. I know it would have been a difficult feat to write two novels quite so dire, but you can never tell with Pournelle. It is better written than its predecessor and the plot is much tighter, probably due to Roland Green.

The novel is a fantasy involving a group of American mercenaries together with their weaponry having been set down on the planet Tran. Their new home has a social, economic and military level comparable to Europe in the early Middle Ages. They are charged with taking control of as much of the planet as possible and with growing and harvesting a drug, surinomaz or madweed, for the Confederation that controls the Galaxy. Led by Rick Galloway, the intrepid band way continual war against their many enemies on Tran and also plan to get even with the Confederacy.

Pournelle and Green have written a colonial fairy tale that is designed to enable its readership to imagine themselves carving out kingdoms, gun in hand. It gives its two authors a chance to play at being generals, a sort of sub-literary war-gaming, where they marshal hosts and engage in large-scale slaughter... and every now and again have a token lament that violence is unfortunately necessary. The hero, Rick Galloway, is a reluctant warrior who would much rather be an academic and who is continually haunted by the fear that he is a coward and not a real man. He is forced to be a soldier and presumably will go on to save the planet and take over the Confederation in JANISSARIES III, IV, V, VI...

Personally I like adventure stories a lot, but this shallow militaristic exercise in war pornography is just too much!

Samuel R. Delany - - FLIGHT FROM NEVERYON
(Grafton, 1989, 480pp,
£3.99)
RETURN TO NEVERYON
(Grafton, 1989, 399pp,
£3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Volume 3 of the series confirms my conclusion regarding volume 2. Much more of a tapestry than the previous volume, FLIGHT is much more successful. The story and the underlying fascination with signs, structures and language interweave rather than clash. Where there is tension, it is creative rather than incongruous.

In three 'stories' we meet some of the characters from the previous books, seen once more from different viewpoints. In 'The Tale of Fog and Granite' a young smuggler journeying south attempts to synthesise a truth behind all the conflicting stories about Gorgik the Liberator. The same character is seen through the eyes of another in 'The Mummer's Tale'. In 'The Tale of Flags and Carnivals' Neveryon and Delany's own New York in the early 1980s combine and collide. Metaphor is given a more 'realistic' gloss as scenes from the first story are returned to as events observed and experienced by Delany in a strange and terrible land swept by a mysterious and deadly plague: New York as the rumours and facts of AIDS sink into the gay subculture and the hustlers and users on the streets. Mythical Neveryon becomes, in more senses than one, real.

Dazzling, shifting viewpoints, episodes which would themselves have sparked S&S trilogies, and touches of disconcerting farce make this a book so far beyond the usual it's difficult to know where to start praising it.

As for RETURN: well, here the reviewer throws up his hands and waits for the aid of the critical scholar. RETURN contains another three stories (but one of them is the same 'Tale of Gorgik' which opened the series) and two dense appendices covering the jungly undergrowths of literary-critical and mathematical theory. Once more we're in the territory of stories which illuminate other stories, which offer teasing questions about the nature of identity, truth and symbol, and all I can really say is that if you've got this far you'll find the stories rewarding in the context of what you've already read, perhaps less so in themselves. Even the apparent oddness of repeating a story has its motives. Re-reading it, you are now aware of the identity and background of some of the minor characters who appear for a scene or two.

What about the series as a whole? Farts ace thoroughly wonderful, parts give me a headache. (I'm not necessarily talking about the dense appendices and critical references. Then I can work through. Well, up to the point where Delany uses 'critique' as a verb). We could argue until doomsday about what Delany is trying to do with the books and the measure of his success; the 'Neveryon' series has its moments of glorious insights and its longeurs. It's probably impossible to separate the two, so read it, and read it all. You'll come out fighting: the sign of a good book.

Joyce Ballou Gregorian - - THE BROKEN CITADEL
(Orbit, 1989,
337pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Laurence Scotford)

If I tell you that this book opens with the obligatory map, that the introduction relates how Sibby, a young girl from Massachusetts, falls inadvertently into another world, that the rest of the book concerns her adventures

in that world, and that this is volume one of the Tredana trilogy, then jaded connoisseurs of fantasy will probably be hurrying on to the next review.

But wait, because although Ms Gregorian's offering may appear on the surface to be just another formula exercise, it actually holds some pleasant surprises for the persevering reader.

The most striking thing about Ms Gregorian's work is the roundness of her characters - they have good and bad days, failures and successes, they make mistakes, and they are unpredictable. It is this, and the good pacing that carry through a rather hackneyed storyline. This mainly concerns the liberation of Leron, prince of Tredara, from Simirimia, the deathless queen of Tredere. But throughout Sibby's involvement with this we also see her maturing with each new experience until the young woman who leaves the world at the end of the book is very different from the girl who entered at the beginning.

The character of Sibby and Ms Gregorian's clear, succinct style make this a good book for adolescent readers but there is also much here to delight the older bookworm.

Lois McMaster Bujold - - - - - FALLING FREE
(Headline, 1989, 307pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

Take a sprinkling of high-technology, add one hard-assed company executive, throw in an exploited race and an idealistic engineer and you have FALLING FREE.

The human race spans the Galaxy, linking their once dependent but now jealously independent colonies by means of the Jump ships through the wormholes. Earth strives to stay technologically ahead of the colonies, not just for the sake of it, but for the profit motive. (Yes this descends from SPACE MERCHANTS through *Aliens* and *Robocop*.) GalacTech and its ruthless Operations Vice President are in the business of doing things cheap!

Cheap in this case means the genetically engineered quaddies designed to operate in free fall without the expensive returns to gravity and lay-offs necessary to prevent bone deterioration in normal humans. But GalacTech believes that quaddies are company property and engineer Leo Graf believes otherwise...

In FALLING FREE, Bujold has created a plausible hard SF future and the quaddies are a convincingly unspoiled and sympathetic race. If you are a fan of the sort of detailed technophilic stories written by Niven or Varley, then this is right up your street.

Ken Webster - - - - - THE VERTICAL PLANE
(Grafton, 1989, 351pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

It had to happen, I suppose. Forget all this seance and automatic writing and tarot card stuff: tune into the supernatural with your computer!

This book concerns messages apparently left on a home computer in a cottage once lived in by a 16th-century farmer. The author charts the developing relationship between himself, his 16th-century friend, and other mysterious entities known only as '2109'. An appendix suggests that the language used by the communicator tallies exactly with 16th-century English.

Isn't it funny that in these cases the impossible comes thick and fast? Webster tells us that two investigators from the Society for Psychical Research turn out not to be known by the Society. And his 'correspondent' seems, at

one point, not to be familiar with the name of St Paul, despite an Oxford education and acquaintance with Erasmus! We have, then, a fusion between Streiber-type 'alien' experiences and spiritualism where - because of the dream-like nature of the events? - a lot of obvious questions aren't asked.

I found THE VERTICAL PLANE a fascinating read, not least because I also live in a village a few miles from Chester and shortly before receiving the book I'd been thinking very hard about computers and the seventeenth century... but I think I'd have found Mr Webster's story much more believable if it had been published as fiction. But then again: 'fiction' implies art implies shape and conclusion. This narrative has neither, but therein lies its half-surrealist appeal.

"Upon the rack in print"

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, MAY to AUGUST 1989, and
ANALOG, MARCH to AUGUST 1989

Reviewed by Edward James

The vagaries of the postal service meant that I had not received the May issues by the last deadline (though the June ones had arrived); I decided to miss the last *Paperback Inferno* and also to indulge myself with a mammoth column this time. Apologies for both these decisions.

To start with *Analog*. In March the cover story was Harry Turtledove's "Nothing in the Night-Time", a somewhat routine but still enjoyable tale of the problems of merchants dealing with aliens on their home planet: the inevitable (eco-biological) problem is solved by a young woman with a weird taste for antique fiction -- like Sherlock Holmes. Turtledove is one of the most reliable of *Analog*'s writers; also reliable, and usually more original, is Michael F. Flynn, who here contributes "On the Wings of a Butterfly". A time-traveller meets Pizarro as he and his men are on their way to Peru, and sets about changing history: a good story, that keeps the reader guessing until the last line. "A butterfly's wings flapping in Spain can create storms in France" is the epigram giving its title to the story. Charles Sheffield offered "Humanity Test", another story revolving around a problem: how to define humanity, and how to recognise it in genetically improved chimpanzees, who communicate by sign language rather than voice. It is all somewhat implausible, but neatly constructed: the inherent sentimentality is overlaid by the shocking details. The shorts included another puzzler, Jeff Hecht's "Extinction Theory" -- how would we know if there had been an advanced civilisation in the geological past, given the problems of material survival? But perhaps the most interesting was Rick Shelley's novella "The Sylph" -- a sensitively written story about a p.o.w. of an inter-stellar war let loose on the pastoral world belonging to the "enemy": the theme being the clash of cultures, moralities and loyalties. A number of satisfying stories here, even if none of them are award-winners. (Though how can you tell? I was as amazed as any when last year's *Analog* serial *Falling Free*, by Lois McMaster Bujold, won the 1988 Nebula for best novel.)

The April issue had a cover story -- Mark Stiegler's "The Gentle Seduction" -- which is one of the best stories this year and one of the best *Analog* stories for a long time. It starts very simply in our day with an ambitious inventor, anxious to move technology on as fast as possible, and his much more timid girl-friend; by the end of the story we have moved thousands of years into the future, in a great Stapledonian vision of technological revolution and evolutionary change. Vision is in short supply these days; it should be cherished. The other novellas were

"Ryerson's Fate", by Doug Larsen, a neat detective story about how a criminal might defeat the latest in anti-criminal devices: viruses tailored to the individual DNA of the criminal; and F. Alexander Brejcha's "Viewpoint", where a young telepath makes first contact with an odd alien race, and with others in the contact team: a moving story, an effective xenobiological puzzle, with good characterisation. The short stories include Harry Turtledove's "Nasty, Brutish, and..." (it takes place in a bar called Hobbes...), where an Earthman learns a little bit about Earth history from an alien -- great fun, with a nice sting in the tail; Rick Cook's "Hackers", where some perfectly ordinary guys with a private rocket racer meet Crazy Eddie, who has these nutty stories about a world in which it is government which initiated -- and then aborted -- the space program: a heavy handed message, but wittily treated; and Joseph H. Delaney's "Snake Oil", a light-hearted disaster tale, in which a neatly tailored garbage-eating bacillus gets loose. An interesting fact article about the effects of zero gravity on the immune system, too; a good issue, worth buying, particularly if you want to find out what *Analog* is like these days.

The *May Analog* featured Lois McMaster Bujold's "The Mountains of Mourning". My initial thought was that it was an emotionally and morally quite effective story about a young aristocrat dealing with misgovernment in the boondocks, but that it had very little to do with sf. Genetic mutation (and the callous slaughter of those children effected) is at the heart of the problem, but needn't have been; it appeared to be an unnecessary sfnal gimmick, for a story which could easily have been given a setting on, say, Europe in the seventeenth century. (Though what magazines buy novellas set in 17th century Europe?) Now, however, (see August issue, below) I realise that it is part of a sequence which does very soon become interstellar; perhaps it is too early to judge the importance of this first story. Clearly the protagonist, dwarfish but resourceful hero Miles Vorkosigan, is going to crop up again. This is, perhaps, the beginning of a reasonably thoughtful space opera series. Rick Shelley's "In the Fluff" was a fairly routine Western about life on a fairly hostile planet. Dean McLaughlin's "The Epsilon Probe" (what an anodyne title!) was an equally routine tale about an interstellar probe and its repercussions on Earth. On the other hand, I enjoyed the monumentally (and deliberately) silly "When Life Hands you a Lemming" by Tom Easton (in which genetically-engineering hybrids of lobsters and roaches were used as automobiles -- until they started to go rogue) and also the well-characterised short story by W.T.Quick, "Bank Robbery", in which an editor's 200 gigabyte hypertext data-bank is stolen: a painless insight into a near-future world of computers, which rings rather more true than *Neuromancer*.

The *June Analog* began the two-part serial by Michael F. Flynn, *The Watcher at the Ford*. In many ways an ultimate *Analog* story, based around the moral and political problems created by a technological advance -- or a biotechnological advance, in this case, involving the development of *Micrococcus radiodurans*, which gives humans invulnerability from radiation. The Washer at the Ford, in Irish mythology, is the Morrigan, the Chooser of the Slain: will this advance bring peace, or will it simply encourage more warfare? The problems are brought out well, and left suitably unresolved; the plot and characters, however, remaining somewhat wooden and unconvincing. (But then I thought that about *Falling Free*.) The issue also had W.R.Thompson's "Ally" -- about the partial duplication of personality into a computer and its unfortunate consequences -- and W.T.Quick's "High Hotel", an investigation of how a hotel on the Moon could be made a paying proposition. I'd like to believe it -- and he has clearly thought it out carefully, but...

In *July Analog* led off with Joseph Manzione's novelette "Cold War", a story which spanned a whole century and more, from the Tunguska explosion (an alien spaceship, of course) through to the development of space exploration and the meeting with (other) aliens on the way to the stars. The main character is the alien who landed in Russia in 1908; the story is how he/it manipulated human development for his/its own ends. A banal idea, perhaps, but developed well.

My main objection was to the excessively fragmentary nature of the narrative; difficult to overcome if you are dealing with that sort of time-scale. The other novelette was "Moonsong", by Lee Goodloe and Jerry Olton: a story of which Heinlein would have been sufficiently content. Libertarian moon colonists dedicated to exploding the deceit and secrecy of Earth governments realise the need to practice -- deceit and secrecy (in order to protect their sources of information in the USSR. Asimov and Bova supply the two shorts; the rest of the issue is made up of the end of the Flynn serial.

The last of the *Analogs* to reach me was August's. The cover story was Lois McMaster Bujold's "Labyrinth", in which Miles (hero of the *May* cover story) meets a quaddie, descendant of those four-armed genetically altered humans we met two centuries earlier in *Falling Free*. So, we find that Bujold is creating a Future History of sorts. Miles is no longer messing around with a debased planetbound peasantry, he is up there in space, dealing with a fairly standard set of stock space opera types, though dealing with rather unstandard problems (such as rescuing a sex-starved teenage monster). (Kelly Freas did the cover. Doesn't he realise that no self-respecting four-armed young lady would play the double-sided hammer dulcimer with a pair of annoyingly jangly bangles on each wrist?) "Treetops" takes Mary Caraker's space-travelling primary-school teacher to a new setting, in quite a readable story; the issue also includes a two-page Caraker, "The Innocents", which takes the same scenario, but turns it into a typical *Analog* "Plausibility Zero" story. Also in this issue is Timothy Zahn's second story about a machine which stores souls, ready for resurrecting, "Justice Machine". It continues the logical extrapolation of technology into plot: this time people start resurrecting in the wrong bodies. And Charles Sheffield's "Dancing with Myself" is a neat parable about experiments with DNA -- reminding us that in the real world many researchers also have to be university teachers as well (strange how few sf writers realise this).

May's *Asimov's* was illustrated quite irrelevantly from Chris Achilleos's *Sirens* (U.K., 1985). The novella was George Alec Effinger's "Marid Changes His Mind", a bold and indeed successful attempt to show us what North Africa, on the periphery of the modern technological world, would look like in a *Neuromancer*-style world of drugs and implants. Cybermoor? Charles Sheffield's "The Serpent of Old Nile" is a very routine piece of Egyptological hocus-pocus. The other novellas, on the other hand, Judith Moffett's "Not Without Honor" I thought an inspired piece of sustained lunacy, when aliens reveal themselves (via black and white tv) in the garb of the Mouseketeers, the appalling children who gelped host the Mickey Mouse Club tv show in the late '50s. There's logic to it, and humour, and pathos. But then Moffett can really do no wrong as far as I'm concerned; one of the very best of the newer writers. There were some very good shorts too, including Richard Kadrey's "The Kill Fix", about an inhumanly programmed assassin; Rory Harper's "Monsters Tearing Off My Face", a splendid short-short, which any description would ruin; Jack McDevitt's "Leap of Faith", about how a horrific encounter teaches a priest about the true nature of an alien people; Peni R.Griffin's meeting with a Texan legend in the flesh, "The Goat Man"; and Marc Laidlaw's powerful tale of a god-like android and the "children" he creates, "Kronos" -- an effective retelling of Greek myth in future guise.

The *June Asimov's* featured good stories by two of my favourite writers -- Silverberg and Watson -- and there were other very readable ones too. The Robert Silverberg, "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another", is set in the 22nd century, when computer advances have made possible the simulation, in holotanks, of reconstructions of historical personalities. First we meet Pizarro, trying to make sense of the world in which he finds himself; next, enter Socrates, who engages in a splendid Socratic dialogue with the Spaniard, over the morality of the killing of Atahualpa among other things. The problem is, these simulacra have much more self-awareness than their programmers expected: what have they created? The Ian

Watson is "Nanoware Time", a glorious jaunt by two hip inhabitants of the future out to Luna City and beyond, to the other side of the Moon, where aliens are ready to get demons to turn them into superbeings, or something. Gradually the alien plan becomes clear: a Stapledonian vision of the future far less reassuring than that offered by Stiegler in the April *Asimov's*. I wonder if this will end up novelised as his last *Asimov's* story, "The Flies of Memory", apparently is going to be? Steven Uttley's "The Tall Grass" looks at the perils of travel into the Devonian jungle -- with a punch that will not be unfamiliar to those who remember Aldiss's "Poor Little Warrior!" Allen M. Steele's "John Harper Wilson" tells, in the fashion of a magazine article, the story of the unknown astronaut, who first landed on the Moon in the late '60s, when Robert F. Kennedy's presidency had still not managed to civilianise the largely military space machine of the Nixon era of the early '60s. The alternate history is all a bit too heavy-handed at times, but quite thoughtful and interesting. Finally, Eileen Gunn briefly explores a future in which children are selected by computer testing for cyborgising, or euthanasia, or whatever; James Patrick Kelly provides a quiet and effective love story, about "Faith"; and Michael Swanwick produces what is possibly the first Arthurian cyberpunk story, "The Dragon Line" -- it begins with Mordred and girl-friend snorting cocaine as he "injects his Jaguar like a virus into the stream of traffic", and ends with a reconciliation with Merlin. Good irreverent fun. The whole: well worth a purchase.

Scottish authors appear but rarely (if ever) in the pages of *Asimov's*, so Duncan Lunan's cover story in the July issue, "In the Arctic, Out of Time", is welcome. HMS Resolute sails into Arctic waters in 1851, not long after the Franklin expedition, and picks up two young American women of strange habits, whom we soon perceive to be from the twentieth century. Time travel, alien intervention and the clash of cultures between the Victorian and the present, are the themes, and they are treated in an entertaining and thoughtful way. John Kennedy's "Encore" is a short story about a couple who relive an episode in their lives again and again; Grimwood's *Replay* replayed, but economically and with feeling. Suzy McKee Charnas's "Boobs" is a nice piece of wish fulfilment, in which a self-conscious and over-endowed young woman gets bloody and supernatural revenge on those who have persecuted her. Even more fun, even more wish-fulfilling, and just as implausible, is Phillip C. Jennings's "Martin's Feast": Martin involuntarily becomes a weird and alien being whose hunger will consume the nuclear bombs of the world. The longest story in the issue, Connie Willis's "Time-Out", left me as cold as did her Nebula-winning "The Last of the Winnebagos". There's a message there somewhere, for someone.

The August *Asimov's*, last of all (I could just write gibberish here -- like the rest of it, you say -- since probably no-one will follow me this far). The lead story was Lucius Shepard's novelette "Surrender" -- apparently the last of his Central America series -- a visit to a mutant factory, and its vicious commander, deep in the jungle. A suitably nightmarish end to a memorable series. It ends: "Don't worry, everything's all right. I promise I won't mention any of this again. Adios." The novella was Orson Scott Card's "Pageant Wagon": a wild west story of an ambitious young man who wants to join Royal's Riders out on the frontier, who falls in with a travelling band of unconventional actors, with a beautiful daughter, etc etc. Set in post-holocaust America, with the Mormons leading the inevitable rise of Civilisation, and with Our Hero learning a useful lesson in cynicism, but otherwise memorable primarily for its description of the patriotic play, *Glory for America*, a beautifully skewed image of a future's version of the past, with portrayals of America's great heroes, Washington, Lincoln, Neil Armstrong, Brigham Young. Charles Sheffield, in "Nightmares of the Classical Mind" has a very different vision of an American future, an America watched over by a gigantic cross-shaped space-station, *Glory of God*, put there by a power-crazed fundamentalist preacher. A more plausible and lived-in future than either of those is offered by M.F. McHugh, in "Baffin Island": a quiet

story about the struggle of a man to come to grips with living in the Arctic. It is only peripherally that we learn about his world, in which America has fallen to a socialist revolution and is racked by unemployment, and in which the ambitious American wants to study engineering in China. Written several months before the events of May '89.

And finally, finally, if Andy finds the space, a reminder that *Asimov's* and *Analog* both have non-fiction as well. It is impossible to find much of note in Isaac Asimov's editorials, but *Asimov's* in July had an excellent review article by Norman Spinrad on "Political Science Fiction", looking in particular at Preuss's *Starfire*, Grimwood's *Replay*, Shepard's *Life During Wartime* and Robinson's *The Gold Coast*. *Analog* had articles on the Soviet Mars project (March), zero gravity and the immune system (April), and the economics of interstellar commerce (May) (fun, that one), among others. As well, of course, as the often provocative *Analog* editorials -- sometimes just as provocative as in John W. Campbell's day but, under Stanley Schmidt, very much more balanced. I particularly enjoyed the ones about teaching (March), utopias (May), gender-specific language (June) and the desirability of introducing intelligence or knowledge testing to qualify for voting rights (August). That should cause some feedback!

INTERZONE 30 (July/August 1989)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

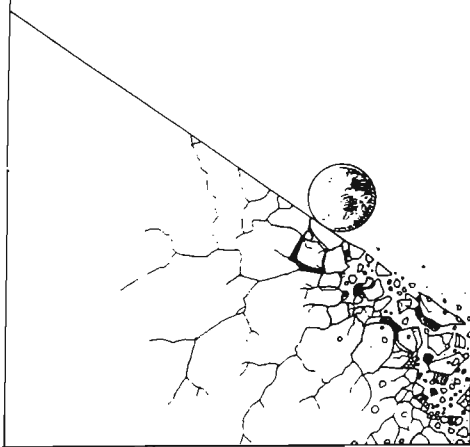
There can be few stranger characters in SF than the protagonist of Ian Lee's "Once Upon a Time in the Park". Our hero, you see, is a wheelbarrow, a bio-engineered cross between a man and a bicycle. In Lee's society, they've taken to heart those ET adverts about tailor-made workforces. "Once..." is original, zany and enjoyable. Three writers make their professional debuts this issue: PI's own Keith Brooke with "Adrenotropic Man", a variation on the D.O.A. theme (and notable for featuring a Green terrorist group); Sylvia M. Siddall with "Kingfisher", a rather laboured replaying of mythic Ancient Britain after the Holocaust; and Ian R. MacLeod with "Through". This latter is by far the best of the three, despite the doubtful logic of the time paradox it centres on. MacLeod has a telling eye for contemporary detail and the story never flags.

Familiar names are here in the shape of J.G. Ballard and Josef Nesvadba. The latter's "The Storeroom of Lost Desire" appears almost anachronistic; his spaceship has winking panels and needs codes punching in for take-off. In fairness perhaps the translation makes the story seem more curious than it should be. Ballard's "The Enormous Space" has its hero withdraw from the world by locking himself in his suburban house. Spider-like, he lives by trapping animal and human visitors, but this withdrawal is more than physical. Interesting, with more than a touch of black humour. However, the gem of this issue's fiction is Lisa Goldstein's "City of Peace". Goldstein's story is about Messiah's, hope, and -- ultimately -- despair. Her stage is Jerusalem, her players an Arab tour guide and his bus-load of tourists (complete -- perhaps -- with alien). The author side-steps any package holiday caricatures and her reason for choosing such odd material is made clear by the ending. Powerful, and highly recommended.

On the non-fiction, a new series of articles about best-selling authors kicks off with Douglas Adams and there's a humorous interview with John Sladek. But I found the 1988 IZ poll results to have been of the most interest. A resume of the results were reported in MATRIX 82: I'll just note here that Clarke, Heinlein and Asimov all made the top five 'Best all-time' writers. And I thought IZ's readership wasn't supposed to be conservative...

COLLISION COURSE

(Readers' letters)



KEN LAKE wishes "to express my disappointment at the tone of your review (PI78. p.11) of Timothy Good's ABOVE TOP SECRET.

Yes, it is enthusiastic rather than analytical, but I deprecate your kneejerk reaction that "government high-ups" are "probably incapable of rational thought anyway." Flippant, but unhelpful.

You admit that Jenny Randles' ABDUCTION interests you, yet her whole content depends upon the reader's being convinced that UFOs do exist and have abducted humans. In fact, a far better coupling for a review of this book would be Jenny's own THE UFO CONSPIRACY: THE FIRST FORTY YEARS (Javelin, 1987, 224pp, £4.99), an admirably researched survey based in many cases on personal contact with those who have been involved and with government and scientists.

I accept that UFOlogy has put the backs up of many fans and others. I make no personal claims for UFO recognition, nor do I support any of the many theories put forward in the literature. But I do seek fair play for the subject, and after corresponding with Jenny Randles I am convinced of her ability, her scrupulous care, her expertise and her serious application to the whole subject."

((Oh dear - another elephantine Sawyer-joke bites the dust... What I thought was a hint that Members of Parliament, military chiefs and top civil servants are capable of being just as gullible, irrational and obsessive as we ordinary mortals turns out to be a "kneejerk reaction". Flippant, yes, but Top People can be deluded too, and - remember - much of the UFO obsession seems to come from sources which produce disinformation on other fronts. And do re-read the rest of the sentence quoted from. An unexplained event near a military base has to be taken seriously but its existence in military records is not necessarily evidence of a UFO visit. And cover-ups might be cover-ups of lax security procedures rather than alien visitations.

After reading ABDUCTION I tend to your view of Randles' ability and integrity but unless I've seriously misread the book she is not saying that "UFOs exist" in the same way as Good is but that "people are having very strange experiences which they interpret as UFO abductions." Just as fascinating, but less provable. It's all like the authorship of Shakespeare's plays: occasionally productive of real moments of insight, especially into the way we accept things because tradition and convenience tell us to, but when it comes down to proving their case both supporters of alternative authorship and UFOs need

a lot of genuinely new and different evidence. If people are writing books on the subject then 'Fair Play' demands that their arguments are treated seriously as rational arguments.))



Ken Lake's own reviewing is the subject of a letter from BRIAN ALDISS:

CRYPTOZOIC! was originally entitled AN AGE, as Lake says. But I certainly did not write it for the Sphere Science Fiction series. I don't think I have ever written a novel for paperback, even if circumstances worked out that way. AN AGE was published in hardcover by Faber and Faber, then my cherished publishers, in 1967 - by no means an easy year in which to be writing SF.

It was never serialised in New Worlds. Mike Moorcock had other fish to fry, and ran an extract only.

Lake claims the change of title from AN AGE to CRYPTOZOIC! (did I really add the daft exclamation mark, or was that a publisher's invention?) is meaningless. Well, yes and no, surely... Isn't that rather a matter of opinion? Directly the Faber edition was out, I felt that AN AGE was both weak and false as a title, and have altered it on all subsequent editions round the world.

For me, CRYPTOZOIC! - with or without that exclamation mark - has always held much more meaning. The definition of Cryptozoic given in my newest dictionary is "of or relating to that part of geological time represented by rocks in which the evidence of life is slight and the life forms are primitive". That is exactly where the most exciting part of the novel is staged.

To the reviewer of RUINS. Graham Andrews, congratulations. The reference to Wells hits the nail on the head. After I had completed the novella, I also saw a Wellsian parallel. A recent re-reading of Wells's A DREAM must have got entangled in the works.



The Chief Inquisitor,
The Library Association.

Dear Mr. Sawyer,

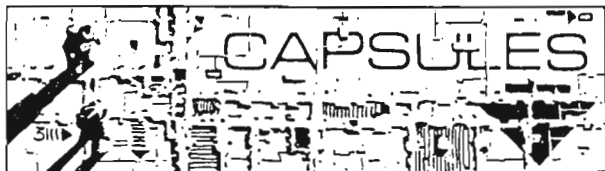
It has come to my notice that you have allowed an issue of Paperback Inferno to be distributed without an index.

It is your duty as a librarian to make sure that every document under your control is adequately indexed. Although you have produced a medical certificate for the frozen shoulder which has rendered you unable to move your right arm without curses, let alone type, for several weeks, your excuse that after typing the letters-page, contents and competition you were frothing with agony is feeble indeed. The next thing we know, you will be refusing to wear your hair in a straggly bun!

Kindly remember the Librarian's Rule: "If it moves, tell it to be silent: if it doesn't move, index it", and provide a full index of PI 79 to anyone who provides a s.a.e. for one.

Your date-stamp is endorsed three penalty points.

yours sincerely
(illegible)



Lyndan Darby - - PHOENIX FIRE (Unwin, 1989, 202pp, £3.50)

The final volume in the disappointing "Eye of Time" trilogy. It recounts King Eider's descent into madness and despair and then his sacrificial recovery. There are some nice touches, and of the three volumes it is the best written, but unfortunately the series has never been better than average. (John Newsinger)

Ru Emerson - - ON THE SEAS OF DESTINY (Headline, 1989, 280pp, £2.99)

I was really looking forward to reading this concluding volume in the "Ylia" trilogy, but it does not really live up to expectation. Emerson does not handle the final conflict with the same assurance that she displayed in the preliminary bouts. Nevertheless, this is still a well-written, exciting fantasy adventure and Emerson is obviously an author to watch out for. (John Newsinger)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - A DIFFICULTY WITH DWARVES (Headline, 1989, 250pp, £2.99)

A comic fantasy novel in which the apprentice Wuntvor goes off on a quest in order to break the spell which has been cast upon his unfortunate master. It raises the occasional grin, but is essentially rather predictable parody. Gardner's writing isn't half as witty as some of the genre's other fine humourists. (Steven J. Blyth)

Kathleen Herbert - - BRIDE OF THE SPEAR (Corgi, 1988, 297pp, £3.50)

This is a pleasant and enjoyable historical novel set in the Dark Ages, but the small elements of magic in it don't qualify it for more consideration. Fine as far as it goes. (Helen McNabb)

Douglas Hill - - BLADE OF THE POISONER (Pan Piper, 1989, 191pp, £2.25): MASTER OF FIENDS (Pan Piper, 1989, 184pp £2.25)

Known for his SF for young readers, Douglas Hill here turns to sword-and-sorcery and makes a good job of it. Young Jarral and his three friends, each with their own talent, combat first Prince Mephtik the Poisoner, who has destroyed Jarral's village, and then the ultimately evil Unnamed Enemy. Fighting Fantasy fans will lap it up as Hill's young hero overcomes his fears and learns the meaning of bravery and comradeship. (Andy Sawyer)

Tom Holt - - EXPECTING SOMEONE TALKER (Futura, 1988, 218pp, £3.99)

A small woodbird has been singing the praises of Tom Holt for a while, and now I can endorse them. Malcolm, who is rather a wimp, runs over a badger one dark night. Dying, the "badger" reveals to him that he has actually slain Ingolf, last of the king-bearers, who has guarded the Ring and Tarnhelm since the end of Wagner's Ring Cycle (which actually happened). How Malcolm takes up the burden, fighting off the menace of Wotan and Alberich as well as the temptations of Flosshilde and Ortlinde, makes a highly amusing tale in the tradition of Adams and Pratchett. (Jessica Yates)

Bernard King - - WITCH BEAST (Sphere, 1989, 278pp, £3.50)

Literally a shaggy-dog horror story which starts well but loses all traces of momentum in pursuit of an absurdly grandiose finale. The writer is aware of the clichés but fails to eschew his embarrassment at delving into such well trodden territory. (Colin Bird)

Don Lawrence/Martin Lodewijk - - THE PIRATES OF PANDARVE (Titan, 1989, £3.95)

I remember Lawrence's 'Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire' for its unusually vivid panels: this collaboration with the Dutch writer/illustrator Lodewijk has a similar feel: superb science fantasy with no concessions to probability. It continues the adventures of Storm, a cross between John Carter and Adam Strange, who after being transported millions of years to a future Earth is now kidnapped by the Theocrat of Pandarve. Arriving in free fall around the planet, Storm and girlfriend Ember are immediately separated by the arrival of a kind of space-whale... and then the action begins! A pleasure to see this kind of thing done so well. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Moorcock - - THE KING OF THE SWORDS (Grafton, 1989, 142pp, £2.99): THE BULL AND THE SPEAR (Grafton, 1989, 158pp, £2.99)

The 3rd and 4th 'Books of Corum'. Taut, spare narrative: brisk plot: deft invention: and each volume mercifully brief. If you like Moorcock's heroic fantasy, these are for you: performances that dazzle and divert, adding nothing whatever to human understanding. *telling them apart? Now that IS difficult. (Norman Beswick)

Paul Preuss - - HIDE AND SEEK (Avon, 1989, 281pp, £3.95)

Third 'Venus Prime' in which a few pages of well-devised description of Mars fail to overcome a few hundred of tedious thriller-quest. The link with Arthur C. Clarke, despite his name appearing more prominently on the cover than the author's is tenuous. It only serves to tarnish his reputation. If you can't find better than this to read you're in a bad way. (Andy Sawyer)

John Wagner/Alan Grant/Carlos Esquerra - - JUDGE DREDD 23 (Titan, 1989, £5.50)

There's always satire from the Dredd strip, but this volume is notable for one of the bleakest visions yet following the so-so 'Prankster' and excellent 'Starborn Thing' tales which make up the rest of the book. A reporter discovers that the Judges are pumping a tranquilising gas into the atmosphere to pacify the population. 'The Man Who Knew Too Much' was written partly, it seems, to stimulate reader response to a story in which JD was the villain of the piece. "The silence was deafening" according to Grant. Very interesting... (Andy Sawyer)

John Wagner & Alan Grant - - JUDGE DREDD VS THE MIDNIGHT SURFER (Titan, 1989, £2.95)

One of 2000AD's most effective satires. The youth of Mega-City One receive lessons in unemployment, the White Cliffs of Dover have been imported as a tourist attraction, the Statue of Liberty is overshadowed by the Statue of Judgement and Marlon (Chopper) Shakespeare finds fame first as number one graffiti artist and then as a skysurfer. Something of a classic, I feel! (Andy Sawyer)