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The Review of paperback SF





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ARTWORK: Colin P. Davies: Cover & Logo.
Steve Bruce: p. 3, p. 15.
Nick Waller: p. 17, p. 18, p. 19.
Kevin Cullen: p.20.
Nik Morton: p.15 (Reprinted with permission from AUGERIES 11, available from Nik at 48, Anglesey Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants PO12 2EQ U.K., price £1.20. This issue shows you what PI contributors like Nik himself, Colin Davies, and Graham Andrews get up to when they're writing fiction. There's also a very good 'first acceptance' from Andy Smith called 'The Lie-In'. End of commercial...)

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

Paperback Purgatory

Guest Editorial:

DEGENERATE SF
- THERE'S A LOT OF IT ABOUT, I'M AFRAID

by Ken Lake

Former *Paperback Inferno* editor Joseph Nicholas, internationally known as a literate and informed writer on matters sfnal and fannish alike, has on numerous occasions in recent years announced that he is no longer reading modern SF at all as it offers him nothing worth reading.

I have always believed that the field continues to offer engaging, exciting, challenging and enjoyable tales, and while I no longer read the professional magazines I do try to keep abreast of all the paperbacks, novels and collections alike. This involves scanning booklists and, from the often misleading information available, ordering some dozen paperbacks a month by mail.

I'm remarkably lucky - a fifty per cent success rate when buying blind can't be bad. But I'm driven to the typewriter by finding five new books in succession that were thrown on to my junkpile after a few chapters or less. The experience cost me over £15, not to mention postage, and I can only assume that either I'm losing my touch, or the blurbs are getting even more misleading.

Kevin J. Anderson was unknown to me. My constant backlog of reading matter left me with two of his books, *RESURRECTION, INC.* (1988) and *GAMAERTH* (1989) in hand: the books are quite dissimilar but each in its own way is crap.

In *RESURRECTION, INC.* we find an Earth where the dead are doctored into zombie life as slaves. There are - sorry about the pun - 'underground' cremators, who will ensure your body is destroyed rather than being re-used, and at one stage the protagonist, a nerd employed on resurrection operations, seeks them when he fears he is to be killed.

Yet right back there at the beginning we learn that simply by walking on the tended grass of the metropolis you can be wiped totally out of existence by the ever-waiting 'disintegrator blanket', for which no justification is given: why, then, should anyone fear the resurrectors?

Anderson sketches out an unbelievable futureworld here - one where simple bullying of staff exists alongside all-seeing, all-knowing bosses aware of their staff's shortcomings: the sole *raison d'etre* for anything in this book is the fact that Anderson wants the plot to work out thus and thus, so the patently cardboard characters have to behave in this or that way, mostly unreasonable and often inexplicable.

Give the man a second chance, then: *GAMAERTH* has a group of young, emotionally juvenile gamers with their painfully sketched hexagonal-graph-paper boardgame, acting out corny parts in the usual *Quest*.

Such is their dedication that the cheap hexagonally divided Earth they have 'created'

takes on a life of its own, their painfully imagined and incredibly boring characters achieve actuality and we are plunged into this make-believe world where everyone knows he or she is no more than a pawn of the Outsiders who control their every movement by the throw of the dice.

I suppose, cleverly done, this could have been at least as believable as Chalker's *Well of Souls*. This is so ham-fisted it cries out to the reader to shout 'what crap!' and chuck it across the room. Put Kevin J. Anderson on the no-no list; let's try Michael Armstrong.

AFTER THE ZAP (1987) has one of those embossed covers - an airship (oops, a blimp they call it, being Americans), a group of unpleasant looking characters shooting each other, houses in flames - that would have warned me to ignore it had I not bought it by mail from a blurb that sketched out a post-holocaust world in which *The Zap*, an aerial nuclear blast, has scrambled the minds of the protagonists.

At least this one has pretensions to technically adequate pulp space-operatic style. It's just that once again I found myself unable to believe in any of the characters. Most of them have lost their pre-Zap memories, so our hero, a rare 'reader', goes around 'naming' them by reading out the inscriptions on credit cards they have treasured since they found them in their wallets. Thus he 'creates' Bron by reading aloud the Brontosaurus Oil Company Credit Card, Lucy from an Electrolux Vacuum Company business card (the blimp's captain snorts 'Electrolux. Well, I thought you'd be a Visa or something like that.'). and reads aloud from *MOBY DICK* - whereupon the heroine refers to Herman Melville as the author although he hasn't identified him and she can't read.

I had already lost all belief in this one before I discovered that these 'Nukers' travel around the world finding atomic bombs and tinkering with them, setting them so that in order to trigger them the locals must tear the heart out of a young girl into which their doctor has set the controls that allow them to be exploded. Swallow that, you'll swallow anything I guess.

That's till you come to 'The Dear Doctor' and the latest product of his wife's imagination. Janet Asimov (who formerly wrote as J.O. Jeppson, her maiden name) has given us *MIND TRANSFER* (1988), as mind-numbing a book as you can imagine.

This one has a robot endowed surgically with the memories of his creator and, as far as I can make out, telepathic contact with the unborn son of that same man. We are in a futureworld where scientists ('bioeffers' - biological fundamentalists) clone themselves but regard 'artificial intelligence' (Asimov's beloved robots) as 'an abomination!' to quote the novel's opening line. We get lots of internalised thinking boringly set out in unimaginative prose, interspersed with Asimovian bursts of illogic; the front-cover blurb tells us that 'Humans have never been perfect...' and on the evidence of this book that's very true.

I still don't believe the auctorial name Ravan Christchild, despite the fact that *THE AGONIES OF TIME* (1989) is copyrighted in his name and the back cover bears what purports to be his portrait and bionotes. This balding, sneering writer was, we're told, born in Minneapolis in 1938 of German and Swedish descent, has a first-class philosophy degree from UCLA; after the traditional late-sixties 'hippy' experiences he came to Britain to escape the attentions of the US Justice Department (it says) and now works in Milton Keynes.

Heaven help Britain! What we are given in 111 pages (with plenteous plain or decorated pages to help bulk it out) is three short pieces, previously published in 1977 in *Vortex SF Magazine*, which gave fascism a good name,

if that's possible.

Switching vertiginously from one imagined universe to another, we have thrown at us a range of unexplained characters that include a randy but past-it Premier Gladstone, an ex-lesbian Countess of Warwick, and a host of other part-historical personalities along with nuclear-powered airships, Palestinian Commandoes, Constantinople, 'the new wireless', and mind-numbing snappy pages of meaningless chitchat quite inappropriate to the pseudopersonalities sketched out by the author, who incidentally tells us that some of the characters were invented by 'my friend Dr Jocelyn Almond' while he has franchised others to her in turn. We get crude sexual encounters - about as convincing as the tale of JFK's father wanking his companion while eating in a top restaurant with his other hand, but tackier.

We get absolutely no logical or rational connection between the brief slabs of described events, flickering from one possible Universe to another. We get part of Bosch's famous triptych as a cover illo, and we get terminal nausea within ten pages.

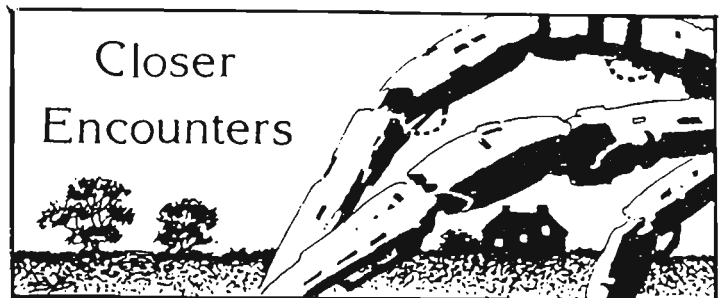
Don't ask me what persuaded me to waste time on this solid proof that modern SF really is as bad as Joseph Nicholas claims. Just mark your card to ensure you don't make the same mistake - please!

Kevin J. Anderson - - - - - RESURRECTION, INC.
(Signet, 1988, 304pp, \$3.50)
- - - - - GAMAERTH
(Signet, 1989, 335pp, \$3.95)

Michael Armstrong - - - - - AFTER THE ZAP
(Popular Library, 1987, 246pp, \$2.95)

Janet Asimov - - - - - MIND TRANSFER
(Ace, 1989, 296pp, \$3.95)

Ravan Christchild - - - - - THE AGONIES OF TIME
(Dunscaith Publishing, 1989, 111pp, £3.50)



Sandy Irvine & Alec Ponton - A GREEN MANIFESTO
(Macdonald Optima, 1988, 178pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

A recent survey suggests that at least 45% of voters would at least 'seriously consider' voting Green in a future election. The same survey also revealed widespread ignorance and confusion about what Green policies actually are. This book should help; being a clear and concise series of statements setting out the underlying Green philosophy on energy, transport, employment, education, etc. etc., and showing how this underlying philosophy

might be worked out in practical everyday life. It should give any reader a good idea of what Green politics is all about (that it's about far more than conventional Parliamentary politics, for a start).

But what (I hear you ask) has all this to do with science fiction? Try asking (or even answering) a few of the following questions: Is SF built on the same Myth of Progress as the infinite-growth 'industrial' economy? Does programmed playing with imagined strategies for 'encountering the new' make it easier to deal with the 'real' new when it faces us in everyday life (as it increasingly does)? Why is it easier to recognise and more fun to solve problems in subcreated worlds than in 'the real world'; and anyway how do we define/delimit/perceive what is 'really there'? Why do we need to 'escape into fantasy'? Can we change the world? How? Why? Should we change the world?

A GREEN MANIFESTO is not a novel, but it is a window into a very different future. Would you like to live there? Should you be working for or against those people who are trying to make sure that you will end up living there? Read and find out...

Lucius Shepard - - - - - LIFE DURING WARTIME
(Paladin, 1989, 383pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

LIFE DURING WARTIME is, like many Van Vogt novels, a 'fix-up' of shorter stories, the central plot that of two underdogs, Mingolla and Deborah, discovering and confronting a conspiracy, involving two warring families, spanning centuries. It utilises a variety of pulp icons best associated with Dick and Van Vogt to explore dualities between science and magic in Shepard's references to irrational reliance on luck and the reason (within the story's internal framework) for it, in the zombification of individuals due to drugs, psychic tampering, manipulation and brain-washing, to the exploration of the dichotomy between appearance and truth, freedom and destiny.

However, these themes are subservient to a much deeper concern - what it is to be human - and the novel's backdrop of war, like some grotesque vision of the Vietnamese War (itself a travesty), richly augments its exploration. There is one particularly powerful scene on pages 116-117 in which Mingolla plays around with the minds of everyone in a hotel bar, like a frustrated puppeteer resentful of the way his own strings are being pulled. Shepard succinctly shows the dehumanisation process of both victim and manipulator.

It is a flawed work, the jumps in narrative between each of the five sections breaks the novel's rhythm and Mingolla's developments from a blindly superstitious soldier into an angry, cynical, but ultimately caring avenger consequently takes erratic leaps. The complex web between science and magic, and freedom and destiny is sometimes awkwardly handled, as if Shepard himself, rather than Mingolla, is still confused by them, but this is to be expected in a work of this nature.

Despite its pulp elements and its flaws, LIFE DURING WARTIME is a compassionate and compelling novel which reverberates in the heart like an unpleasant truth.

Paul Park - - - - - SOLDIERS OF PARADISE
(Grafton, 1989, 365pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

A world of suffering and oppression that has been given by God to the Starbridge families

to rule over, a rule that is however constrained by the perverse dictates of the self-mutilating priests of Angkhd. This is the marvelously realised setting for Paul Park's tremendous first novel. The social order is disintegrating as the Paradise planet that wanders through the solar system comes near, bringing the sugar rain and transforming the world's ecology. The authoritarian rule of the Starbridges is breaking down. War and rebellion, heresy and persecution, poverty and despair provide the background for the strange odyssey of Doctor Thanakar Starbridge as he tries to behave decently, to preserve some integrity in a society that is falling apart. He attempts to save his friend and cousin Prince Abu Starbridge from himself, to bring his parents back from the death that they have been condemned to by the priests, to challenge the laws of the Church...

Thanakar's story is also involved with the fate of the antinomials, a community of persecuted free men and women, primitive individualists who reject all constraint, even to the extent of having no names. Park successfully juxtaposes these two extremes of freedom and authority.

The power of Park's imagination is more than sustained by the quality of his writing. In one incident, Chrism Demiurge, the bishop's powerful secretary, suspects that something is amiss: he

limped up the stairs one night when they were half asleep. Devils and angels cavorted in his clothes, peeping with long-nosed faces out of his sleeves, hanging by their tails from his chain of office, playing hide and seek in his hair. They bounded past him up the spiral stairs, full of play... Lamps burned bright here. And every angle of the corridor, every discoloration of the marble floor was known to him, illuminated by the lamp of memory for his blind eyes... But there was something unfamiliar now, an unfamiliar smell in this sacred place, something that made him pause, something that had brought him fumbling up the stairs from his own room, something. He smelled a faint, lingering smell of sin.

Both the variety of Park's characters and the stage on which they act out their parts are remarkable achievements.

Without a doubt this is the best novel that I have read so far this year and I shall be very surprised if I come across one better. I cannot recommend it too highly. A triumph!

Brian Aldiss - - - - - MAN IN HIS TIME
(VGSF, 1989, 328pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

The 22 stories in this collection range from the 66-page 'The Saliva Tree' to the six-page 'Poor Little Warrior!' and in composition from 1955 to 1986; they are stories he regards as specifically science fictional, having hived off his 'fantasy' output for a parallel collection.

That's why one of my favourites, 'Old Hundredth', is missing - but so are many others, and I shan't be parting with my Aldiss paperback collection for a long time yet.

There's probably something in here for everyone, though I have been surprised to discover how much a 'Little Englander' Brian is in his outlook. Of course a British writer should not seek to bury his identity on pseudo-American styles, ideologies or contents, but Brian's Oxford background and his political attitudes seem to stand out more here than I had recalled from decades of

enjoying his writing.

Perhaps the tone is set by 'My Country 'Tis Not Only Of Thee', a very bitter anti-American tract formerly published as 'Vietnam Encore'; this one will probably reinforce some readers' own xenophobic political stance, but I fear it will antagonise many more, a pity when one considers the importance of Aldiss' contribution to the genre, his professionalism and his infinitely varied imaginative powers.

Doris Lessing declares this collection 'Un-putdownable'; in his new introduction Brian himself quotes a somewhat obscure but favourable judgment by Scott Bradfield in *TLS*, while Books says they 'succeed in bringing out the real, human meaning in all the situations they describe.' My own way of coming to terms with Brian's approach is to describe these stories not as merely fiction, not just SF, and certainly nothing like most SF shorts - they are 'think pieces'. Each one leaves you with a taste in your mouth - often a thoroughly unpleasant one. You get the feeling you'd like to settle down with Brian, as I have done, in some quiet University bar and simply argue your way through his premises, his conclusions and the whole damn night.

The last time I tried it, a dozen other fans, including some writers, kept horning in. Brian's that sort of man: he'll never be left alone in a bar, yet his writing reveals a strangely cold, almost empty soul at times, leaving the stories with a remorselessly downbeat, depressing, even negative after-taste. One thing is certain: these are works of genius, and genius is rarely comfortable.

Colin Greenland - - - - - OTHER VOICES
(Unwin Hyman, 1989, 182pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

In *OTHER VOICES* Colin Greenland takes us back to the world of *THE HOUR OF THE THIN OX*. To have read the earlier book is not essential, because this is not a direct sequel.

The story starts some time after the Eschalan war has led to the defeat and occupation of Bryland and Luscan by Eschaly. (I was puzzled by the fact that the country's name was spelt 'Escaly' in the previous book.) In the Luscan capital city of Calcionne, Princess Nette (who appeared as a minor character in *OX*) yearns to break the bonds that confine her to a life of powerless ceremonies for the Eschalan conquerors, while Serin Guilles is the relatively contented daughter of an alchemist who is seeking for the secret of immortality. One day, however, Serin witnesses the murder of an Eschalan noble, and becomes a fugitive amongst the montanos, who lead lives similar to our gypsies. The book tells how the lives of the two women become entwined, and how a start is made to the bloody campaign to free Luscan from the Eschalans.

Greenland marries a literary writing style with an exciting storyline, and his descriptions of courtly intrigues and mannerly disputes make more interesting reading than those in Donaldson's *MORDANT'S NEED*, for example. Although he ends this book rather too quickly for my taste, with the story less obviously at a concluding point than at the end of *OX*, Greenland has nevertheless maintained his progress from *DAYBREAK ON A DIFFERENT MOUNTAIN*. In that book we always knew that Lupio and Dupilier's quest would end with an anti-climax, because it was obvious from the start that they were searching for their own inner selves rather than anything external to their city or themselves.

On reflection, perhaps I am perceiving the ending as a fault only because *OTHER VOICES* was over too soon for me, which is as good a recommendation as any. I look forward to Greenland's next book set in this world.

Christopher Priest - - - - - THE AFFIRMATION
(Gollancz, 1988, 213pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

'Schizophrenia - mental disease marked by disconnection between thoughts, feelings and actions.'

The OED definition gives an idea of the ground being explored. This is a book which leads the reader through a number of possible realities which, unlike harder SF, are not the realities of other planets and other places. Instead they are the other realities made in the mind of one man, the protagonist, Peter Sinclair. At first it all seems clear. Peter Sinclair is a man who has gone through a number of traumas who, as an exercise to alleviate the stresses brought on, writes a fictionalised autobiography using a fantasy world and different names. Until this point the reader is, as usual, a spectator, not truly involved with Peter's fantasy. However as the book continues the certainty felt in the beginning about what is real and what is fantasy begins to dissolve, pulling the reader into the quicksand of Peter's own mental unbalance, until it is nearly impossible to judge, to be detached, to speculate - willingly or not the reader becomes involved.

It is a masterly novel, written with control and precision as well as a subtle use of vivid imagination and perceptive use of an insight into the tricks and deceits the human mind can play on itself and other people. If you haven't read it you should, it will make you think, although it is not perhaps the best book to choose for those feeling their own insecurities and uncertainties too acutely.

Terry Pratchett - - - - - SOURCERY
(Corgi, 1989, 270pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

Surprising as it may seem, I have never read one of Terry Pratchett's books, so I came to this Discworld novel with preconceived ideas: not another fantasy series, albeit trying to be funny. But of course, I was wrong. He doesn't have to try to be funny, he just simply is! And this book can stand quite alone from the rest of the series (though I will be reading the others before long, I'm sure!). For over a month this book has been number one in the Portsmouth News listings, followed by his hardback.

The story concerns Rincewind, a hopelessly inept wizard (description used advisedly - he advised), his Luggage that walks and pouts, and an odd assortment of characters - swash-buckling voluptuous girl, wimpish Barbarian, temperamental books, and the orang-utan Librarian, among others! I found the humour refreshing, far superior to *HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE*, subtly interlaced with a fine understanding of people and their emotions, of compassion and horror. The horror comes in the guise of a young boy who takes over the Unseen University of wizards, setting free sorcery and bringing back the bad old days when wizards didn't know their place but fought to the death, taking most of the population with them, and so what?

If film options haven't been taken up on this creation yet, I would like to know why not: the material is ideal, comic, cartoon, film, what you will, it would be great; the special effects people would have a ball! I'm probably preaching to the converted, judging by the number of reprints of his earlier books: buy and enjoy.

and talking of Terry Pratchett... ➔

PI's first competition can be judged a success: entries came flooding in from as far afield as Berlin and Finland, and we really did have to draw the winners from my hat. Most of the entries were correct and most of them got the spelling of question 4 right.

However, the winners were:

P.T. ROSS
R. CARTHY
MATTHEW FREESTONE
ROD CAMERON
MARGARET HALL

and 'Cup and Sorcery' sets should be with you soon.

Congratulations to the winners, thanks to all who entered, and appreciative thanks to Cathy Schofield of Transworld for supplying the prizes and the photograph reproduced in PI 79. More thanks to Birkenhead Press for screening the photograph at short notice and for turning out to be Terry Pratchett fans.

So you want the answers? OK.

- 1) Slap-on-the-wrist time: I suppose I should have asked how many had been

published, but fortunately everyone answered that question anyway. Seven novels (THE COLOUR OF MAGIC, THE LIGHT FANTASTIC, EQUAL RITES, MORT, SOURCERY, WYRD SISTERS and PYRAMIDS) have been published. According to Critical Wave, written, but not published are ERIC and GUARDS, GUARDS, while being written is something about tortoises...

- 2) DEATH, OF COURSE.
3) Octarine
4) Great A'Tuin
5) Hot water, good dentistry, and soft lavatory paper. (LIGHT FANTASTIC, p. 37)
6) Sapient pearwood.
7) Well, not many of us are orang-utans...
7a) Good god... well, there's STRATA (disc-world, but not Discworld, as someone said); THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN, and THE CARPET PEOPLE, a children's book. And I see that another children's book, TRUCKERS, is due for publication at the end of September.

R E V I E W S

Rudy Rucker - - - - - WETWARE
(NEL, 1989, 183pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The US edition (Avon) of this book was reviewed by Graham Andrews in PI 74. Rucker is a writer I find entertaining because of his resolute insistence upon the old-fashioned virtues: sex, drugs and Higher Mathematics. In this sequel to SOFTWARE we have the intelligent robots (boppers) of the previous novel, now encamped on the moon, planning a merger of the DNA information code (wetware) and their own software to create 'meatbots' or cyberhuman intelligences. (We also make a glancing collision with 'limpware', which sounds vaguely sexual but probably isn't, and 'merge', the most revolting form of drug use since the hypodermic.)

Some of the characters from the previous novel are here, namely Sta-Hi, now a particularly ineffective detective calling himself Stahn, and Cobb Anderson, the creator of the boppers, recalled to life to help them enter the information mix of Earth. Other characters are new - although if you've read a lot of cyberpunk that may not be the best way to describe them.

Rucker is, however, more than a band-wagoner - he's partly responsible for setting the whole thing off in the first place, and his senses of pace, weirdo ideas and jargon are all first-rate. There's a lovely fusion of mathematical theory and hippie comicalness in Cobb's memories of heaven. I'm only glad I read enough of an article on fractals in *New Scientist* to almost make sense of it all... If your vital senses ('wonder' and 'humour') are in working order then this is one to look for.

Norman Spinrad - - - - - THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE
(Grafton, 1989, 316pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

This novel, Spinrad's second, allegedly grew out of a projected submission for DANGEROUS

VISIONS. As a novel it is one of the most violent, bloodthirsty things I have ever read. It is also well written.

Plotwise it concerns Bart Fraden, a minor dictator in the asteroids, who is evicted by Earth forces. He heads out for a new planet, aiming to foster revolution and seize power. The planet he finds is Sangre, where the Brotherhood of Pain rule in extremely sadistic fashion, with cannibalism amongst the chief pleasures for the ruling elite. Fraden is sickened, and determines to 'free' the enslaved populace. Unfortunately they accept the situation as the norm and reject him. With the aid of drugs he does manage to create a berserker effect, however, and things become very bloody.

As outrageous OTT horror this works reasonably well. Spinrad is a good writer though this is far from his best; as a statement on the atrocities of the Vietnam War, it is perhaps too strong to be effective. (Though the truth may well have been far worse, fiction needs control.)

The advertising describes this as 'Science Fiction ultra-violence at its best', but I'm not sure something like this can ever be 'best', and there is the question of whether this is just exploitative pre-splatterpunk or something worthwhile. I'm not sure.

It does, however, have one of the classic silly blurbs: 'Sangre could cost him more than his life: it threatened to breakfast on his very soul...'

Fortunately the book is better than that, but be warned, you may find it bordering on the obscene.

Created by Andre Norton - - - - - TALES OF THE
WITCH WORLD
(Pan, 1989, 344pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Some time ago, the friends of Andre Norton put together an anthology called MOONSINGER'S FRIENDS (Severn House, 1986, edited by Susan Schwartz) as a tribute to her influence in the

SF field, 'Moonsinger' being her SF convention costume persona. None of the stories in that book had a Witch World setting, although some were set in Thieves' World, to which Norton has contributed. This present book is the first in a series of anthologies of stories by Norton and other writers set in the Witch World itself. Of the writers in MOONSINGER'S FRIENDS, none are actually represented here: Judith Tarr is listed in the Biographical Details, but does not have a story included in this edition. (As the editor of the anthology is uncredited, it may be her????) Of the other authors, I have read only Robert Bloch and Robert E. Vardeman before, those two making up two-thirds of the male authors in an otherwise all female book. Another author, Mercedes Lackey, had a novel, ARROWS OF THE QUEEN, unsympathetically reviewed in PI 77. The raison d'etre of MOONSINGER'S FRIENDS was the wish to acknowledge Andre Norton's contribution to SF and fantasy by being one of the first widely accepted (and known) female writers in what was initially an exclusive male preserve, and many of the contributors here admit this debt in their Afterwords which follow each story.

Norton herself supplies the first story (they're included after that in alphabetical order of writer), 'Of The Shaping Of Ulm's Heir', featuring a character from 'Gryphon's Eyrie', her collaboration with one of the other contributors, Ann Crispin. Most of the stories here follow the pattern of 'What happened next...' or 'What happened before...' after or before the events of other Witch World novels or stories, although none of the Tregarths comes on stage in any of them.

I first came across the Witch World in 1970, when the six original Ace paperbacks from the sixties were published here by Tandem, later Universal (part of W.H. Allen), and read all six in quick succession. The next Witch World book I acquired, TREY OF SWORDS, did not appear till July 1978, and I have not seen or read more of the series since. (In PI 77 Andy reviewed a new Gollancz reprint of TREY, stating that it was the eighth in the series, although the list in my copy of the original Ace release makes it the seventh.) [I was going by the Gollancz numbering of the series which reflects that given in the Nicholls ENCYCLOPEDIA - Andy.]

Unlike Marion Zimmer Bradley, whose latest Darkover books are very different from her early books also published in the sixties by Ace, Andre Norton has maintained a consistent style throughout her Witch World novels, and most of the stories included here continue that original style very closely. The two stories where writers transfer events or their own experiences of the Vietnam War to the Witch World fit into this book less successfully because of their lack of homogeneity, even though they are perhaps the best intentioned. For lovers of the Witch World, TALES OF THE WITCH WORLD is definitely 'more of the same', and will be relished for that alone. I do, however, recommend other readers to try Norton's own books before this one. Another word of caution: the Afterwords contributed by the writers are nauseatingly ingratiating - even worse than the pompous rubbish that Isaac Asimov writes between the stories of his latest autobiographical and other anthologies. Avoid reading them at all costs!

John Fairley &
Simon Welfare - -ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S CHRONICLES
OF THE STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS
(Grafton, 1989, 189pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Brian Magorrian)

Arthur C. Clarke heads this book, and he does have a degree of input in the form of a

foreword, and notes in the main body of text. Fairley and Welfare worked together in the production of the TV programmes Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World and Arthur C. Clarke's World Of Strange Powers. If you've seen many of these programmes then you'll know what to expect: a re-working and expansion of some of the themes mentioned in the earlier series. From the foreword it would seem that letters from viewers formed a base for the book. That would account for the slightly bitty nature of many sections.

Topics covered include 'Beasts That Hide From Man', and a couple of examples of archaeological mystery in 'Silence Of The Past'. These first two chapters strained my credulity, as the authors appeared to be ascribing certainty to very weak evidence. Although the remaining chapters mentioned phenomena that I'd heard of before, I still found bits of interest, such as the method of faking the Cottingley fairies.

The classification of this book as 'Occult' strikes me as a bit extreme, as does the price tag of £5.99. If you want to learn anything detailed about the topics mentioned in this book it would be better to get hold of a more detailed reference. CHRONICLES is a lightweight skim across a number of mysteries, having the same feel to it as the TV series mentioned above.

John Brosnan - - - - - THE SKY LORDS
(Gollancz, 1989, 318pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Brosnan is a film critic and journalist with previous books about James Bond and Science Fiction movies to his credit. He also penned a monthly column in Starburst and his first novel is steeped in the imagery of Science Fiction in the cinema. It would not surprise me if the book began life as a 'concept' which Brosnan hawked as he met the movie people that he was writing about. THE SKY LORDS is full of gargantuan special effects, Van Vogtian supermen and dominating hardware.

The story follows Jan Dorvin, a genetically engineered amazon and the only survivor of a raid by the mighty Sky Lord on a feminist utopia. She is taken aboard the eponymous mile-long airship and enslaved. She is befriended by the mysterious Milo who admits to being immortal and originating from Mars. What he is doing cleaning the solar cells on top of a Sky Lord is never satisfactorily explained. Since he has superhuman powers he sets about taking over the vessel and Jan duly tags along.

It's with the character of Milo that the book comes adrift but never enough to disrupt the brisk pace and invention. Milo is the real hero and Jan is used by the author as a means of disclosing the rationale of his future world. The attempt to rectify this at the book's finale is rather messy and unconvincing. Nevertheless the conception of the Sky Lords is tailor-made for this type of wide-screen story and the action-orientated plot makes this a diverting read.

M. John Harrison - - - - - THE COMMITTED MEN
(Gollancz, 1989, 223pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

It is almost twenty years since THE COMMITTED MEN first saw print but this short 'disaster' novel stands the test of time very well indeed, despite belonging to a sub-genre which has been a popular haunting-ground for sf writers both before and since. Harrison postulates a future Britain where high radiation levels have caused civilisation to collapse. The cancer-ridden remnants of

society survive in small groups and these are gradually perishing. Only one hope for the future remains - a mutant breed which can withstand the radiation. However, when mutilated children are born they are generally killed by normal humans. The book charts the journey of four people who rescue a mutant baby and undertake to deliver it to a mutant stronghold. These characters are linked by a fifth stranger who interacts briefly with each of them, and on their quest their weird adventures include meeting a band of degenerate clerks in a ruined city and a mad nun on a hovercraft.

The beginning of the novel has overt Ballard-like motifs (the destruction wrought by cars, the technological detritus of the post-civilised world, the language of entropy) which is openly acknowledged by Harrison - one of the remnants of civilisation is a photograph of JG himself! But when our four heroes band together the pace hots up and stays that way until the end of the book and the conclusion of the quest. The novel's strength lies not only in the nightmarish adventuring but also in its sympathetic rendering of the main protagonists (although the girl is never more than a cipher). They are not conventional heroes but their commitment to their cause - preserving humanity even though it may not take the form of human-kind - is uplifting. THE COMMITTED MEN does not offer platitudes, but it does offer hope.

Allen Harbinson - - - - - THE LODESTONE
(Sphere, 1989, 568pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Take a Nazi searching for a magic lodestone which will enable him to rule the world, his daughter, Ingrid and her naïf boyfriend, Jerry, who are determined to stop him, immortals, a homunculus and the kind of theories made popular by Fort and Von Daniken, and you could end up with something great like the ILLUMINATIS! trilogy, THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN or Raiders of the Lost Ark.

Unfortunately, you're more likely to end up with Harbinson's repetitive doorstopper.

All the characters' strings are clearly visible, and this is never more obvious than in the mortifyingly contrived climax when Zweig, the Nazi, who need never have proved any threat, is literally plucked onto the stage so that Jerry, in a morally confused scene, can kill him in the name of virtue.

This embarrassing book shows every sign of being rushed. On page 533, for example, two characters are muddled up, and on page 490 the author mistakenly implies that one of the characters detaches his hand. Rarely does the writing grip and scan well, and I could quote at length to illustrate the book's many inadequacies. Saying this, Harbinson could possibly write well if he just put his mind to it.

David Nighbert - - - - - TIMELAPSE
(Headline, 1989, 294pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

A first novel of some note. (Why aren't Headline publishing first British novels? Easier/cheaper/safer to import already published works? I would like to know!)

Anton Stryker has been killed by Tessarian and rebuilt by Dr Wen to become an artificially enhanced, virtually unstoppable assassin: indeed, the only vulnerable part of Stryker's anatomy is his groin! This is not the first Man-plus character in SF - and I was struck by the serendipitous similarities between Stryker and Mike Cobby's character in WORKS #3 - but he is a worthy successor. In

his search for Tessarian, his next target, Stryker joins up with Hersule the Cat, a lispng alien creature, and his sentient spaceship, Nefertiti, who has a nice line in suggestive back-chat.

The narrative is in the first person, complete with wisecracks and self-parodying wit. And it works. Details about space and time are handled convincingly; you can almost believe in their world: the space battle is graphically described. This is a sure-footed fast-paced adventure, with engaging characters and a nice ironic humorous slant. Graphic sex is briefly included, which actually leads to a fascinating time-twist; yes, even the time paradoxes seem to work. There is a sub-level of cynical philosophy, reminiscent of the Chandleresque detective school: I liked it. It is probable that Stryker could feature in a sequel, and I might welcome this; however, I would like to see Nighbert try something else, possibly more serious, to stretch himself further and in the process avoid the sequel rut. He is certainly worth keeping an eye on. Recommended.

Terry Brooks - - - - - WIZARD AT LARGE
(Orbit, 1988, 291pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This is the third 'Magic Kingdom of Landover' novel but thanks to the lengthy expository asides can be read without reference to the earlier books.

Ben Holiday, the High Lord of Landover, consents to the magician Questor Thews performing some magic on the luckless Court Scribe, Abernathy, in an attempt to return him from the body of a dog to human shape once more. Unfortunately, the spell goes awry, sending Abernathy together with Ben's precious medallion to Earth. In exchange, a mysterious bottle, complete with resident evil-spirit, ends up in Landover.

A kind of quest ensues: Ben trying to find Abernathy and the medallion. I found it too long, too wordy, in great need of serious editing; and Brooks still persists in reiterating in encapsulated form events that happened 50 pages back, possibly just in case the reader's retentive powers are lacking. I must admit that my attention did wander, because the prose was too loose, hardly gripping; admittedly, there were some tense moments, and the affection Brooks has for these characters shines through, so I suppose I must say I liked the book, particularly the gentle humour. There were few surprises, invention was limited, but I cannot condemn WIZARD outright: it is a light, passably enjoyable read. But I still felt I should be reading something more worthwhile.

Lynn Abbey - - - - - THE GREEN MAN
(Headline, 1989, 262pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Good fantasy is so rare that when one comes across a readable fantasy novel it is tempting to overload it with praise. So, first of all let me say that THE GREEN MAN, the second volume in the Unicorn And Dragon series, is not the sort of book that is likely to win every SF and fantasy award going. What it is, however, is a Good Read, whose author creates a convincing eleventh-century background to her story, and avoids the stereotypes of the fantasy genre. The novel continues the story of the Saxon Lady Alison Hafwynder, who has been trained in the ancient magic of the Cymry, and her foster-sister Wildecant. It is the eve of the Norman Conquest and the old gods of the Cymry aim to use Alison and her would-be husband Stephen, a Norman, to prevent the Saxon defeat. Wildecant, meanwhile, is

attracted to the sorcerer Ambrose, seeking magic of her own.

THE GREEN MAN can be read as a complete novel in its own right - although the loose ends of the Wildecant-Ambrose sub-plot will no doubt be taken up in the next volume of the series. An enjoyable book for fans of historical fantasy.

James P. Hogan - - - - - INHERIT THE STARS
(Grafton, 1989, 239pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Steven J. Blyth)

A 50000 year old body is discovered on the lunar surface. Remnants of an ancient civilisation are then unearthed and, to top it all, a huge starship is found deep within the ice on one of Jupiter's moons. This mysterious craft is over twenty-five million years old and belonged to a race of giants. A team of physicists, biologists, metallurgists, and all the other ists imaginable are assigned to the task of investigating these bizarre findings. Tests are done, theories are expounded, and conclusions are drawn.

The initial idea behind this novel is an intriguing one which poses many interesting questions. However, the tale soon turns into a mediocre hard SF yarn complete with gimmicky high-tech trimmings. The few attempts at characterisation drown in a sea of test tubes and the prose is like that of an encyclopedia rather than a work of fiction. An overdose of molecules and microscopes ruins an ingenious concept which has a great deal of potential.

Overall, I found INHERIT THE STARS disappointing. The first quarter of the book held my attention, but before too long the dull ramblings of the stereotypical scientists in their stuffy laboratories became tiresome, and I lost all interest in discovering the origins of the enigmatic body from the moon.

A keen hard SF fan may enjoy INHERIT THE STARS, but anyone else would probably find themselves nodding off to sleep at around chapter four. Still, this is the first volume of a trilogy and perhaps the next book will compensate by providing some of the elements that were so sadly lacking in volume one.

Sheri S. Tepper - - - - - THE AWAKENERS
(Corgi, 1989, 312pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

A Stunning Epic it says on the cover, and epic this is. Stunning? Perhaps. This is a fantasy novel, of the type set on a colony world fallen to barbarism. The humans live on Northshore of the World River. They are kept in thrall by the religion of the Awakeners. This has obvious parallels with Ian Watson's THE BOOK OF THE RIVER, but parallels are hard to avoid in the Fantasy writing world these days, with so many different scenarios being used to set so many different novels.

But just what is it about? Well, the people live in towns dominated by a Tower in which the Awakeners live. If they are good, when they die, they are Sorted Out and are transported directly to the arms of Potipur. If not, then the Awakeners dose the corpse with Tears of Viranel, which re-animate the body and allow it to be used as a worker. When it has been worked to destruction, it is thrown in the pit for the Servants of Abricor (humanoid flying natives) to eat. Pamra Don, an Awakener, realises that all is not as it seems, renounces her life and sets out to change things with the aid of Thrasne, a Boatman.

The novel is well structured and gripping, spoilt mainly by the slow central section where most of the essential politics are explained, but redeemed by the fact that the end is indeed the end. (I hate cliffhangers!)

Jane Yolen - - - - - SISTER LIGHT, SISTER DARK
(Futura, 1988, 244pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

SISTER LIGHT, SISTER DARK tells the story of Jenna, brought up as a warrior by the followers of the goddess Alta, whose ritual enable them to summon their enigmatic Dark sisters to share their lives. Certain events in Jenna's early life seem to indicate that she is the Anna, the avatar of the goddess, whose coming is foretold in prophecy, and who is destined both to destroy and begin the world anew. Jenna decides that she is the 'white babe' of the prophecy, pointing out that she is an ordinary girl who had an ordinary childhood, but a priestess of Alta tells her: 'What do you think the Anna should have? . . . Thunder and lightning at her birth? An animal in the woods to nurse her? . . . Do not worry . . . there will be poets and storytellers who will gift you such a birth'. And interwoven with Jenna's story are 'excerpts' from Altite myth and song, legends in which Jenna's story has become distorted, and the writings of historians and archaeologists looking back on the Altite era and often misinterpreting their finds.

These 'excerpts' add an extra dimension to what is an enjoyable and original fantasy. If I have any complaints about this book it is that it is very definitely the first in a series and ends frustratingly in mid-tale. I admit that I am hooked, I enjoyed SISTER LIGHT, SISTER DARK and I do want to know the rest of Jenna's story - but I hope it reaches a satisfactory conclusion in a reasonable number of volumes.

Kim Stanley Robinson - - - - - THE GOLD COAST
(Orbit, 1988, 389pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

If, as many Californians believe, as goes Orange County today so goes the world tomorrow then in a few years time we will be gliding down automatic freeways - automatic to squeeze in more cars and because we are smashed out of our skulls on designer drugs - with the overweening military-industrial complex the only residue of a productive economy. And we'll be rich.

Of course, even into this paradise a worm must crawl - call it boredom if you like. Jim MacPherson is terminally bored. Like almost all in his circle he might best be described as a drone, a couple of part-time make work jobs and sponging off Dad, who happens to be a high up in that military-industrial complex, designing the smart missile which will put an end to war. For whatever reason - Jim doesn't know, so why should we? - our hero gets involved in increasingly serious terrorism as a result of which wheels within wheels are revealed. Of course his 'search' coincides with that of his father and eventually his whole group is turned inside out.

Life, in the meantime, goes on.

I have been highly impressed by Kim Stanley Robinson's work, when it exists outside California. Once he sets his story there, however, something goes wrong. THE WILD SHORE, for instance, is a remarkably well written book populated by finely drawn characters - very much like THE GOLD COAST - but lacks much by way of plot and involvement, certainly by comparison with, say, A MEMORY OF WHITENESS. Somehow THE GOLD COAST - despite having everything a good novel ought to have - adds up to less than the sum of its parts, probably because I was not made to feel any sort of commitment to any of the rootless, desperate characters.

Ah well, even marked down as a failure THE GOLD COAST is a more engrossing read than many 'successes'. If only . . .

K.W. Jeter - - MORLOCK NIGHT (Grafton, 1989,
190pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

Let's get this straight. Cyberpunk, Splatterpunk, Steampunk... Jeter rejects all these train-spotter characterisations, out of hand and in public: right? The fact that all three can be applied variously to different examples of his oeuvre is merely an embarrassment. And comparisons with Philip K. Dick are not welcome!

Which is a shame, because this novel is somewhat Dickian in tone, and a classic work of Steampunk pastiche. Remember THE TIME MACHINE? Well, what did its creator do after he returned to tell his story to an audience in Victorian London? Did he, perchance, return to the future - there to fall victim to the Morlocks, along with his infernal device? Jeter grabs the ball and runs, neatly scoring into the goal of suspended disbelief with one of the most bizarre pseudo-wellsian plots since THE SPACE MACHINE. His authorial voice is compelling, his litany of grotesques is evocative of the most gothic excesses of the Slaylock-Powers axis, and its only the hurried, truncated ending that suddenly brings the reader to their senses, boggling at the very tall story that they've just swallowed hook, line and sinker.

Recommended, especially for the post-wellsian iconoclasts among you!

Tom Deitz - - THE GRYPHON KING (Avon, 1989,
406pp, \$3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

While not a sequel to WINDMASTER'S BANE and FIRESHAPER'S DOOM, this, like them, features the invasion of the world of the Sidhe into the American South. It's good that Deitz tries to avoid building his initial success into an interminable series (although there are indirect links): however THE GRYPHON KING is disappointing. There is little focus on Deitz's hitherto most effective element, his fusion of Celtic myth and American legend, and there's altogether far too much faffing around pretending to be medieval. Eventually the story collapses into a standard fantasy motif with an evil spirit feeding on the desires of the villain (the hero's half-brother).

What we're left with is a mixture of the novel about fantasy enthusiasts finding that their obsession is real and the novel about a bunch of wacky college kids doing whatever it is that wacky college kids do. Deitz's habit of referring to his characters by their full names is merely irritating (though Americans do tend to have silly middle names): the immaturity of these characters is perhaps a reflection of American college students. Despite the '80s references (REM, sex, etc.) this is a straight '50s teen exploitation job. I wanted the wolfman but didn't get it.

Isaac Asimov - - FAR AS HUMAN EYE COULD SEE
(Grafton, 1989, 267pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

The 17 essays in this volume are reprints from Fantasy & Science Fiction November 1954 - March 1986. The ground covered, as you'd expect from such an erudite and prolific writer, is quite large: Physical Chemistry, encompassing the discovery of elements, batteries, electric currents and solar power; Biochemistry, including the discovery of vitamins, trace elements, proteins, and enzymes; the Geochemistry section is thin on the ground (pun intended) featuring only one essay, discussing the contents of the centre of the earth, with an interesting aside on

the fictional literature concerning that theme; Astronomy, concerning sidereal time, the discovery of the space/void, black holes and the planets. This is Asimov's 23rd book of essays and while they tend to talk down to the audience - he seems to be repeatedly addressing adolescents - they are informative and the historical facts inserted can be fascinating. Inevitably, he talks too much about his own achievements (admittedly considerable) plugging earlier books quite regularly and doubtless embarrassing his family by referring to them in over-effusive glowing terms. He is at great pains to reassure us that it is all an act. Unfortunately, if you say something often enough, sometimes people tend to believe you. Educational, but with egotistical overtones. Not very well written, either. But you knew all that, didn't you?

Raymond Harris - - SHADOWS OF THE WHITE SUN
(Headline, 1989, 230pp,
£2.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

SHADOWS OF THE WHITE SUN is set in a far future: following the overthrow of the artificial intelligence, Megmat, the colonised Solar System becomes fractured. Ethri (Earth) is a cold planet populated by savages and the self vaunted *creme de la creme* of civilisation resides in the ten Hypaethra, vast orbiting constructs. The book's narrator is Risha, a courtly lady on the Hypaethron Gheo: she becomes infatuated with Seren, a warrior who kills his political rival Rhamant, the Spear of Gheo. Risha is sent to find and execute him on Veii, the second planet, which is harsh and dry; it has a day lasting months, with a pre-industrial society, superstitious, poor, prone to disease and starvation. Risha "goes native", and becomes involved in Veii politics subject to the manipulation of the Firin, eerie guardians of the planet, artificial beings created by Megmat.

Primarily, SHADOWS OF THE WHITE SUN is a traditional SF tale, a good read and not too demanding. Having said that, there are some interesting points of discussion. Harris's adoption of a female first person narrator seems unusual for a man; the issue of male/female roles is clearly one he's interested in. In the Hypaethra, women seem to be either decorative or maternal. On Veii, the long night, engendering unrest and rebellion requires the strong rule of a man; the day, when people are less prone to the dark spirits, calls for the gentler hand of a woman ruler. Risha ultimately rejects the insular controlled environment of Gheo in favour of Veii, but her choice is not a political one - she has friends there. So perhaps the political intrigues of the novel are more of a plot device than a serious debate.

Walter Jon Williams - - VOICE OF THE WHIRLWIND (Orbit, 1989,
278pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

Walter Jon Williams is a technician par excellence. By that, I mean that he writes some of the smoothest, most tautly-plotted SF thrillers on the market. In a decade dominated by the cool-running, chrome-plated user manuals of Gibson et al. However, there's just one problem; a niggling flavour of deja vu that seems to pervade all his novels. Despite some incredibly innovative short fiction (cf 'Dinosaurs' collected in BEST SF 2 (Dozois ed.)), his long works to date all rely on some specialised genre tropes that bear the imprint of some recognisable Higher Entity in the SFictional pantheon, which is a shame; because if Walter Jon Williams ever writes a truly original idea out to novel length he's going to be a giant in the field. VOICE OF THE WHIRLWIND is instantly rec-

ognisable as Cyberpunk: the second generation model with added zazen militaria and cloning. Steward is a beta; a clone with the duplicated memories of his alpha (a mercenary turned security consultant) who's been murdered. When his insurance company has him resurrected, he discovers that he's got a problem - his alpha never bothered to update his memory recordings, so he's missing about 15 years of experience. And then he discovers he's got an even bigger problem; the events which killed his alpha aren't going to leave him alone! Things snowball, until finally Steward is caught up in a mess of corporate intrigue with only one hair-raising way out. Now he solves these problems provides about a hundred thousand words of hardwired technoprose, with a cutting edge on it fit to slice semiotics; and the end result is a thriller set in a silicon future where the pressure's dialed to overload and there's no way out.

which just about says it all. Williams tackles the novel with gusto and talent; among the midlist competitors this is a man to watch. VOICE OF THE WHIRLWIND is a damned good read; it's just a shame that it isn't more, well, original.

Megan Lindholm - - THE REINDEER PEOPLE (Unwin, 1989, 266pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

THE REINDEER PEOPLE has quite a large cover price and is being marketed as "in the glorious tradition of CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR"; I presume that there are megabucks here, so I suppose it was an interesting exercise to read this rather stolid looking book to find out why this should be so.

In fact, REINDEER PEOPLE is a very well written novel. Its plot is simple: Tillu, a healer, flees from a male dominated bullying tribe with her son, Kurlaw. Kurlaw, a strange backward child, has fallen under the influence of the shaman, Carp. Tillu becomes the healer of a more prosperous, comparatively liberated tribe. But Kurlaw's strangeness establishes him, as usual, as bait to the more bone-headed of the macho tribesmen, and so they stay aloof from the tribal camp. Kurlaw has supernatural powers and when Carp eventually catches up with them the child becomes the new shaman of the tribe.

The characterisation - particularly of Tillu, Kurlaw and Heckram who befriends them, is expertly done, well rounded and fascinating. Lindholm paints a remarkably believable prehistoric world, with its details of the grim realities of survival. 20th-century issues - the male/female struggle, poverty and wealth, power and submission - are skillfully shown developing in this world. This aspect of the novel I have no difficulty with. However, the 'fantasy' element I found much more difficult to contend with - it seems grafted on and unreal. With a sceptic's distrust of superstition, I found myself rejecting it. However, Lindholm clearly intends the magic to be "real" in this world. Somehow it didn't come off for me, and I found the Kurlaw/spiritual interludes almost impossible to read.

Elizabeth Mace - - UNDER SIEGE (Deutsch Adlib, 1989, 167pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Several recent novels published for teenagers take as their theme a teenage boy who has become addicted to fantasy role-play to the extent of not being able to tell fact from fiction, and preferring the fantasy game to real life: e.g. GAMEPLAYERS by Stephen Bowkett and A MAP OF NOWHERE by Gillian Cross. Elizabeth Mace has a substantial body of SF and realistic children's fiction behind her, but has re-

mained an acquired taste, achieving neither popularity among children nor the crossover enthusiasm enjoyed by Diana Wynne Jones or Robert Westall.

In UNDER SIEGE she acknowledges her debt to Philip K. Dick's story 'War Game' from THE PRESERVING MACHINE, a story which described how Earth-based games testers wonder whether board-games and war-games from alien societies are in fact Trojan horses designed to indoctrinate Earthlings and conquer our planet. It ended with the tester approving a Monopoly like game called "Syndrome" which indoctrinates its players into the pleasure of losing.

Mace, however, bases her story on a game which the testers in Dick's story rejected, the fort under siege, where the attackers and defenders appear to besomewhat alive. Morris, a 16-year old boy whose parents might get divorced, is going to spend Christmas with his mother's brother, who turns out to be a games addict with a medieval village and castle laid out in his attic.

Morris becomes obsessed with the game, and "brings to life" two of the villagers, who take him for their god-like Lord. His uncle, however, doesn't realise the game's potential, and resents signs that the model people might run their own campaign instead of following his instructions; there is some hint that the villagers would rather make peace with the castle folk than fight, but Morris's uncle and his fellow-gamer want slaughter.

This quality read for discriminating teenager probably moves too slowly for the average teenage SF reader, who will find the bits about Morris's parents tedious. It might interest seekers after literary SF, and anyone doing a thesis on the influence of P.K. Dick, or the psychology of fantasy gaming.

Adrian Cole - - MOTHER OF STORMS: STAR REQUIEM 1 (Unwin, 1989, 378pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Laurence Scotford)

Even had the title not heralded it, one would be left in no doubt on reading this book that it is destined to have at least one sequel. Adrian Cole leaves enough loose thread to make a shirt with. The sub-plot, for instance, completely fails to marry with the main story-line, even by the end of the book, at which, incidentally, the fate of the chief baddie, Zellorian, is left enticingly open-ended.

I suppose it would be unfair to criticise Mr Cole for using a "watch next week's exciting episode"-type hook to ensure that his readers remain faithful. The whole thing is, after all, quite an enjoyable romp, even if you have seen it all somewhere before: local boy meets girl from out of town (or off-world in this case) and both go off hand in hand to prevent the mutual destruction of their respective races. All this is played out in front of a space operatic background of intergalactic politics and intrigue.

There are one or two moments where the writing jars, this all too obvious exposition al device being a classic example:

Vittargatus is fully mobilised... soon he will begin the first of his troop movements."

Vymark nodded. "The details?"

"They are in the papers I have given you, and with a map."

"Tell me anyway," said Vymark.

It is also quite difficult to generate any real sympathy for the cardboard cut-out characters. Nevertheless, if you are looking for a light, well-paced read, and don't mind wading through several volumes to reach any real conclusion, then you can't go far wrong with MOTHER OF STORMS.

Roy Lewis - - - - - THE EVOLUTION MAN
(Corgi, 1989, 158pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Never a big seller, long a cult work, launched in paperback in 1960 by Brian Aldiss as the first of the Penguin SF list, originally titled WHAT WE DID TO FATHER, and now re-launched with an adulatory introduction by our own Terry Pratchett, Roy Lewis' humorous account of the passing of the pleistocene Era is still a book to remember - and to recommend to all those who still prefer their humour literate and delicate.

Biochemist Jacques Monod spotted a few technical errors in it but said they didn't matter a damn - reading the book made him laugh so much that he fell off a camel in the middle of the Sahara. At least, that's what Terry tells us; I remained solidly seated but did suffer - I suppose I mean enjoy - a constant series of small subdermal rumblings and twitches as I fell over now this, now that deliberate anachronism, this or that delightful verbal felicity.

For the whole point of the book is that our subhuman protagonists all talk like 20th-century students. When ape-man Uncle Vanya, opposed to all progress, mentions that 'it's been rather a poor season for the fruit and vegetables', Father commiserates with him: 'Looks like we may be in for an interpluvial after all. I've noticed the way dessication is spreading lately.'

And so the 'horde' develops: fire is tamed, cooking invented, exogamy introduced, all with copious scientific discussion as well as some neat sociological touches for followers of the soft sciences. Uncle Ian returns from his wanderings with news of other tribes including 'Palestine: there I found the Neanderthaloids fighting with immigrants coming from Africa.' Father wonders 'what will come of it? Hairy apes and hairless apes miscegenating in Palestine in the Pleistocene?' to which our narrator, Ernest his son, suggests 'Bearded prophets living on locusts and honey in the Holocene.'

'Don't try to be smart, Ernest', is Father's reply. 'You're not cut out for it'. But all the same Father comes to a bad end, playing the politician to the hilt but forgetting to protect his back against his own horde. I can see why it never became a best-seller: it's too clever, too assured for the average reader. Just right for BSFA members, though, I'd say: thanks are due to Corgi for resuscitating this book - also previously published as ONCE UPON AN ICE AGE and here only marginally spoiled by the appearance of the title on the front cover garbled as EVOLUTION THE MAN.

Moebius - - - - - UPON A STAR
(Titan, 1989, £5.95)

James Robinson & Paul Johnson - LONDON'S DARK
(Titan, 1989, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Jean 'Moebius' Giraud's art is simple and colourful, more 'comic-strip' than that of many other masters of the field (faces a couple of dots, a line and a curve in some panels of UPON A STAR). It aspires to spirituality, with images of apotheosis not far removed from the closing scenes of *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* gracing several of the sequences here. The title story grew from a commission from Citroen to produce a story for a sales force promotion, while 'Aedena' is, in the creator's words 'a tract, a manifesto, something like the Chinese used to do under Mao.' The last time I reviewed a Moebius 'graphic novel' I used the phrase

'Tintin on acid'. It was partly a joke, but damned if the style and parts of the story here didn't remind me of Herge, though that to me isn't necessarily a bad thing. I don't know how spiritual it makes these comic-books but it doesn't stop them from grand aspirations either.

LONDON'S DARK is comic art in a grittier, more realistic style; perhaps more verbal (there are two pages of straight textual narrative) and certainly at face value less 'cosmic'. Black-and-white art allows for murky shadows and stark contrasts in this tale of wartime London. A young ARP warden, rejected for active service because of a bad heart, falls in love with an attractive medium who discovers the dead son of one of her anguished and lonely clients has been murdered. This knowledge brings Jack and Sophie into mortal danger from a black marketeer and his psychopathic henchman. LONDON'S DARK is at once grimly haunting and touching. I have my doubts about the 1940s authenticity of some of the speech patterns and vocabulary, but the art wonderfully captures the drabness and tension of the bomb-shattered, blacked-out city and the bowed-but-not-beaten spirits of its inhabitants. Love - war - crime - the paranormal: LONDON'S DARK has all this and readability besides. If I find more in its focus upon individual pain and yearning than Moebius' transcendence, it's probably because it's easier to identify immediately with its characters than with Moebius' more obviously symbolic ones. Taken together, both show the range of the 'graphic novel'.

Philip K. Dick - - - - - THE DIVINE INVASION
(Grafton, 1989, 270pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

This is late Dick, first published 1981, and from the same experience that produced VALIS. It is explicitly theological and any summary of its plot will sound absurd; it's a measure of Philip Dick's stature as a writer that he nonetheless gives us something memorable to digest.

At the time of the Fall, Divinity was sundered; the Godhead lost touch with part of Itself. Jahweh was driven from Earth by Belial in the first century AD and has been in space planning His return. Herb Asher, travelling from the star system CY30-CY30B and enjoying his tapes of galaxy-wide singing-star Linda Fox, gets trapped into marriage with Rybys Romney, a terminally ill woman who has immaculately conceived God's Son. Landing on Earth, accompanied by Elias, they miraculously get through Earth security, but Rybys dies and in an air collision Herb is severely injured, spending the next ten years dreaming in cryonic suspension.

The divine Child is saved and called Emmanuel, but has been brain-damaged in the disaster and needs special education. His constant companion, Zina, turns out to be the female aspect of divinity, ruling an alternative world she reveals to Emmanuel. Herb Asher, struggling manically to make sense of his experiences in the middle of all this, receives the ultimate reconciling reward: he moves in with an alternative Linda Fox, fatfaced with a little acne.

Not Dick's best, but I enjoyed each preposterous moment.

George R.R. Martin - - - - - FEVRE DREAM
(Gollancz, 1989, 350pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Martin's Gothic novel of vampires and Mississippi steamboats was first published in 1983 and this is a welcome new edition. The

book has a very traditional flavour and the 19th century riverboat is an original locale for this carefully plotted battle between good and evil vampires. The combination of tense action as the mighty steamboats confront each other, and brooding horror caused by the brutal clique of bloodsuckers is unnerving but convincingly handled. This novel works because of the author's creation of believable three-dimensional vampires, the rationale behind their power struggles is inextricably bound to their origins.

The elation and horror caused by the lust for blood is portrayed as a tragic urge leading to damnation until one 'bloodmaster' finds an artificial replacement which satisfies the urge. He attempts to unify the others and halt the random slaughter of human 'cattle'. But Damon Julian, the oldest bloodmaster, prefers to continue with the old practices and takes over the steamboat 'Fevre Dream', upon which the thirsty vampires were gathering. The captain, Abner Marsh, representing the good side of humanity, joins forces with reformed vampire Julian York and together they attempt to wrest back the 'Fevre Dream' and regain control of the vampiric forces. The struggle is played out against a backdrop of riverboat life and builds to a suitably Grand Guignol finale on the decaying wreck of the eponymous steamer.

A superior novel that should appeal to people who do not read horror fiction: rousing storytelling of this calibre transcends all genre boundaries.

Robert Westall - - - - -THE CATS OF SEROSTER
(Piper, 1986, 278pp, £2.25)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is a somewhat unsatisfactory mix of fantasy and historical novel. The premise of intelligent cats and the magic from Ancient Egypt which controls the hero, Cam, forcing him to become a war leader are acceptable, except that the location in time and place seem too concrete - medieval France had neither of these things. The mixture was strangely dissatisfying, as was, ultimately, the novel.

Cam is caught by magic to become the 'Seroster' - a war leader who, with the aid of the Miw (the intelligent cats) ousts a tyrant and restores the rightful Duke and law and order to the city. The story is fast paced and exciting enough unless one gives it more than passing attention. There are some good ideas and Cam is more interesting than a gung-ho hero because his doubts and his dislike of the magic make an interesting conflict, but his possibilities are never fully explored. This is the basic problem with the book, it is too shallow, but having said that it is quite readable and fine if you want something light.

Michael Swanwick - - - - -VACUUM FLOWERS
(Legend, 1989, 335pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

I have not read much cyberpunk, and approached VACUUM FLOWERS as something of a novice, a little wary of such post-computer age jargon as 'wet ware'. However, I found this novel about the adventures of a programmed personality coming to terms with its host body while looking for a way home gripping and readable. It is a good SF novel which is rather more than a vehicle for the bandying of sub-genre ideas.

Rebel Elizabeth Mudlark wakes up in a new body; we shortly discover that she is a created persona, being tested out for a large money-making concern which peddles artificial personalities to those bored with the

mundanities of 'real life'. Naturally enough, she's not too keen on being exploited by an Interplanetary Conglomerate and escapes. She falls in with Wyeth, who dedicates his life to the overthrow of the Comprise, otherwise known as Earth. Earth has become a gigantic gestalt mind, and Wyeth opposes its exploitation and submission of the individual.

We are presented with an interesting discourse on the nature of 'self'. Rebel is an artificial person with an apparently temporary existence; she shares her body with Eucrasia, the original occupant, who seems set to regain full control. Wyeth has four personalities, based on the Aboriginal grouping of the leader, the clown, the mystic, and the warrior. For Rebel and Wyeth, 'self' is a question of individuals who share a body; for the Comprise, it's a matter of an individual with many bodies. The disparate philosophies share an instinct for survival. Rebel has been created with 'integrity', which prevents her personality from dissolving; the Comprise needs the secret of her integrity in order to retain its identity when it leaves the Earth to reach for the stars. Humanity and the Earth are symbolised by the vacuum flowers, which are almost impossible to exterminate, and represent survival against all the odds.

Michael McCollum - - - - -ANTARES DAWN
(Grafton, 1989, 333pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

The tardy UK publication of Mike's 1986 novel led me back to our ongoing correspondence. Mike dislikes trilogies but finds he tends to create stories too long to fit into a saleable paperback; ANTARES PASSAGE is the sequel to this, and just as enjoyable as the present work. However, that didn't actually bring the plot to an end either, so there's an outside chance he's going to be forced into a trilogy at last (working title ANTARES VICTORY - you can say you read it here first).

Travel between solar systems is made possible because of Foldspace - warps, to you, I suppose - which mean a spaceship can travel from A to B and C, but to reach D must pass through E and F - and some places, which appear close in astronomical terms, are inaccessible to mankind.

However, mankind isn't alone in the Universe, and when Antares goes supernova the Foldspace system is thrown into confusion, planetary settlements are isolated and the aliens get a chance to muscle in.

Unlike Mike's earlier books, this one is slow to get started. There's a lot of scene-setting, establishing characters and their relative importance, as well as a superb solution by the author of the question 'how do you describe the indescribable, the sight of a supernova from right close up?'

Although it forms but a small part of the story, I would like to offer you, for leisurely consideration, an ethical question which I have argued with Mike without either of us convincing the other. With a newly commissioned ship containing both military and civilian (scientist) staff aboard, the Captain makes his first ceremonial entrance; to the cry 'Ten hut!' the soldiers stand up, as do a few of the mostly confused civilians. Immediately, the Captain orders menial tasks as a punishment for all those who did not rise at once.

I maintain that this merely indicates he is a hidebound martinet, that he runs the risk of setting the scientists emotionally against him and that nobody should ever be punished (not to mention over-punished) for ignorance. Mike believes that since the spaceship was in effect a 'military dictatorship', the Captain had to react thus, immediately, or lose face and control of the people on board.

Be that as it may, what you have here is an excellently crafted story of interstellar adventure, with a carefully created and described scientific environment and the usual level of somewhat mawkish interpersonal relationships typical of the genre. I thoroughly enjoyed it: I hope you do too.

David S. Garnett (ed.) - - - - -ZENITH
(Sphere, 1989, 298pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

ZENITH contains twelve original short stories. Some are hard SF, some are soft; some, even, are close to (science) fantasy. Whatever they are, they make up one of the best collections I've read.

The only disagreement I have with David Garnett about the contents of this volume is his description of it as 'stories for the next millenium'. They are good, and nothing reminds me of earlier stories (except Christopher Evans, of course, who has supplied a new story in his new series), but in some ways the atmosphere is not millenial. 'Feminopolis' by Elizabeth Sourbut, for instance, is very much a story that one would associate with Frederik Pohl. Pohl didn't write it, but it belongs to the same thought-world, the same line of tradition of socially aware SF. Similarly, 'Death Ship' by Barrington J. Bayley is an examination of time-travel, brilliantly done, yet belonging to the line of descent that begins with Wells. David Garnett also makes this more obvious by juxtaposing 'Death Ship' with Colin Greenland's 'The Traveller' which is also about time travel. Greenland and Bayley tell their tales in very different ways, and this helps to show them off. (In fact, one of the notable things about this volume is the great number of different styles and voices the authors have chosen.)

Talk of lines of descent and thought-worlds may seem a distracting line of criticism but apart from being true, it is also useful to me as a critic because I do not want to disclose the contents of these stories too much. I want you potential readers to enjoy them fresh and without knowing what is going to happen before you read them.

Events may have already taken over these stories, and who will believe that Christopher Evans did not intend to write an allegory of events in the first part of June 1989 in China in 'The Bridge'? And they will ask what inspired 'Gardenias' by Ian McDonald.

Guy Gavriel Kay - - - - -THE DARKEST ROAD
(Unwin, 1988, 420pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

How different are the expectations today of readers who embark on a new fantasy trilogy, from those of Tolkien's first readers in 1954-55, or those who have tackled THE LORD OF THE RINGS since, without the experience of the 1980s glut on the market! There may, out there, be indiscriminating collectors who buy everything they see in W.H. Smith, but I have neither the money, time or shelf-space for that, so I am extremely wary of adding a new trilogy to my collection.

But I will keep THE FIONAVAR TAPESTRY, whose echoes of Tolkien, at first irritating, have become more pleasant as Guy Kay reaches the climax of his epic. In THE DARKEST ROAD the four Canadian students remaining after Kevin Laine's death each play a crucial part in the defeat of Rakoth Maugrim, the trilogy's Dark Lord.

The map is essential, as THE DARKEST ROAD in Tolkien fashion deploys heroes, villains and various armies moving hither and yon, eventually converging on Rakoth's fortress in the North for the ultimate battle. And if you

think that's slightly different from Tolkien, whose Mordor lay in the south-east (roughly in the Balkans), alas, in THE SILMARILLION, Morgoth's fortress was in the North!

Other clear parallels: Rakoth came from outside time and the walls of Night, where Morgoth was imprisoned. The journey of his son Darien to Rakoth's father is like Frodo's to Mordor. The climax consists of an all-out battle where Evil forces outnumber Good, while simultaneously Morgoth and Darien engage in a personal conflict of wills. The peopling of Fionavar resembles that of Middle-earth (and most fantasy war-gaming setups) being organised by race/species, with dwarves, elves, men etc. each with their own customs and fate after death. And because Fionavar is said to be the first of all worlds, Guy Kay licenses himself to plunder Celtic mythology, the cult of the Mother Goddess and the Arthurian legend. You don't mind this when he re-uses the names of minor Celtic beings without conflicting associations, but I quibble over Diarmid, Mabon, Gereint and Aileron, while Maugrim was the name of the chief wolf in THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE!

As the book moves towards its series of climaxes, Kay's portentous doomy phrasing, so tedious in the first two books, hits the mark more often, though some pruning could have made the climaxes more effective. He has cut down on the transatlantic slang, which is good, but he is still self-indulgent about grammar, employing for formal effect, sentences without main clauses, without verbs, and broken up into ungrammatical units.

There are actually a few original elements in the trilogy once you've got past Tolkien, Joy Chant's nomads, and King Arthur. There is Sharra, and there is the Dwarf-moot, and the concept of the Giants. I am left with two puzzles: was Sharra pregnant? And will Jennifer, Arthur and Lancelot continue their immortal existence as a menage a trois or a celibate trio?

Frederik Pohl - THE COMING OF THE QUANTUM CATS
(VGSF, 1989, 243pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

Having read THE COMING OF THE QUANTUM CATS when it was first published back in 1987 (Gollancz), I found that upon re-reading it I was yet again amazed by Pohl's use of his creative imagination in his story telling.

I was particularly impressed with Pohl's ability to handle what I regard as a rather complex plot, that of the (well worn) theme of alternate history. Rather like Richard C. Meredith's TIMELINER trilogy.

As with most Pohl's SF works - GATEWAY, BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT HORIZON, HEECHEE RENDEZVOUS, among others - I found myself very amused with the way the main characters were often put into various sticky situations and left to fend for themselves. You could almost call THE COMING OF THE QUANTUM CATS an SF comedy, it's that hilarious in places.

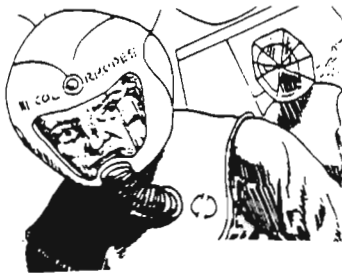
The story basically deals with several slightly different Time-Lines, out of an infinity of them (each with a Dominic DeSota in it), that are trying to develop the Paratime Portal. As the story progresses, we find that because of the over-use of the Portals, the very fabric of Space/Time itself is being distorted. This is what is known as 'Ballistic Recoil', and is causing various pieces of each Time-Line to enter into each other, with disastrous consequences!

Just imagine:

A combo driver, hunched high in the cab of his big John Deere, drove slowly down the rows of early beans, thinking of nothing more serious than a cold beer and the sox game he was

missing on TV, when he heard from behind him the zap-zap-zap of high-speed cars passing and the rrrrawrrrawr of sixteen-wheel semis. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a huge diesel bearing down on him. Frantically he wrenched the wheel of the combo. He spoiled a dozen rows, but when he looked back there was nothing there . . .

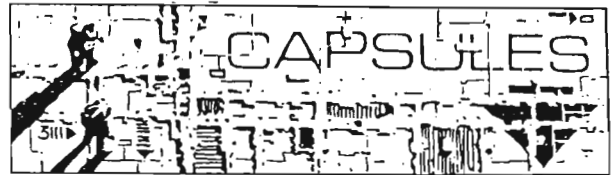
Whilst all this is going on, another group of Time-Line Worlds, more technologically advanced, are increasingly concerned with the destructive effects of the Ballistic Recoil phenomenon, so they conspire together to stop the use of the Portals. In doing so, they gather together all the various people involved and transport them to another, totally desolate, world, where they are told that they cannot go home but must stay where they are for the rest of their lives . . . but enough said. I won't spoil the plot for anyone who hasn't read it yet . . . So, all in all, this is Pohl at his best, and I seriously recommend to those who haven't read it yet, to do so - you're in for a treat.



Joanna Russ - - - - - THE HIDDEN SIDE OF THE MOON
(Women's Press, 1989, 229pp, £4.95)

Reviewed by Edward James

This is a collection of 26 of Russ's short stories, published over a period of 30 years (the back cover says 25 years, but "Nor Custom Stale" is there -- her very first sale, to *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* back in 1959). It is the sixth Russ book that Women's Press have published, for which they deserve every congratulations; Russ is undoubtedly one of the most important writers in the sf field during the last couple of decades. This collection well illustrates the extraordinary range of her writing, from the uproariously (and biting) funny "The Clichés from Outer Space" through the chilling (and beautifully titled) "I had Vacantly Crumpled It into My Pocket... But By God, Eliot, It Was a Photograph from Life!" and rewritings of the lives of Oscar Wilde, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf to the rather fey and sentimental "How Dorothy Kept Away the Spring". There's even some straight traditional sf here, but not much, and even then tinged with Russ's own delight in experimentation. My own favourite story in the book, "The Little Dirty Girl", is quite indefinable in terms of adjective-pairs: it teeters teasingly between apparently autobiographical description, a ghost story, an account of schizophrenic behaviour and post-modernist narrative play. The huge range of style, mood and subject-matter is, of course, one of her drawbacks as far as readers are concerned. Only a died-in-the-wool Russ fan is going to enjoy all the stories (I didn't). But there are some gems here, and anyone who doesn't know Russ's work and who wants to find out what sf writing is capable of, really ought to try this.



Anne Billson - - DREAM DEMON (NEL, 1989,
188pp, £2.50)

Two dumb broads, straight out of NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, try to figure out why their dreams seem so real and wind up in deep shit. Tedious novelisation of awful film. (Colin Bird)

Jack L. Chalker - - MASKS OF THE MARTYRS
(NEL, 1989, 340pp, £2.99)

This is Book 4 of *The Rings of The Masters*. As I haven't read the first three parts, I find myself at somewhat of a loss to do justice in reviewing this one, except to say that it's crammed full of the usual goodies like 'Shapechangers' and 'Renegade Pirates', storming through the galaxy in search of the long lost and fabled 'Rings' that can, ultimately, control Humankind's destiny. A good book. (Chris C. Bailey)

Hugh Cook - - THE WICKED AND THE WITLESS
(Corgi, 1989, 459pp, £3.99)

This fifth volume of yet another fantasy saga is all about the dreary history of the land of Argarn. It's a mind-numbingly hackneyed tale which reads like a role-playing game adventure. No doubt it will look very pretty adorning the shelves of W.H. Smith's in vast quantities. Looking on the bright side, this book would make a great cure for insomnia. (Steven J. Blyth)

Catherine Cooke - - REALM OF THE GODS (Orbit,
1989, 218pp, £2.99)

Real people do not exist in this inconclusive sequel to WINGED ASSASSIN, for all the characters are either unexcitingly rotten or flatly boring, showing no signs of development or progression. The drab prose is as poorly scrawled as the book's singular redundant map, stolid and without style. I cannot urge you strongly enough to avoid this book. Save your money. Buy a typewriter and write your own. It's much more fun. (Terry Broome)

John Peyton Cooke - - THE LAKE (Avon, 1989,
224pp, £3.95)

"Slimey horror novel" about what lies beneath a stagnant lake in a small town. Considerably better than it sounds, though, with its oddly sympathetic "evil witch" and liberal handling of awakening homosexuality. References to sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll, horror books and porn videos give it a splatterpunk veneer undercut by the lack of lovingly described nasty bits, for which we may give thanks. Cliffhanger ending may disappoint a few but if Cooke gets his act together the sequel could be pretty good. (Andy Sawyer)

Joe Dever & John Grant - - ECLIPSE OF THE
KAI (Beaver, 1989, 237pp): THE DARK DOOR
OPENS (Beaver, 1989, 272pp, both £2.50)

Now we have novel versions of game-books which seems to undercut the idea that such books enable you to be more creative than the usual formula novels. These are based on the

Lone Wolf series and may be interesting to young players and those who note the name of Dever's co-author and remember his part in EARTHCOM and the legendary GUTS. (Andy Sawyer)

D.G. Finlay - - THE KILLING GLANCE (Arrow, 1989, 649pp, £4.50)

Omnibus edition of four previously-published novels about the Bayliss family and their malevolent house Lavenham. Family sagas are best with lots of detail, passion and a sense of relentless fate. The horror of place fits well with this sub-genre and although the eventual explanation of the evil's source doesn't quite match the suspense with which the author marks the path to it, this is a superior combination despite the grossness of the climatic scenes. (Andy Sawyer)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - BATMAN (Futura, 1989, 221pp, £3.50)

Novelisation of The Film, which owes more to the original concept of the Batman as driven crimefighter and the brooding atmosphere of the '80s Dark Knight than the Caped Crusader of the '60s - which all the pre-publicity I've seen so far has resolutely ignored. It includes a detailed and dramatically unified 'origin' of the Joker and the obsessive link between him and Batman. Certainly readable, but makes best sense if you've seen, or intend to see, the film. Otherwise, refer to recent reviews of the 'graphic novels' published by Titan. (Andy Sawyer)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - AN EXCESS OF ENCHANTMENTS (Headline, 1989, 180pp, £2.99)

Another episode in the continuing misadventures of Wuntvor, the Eternal Apprentice. The humour is more silly than amusing, but some of the ubiquitous sword and sorcery clichés are nicely parodied. The plot is inconsequential and revolves around Wuntvor's unwilling participation in Mother Goose's (i.e. the wicked witch of the Eastern Kingdom's) fairy tale building. If you can follow US humour, the end result is mildly entertaining. A certain British author, however, does it better and funnier... (Ian Sales)

Sheila Gilluly - - THE CRYSTAL KEEP (Headline, 1989, 313pp, £6.95)

What makes a fantasy worth a large-format paperback edition at £6.95? This follows GREENBRIAR QUEEN and is for the most part competently told except where it fizzles out at the end. If you've a fondness for herb tea and scones, and can put up with characters named Peewit and Alphonse, then you may prefer this over a dozen or so competitors. (Andy Sawyer)

David Hallamshire - - THE ALIEN'S DICTIONARY (Headline, 1989, 115pp, £2.99)

Collection of definitions compiled by a puzzled alien visitor to Earth, not a million miles from a Hitch-hiker's guide to the Galaxy. Nevertheless, it raised a few chuckles when I needed them, and was promptly stolen by a daughter and returned in a well-battered condition.

ALIEN'S DICTIONARY: Collection of humorous definitions which you could have done just as well. Only you didn't, did you? (Couldn't resist that one) (Andy Sawyer)

Simon Hawke - - THE ARGONAUT AFFAIR (Headline, 1989, 195pp, £2.99)

Seventh book in the Time Wars series. This time our heroes travel back to ancient

Greece and Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece in an alternate universe. They become Argonauts and re-enact the myth.

The book has a semi-spoof feel, the action is violent and graphically described, the temporal aspects and paradoxes are underused, and the plot meanders between confusion and farce - but it all hangs together to produce a couple of hours of undemanding entertainment. (Ian Sales)

Douglas Hill - - GALACTIC WARLORD (Pan Piper, 1989, 127pp, £2.25): DEATHWING OVER VEYNAA (Pan Piper, 1989, 125pp, £2.25)

Reprints of the first two volumes of Hill's attractive adventure-SF series for children, in which Keill Randor, the Last Legionary, sets off to track down the evil Warlord who has destroyed his world. Fast-paced adventure in the Grand Tradition - worth a look. (Andy Sawyer)

Dean R. Koontz - - THE MASK (Headline, 1989, 341pp, £3.50)

A childless couple need to discover the identity of a teenage girl who appears in front of Carol's car and is possibly linked with paranormal experiences. If Campbell, Barker, King etc. are in the first division of horror writing, Koontz is in the second - but on the evidence of the Hitchcockianly tense last third of this book he's heading for promotion. (Andy Sawyer)

Mercedes Lackey - - ARROW'S FLIGHT (Legend, 1989, 318pp, £3.50)

Pedestrian tale of woman dealing out a Herald's justice while on a mounted patrol of the Kingdom of Valdemar. The second volume of a continuing series, it centres around the heroine's struggle to keep her psi powers under control. Familiar scenes of plagues, bandit raids, snow storms and sex are dealt with unexcitingly. One plus point - it isn't a quest novel. (Terry Broome)

Adrienne Martine-Barnes - - THE FIRE SWORD (Headline, 1989, 374pp, £3.99)

Young woman awakens in her bedroom 800 years in the past to find an alternative Albion with gods, symbolic figures and Darkness v. Light. Amid bouts of rather coy sex she completes her quest. (Andy Sawyer)

Victor Milan & Melinda Snodgrass - - RUNE-SPEAR (N.E.L., 1989, 278pp, £2.99)

A novel about the Nazis' search for the spear of the god Odin. The prose is skillfully written and the chapters set in pre-war Berlin are atmospheric. However, the idea of Nazis trying to find a legendary artifact to help them conquer the world is somewhat unoriginal. Also, the novel's structure is simplistic and similar to that of a sword and sorcery quest. (Steven J. Blyth)

Douglas Niles - - DARKWELL (Penguin, 1989, 341pp, £3.99)

Book 3 of the Moonshae Trilogy; the most derivative, ill-written and tedious RPG novelisation I've come across to date. (Andy Sawyer)

Steve Perry - - THE MAN WHO NEVER MISSED (Sphere, 1989, 195pp, £2.99)

Book 1 of the Matador Trilogy. Emile Khadaji deserts from the Confederation army, sickened by the slaughter of innocents on the planet Maro. He undergoes martial arts and special weapons training, a course in barkeeping (sic) amasses a fortune - and is ready to take on the galaxy-wide Confed oppressors single-handedly! The story is slight, the writing

superficial and the ending, even for the first volume of a trilogy, very disappointing. (Eric Brown)

Susan Schwarz (ed.) - - ARABESQUES 2 (Avon, 1989, 373pp, £3.95)

Follow-up to the well-received collection of oriental tales, with stories by many of the same writers - Gene Wolfe, Larry Niven, Tanith Lee, etc. M.J. Engh provides a sort-of sequel to 'The Lovesick Simurgh' from ARABESQUES and Judith Tarr's 'Al-Gazabah' is again about horses. There's a neat and wise twist to Cherry Wilder's 'The Soul of a Poet' but the strength of the collection is perhaps the architecturally clever way the themes of the tales exist within and as commentary on Susan Schwarz's framing story of Peter of Wraysford's party and their storytelling duel with a group of desert djinns. (Andy Sawyer)

Guy N. Smith - - NIGHT OF THE CRABS (Grafton, 1989, 191pp, £2.99)/CRABS' MOON (Grafton, 1989, 284pp, £2.99)

Many years ago, on holiday in the area where these novels are set, my daughter discovered an aversion for crabs - after re-reading these, I can't say I blame her. Prime examples of the horror-disaster genre as nasty scuttling shelled things come out of the sea to wreak havoc and dismember people. (Andy Sawyer)

J.M. Straczynski - - DEMON NIGHT (Sphere, 1989, 340pp, £3.50)

Eric Langren returns to Dredmouth Point, where his parents died in a car-smash, to confront his relationship with the shunned Indian Caves. Stephen King territory brushed with a very faint touch of Lovecraft. Snap it up. (Andy Sawyer)

James V. Smith jr. - - BEASTMAKER (Grafton, 1989, 336pp, £3.50)

Yet another horror story about the escape of a vile and ferocious monster created by genetic engineering. (Andy Sawyer)

Roy Thomas/Tony Dezuniga - - THE DRAGON-LANCE SAGA 3 (Penguin, 1989, £5.99)

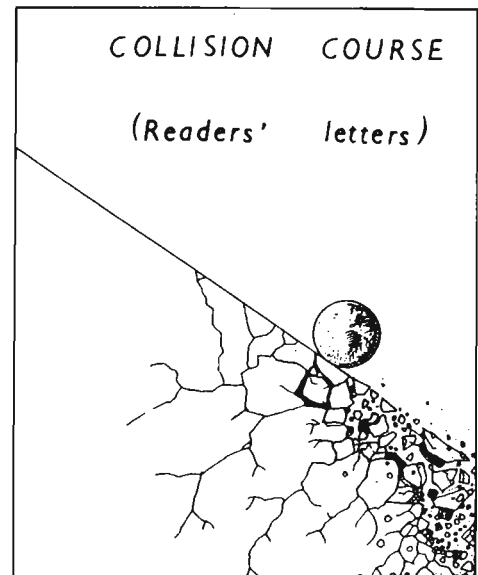
'Graphic novel' adapted from a section of DRAGONS OF WINTER NIGHT. Perhaps the way this stuff ought to be read; reduced to the story-action only and considerably shorter than the original. (Or have I used that joke before?) (Andy Sawyer)

John Wagner/Alan Grant - - JUDGE DREDD'S CRIME FILE 1 (Titan, 1989, £3.50)

Features 'Last of the Bad Guys', a colourful three-parter, art by John Higgins, story by Wagner & Grant. Also 'JD and the 7 Dwarves', B Grover's send-up of Rambo et. al.; 'Rogue Trooper' by Ortiz and a short Dredd with art by Ian Gibson. Humour is the usual 2000AD kind, but it's the artwork and colours which make the package most attractive: a great improvement on Titan's B/W offerings. (An aside: try getting their STORM books, beautiful art by Don Lawrence). (Nik Morton)

Jonathan Wylie - - THE LIGHTLESS KINGDOM (Corgi, 1989, 351pp, £2.99)

Gemma is persuaded to leave the Valley and aid the revolutionaries while Arden finds himself in an underground realm menaced by pollution (yes, a Message). Injections of various interesting SF/Fantasy situations put some life into this 'Lightless Kingdom' trilogy, of which this is vol. 2. (Andy Sawyer)



KEN LAKE argues his way through Brian Aldiss premises (see his review of MAN IN HIS TIME) re the reaction to his comments on CRYPTOZOIC!:-

I never wished to imply that (Brian Aldiss) had written AN AGE solely for paperback publication, though I don't see that this matters - after all, I was reviewing a paperback reprint... I'm intrigued to discover that he has no idea why that stupid exclamation point is in the revised title or who put it there: might I suggest that an ignorant publisher's reader thought CRYPTOZOIC meant something like "Hidden-like" (with -CIC as an ending like "parenCID", and so felt the "!" would enhance the impact?

But I must take issue with him over the "serialisation" in NEW WORLDS. No. 176 has AN AGE (PART ONE, No. 177 AN AGE (PART TWO) with the words "to be concluded" at the end. In No. 178, Mike Moorcock was lucky enough (he thought) to get serialisation rights to Spinrad's BUG JACK BARRON - which later led to NEW WORLDS being banned from W.H. Smuts and virtually brought about the extinction of the magazine - so he scamped the rest of Brian's serialisation with these words:

"For reasons of space we have had to publish this novel in a condensed form. A synopsis of past episodes and of the omitted chapters follows." This "space" excuse is far from unique in Mike Moorcock's editorship, for after the troubled serialisation of BUG JACK BARRON through five parts we come to No. 183 and the words "For space reasons we have had to condense the conclusion of this novel to be published in 1969 by Avon Books."

As for "the most exciting part of the novel" taking part in the Cryptozoic era, that too is, to quote Brian, "rather a matter of opinion"; I found the alternate-future-world bits more interesting and appealing, if unfulfilled in their promise.

IAN SALES has read the last two editorials:

I note what you've been saying about the current plethora of sword & sorcery books. You may have gathered from the letter Maureen kindly printed in MATRIX 82 that I happen to dislike it too. No, perhaps "dislike" is the wrong word. There are some excellent fantasy sagas about - Guy Kay's FIONAVAR TAPESTRY, for instance. There are a hell of a lot of bad ones about too. Mind you, sword & sorcery gets slammed quite a lot as corny, hackneyed and cliched, but it's by SF fans (more often

than not). Silly, isn't it? People living in glass houses... Having said that, I still maintain that bad SF is generally better than bad S&S. Perhaps because SF has had the time to work all the hoary old clichés out of its system (although some are still being used today, and badly at that) whereas S&S is still under the impression that the clichés are necessary literary devices...

Anyway, despite all these "interminable chronicles" (a lovely phrase that), I must admit there's still a lot out there worth reading - providing you know where to look (this is where FI is invaluable).

CHRIS OGDEN makes a belated comment on PI 76:

Steven Tew, reviewing FANTASTIC VOYAGE II: DESTINATION BRAIN, expresses relief that the book "is not another addition to the Spaghetti Junction connections Asimov has latterly been engineering between the interminable Foundation and Robot series." If you read the closing chapters, you will find a reference to "Positronic Robots" - or it might have been "Positronic Brains": mine was a library copy, so I don't have it to hand, but the point is that good ol' Positronic Technology is in there somewhere. I suppose the solution is NOT to read the closing chapters.

MARGARET HALL also noted the editorial matter:

A very interesting editorial about the state of Penguin's list. When the DRAGONLANCE books first appeared, I almost bought one thinking, "Oh, if it's a Penguin it must be good." Fortunately I skimmed the book first and as a result left it on the shelf. They don't even come up to my requirements for a fast-paced, trashy good read. You're right too about the high quality of the Puffins. I've just read Peter Dickinson's ANNERTON PIT - a Puffin - and my son found THE TROLLTOOTH WARS by Steve Jackson in the bookshop in Aberystwyth. This like the DRAGONLANCE is based on a game (the FIGHTING FANTASY series) but at least has some life to it. I think it's something to do with humour. I don't mean that the novels I enjoy are full of jokes, or that they're written tongue in cheek. Far from it. To succeed at popular fiction, you've got to believe in what you're doing wholeheartedly, whether it's fantasy or romantic fiction or a thriller. But though the skilful authors are serious about what they write, they are not solemn; they have no delusions of grandeur and they have a light touch.

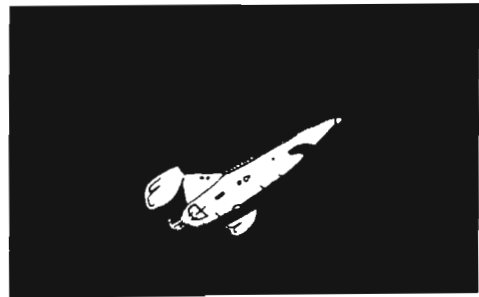
"Upon the rack in print"

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE and ANALOG, SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER 1989

Reviewed by Edward James

Asimov's in September has the third magazine cover featuring Lucius Shepard's "Dragon Griaule" series, in which the known world is dominated by a mountain-high, partly petrified, partly living and still powerful dragon. And this novella, "The Father of Stones", is one of the best. It traces the fortunes of a lawyer who takes on the defence of a gem-cutter found red-handed at the murder of the priest of the Dragon. Plenty of suspense, sinister goings-on and twists in the (dragon's?) tail: not terribly profound or original, perhaps, and the narrative is very traditional in style, but it takes us deeper into a knowledge of Griaule (one of the great fantasy

inventions of the last few years) and is undoubtedly a good read. Also well worth a try is another traditional tale, an sf novella by Allen M. Steele called "Red Planet Blues", in which an expedition is launched to find the secret of the heavily booby-trapped alien building on Mars ("the face on Mars"). The characterisation is interesting, the complex politics intelligent; it's another worthy successor to the long tradition of problem stories about communication with aliens. There is also: another successor to the even longer tradition of stories about deals with the devil, Deborah Wessell's "As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us", in which the moral problems are much more complex and thought-provoking than the norm (the dealer is a Catholic priest); a fine piece of social observation of humans and aliens from Nancy Kress, called "People Like Us"; another enjoyably eccentric little tale from Eileen Gunn, "The Sock Story"; a nice bicentennial touch provided by Avram Davidson's short story "Events Which Took Place a Day Before Other Events" -- an alternative view of the start of the French Revolution from the Bastille's most celebrated prisoner (the Marquis de Sade, as if you couldn't guess); and what probably deserves to be on the nominations for short-story awards next year, Bruce Sterling's "Dori Bangs", combining neat extrapolation into the next century, effective characterisation and post-modernist narrative, telling of the real and fantasy lives of Lester Bangs (b. 1948), rock critic, and Dori Seda (b. 1951), underground cartoonist. There a mix to please everybody in this issue, and those with a broad palate of tastes would find it well worth buying.



The October Asimov's has Alexander Jablokov's novella "A Deeper Sea" as the cover story. Jablokov is obviously one of the genre's more imaginative newcomers; his first novel *The Man Who Carved the Sky* will surely be worth watching out for. But so far he seems incapable of restraining his imagination -- he throws everything in, straining the reader's plausibility lobes to bulging point. This time we have intelligent dolphins and whales who do not communicate with humanity until one of them is tortured; a cetacean Messiah who is connected to hardware and sent off to the clouds of Jupiter (why?); a world war in which the Russians and Americans have been hammered by the Japanese; and... The central character is a Russian, who was in charge of the project to communicate with dolphins (and use them in the war against the US), and who is subsequently -- despite all his personality problems -- put in charge of the space-born whale. My plausibility lobe exploded when I met the Greek scholar whose speciality was dolphin-human interaction in the second millennium BC. Given the nature of historical and archaeological evidence (and barring the invention of time travel, which Jablokov doesn't seem to have thrown in), it would take about a morning to learn all that can ever be learnt about that particular subject. Still, Jablokov does tell a story well... Kristin Kathryn Rusch's "Fast Cars" tells the story of the (psi) effects of a chemical experiment done by a bunch of high-school seniors, in an effective series of flashbacks between 1988 and 1978. The other novelette is "The Return of the Kangaroo Rex" by Janet Kagan, the second in her series about a planet colonised by survivors from an earth ship: humans and a whole lot of highly mutable genetic material. The stories are workperson-like enough, but seem oddly out of place in Asimov's; this sort of nuts-and-bolts (or genes-and-embryos) planetary adventure story is the sort of thing that *Analog* has made a speciality of for the last forty years or

so. The shorts include M.F. McHugh's "Kites", a competent glimpse into the highly dangerous world of hang-glider racing about the towns of the future; Tanith Lee's "Zelle's Thursday", a nasty little glimpse into a day in the unpleasant life of a domestic android, beautifully imagined, as is the equally well written "Points of View", by Kathe Koja -- a cyberpunk world of designer drugs and video drawings, seen through the eyes of the exploited woman.

In September *Analog* led with Linda Nagata's "In the Tide", a rather ordinary space-rescue-and-romance story, taken out of the ordinary only by two gimmicks: the Makers, molecular-sized computers which can be programmed to multiply themselves indefinitely and to defend areas of space, and Indigo, a genetically-altered human who can live in space (she graces the cover). Eric Vinicoff's "Puff" takes place in his future of a contaminated Earth and a human civilization living in giant dirigibles high in the stratosphere; piling implausibility on implausibility again, the story revolves around a girl and her relationship with an intelligent stratosphere-living fire-ball (?) -- Puff (the magic dragon, geddit?) Much better than either of these novelettes was the novella: Jerry Oltion and Lee Goodloe's "Down the Colorado!". A considerable portion of this (rather overlong) story is no more than an adventure of shooting the rapids on the Colorado. We only get hints of what the outside world is like; the only links the two adventurers have (and they manage to pot most of them) are little dirigible-born robotic holocameras, sent by newspapers to trail the two participants (celebrities after their exploits in "Sunstat", *Analog* October 1988); the main interest -- and this is well developed -- is in the various effects that a hearty and indeed positively dangerous outdoor vacation has on a woman brought up in a space habitat. The various shorts include Kevin O'Donnell's "Future's Puppet", in which one agent from the future meets an agent from a different future, and, much more intriguing, Grey Rollins's "Out the Window": a brief well-constructed whodunnit in which a man is found asphyxiated and with frost-bite in a laboratory cupboard -- and in which the reader is given just enough clues not to be annoyed at the gimmick.

The October *Analog* saw the start of a two-part serial by Thomas A. Easton called *Sparrowhawk*. To quote from my review last time, referring to the May *Analog*: "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)". My mistake. It obviously couldn't have been deliberately silly, since he has now dedicated a novel-length story set in the same future, though with a much more sinister tinge, as a genetically engineered and jet-assisted sparrow, the size of an airplane, belonging to Palestinian Airlines goes rogue and eats a fair number of "genanimal" cars. Still sounds silly to me, but it is treated in a deadpan manner with dollops of scientific data. It's a three-part serial. I've read (and enjoyed) the first part, but reserve judgement until December. The issue also had Alexis Gilliland's novella "The Man Who Funded the Moon": an effective tract-as-story updating Heinlein's "Man Who Sold the Moon" with the injection of plausible economics and post-détente international relations. ("The Man" is a senator who pushes for the USA-USSR mission to set up a mining-base on the Moon.) The three shorts were somewhat routine stories: a space rescue, a personality transplant and an alien in disguise. The novelette was different: Paula Robinson's affecting story "Hearts and Dandelions" about those people condemned to useless (?) lives as a result of medical "progress".

In October, I am pleased to report, both editorials -- Isaac Asimov's "Assassination" and Stanley Schmidt's "The Limits of Tolerance" -- were strong attacks on those who deny the rights of authors to publish what they want. Schmidt's editorials are always worth reading, but this time he excelled himself. It is a pity that such cogently argued pieces are usually read only by the already converted. Any BSFA member willing to export a large number of October *Analog*s to Iran?



INTERZONE 31 (Sep/Oct 1989)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

"Special Space Story Issue!" proclaims the cover of IZ 31, which also features a David Hardy spaceship that wouldn't have looked out of place on *SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY*. It's no surprise, however, to find that the lead story -- 'Star-Crystals and Karmel' by Eric Brown -- isn't set in space at all but is planet-bound (albeit off-Earth). Brown's theme concerns the humanity of aliens and vice-versa, wrapped up in a smoothly-crafted tale which somehow reminded me of the *Vermillion Sands* series. Next is Gwyneth Jones's 'Grave-goods'. This does have a space setting and also features alien-humans and human-alien. A wicked sense of humour permeates this story; the oddity of the crew of the aptly-named *Cheops* is explained by the ship's method of transportation. The best of the bunch, I feel. But if Jones has created the strangest crew, then S.M. Baxter's 'Raft' has the strangest spaceship, drifting through an alternate universe. Certainly full of interest, though none of the characters claimed my affection and it's all rather too rushed.

Jamil Nasir's 'Not Even Ashes' has one of the best opening lines I've come across for a while. "If I hadn't liked garbage dumps, I would never have seen her," says Nasir's hero. But what for the most part is a very effective little thriller peters out into quasi-mysticism. Nevertheless there's more than enough promise here to warrant keeping an eye out for this author. Other stories this issue are by John Gribbin and Charles Stross. Gribbin's slight 'Other Edens' is curiously old-fashioned; not so 'Generation Gap' by Stross. The futuristic language here both develops and hinders the story of lunar juvenile delinquents. It's the best of his I've yet read.

On the non-fiction side, Charles Platt warns of the death of reading, evinced by his Californian experience, and there are interviews with C.J. Cherryh (mainly on her views on the role of SF) and Stephen Gallagher (an overview of his career and work, though curiously there's no mention of the 'Stephen Couper' books). Also worth a mention, simply because I haven't done so for a while, are the consistently excellent film reviews by Nick Lowe. I confess his all-too-brief 'Mutant Popcorn' column is just about the first I turn to each issue. If you're an SF film fan and haven't yet sampled IZ, do check it out.

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