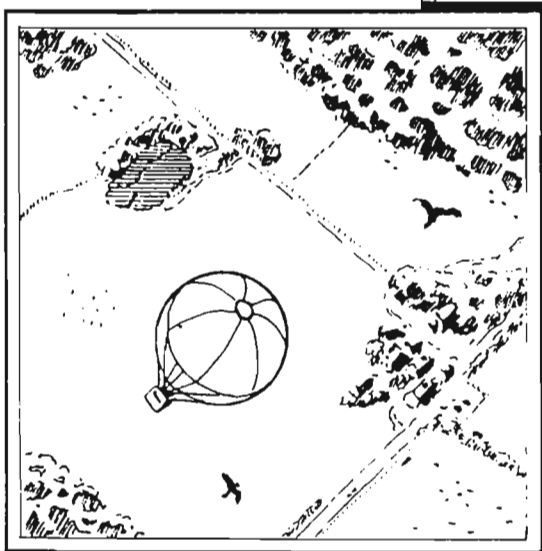
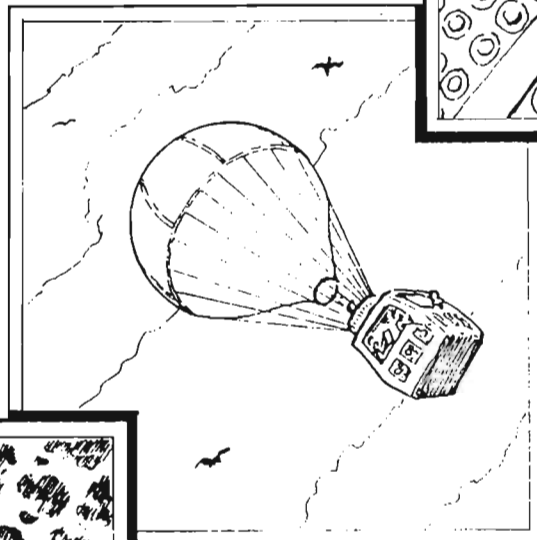


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The Review of paperback SF



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ARTWORK: Colin P. Davies: Logo & Cover (Inspired by Bob Shaw's RAGGED ASTRONAUTS trilogy).
Kevin Cullen: p. 15

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

Many thanks to William Delves for helping me tackle the reviews backlog by introducing me to the Archimedes (where are you, large sums of money, when I need you?) and to Mary Sawyer, without whom I would not be able to be typing this.

Paperback Purgatory

Why should a book about the misuse of one of our most precious natural resources - water - be reviewed in PI? The quick answer is that other books by the same author have, so why not this? (DOWN THE DRAIN by Stuart Gordon, (Macdonald Optima, 1989, 194pp, £5.99))

Stuart Gordon is a sf/fantasy writer known for his One-Eye trilogy of the mid '70s and his later Watchers books, well received in PI 74 and 78. Considering that sf is about the future - so people say - why not have an sf author writing about topical issue? A more considered answer to my original question is simply that over the past few months we've experienced a major change in our relationship with the means of production of the diluted mix of chemicals which comes out of our taps. Much of what Gordon writes in DOWN THE DRAIN sounds like sf anyway - and I'm not talking about his apparent belief in ley-lines and dowsing but rather of such episodes as the dumping of 20 tonnes of aluminium sulphate into the drinking water in the Camelford area of Cornwall, affecting 20,000 people, and the slow build-up of nitrates in the soil (and reservoirs) of intensively farmed areas of East Anglia and the Midlands.

The human and environmental poisonings caused by such activities aren't as dramatic or as horrific as a Chernobyl, but they're bad enough: if this is what we get with a so-called publicly accountable system, who knows what we will have now that the finance houses have seized their chance to make a quick buck. (Those who see this as an extension of "popular capitalism" might care to ask how many other "privatised" shares remain in the hands of so-called "small investors". At the time of writing (just before Christmas) a NatWest stockbroker

is reported as saying that 20 % of investors will sell "the next couple of weeks". In the same newspaper article I read that more than half of individual shareholders bought intending to sell rather than invest, and that ¼ - ⅓ of all investors in previous privatisation issues have pulled out within the first six weeks.)

But what's Gordon's book like? It's not an original work of scholarship, but an exercise in passionate journalism; sometimes quirkily, even jokily written. Gordon takes care to document his claims. If there are any factual errors, they presumably stem from his original sources. He takes less care, however, when he's being passionate and quirky. Yes, we all know the story of Canute, but don't we all know by now that the popular image is wrong and that the king was proving a point about his lack of omnipotence to flattering courtiers? There's a neat quotation, in the context of contemporary Scandinavian concerns about acid rain caused by British industrial emissions, from the 19th-century Norwegian playwright Ibsen: "Britain's smoke-cloud sinks corroding..." Unfortunately, Gordon blows it by remarking "Ibsen's ancestors (sic) feel much the same way about it today."

However, if you've been watching all those TV ads (which the Chairman of my local Water Board, sorry Business assures me cost "a tiny percentage of the overall expenditure of the industry on its services to customers") and care to know more about why we've been subject to such a barrage of blandness, then DOWN THE DRAIN is a good starting point. You'll discover that our water supply - like our police, legal system and education - is another area in which we gave up leading the rest of the world some time ago. Though I wouldn't bother emigrating to Southern Poland and the Czech-East German border if you want to avoid pollution...

What struck me when reading this book - as it does when I read anything on political/environmental issues nowadays - is what, I suppose, is the justification for



Brian W. Aldiss - GALAXIES LIKE GRAINS OF SAND
(VGSF, 1989, 188pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

GALAXIES LIKE GRAINS OF SAND is

... a series of (nine) short stories ... conceived along with the connecting 'non-fact' material as a single entity. It covers a Stapledonian span of time, from the near future (*The War Millennia: 'Out Of Reach'*, *Authentic*, August 1957) to the ultimate hour of the universe (*The Ultimate Millennia: 'Visiting Amoeba'*, *Authentic*, July 1957, as 'What Triumphs?') ... without ... being a template for some tiresomely consistent future history (other 'future historians', please take note.)

[Adapted from the Introduction, by Norman Spinrad, pp. 9-17; brackets mine.]

Spinrad goes on to discuss the ... emphasis between the scene-and-character stories and the characterless fictionalised meta-history' (*ibid.*), but - beyond an 'honourable mention' - that need not concern us here. My favourite stories, for what it might-or-might-not-be-worth, are 'Who Can Replace A Man' (*Infinity*, June 1958) and 'Secret Of A Mighty City' (*Nebula*, May 1958, as 'Have Your Hatreds Ready'). But the whole remains greater than the sum of its parts, which is more than can be said for most other 'chronicle novels'.

Olaf Stapledon's *LAST AND FIRST MEN* may be the most obvious model for *GLGOS*, but there's no doubt in my mind that Aldiss' book is the more readable of the two. As Spinrad points out, Aldiss has 'an irony that Stapledon lacks, a sense of style, and a cool sophisticated distancing of intellect from his transcendental material' (*ibid.*) In any case, I prefer to think of *GLGOS* as a cross-time collaboration between the world-wearying H.G. Wells of *THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME* (193) and the comparatively devil-may-care Wells of *TALES OF SPACE AND TIME* (1899).

Bibliographical data: *GLGOS* was first published by Signet Books, USA (1960), minus much of the expository narrative and one story, 'Blighted Profile' (*Science Fantasy*, June 1958). *THE CANOPY OF TIME* (Faber & Faber, 1959) contained some of the stories, but discarded all of the linking material. The VGSF edition follows the 1977 American hardback (Gregg Press?), plus a revised Introduction and the reinstatement of 'Blighted Profile' (*The Mingled Millennia*).

William Gibson - - - - - *MONA LISA OVERDRIVE*
(Grafton, 1989, 316pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Boyd Parkinson)

MONA LISA OVERDRIVE is set seven years after *COUNT ZERO*, some fifteen years after *NEUROMANCER*, and is the final novel in

Gibson's 'cyberspace sequence'. (NOTE: this isn't a trilogy - not according to Grafton. But that still adds up to three ...) We return to the world of mirrorshades, cyberspace, devious Corporate politics, the hustle of the Sprawl ... and find that Gibson has matured considerably as a writer. He is subtler, much more atmospheric, his imagery stronger and more colourful, slightly less cinematic. In all, the book has a great deal more depth than its predecessors.

He weaves together four separate plot strands. In the first, there is Kumiko Yanaka, a thirteen-year-old sent to London by her crimelord father from a Yakuza 'war' in Tokyo. Under the aegis of one Sally Shears (aka Molly) and Colin (a cybernetic ghost), Kumiko is shown around a wintry London, the ground thick with snow and gomi, a place filled with intrigue that hints at developments to come. And there is Slick Henry, living in the garbage wasteland of Dog Solitude out in the Sprawl, building his robots and reluctantly looking after a comatose man, known simply as 'the Count', who is jacked into some sort of cyberspace deck (an 'LF'). Then to Malibu, the beach-house of Angie Mitchell the simstim star, recovering from intensive drying-out treatment and who is beginning to dream again of the loas. And finally, he introduces us to Mona: a sixteen-year-old whore, living in a squat with her boyfriend/pimp, dreaming of a comfortable life and wiz ... He has set the scenes, each well realised and his sense of place and character defined and maintained throughout: there is never any mistaking through whose eyes the reader is seeing.

Despite there being a certain lack of 'middle' to the book, Gibson still manages to maintain the pace, to keep pushing the story and the reader headlong through the twists and turns of each strand. And he pulls it all together, weaving tighter and tighter, ermeshing each strand like a steel cable: twining each about the other, taut and tight and strong, snapping at the climax and whipping away, leaving you teetering on the edge of his narrative.

MONA LISA OVERDRIVE is Gibson's best yet. Mostly, perhaps, because his characters are alive and in some instances even likeable, yet he has retained the polish and hard-edged prose style which made his earlier works so accessible. At present he is working on a collaboration with Bruce Sterling (a 'steampunk' novel, I understand), but what will be really interesting will be to see what his next solo work will be: perhaps a continuation of the trilogy, turning what was once a few loosely connected stories into an open-ended novel series? Or will he dare to try to do something different?

Suzy McKee Charnas - - - - - *WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD*
and *MOTHERLINES*
(Women's Press, 1989, 436pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

These two novels, here in one volume, complement each other and have since the '70s made a discernible impress on feminist thought and feeling. *WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD* depicts the post-'Wastings' dystopia of 'Holdfast', its women (fems) the guilt-bearing whipping-boys (-girls?), brood-slaves and work-slaves of a homosexually oriented male hegemony. The action's mainspring is an Oedipal quest, at the end of which, as Holdfast intercinely disintegrates, the quest co-opted slave Alldera escapes, pregnant and purposeful, to the outer 'Grasslands'. *MOTHERLINES*, a manless tale, shows her child-bearing and maturing there, shuttled between, but eventually instrumental in reconciling, the polarities of the sterile free fem escapees

and the parthenogenetic horse-rearing/rustling/loving/Riding Women in their semi-nomadic lesbianly oriented utopia manquee.

Such, minimally, are the scenarios. What compels, over and above the psycho-sexual insights and a didacticism made forceful by resort to extremes (reductio ad horrendum?), is the sinewy prose and the way that archetypal imagery is made to invade the action. To use the word 'Homeric' of Charnas' descriptive and dramatic writing is, doubtless, hyperbole; but in such passages as the fems' Cursing Song, the death of Maggomas, and certain episodes of Daya's story-telling, it almost merits it. Wasn't it Samuel 'Erewhon' Butler's theory that THE ODYSSEY was written by a woman?

Among the governing archetypes and symbols, the Cross in WALK has unique significance. It represents Father crossed with (i.e., in contention with) Son. Oaths are such as: 'Christ and his unfortunate father'. There is overt correspondence between body-signing and the starry Northern Cross. The heavens far from declaring the glory of god seem to pronounce him schizophrenic. In MOTHERLINES 'Mother Moon' is the free fems' oath: Moonwoman their deva. The prayer to her of Fedeka, 'freest of the free fems', is for 'Grains of silver, to bend to any pressure . . .'. For the Riding Women, however, the rhythms of the Grasslands prevail - ' . . . a great disc of earth revolving endlessly under the great disc of sky and season'. At the end of MOTHERLINES Aldera is about to lead free fems back to Holdfast uncertainties.

In ten years there has been no trilogic third novel, but now work on this is in progress. In the existent two, yin and yang confront starkly. Charnas' more recent novels have been variously interpreted as intensifying or as modifying oppositional natures and forces. Idle, but interesting, to speculate whether the successor to MOTHERLINES will perpetuate dichotomies or point towards any Tao-like resolution.

Garry Kilworth - - - - - ABANDONATI
(Unwin, 1989, 162pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

Three men on the bummel - to say nothing of the dog, which had probably been eaten. For it is hardly a Jerome K. Jerome funny. This threesome's journey is through and away from a post-holocaust city of utmost nastiness - ruin, dirt, disease, mayhem, and omnipresent and omnivorous hunger. One (Guppy - the naive and amnesic focal protagonist) has mirage-like hallucinations of other and better times. One (Rupert - tiny but resolute) works to actualise fantasies of a spaceship ascent to some starry and planetary heaven. Massive Trader has his faith firmly anchored in booze. They are of the abandonati: the street-people of apocalypse. Like another three fleeing a City of Destruction (Christian, Faithful and Hopeful), their progress is signposted by significant diversions and way-stations. For our abandonati these include: a Wellsian-type museum of outworn artefacts; a cathedral given over to stupefying wine orgies; an arcade of fruit machines yielding only impeding dead-weights of metal; a transient gypsy garden of sexual delights; and an airfield turned farmland, scene of promise and disillusion. Kilworth's upbeat endpath skirts the sentimental, but takes a last-chapter twist towards a truly Bunyanesque crossroads and a route back into the city.

A few extended italicised passages represent sketchily the existences of those escapees by whom the abandonati have been abandoned. Had such representations been developed more fully and less ironically, the story might have had a more substantial 'historic' dimension; but it would then have

been a different kind of novel. The 'fuggitivi' (to coin an expression) and even the catastrophic occasion remain somewhat mysterious; and this helps to invest the narrative with a sense of the fanciful - a sense strengthened by the ingenious parodic degradations of nursery-rhymes heading each chapter (e.g., 'Tom, Tom, the piper's son/Stole longpig and away he run'). It is this fable-like quality, by turns tempering and augmenting the catharsis of futuristic horror, that makes the reading of ABANDONATI so penetrating an experience.

Garry Kilworth - - - - - CLOUDROCK
(Unwin, 1989, 160pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Cloudrock is a plateau atop a gigantic stalk, peopled by two tribes which hunt by day and night respectively. To keep their bloodlines pure they practice cannibalism, incest, and the ritual slaughter of 'unwanted' deformed offspring (tossing them over the side at birth). Shadow, a neuter dwarf, is saved from this fate by his brother, Clay, but can stay alive only whilst the Tribe continue to ignore his existence. Tensions mount and come to a head when Clay falls in love with a girl from the Night Tribe.

CLOUDROCK tackles the taboo issues of incest and cannibalism by turning our moral conventions on their heads. The culling of the 'unwanted' is a natural consequence of inbreeding, the Tribe's treatment of physically and mentally retarded a telling reflection of our own society's treatment of the disabled and outsiders in general. Shadow is only suffered by being ignored, his talents unrecognised; his ultimate role in saving the Tribes from destruction ironically underlining this.

Kilworth explores the differing world views of the Tribes, the people who live below Cloudrock, and the strangers from beyond the Deadlands, showing how humanity and its individuals are blinkered and conditioned by the prevailing views, customs, and taboos of contemporary society.

Furthermore, CLOUDROCK is an excellent character study of its narrator, cleverly employing the first person narrator technique to contrast the world view of the reader with that of Cloudrock's society. A thought-provoking and compelling book.

Tim Powers - - - - - ON STRANGER TIDES
(Grafton, 1989, 397pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Tom Jones)

Tim Powers' THE ANUBIS GATES is amongst my top twenty novels. DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE was good but perhaps the attempt to stay within a strict SF format limited the wild flights of imagination which are one of Powers' trademarks. THE DRAWING OF THE DARK, one of Powers' earlier books, is an out and out historical fantasy. Taking that book with THE ANUBIS GATES and ON STRANGER TIDES, common themes emerge, in particular a mix of historical fact and fiction and the use of myths ancient and modern. Stir lightly and we have fast paced, boisterous, well written fantasy which demonstrates just how poor most of this swords and dragons stuff is.

This is the 18th century Caribbean sea with a mix of voodoo and pirates. Powers mixes the storybook and Hollywood pirate myth with historical fact. During the '60s New Wave writers plundered classical myth, some to excellent effect. In this book Powers plunders these more modern myths to equally good effect.

This is the story of John Chandagnac's transformation from puppeteer to pirate Jack

Shandy. It is an odyssey of love as Jack seeks to save Beth Hurwood from the clutches of her father who wishes to expel her soul so that his dead wife can be resurrected. And he also has to worry about Blackbeard, pirate and voodoo sorcerer, who is intent on making himself immortal and also needs Beth.

Powers has a knack of evoking small details which not only bring scenes to life but contribute to creating the right atmosphere. This contributes to making this a good book. The plot line is pretty straightforward and I feel a more labyrinthine storyline might have enhanced it. Nonetheless it's unlikely there'll be many better fantasies this year.

David S. Garnett, ed. - - - THE ORBIT SCIENCE FICTION
YEARBOOK TWO
(Orbit, 1989, 347pp, £4.99)

Reviewed by Edward James

This volume of "The Best Short SF of 1988" contains just twelve stories, half from the familiar American magazines (three from *Asimov's*, one each from *Analog*, *Omni* and *F&SF*), and half from anthologies and other sources. Three British authors (Ballard, McDonald and Watson). It's fairly pointless to argue about the choice of stories; every selection is going to be personal. My own favourites were Ballard's "The Secret

History of World War III", Paul Di Filippo's "A Short Course in Art Appreciation", Steven Gould's "Peaches for Mad Molly", and Ian Watson's "The Flies of Memory". But I appreciated being brought up against even those I didn't enjoy (Rucker and Laidlaw's "Probability Pipeline"), and I finished the book with a great admiration for Garnett's judgement and broad taste, which ought to supply the maximum enjoyment to the greatest number. It is not just the stories that are worth reading, however. Apart from the totally inconsequential and instantly forgettable introduction by Lucius Shepard, there were three nonfictional pieces that alone almost make the volume worth buying. There's a delightfully written tribute to Salvador Dali by Brian Aldiss -- absolutely appropriate here. There's a *tour de force* from John Clute, assessing several dozen novels from 1988 without repeating a single adjective, and putting all of us in touch with a few novels that otherwise we would have missed. And, finally, a summation of 1988 from David Garnett himself, looking at the deaths (Heinlein, Simak, Lin Carter -- "responsible for spreading the plague of fantasy"), at the latest trends in publishing (sharecropping, horror), at the prizes, and at the magazines. All of it perceptive, personal and to the point. In years to come, when most of the stories will have been anthologised again and again, it is the nonfictional pieces that persuade us to take our "Best Of 19XX" books off the shelves. Garnett will not be gathering dust for long.

R E V I E W S

Steve Erickson - - - - - RUBICON BEACH
(Futura, 1989, 300pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

The final words of this novel are: 'and it sings to me. It sings.' And this book does sing to me. It is surreal, peculiar, difficult, beautiful, vivid, strange, murky, and a dozen other adjectives beside, each one sharply accurate yet oddly wide of the mark. Because this is the kind of writing that consistently slides out of focus, every time you come close to defining it, to giving it a name, it becomes something else. At times it hovers in sight of the new metafictionalists like Paul Auster or Eric McCormack, but just as soon as you begin to think in terms of an austere pose which eschews storytelling in favour of telling about story, then he veers off with some magnificent *jeu d'esprit* which demands nothing of the reader but the utmost suspension of disbelief. But just as soon as you feel you have got to grips with a story that is wildly unbelievable yet startlingly convincing, then the whole direction of the narrative shifts and you find yourself grasping at shadows. There is only one way to read this book, by abandoning yourself to it, letting it take you where it will, not questioning, not trying to impose upon it any shape or form. The tales it tells are exciting enough, the characters he draws idiosyncratic and believable, the landscapes evocative, the prose a pure pleasure. And at the end you can draw breath, and it sort of makes sense. Almost. In a way you can't quite define. But it was fun.

Along the way you'll meet Cale, an ex-con who returns to a shattered, prismatic Los Angeles (if Erickson's landscapes evoke anything, it is the world of J.G. Ballard) and witnesses, in a series of all-too-solid visions, a girl cutting the head off a man. He eventually discovers that he is that man. And there is Catherine, a girl from the South American jungle, whose eyes can make men do peculiar things. And there is Jack Mick Lake, who believes that there is a number for

everything, and who discovers another number between 9 and 10. Most of all you'll plunge into a world of dreams, startling, enchanting, delightful dreams.

John Clute, David Pringle
& Simon Ounsley (eds.) - - - - - INTERZONE:
THE THIRD ANTHOLOGY
(NEL, 1989, 243pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

A collection like this has two possible aims: to save stories from *Interzone* in a more permanent form, or to present *Interzone* to the book-buying but non-*Interzone*-subscribing public for their delight. John Clute's introduction suggests that the latter is the more intended, but I am not sure that this anthology is markedly different from any previous ones.

Like the recent *ZENITH* this is good SF but it is not markedly different SF. Eric Brown's 'Krash-Bang Joe And The Pineal-Zen Equation' is cyberpunk, while Lisa Tuttle's 'Memories Of The Body' and Pat Murphy's 'His Vegetable Wife' have feminist strands to them but Kim Newman gives us a fable and Brian Stableford a moral tale. This sort of proximity is no problem, but then any non-thematic anthology - from Groff Conklin's first onwards - will contain many different styles.

The one reservation I felt was in the inclusion of a number of stories that are not original in idea - Michael Swanwick's 'Foresight' is a time in reverse story, and I can think of examples of that by Ballard and Dick, and even F. Scott Fitzgerald; and Paul J. McAuley's 'Karl And The Ogre' is set in a world nearly identical to Jerome Bixby's 'It's A Good Life'.

John Clute says 'each of these stories embodies stings - dramatic ironies and ironies of diction - which significantly mottle the apparently clear surface of the text'. Given the reasonable cost, it is worthwhile checking whether the claim is true.

Howard Waldrop - - -STRANGE THINGS IN CLOSE UP
(Legend, 1989, 363pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Tom A. Jones)

This book gives you nineteen short stories, a foreword by George R.R. Martin, an afterword by Lewis Shiner and an introduction to each story from Howard Waldrop.

I'd only read one of the stories before, 'God's Hooks!', a fishing story with Izaak Walton and John Bunyan which I remember liking at the time. Indeed I liked all these stories, but few had that extra something to make them really stand out. The one that did for me was 'Doctor Hudson's Secret Gorilla', about a man put into a gorilla body and the indignities done to him. Perhaps I liked it because it's told with feeling and anger and most of the others didn't have quite that passion. Another story with passion is 'Horror, We Got' about time travelling Jews creating all the horrors which have happened to that race, a powerful story but not necessarily one you'll like.

Howard Waldrop likes alternative worlds and historical events. Many of the stories include some aspects of these themes including 'Der Untergang Des Abendlandesmenschen', which has a cowboy Sherlock Holmes and Watson fighting a vampire in a Germany just before the Nazis took over. Also we have rock and roll, at least four stories have some connection including 'Save A Place In The Lifeboat For Me' which has classic comedy acts trying to stop the death of Buddy Holly and a story called 'Flying Saucer Rock And Roll', a title which describes the story exactly.

Howard Waldrop is a good writer, an interesting writer, perhaps even a unique writer as George Martin says, but being unique isn't good enough by itself. So whilst I don't rave about him like Mr Martin, I'll certainly look out for him again. As for this book I would say it's certainly worth reading.

Mick Farren - - - - -EXIT FUNTOPIA
(Sphere, 1989, 264pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Eric Brown)

EXIT FUNTOPIA presents the flipside of the cyberpunk dream. Planet Earth is almost dead - a wasteland ravaged by nuclear meltdowns, global epidemics, a runaway greenhouse effect. The rich have domes, the vagrants the badlands, the normals the cities, and the leisure-outs the Zone - a fantasy land where the individual lives out his or her dream existence.

Marlowe lives a scenario right out of a '40s Bogart movie - subsidised by a proxy robot which does his work out in the real world. The novel opens with a 'leggy looker' (cover blurb) hiring him to locate her sister. Marlowe finds himself precipitated willy-nilly into a series of adventures that takes him from the Zone, across a derelict USA and finally into space. The action is virtually non-stop and the narrative pace fast, helped along with a couple of hero-saved-in-the-nick-of-time effects. The novel loses its way two thirds of the way through, when Marlowe finds himself among revolutionaries aboard an orbiting satellite. The plot meanders towards an unsatisfying conclusion.

EXIT FUNTOPIA reads like a cross between NEUROMANCER and HARDWIRED, with the difference that Marlowe is an unskilled victim, a pawn with little control of his destiny. This subverts the tenets of ultra-capitalist c-p and helps to make Marlowe a sympathetic character. Unfortunately, certain infelicities of plotting do make for a somewhat directionless read.

Despite its faults, EXIT FUNTOPIA is a workmanlike, (occasionally funny) and unpretentious fiction, and overall I enjoyed it.

Charles Sheffield - - - THE WEB BETWEEN WORLDS
(Sphere, 1989, 275pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Brilliant engineer Rob Merlin is hired to construct a 100,000 km 'bridge' from Earth to space. His wealthy, cancer-doomed employer, Darius Regulo, lives permanently aloft in Atlantis, a converted ice asteroid, with Joseph Morel, his evil physician, a computer called Sycorax, and a huge, intelligent giant squid called Caliban. Merlin, aided by Regulo's daughter/assistant Corrie, successfully tackles the assignment, but also discovers evil secrets connecting Regulo and Morel with the deaths of his own parents. Who, or what, were the mysterious 'Goblins', one of whom was being carried by Merlin's mother on to an aircraft on page two? Read this book and you'll find out.

In the process you'll tackle pages of engineering dialogue, and find that it isn't the real story. The 'bridge' (alternatively and more accurately called the 'beanstalk') gets built on schedule and without hitches. The idea fascinated Charles Sheffield's mind, but not his novelist's imagination. This got to work on the sub-plot, and didn't get quite enough attention.

Once you've started, you'll want to read on for the answers, and some of the incidental notions have their interest; but it's not a success as a novel. A pity.

Clive Cussler - - - - -TREASURE
(Grafton, 1988, 600pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

It could be argued that Clive Cussler is not sf and thus does not belong in *Paperback Inferno* - for a start, he sells more books than any self-respecting sf author could ever hope to. However, Cussler's books are still marginally sf - in much the same way James Bond (more so the Bond of the films than Fleming's books) is. Cussler's novels are all set in the early years of the 1990s, and the plot often relies on high-tech, as-yet-uninvented devices. The rest of the book, of course, is formulaistic action-packed adventure-thriller.

Cussler's latest offering, *TREASURE*, is based on an interesting historical premise: what if the contents of the Library at Alexandria weren't all destroyed when the Library was razed by the Christian Emperor Theodosius in AD391; what if some of the knowledge of the Ancients was spirited away and hidden, safe from the book-burning zealots; and what if this treasure trove remained undiscovered and untapped until Clive Cussler's ace hero trouble-shooter Dirk Pitt stumbled across clues to its 1600-year hiding place in 1991?

These Alexandrian manuscripts - the treasure of the title - also have 'modern' value since they include geological maps of the Ancient world, giving (everyone hopes) the locations of oil deposits in Third World nations. So, a priceless historical find becomes a political 'hot potato'.

However, for Clive Cussler, this is not enough. Dirk Pitt spends only about a quarter of this massive novel uncovering the location of the treasure. The central puzzle, a characteristic of Cussler's novels, has become less something on which the plot hangs and hinges about, but merely one of three relatively unconnected sub-plots. The book as a whole is far from seamless - in some parts you can see the join where the three plot-threads meet and supposedly tie everything up in a neat little knot.

Nevertheless, in common with most of Cussler's books, *TREASURE* is a gripping but

fast read. The villains are so outrageously villainous that they're the most memorable characters in the book. The action is frequent, bloody, over-blown, and in places a little over-done - almost to the point of

farce. I give you an example of this last: Dirk Pitt, Al Giordino, and Clayton Findley, three marine scientists (although Pitt could never be called just a marine scientist), manage to defeat thirty-odd trained Arab terrorists in a pitched battle, and - wait for it - suffer only a mere five bullet wounds each!

In all, TREASURE is definitely not Cussler's best - the good bits creak and groan before finally being buried under all the bad bits of this novel. However, when you pick up a Cussler book, you know what you'll be getting. And when you read TREASURE, you'll get it. In abundance.

Isaac Asimov (ed.) - - - - - - - - - - -ROBOTS
(Robinson, 1989, 351pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Inventor of the Three Laws of Robotics, Asimov lends his name to yet another anthology, although, oddly enough, his own contribution makes no mention of them at all. 'Sally' (1953) is an interesting robot turns on man story, neatly turning its narrator's sentimentality to fear by the turn of events.

My favourite stories from this collection include Philip K. Dick's 'Second Variety', in which soldiers of the future fight robotic weapons which turn on their creators. Excellent, too, is Robert Sheckley's 'The Lifeboat Mutiny', in which the lifeboat in question is programmed to protect its occupants at all costs - but its normal occupants don't share the same environmental needs as its new human crew. The most recent story is David Brin's 'The Warm Space', which explores what happens when Man outlives his usefulness because of his inability to live in space as can robots.

It was interesting to read Harry Bates' 1940 story, 'Farewell To The Master', which was the basis for the 1950s film *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. Unfortunately, to my mind at least, it has not worn as well as the film, plodding along rather slowly.

Other contributors include Pohl, Budrys, Kuttner, Simak and Del Rey. All in all, a vaguely interesting collection of stories, but not without its disappointments - Henry Slesar's 'Brother Robot' is a particularly mundane and trite retelling of the Frankenstein story.

Joan Wolfe - - - - - - - - - - -THE ROAD TO AVALON
(Grafton, 1989, 475pp, £3.99)

Fay Sampson - - - - - - - - - - - WISE WOMAN'S TELLING
(Headline, 1989, 229pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

THE ROAD TO AVALON and WISE WOMAN'S TELLING are very different novels, but they are both typical of the ever-growing volume of Arthurian literature in which the sparse facts of Dark Age history are fleshed out with characters from Medieval legend. Joan Wolfe's book is an historical novel set firmly in the Fifth Century. The familiar characters of Arthurian legend are present, but there are none of the magical elements that constitute the usual definition of fantasy. In this version, Merlin is no wizard but a Romano-Celtic lord who serves Uther the High King. Arthur is Merlin's grandson who must forge the Celts and Romano-British into one people if Britain is not to be over-run by Saxon invaders. The novel is well written as far as it goes, but it lacks the sense of tragedy

that underlies Arthur's story from the beginning. Arthur, Gwenhwyfar and the rest as described here are so rational and reasonable that they seem unequal to the task of playing out a passionate drama on the epic scale. Morgred is merely weak rather than villainous, persuaded to usurp Arthur's throne by his foster-brother Agravaine, who appears disturbed rather than evil. A novel of limited appeal for SF or fantasy readers.

WISE WOMAN'S TELLING, Book One of the Daughter of Tintagel sequence, covers the early part of Arthur's story, up to his birth. The narrator is Gwennol, woman of power, practitioner of the Old Religion that worships the Mother, and nurse to Morgan, Morgause and Elaine, the daughters of Ygerne and Gorlois of Cornwall. The Dark Ages in this novel are wild and magical, the waves crash against the cliffs of Tintagel, there are places in the forest where Gwennol 'wouldn't go . . . without strong spells to guard me.' Merlyn is a figure of power and mystery. He is a trickster, sometimes a druid, sometimes disguised as a beggar. Rather at odds with the hints of dark magic scattered throughout the book is Gwennol's irritating and anachronistic habit of referring to Dark Age warriors as 'the gentry', and the occasional flight of purple prose: 'the beads of the rain . . . were rose-crystals on the trees of fairyland.'

However, neither WISE WOMAN'S TELLING or THE ROAD TO AVALON is a bad book. It is simply that as new interpretations of the Matter of Britain, they have little to add to what has gone before. With so much writing on Arthurian themes in the bookshops, a novel of this sort must be truly exceptional to stand out from the crowd.

Isaac Asimov, Charles
G. Waugh & Martin H.
Greenberg (eds.) - - - - - THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF
GOLDEN AGE SCIENCE FICTION:
SHORT NOVELS OF THE 1940s
(Robinson, 1989, 504pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Brian Magorrian)

'Perfect plane reading mammoth value holiday books' runs the publisher's publicity for the Mammoth Book series which the GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION is a part of. Other volumes feature war stories, spy thriller and crime. This one is good value, with 504 pages of close-spaced type.

The ten short novels in this book are fairly typical examples of the 'Golden Age': high on the *sensa wonder*, refreshingly so for me, and with a large dollop of scientific rationale spread here and there. The scientific content is sometimes dated, but usually it doesn't get in the way of the story too much. The one exception being 'Nerves' by Lester del Rey. The description of a nuclear accident, and the efforts of engineers to cope with it, was quite gripping. Unfortunately the author appeared to think that the main problem arising from a nuclear incident would be skin burns, rather than the long-term cancers, etc, which would arise.

In the collection there was only one story I actually disliked: 'Time Wants A Skeleton' by Ross Rocklynne. There were far too many meaningful looks flying around for comfort! Asimov makes a familiar, but welcome, appearance with a Foundation story, 'The Big And The Little'. Other enjoyable stories are 'Daymare', by Fredric Brown, where the local constable solves a murder which is certainly more than it first seems, and the famous 'The Weapon Shop' by A.E. van Vogt.

Perhaps I'm taken in by the reputation of the 'Golden Age' but, despite some slight shortcomings in the stories, this is an entertaining book.

Tom Holt - - - - -WHO'S AFRAID OF BEOWULF?
(Orbit, 1989, 206pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Another frivolous delving into Norse mythology, anachronistically setting (pseudo-) mythic characters in modern-day Britain in a similar way to the author's previous novel, EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER. On the whole, the story is a silly, but enjoyable send-up of myths and the fantasy genre, attacking obvious targets like archaeology, television reportage, stock market yuppies and unreliable computers. The book could have been written for children.

Holt's enthusiasm for his subject matter makes the fairly predictable story seem fresh, though, and whilst I didn't find it riveting reading, it was pleasant enough:

What are the deeds of heroes, except a few frightened people doing the best they can in the circumstances? Sigurd had no trouble at all killing the dragon; it was a very old dragon, and its eyesight was starting to go. If he'd waited another couple of weeks it would have died of old age.

[p. 193]

The plot? Hildy Frederiksen, archaeologist, wakes a band of vikings and helps them in their fight against evil, personified by the Sorcerer-King. Whilst the climax makes a pleasant, if unsurprising change, it is also weak. The story rolls gently along, with no peaks or troughs to make the journey truly memorable and, as usual in novels of this kind, there is little in the way of characterisation. Fantasy fans who like their reading very light won't be disappointed, but if you want meat, you'd do better spending your money on a Big Mac.

Ben Bova - - - - -MILLENNIUM
(Mandarin, 1989, 296pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

This, says the cover, is the second story in The Kinsman Saga: see also KINSMAN and COLONY. This reviewer has read neither and can only comment on the volume to hand.

In 1994 Chet Kinsman runs the American Moonbase, pally with his opposite number Leonov of neighbouring Soviet Lunagrad; they even co-operate, even (in lunar circumstances) have to co-operate. Earth, meanwhile, totters towards outright nuclear war. When the warning signals go out, Kinsman and Leonov declare the independent nation of Selene and threaten to destroy all nuclear missiles from whichever quarter. (It just so happens they can.) The military down below set out to defeat them. You can guess who wins on the last, sad, heartwarming page.

There's Diane Lawrence, Kinsman's folk-singer lover, Frank Coit his patriotic black number two, and a mixture of other sketched-in characters to complicate the plot. The book slaps military patriots in the eye; in some areas of the USA it could be brave to commend it; it makes a fairly exciting escapist read.

Believe it? Well, try picking holes in the plot. Isn't it, really, pure wish-fulfilment fantasy? And don't you wish it wasn't? Don't answer, in case you incriminate yourself.

Chris Beebee - - - - THE MAIN EVENT. BOOK TWO:
IN THE CIPOLA SEQUENCE
(Futura, 1989, 202pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

I haven't read THE HUB. BOOK ONE: IN THE CIPOLA (the European L5 Orbital Location) SEQUENCE, but it doesn't really matter,

because Chris Beebee deftly sketches in the salient facts about Frank Turner, one-time deprogrammer:

[Deprogramming] had been Turner's calling. Rescuing the children of the wealthy from . . . the myriad pernicious and not-so-pernicious religions or quasi-religious cults that flourish on Earth . . . Working for a nasty little agency called Reclaim Incorporated, whose methods . . . had been criticised . . . by OCTAVE [explanation follows]. [But] now he was an OCTAVE agent. He'd joined the other side.

[pp. 14-15]

The first seventy-odd pages of the novel are (fortunately or unfortunately, depending upon your point of view) chock-a-block with informational gobbets like this - mild - example:

DATA UPDATE 2038:

OCTAVE: A research group incepted early century to investigate the mystery of human consciousness. Original founders believed structure of consciousness to be eightfold. Original funding through private trusts soon complemented by CENTERCOM [the gigantic intercontinental welfare state which effectively rules the world].

[p. 8]

The rest of the novel is something else again - a slam-bang space opera, with occasional thinky bits. Chris Beebee is, to quote an especially well remembered blurb, 'a brilliant new star in the science fiction firmament'. Cop this:

Turner's boss, Dralon, orders him to recover the missing - no, stolen - programs from GRAIL (Government Related Intelligence Analog and Liaison) which has been designed to increase the intellectual and 'spiritual' awareness of BUREAUCOMP (a 21st-century Conservative Party Central Office) itself, and report back to OCTAVE through computer links. Much, much easier said than done: if Dumarest ever came back to this f***ed-up Earth, he might well seek sanctuary with those (comparatively) nice Cyclans.

Rosaleen Love - - - THE TOTAL DEVOTION MACHINE
AND OTHER STORIES
(Women's Press, 1989, 167pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

When we say machines are taking over, we don't really mean that machines are taking over; not really. Rosaleen Love, in this collection, asks what would happen if it were true. The eponymous Total Devotion Machine called in by a spacewoman to care for her child while she is in flight because she cannot trust the father is a machine that can take control and does. The result is comic. This is a book of wit and humour and the basis of it is one of reversing the status quo - mechanically or otherwise things are not what they seem, from ex-pat Australians in Earls Court to the janitor responsible for the office tea school.

There are a lot of theories of humour - and at least one of them has a lot of relevance to this book - since Henri Bergson (Monty Python's great opponent of Cartesian dualism) held that all humour is based on the abrupt change from the independent human to the mechanical action of the will-less individual slipping on the banana skin. And soon after Bergson wrote, the silent comedies were all based on that automatism - if there is a plank, our hero is going to get it in the

neck. Life is like that. Now extend that - the plank becomes sentient - instead of the painter's scaffolding it becomes the spacewoman's childminder.

Imagine what change there would be in the status quo. Rosaleen Love has set down some of those possibilities.

Andrew M. Greeley - - - - - THE FINAL PLANET
(Legend, 1989, 302pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Pilgrim ship Iona, of the Holy Order of St Brigid and St Brendan, approaches the planet Zylong and despatches Seamus O'Neill, a soldier dressed as a poet, to spy out the situation. He discovers a rigid society, sexually puritanic, admitting neither problems nor enemies, yet maintaining a sizeable and largely incompetent army and an internal apparatus of repression.

Good natured Seamus, who thinks and talks in a tourist's Irish brogue, has his own personal obsession: a not-too-pious quest for his 'proper woman'. With his height, his novelty and his red beard, not to mention his spy's mission, he rapidly becomes involved in every sense, finding himself among gorgeous women, oppositional factions, outcasts and rebel soldiers, at last confronting the Zylong government's real enemies. Naturally, decent Celtic anarchy triumphs in the end.

At the start I found the twee Irishisms irritating. But eventually the plot takes over with a happy sprinkling of puzzles, flirtations, ambushes and improbable escapes. Despite the slaughter of the final pages, this is a cheerful, fairly reverent tale of love and battle, if a little bit too innocent for its own good. Ideal for the beach, rather too lightweight for the study: and sure, what they'd be after making of it in fundamentalist households, be they protestant or Islamic, I wouldn't be knowing, at all, at all.

Clifford D. Simak - - - - - OFF-PLANET
(Mandarin, 1989, 223pp, £3.50)

Reviewed by Edward James

This collection of Simak's short stories is put together, and introduced, by Francis Lyall (Professor of Law at the University of Aberdeen). It has no overlap with any of the other Simak collections published in the UK that I have on my shelves. And although one or two of the stories are quite well known from anthologies -- notably "Construction Shack" and "Junkyard" -- this seems to be a very useful collection for any Simak reader. *Aliens for Neighbours*, the title of an old Simak collection, would suit this one just as well. "The Observer" and "Construction Shack", from 1972, both feature aliens, in a fashion; "Mirage" (1956) shows a human coming to understand and to join in transcendental reunion a group of elusive Martians. The other four stories are all from Simak's classic period -- 1944 to 1957 -- and all of them belong to what is virtually a sub-genre of the sf of those days: human ship lands on alien planet, confronts incomprehensible alien life, learns to comprehend it. The Simak sub-sub-genre continues: learns to live with it in neighbourly fashion. All these stories are classic Simaks, with marvellous aliens (especially in "The World that Couldn't Be"), splendid puzzles ("Junkyard" and "Shadow World"), a delightful robot ("Ogre"). Humanity with humour: Simak's gift to sf. This is the sort of sf (and, indeed, some of the stories) that bowled me over as a teenager, and it has survived the test of time and nostalgia remarkably well.

Christopher Rowley - - VANG: THE MILITARY FORM
(Legend, 1989, 396pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

The parasitic Vang had floated in space for half a billion years waiting for host to come

within striking distance before an asteroid miner fatally discovers the small escape pod. Once they have achieved mobility and the means to grow, the ferocious Vang turn their attention to the human colony planet of Saskatch. The greater part of this book is taken up with the Vang's invasion of the frontier world, their attempts to reproduce and the human's efforts to protect themselves.

The book is a strange mix of the inventive and the downright lazy. The Vang are truly alien and their reproductive processes and alien mentality are well described, even if they do seem to develop recognisably human attributes as the book goes on. The creation of the human colony is an abject failure of imagination.

The planet of Saskatch is a barely disguised version of today's Canada, complete with Anglo-French population. And who can believe that in 3000 years mankind will still be going to restaurants to order steak tartare? The book reads like a storyboard for an alien invasion film set in contemporary small town North America, not an adventure set 3000 years into the future.

VANG is a sequel to Rowley's STARHAMMER. It can certainly be read without reading the earlier book, but it would help if you are a fan of Rowley's other work.

Adam Lively - - - - - BLUE FRUIT
(Sceptre, 1989, 144pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

At first sight, BLUE FRUIT does not hold much interest for the science fiction reader, with its story of a white Englishman playing jazz fiddle in a black band in New Orleans. In fact, if your taste in SF is traditional and conservative, it probably won't interest you anyway, but for those people who relish the way that mainstream writers sometimes embrace science fiction conventions, this is an interesting example. You see, John Field is an eighteenth century Englishman, put ashore on the American coast at his own request who somehow manages to bridge two hundred years in the simple action of walking up a beach. Literally an innocent abroad, he provides Adam Lively with a detached and unbiased commentary on modern American society. But forget the theory; this novel is really about jazz music in New Orleans, not the glamorous touristy view, but the real thing, played in grubby bars and late-night rent parties. Ironically, with his training in classical musical forms, John Field finds himself more truly at home here than in his own time, a fact emphasised by his eventual decision to turn down a lucrative job to remain as a musician. BLUE FRUIT is a curiosity, and exhibits some of the flaws one might expect of a first novel, but Lively writes well, exhibits an original turn of mind and I strongly recommend BLUE FRUIT to anyone who likes their fiction just a little bit off the wall. And yes, he is Penelope Lively's son, but I don't that really matters.

Isaac Asimov, Charles
G. Waugh & Martin H.
Greenberg (eds.) - - - ISAAC ASIMOV'S WORLD OF
SCIENCE FICTION: MONSTERS
(Robinson, 1989, 349pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

With the exception of Van Vogt's entertaining first story, 'Black Destroyer' (1939), later incorporated into THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE, and the pseudonymous J.H. Rosny aine's 'The Shapes' (1887, translated by Damon Knight), the eleven stories (seven shorts, three novelettes, and one novella) in this surprisingly enjoyable anthology were all written in the '50s and '60s.

Only three of them are truly frightening, P.J. Farmer's 'Mother', which deals with the protagonist's deterioration with chilling depth and feeling, and the two Nebula winners, Silverberg's 'Passengers', about aliens who periodically take control of their human hosts, and Zelazny's 'The Doors Of His Face, The Lamps Of His Mouth', an atmospheric story of a hunt for a sea monster.

Three more stories were expanded or incorporated into novels. William Tenn's excellent 'The Men In The Walls' became MEN AND MONSTERS, portraying men as rats living in the walls of the homes of giant alien invaders; Theodore L. Thomas' unremarkable anti-pollution story, 'The Clone', concerning a ravenous blob, became a novel co-written by Kate Wilhelm; and Murray Leinster's wryly exciting Hugo winner, 'Exploration Team' about a pionerring Luddite rebel and his bear-friends, was incorporated into COLONIAL SURVEY (aka THE PLANET EXPLORER).

The final story, 'All The Way Back' appeared in a 1988 Headline anthology, ENCOUNTERS, edited by the same trio who did this one. An argument can be made for giving new life to deserving old stories, but Michael Shaara's is dreadful, and I wonder how the editors could justify using it twice in the space of a year.

Clifford D. Simak - - - - -WHERE THE EVIL DWELLS
(Mandarin, 1989, 249pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

Think of the works for which Clifford D. Simak is known, such as CITY or WAY STATION; WHERE THE EVIL DWELLS is nothing like them. In fact, not only is it different in style and genre, it is also very different in quality. It is pretty bad.

This is heroic fantasy-cum-S&S where a small group of comrades cross a wasteland in search of a magic prism, are harried by dragons and ogres and The Evil (complete with capital letters and not a lot of description otherwise), get help from wizards, witches and others, eventually succeed and come home - that's the story.

Like all these stories the comrades have different qualities - so we have a white knight, a rather modern woman, a mace-carrying Abbot and a possible Neanderthal still in touch with the earth. These people are Christian and they work quite happily with Roman legionaries who also fight The Evil in the same way they once fought Celts, Gauls and Belgiae. So in those two sets of people we have a thousand year difference. Then the whole journey is made across the Empty Lands - rather oddly echoing William Hope Hodgson's fantasy of the far future, THE NIGHT LAND - seeming to change the period once again.

In other words this book is a hodge-podge of ideas badly put together. I couldn't see why.

J.N. Williamson - - - - -MASQUES
(Futura, 1989, 221pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

Short story collections are not my favourite recreation. Too often the good stuff is required to carry more than its weight in ballast, and this particular compilation is no exception. J.N. Williamson has put together no less than twenty-six stories of horror and the supernatural, most of them by writers whose work I, at least, have never come across before. The majority are distinctly average, but a number lurk in the mind.

There are good competent efforts from Robert Bloch, Mort Castle, Stephen King, David Silva and Ray Russell. And along with this half dozen are two other stories that are

exceptional: Thomas Monteleone's 'The Night Is Freezing Fast' and Alan Rodgers' 'The Boy Who Came Back From The Dead'. Monteleone's story is a simple but effective account of a grandfather's attempt to save his grandson from a mysterious stranger. Even better is the Rodgers story which concerns the problems that confront young Walter Fulton when he is resurrected from the dead. This is a superb piece of writing. Walt's mother can't accept him, his school friends persecute him and aliens are after him. In a nice touch, young Walt tells the press the great secret of the afterlife only to have his story sensationalised and distorted out of all recognition. Very enjoyable. Rodgers is a writer I shall watch out for.

Overall, though, is the collection worthwhile? I am grateful for the Monteleone and Rodgers stories, but does this justify the whole volume? I don't think so.

Stephen Bowkett - - - - - DUALISTS
(Piper, 1988, 159pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

DUALISTS (Gollancz juvenile, 1987) is about '... slubber' - neither one thing or another; not slime or rubber, a bit of both' (p. 31.) Slubber, accidentally discovered by young Simon Hallam and his beachcombing friends (acquaintances, rather), is a jelly-like substance that can create perfect duplicates (plus-or-minus X) of anything - or any being - it touches. Simon, a precocious ~~brax~~ boy, comes to realise the implications:

'... you're [slubber] probably more dangerous than bullets or bombs, because people won't have to make bullets or bombs any more, just drop them in a vat of slubber and stand back. Does that mean we won't have to make new things? ... Instead of working to earn money for something, you can get it for free from slubber. Whoever has slubber could rule the world ... Are you an invasion, a weapon, or a gift?' [pp. 105-6]

These questions (and many others, equally pertinent) have, alas, only been raised in order to be half-answered or not-answered-at-all. I enjoyed the 'mundane' story, concerning Simon's painful integration into his new school- and private-life at Seabeck. But - to cut a short novel even shorter - DUALISTS concludes without being conclusive. Perhaps a sequel is in the offing (Son Of Slubber?)

Isaac Asimov - - - - -ROBOT DREAMS
(Gollancz, 1989, 475pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

Yet another collection from Asimov, this book contains stories mainly from '50s sf magazines (and one copyrighted 1977 for an American Airways in-flight magazine!).

It opens with an Introduction in which Asimov pats his own back for his 'invention' of robotics, and describes a few of his 'propecies' that came true. I found this annoying since (a) Asimov ignores most of the 'propecies' that have been shown to be way off (he focuses on small mistakes he made and how science has since proven what scientists of the time when he wrote the story thought), and (b) in my mind, sf has never been about predicting the future anyway.

The stories themselves range from the ubiquitous to the obscure. I found the better ones to be those that didn't involve robots or Multivac - perhaps because I hadn't actually read many of these before. The old favourites

include 'Jokester', 'Franchise', and 'The Ugly Little Boy'. 'Lest We Remember' is a nice little parable about a man given total recall by an experimental drug, dwelling mainly on the effect an eidetic memory has on him and his subsequent ruthless bids for power. 'Breeds There A Man...?' is a '50s atomic scientist Man-is-just-an-experiment paranoia trip. 'The Machine That Won The War', a Multi-vac story about false idols, has improved with Time and Technology, becoming quite poignant (remember GIGO: Garbage In, Garbage Out?).

Since short stories often vary in quality, then it follows that a collection of short stories is, by definition, variable - ROBOT DREAMS is no exception to this rule. Other than that there isn't really a lot else that can be said about a book such as this - for one thing, most sf readers have probably read at least 75% of the stories in it already in other collections or magazines, and formed their own opinions on their merit (or lack thereof).

For Asimov fans, I shouldn't think there is much point to getting ROBOT DREAMS. But this collection does make a good introduction to Asimov's short fiction for readers new to sf - in that respect, I can't really fault it.

Norman Spinrad - - - - - LITTLE HEROES
(Grafton, 1989, 733pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Eric Brown)

LITTLE HEROES is about media manipulation and the decline - and resurrection - of Rock and Roll. Set early in the next century, the novel paints a convincing landscape of a class-divided America. The haves are protected by Zonies, Uzi-wielding security guards; the have-nots, the Streeties, eat State hand-out Kibble and inhabit decaying ghettos. Rock and Roll as we know it is dead, and the MUZIK music co. churn out the muzak of the future: synthesized pop fronted by APs, computer-generated Artificial Personalities.

The many stranded plot involves the little heroes of the title, their survival and rebellion against media control. The novel's strength is its cast of characters: Gloriana O'Toole, the Crazy Old Lady of Rock and Roll, now in her sixties; Paco Monaco, impoverished Puerto Rican Streetie with natural savvy and ambition; Bobby Rubin and Sally Genaro, young cyberwizards whose relationship is perhaps the most satisfying aspect of the book. Spinrad succeeds in portraying these characters, and a host of others, with sympathy and humanity; they are fully rounded individuals who act with cruelty and kindness in a world made rotten by those with power.

The book's weakness, however, is its length and the quality of its prose. At seven hundred plus pages, it weighs in at a couple of hundred over the limit. It is padded in places with superfluous descriptive passages; everything is described, and nothing left to the imagination. Many narrative paragraphs conclude in a welter of adjectival subordinate clauses which gives the impression they were written on automatic pilot or, even worse, dictated.

LITTLE HEROES is enjoyable for its satire and characterisation, but I can't help feeling that Spinrad was too consciously attempting to join the legion of American SF writers who have tipped the scales recently with multi-hundred page blockbusters. The result is vaguely disappointing, but worth a look.

Arthur C. Clarke - - THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE
(VGSF, 1989, 258pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

The focal point of THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE is the space elevator, a massive orbital tower built downwards to Earth from synchronous

orbit and upwards to 40,000 kilometres. It will make obsolete the expensive, noisy and environmentally unfriendly rocket and open up the solar system if not the stars. This is pretty familiar fare from Clarke but this book, first published in 1979, still stands as one of his best offerings.

The Tower's base is to be the island of Taprobane, based upon Sri Lanka. The book opens with Kalidassa, one of the island's ancient kings aspiring to build his palace towers towards heaven. The religious aspirations of this self-appointed God-king are contrasted with the aspirations of the designer of the Tower, Vannevar Morgan. Indeed, the relationship between science and religion is the central theme of the novel, and Clarke introduces a rather obvious device to discuss it, in the form of a Rama-like alien space probe bringing information about many other worlds, and conclusively demonstrating religion to be a by-product of human biology. Science and reason are almost seen as the true religion - at least in the sense that they govern the actions and beliefs of the rational man. Although as one of Clarke's characters says, even if this is true it is 'totally irrelevant to the question of God's actual existence'.

As usual, Clarke's optimistic attitude to science and humanity dominates - he even makes reference to Man's successful solving of the ozone layer problem a good decade before the current upsurge of 'Green' politics. The idea of the orbital tower is certainly breathtaking, and Clarke gives full credit to the inventor of the concept, Yuri Artsutanov; Clarke should receive credit for successfully translating the concept into fiction.

Megan Lindholm - - - - - WOLF'S BROTHER
(Unwin Hyman, 1989, 236pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Maureen Porter)

This appears to be a direct sequel to THE REINDEER PEOPLE, although, with a little concentration, it is possible to read it on its own as Lindholm gradually and effortlessly fills in the background without delivering up indigestible lectures on what has gone before. I'm not sure I'd go so far as to agree with the blurb, which proclaims the book as a 'saga of magic, terror and triumph', but it is certainly a model of its kind. The plot, whilst familiar, is deftly handled, and whilst Kerlew, the enigmatic child-magician, is a little hard to stomach, his mother Tillu, Carp the evil shaman who would bind her and Kerlew to his service, and Kari the wild daughter of the tribe's leader are beautifully drawn characters. The ending is, I fear, inevitable, though I leave you to discover that for yourself, but the enjoyment of the journey makes up for its banality. This may not be high literature but it is certainly better than average fantasy and, bearing in mind that one cannot entirely survive on a gourmet diet, this staple fare is worth considering.

Greg Bear - - - - - PSYCHLONE
(VGSF, 1989, 312pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven J. Blyth)

The novel begins with the strange and gruesome eradication of the population of a small New Mexico town, the brutal murder of someone's best friend and also - as if that wasn't enough - the suicide of the dead friend's father. A group of central characters are then introduced as they become involved in the whole affair by curiosity, accident, or by the government calling upon them for assistance. They soon discover that these horrific events are the work of a powerful supernatural force, namely the Psychlone. This destructive force

is on the rampage and, of course, must be stopped.

The narrative flows at quite a speed and it doesn't take long for the plot to develop. The cause of the Psychlone is the Atom Bomb blasts of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and one gets the impression that there is a slight anti-nuclear message, but this is in no way blatant and it isn't rammed down the reader's throat. In fact at the end of the novel there is, I think, a general comment on the dangers of using scientific breakthroughs and Hi-tech in warfare as Bear creates something which is far more terrible than a weapon that merely destroys life in a physical sense.

In PSYCHLONE there are characters who have a purely scientific point of view and also those who favour a more mystical approach. Bear treats both viewpoints in a good, unbiased manner, and he doesn't try to ridicule either one of these opposed attitudes.

On the whole I enjoyed PSYCHLONE. It's not a masterpiece and it does in places suffer from some clumsy prose. It was, however, a fairly decent read that held my attention throughout.

Octavia Butler - - - - - ADULTHOOD RITES:
XENOGENESIS 2
(Gollancz, 1989, 277pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Butler continues her outstanding trilogy concerning the forced genetic fusion between Mankind and the Oankali. This second volume joins the Oankali and humans on the surface of the war-ravaged Earth and follows their attempts to successfully colonise the planet. Some humans show no gratitude to their Oankali saviours and form splinter groups who resist breeding with the aliens. The half-Oankali son of Lilith, from the first book, is taken forcefully by one group of resisters. Akin appears human to them and is a powerful tool for trade between the child-less humans who shun the aliens. But Akin has some Oankali traits and soon stirs conflicts amongst the community as they realise he is soon to metamorphose into an alien form. The book ends with Akin transformed and attempting to lead the resisters into a new life on terraformed Mars.

Apart from giving us a new word, this Xenogenesis trilogy works best as a lament for humankind as our racial identity and the very Earth is lost to the Oankali. Butler never misses an opportunity to muse upon our innate destructiveness and ironically the aliens believe mankind can only co-exist peacefully when absorbed into their own biology. Akin sees Mars as one last chance to breed out what the Oankali call Mankind's 'genetic contradiction'. If men cannot work together against a hostile environment then they are lost.

The aliens are complex creations, resolutely ambiguous in their motivations; they are both healers and planetary tyrants. It's this convincing relationship between the two races that sets up Xenogenesis for an enthralling concluding volume.

David Eddings - - - - - DEMON LORD OF KARANDA
(Bantam, 1989, 378pp, £6.95 (trade pbck))
(Corgi, 1989, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

When I heard that Eddings had succumbed to the temptation of a book auction, and was going to publish two epic sequences simultaneously, I was disappointed in him. Completion of the five-book 'Malloreon' was bound to be scrappy, with loose ends left untied. So far, however, Eddings has sustained those qualities I like best, his witty dialogue and twisted plot, though the conclusion of Book Three with two

deae ex machina halting Zandrmas' plans, is too soft-hearted. I've also noticed discrepancies in his time-scale.

Novelties introduced in DEMON LORD OF KARANDRA include a different kind of Prologue. Instead of summarising Books One and Two, it offers a version of 'The Belgariad' from the Melcene point of view, the Melcenes being the intellectuals and bureaucrats who actually run the Malloreon Empire on behalf of its Angarak rulers. Its capital, Mal Zeth, is an enormous city which reminds me of Gandahar, modelled on our India. We read of Silk's attempt to subvert the empire's economic system, and of Sadi's involvement with 'agricultural products' so as not to allow the 'grass' grow under his feet. Then there's a show-down with Urvon and Harakan in the House of Torak, and we find out more about demons.

You don't have to be a great or good writer to make the Sunday Times hardback best seller list, which ranges from Anita Brookner through Wilbur Smith to Julie Burchill, in the lists I'm looking at. But to make the list as a fantasy writer demands a certain something, especially if you're asking your readers to invest in a fiction sequence. 'The Malloreon' will cost its purchasers, in hardback, nearly £60, and they're also buying Book One of 'The Elenium', a trilogy which will cost at least £35. While not attempting to persuade the unwilling to try him, I would still reject the implication from some BSFA reviewers that if you enjoy Eddings your tastes must be irredeemably bad.

Pamela Sargent - - - - - VENUS OF DREAMS
(Bantam, 1989, 538pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

The first in a trilogy, this is one of those long dynastic novels of the kind popularised by writers like Barbara Taylor Bradford or Susan Howarth, where a series of strong-minded characters, usually women, overcome seemingly insuperable odds down the years in order to build an empire of one sort or another. It was inevitable that the genre would spill over into SF eventually.

The main character, Iris Angharads, comes from the American Midwest six centuries in the future, on an impoverished Earth whose climate has been wrecked by the greenhouse effect. The Arabs are now dominant, and have established a mainly benevolent oligarchy. America is a matriarchal society where matronymics have replaced surnames, the women farm the land, and the men are forced to lead nomadic lives as journeymen tradesmen. Universal schooling and literacy are things of the past, and Earth's society is as stratified and hierarchical as any feudal society (or even one invented by Jack Vance!).

The most talented people have long since left, and live in artificial Habitats from Mars orbit outwards, but Earth is desperate for new living space, and embarks on an incredibly ambitious Project: to terraform Venus, and transform it into a planet on which humans can live comfortably. (At the same time they hope to develop the techniques required to restore Earth to its pre-greenhouse climate, and reclaim the land lost by the melting of the icecaps.)

Iris is attracted by the Venus Project from childhood, and devotes her life to qualifying for it, against the wishes and advice of her family and friends, who wish her to settle down and be a good farmer like her mother and grandmothers before her. Those qualities of hers which make her succeed in this make Iris an initially unlikeable main character, as she puts everything others find of importance into second place, and uses the people who love her ruthlessly in order to meet her career goals (just as mainly male 20th Century corporate executives do, of

course!).

However, Iris does redeem herself in the reader's eyes by the end of the book, and Ms Sargent's writing brings a lump to the throat as the first settlers finally make it down to the domes on the surface of the planet from which they'll launch the completion of the terraforming Project.

I had some difficulty sustaining my interest through the centre parts of this book, and thought that 538 pages was a trifle more than the story could carry. However, a strong ending left me ultimately keen to get the next in the series, and follow the history of Iris' dynasty.

Dave Duncan - - - - - SHADOW
(Legend, 1989, 276pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Shadows have personal responsibility for the safety of a ruler; they are bodyguards, security advisors, and (in the last resort) human shields. If a ruler dies by violence, his Shadow is promptly executed for treason. On Rantorra, Shadows don't usually live long.

Sald Harl, a minor noble, unexpectedly becomes Shadow Prince, curtailing his promising career as an eagle rider. 'Eagles' are huge winged beings capable of carrying a man, and the main means of communication between the isolated human settlements of Rantorra's (marginally) habitable terminator zone. Sald rapidly becomes the fall-guy of a complex political intrigue. Branded a traitor, he flees for his life to 'the enemy' republic. Here he discovers 'the eagles' secret', becoming a violent and radical revolutionary, and returns to his homeland to destroy the culture of his birth.

A good recreational read, essentially a swashbuckler in SF clothing. The human societies are credible, the landscape original and interesting. My only reservation concerns the eagles. Although they form a major plot pivot they seem ecologically unworkable; there are far too many large predators for such a restricted habitat. What do they eat? Otherwise, recommended.

Richard Kadrey - - - - - METROPHAGE
(VGSF, 1989, 240pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

METROPHAGE was highly praised when it first appeared in hardback. This first UK paperback edition gives a wider audience a chance to see what all the fuss was about. I'm happy to say that it fully lived up to its star billing.

The plot is dense, full of twists and almost convincing. Jonny Qabbala, teenage law man turned drug dealer, is chased alternately by his ex-boss, the mad Colonel heading the notorious Committee of Public Safety which effectively runs the city, and the drug baron Conover, Jonny's most recent mentor. In classic punk hero style he spends most of his time talking his way either into or out of trouble. The real reason for Jonny's sudden popularity only gradually becomes clear but it seems linked to the mysterious alien Alpha Rats who have established a base on the moon. Meanwhile a new viral epidemic sweeps through defenceless LA and the search is on for a cure.

What helps set METROPHAGE apart is the sheer volume of detail Kadrey loads into each page. The whole book is densely packed with invention: locations like the Carnaby Pit club with its soft porn videos and low life clientele; gangs like the Zombie Analytics with their subcutaneous pixels flashing faded stars; and characters like Man Ray and his exploding rose bombs.

Kadrey also shows a level of political commitment unusual in this type of SF. The

good guys are undoubtedly the Croakers, underground medics led by the surreal anarchist Groucho with his theory of the Spectacle, a variation on 'don't let the bastards grind you down' (although as a committed anarquistas how could he join a club that would have him as a member?).

METROPHAGE is a self-consciously arty book, not simply in the way Kadrey uses the lexicon of surrealism and dada, but also in his apocalyptic vision of this third world 22nd century America. His LA (Los Angeles, Last Ass, Laughing Adder) is consuming itself from within as warring factions tear the city apart, in the same way as the virus feeds on itself and as Jonny is torn between love and survival in a fundamentally sick city. In feeding off each other Kadrey's characters are feeding on themselves. Jonny and his ilk are the virus in the sick society of LA.

This is an impressive first novel. Read it.

Christopher Hinz - - ANACHRONISMS (Mandarin, 1989, 304pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Vernon Leigh)

the time... the future...

...Mars Lea, a woman with amazing psych powers goes on a mysterious mission to an inhospitable planet. There she encounters a strange life form which, at the insistence of mad scientist Hardy, is brought on board the starship, Alchemon... Within a week ALIENS: the Final Conflict hits the movie screens of Earth... Signoury Weaver reprising her role for the thirty-second time.

To the rescue - our superhero Captain Erich Brad, fighting against a force he doesn't understand, hindered by a philosophising lieutenant with suicidal tendencies and helped by one genetically altered love-sick human with a hole in his head.

Just as a point of interest, the hole is for a cable which connects him to a very detailed computer network.

Apart from being very sad, it's difficult to know what to say when faced by a book whose beginning is lukewarm, middle is superb, and ending is awful. Hinz just gets better and better... until he reveals what is actually going on, the tension that he builds up so beautifully in the central section of ANACHRONISMS fades away as he introduces a goody-goody alien which promptly decides to lecture our PKing friend, rambling on about the good old days and the one terrible mistake that ruined the proverbial party.

But, even as you groan at the grotty ending and some of the more painful cliches you realise that this is only Hinz's second book (the first being LIEGE-KILLER) and if he can get his endings together then he'll be one hell of an action writer to watch for in the future.

William Tenn - - OF MEN AND MONSTERS (GOLLANCZ, 1989, 251pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

"Mankind consisted of 128 people.

The sheer population pressure of so vast a horde had long ago filled over a dozen burrows. Bands of the Male Society patrolled the outermost corridors with their full strength, twenty three young adult males in the prime of courage and alertness. They were stationed there to take the first shock of any danger to mankind..."

And so it begins; in my (admittedly biased) opinion a classic of the genre to stand beside A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ. Tenn was the originator of a whole new idea - a rarity in this incestuous genre - the "rats in the walls" approach to alien invaders, in which we see hapless humans scurrying hither and yon, grabbing what crumbs of sustenance they can find from the tables of their alien conquerors. We also see human relationships under a microscope, mounted on a glass slide of survival-induced stress. Look, I'm not going to say any more. If you've read the book you'll know what I'm talking about; if not, go out and buy it. You won't regret it.

Diana Wynne Jones - - - - - THE LIVES OF
CHRISTOPHER CHANT
(Mammoth, 1989, 252pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This prequel to *CHARMED LIFE* shows how Chrestomanci came to occupy his post: we meet him as a lonely but ordinary boy. Ordinary? Well, apart from his ability to visit 'Anywheres' - other dimensional worlds - and actually fetch things from them. When wicked Uncle Ralph gets to hear about this, he dupes Christopher into a series of 'experiments' (or smuggling). Christopher's experiences eventually reveal him as a potential enchanter with no less than nine lives . . . the catch being that this only becomes clear after he has lost several of them! Even at Chrestomanci Castle, studying to be the present incumbent's successor, Christopher is not safe . . .

The story is told with the author's usual sparkle and eye for the amusing aside: at his school Christopher obtains an unexpurgated edition of *THE ARABIAN NIGHTS* which becomes regular dormitory reading (though as this is a children's book we are not told what the 'dirty bits' involve!) and he becomes close friends with the Living Goddess Asheth, in her incarnation as a girl his own age who would much rather be a conventional schoolgirl. Christopher, of course, acquits himself well in the face of danger and becomes a better person as a result. Like all Diana Wynne Jones' books, this is thoroughly entertaining.

C.J. Cherryh - - - - - SERPENT'S REACH
(Mandarin, 1989, 287pp, £3.50)

- - - - - PORT ETERNITY
(VGSF, 1989, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

If insects could evolve into two-legged sapients, they would be the majat of the star-system known as SERPENT'S REACH. These strangely beautiful creatures, who communicate through touch and the analysis of body chemistry, are convincingly alien, and definitely not humans in chitinous guise.

The majat have rejected all contact with humans except for the Family, originally the Kontrin trading company, and now the rulers of the human colonists of the Reach. Members of the Kontrin Family have had their body chemistry altered by the majat so that they are virtually immortal - if they can avoid their rivals' assassins. Fabulously wealthy, they have limitless power over the betas (ordinary humans) and the azi (humans grown in laboratories and programmed for specific servile functions). The novel centres on Raen, whose family have been massacred by rival Kontrin. Raen's journeys through the Reach seeking revenge give C.J. Cherryh the opportunity to portray the Kontrin from the point of view of the betas, and of the azi in the person of Jim who is purchased by Raen in the course of her travels. Most memorable, however, are the descriptions of the majat hives, their sound-filled darkness and the Warriors, Workers and Drones circling about their Queen.

Like the azi, Elaine, the narrator of *PORT ETERNITY* has been grown in a laboratory and programmed by 'deepteach' tapes, but the two novels are not in any way connected. Elaine's owner is obsessed with the fantasy world of Tennyson's 'Idylls Of The King', naming her constructed servants Lancelot, Gawain, Percival, Vivien and Lynette, and her space ship the 'Maid of Astolat', after characters in the poem. The plot concerns Elaine and her fellows' discovery of and reaction to the stories of their namesakes, the ship's being trapped 'between' space and time, and the changing relationship between the made-men and

the born-men as they face the dangers of their situation. Life aboard the space ship is depicted in convincing detail, but the novel's ending is somewhat fanciful, especially when compared with the 'realism' of what has gone before.

Both novels are highly imaginative and well written, but *SERPENT'S REACH* is the more satisfying read. Its scope is wider than the enclosed world of 'Maid of Astolat' in *PORT ETERNITY*, and yet it manages to explore the nature of laboratory-grown men just as fully. *PORT ETERNITY* is entertaining, but *SERPENT'S REACH* is a totally absorbing read.

C.J. Cherryh - - - - - CUCKOO'S EGG
(Mandarin, 1989, 319pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

There is something complete about Cherryh's novels - as though the pages of the book were no more than a window onto an alien world. Details and background - thrown at the reader by lesser authors in hard-to-swallow expository chunks - are slowly released from the story, keeping the reader hooked.

CUCKOO'S EGG is as evocative of its strange setting as any of Cherryh's books, and concerns the childhood of Thorn, a human growing up amongst the alien *Shonunin*. But, we are not told why Thorn - the only human being on the *Shonunin* world - exists, or for what he is needed. The answer lies as much in the culture of the aliens as in the plot of the book. Revealing any more would probably spoil the climax.

The *Shonunin* themselves, as a creation, are consistent and far from being 'men in rubber suits' - this, I feel, is Cherryh's strength. In fact, by the end of *CUCKOO'S EGG*, I found myself regarding Thorn, the human, as an alien.

The prose is characteristically terse, and the plot is taut and action-packed, building to a tense climax, and only then is the riddle of Thorn's existence answered.

CUCKOO'S EGG is typical Cherryh: good. Read it.

Eric Frank Russell - - - WITH A STRANGE DEVICE
(Mandarin, 1989, 154pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

WITH A STRANGE DEVICE was Eric Frank Russell's last novel, published by Dennis Dobson in 1964. And, apart from two perfunctory paperback editions (Penguin, 1965; Lancer, same year - retitled *THE MINDWARPERS*), it has been neglected ever since. Understandably neglected. The current - and other- wise very welcome - EFR mini-boom has now returned *WITH A STRANGE DEVICE* to visibility, if not prominence.

I first read *DEVICE* mumblety-mumblety years ago, and my main reaction then was aggrieved disappointment. Perhaps I'd expected more *NEXT OF KIN/WASP*/'Allamagoosa' jolly-japes-in-the-airlock stuff, instead of - well - a weak tea 'spy' novel that might well have been written by (say) Francis Durbridge trying to imitate (say) Charles Eric Maine. Having re-read *DEVICE* mumblety-mumblety days ago, my main reaction now is - well - about the same, really.

The novel starts well enough, with a chilling pen-portrait of some ultra-secure governmental research establishment, the fatal(?) weakness of which lies . . . Not in concrete, granite or steel, not in mechanisms or electronic devices, not in routine or precautions or paperwork, but in flesh and blood' (p. 8). But things get incredibly tacky/tackily incredible after Richard Bransome (our hero - or is he?) falls victim:

to the DRUNKARD'S WALK-type brainwashing ('Did I murder Arline twenty years ago, or - who is 'Arline', anyway?') instigated by . . . you-don't-need-to-be-told-who.

Bransome is a no-nonsense metallurgist with a 'high IQ' (p. 36), but he's glacially slow on the uptake, even considering the severe mental strain that hag-rides him all over the ~~Worm~~ ~~Country~~ USA. The Man Who Learned Better - at long, long last. And WITH A STRANGE DEVICE ends with an 'explanation' that reads more like an excuse: the putative sf gimmick is just not fantastic enough to sustain a good fantasy. Sorry, Eric . . .

Eric Frank Russell - - - - -DEEP SPACE
(Mandarin, 1989, 249pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Yes, I know that several of these stories from the late '40s and early '50s have not worn well. 'First Person Singular' is about a man called Edham whose job it is to assess and colonise a primitive world and if I say 'Shaggy God story' you'll guess the outcome. 'Last Blast' contains at least two major scientific errors. Even the much vaunted EFR wise-cracking humour can grate - one of the best stories in this book ('The Timid Tiger') contains a remark about 'effervescence in my thinkery' which almost caused parallel efferescence in my eatery.

Yet Russell remains readable when many of his contemporaries seem semi-literate and oafish. It's the irreverence of his stories which is so appealing. 'Last Blast' revolves around the use of intelligence rather than brute force to resolve conflict, and 'The Timid Tiger' is an interesting view of colonialism, apt in its picture of a difficulty between a Terran mining company and Venusian natives. Is Russell's justification of a need for ethics in negotiation naive? Perhaps: but Russell's humanity is something to be cherished. He is traditionally Us against Them, but 'They' are not aliens but officers, bureaucrats and squeezers of square pegs into round holes of whatever biological background.

The nine stories included here are minor Russell, apart from 'A Little Oil', a story about how the pressures of long interstellar journeys are resolved, which shows his ingenuity at its best. But all Russell is worth reading. If his sentimentally bolshy attitude was removed from SF, we'd all be a lot poorer.

Douglas Hill - - - - - THE FRAXILLY FRACAS
(VGSF, 1989, 220pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

I was really looking forward to reading this one. Having heard of Douglas Hill as a respected writer of juvenile SF through his 'Last Legionary Quartet', having read Andy's favourable reviews of two children's fantasy novels of his in PI 79, and having seen an advert in which THE FRAXILLY FRACAS was described as being in the tradition of THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT, I was prepared for a good light-hearted read.

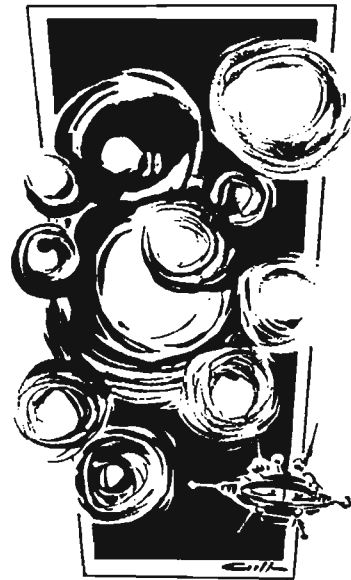
Hill's hero Del Curb is a private investigator turned interstellar courier, who accepts a job to take a small sealed container to the planet Fraxilly, helped by his beautiful partner Mala, who was formerly a FedPol special investigator. Needless to say, this simple job turns out to be extremely illegal and hazardous, attracting the interest of the galactic crime syndicate and two opposing bands of space pirates.

Unfortunately for the reader, Del Curb is not in the tradition of sparkling Slippery Jim DiGriz at all. In fact, he seems to me more

like a less appealing version of George MacDonald Fraser's Harry Flashman. Curb is vain, greedy, sexually unprincipled, chauvinistic, selfish, cowardly, deceitful, jealous, spiteful, and vindictive, to name a few of his more admirable qualities. I have rarely read a book in which the so-called 'hero' has been so utterly unsympathetic. For example, when Curb accidentally drinks some of the Fraxillian wonder drug phetam, he takes advantage of his momentary superhuman strength to kick in the face of his handsome rival for the affections of Mala, Gharr the Gherpotean, who is permanently disfigured.

The problem as I see it is that Hill's writing is not funny or well plotted enough to carry an utterly over-the-top bastard like Curb. Harrison's DiGriz may have been a rogue, but he does have his heart in the right place. Fraser's Flashman is certainly an unprincipled scoundrel, but one who usually ends up doing the right thing in spite of himself. Curb, as depicted here, has no redeeming qualities whatsoever.

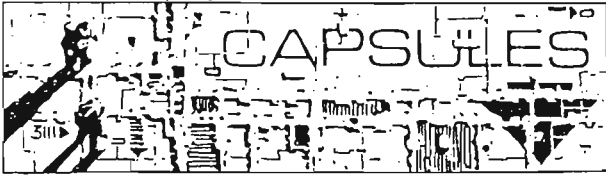
The best thing about this book is a delightful cover by John Higgins featuring a pack of homicidally minded aliens. It's a pity they didn't succeed in their aim to eliminate Curb, who seems destined to spoil many more books by Hill, I fear. Don't buy it unless you're a fanatical Douglas Hill fan, or absolutely desperate for something remotely resembling SF to read on the train (and leave on the seat)!



((Cont. from p. 2))

featuring it as an example here. I've been reading sf for a quarter of a century now, and this is the future I was reading about when I started. Only it doesn't look quite the same. No space-travel, no dramatic one-man-against-a-totalitarian-system set pieces. Just a relief driver pouring a consignment of poison into a wrong tank. Cock-up and cover-up. But the change between then and now is immense, and I won't even touch on Eastern Europe. Somehow, it makes space-opera and fantasy trilogies all too irrelevant. I have seen the future, to adapt the cliché, and it was a load of bureaucrats trying to cope with a job too big for them. There's no glamour in the important issues of our brave new world of the '90s - just economics, environmentalism and people wandering around bemused by it all. Who'd have read about these issues 25 years ago but a bunch of cranks like that idiot who picked up a copy of Frederick Pohl's THE SPACE MERCHANTS and wondered if the future might really turn out like that. What will the contrast be in another 25 years? Well, I can hope that books like DOWNTHE DRAIN might have made a positive difference, might have woken our collective ideas up.

But there'll be space opera and fantasy trilogies, though...



Marc Alexander - - MAGIC CASEMENTS (Headline, 1989, 342pp, £3.99)

Second volume (not a sequel as the cover states) subtitled "Part the Second of the Wells of Ythan", in a quartet begun with ANCIENT DREAMS and no improvement over it. Alexander uses the stuff of myth and legend with no understanding or sympathy, and as a result his work is not a tenth as interesting as the original stories. In addition, this volume includes two versions, each, of the Pied Piper of Hamelin and Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death', which serves only to highlight what an imaginative and creative desert exists - and that only vaguely - in the author's work. (Terry Broome)

Piers Anthony - - FOR LOVE OF EVIL (Grafton, 1989, 381pp £3.99)

Book six of the Incarnations of Immortality from the Henry Ford of fantasy. The first half, concerning the adventures of Parry, a Dominican friar in 13th century France, reads well and stands on its own; the second half reiterates the complex plot from the other five books but from the viewpoint of Parry, now the Incarnation of Evil. Despite being Satan, he now turns out to be another misunderstood nice guy, forced into taking action because of his position.

In all other respects, it's fairly typical Anthony. (Ian Sales)

Piers Anthony - - MAN FROM MUNDANIA (Avon, 1989, 352pp, \$4.50)

Yet another Xanth trilogy brought to a close as Princess Ivy ventures into Mundania, falls in love with a student and proves the existence of Xanth by pointing to all the books about it. Later on they get to see forthcoming titles. Aren't they lucky? (Andy Sawyer)

Gerry Davis & Kit Pedler - - THE TOMB OF THE CYBERMEN (Titan, 1989, 159pp, £3.95)

Second in Titan's series of classic DR WHO scripts, this was broadcast in 1967 and is one of the "lost" programmes now no longer available on tape. It features the "Patrick Troughton" Doctor with assistants Jamie and Victoria and even within the limits of its format is an exciting read. (Andy Sawyer)

Carole Nelson Douglas - - HEIR OF RENGARTH (Corgi, 1989 382pp, £3.50)

Second volume of the Sword and Circle trilogy. Bog-standard fantasy, pedestrian writing. Doesn't stand alone. Forgettable. (Sue Thomason)

Janice Elliot - - THE KING AWAKES (Walker, 1989, 188pp £1.99)

First in a trilogy set in post nuclear holocaust Britain: people are gradually recovering, governed by a priesthood of Guardians who have decided that mutants must be expelled from the Cities to become Outmen and live among the Outbeasts. Also outside the Cities are Travellers (former gypsies) who have developed Mindtalk. This theme will remind many of Wyndham's CHRYSALIDS, and has also been used by John Christopher in his Prince in waiting; - which, like THE KING AWAKES, had Arthurian echoes. Well written and fine for young readers: adults may find its mix of SF and Arthurian legend irritating. (Jessica Yates)

Rose Estes - - BLOOD OF THE TIGER (Bantam, 1989, 198pp, £2.99)

A fantasy at the dawn of time, somewhat derivative of

Jean M. Auel. In this book, however, the outcasts live with a pride of sabre-tooth lions. Despite being the first in a "saga" - always a reason not to buy a book you know little or nothing about except that the premise/cover/blurb looks interesting - I enjoyed it. (Ian Sales)

Philip Jose Farmer - - DAYWORLD REBEL (Grafton, 1989, 332pp, £3.50)

This is the "long-awaited sequel" to DAYWORLD. I've not read the latter, but believe it involved people allowed to live for only one day in seven, frozen for the remainder of the week, to relieve the population problem. As with a number of Farmer's ideas, this is quite original, but now of course he will doubtless flog it to death, as he has with RIVERWORLD.

If you've read Farmer before, you'll know what to expect. A light concoction, with some inane jokes, silly names for people, and atrocious writing. But he can be forgiven much - he often is! because he sweeps the reader along with his bravura performance. It's about a rebel against the system, and I suppose we should feel sorry for the system; it'll lose. (Nik Morton)

John Farris - - BAD BLOOD (Gollancz, 1989, 350pp, £3.99)

Which is the true "dark continent"? Originally published as ALL HEADS TURN WHEN THE HUNT GOES BY, this highly regarded if somewhat old-fashioned tale of family skeletons and demonic possession contrasts African voodoo and the plantation-aristocracy of the Deep South. (Andy Sawyer)

Chris Foss - - FOSS POSTER PORTFOLIO (Grafton, 1989, £9.99)

Ten A2 size posters in a card 'portfolio', the inside cover of which is printed with biographical information. You'll recognise the paintings from the covers of recent Grafton paperbacks, although they've been given Foss's own titles with a sentence or two of descriptive background. Foss's hard-technological imagery is impressive and if you look at this as £1 a poster for your bedroom wall this isn't bad: but couldn't Grafton have listed the books on which the paintings appeared? Perhaps this shows that cover illustrations really do have sod all to do with a book's contents. (Andy Sawyer)

Alan Dean Foster - - GLORY LANE (NEL, 1989, 295pp, £2.99)

Teenage rat-pack comes to science fiction in GLORY LANE was my first impression when I read this book. Seeth the local renegade punk, Kerwin the nerd, and Miranda the token dumb blonde are caught in an intergalactic chase all over a glorified disco-display called Izmir. Of course Izmir is much more than that - he's pretty neat in the local bowling alley - so numerous alien species keep popping up left, right and from hyperspace to get hold of "it". During their travels with Izmir they discover that 42 is not the answer to life, etc. but is something I would have thought was obvious by now in Thatcher's Britain. I found this book mildly amusing and no strain to read! (Brian Magorrian)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - BACK TO THE FUTURE II (Headline, 1989 216pp, £2.99)

Must be in my second childhood. I really enjoyed BACK TO THE FUTURE, both the movie and the novelisation, and now I find this sequel just as juvenile, just as pulpish, and just as much fun! Time paradoxes are well handled, characters are not quite comicbook, and we all need to relax at times: enjoy! The plot? If I tell you, it'll spoil your innocent pleasure. (Ken Lake)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - A DISAGREEMENT WITH DEATH (Headline, 1989, 185pp, £2.99)

This is the third volume in the comic fantasy Wuntvor trilogy. I quickly realised why I hadn't heard of the first two. (L.J. Hurst)

Alan Grant, Kitson, Gibson & Roach - - ANDERSON PSI DIVISION 4 (Titan, 1989, 64pp, £5.50)

This is the complete HELIOS storyline, concerning electronic brain-implants and the manipulation of people, the creation of alien creatures, all for the sake of revenge. Of the three artists mentioned, Roach is the

- most satisfying, i.e. realistic - if anything can be termed that in *Mega-City one!* Pretty gruesome in parts, but never mind, it's only a comic for kids... (Nik Morton)
- Lyndon Hardy - - RIDDLE OF THE SEVEN REALMS (Corgi, 1989, 403pp, £3.99)
- Very sticky, slow-moving, and a touch boring, follow-up to FIFTH and SIXTH MAGIC. It is, as the back cover claims, incisively logical, but it gets bogged down in some rather dire prose, a lot of one-dimensional characters and an awful plot. (Vernon Leigh)
- Diana Wynne Jones - - POWER OF THREE (Beaver, 1989, 272pp, £1.99)
- First published 1976, this has a Celtic flavour in its portrayal of little people living in mounds in Otmoor (near Oxford), at war with the Dorig (Water-spirits) and in fear of discovery by the Giants or humans. The "Three" are not only these three races, but the three Powers which lie behind them, of the Sun, Moon and Earth. Only a great renunciation can lift the curse which lies on the moor. A pity the cover illustration isn't as good as the out-of-print Puffin. (Jessica Yates)
- Dean R. Koontz - - THE FACE OF FEAR (Headline, 1989, 314pp, £3.50)
- Mass-murderer stalks a clairvoyant who has "Seen" him kill, and the only way to escape is down the outside of a tower block. I liked the "Colombo" - clone detective, the nailbiting suspense of the last third, and the gradual unravelling of the murderer's identity. (Andy Sawyer)
- Tanith Lee - - SHON THE TAKEN (Beaver, 1989, 144pp, £2.50)
- Reissue of a 1979 juvenile fantasy; Shon the peasant discovers his true abilities and inheritance (both considerable) through a series of tests and challenges. Competently written, stock plot, characters, etc. Nothing special. (Sue Thomason)
- Andre Norton - - 'WARE HAWK (Gollancz, 1989, 258pp, £3.50)
- A new 'Witch World' novel in which a young woman attempts to reclaim her lineage in the Dark-riven Estcarp mountains. Good setting, reasonable characterisation, otherwise standard Andre Norton S & S. (Andy Sawyer)
- Clarence Paget (ed.) - - THE 30th PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES (Pan, 1989, 208pp, £2.99)
- Yet another volume in the old favourite series. Like all collections, it's patchy, but the stories are generally of a high standard. Worth buying. (Jon Wallace)
- Dan Parkinson - - STARSONG (Penguin, 1989, 314pp, £3.50)
- The Cai race left the planet Earth more than five million years ago. In this whimsical novel, five of them have returned, seeking the means to defend "The Corad" which menaces their home world. When one of them dies, her betrothed must search for her spirit which has passed into a human woman. Not to worry; this is the sort of SF in which, with the help of an eccentric professor, everybody lives happily ever after. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND meets Mills & Boon. (Lynne Bispham)
- Wendy & Richard Pini - - THE SECRET OF TWO-EDGE (THE COMPLETE ELFQUEST:6) (Titan, 1989 128pp, £7.95)
- Not having read the first five books of this full colour rendering of the 10-year old comic series, originally published in black and white, I entered the fantasy land wondering what was happening. The wolf-riders must use all their magic against Winnowill, mistress of Blue Mountain, to rescue the baby Windkin. In the space of 113 large pages we have adventure, action, colour, passion, selfless bravery, love, anger, hate and humour. The artwork is continually moving the reader on, at breakneck speed, to a resolution. I found these characters strangers at the beginning but was engaged at a number of levels by them at the end. (Nik Morton)
- Fred Saberhagen - - STONECUTTER'S STORY (Orbit, 1989, 247pp, £2.99)
- Third in what may be a twelve-book LOST SWORDS series, following on from the SWORDS series, this book has Wen Chang (a Sherlock Holmes figure oriental in name only) and the physician Kasmir attempt to retrieve a stolen sword. Vaguely reminiscent of Vance, but lacking his rich inventiveness and colourful stylistic idiosyncrasies, the plot's few twists are all telegraphed well in advance, robbing it of most of its surprises. Despite feeling I'd finished before I'd begun, I did enjoy it - superficial, but fun. (Terry Broome)
- Joseph Sherman - - THE SHINING FALCON (Avon, 1989, 342pp, \$ 3.95)
- Unlike most genre fantasies, this story of love and magic is based on Slavic rather than Celtic folklore, which gives it a sense of originality marred only by the fact that like most genre fantasies it's - well - like most genre fantasies. (Andy Sawyer)
- Guy N. Smith - - THE SUCKING PIT (Grafton, 1989, 158pp, £2.99)
- The reissue of a dated and small-screen horror novel which lives up to its title. Evil happenings (with sex) in a gypsy-haunted wood. At least we're told it's gypsy-haunted (and full of sex), we never actually see any gypsies (or sex...) (Jon Wallace)
- Paul B. Thompson & Tonya R. Carter - - DARKNESS & LIGHT (DRAGONLANCE SAGA PRELUDES 1) (Penguin, 1989, 376pp, £3.99)
- Every disparaging word you have ever read about books based on role-playing games can be applied to this ludicrous fantasy in which the swordswoman Kitiara, the Solamnic knight Sturm Brightblade and a party of insufferably cute gnomes crash-land a flying ship on the Red Moon. Tree-men, an imprisoned dragon, and the reader's patience are dealt with in quick succession. Not the sort of thing that ought to be encouraged. (Lynne Bispham)
- Margaret Weiss & Tracy Hickman - - DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS COLLECTOR'S EDITION (Penguin, 1989, 909pp, £9.99)
- Omnibus edition of TIME OF THE TWINS, WAR OF THE TWINS and TEST OF THE TWINS. It weighs nearly two pounds, but has a nice cover. (Andy Sawyer)
- Angus Wells - - THE USURPER (Sphere, 1989, 346pp, £3.99)
- "This time you must not fail me!" thunders the evil god to his cringing demon-acolyte. But we know better even as Taws details his cunning plan. Another by-no-means bad book which committed fantasy fans may find exciting, especially if they've read THE WRATH OF ASHAR, its predecessor. (Andy Sawyer)
- Janny Wurts - - SORCERER'S LEGACY (Grafton, 1989, 303pp £3.50)
- After the death of her husband, Lady Elienne is taken by a sorcerer to a land of the usual magic, intrigue and adventure. Here things happen to her which are, not surprisingly, similar to those things that happen to everybody else in most other sword and sorcery novels. I really tried to like this book, but I just couldn't. Raymond E. Feist does say that Ms Wurts is "A gifted creator of wonders", but then seeing as he once wrote a novel with her I suppose he would say something like that, wouldn't he? (Steven J. Blyth)

"Upon the rack in print"

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE and ANALOG, MID-DECEMBER 1989 and JANUARY 1990

Reviewed by Edward James

I should start, back to front, with the double-length January issue of Analog -- simply to take the

opportunity to congratulate *Astounding/Analog* for having lasted for 60 years. Continuously too, unlike the now defunct *Amazing*, which otherwise holds the survival record. An astounding (sorry) relic from another age, but still strong and lively thanks to the work of Stanley Schmidt -- who manages to preserve the Campbellian standards without ever treading the paths of dotty science and political extremism that Campbell trod rather too often. I opened this issue at random, to find my eye caught by the final line of a story: "The long night had come again." What's this? Plagiarism? No, *Analog* celebrates the birthday by reprinting some classic items from past issues, including Asimov's "Nightfall" (of course), Poul Andersen's "Birthright" (a Nicholas van Rijn story), Fredric Brown's "Letter to a Phoenix", a typically hard-hitting editorial from Campbell on medical quackery, and a much more recent (1977) editorial from Ben Bova. But that only takes up pages 234 to 304. There's still ten pages of new reviews and letters from page 304, and a lot of new stories and features in the first 233 pages.

Two of the most interesting were the features: Michael F. Flynn's rundown on the last sixty years of *Astounding*, comparing past visions of the future with our own 1990, and the article by Kelly Freas (surely the most consistently popular *Astounding* artist) on the current state of sf art. The first novelette was Stephen L. Burns's "Angel", in which we meet again the surgeon who operates a little like the detective Gil Hamilton in the Larry Niven stories -- using the psychic remains of his nonexistent hands to probe inside the patient's body. Yes, I know it sounds silly, but it's reasonably well done, and the mad religious despot and his viciously powerful female bodyguard, Angel, who embroil Dr Marchey in their plots, are both quite fun. Nancy Kress -- much more on an Asimov's author than an *Analog* one -- is always worth reading, and her "Inertia", which explores the psychology of those interned in a camp because of their contagious and disfiguring disease, is no exception: the most powerful and effective story in the issue. The other novelette were readable enough, but not exceptional: Stephen Kraus's "Checksum" (yet another story about the genetic breeding of a superrace) and "The Baseline Project", by Lee Goodloe and Jerry Olton, a story about research into the Oort cloud of comets, about government funding for research, about Nemesis: a matter-of-fact story, whose only real problem is the tendency to preach. There were a number of enjoyable shorts too, most notably John Gribbin's "The Carbon Papers" in which government pressure forces a certain Mr Holmes in 1890 to conceal the discovery that Britain's huge consumption of coal was fuelling the "greenhouse effect". I rather liked Michael F. Flynn's "The Feeders" too: the nasty reality behind the Angels of Mons. If you have a spare \$3.95 (I suppose the British price will be £3.50 at least), then this anniversary issue might well be worth buying, even if only to participate in the 60th anniversary.

Going back a month, the first story of the Mid-December *Analog* is a continuation of the relationship begun in the December issue, in "Maverick", between eccentric but highly intelligent diplomat Nancy O'Donoghue and her colleague John Baxter. The story is W.R.Thompson's "Varmint", the plot more interstellar intrigues between huamsn and two alien races (one of them genocidal). Entertaining if you like standard space opera (as I often do). Rick Shelley's "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men" is an obligatory Christmas story, in which noble, peace-loving, altruistic American politicians and CIA men spend billions of dollars on new technology which brings an end to poverty, hunger and suffering throughout the world. Clearly fantasy, rather than science fiction. Also rosy, but rather more interesting and plausible as a utopian solution to some of our social problems is Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff's "Hand-Me-Down Town", about the success of a community settled by ex-bag-ladies and down-and-outs. It's one of those now rare, once common, pieces of fiction that read suspiciously like some idealist's view of how a utopian community might actually be founded -- make that "semi-utopian", as it's not

nearly as socially radical as a good utopia ought to be! Finally, an above-average tale of how colonists try to overcome an alien pest on another planet, thanks to a helpful alien race, in F. Alexander Brejcha's "Why?", and Michael McCollum's "Gridlock", which takes Garry Kilworth's splendid "Let's Go to Golgotha!" to an ultimate conclusion. Saying any more would give it away: but think -- if you had a time-machine and knew that (because of the movement of the earth, the solar system and the galaxy), you would simply end up in the depths of space if you went back in time, what event would you aim for? That was the story I enjoyed most in a readable but somewhat unexciting issue.

The Mid-December Asimov's has two new Asimov robot stories. The cover story, "Too Bad!" by Isaac Asimov himself, seems to be part of his continuing obsession to relate the different parts of his earlier fiction together: this is a mixture of *I, Robot* and *Fantastic Voyage*, with the traditional conflict between one or other of the Three Laws taking place within a robot which has been miniaturised in order to enter a patient's body to excise cancer cells. Not very original, really. Too bad! The second story is much more fun, and rather better written: Connie Willis's "Dilemma". Here too we have an amalgam of Asimov staples: robots in conflict over the Three Laws, plus a traditional-style detective story format. The robots are fun (they are called Darius Just, Bel Riöse, Dr Duval and Susan Calvin -- work it out!) and the main character is an extremely aged Isaac Asimov, "the most famous author of the twentieth century, and now the twenty-first". It takes place on the day of the reception in honour of his one thousandth book: *Asimov's Guide to Asimov's Guides*. Connie Willis does have a good sense of humour, and fans will enjoy finding all the in-jokes. Suitable fare to have read in between meals of warmed-up turkey. The last story in the issue is "Pillar of Cloud, Pillar of Fire", another well-crafted story in Harry Turtledove's series about Basil Argyros, a Byzantine agent in a medieval world in which Mohammed became a Christian bishop and saint and the Byzantine Empire continued in strength. This time Basil goes into the strange world of Alexandria, and manages to settle a workers' dispute and to restart rebuilding work on the Lighthouse. Turtledove captures the cultural differences between Constantinople and Alexandria very nicely, as well he might (being a former professional Byzantine historian). In between the relatively light-hearted Willis and Turtledove stories are sandwiched a number of much more sombre and interesting pieces. The best of them, perhaps, was Melanie Tem's "The Better Half", in which we have seen the idea before, but seldom better done: it is how a husband and two sons act as emotional vampires and drain the wife and mother to death. An obvious allegory of the joys of married life (seen from the woman's side), but none the less chilling for that. I also enjoyed R.V.Branham's "The Color of Grass, the Colour of Blood", a cat's eye view of life at home: not a normal cat, perhaps, although maybe (as cats go) normally vicious and amoral: an original fantasy, and light-years away from he talking animals of our childhood. Kathe Koja's "The Energies of Love" was nicely written: another cyberpunk variation on computer-stored personalities. Nancy Kress's "Renaissance" was very short, but, with her usual skill, she crammed a hell of a lot in: memorable characters, humour, and some chills, in a story about the birth of a genetically altered child. Mary Gentle's "The Tarot Dice" was the longest of these stories (the only novelette) and the one I know least what to say about, even after having read it twice. Atmospheric, yes, with some striking images, in an intriguing setting. The mist of ambiguity and uncertainty which hung over the story was obviously deliberate, and indeed cleverly fostered the dry and witty authorial tone, and the fact that it left me wondering what was happening was also no doubt intentional -- but it left me slightly frustrated. There is no doubt, however, that she is a very skilful writer. In addition to all these treasures, there were some poems I liked too. How can one resist a poem whose title is "When I see Rigel's Light Sleeting Through the Side of Heinlein Station"? Anyone with an imagination could fill in the remaining fifteen lines -- though not, probably, as well as Lawrence

Watt-Evans. So, all in all a memorable issue, and worth buying.

Finally, the January *Asimov's*. The cover story is Gregory Benford's "Warstory": the cover, by Gary Freeman, has a nice aerodynamically designed Concorde style spaceship swooping over the surface of airless Ganymede (huh?). At first sight it is a tough-guy war-story, with mercenaries (male and female) dropping fusion bombs on each other, with some insights into life back on earth via the stories that the hero tapes into himself each night. But it is not just for fans of space warfare: there is a twist in the tail which makes it much more thought-provoking and interesting. The Australian writer Greg Egan, known to *Interzone* readers, but appearing here for the first time, offers "The Caress", in which a detective investigates a murder in which a chimera is implicated -- a genetically manufactured person with the head of a woman and the body of a leopard, based on *The Caress*, a painting by the (by then) ancient artist Fernand Khnopff, from 1896. So it is obvious what inspired Egan here: and the inspiration has resulted in a fascinating future world, full of detail, and a fast moving and intricate plot. The third novelette is Molly Gloss's "Personal Silence" -- an effective and moving story about one man's attempt, following a Quaker meeting, to bring an end to the decades of war in the Third World, in which thousands of Americans have lost their life: his response, a silent protest, as he wanders around the world in a fitful glare of publicity. Tom Purdom's "A Proper Place to Live", set in an alternate 18th century London, would have benefitted from a greater understanding of English class structure (though, I suppose he would argue, this is a *different* England. Yes, but not that different.) Kathe Koja's "True Colors" plumbs the emotions like her stories usually do; a story about a lost alien on Earth that is likely to stick in the memory more than most. And finally, the longest piece in the issue, Mike Resnick's novella "Bwana", a sequel to his Hugo-winning short story "Kirinyaga" (*Magazine of Fantasy and SF*, Nov. 1988). I wasn't that fond of the short story, either: I just couldn't accept the idea of a tribal Kikuyu society apparently given this planetoid or space station in Earth orbit on which to live. Why, for Christ's sake? "Bwana", as a tale of traditional Kikuyu society meeting the West, in its various guises, it is quite a good one -- but it could just as effectively have been set in twentieth-century Kenya. The implausible sf element is really quite redundant. But some people obviously and excessively enjoyed "Kirinyaga", so it would be safer to ignore my petulant complaints. Apart from the Resnick, anyway, a good and varied issue.

INTERZONE 33 (January/February 1990)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

David Brin's 'The Giving Plague' recieved a Hugo nomination; 'Piecework', this issue's offering, is a superior story. It is a surrogate mother who lives in Merseyside sometime around the mid-twenty first century. Her progeny: industrial goods! It's a hi-tech, lo-dignity world, Thatcher's Britain in extremis. It, like everyone else in her position, hadn't been forced into it -- it's just that there's little alternative. For the most part Brin avoids overkill (not, however, with "they were only girls, taking turns guarding each others' ration books, teaming up killing rats for bounty money...") and knows when to inject humour: "count zero" has a meaning somewhat a variance with the cyberpunk version. IZ has produced many top class stories regarding bio/genetic engineering- 'Piecework' is a most worthy addition to the list, as well as offering barbed comments on today's society.

I'm pleased to say that Brin's story isn't the only good reason to read this month's issue. If you'd always suspected that

there's something sinister about the craze for Care Bears and Transformers, then with 'Gargantuabots vs the Nice Mice' Kim Newman will confirm your fears. Vaguely touching on territory explored by Dick in 'War Game' and Simak in RING AROUND THE SUN, Newman's story somewhat runs out of steam by the end, but there's plenty of laughs in it, as when the heroine "wondered how much her Thunderbirds models would be worth if she hadn't set fire to them with lighter fuel when she was eleven."

Jonathan Carroll in 'The Panic Hand' deftly draws the reader into an encounter-on-a-train-story before unleashing the fantastic. Sharon M. Hall, on the other hand, pitches you straight into a familiar Secret Garden setting; then you realise all is not as it seems. I found 'The Last Game' to be a harrowing read... Ian Watson tackles a sensitive topic - the assassination of Rushdie - with panache in 'The Eye of the Ayatollah'. 'Familiars' by Stuart Falconer is the weakest item of fiction, chiefly because of its plot, yet even so provides an easy read and some neat concepts.

Amongst the non-fiction John Clute examines Terry Pratchett's novels; interestingly enough, he doesn't concentrate on Discworld but gives due attention to earlier works. There's also an interview with Geoff Ryman which touches on some of the deccets of sf - a topic worthy of further exploration.

Depending on whether you go on publication date or cover date, this is a great end to 1989 or beginning to '90 for IZ. But would someone please tell me, is it just my copy which occasionally arrives battered and bruised or do all subscribers end up with a mangled delivery?

FANTASY TALES vol. 11 no. 3 (Autumn 1989)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

As hinted at last issue, the third issue of the relaunched FT from Robinson Publishing contains an unusual item from Ramsey Campbell. 'The Sustenance of Hoak' is the first UK publication of a sword and sorcery story, part of a series linked by the character of Ryze (it says). It's a good story too, with the usual extremely nasty thing from underground, never quite fully described, which feeds on villagers as they in turn feed on it. It's certainly the most interesting story in the magazine, but I tend to prefer Jessica Salmonson's cajun folk-tale 'The Magic Skillet' for its ring of authenticity down to its morality-tale ending. Stephen Gresham's 'The One Left Behind' may, at the end, turn out to be the best: a story about a photographer in search of a really grotesque picture to improve his college grades. Its ending, though, is conventional enough. So, in an odd way, is 'The Embracing' by David J. Schow, who apparently coined the term "splatterpunk". This is more fantastic than the bits of TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE III and NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET V he's associated with, but it - er - schows. Most unusual story is Alan W. Lear's 'Fatal Bellman'. You need two or three reads to work out quite what is happening in this post-Apocalypse world, but once you get the picture it's an elegantly sinister one.

As for the rest, the verse seems to have taken a step downwards from Neil Gaiman's offering last issue (memo to Charles Whatley: "Lo!" introducing any poem after the mid-nineteenth century generally means poetaster rather than poet). Mike Ashley contributes a good survey of new and forthcoming fantasies. The editors hint at expansion next year. This will be welcome.

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