

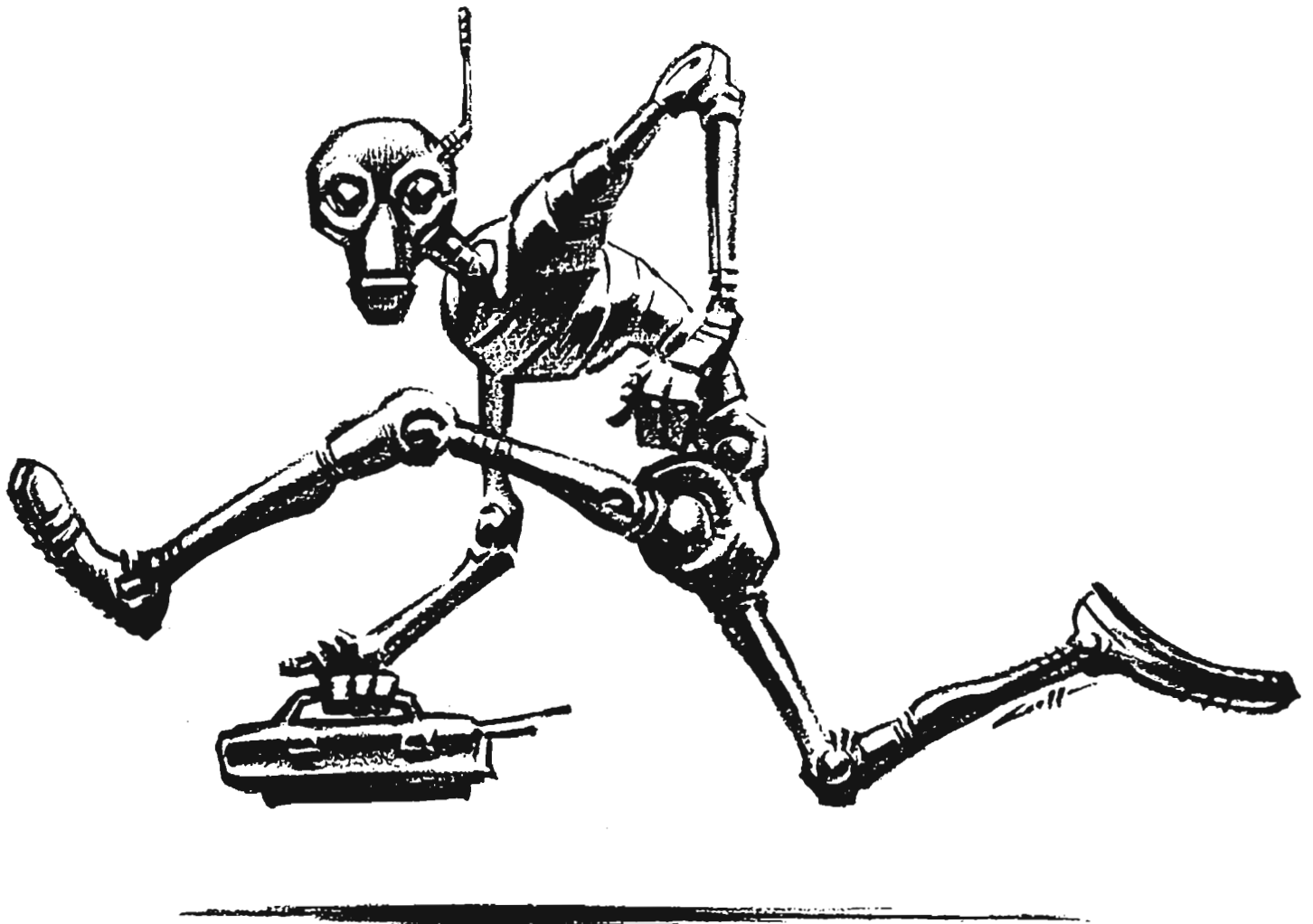


# Paperback Inferno

83

April - May 1990

The Review of paperback SF



A British Science Fiction Association magazine 50p.



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Contributions of cover art and interior art are especially welcome.  
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DEADLINE for all contributions to PI 84 is:  
Friday May 5th  
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HELP WANTED  
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PAPERBACK INFERNO is in need of a new production  
assistant as Phil Nichols has started a new job in a  
different part of the country. I'm looking for someone  
with word-processing facilities who will take on the job  
of typing up reviews ready for paste-up. Anyone willing  
to help, please contact me at the editorial address. You  
don't have to have a particular machine, just one which  
will give a clear and readable typeface after reproduct-  
ion.

## Paperback Purgatory

With more and more books being reviewed in PI, the SF fan  
is more and more spoilt for choice. How much more confused  
must the reader be who does not have the benefit of the  
deep knowledge and wide expertise of the PI reviewing  
panel. Pity the poor browser, lost in the bookshop among  
hundreds of really wonderful books with only the blurbs on  
the back cover to go by. Each book is, of course, the **only**  
essential literary work available; the best novel/collection  
ever. To enable you to fathom what these words of high  
praise really mean, we here present

#### THE PAPERBACK INFERNO GUIDE TO PUBLISHERS' BLURBS

"The thrilling sequel to..." - - - "If it worked once,  
it'll work again."

"First in another exciting [...] trilogy!" - - - "We pay  
our writers by the  
word."

"In the tradition of J.R.R. Tolkien." - - - "We asked our  
publicity department  
if they could think  
of a fantasy writer."

"In the tradition of Terry Brooks." - - - "This person  
really has got prob-  
lems."

"I couldn't put it down! [Big-Name Author] - - - "I carried  
it around for ages. I  
meant to read it,  
honest..."

"The Fantasy equivalent of WAR AND PEACE." - - - "It's very  
long, isn't it?"

"Traditional SF of the finest quality." - - - "The MS was  
submitted in green  
crayon."

"Fuses literary and traditional SF." - - - "MS was submitted  
in green crayon but  
joined-up writing."

"Phenomenal storytelling." - - - "Can't spell."

"The most important work of Fantasy since..." - - - "...the  
last one."

"\*Dekalogy: a group of ten volumes." - - - "Not only do we  
assume our readers are  
morons, we gloat over  
it, as well."

"Transcends the genre." - - - "What's he doing writing this  
rubbish when he could  
write real novels?"

"Collectors' Edition." - - - "Put a new cover on and clear  
the warehouse stocks."

"A classic." - - - "First saw magazine publication in  
ASTOUNDING STORIES."

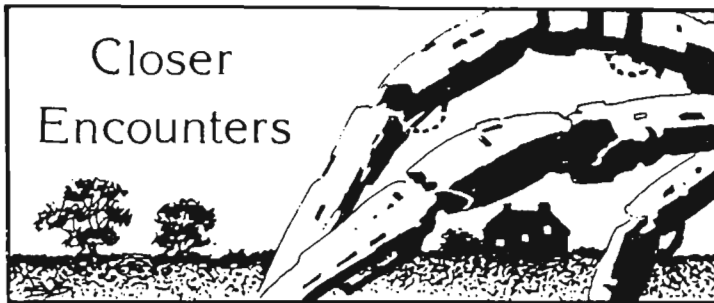
"Taboo-breaking." - - - "Fond of the word 'fuck'!"

"One of Britain's most promising young writers." - - - "Sold a story to INTERZONE."

"One of the field's great stylists" - - - "You won't understand a word of it."

"The SF novel of the year!" - - - "I've only read one SF novel this year."

"Indispensible... a masterpiece." - - - "My job's on the line if it doesn't sell."



Piers Anthony - - TAROT (Grafton, 1989, 616pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

This edition of TAROT is the first single volume version of a book that was originally published in three parts, as GOD OF TAROT, VISION OF TAROT, and FAITH OF TAROT, in 1979 and 1980. As Anthony explains in his 1987 introduction, TAROT was written in 1976 as one book, but the only way he could get this "serious" work published then was to agree for it to be cut up. He specified that it should NOT be referred to as a trilogy, but it has been ever since, naturally.

From his Introduction, Anthony considers TAROT his major work, and a labour of love rather than a "paying project". I knew him till now as a prolific writer of light fantasies and SF novels with a humorous side, with a penchant for particularly awful puns. That, I must say, he excels at. I'm not so sure about TAROT...

TAROT is a venture into the same territory as John Crowley's AEGYPT, a book of structure, patterns and meanings within meanings, in this case bound up with the development and significance of the cards of the Tarot, and its applicability to a future galactic civilisation. TAROT is a novel in Anthony's Cluster series, and features Brother Paul of the Holy Order of Vision, who also appears in BUT WHAT OF EARTH? and six other books of the series. Brother Paul is sent by the order from a deserted and retrogressing Earth to the planet Tarot to investigate a strange phenomenon: the apparent materialisation or Animation of human thoughts. These materialisations are not hallucinations; they can be seen, heard, felt, and photographed, and include visions of both the Christian heaven and Hell. The first Animations were of images from an explorer's Tarot deck, which explains the planet's name. Brother Paul is to find out whether the manifestations are material or spiritual, and if the latter, whether God is physically present on Tarot.

Brother Paul's task is made more difficult by the fact that the inhabitants of Tarot consist entirely of members of a plethora of mutually antagonistic religious sects. (People with deeply held religious beliefs are those who have most success creating Animations, and who are also most profoundly affected by them.) When he arrives on Tarot he is immediately embroiled in the settlers' quarrels, each of them wanting him to prove that the God of Tarot is their own personal Deity, and that all the others are wrong. Paul DOES solve the mystery, although he goes through the most intense catharsis in the process, reliving the pains of his own life, and descending into the Hell of Dante's Inferno to save the life of a young girl he has unwittingly caused to be trapped inside an Animation. During his ordeal he creates a new enhanced Tarot deck, one that long after becomes accepted throughout the Universe as the Cluster Tarot. In the course of the book Anthony manages to take a large number of heavy sidswipes at the Christian and other religions, often in ways that would (deliberately) cause believers offence.

Unfortunately for the high pretensions of its creation, I found TAROT to be slow-paced, longwinded and in parts extremely crude. I think that a; but the most devoted Anthony fans will find it heavy going. Of course Anthony is

well prepared for such criticism from reviewers who like his lighter side, but don't like TAROT. He anticipates reactions to this book with the statement that people who praise TAROT "can easily be distinguished from the average reviewer: the difference is one of intelligence and literary taste." As regards the provocative material, his final point in the Introduction is "If you succeed in reading TAROT through without being disgusted at some point, you probably don't understand it." I must say that I WASN'T disgusted, although I did flinch a bit at times, especially when Brother Paul is castrated!

At the beginning of this review I compared TAROT with AEGYPT, but I must say I found the latter an infinitely superior book, because Crowley is a better craftsman in this area, merging mystical and philosophic elements into his books without slowing the surface events down. Anthony is one of the most popular and prolific of SF novelists for good reasons: he has a very original imagination, which he realises well and combines with good, well-paced storytelling. He can also blend humour and sex into his books without normally overdoing either. Such a writer of course is perfectly entitled to try to write a more serious work and be accepted as more than just an author of light reading. However, in trying to create a more significant book with TAROT, Anthony has set aside some of his own strengths.

Stephen King - - THE DARK TOWER 1: THE GUNSLINGER (Sphere, 1989, 242pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Craig Marnock)

This is a sequence of short stories making up the first installment in a series of six or seven books, provided King stays alive long enough to write them all.

The five stories follow the Gunslinger, whose given name is the same as Charlemagne's semi-legendary paladin, Roland. He is the last of a knightly caste of Gunslingers on a parallel world that is a weird avatar of the Old West. He is chasing a black-robed sorcerer through the desert and on the way encounters the traps - all human - that the Man in Black has set for him. At the end of the book he catches him, and through him learns more about his ultimate goal, the Dark Tower, the Nexus of Space and Time. Though obviously both episodic and very retrospective, looking back at the Gunslinger's past, the book holds together very well, probably because of the bizarreness of the whole thing. In an interesting Afterword, King mentions the influence of Robert Browning's poem 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' on the work, and the book has a very dense, lyric feel to it.

This is rather different to most of King's work, and probably isn't for the Horror fan buying it on the strength of the name. You have to pay attention to read it, but the whole effect is probably worth it. If Sergio Leone had been a romantic poet instead of a film director, he might have produced something like this.

Stephen King - - - -THE DRAWING OF THE THREE  
(Sphere, 1989, 400pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

We all know that Stephen King is the Greatest Horror Writer Ever, despite the fact that (to me) his books post-*THE STAND* have always suffered from the sense that once you've charted the Apocalypse, where do you go? (Though *MISERY* and the new *THE DARK HALF* are particularly good stories involving the tension between an author's 'own' writing and that which earns him a living. The latter novel credits a certain Mr Bachman for inspiration.)

The *Dark Tower* series is something different. It's a weird combination of Western archetype and Robert Browning, with soundtrack by Bob Dylan circa *Highway 61 Revisited* or *John Wesley Harding*. Roland, the 'gunslinger' of the previous volume, is searching for the Dark Tower. His world has 'moved on' - faded, dried up, undergone some major and metaphysical catastrophe, and he is the last of a band of heroes which have searched and failed. After having trailed, met and defeated the Man in Black, he must now cross into our world to contact three people who are important to his quest: a junkie, a schizophrenic Black woman confined to a wheelchair, and the psychopath who put her there.

Maimed and ill, Roland finds our world a strange analogue of his own - a violent world with uncanny reflections; a similar but not identical alphabet and language; Christianity; the song 'Hey Jude'.

King is an absolute master of page-turners, and this is no exception, but it's more. Considering the film-criticism guff about Western heroes being symbolic knights, it's strange that no major writer has really explored this. *THE DARK TOWER* has taken the fantasy-quest idea which is basically medieval European legends and epic and dressed it in an American mythology: six-guns, dusty deserts, Men in Black, preachers and junkies. And would you believe it, it works.

Arthur C. Clarke & Gentry Lee - - - - CRADLE  
(Futura, 1989, 374pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

I hate yuppiebacks! I don't yet need kingsize typefaces, a normal paperback is easier to carry around, and I object to paying seven quid for something that should be available later for half the price.

Joint authorships confuse and upset me, especially when one writer has an international reputation stretching back to when I was a kid, and the other is a NASA scientist and screenwriter. Who, I ask myself, has done what; if ACC has really written or plotted it, why give the credit to a technical adviser, while if he hasn't (and simple sampling indicates that much of it would be right outside his experience, and yes, I do mean all the kinky sex bits) why should he lend his name to the book?

After eight pages of overwritten, adjectival description of boring scenes on Canthor (who, I wonder, named the planet?) and prehistoric Earth, we are plunged into the world of 1993 for yet more unnecessarily detailed description (who cares if ace girl reporter Carol Dawson drives a 'sleek new Korean station wagon' and what happened to the oil shortage anyway?). Undeterred, I plough on to the first, fateful, scene-setting piece of actual speech: 'Good morning, Jeff,' she said. Is this, I ask myself, the stuff of drama?

Well, no, it's more a travelogue of 1993 electronic technology, each artefact more predictable than the last. Please, let's have

some story! But first we must be given the emotional bit: sex, separation, divorce, tears at bedtime . . . then the military bit with passwords and codes and stiff-necked idiots in full flow - god it's so boring! Kooky characters follow, then (in no particular order, and well reiterated) politics, war, potted life histories galore, religion, a lot more sex, and white mayonnaise oozing out between the slices of bread, whatever that may be doing in there.

Around page 75 something actually happens - but don't hold your breath, for next we get a whole swatch of chat and socialising before the joint authors finally take us on . . . to another splurge of celestial descriptions, can you believe?

After about the seventh pair of 'nice, full, upright breasts', not forgetting 'rounded, feminine buttocks' and a few other anatomical bits, we learn about parking fees, become inured to the 1993 custom of the all-purpose adjective ('fucking', of course, what did you expect?), see the Russians set up yet again as bogus adversaries (ho-hum) . . . look, do you really want to know about this book?

If so, let me quote from the publisher's own blurb: 'dark wound . . . gaping lips . . . fantastic world . . . frightening irregularities . . . tough local journalist . . . wildest imagination . . . sentry robots with deadly spears . . . something alien is trying to communicate . . .' It failed.

Michael P. Kube-McDowell - - - - ALTERNITIES  
(Sphere, 1989, 383pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

When they get it right, science fiction writers can have enormous fun with alternate worlds. Kube-McDowell gets it right. This book gave me as much old-fashioned enjoyment as just about any other I've read this year.

It's not great literature. The prose varies from the very good to the workmanlike, but mostly settles around the level of a decent political thriller. And that, really, is what this is - though there are all sorts of occasions where he attempts something more, and doesn't quite make it. The extracts from newspapers and other documents that provide the break between chapters demonstrate that Kube-McDowell has thought long and hard about the political, social and artistic make-up of his various alternities; but if we are meant to read other levels into this, it doesn't come off. The sensitive, viewed-from-both-sides account of the break up of a marriage just becomes the springboard for a fairytale romance and a final rite-of-passage for the hero. The peculiar relationship between a sadist and his victim constantly suggests that a daring and fascinating character study is going to emerge, but it doesn't.

Yet, these quibbles aside, this is a complex, and vividly realised set of worlds, told with drama and action enough to suit anyone. Only the Home Alternity is aware of the gateways which link it up to twenty similar but disturbingly different worlds. The President of the USA (sole guardians of the secret) uses the gateways to plunder technological ideas to make his country great, but he has a bolder plan in mind. For twenty years America has been ground down by Russian authority, now he is going to unleash a nuclear war on Russia and use one of the alternities as a bolt-hole for himself and his chiefs of staff. So, while Rayne Wallace is dispatched as one of the pioneers to prepare the way in Alternity Blue (only for the authorities in that world to slowly become aware of what is going on), back home a tense political drama is played out. With its

liberal heart eventually fixed firmly to its sleeve, this book is a great thriller, and a very gripping piece of science fiction.

# R E V I E W S

Jonathan Carroll - - - - - SLEEPING IN FLAME  
(Legend, 1989, 244pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Some novels defy reviewing . . .

So, you've heard it before; that doesn't make it any the less true.

SLEEPING IN FLAME is such a novel.

I could say that it is a tale of American expatriates in Vienna who somehow are mixed up in reincarnation, magic, the true life story of Rumpelstiltskin, sex crimes, infanticide, parricide and the universe according to an old Indian bearing a distinct resemblance to Carlos Castaneda. All those elements are within SLEEPING IN FLAME. There are also anthropomorphised cats, Parisian sadists, Russian cemeteries, sea monsters, magical cities, pregnancy and late night dashes through disgusting weather. Above all there is love - love carnal, love obsessive, love glorious, love murderous. I could then tell you that this is being marketed as horror and you will realise it is a VERY strange horror novel indeed.

I began reading this with very strong images of Nic Roeg's *Bad Timing* in my mind. Whatever Carroll's descriptions I 'saw' Art Garfunkel and Theresa Russell as his protagonists. Then the fantasy began to take over - about half way through - and I felt he was losing it, what a pity to spoil such a fine novel like that. I suppose that feeling lasted maybe twenty pages, by which time Carroll had his fantasy faculties functioning fully. By then I knew SLEEPING IN FLAME was like nothing I had ever read or seen. It is sufficient to itself. The erudition is light and delightful, the writing is lyrical, the plots take you warmly by the throat and don't let go. It is inexorable and Jonathan Carroll is a sly, effective writer in taking you into his world, wherever you expect to go.

This is a marvellous novel and I urge everyone to read it. You will not be disappointed.

Terry Pratchett - - - - - WYRD SISTERS  
(Corgi, 1989, 252pp, £2.99)

- - - - -THE UNADULTERATED CAT  
(Gollancz, 1989, 96pp, £3.99)

Josh Kirby - - - - -THE JOSH KIRBY POSTER BOOK  
(Gollancz, 1989, £7.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is the one I've been waiting for - the Shakespearian one. And if I break into hysterical giggles at a performance of *Macbeth*, it's all Mr Pratchett's fault. In WYRD SISTERS, he brings back Granny Weatherwax and introduces, in no particular order, a Rightful Heir brought up by a troupe of actors, His Father's Ghost, a Wicked Usurper and Even More Wicked Wife, a Fool, two more witches, and a large and smelly cat. Not to mention a whole slew of jokes concerning novice witches wanting to form covens, getting those damned bloodstains off your hands, and the problems of being a dwarvish playwright. And there are cameo roles by the Librarian of Unseen University and DEATH (quite literally).

The only thing that prevents me from saying this is the best Discworld novel is

that I haven't read the next one yet.

THE UNADULTERATED CAT has nothing to do with SF. It is, however, by Pratchett and that's enough to recommend it, especially to those who might care to look closely at the character of Nanny Ogg's cat, Greebo, in WYRD SISTERS. It's a large-format glossy with cartoons by Gray Joliffe, giving advice, warning, and commiserations to all those who share living space with Real Cats. 'Real Cats do eat out of bowls with Pussy written on the side. They'd eat out of them if they had the word ARSENIC written on the side. They eat out of anything.' I loved it, and I don't even have a cat.

Josh Kirby's POSTER BOOK consists of his Discworld artwork. It's colourful, detailed, wacky and totally inaccurate according to my own conception of the characters. Still, this souvenir album of 13 large poster-size pages comes with endorsement from Terry Pratchett himself and is a good addition to your Discworld collection. Kirby admits to reading the books he's given to illustrate, by the way: it's a shame that this collection is merely recycled covers (or details thereof) rather than original scenes.

Frederik Pohl - - - - -THE ANNALS OF THE HEECHEE  
(Futura, 1989, 338pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

In his undeniably gripping, wide-ranging and not-too-complex quartet about the alien Heechee of which this is the culmination, Pohl reintroduces one of my least favourite protagonists - the one who is so stupid that everything revolves around his mistakes, and the attempts of those cleverer than he to save him from them.

For once, Pohl has an almost acceptable reason for this unfortunate SF cliché. It goes like this: so galactically stunning are the events of this tale that I have to give the reader dollops of explanation from time to time - and as much of this is scientific and I don't want to lose his interest, I'll write the whole story around my problem. I'll make the Hero not only ignorant but neurotic too; then I'll give him an all-knowing but idiosyncratic informant in the shape of a holograph of Albert Einstein coupled to an ultracomputer designed by the Hero's incredibly intelligent Russian wife, and every time I need to explain things, I'll have the Hero appeal to his *deus ex machina* for help.

This way, the facts come through quizzically and simply; unfortunately they also come through condescendingly and pukingly - OK no doubt for your average non-fannish casual reader, but a smack in the face for anyone with an IQ over about 60 and a mental age in excess of 12.

But then, such a reader would immediately demand to know how come the incredibly skilled and intelligent and knowledgeable scientist-wife can be so thick that after decades she still can't speak English without omitting all the personal pronouns and other normally expected bits of speech. The same reader would probably object to many of the cardboard characters - the woman-torturing war criminal, the gung-ho general, the unspeakable bullying child, and the two really nice kids thrown in for you to empathise with.

All this is a great pity, for the Heechee story is basically a good one. Cowards by

nature, they have hidden in the Black Hole at the centre of the galaxy, while humans nonchalantly spread across the universe, hitch-hiking on Heechee vessels left behind to bring them up against the most destructive power ever to have sought to wipe out 'life, the universe and everything', to quote a more skilled and for that matter funnier writer.

Pohl works it all out neatly, combining recapitulation of the previous three books (GATEWAY, BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT HORIZON and HEECHEE RENDEZVOUS) with development towards his climax: if his characters showed one-tenth of the skill that he demonstrates in plotting, this would be a most enjoyable read with pretensions to becoming a classic. As it is, it's back to my 'down with the dummies' campaign for this reviewer.

would otherwise be a dull read sufficiently entertaining to keep turning the pages.

Card's craftsmanship helps to disguise the inconsistencies in the plot and the banal dialogue, but the story, snagged in a McGuffin and omnipotent aliens, is somewhat contrived, especially at the end.

The story's roots can be traced back to tales of secret civilisations and countless sf thrillers with aliens, cosy, conservative, middle class heroes and psychotic soldiers, but the action and attempted wonder (or sfx) will keep your brains out of gear long enough not to trouble your intelligence.

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Stephen Lawhead - - - - - ARTHUR  
(Lion, 1989, 504pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Stephen Lawhead's Pendragon Cycle is something of a curiosity amongst the current crop of Arthurian fantasy, as it links the legend of Arthur with the legend of Atlantis. The survivors of the destruction of Atlantis have reached Britain where they are seen as the 'Fair Folk', and various magical characters from Arthurian literature such as the Lady of the Lake and the Fisher King. By this, the final volume of the trilogy, most of the Atlantians have become secondary characters (except for Merlin, Morgian and Pelleas), and the emphasis is on Arthur and the Dark Age British. The book begins with Arthur's drawing the sword from the stone, and goes on to describe (in unrelenting detail) his victories over Saecsen, Angli and Picti which leads to his crowning as High King of Britain and his establishment of the peaceful and prosperous Kingdom of Summer. Lawhead's interpretation of Arthur's story is individual, and manages to avoid the usual clichés of contemporary Arthurian fantasy, but the book veers uncomfortably between the realistic and the mystical. The characters that surround Arthur are mighty warriors, but they are not fully rounded, believable people, while Arthur himself remains remote, whether he is seen through the eyes of a servant or the eyes of his closest friend. ARTHUR is a brave attempt to inject new life into the myth of the Once and Future King, but ultimately it is the least successful of the books in the Pendragon trilogy.

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Pat Mills &  
John Hicklenton - - NEMESIS THE WARLOCK BOOK 9  
(Titan, 1989, £5.50)

Grant Morrison & Steve Yeowell - ZENITH BOOK 3  
(Titan, 1989, £4.95)

Jamie Delano, John  
Ridgeway & Alfredo Alcalá - HELLBLAZER BOOK 2  
(Titan, 1989, £6.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Warning: NEMESIS 9 is not a direct sequel to Book 8, because various adventures chronicled in ABC WARRIORS 3 and 4 have intervened. Here we have the bleakness of contemporary Britain while the epic combat of Torquemada and Nemesis has followed the lines hinted at in Book 8 and degenerated into a squabble between insane egoists. Hicklenton's art is sometimes shocking, sometimes obscure. Only the one remaining idealist in the strip, Purity Brown, stands for the reader against 'the demented and the demonic', and by the end of this book even her optimism is all but suffocated.

Book 3 of ZENITH brings to a close a chapter of a saga linking something called Chaos Magic, a hippy-capitalist do-gooding megalomaniac about to nuke London, and an assortment of young superheroes, plus an older one who appears to be Margaret Thatcher's Minister of Defence (which reshuffle was this?). Strong characters, confusing story-

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Greg Bear - - - - - ETERNITY  
(Gollancz, 1989, 399pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

'She was his match - a homorph, neither Naderite nor Geshel in her politics, lifelong advocate, one-time senior corprep for Earth in the Nexus . . . . [p. 9]

Did you understand that? If so, it's because you've read EON. I hadn't, and for the first hundred pages or so of ETERNITY I struggled to make sense of what was going on! Flipping through a library copy of the earlier book did illuminate some of the events and concepts dealt with in the sequel but even now there's much that eludes me. So be warned: don't attempt to read ETERNITY unless you've read EON.

ETERNITY takes up the story of several of the characters in EON and is set upon Earth, Thistledown (an orbiting satellite) and Gaia (an alternative Earth). The strands of the story are brought together as a messenger from the far future comes to Earth with instructions: the Way - the worm-like gateway from Thistledown to other universes - must be re-opened and then destroyed in order to serve the purposes of the 'Final Mind'.

Bear throws ideas at the reader like confetti. Many of these ideas are fascinating - the Jarts and their purpose, for instance - but the book still didn't work for me. Doubtless this was in part due to the difficulty outlined earlier, but this aside the novel has other faults. Characterisation and prose are no more than workmanlike and the author's manipulation of the separate threads of the plot is crude, there being far too many coincidences for comfort. The mysticism of the Final Mind sits uneasily within this hard sf novel and what should have been an apocalyptic ending falls flat. If you enjoyed EON no doubt you'll want to find out what happened next; otherwise, I'd advise you to give this one a miss.

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Orson Scott Card - - - - - THE ABYSS  
(Legend, 1989, 363pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Novelisation based on James Cameron's film about an encounter with aliens during a military attempt to destroy the secrets of a wrecked nuclear submarine which lies on a ledge near the top of an abyss. The insane taskforce leader is in possession of a nuclear warhead, and above the waves World War III looks imminent.

Written in a simple, chatty style, Card has attempted to give depth to the standard characters and story, and although he doesn't quite manage to transform Cameron's trite iconography (including scenes where characters miraculously come back from the dead to wring one more tear from your hearts), he makes what

line, and a few too many zap, pow, thrunch sequences.

The linking theme - what's 'good' and 'evil' in modern Britain? - is returned to in the second volume of HELLBLAZER. First, though, John Constantine experiences the rampaging horror of the Vietnam war in a small town in the American mid-West ('When Johnny Comes Marching Home'). Then he finds himself more directly involved in the conflict between the Resurrection Crusade and the Damnation Army. Another friend is lost, and against a foreground of queerbashing skinheads and a background of gibbering hellishness, Constantine accepts a demon's help to save his girlfriend from a fundamentalist cult. Moments of macabre humour and Constantine's own cynical wit prevent HELLBLAZER from becoming ghoulish or depressing: at one point, confronted by a composite monster, he can only laugh at its grotesqueness. There's plenty of conflict in HELLBLAZER, but it's often inner conflict of the darkest kind, which places it on another plane entirely from the crudities at the heart of even the most virtuoso of the 2000AD reprints.

James P. Hogan - - - - - GIANTS' STAR  
(Grafton, 1989, 384pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven J. Blyth)

This is the final volume of Hogan's The Giants trilogy. The first volume (INHERIT THE STARS) was disappointing and unimpressive, and the second (THE GENTLE GIANTS OF GANYMEDE) was slightly better. This novel is, I feel, the best of the series. The characters, although still not the most believable or realistic, do have a touch more life in them than they did previously. Also, the plots of the other two novels are summarised clearly and concisely in the prologue, which is far better than the clumsy summarization that appeared in GENTLE GIANTS.

In comparison to the other books the storyline of GIANTS' STAR is more interesting and moves at a much quicker pace, and once again the ideas are ingenious. There are still some rather irritating points, however. For example, Hogan presents us with a Hi-tech future run by huge conglomerate companies in which most of the world's problems have been solved. Somehow I find this rather naive, but of course that's my opinion. Hogan also gives us an array of characters who are all near geniuses and are the best in their scientific fields. Nearly all of these are men, however! I'm sure women can be super-scientists as well.

I still maintain that this trilogy is strictly for those hard SF fans who enjoy a literary diet of laboratories and white coats. Other readers will, I'm sure, find the series dry and uninteresting despite its clever ideas.

Esther M. Friesner - - - - - DRUID'S BLOOD  
(Headline, 1989, 279pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Liz Holliday)

This is one of those books that looks like a good idea. Just as long as you don't stop to think about it. Druidic magic in a Victorian England peopled by a selection of real (Byron, Ada Lovelace, Lord Kitchener) and fictitious (Sherlock Holmes, Dr Watson - by any other names) characters.

But it just doesn't work. Leave aside the ridiculous notion that British history would have been the same with or without magic - there can have been no Norman invasion, no invention of firearms, no industrial revolution here. Leave aside the Americanisms, and the god-awful dialogue the 'lower-classes' - spear-carriers all - are given (''Elloo, guv. Gawds syve th' Queen an' all. What're yew

doin' 'ere on your lownsome, eh? Fancy some comp'ny?'). Leave aside the fact that Victorian England minus the sexual repression is hardly Victorian at all. You can even leave aside the fact that, when you stop to think about it, the magic does not work very logically at all.

Leave aside all that and you'd still be left with a couple of glaring flaws in the construction of the book. First off, it's set up as a who-dun-it - the narrator is Dr Watson, for goodness' sake - yet the criminals are revealed in chapter one. Secondly, when an awful lot is made of someone's inability to act, you can bet the resolution will depend on them doing just that. And it does.

Gawds syve yer, guv'nor. Yer can find a better way t' spend yer free pahnds fifty than this, can't yer?

Richard A. Lupoff - - - - - GALAXY'S END  
(Grafton, 1989, 304pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven J. Blyth)

The cover blurb on the back of GALAXY'S END tells us that Daniel Kitajima, the central character, has an artificial body which gives him superhuman abilities. Upon reading this I was somewhat dismayed, thinking the book would be yet another one of those tedious SF/super-hero cross-breeds. The first couple of chapters do give this impression. Kitajima is a 100% cliché character who had most of his body destroyed in an accident but had his life saved by the wonders of robotics. Dull stuff, or so I thought. However, Kitajima soon finds himself in a situation where his physical attributes are largely irrelevant. Things take a turn for the better here and the novel becomes a series of events spanning space and time. From then on GALAXY'S END trots along at an enjoyable pace and develops into an interesting read.

The main stumbling block of the novel is Kitajima's robotic body. Everything about it is so dated. Other contemporary SF writers have handled the new-body idea with far greater originality. Having said that, though, it is true to say that in the novel there is the suggestion of a theme of man disliking the way in which he must rely on machinery for his survival, and Kitajima is of course the obvious example of this theme. But perhaps I'm making excuses for Lupoff as this theme is very slight and doesn't really justify such an unoriginal creation.

On its front cover the novel is described as being 'The explosive sequel to SUN'S END'. I don't agree with 'explosive' as an apt description, but GALAXY'S END is highly readable and enjoyable.

Philip K. Dick - - - - - MARY AND THE GIANT  
(Paladin, 1989, 220pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

The theory has been put forward that Philip Dick was a Great American Novelist who demeaned himself and his talent by churning out SciFi - real writers don't write SciFi, do they? The posthumous publication of his unpublished early mainstream novels gives us the opportunity to test this theory. Whatever the others are like (and some are good . . .), on the evidence of MARY AND THE GIANT the theory is junk.

Mary Anne Reynolds and her coterie are archetypal Dick characters, little people, effectively marginalised, excluded from the American Dream. Mary has little talent, no qualifications and nothing to recommend her except the realisation that there is more to life than rotting in small town USA. She rebels by quitting jobs - some even before she gets them - and taking unsatisfactory lovers while ignoring her AllAmerican boy fiance.

Carlton Tweany, the black 'folk' singer, Paul Nitz, the piano doodler, Joseph Schilling, the mittel European record dealer with a shady past - as escape routes for Mary Anne these are all non-starters. Yet she takes their trust, their affection, and abuses it, relentlessly, pathologically.

Anyone reading that little description against the background of mid-1950s America may have little difficulty in understanding why this novel could not find a publisher then. Unknown authors couldn't really trample on so many taboos, at least with so little style. Absent from MARY AND THE GIANT is that characteristic of Dick's best work, the capacity to create a sense of place in no more than a few words. There is little description in this novel, and no more sense of place than I have gleaned from tv and movies about California at that time. As a film script this may work, but as a novel . . . ?

This is a tale as much about sex as relationships. Before reading it I had never come across a single erotic passage of writing by Dick. I still haven't.

For completists like me, and for the curious, MARY AND THE GIANT is an interesting work. As a finished novel it is deeply, fatally flawed.

George R.R. Martin (ed.) - - - - -WILD CARDS  
(Titan, 1989, 410pp, £3.95)

- - - - - ACES HIGH  
(Titan, 1989, 390pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

'Shared World' stories can be interesting in the way they offer different perspectives on a given background through the styles and thematic concerns of different writers. Usually, however, this is precisely what doesn't happen.

Nevertheless the Wild Cards stories offer a novel twist. A virus was let loose on Earth in 1945, transforming victims into disfigured 'Jokers' or Aces with super-powers. Just like the comic books, in fact. Howard Waldrop, Roger Zelazny, Walter Jon Williams, Pat Cadigan and others must have had great fun charting this epic of a post-war world in which super-heroes co-exist with McCarthyism, Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement. In fact, the first book is something of a gem, with Williams' 'Witness' being a notably vivid picture of how even Superheroes can be pressured by Congressional Committees to rat on their friends in the name of anti-communism. Martin's 'non-fictional' interludes - especially an extract from Tom Wolfe's WILD CARD CHIC - are delightful parodies.

If you ever thrilled to a costumed hero with a silly name, this is for you. ACES HIGH explores the concept more deeply, adding a few twists to the saga, but it does so in the context of a plot involving a threat from outer space and a gang of devil-worshipping Masons which despite some good moments has neither the wit nor the colour of its predecessor. Invention is sacrificed for action. Just like the comic books, in fact.

Chris Dixon - - - - - WINTER IN APHELION  
(Unwin, 1989, 220pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Epic Fantasy, at least in my experience, tends to be long on action, short on character and philosophically neuter. It is a change, therefore, to find Chris Dixon concentrating so hard on having his ideologically correct protagonists not resort to slaughter as the solution to all their many problems.

The trouble is that the baby appears to have been thrown out with the bath water. Skarry, the gentle, thoughtful hero (wimp) and

blind Ressa progress through the war which will end all wars, meet all the warrior chiefs and a couple of heavy duty wizards, go through an earthquake which literally means the end of civilisation as they know it and all with little more excitement than might be found on a second form nature ramble. Having all the action take place offstage worked in Greek tragedy, but Euripides had his kings and princes do something. They weren't just names to be picked up and discarded with no examination, which is what Chris Dixon does with his great and good.

As I say, this is atypical fantasy and Chris Dixon obviously believes with a clear, bright flame. He might have convinced me had he given me more meat than I found here. At the end of this epic I was left yawning, asking 'So what?'. This could have been the antidote to the myth by the mile machines, but it isn't. Sad that.

Paula Volsky - - - - -THE LUCK OF RELIAN KRU  
(Legend, 1989, 294pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven J. Blyth)

Relian Kru's luck is not in the least bit good. The central character of this novel is prone to pratfalls and has a talent for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In all its aspects THE LUCK OF RELIAN KRU is traditional fantasy. It's crammed full of larger-than-life, stereotypical characters and it even has a sugar-sweet, fairy tale happy ending. But despite these factors, I must confess that I quite enjoyed it. THE LUCK OF RELIAN KRU is, I feel, a typical example of how an old idea can be made interesting if it's given the correct treatment. The treatment in this case is humour. It's not the sort of madcap lunacy that Pratchett has made so popular (and that so many of us try to emulate). This book uses what can best be described as a light-hearted brand of comedy, which produces pleasant grins instead of belly-laughs.

Stylistically the novel is good apart from the odd moment when style suffers for the sake of a joke. Perhaps the novel is a little too long (the 294 pages have very small print) but on the whole it's an entertaining, unpretentious, and competently written comedy adventure story.

Mike Shupp - - - - -WITH FATE CONSPIRE  
(Headline, 1989, 306pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

'Book One of The Destiny Makers', the cover tells us; 'drafted into a war that could not be won, Tim Harper was determined to twist time and change future history!'

In fact, precious little happens for some fifty pages; from then on, the pace quickens to pretty slow as Tim - addressed with a range of futuristic names but constantly referred to by the author as 'the redhead' - finds himself more and more involved in the picayune struggles of a fragment of mankind 90,000 years in the future.

Unfortunately, Mike Shupp appears never to have read any SF written later than the fifties; for the enquiring teenager with a sensawunda intact this may well be an intriguing if slowly unwinding tale, but such is the aerospace engineer author's self-involvement with minutiae of time travel that one can probably track the action by picking out two or three lines on each page.

Reprinted from Ballantine Books, the type is thick and clumsy and sometimes hard to read and the paper coarse; even with current inflation I feel £3.99 is rather a lot to ask for the book, which will appeal only to the newest members of the BSFA - unless of course they are themselves living in a science-



fiction timewarp and prefer the leisured, description-heavy and relatively sexless stories of The Golden Age. To be fair, within those parameters the book has quite a lot to offer, but such has been the improvement in storytelling techniques since that era, that I found myself irritated by Shupp's innocence.

The future society with its Teeps (telepaths) working as a kind of intellectual Underground, pretending to a lack of political involvement for fear of their lives, has a naive appeal; the military action is sketchily described and in no way demands the reader's involvement. Book Two is to be MORNING OF CREATION; I don't think I'll worry overmuch if I miss its publication.

Cordwainer Smith -- QUEST OF THE THREE WORLDS  
(Gollancz, 1989, 184pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Although I've been a fan of Smith's inventive visions for years, this is the first time I've seen these 'Casher O'Neill' stories, linked to his other work as part of the loosely knit Instrumentality/Rediscovery of Man religious epic.

They are typical Cordwainer Smith, in places the equal of the better known stories set earlier in his future-history. Underpeople bringing religious fulfilment feature prominently; so do superb creations such as the 'forgetties', condemned never to remember their identities and crimes and knowing that even if they do they will immediately forget again. However, the linking plot of the four tales - Casher O'Neill's quest to rid his homeworld of a usurper - fits uneasily with the underlying theme. As O'Neill gets more and more entangled with the symbolism of an essentially religious quest, so it seems more clear that the adventure-serial is an awkward manifestation of Smith's mixture of visionary inspiration and humour.

Read as part of Smith's overall design, QUEST is worth buying. This design is without doubt one of SF's true gems. I'd just advise new readers to start with NORSTRILIA or THE REDISCOVERY OF MAN (aka THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH) to get the full richness of this amazing storyteller.

Sherry Tepper - - - - - STILL LIFE  
(Corgi, 1989, 247pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Liz Holliday)

Sarah Chenowith's neighbours allow the mysterious painter Madelaine to move in with them. Then the deaths begin . . .

The novel concerns Sarah's attempts, with her tutor Bob McCleary, to deal with the situation. It also deals with the growing relationship between them. The background is realistic and the characters well drawn. Tension builds nicely, and the book ends in a genuinely moving situation.

Despite this, I can't say that I enjoyed the book, or thought it a success. To begin with, there is the rather odd construction of the book. The first person viewpoint alternates between Bob and Sarah, in sections which are not clearly labelled. Thus, it is possible to be half-way through a chapter without realising who the narrator is!

The real problem, though, is the rather murky, undefined nature of the menace. By the end of the book the reason for this is clear, but even in retrospect the book seems centreless. At least one of the villain's actions seems completely ridiculous and a prime piece of idiot plotting. Many of them seem to go against her established characterisation. I can't say more than that without revealing too much. I suppose the clues were there, when I think about it. It's just that I like to enjoy a book while I'm reading it, not afterwards. This one was just pretty much irritating.

A devotee of Tepper's SF, I had never read any of her horror. I think I'd have to be pretty stuck for something to read to bother with it again, if this is anything to go by.

Storm Constantine - - THE FULFILMENTS OF FATE & DESIRE  
(Orbit, 1989, 424pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

Volume 3 of this trilogy definitely requires you to have read volumes 1 and 2, so I am assuming knowledge of the trilogy hereafter and recommend those who have read none of them to begin at the beginning.

As Book 1 followed Pellaz, Book 2 followed Swift, so this book, the last, follows Cal. Cal, with whom our knowledge of the Wraeththu began, who has been both angel and devil, becomes clearer to us and to himself in his own story. It begins at a time after the end of Book 2, but there are flashbacks to important moments in the other books which have not been seen from Cal's point of view, and to other formative moments of Cal's past. It takes us forward by a somewhat zigzagged route to eventually confront what Cal feels for Pellaz. More than that I'm not giving away about the plot, except to say that if you think the end is predictable and escapist by about half-way through, you may very well, as I did, have missed the signs. It didn't go quite where I expected it to.

In my reviews of the other two books I've praised Constantine's creation and I am happy to do so again. The Wraeththu, their world, their lives, are complex, credible, and original. The focus in all the books is narrow, dealing intensely with a few characters, the wider background sketched out in sweeping strokes, the concern and the interest is in the person of each narrator, what they feel and what they become, rather than in the details of Wraeththu history.

There are chapter headings from various authors including T.S. Eliot, so I shall let him conclude for me:

"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."

FOUR QUARTETS: 'Little Gidding'

Iain M. Banks - - THE PLAYER OF GAMES (Orbit, 1989,  
309pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This is a good book. Read it.

As a review that falls short of my requested wordage by a few hundred. It does summarize neatly my opinion and may be deemed sufficient for those who favour brevity. However for those who want a smidgin more detail I'll supply a bit more - but not too much.

The setting of PLAYER OF GAMES is the Culture - a future society spanning many worlds where everyone is provided with all that is necessary for life, where computers are sentient, gender is changeable at will and society is secure and evenly balanced. Out side the sphere of the Culture's influence are other worlds with different mores and habits.

The protagonist, Gurgeh, is the "player of games" of the title, an expert in all the games with which the people of the Culture amuse themselves. Because of his expertise he ends up playing a game which is a way of life in an alien empire, and is also the means of choosing the Emperor. What happens to him, and others, there had me on the edge of my seat in one of the most gripping reads I've had in a long time. It is a really exciting story. It is also a well paced, cleverly plotted, imaginative, original and beautifully written story. I would be hard pushed to find faults in it and I am not going to try.

Josephine Saxton - - JANE SAINT AND THE BACKLASH (Women's  
Press, 1989, 167pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

Quantity doesn't equal quality, but nor does rarity equal excellence. A new book from Josephine Saxton is uncommon, but it is generally worth the wait. This slim volume also contains 'The Consciousness Machine', a rewritten extract from the 1969 novel THE HIEROS GAMOS OF SAM AND AN SMITH (never published in the UK), and an introduction explain-

ing what are fairly obvious similarities between the two pieces here.

The title novella is a sequel to the 1980 novella THE TRAVAILS OF JANE SAINT and sees Jane returning to the surreal realm of the Jungian Collective Unconscious to seek further solutions to the problem of sexual inequality. Since her last visit Jane has a new boyfriend, described as a New Man, but generally there has been a backlash which is negating almost all she has achieved then.

Josephine Saxton's characters are archetypes, but that is not a fault that it could be in a lesser writer. As we are, a little unnecessarily, told in the introduction, her landscape is the Collective Unconsciousness and these surreal fantasies lose none of their joy through that. The archetypes are solid and living; not only Jane, but her companions, the cat Mr Rochester, the canine Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty and Agatha Hardcastle the witch of Hep-tonstall.

There is no need to have read the first volume, though you have missed some delights in the Women's Press edition and there is no need to fear a trilogy... if you think carefully about what this book is, ever so gently so you won't notice until afterwards, telling you. It is overt feminism, but this is never intrusive, more subliminal perhaps.

Read, enjoy, and learn a little, maybe.

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Poul Anderson - - TAU ZERO (Gollancz, 1990, 190pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

"Look - there - rising over the Hand of God. Is it?" Yes it is, the rivetting opening to a spectacular novel, a classic of hard SF here reissued twenty years after its first appearance. The plot is simple and breathtaking: an interstellar scoopship flying close to the speed of light runs out of control, unable to decelerate, with the result (as we all know, don't we?) that subjective time slows down and they whizz through galaxies and the gaps between in a couple of heartbeats. Crisis follows crisis, as the novel mindboggles its way through implications, and the morale (and religious faith) of the very mixed crew has its rocky moments. In the end - well, buy it and see for yourself.

Twenty years on, the cosmology begins to date rether (Hawking surely wouldn't allow sitting outside the monobloc waiting for a new creation); the characters are as soap-operatic as they seemed at the time, and the prose is a bit hectic, though not as embarrassing as I'd feared. By 1970, the New Wave was in full flow, but you'd never guess it from this novel. Definitely sensawunda (for some characters, even religious awe), but I wouldn't have missed it for the worlds.

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John Gribbon & Marcus Chown - - DOUBLE PLANET (Gollancz, 1989, 220pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

What We have here is a novel about terraforming from two top science writers (it says on the cover) influenced by David Brin who supplied the astronomical data and splashes a "slaes-friendly" quote on the front. The ideas in this book are very simple and the scientific rationale is convincingly detailed, if lacking in originality.

The Earth has survived a small scale nuclear "incident" and the Greenhouse Effect makes large areas of the planet unsuitable for farming. A comet is tracked on a course which brings it close enough for a celestial spectacle never before seen. The bad news is that three and a half years later it is due for an even closer approach. Doctor Kondratieff persuades the Secretary of the Reunited Nations (geddit!) to rustle up a manned mission complete with a fusion drive with which to steer the comet away from collision. The mission goes ahead but Kondratieff has other plans for the comet, namely the aforementioned terraforming of the Moon by using the impact of the comet to provide a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere.

With the cover blurb revealing the one pivotal feature there is little left to enjoy in this book other than to say as a novel it is a terrific short story! The meat of the story is told from the viewpoint of the astronauts but the authors introduce a bewildering array of Earthbound characters. Through this they intend to engender a feeling of impending doom but only serve to point to the book's major structural flaws.

Jessica Yates - - DRAGONS AND WARRIOR DAUGHTERS (Lions 'Tracks', 1989, 223pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

You'll see Jessica Yates' name elsewhere in this issue as a reviewer: she mentions her membership of the Tolkien Society and the BSFA on the inside front cover of this excellent selection of heroic fantasy for teenagers subtitled "Fantasy stories by women writers". Although most of the stories have strong female characters, the choice of story does not necessarily imply a feminist slant. I'm sure that the way Jirel of Joiry in 'Black God's Kiss' discovers the nature of her feelings towards the ruthless Guilleme, who has conquered her country and dishonoured her, is ideologically unsound. Good grief, I found something in the heroine of Pat McIntosh's 'Cry Wolf'. We see from this and a previous story (Falcon's Mate) that she is a warrior, yet caught half-naked in the presence of a man, all she can do is go all jittery. Yet this isn't to deny their effectiveness as stories. C.L. Moore in particular, who more or less started the tradition which McIntosh capably continues, is a writer well worth bringing to the attention of girls who believe all this sword 'n' sorcery is "boy's stuff". Moreover, Tanith Lee's superb 'Draco, Draco' shows that heroism is not made manifest by waving swords about, and that it is often a matter of tragic victims and ironic manipulations.

Jane Yolen's 'Dragonfield' also has something to say about heroes with golden hair and rippling muscles, while Diana Wynne Jones' 'Dragon Reserve, Home Eight' is, like most of her work, packed full of imagination, the only flaw perhaps being that the setting needs a novel-length to realise it fully. Vera Chapman's story of astral travel in Crusader times and Robin McKinley's tale of a mute made whole - good setting, but few surprises in the plot - make up the collection.

Seasoned readers will have come across half the stories before, but this isn't a book for seasoned readers. For newcomers to heroic fantasy, this is a good collection which will keep 'em reading. For female teenagers, possibly, but leave it around for their 'Dragonlance'- reading brothers!

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K.V. Bailey - - THE SKY GIANTS (Triffid Books, 1989, 24pp, £1.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

The Matter of Britain has a perennial attraction for writers of all kinds, particularly poets and writers of "speculative fiction". A recent glut of poor "Celtic fantasies" obscures a genuine fascination with the potent Arthurian myths; attempts to update the magic by turning it into advanced or alien technology show how strongly the stories still work on the creative imagination, even in their "demythologised" versions.

This cycle of sixteen poems uses the language and imagery of SF to augment, rather than destroy, the mystery in the story of Parsifal. The interlocking patterns of rhyme and metre net a deliberate ambiguity: Parsifal the hero follows his quest through vast distances, beneath strange stars. He enters the spinning glass castle/satellite, he pursues a unicorn through a metal forest, he sojourns in the ship/hall that distorts time, entertained by a clone of dream-women, uncannily beautiful and alike... The traditional and modern images fuse and blend, adding depth to the vision seen simultaneously with the traditional eye of the Parsifal story and the modern eye of SF. Recommended to anyone prepared to read carefully.

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Gordon R. Dickson - - THE EARTH LORDS (Sphere, 1989, 311pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Craig Marnock)

After a terrible opening fifty pages or so (sloppy writing and a series of coincidences to get the plot kick-started) the novel picks up interest as the hero, Bart Dybig (who just happens to be both extremely strong and extremely intelligent, but looks neither) finds himself a slave in an underground complex known as the Inner World. It is ruled by a race of small humanoids (who may or may not be aliens) called the Earth Lords, who plan to blow up the Earth. All this is set in the backwoods of Canada in 1879.

Having presented this to the reader, Dickson totally forgets to justify it or even explain it and the book de-

generates into a standard get-the-girl-and-get-out-of-here set-up. The plot along the way (which tends to run out every thirty or forty pages so Dybig has to talk with someone or think to the reader to let the author tell everybody what's going to happen next) is provided by the plot-to-destroy-the-world and then some long-lost-family. The latter gives the hero a useful cop-out on the former, as he leaves his new-found family behind in the Inner World to go out into the wilderness with his woman and pretend he's a Heinlein character, plugs for which life-style unobtrusively litter the book.

There are occasional nice touches, but not enough to recommend it. For Dickson fans.

Michael Scott Rohan - - RUN TO THE STARS (Orbit, 1989, 245pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Mark Bellamy, Chief of Security in a police state, rescues a spacecraft pilot who is later murdered by government agents. Investigating the murder he discovers the state has launched a relativistic weapon capable of wiping out Earth's only colony world. Fleeing from the government who want him dead, he leaves Earth on a colony ship determined to stop the weapon.

Written in 1982 and published by Arrow the following (a detail omitted from this latest edition), the book contains the following sentence: "The former superpower fragmented, just as its old rival Russia had in the previous century, into a welter of little states." (p. 80) A very accurate prediction, timely reprinted!

Contrived in places, with the dice loaded in Bellamy's favour and weak on characterisation like most books of its type, it is to Rohan's credit that I could overlook the book's faults and thoroughly enjoy it. Whilst the formula hasn't changed that much from the '50s, the details are finer and more realistic. Rohan is a Scottish writer, but the novel is very American in its feel, with only a touch of British pessimism stealing in during the surprisingly logical climax.

Harry Harrison - - RETURN TO EDEN (Grafton, 1989, 400pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

The concluding volume in Harrison's *West of Eden* trilogy continues to explore a world in which dinosaurs, in the form of the intelligent Ylane, still rule the Earth. The author posits that the meteor strike which occurred (in some theories) 75 million years ago never happened and that saurian life has evolved at the expense of mammalian life. This basic premise is debatable. Cold-blooded life forms are far less adaptable to varying climates than mammals; dinosaurs failed to evolve in their 140 million year "innings" due to an inherent design flaw. But Harrison's impressively worked-out genealogy provides a fascinating and consistent saurian culture and the initial book provides a diverting work of "what if" speculation.

The final volume commences with Kerrick, the human hero of books one and two, musing quietly on the island to which he has led the rebellious humans. He soon realises that their peaceful life of hunting and fishing cannot continue under the constant threat of attack from the various powerful predators which surround them. The humans need the Ylane's technology and in particular more of their biological guns, the living "death-sticks". This precipitates a final showdown between human and saurian.

The incidental details are inevitably more interesting than the plot which is developed at a painfully slow pace. Ultimately if you enjoyed the first two books you will find this a satisfying end to a worthwhile saga.

Melissa Scott - - THE EMPRESS OF EARTH (Gollancz, 1989, 346pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

It seems to be breaking out all over... alchemy? No. Serials, however, are ten a penny and it takes something different to set one apart; a philosopher's stone, perhaps. Melissa Scott found an interesting - some would say bizarre - twist to bolt on the classic space operatic chassis with her first novel, *FIVE-TWELTHS OF HEAVEN* and began a

sequence which she continued with *SILENCE IN SOLITUDE* and now *THE EMPRESS OF EARTH*.

She's got a strange universe out there, where starships are driven by alchemy and mages are employed to provide those everyday touches of high-tech gloss that you expect from a space-going civilization. Did someone say civilization? The vast galactic empire - or nearest substitute - known as the Hegemony comes complete with an attitude to women and politics which assimilates some of the least tolerant aspects of shi'ism in the large. Silence Leigh, a female who has somehow managed to make a career for herself as a spacer and picked up two husbands along the way, starts off the novel by (re-) embarking on her quest for long-lost Earth. The only surprise comes when she arrives at destination, complete with husbands and tutor in the arts of magic - yeah, she's a trainee magician too - and winds up organising a revolution.

Now this is all good clean fun in the tradition of, err, something or other - but anyway it does have a couple of shortcomings that grate after a bit. Despite the original background Scott's characters often fall into the trap of behaving, thinking and talking like twentieth century Americans; the points where she attempts to restore to the characterisation the weird and wonderful ambience she builds up in the background passages tend to jar. And her plot, stripped of alchemical trappings, is rather threadbare; re-tread quests and street-gangs with mohicans are not the stuff of immortality. It's not a bad read, but it fails to deliver on earlier promises of something superb, which is a shame.

Larry Niven, Poul Anderson & Dean Ing - -

THE MAN-KZIN WARS (Orbit, 1989, 289pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Eric Brown)

Although Niven's name is emblazoned in gold lettering one inch high (with Anderson and Ing minute beneath) Niven contributes only 22 pages to this book - and three of those are the introduction. We're in share-cropping season again or, as Niven himself would rather have it: "franchise universe" territory. He actually gives the game away in the introduction, when he says of his story 'The Warriors': "Fred Pohl... saw it often enough that he eventually wrote 'I think this can be improved... but maybe you're tired of reworking it, so I'll buy it as it is...'" Which speaks volumes, you might say, for Niven's honesty - or for his mercenary shamelessness in giving us such a feeble story, twenty-plus years after its first publication, as the lead piece in this present work. (For the record, 'The Warriors' describes humankind's first contact with the warlike, feline: Kzin, in a clunking tale with maddening viewpoint shifts and dire expository dialogue.)

The forty thousand word Anderson novella, 'Iron', takes us on an interstellar expedition to a newly-discovered sun with a crew of cardboard cut-outs, and into conflict with a Kzin warship. In Blytoneseque prose, and with no human insight whatsoever, Anderson gives us a space opera that would not have been out of place in a 1940s issue of *ASTOUNDING*.

Ing's novella 'Cathouse' is by far the best story of the three. Set on an artificial world, it involves human Carroll Locklear, three Kzin females resurrected from suspended animation, and four Kzin warriors, in an inventive, fast-paced adventure. It is competently told, if a touch twee, and comes as a relief after the first two offerings.

Judith Tarr - - A FALL OF PRINCES (Pan, 1989, 401pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Judith Tarr continues her fantasy trilogy *AVARYAN RISING* in a fitting manner, true to its own ethos, if not to conventions of the genre. Thankfully moving on from the all-powerful Mirain, son of the Sun, and the insufferable Elian, his consort, she introduces two new characters, Sarevan, son and heir of Mirain and Elain, and Hirel, heir to the Emperor of Asanion, he who wooed Elian in vain in vol. 2, *THE LADY OF HAN-GILEN*.

Mirain has sworn to overthrow the Empire and its numerous deities which demand human sacrifice and impose the worship of one god, the Sun. In doing so he lays waste each territory where a great battle is fought. Sarevan and Hirel see this as folly and recognise a mutual attraction, but reject the impulse to consummate a love which would be homosexual. Hirel tries to seduce Sarevan several

times, but Sarevan turns him out of bed to seek other com-forters (of either sex!)

Once the book reaches a surprise plot-twist (but not until page 284) it moves on well, and Tarr's style rises to the challenge of a journey between worlds and a battle between mages. I felt there was an awful amount of piffle on the way!

The homoeroticism noted in Ms Tarr's first trilogy *THE HOUND AND THE FALCON* about an Elf who becomes a medieval priest and then leaves the Church to join Elf-kind is substantial in *A FALL OF PRINCES*, with much stripping, bathing and the occasional erection. I wonder if Ms Tarr's ideal reader is a gay male, or even a transsexual; which rather rules me out: personally there's too much foreplay, too little fiction, to suit me.

Arthur C. Clarke - - *REACH FOR TOMORROW* (Gollancz, 1989, 166pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

This is a collection of stories first published in <956; the stories themselves appeared between 1946 and 1953 in various magazines. The chief appeal of this reissue must be for fans of this author to replace old dog-eared copies, although Clarke points out that the original hardback is something of a collector's item. The fiction is a mixed bag with some horribly dated stories deeply rooted in the post-war optimism then prevalent in science fiction.

The two longest stories, 'Rescue Party' and 'Jupiter Five' feature wooden characterisation and the latter contains a scientific premise now superseded by images from the two Voyager probes. 'Rescue Party', Clarke's first published story, has fared better, with an engaging plot, despite the painfully obvious end. Some of the shorter pieces are more interesting, many with ideas so briefly sketched that they barely stand as stories.

The collection does contain a welcome reminder of the author's ability to evoke a quasi-mystical atmosphere from spare writing. 'The Forgotten Enemy' conjures a disquieting picture of frozen London before an impending ice age and 'A Walk In The Dark' describes a stroll along an alien road on a distant planet with unerring credence. Enough vintage Clarke, then, to entertain fans of this important writer.

Orson Scott Card - - *RED PROPHET* (Legend, 1989, 396pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

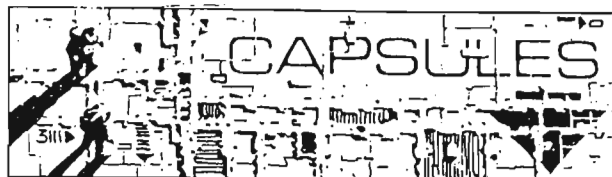
*RED PROPHET* is an oblique follow-on from *SEVENTH SON* (see PI 81 for The Story So Far, if'n you've got a mind to...) In Chapter 7 ('Captives'), Alvin Miller/Maker and his elder brother, Measure, are made the victims of a Foul Scheme that has a bigger beard on it than Grizzley Adams. Before then, we have met these (fascinating) new characters: Hooch Palmer (a 'Spark') - 'Governor' Bill Harrison - Andrew Jackson - the Comte de Maurepas - the Marquiss de la Fayette - napoleon Bonaparte - Mike Fink - Lolly-Wossiky (the one-eyed 'Whiskey Red' who is Not What He Seems) - Ta-Kumsaw (the implacably war-like brother of L-W).

In many ways, *RED PROPHET* is a better novel than *SEVENTH SON*; I especially liked the seamless plotting and the more detailed alternative historiography. But it does seem to take two steps backward for every step forward... At the start, Alvin is about to take up his apprenticeship as a blacksmith, at the end... ditto. My main concern, however, is with passages like this one: "A true red didn't need to hunt with a gun, because the land knew his need, and the game would come near enough to kill with a bow. Only reason for a Red to have a gun... was to be a murderer, and murdering was for White men" (p.174).

Hmm... Life for even the most 'prosperous Amerindian tribes was mainly brutish and short, thanks to disease, poverty, and more or less constant warfare. The idea of game coming "near enough to kill with a bow" (by arrangement!) is - at best - wishful thinking, and, at worst - woolly-minded mysticism. (It may be, of course, that the natives of Card's other-America have developed an ecological 'response' to the European magical 'challenge'). And murder wasn't exactly unknown among Red men - even before the Whites came to show them the arts of 'civilized' man-killing.

The probability is that Card is working towards an eventual synthesis between the best of both cultures (Amen to that), but the moral scales are - at present - too heavily

ily weighted on one side. Time will tell... I'm reminded of something Kingsley Amis wrote in *NEW MAPS OF HELL*: "Those interested in the notion that the American psyche is tormented by guilt over the subjugation of the Indians would find much useful material in science fiction... resourceful Amerinds turn up in the space services with a frequency out of all proportion to the present numbers of that people".



Donald Aamodt - - *A NAME TO CONJURE WITH* (Avon, 1989, 266pp, \$3.50)

Names always have power in magic, and Sandy McGregor is conjured to a world where he is a demon and the very mention of his name will bring cataclysm and havoc. With a dodderly sorcerer and twopsychopaths he sets out unwittingly for a treasure guarded by some really nasty Dark Lord-worshippers. And beyond everything is the mysterious Goddess... A very readable quest-fantasy. (Andy Sawyer)

Poul & Karen Anderson - - *THE DOG AND THE WOLF* (Grafton, 1989, 541pp, £4.50)

Conclusion of the story of Gratillonius, King of Ys, who must save the remaining people of the noew-destroyed city and struggle against the presence of his drowned daughter Dahut. An interesting picture of the conflict between Christianity and Paganism in the twilight of Rome, but it takes a long time for the characters to come alive and the Breton legends on which the saga is based are not as well known as the Arthurian ones. (Andy Sawyer)

Robert Lynn Asprin & Lynn Abbey (Eds.) - - *THIEVES' WORLD 6: WINGS OF OMEN* (Titan, 1989, 280pp, £3.99)

I think *THIEVES' WORLD* is the best of the shared world fantasy series, because of the high quality of the contributors, who include C.J. Cherryh and Andrew J. Offut in this volume. More of the same, definitely, but still well worth buying. (Alan Fraser)

Robert Lynn Asprin & Lynn Abbey (Eds.) - - *THIEVES' WORLD 7: THE DEAD OF WINTER* (Titan, 1989, 273pp, £3.99)

Enjoyable collection of fantasy stories, some incomplete, by Lynn Abbey (who also provides a *Dramatis Personae*), Robert Lynn Asprin (two "stories" including the introduction which is, in fact, a prologue), Robin W. Bailey, C.J. Cherryh, Diane Duane, Jane Morris, Andrew Offutt (who additionally supplies an afterword) and Diana L. Paxson. The series seems to have improved slightly since *THE FACE OF CHAOS* (Book 5) with the loose ends doubtless being taken up in succeeding volumes. (Terry Broome)

Richard Awlinton - - *TANTRAS* (Penguin, 1989, 338pp, £3.99)

Midnight and Adon have been sentenced to death for the murder of Elminster the mage, in this second volume of the *Avatar Trilogy*. From what I remember of him they should have got medals. (Andy Sawyer)

John Brunner - - *THE COMPLEAT TRAVELLER IN BLACK* (Mandarin, 1989, 232pp, £3.50)

Revised and expanded edition of *THE TRAVELLER IN BLACK* (1971), containing an extra story, 'The Things That Are Gods'. Set in a fantasy universe whose primal struggle is that of Order against Chaos, these stories chronicle the adventures of the eponymous Traveller, an agent of Order who limits and dispells the lingering traces of Magic that disorder an increasingly rational cosmos. His single nature gives him a single power, to fulfil peoples' spoken wishes, be they wise or foolish, in such a way as to in-

crease Order. It's a book about the end of a world, the world of High Fantasy; highly-wrought, pervaded with nostalgia and melancholy, a self-defeating paradox. Recommended for those who don't have the original edition. (Sue Thomason)

Tom Deitz - - DARKTHUNDER'S WAY (Avon, 1989, 342pp \$3.50)

Third novel about David Sullivan and his adventures among the Sidhe, this time with a greater input of Amerindian mythology. It's readable, and the mythology is always interesting. Unfortunately, Deitz's characters have become callow stage-props who speak like characters in a fantasy novel whenever any kind of emotion touches them. (Andy Sawyer)

Dave Dutton - - HORRORS (Futura, 1989, 159pp, £2.99)

Which King of England was used as bait by a fisherman? Who became chief executioner at the age of seven? Has anyone ever committed suicide inside a dishwasher? This "gaggle of gruesome facts" is obviously targeted at youngsters who like The Gory Bits". An ideal novelty present for ghoulish juves. (John Newsinger)

Michael Jan Friedman - - STAR TREK, THE NEXT GENERATION: A CALL TO DARKNESS (Titan, 1989, 274pp, £2.95)

Better than most other review books I read in 1989, the part I most enjoyed was the author's acknowledgements, and yet I remember James Blish's short stories of the original STAR TREK with fondness. The novel SPOCK MUST DIE! and the New Voyages anthologies are better, though this ninth in the new sequence is a competent-enough space opera which unashamedly rehashes plots and scenes from the original series with a good deal more padding and less skill. (Terry Broome)

Esther M. Friesner - - THE WATER KING'S LAUGHTER (Avon, 1989, 283pp, \$3.95)

Timeo is a would-be bard with a voice like a corncrake. Then he is hailed as Prince of the Waterfolk and his adventures really happen. Unfortunately by then only the most desperate fantasy addict has got this far. Friesner is an amusingly whimsical writer but the story just isn't very interesting (Andy Sawyer)

Dennis Hamley - - BLOOD LINE (Deutsch Adlibs, 1989, 113pp, £3.50)

Dennis Hamley is an experienced writer for teenagers specialising in ghost and horror fiction. Rory's TV set becomes possessed, locked into a mini-series which begins with the eviction, in the 19th century, of a shepherd and his family from their cottage. This starts a violent feud between the shepherd's family and the landowner, handed down through the generations. After four episodes Rory finds the characters coming into his life, and realises that he is descended from one family and it's up to him to end the curse. The pastiche 19th century dialogue adds to the book's interest and it should make an enjoyable read for reluctant teenage boys. (Jessica Yates)

Chris Hockley - - STEEL GHOST (Grafton, 1989, 320pp, £3.50)

Chris Hockley is a feature writer with the "Sun" newspaper, trying his hand at fiction with this horror story, in which he asks you to believe that Joseph Stalin was so evil that his spirit is able to reach out from the grave to get revenge on the perpetrators of a failed assassination attempt. You might be put off by Hockley's background and subject matter at a time when the Cold War is thawing, but STEEL GHOST is fast-paced and quite well plotted. (Alan Fraser)

Maxim Jacobowski (Ed.) - - NEW CRIMES (Robinson, 1989, 253pp, £5.99)

A completely different genre (though Derek Raymond's 'Every Day is a Day in August' and Peter Lovesey's 'You Durnit' would not be out of place in, say, FANTASY TALES) but Maxim Jacobowski is of course a well-known figure in the SF world. Here, however, he's wearing his crime-fan hat and brings us the first of an annual collection of new crime writing, including the first "straight" crime story

from Stephen Gallagher and an interview with Patricia Highsmith. NEW CRIMES shows the variety of the current crime writing scene. I particularly liked Mike Phillips' Black detective Sam Dean and M.J. Trow's "Inspector Lestrate" story, and much appreciated John Conquest's elucidation of the true meaning of the word "gunsel". If all this rocket-ship-and-alien stuff gets too much, you'll find some good alternatives here. (Andy Sawyer)

Diana Wynne Jones - - WARLOCK AT THE WHEEL (Beaver, 1989, 176pp, £2.50)

Eight amusing fantasy stories from one of the top imaginative children's writers. Some are related to her 'Chrestomanci' books, others offer a slightly sardonic look at eco-consciousness ('The Fluffy Pink Toadstools') or intelligent household gadgetry ('No One '). Lighter than much of her work, there is usually a wry core to each tale which makes the book well worth the read (Andy Sawyer)

Mary Kirchoff - - KENDERMORE (DRAGONLANCE PRELUDES Vol 2) (Penguin, 1989, 346pp, £3.99)

The Dragonlance 'Preludes' take place five years before the 'Chronicles' and are not written by Weis and Hickman. Kendermore is the capital city of the race of Kender (Krynn's equivalent of Tolkien's hobbits) whose culture, society and dialogue resembles that of small-town America. The plot hangs on whether Tasslehoff Burrfoot will return to Kendermore from the Inn of the Last Home and marry the female kender to whom he was betrothed at birth. I found this rather twee, preferring vol. 1 (DARKNESS AND LIGHT), which starred Kitiara the woman-warrior, and featured a journey to the moon via primitive technology, but on the evidence of both, the world of Dragonlance (TM) does not satisfy me. (Jessica Yates)

Louise Lawrence - - THE EARTH WITCH (Lions 'Tracks', 1989, 214pp, £2.50)

This Celtic fantasy for teenagers has had to wait seven years for a British paperback edition, as teenagers were deemed to be only interested in contemporary realism, mainly from the States. THE EARTH WITCH has been compared to Alan Garner's THE OWL SERVICE, with its triangular love story: boy, girl and Mother Goddess. It's more full-blooded than Garner's novel, with its purple passages evoking Welsh speech patterns. (Jessica Yates)

H.P. Lovecraft & August Derleth - - THE LURKER AT THE THRESHOLD (Gollancz, 1989, 196pp, £3.50)

Reprint of the Cthulhu Mythos novel put together by Derleth from posthumous fragments by Lovecraft. Perhaps the best of the collaboration/pastiches, it follows the pattern of raising sinister unease to paranoid horror through the viewpoints of three individuals caught up in the secret of an old mansion, a shunned sorcerer, and the Elder Gods. Stylised, but authentic and effective in its gradual release of the central premise. It really is a classic of its kind. (Andy Sawyer)

Brian Lumley - - SHIP OF DREAMS (Headline, 1989, 243pp, £2.99)

Second in Lumley's disappointingly juvenile series of fantasies set in the "Dreamworld of Lovecraft's early stories. The point of the Dunsanian dream-quest is its mixture of contemplation and unease. Lumley resolutely avoids both. (Andy Sawyer)

Gordon McGill - - STALLION (Futura, 1989, 176pp £2.99)

This book looks terrible. An appalling cover is made worse by the boast that the author has also written three Omen novels. In fact, it is quite a gripping story of blood, sex, madness, corruption, death and horror. Slight but enjoyable. (John Newsinger)

Andrienne Martine-Barnes - - THE FIRESWORD (Headline, 1989, 307pp, £3.99)

Well written fantasy, set in the thirteenth century, with a well characterised shape-changing hero and a happy mix of swords, sorcery, and a little sex (about a paragraph, actually). It does sometimes get a little (!) gory around the hack 'n' slash department but it's all succinctly done and neatly finished with a bitter-sweet ending. Don't be put off by the cover. (Vernon Leigh)

Graham Masterton - - RITUAL (Sphere, 1989, 359pp, £3.99)

This author's writing is hardly felicitous for such a mean story involving cannibalism and religious fervour. The action is furious but the characters are drab and the titular ending is rushed. WARNING: some scenes, especially when our hero is forced to slice off his finger and eat it, come close to inducing a technicolour yawn. (Colin Bird)

Jean Morris - - THE TROY GAME (Beaver, 1989, 144pp, £2.50)

The 'Troy' is the prehistoric spiral maze still to be found in certain English villages. Brannock and Eilian, in a land which may be post-Roman Celtic Britain, need to follow the paths of such a maze to the headquarters of the Druid-like 'Order'. But the land may have its own wishes concerning the threatened wave of invaders... This is a deceptively simple story hiding a great deal under its surface. Beautifully conceived and haunting. (Andy Sawyer)

Steve Perry - - MATADORA (Sphere, 1989, 211pp, £3.50)

Volume two of the Matador Trilogy. The story of Dirisha Zuri and the bodyguard training school at Simplex-by-the-sea, set up by Emile Khadaji in THE MAN WHO NEVER MISSED. Dirisha graduates and is assigned to guard a politician, falls in love and saves his life. The novel lacks colour, but the character depiction of Dirishi, especially in flashback, is interesting. (Eric Brown)

Susan PRICE - - THE GHOST DRUM (Faber, 1989, 167pp, £1.99)

Dark Age Russia, where witches live on huts which move around on chicken-legs, is the setting for this unusual children's fantasy which won the 1987 Carnegie Medal. A witch adopts a baby girl whom she brings up to be a witch and shaman, and to play the ghost drum which is used for divination. The young witch has to take on a tyrant (named Margaretta, with her blue-dyed hair and "thrifty housewife" mentality, who tolerates no opposition), plus the shaman who aids her, in order to set free a young Czar's son to be her partner. THE GHOST DRUM has it all: an original plot, poetical writing, and political relevance! (Jessica Yates)

Lorna Read - - THE LIES THEY TELL (Deutsch Adlibs, 1989, 178pp, £3.50)

Lorna Read is not an SF-genre author, but a novelist for teenagers borrowing an SF theme - telepathy. After a blow to the head the heroine, Anna, is granted telepathic powers which she uses, first to find out what her boyfriend thinks of her, and then to read the mind of a parliamentary candidate who's planning a crooked deal. More of a "teenage read" than a contribution to the SF genre. (Jessica Yates)

David St. Clair - - BLOODLINE (Corgi, 1989, 359pp, £3.99)

Despite the extremely crass cover - which has nothing to do with the book as far as I can tell - this horror novel has almost no gore, being the story of an American woman lured back to Scotland by her young son's kidnap to discover the truth about her ancestry. Although it's a bit slow paced and the plot is a bit creaky in places, it isn't bad for a first novel. (Craig Marnock)

John Saul - - CREATURE (Bantam, 1989, 329pp, £3.50)

CREATURE is a readable, light page-turner, but the level of characterisation never allows the reader to identify with the protagonists or to suspend disbelief in the essentially weak premise. The Tarrentech Corporation uses high-school kids in experiments to accelerate growth, resulting in the creation of ape-like beasts... (Eric Brown)

Guy N. Smith - - THE SLIME BEAST (Grafton, 1989, 144pp, £2.99)

This book dates from 1974, before this excessively prolific writer hit upon his successful 'Crabs' books. It is minimal horror/trash featuring an almost continual parade of cliches from 50's monster movies. One of the funniest piss-poor books I've read for ages - would definitely jazz up the Booker Prize shortlist! (Colin Bird)

Midori Snyder - - NEW MOON (Unwin, 1989, 280pp, £3.50)

An original fantasy political thriller, featuring psychic vampirism/murder, an ancient magical realm under occupation by a powerful neighbour state, a pogrom against magic users (the talent is inborn/hereditary, abetted by the rightful ruler (a Fire Queen who has killed her co-rulers and outlived her natural span) gangs of homeless street children who survive by begging and theft... and an unusual hero named Jobber, a street child with a secret. Meanwhile in the North, the proscribed revolutionary group New Moon fosters magic and the magic-users, and plots to restore the old order and balance. A well-told tale with a lot of action and more underlying thought than many, in which magic is more of a handicap than a convenient super-power. Recommended. (Sue Thomason)

Paul Stewart - - THE THOUGHT DOMAIN (Puffin, 1989, 222pp, £2.99)

This piece of children's fantasy in the nonsense tradition from Carroll via THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH is notable as its authors first children's book. Neil is magically transported into the Thought Domain, where he meets the Great Methodical and his servants who have the task of keeping the thoughts of the world's population tidy and open to new ideas. Neil's quest is to slay an evil thought in the form of a great bird or Gander which plans to take over mankind's thoughts (the Proper Gander - it's a pun!) On his way, Neil meets such personifications as The Foggiest Idea, The Thought That Counts, and Schools of Thought, while finding comfort in Food for Thought. This well-planned work with allegorical implications is just the things for intelligent children from 9 - 14. (Jessica Yates)

Rob Swigart - - PORTAL: A DATASPACE RETRIEVAL (Grafton, 1989, 346pp, £3.99)

Lone astronaut returns from mysteriously aborted mission to find Earth totally depopulated. He uses its still-running computer network to find the routinely surprising answer amongst the seven missing dimensions and the Psion Equations. Based on a computer mystery game, it reads a little bit better than you first expect. (Norman Beswick)

Keith Taylor - - BARD 2: THE FIRST LONG SHIP (Headline, 1989, 260pp, £3.50)

Enthusiastic, but otherwise undistinguished second volume in an ongoing series which picks up after the colourless start in the final hundred pages. Minimal characterisation, stilted prose and dialogue, fights, battles and self-conscious love interest make up the story. A bard joins a band of pirates led by a hard-bitten woman who later comes to his rescue when he is enslaved by a magician. (Terry Broome)

Roger Taylor - - THE WAKING OF ORTHLUND (Headline, 1989, 472pp, £3.99)

Hawklan spends half of this third volume of his 'Chronicles' in a coma. A really uncharitable reviewer would wonder whether the reader would notice the difference in the second half... (Andy Sawyer)

John Wagner, Alan Grant, & Ian Gibson - - JUDGE DREDD 25 (Titan, 1989, 64pp, £5.50)

A strange assortment that doesn't sit well together, though individually they are fun: 'The Alien Way' concerns an alien writer studying police tactics on Earth, with hilarious results! 'The Nightmare Gun' concerns a weapon that does just that, kills with nightmares, while 'Rumours Can Kill' stretches the consequences of rumours to the logical conclusion. Another short extrapolates on the present in-vogue 'Crimewatch' shows. The longest story, 'Tomb of the Judges' is about a maniac who needs dead judges to feed his religious master - well, he's insane... but then almost everyone else is in this series, surely...? (Nik Morton)

John Wagner, Alan Grant & Barry Kitson - - JUDGE DREDD 27 (Titan, 1989, 64pp, £5.50)

Gasp! Dredd is defeated by a martial artist called Stan Lee (aka Deathfist)! The framing stories of this collection - others show some of the more totalitarian aspects of Mega-City One - show Dredd hospitalised and his final rev-

enge - a public demonstration that "the law may occasionally bend... but it never breaks". Interesting contrast between Kitson's early art and his more adept, developed style, as he himself points out. (Andy Sawyer)

John Wagner, Alan Grant & Ron Smith - -JUDGE DREDD 26 (Titan, 1989, 64pp, £5.50)

Excellent artwork from a veteran, featuring the nuking of Mega-City One and echoes of FAIL-SAFE. The most memorable story is 'The Lemming Syndrome', a natural consequence of living in confined claustrophobic cities. There's a side-swipe at advertisements to the nth degree and cultist murderers too. Extrapolation is the name of the game and Wagner and Grant are masters at this. (Interesting that the Sovs are the bad guys here - how times have already changed...) (Nik Morton)

Jill Paton Walsh - - TORCH (Puffin, 1989, 167pp, £1.99)

TORCH is by a celebrated children's author who has written in various genres, and is not committed to SF; but it is more thought-provoking than much routine children's SF. We ask: what caused the catastrophe which sent mankind back to the Bronze Age, to the peasant and tribal ways of life? Civilisation just seems to have stopped, as mankind lost technological skills. The story is a quest by some Greek children carrying the last of the Olympic torches across Europe to south-west England, to a place where the torch will allow them to settle down. The idealism of the children is contrasted with the scheming and cynicism of the adults they meets. Ironically, one of the children wishes that the West had pursued "civilisation" rather than choose unilateral disarmament: he does not realise that what they have in the future, an unpolluted countryside, is far better than a nuclear wasteland. (Jessica Yates)

Patricia C. Wrede - - CAUGHT IN CRYSTAL (Orbit, 1989, 293pp, £3.50)

When the magic of the Sisterhood of the Stars no longer works, they re-summon an ex-Sister and send her back to the Twisted Tower whose evil creature is believed to be the cause of the magic drain. The fact that the heroine in question is 36 years old with two children to look after makes this a little bit different from standard genre fantasy, but not much. (Craig Marnock)

T.M. Wright - - A MANHATTAN GHOST STORY (Gollancz, 1990, 381pp, £3.99)

The word 'oblique' seems to develop new emphasis when applied to T.M. Wright. A photographer 'minding' an apartment for a friend, meets his friends girlfriend who seduces him, takes him to meet her parents etc. Then the friend confesses that he is not on holiday, but fleeing from justice: the murder of his girlfriend, to be exact. Most ghost stories have the dead intruding into the world of the living: this seems to be the reverse. But what exactly is going on? We're not given much of explanation, but any over-rationalisation would ruin the effect of this excellently hallucinatory tale. (Andy Sawyer)

## "Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 34 (March/April 1990)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Three years ago INTERZONE devoted an issue to new (or nearly so) writers. David Pringle has repeated that experiment and, if there's nothing here to quite match Richard Kadrey's 'Goodbye Houston Street, Goodbye' or the Newman and McAuley pieces from issue 19, then there are some admirable attempts.

Foremost amongst these is Richard Calders 'The Lilim', horror a la Carter, an intricate, dense piece about "dolls" created by a nanoengineer, which are somehow infected by his subconscious. Barren, they use his son to reproduce... Susan Beeston's 'An Artificial Life' takes a vastly different approach to, well, artificial life. Old-fashioned SF here, accessible and amusing. 'Well-loved' by Ian McLeod is about personality transfer, at least its seedier possibilities. Disturbing too; the omission of full stops boosts the story along.

Both Keith Brooke ('The Greatest game of All') and Matthew Dickens ('Great Chain of being') faithfully adapt the good old rule about examining a single technological change. Although the ending is somewhat predictable, Brooke's is much the better story. (It also has the best in-joke. The hero, on being told he reads too much Wells and Gibson, protests "I'd never even heard of Wells." Dickens's story is the weakest of all, with strained dialogue and a fanciful premise which really required a more blatantly comic approach. Glenn Grant's rich 'Memetic Drift' read more like an episode from a novel than a short story in itself, a novel I'd love to read, with its theme of Americans turned nomads due to a series of environmental disasters. 'Down the Path of the Sun' by Nicola Griffith would also have been more effective as part of a larger piece. The death described within is horrific, true, but its impact is diminished by the fact that within the confines of the story the reader has had no chance to develop any empathy with the character.

Two contrasting articles: the romantic fantasies of Anne McCaffrey are examined as part of the 'Big Sellers' series, while there's also a lengthy interview with Lucius Shepard. How was Lucius encouraged to read by his father? You won't believe me if I tell you, so check out the magazine! Finally, there's a refreshing change in the look of IZ, with Ian Miller providing all the illustrations and story titles, and photographs included of most of the featured writers.

### LAST-MINUTE PURGATORY

People do write in to PI, honest, and various folk said nice things about the Colin Davies cover of PI 82 and the clearer typeface used in various parts of it (i.e. pp 16 - 17: no, that wasn't the Archimedes, though). Pity about the ribbon ending towards the end of the index... You'll see more variant types over the next couple of issues, one reason being given elsewhere, the other being far too complicated to go into. Please bear with me for a while. But just to prove that people read the reviews, here's Dave Langford:

While I'm quite fond myself of William Tenn's novel OF MEN AND MONSTERS, the highly enthusiastic review by Charles Stross does beg for comment. First, Charles manages to make it sound as though his opinion that it's a "classic" is a startling and unusual one, while neglecting to mention that this edition is in a series of supposed classics - it's VGSF Classic #35. Second, I'm sceptical of his claim that Tenn in this book originated the idea of humanity's being reduced to "rats in the walls". The short version 'The Men in the Walls' appeared in Galaxy in 1963. In 1957, the same magazine had serialized Pohl's and Korman's 'The Wolfbane' (VGSF Classic #7), which tersely but unmistakably develops this precise notion. Howzat?

**APOLOGIES:** Because of problems at work, I've had to complete this issue of PI earlier than I would have liked, and before the arrival of Edward James' magazine reviews. (Complicated? Well, it was either earlier or later and I assumed you would prefer that I made my printer's deadline...) Apologies to all you out there, and to Edward, and I hope normal service will be resumed next issue.

### NEW SF ALLIANCE

You'll know from Dave W. Hughes' Matrix column of the existence of the New SF Alliance, which exists to promote and market the best of the UK Small Press SF&F magazines (Auguries, Back Brain Recluse, Dream The Edge, New visions, The Scanner, Works) with an increasing selection of US magazines as well (Space & Time, Ellipsis, Ice River etc.). Two more US magazines have become linked with the NSFA, and you can now order New Pathways and Science Fiction Eye through them.

Availability of some of the US magazines depends on stocks (I got one only by reserving my order and responding very quickly when notification of its arrival came!) but the choice is increasing all the time: check Dave W.'s column for further details or - even better - contact him at 12 Blakestones Road, Slathwaite, Huddersfield, Yorks. for up-to-date information on what's available. (I'm sure a see would be appreciated.)

The range of material under the cloak of the NSFA is wide and getting wider. It's the most important development in the SF & F small press scene for some time and deserves the support of anyone interested in new writing in the field.

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