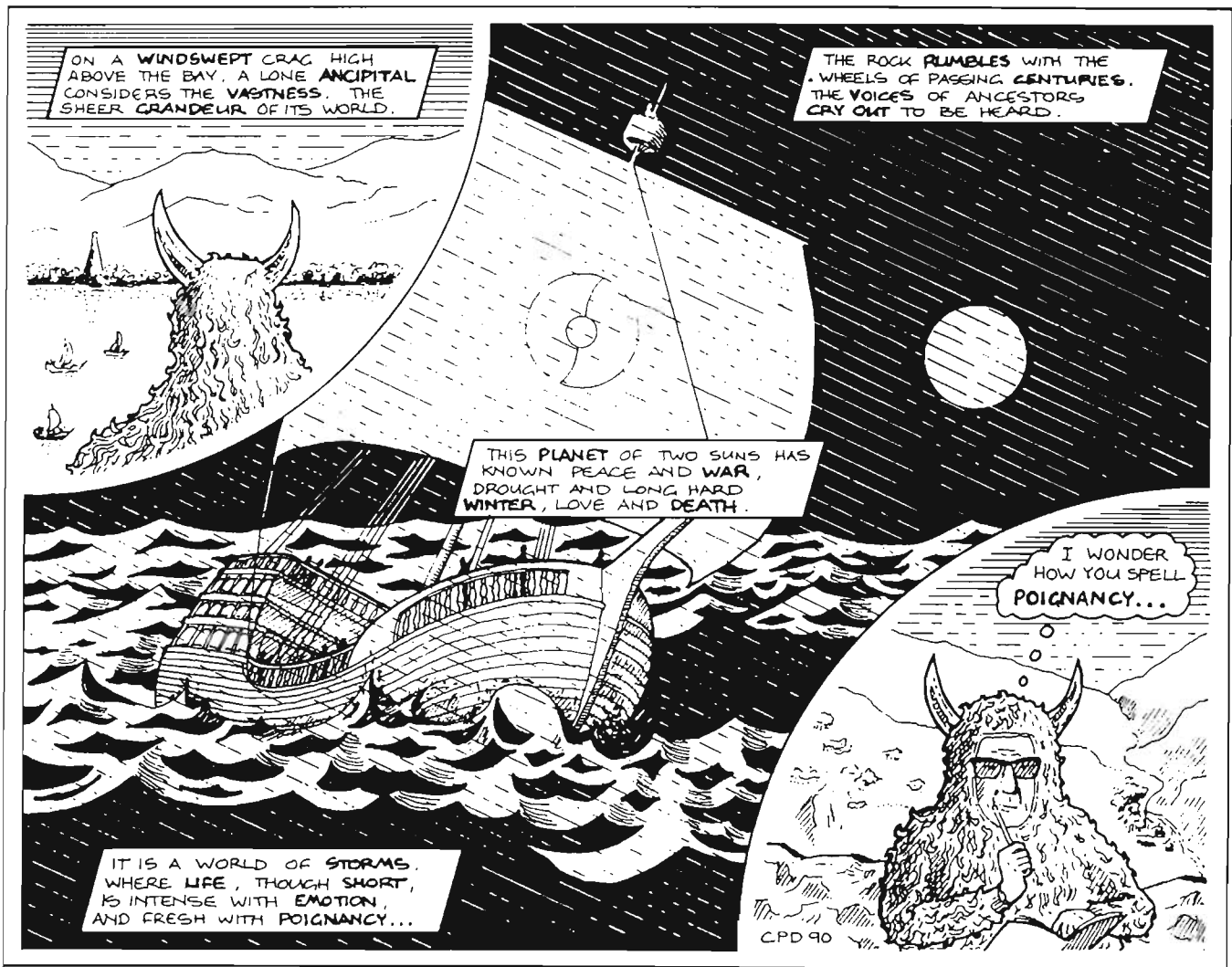


Paperback Inferno

85

The Review of paperback SF

August/September 1990





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

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* DEADLINE for all contributions to PI 86 is:-
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* Saturday September 8th.
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# HELP WANTED #
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Anyone with word-processing facilities willing to type up copy ready for paste-up is invited to contact the editorial address. You don't have to have a particular machine (though Amstrad PCW would probably be convenient) just one which will give a clear and readable typeface after reproduction. [No hollow laughs, please: I'd rather have your money...]

Paperback Purgatory

Not much from me again this time round, but something from you. "You", in this case, being JOSEPH NICHOLAS, who writes to correct Ken Lake's review of two Vernor Vinge titles in PI 84. "He states that Vernor 'is married to Joan Vinge', but in fact they were divorced several years ago! She subsequently married Jim Frenkel, who you may recall used to edit Bluejay Books... but I've no idea what he's doing now."

And as this is, of course, Not The Brian Aldiss Tribute issue of PI (see the cover!) it seemed logical to feature - somewhat edited - DAVID WINGROVE's comments upon Maureen Porter's review of Aldiss's FORGOTTEN LIFE last issue:-

"While one shouldn't always expect a consensus of opinion, Maureen Porter's 'review' of the book was quite remarkable in that it managed to describe a novel I know rather well in terms that made it seem utterly alien to my reading experience. Not only does FORGOTTEN LIFE bear little relationship to 'the acerbic novels of observation produced by the likes of Iris Murdoch and Penelope Lively' (a strange couple to pair so readily considering the vast difference in the kind of novels each produces), but in its central sections - those concerning Joseph Winter's far eastern experiences during World War II - it has a passion and vividness of expression totally missing in that particular branch of literature, the 'Hampstead Novel' (which, I assume, is what Ms Porter infers it is but a pale shadow of). Certainly FORGOTTEN LIFE is about flaws of character:

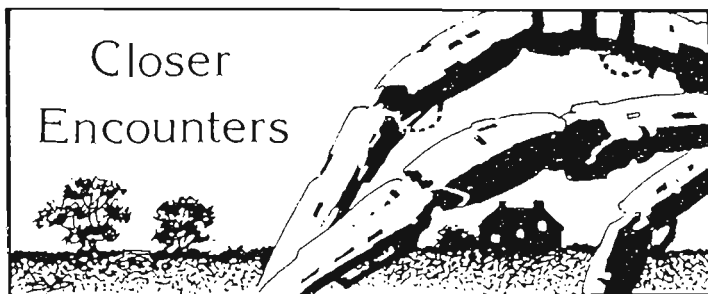
the difficulties of living and relating; the petty jealousies within relationships; and the difficulties of coping with both the successes and failings of one's partner in life, but this is very different - VERY different - from saying that it is a 'very mean-spirited novel'. Indeed, the novel's main theme - underscored by the final chapter - is a coming-to terms with past experience leading to reconciliation and forgiveness.

Maureen Porter's description of the book is at best a slovenly mis-

reading of the text, at worst a piece of 'mean-mindedness' and petty feminist 'corner-fighting' (an insane "let's defend the female character" stance) that gives criticism of this kind a deservedly bad name. She claims that this is a book about 'creative castration'. It's a strong claim, which her review appears to support - Joseph and Clem are, in their different ways, disappointed men - but which the experience of reading the text once more refuses to bear out. Joseph, particularly, has had a very full life.... Nor is the structure of the novel 'poor'....The inter-cutting of material is, in fact, quite masterfully achieved, juxtaposing and balancing the various levels of experience provided to us within the novel in such a way that we are continually given insights into the range and complexity of contemporary existence. Indeed, this is a novel which deliberately sets out to break down that sense we all have (to a greater or lesser degree) that the way we live our lives is the only possible way. The 'forgotten life' of this novel is not a single thing - is not necessarily 'that of Sheila', nor the supposedly denied creativity of the Winter brothers - but has more to do with the two dead children which lie at the heart of the novel (one the cause of the emotional coldness between Sheila and Clement, the other a 'mystery' which, once unveiled, explains and finally 'cures' the emotional isolation both brothers have suffered all their lives. These two denied lives (forgotten yet ever-present even in their absence) are the real determinants of this novel, and Ms Porter doesn't even mention them in her review!

...As an Aldiss observer and - dare I claim it, having co-authored a book on the man's work? - expert of some years, I'd say that this was Aldiss's most successful venture into the mainstream and, if not a perfect novel, certainly a lively and interesting one, with some of his finest writing within its pages. I don't say that lightly."

Further to what I said last issue about the forthcoming R.E.M. magazine: it's still forthcoming, but with a "late August" publication date. But The Gate has now reached its second issue. Rumours that the Paperback Inferno editor has bought 250 copies for distribution to his family have been hotly denied, but it makes a jolly good excuse for throwing caution to the winds and buying an Amstrad PCW instead...



You mean, that "Buck Rogers" stuff?

Flint Dille, Robert Sheckley, Abigail Irvine, M.S. Murdoch, Ulrike O'Reilly, Jerry Olton - - ARRIVAL (Penguin, 1990, 326pp, £3.99)

M.S. Murdoch - - REBELLION 2456 (Penguin, 1990, 281pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

The world's most prestigious producer of fine literary paperbacks has descended to the nadir of thirties pulp SF with this venture. The Dille Family Trust owns the "Buck Rogers" trademark; the TSR trademark is that of the se books' first US publisher, and it's interesting that none of the authors mentioned above holds copyright to their work.

Buck Rogers embarks on a mission, hatched by a macho paranoid USA against the insane, cowardly, murderous Connie who killed his parents, and ends up incorporated with the Russian in the mind of a supercomputer. Basically that's Flint Dille's first story in ARRIVAL; the ultra-pulpish Ms Murdoch takes up the tale in the 25th century in REBELLION 2456 and showers us with a confection which is equal parts of Buck Rogers' eyes twinkling, boring, narrowing and otherwise talking for the muscle-bound, semi-articulate clod, and totally gratuitous murder along the lines of "the rifles drilled a hundred holes in her chest." According to the blurbs, these events take place in "the conceivable 25th-century world of Buck Rogers", which is rather like calling those antique visits to Bedlam "a nice day's outing".

Sheckley and the others provide short stories of varying quality and interest, tangential to or totally separate from the Buck Rogers theme but all tortured by link-passages into being aspects of this lunatic imagined world. All the writers, described as "today's hottest science fiction writers" show admirable good sense in selling their rights to the Family Trust; better they should have adopted pen names as well, for all the good this farrago of nonsense will do their reputations.

Never again will you be able to buy a Penguin Book in the expectation of enjoying a literate, intelligent, challenging and memorable experience.

Brian Aldiss - - HOTHOUSE (Gollancz, 1990, 206pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

First published in 1962, HOTHOUSE passes the test of time pretty well, which is more than can be said for a lot of Hugo winners. It's set in the distant future on an Earth which has stopped turning, amongst the descendants of humanity who live in a gigantic continent-spanning tree.

Ostensibly a journey across the continent by the young Gren and his fellows in search of a new home, HOTHOUSE is a novel concerned with "the getting of wisdom" (of a limited sort), the inevitability of both growth and decay and the contrast and conflict between the richness (in this case threateningly so) of life and the constant nearness of death.

Nature in HOTHOUSE is "green in tooth and claw" and there is a pleasing irony in the threat to humans posed by the abundant plant life; indeed the nasty flora of the novel are part of its success; along with the Morel, an intelligent and parasitic fungus and such creatures as the tummy-bellies - attached by umbilical cords to the tummy-trees - Aldiss paints a convincingly alien vision of the future.

His description of this world is convincing despite the allegedly "unscientific" nature of the book; even if this criticism, voiced by James Blish amongst others, is true (and to make it implies an absurd over-confidence about one's understanding of the world) it misses the point. If we are to criticise every novel which does not accord with our view of reality we are left with the worst sort of unimaginative literalist fiction. Haven't people like Blish ever heard of the word "metaphor"?

Robert Holdstock - - MYTHAGO WOOD (Grafton, 1990, 319pp, £3.50)

LAVONDYSS (Grafton, 1990, 475pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

MYTHAGO WOOD first appeared in magazine form nearly ten years ago and as a novel over five years ago. When I read it originally I thought it was good, but re-reading my review I see that I did not do it full credit. Perhaps I can do more now.

At a time when some advocates of fantasy are attempting to separate themselves from science fiction, and vice versa, it is worth pointing out that while the novel is a great and original fantasy (as Alan Garner and Michael Moorcock have said) it is also a science fictional novel. It is a book that has said let's develop the psychological theories of Freud or Jung, and consider what would happen if they were made real in the Britain of the post-war years. The consequence of that experiment is a novel that grips the reader all the way through to the end.

It is also a book about many other things. It is a novel in the traditional sense. It is about the relationship between characters - about father and son, and men and women, and brothers and jealousy. However, it has the space to explore those in ways that are very different - how a father's mental projections typify the relationship, for instance. It is also an adventure story and a quest.

LAVONDYSS is not a sequel in the sense that it continues the first book. It introduces new characters - the heroine, Tallis Keeton, is the sister of a character from the first book but is never mentioned there - and also presents characters mentioned in the original book who were never seen. The atmosphere is different too - if the first book is Saxon, then this is Celtic. The world of mythology feels very different, and the way that Tallis experiences the world is not that of Steven Huxley in the first book.

This part of the woods is filled with shamans, early humanity, and experiences close to psychedelia or psychosis. Yet this novel too is multifaceted, and the break between the first and second parts of the novel comes as a surprise. Robert Holdstock does not give up his grasp on the traditional tools of the novel.

A nice pair.

Ian Watson - - THE FIRE WORM (Grafton, 1990, 240pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

The framing narrative of this intricately structured novel concerns John Cunningham, a psychotherapist who, in a near-future warped by AIDS, practices hypno-regression to previously experienced or imagined lives. Sceptical of reincarnation, he is schizoid to the extent of debating conflicting interests with an alter ego, Jack, a closet horror story writer. The Jack persona uses a former-life experience of John's patient, Tony, to write 'Jingling Geordie's Hole', a semi-fantastic, semi-realistic tale of adolescent sodomy, which ends with the disappearance of the younger boy, absorbed into earth's entrails by the cave-haunting "Worm" - to one manifestation of which the boy has himself given unnatural birth.

'Jingling Geordie's Hole' is an earlier Watson story (Interzone 17). Now it is functionally interleaved with the initial therapy chapters. In later chapters its symbolic content is thematically related to events in the framing narrative's Tyneside present, and in the worlds of by-gone Tyneside and Durham as recollected by Tony, searching for a buried emasculating trauma. These past worlds and their people (certain of them, such as Harriet Martineau, verifiably historical: many shadowily pre-figuring characters of the framing narrative) appear in convincing though occasionally paradoxical detail, sometimes authenticated or elaborated by the researches of John/Jack, the latter persona becoming increasingly influential.

In the fourteenth-century episode a pseudo-Ramon Lull's alchemical operations accidentally set loose a salamandrine marvel and terror, the Lambton Worm of north-eastern legend. In linking the Worm to the 'Geordie's Hole' monster, Ian Watson invokes landscape and geology and, pursuing a trail of historical incident and folklore, blends erudition with intuition. Richness of detail and subordinate action may at times appear to sidetrack but in fact we are always routed back, our perceptions enlarged. The historical sequences build towards the paradisaic and cosmic visions of the Epilogue, and towards their aftermath where the Worm (cousin surely to Watson's RIVER WORM) in all its horror finalises the John/Jack schizophrenia, but also mediates through phallic and anal imagery a correspondence of organic form with both the entombing and sealing rock and the searing and erupting plutonic fires which are the salamander's native sphere. Ian Watson here brilliantly negotiates those treacherous ways between the earthy and the mystical, between the sadistic and the ecstatic, of which, in such novels as MAIDEN CASTLE and A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE, John Cowper Powys was so assiduous a master-explorer.

R E V I E W S

Ellen Datlow & Terri Wilding (eds.) - - DEMONS AND DREAMS
2: THE BEST FANTASY & HORROR (Legend,
1990, 650pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

The immodest title actually refers to the year 1988. This anthology is of American origin; the editors are respectively the fiction editor of OMNI and a former fantasy editor at Ace Books. Most of the stories are from North American publications though there are some stories of British origins which first appeared in OTHER EDENS II or INT-ERZONE; there are no stories from anywhere else. Further selection criteria become evident on reading the volume. These stories represent a particular kind of fantasy; a particular kind of horror writing; contemporary, literary, avoiding the more well-worn and pulpish themes. It includes a few faery tales, but swords-&-sorcery, heroic fantasy, splatter horror, slimy things and haunted churchyards are conspicuously absent.

It gets off to a doubtful start with a conventional life-after-death mystery, but improves rapidly with Gene Wolfe's 'The Tale of the Rose and the Nightingale'. Most of the stories that stick in the mind are dark: Ian MacDonald's 'Unfinished Portrait of the King of Pain by Van Gogh', M. John Harrison's 'The Great God Pan' (probably the best piece in the book), Ian Watson's 'Lost Bodies', Lucius Shepard's 'Life of Buddha' (a grim look at the lowest reaches of American life), John M. Ford's 'Preflash', F. Paul Wilson's 'Faces', and Joe R. Lansdale's 'Night They Missed the Horror Show'. The last is the kind of story that makes one glad one doesn't live in the American South. Charles de Lint's 'The Soft Whisper of Midnight Snow' is gentler.

Other authors featured include Tanith Lee, Thomas M. Disch and Sara Maitland. This is a collection that shows (subject to the above qualifications) the state of the art in fantasy and dark fantasy short writing, and as the copyright page and 47-page introduction give namechecks to a large number of American magazines and presses the volume should be of interest to writers.

There are no really duff stories in the collection though the poems may be an acquired taste. The reader should be cautioned that the darker stories overshadow the lighter if one tries to read too many at a sitting.

Expensive, but recommended.

William Hope Hodgson - - THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND
(Grafton, 1990, 188pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

The author was born in Essex in 1877, the year in which he sets the bulk of this novel. The book takes the form of a manuscript framed by episodes detailing its discovery. The manuscript is a journal telling the tale of an unnamed recluse who lived with his sister in the eponymous house. The recluse discovers that the house is situated near a strange pit which leads into another world of bizarre monsters and apocalyptic visions.

Hodgson wrote several novels in which he often blended his experiences at sea with vivid fantastical elements. THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND is his most experimental work. A deranged quality of feverish invention is apparent in the writing, especially when the recluse makes his transdimensional journeys across the cosmos.

The scope of the central character's temporal odyssey, from battles with foul "swamp things" from the Pit, to witnessing the cataclysmic end of the solar system, is rivaled only in the SF of Stapledon and Wells. The author's writing style is, however, substantially less rigorous than these two giants of the field. Hodgson has a penchant for passages of lumpy prose and the characters and descriptions would not look out of place in the pulp fiction of the era. But compared to the dense adjective-rich world of H.P. Lovecraft, who was clearly influenced by Hodgson's style, this book is very easy to read.

This edition features an illuminating afterword by Iain Sinclair and a striking cover by Luis Rey.

Greg Bear - - TANGENTS (Gollancz, 1990, 290pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by L.J.Hurst)

TANGENTS includes short stories from the beginning of Greg Bear's career up to last year, though only one is appearing for the first time. The title story and the original version of BLOOD MUSIC were award winners, and both are hard SF, but some of the other stories are fantasies, or even moral fables.

The biggest difference between the stories written at the beginning of the eighties and at the end is Bear's development of a sort of conscience - 'Blood Music' is a gosh-wow look at what the hard-ware (or floppy-ware) can do, and the new story 'Sisters' is not. 'Sisters' will be developed into a novel, QUEEN OF ANGELS. It describes a schoolgirl who has not been genetically enhanced, and is therefore less than perfect in a school where parents have normally taken half their children's genotype from the test tube. The girl who has been an oddity and an outcast learns that the gene splicing has also introduced the risk of death into the recipients as she sees some of her classmates die and the others live in the fear of that happening to them. How does someone who is normal react to people who should be better, but are plunged into things far worse by their attempted improvement? With pity, assistance, smugness or what?

Not all the stories here are good, but it is not a disappointing collection.

Moebius - - THE AIRTIGHT GARAGE (Titan, 1990, £7.95)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

THE AIRTIGHT GARAGE graphic novel is the third volume of Titan Books' Collected Fantasies of Jean Giraud, better known as "Moebius". This particular work took him four years to complete and consists of a series of episodes set in Major Grubert's asteroid universe, the Airtight Garage.

We are taken on a Cook's tour of Giraud's calculatedly absurd science fiction universe: the flight of the Engineer Barnier, the mission of the spy, Samuel Mohad; the loss of Lark Dalxtrey; the shooting down by bow and arrow of the airplane of Destiny; the struggle between Major Grubert and Lewis Carnelian; the breakup of the Airtight Garage and Grubert and Carnelian's efforts to save it from the Bakalites. Throughout, Giraud demonstrates his mastery of a variety of graphic styles.

The result is a visually rich book that is very pleasing to the eye, but what does it really amount to? This is the absurd as self-indulgence, as coffee table book, as bourgeois affectation. Personally I prefer something a bit more radical.

Jack Vance - - THE GREY PRINCE (Gollancz, 1990, 160pp,
£3.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

[Publishing Note: Gollancz claim this is the first UK publication of this 1974 novel, but in fact Hodder & Stoughton released the book as a Coronet paperback in 1976, with the American-spelt title of THE GRAY PRINCE. That book had 176 pages, but was set in a slightly larger typeface, as the text of both is identical. This new edition has the spelling THE GREY PRINCE only on the cover and the title page; "gray" appears throughout the text, which appears to be a photoreproduction of an original American edition.]

The action of this 1974 Vance Gaean Reach story takes place on the planet Koryphon, where a small number of human settlers called Outkers own all the land and rule two alien races, the Uldras and the Windrunners. The erjins and the morphotes, two quasi-intelligent species indigenous to Koryphon, are at the bottom of the pile, the erjins being enslaved by the Uldras. Schaine Madduc, the daughter of one of the wealthy Outker families, returns to Koryphon after five years of off-planet education. She finds that a

new Ultra movement called the redemptionists has arisen, wanting political and land rights, and an end to Outker domination. The leader of the Redemptionists, known as the Gray Prince, is none other than an Ultra fostered in her own household, formerly called Muffin, whom she regards as a brother.

Schaine's land-baron father is murdered when his air-car is ambushed on the way to meet her at the airport, and she quickly becomes embroiled in the conflict, with divided loyalties between the interests of her own Outker family and friends, her affection for the former Muffin, and her belief in a fairer society for Koryphon. However, surprises await all sides, and the erjins and morphotes play a much larger role in ultimate events than might be assumed from the opening scenario.

THE GREY PRINCE, more topical today perhaps than when it was written, addresses the issue of how a settler regime can share its power with the native inhabitants, whilst ensuring that any new majority government protects the rights of the former ruling minority. It should be said, of course, that this is first and foremost a novel of action and adventure, and Vance's ultimate solution of dividing Koryphon between the races might be too simplistic to be an effective answer to problems here on Earth.

However, enough of all the serious talk. Lovers of Vance's work will find all the elements they enjoy in THE GREY PRINCE - the familiar backdrop of the Gaean Reach, copious footnotes of fake scholarliness, and the usual well-detailed structured hierarchical society of people with silly customs and even sillier names. Vance, of course, doesn't really "do" aliens - the Uldras and the other races are just further examples of strange human cultures from his fanciful imagination, but that doesn't spoil the book. All in all, an enjoyable read of refreshing crispness after some of his more verbose recent efforts.

Robert A. Heinlein - - RED PLANET (Gollancz, 1990, 173pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

This category of Heinlein novel is one which shows its age, having been first published in 1949. If you have seen any of the repeats of *Lost In Space* with the women of the next century meekly cleaning and cooking while being left in the charge of a bratty boy of about 13, you will have the feel of RED PLANET. It is Heinlein in one of his worst phases. The protagonist is a bratty boy called Jim (all American despite being on Mars), there is a cute alien, dimwitted but well-meaning parents, one sensible gruff batchelor ("Doc", of course) and a number of petty-minded, thoroughly bad, baddy adults, plus some superior aliens. The book follows the adventures of bratty Jim battling against the nasties in the cause of life, liberty and the pursuit of... something (the American Way perhaps? Certainly not the Martian Way).

It is a juvenile novel full of cliché, stock characters, sexual stereotyping; a "cowboys in space" plot and only Heinlein's undoubted fluency as a writer makes it in any way readable. When compared to the good books that Heinlein has produced it does make you wonder how he could write such rubbish. For rubbish it unfortunately is, being dated, clichéd and hackneyed, only slightly redeemed by the talent of the author: "only slightly" because the author has debased his talents as a writer turning a pot-boiler into something more. A minor tragedy perhaps? certainly evidence of a betrayal of talent. It is a shame. It is also not worth reading. Try THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS instead.

Carol Emshwiller - - THE START OF THE END OF IT ALL (Women's Press, 1990, 163pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

A collection of 18 short pieces of writing of the sort called "feminist science fiction" or "women's writing" or "imaginative fiction" or "fantasy"; writings rooted in a distinctively feminist continuum of experience (dreams, visions, "real-life" perceptions and events). The title story describes a woman's experience of men as aliens (and aliens as men), her complicity in a planned programme of environmental degradation and destruction, and her sporadic, chaotic and successful attempts to subvert the Master Plan. 'The Circular Library of Stones' is about an old

woman excavating some stones, some dreams; her left-handed automatic writing brings her Sybilline messages from a vanished or imaginary storehouse of old women's wisdom (the library, a circle of white stones) while her daughters plan to put her in an old peoples' home. Given the choice between dying into visionary wisdom, or living as a mad-woman in the home, the old woman chooses life. The story is non-judgemental about the "reality" of her vision, the wisdom of her choice. In other pieces there is a lot of playing with words, the sort of activity labelled "trivial" by people with self-important self-images who aren't sure whether or not they (and their standards) are being subtly challenged and undermined (they are). I enjoyed reading most of these pieces very much.

Lisa Tuttle (Ed.) - - SKIN OF THE SOUL (Women's Press, 1990, 231pp £5.95)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Men have always been reluctant to admit that women could write horror fiction, applying such cosy epithets as "psychological" or "subtle" to the dread word. But since Mary Shelley, women have been successfully writing stories that scare the shit out of the reader and that, semantics aside, sounds like horror to me. The problem is that most Horror is written by, and packaged for, men, which accounts for the lack of interest women often show for the genre.

Lisa Tuttle has set out to open up the field a tad with this collection of sixteen stories and one poem, not to prove that women can write horror since Anne Rice, V.C. Andrews, Shirley Jackson and others have done so many times in the past. The collection does concentrate more on domestic horrors, because that was Tuttle's own preference as editor, and this gives the book a more cumulative effect than many male-dominated anthologies.

One of the best stories is Suzy McKee Charnas' 'Boobs', which appeared in IASFM last year and has been nominated for a Nebula. The link between menstruation and lycanthropy has been examined before (in one of Alan Moore's SWAMP THING comics, of all places) but it makes for a particularly fresh tale when told with such wilful glee. The editor's own 'Mr. Elphinstone's Hands' is imaginative and distinctly queasy reading and Anne Goring's 'Hantu-Hantu' should be avoided by those with a phobia for our six-legged friends.

All the stories are followed by a short afterword in which the author's outline why they write horror - if they think they do! The price is a bit steep for a short book but that's to be expected from a small publisher such as this. For once I agree with the quote on the cover from Clive Barker (male) - "Long overdue, this is instantly an essential volume".

Fred Saberhagen, Stephen R. Donaldson, Larry Niven, et al. - - BERSERKER BASE (Gollancz, 1990, 320pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Saberhagen invented the Berserker (insane destructive spaceship killing machine) concept in the sixties and has been flogging it ever since to a readership apparently hooked on death. Here we have 17 short stories - seven by Saberhagen as well as others by Poul Anderson, Edward Bryant, Connie Willis and Roger Zelazny as well as the above authors (whose names oddly enough appear in a different order on the cover and again in the way their contributions are scattered through this fix-up).

Unfortunately there's little in the way of individual flavour to the stories. Niven's living computer story could have been written by Zelazny; Zelazny's piece smells of Anderson, Anderson's story reads like Saberhagen... and Connie Willis' sticks out like a sore female in this gathering of macho males, to prove that too many cooks spoil not only the broth but, in seeking to combine meaningfully, their own personalities.

I suppose one should feel happy for the writers, that they can obtain catharsis by externalising all their xenophobic, murderous tendencies on paper like this; the question is whether we should feel that we have to take their hangups on board. Fortunately, the end product just is not believable enough to keep your interest. One merely wonders at the dedication of the publisher's reader who got through the lot and recommended its publication - and at his or her motivation.

Martin H. Greenberg (Ed.) - - ASIMOV'S UNIVERSE 1: THE DIPLOMACY GUILD (Avon, 1990, 260pp, \$3.95)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

"Shared-world series are fan favourites", "best-selling author Asimov brings profit potential to any project bearing his name", "contributing authors of quality and individual prestige [Robert Silverberg, David Brin, Poul Anderson, Robert Sheckley, Harry Turtledove] guarantee even more appeal", "regular series publication", "foreword by Asimov", "strong cover format" - these are all Avon's justifications for the latest leap on the share-cropping shared-universe bandwagon.

This "universe" of Asimov's however, bears no resemblance to that in any of his short stories or Foundation-Robot-Anything else he can tie in. There are robots, yes, but no Three Laws. It appears as though Asimov (or someone using his name) sketched out a background, and then handed briefs to the contributing authors to write around. However, Games Designers' workshop designed a (suspiciously) similar universe over ten years ago - six star-faring races in uneasy peace, and a long-vanished race that left only inexplicable highly technological artifacts - for their role-playing game *Traveller*. And they did it better.

Poul Anderson provides the strongest story, 'The Burning Sky' (if a little over-written at times) with Brin a close second. Sheckley's is silly, and the other two are word-processor jobs. It seems to be a symptom of this "branding" of SF books by best-selling authors that the writer(s) of the actual book/story never lives up to the standard of their previous stuff. Why? Easy money?

So, avoid ASIMOV'S UNIVERSE - especially if you're a fan of Asimov's, you'll find little that is familiar in this series.

ANTHONY Burgess - - ANY OLD IRON (Arrow, 1990, 386pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Anthony Burgess, author of *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* (staged at the Barbican at the beginning of the decade) demonstrates his stylistic skills to perfection in the first hundred pages of *ANY OLD IRON* at great cost to the story's momentum. The wit is obvious and pale, the characters like shadow puppets on a stage full of stereotypes and the story, told in exposition, is too distancing for involvement. This is the tale of Reginald Jones, his lucky escapes from drowning on the *Titanic* and *Lusitania*, his part in World War 1 and his marriage to the Russian-born Ludmila Likutin.

It fortunately thereafter takes off, with the narrator's appearance on the scene of the archaeological site at Abergavenny, where a stone - the one which reputedly housed Excalibur - is unearthed. The sword itself (if it is to be taken at face value) is finally brought on to the scene proper in the final hundred pages, but is never more than a convenient plot device on which to hang an admittedly interesting tale of Welsh, Russian and Jewish angst.

This is the tale of Reginald's offspring (two sons and a daughter) and their part in the second World War, the troubles that followed and in the lives of the narrator and his sister. The exposition is at a minimum, the wit is sharp and less obvious, the characters are engagingly real.

It isn't science fiction and Excalibur has very little to do with it, but after Reginald retires into the background it makes some poignant comments in its rich, satirical look at history and the lives of its characters, and I was well entertained.

Jack Womack - - TERRAPLANE (Unwin, 1990, 227pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

A curious blend of improbable, post-punk cyberspeak (which takes a dozen or so pages adjusting to), '80s war-torn futurama, '60s American thriller alternate-world SF, apartheid and Commie threat, *TERRAPLANE* creakily races along to its climax with all the gusto of a sweetened grapefruit. I loved it.

A 21st century Moscow sees Luther and Jake's mission to steal an experimental device catapult them into a 1939 alternate America from which, as a throwaway background development, its inventor has returned with Stalin and a deadly, virulent disease (the Tunguska flu). To return to

their future Luther and Jake must gatecrash the World's Fair to gain access to a giant pair of Tesla coils. *AMBIENT* gets a passing reference along the way.

Apart from the vicarious thrill we all get imagining violence there is no sense that Womack approves of the violent nature of his characters, and even with the Black hero (unusual in SF, and not a mere cipher), the story is distinctly nostalgic, right down to the doomed love-interest and mixed-fate finale. The background dates it, but it will be interesting to see if Womack and others will now turn to fresh fields or continue to prolong the cold war in their fiction.

Garry Kilworth - - HUNTER'S MOON (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 330pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

HUNTER'S MOON: A Story of Foxes is, as one might guess, a talking animal book. My first thought was that what the world didn't need was yet another book like this, but I was wrong.

In general, Kilworth manages to avoid the pitfall of simply making his foxes furry humans, nor does he de-sex them. Unlike many other animal books *HUNTER'S MOON* is not used as an excuse for simplistic political philosophising. It isn't interested in comparing different ways of living, but it does tackle the more practical issue of animals' lives and their deaths: one of the principal characters almost loses her life to the Hunt and her mate is dug out of the earth and killed by stable boys; the other main character begins the novel in a zoo, fearing that he will share the fate of most zoo animals and go mad.

The first half or so of the book is particularly effective: Kilworth conveys something of what it might be like to be a fox, without overburdening the reader with an elaborate fox language. His characterisation of the foxes is convincing and unsentimental, and much (successful) effort goes into depicting the seasonal changes of the natural world. As the novel progresses the story becomes more expansive and Kilworth's enthusiasm for mythology (as adumbrated in *Vector* 154) is only just kept in check; as a consequence some of the atmosphere which has been created is dissipated, but it never loses its focus on the real lives of foxes, both urban and rural.

At a simple story-telling level *HUNTER'S MOON* is one of the most successful talking animal books I have read, but what makes it particularly worthwhile is its sympathy with its subject.

Robert Silverberg - - TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING (Gollancz, 1990, 308pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

All of the people who ever lived are born again, to live and die and be reborn again and again - no, listen, not in Riverworld, this is different, in the Afterworld. No, we aren't told how or why, that doesn't matter, it just is. It's huge, and people get mixed together but tend to sort themselves out again, and maps don't work, things don't go right and simple pleasures like food and sex aren't such fun any more. We follow Gilgamesh (whose story Silverberg has already given us in *GILGAMESH THE KING*, but this isn't a sequel) in his eternal quest for his friend Enkidu, together with King Herod, Simon Magus, Prester John, Helen of Troy, Pablo Picasso, Walter Raleigh, and an Ice-Hunter from the Pleistocene, not to mention Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft. No, thankfully, no role for Sir Richard Burton or Mark Twain. Apart from one monstrous example, we meet hardly any black Africans, Australasians or South Americans, but Lenin and Mao are somewhere around. Towards the end Gilgamesh's party seek the rumoured gateway back to the land of the living and you'll quite enjoy getting that far. Silverberg at play, with odd moments of melancholy eloquence.

Dave Duncan - - THE RELUCTANT SWORDSMAN (Legend, 1990, 326pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

After the scene is set in the temple of the Goddess, and an unknown swordsman complains to one of Her priests that he is haunted by a demon, we are introduced to Wallie

Smith who (as the blurb conveniently tells readers in advance) is reincarnated in the fantasy world after dying of encephalitis in our world, and takes over the body of that unknown swordsman, a fighter with exceptional skills. This looks like routine fantasy for the high-street bookshop, but there is intelligence and irony in the writing, in the way the author, through his hero Smith alias Shonsu the swordsman, observes the good and bad points of his fantasy world, and questions the sexism, poverty and caste system.

This world is modelled on primitive Japanese culture, which makes a welcome change from Tolkienian settings. Names have a Japanese ring, the concept of a fighting caste with its code of honour recalls the samurai (though these swords are straight), but there are differences too. Wallie-Shonsu accepts his divinely-authorized quest and uses his 20th-century brain to work out winning strategies, reluctant to let his body's knowledge of swordplay take over and make him a killing machine. The author, who has come late in life to fantasy writing, brings to the genre his experience of a lifetime's work, knowledge of human nature and of how men operate in groups. This is a well-paced story which would keep one happy on a journey or at the beach, and I'll look forward to Book 2 of the trilogy.

David Zindell - - NEVERNESS (Grafton, 1990, 685pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

This mammoth first novel from Hugo nominee David Zindell is an impressive work of fiction on a number of levels. The sheer panoply of invention is dazzling, the yarn is compelling and the characters are well defined and believable.

The book divides neatly into three separate sections but the author ensures that the consistency is maintained and the parts are interwoven into a satisfying whole. Thankfully the publishers did not take the opportunity to present us with three emaciated chapters in a dreaded trilogy which would have diluted the book's potency.

Mallory Ringess is a novice in the Order of Pilots who takes his lightship into the heart of the giant astral computer, the Solid State Entity. He learns of a secret, locked into the genetic structure of a tribe of neanderthal people by the legendary race of Ieldra who seeded the galaxy with life and then vanished. Mallory returns with the information to Neverness and mounts an expedition to obtain some genetic material from the primitive Aloloi tribe. The expedition fails and in the concluding section Mallory traces the true source of the Ieldra's secret back to Neverness.

The book is inevitably episodic with the occasional passage of eclectic philosophising which verges on rambling but most books of this size and scope could do with some judicious editing and NEVERNESS is no exception. The sweep of the narrative covers any structural flaws and ensures that this is both an enthralling and thought-provoking read. A big book by a big new talent.

C.J. Cherryh - - HUNTER OF WORLDS (Mandarin, 1990, 254pp, £3.50)

(reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

When Aiela, captain of a small space craft, is summoned aboard the great iduve spaceship Ashanome, he has no choice but to obey, for the iduve are rightly feared throughout known space, and are capable of destroying entire planets if their will is thwarted. On board Ashanome, Aiela is "mind-linked" with a woman of his own race, the kallia, and with a human. He can only guess at the iduve's reasons for his abduction, and his fear and misery are matched only by his helplessness as he comes to realise that the iduve are literally incapable of comprehending his kalliran notions of honour or morality.

Once again C.J. Cherryh has succeeded in creating alien characters who are humanoid in appearance, but whose behaviour and languages reflect their non-human culture and psychological motivation. Of course, to Aiela, humans are aliens, and much of the book's interest lies in his attempts to understand and mediate between human and iduve.

In the second half of the book the plot gathers pace. Aiela discovers the part he is to play in the iduve's schemes and manages to reconcile himself to his situation. A strong storyline, fully realised background and fascinating characterisation allow HUNTER OF WORLDS to take its place amongst the best of C.J. Cherryh's fiction.

C.J. Cherryh - - THE PALADIN (Mandarin, 1990, 283pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Vernon Leigh)

Look at the cover. Your first impression is going to be that this book is going to be yet another slash-and-hack rampage through the forgotten lands of the never-never. Approach the book itself as a slash-and-hack rampage through the forgotten lands of the never-never and you are going to hate it. It's very sad that the publishers choose to sell Cherryh in this way but there is a way to overcome the problem. Close your eyes, flick open the cover, ignore the rather unhelpful map, and start reading the book immediately because it is actually quite good.

The story is set in Chiyaden, a feudal Japanese-typoe world, and concerns a reclusive swordmaster, Shoka (or Lord Saukendar), a peasant girl called Taizu, their lives and loves. Taizu, whose family and village have been destroyed by a Lord Gitu and his band, has sworn revenge. She comes to Shoka who is living a happily lonely life on a remote mountain near the borders. She manages to get Shoka's promise of tutelage (and offer of love which she initially rejects) and the two eventually set off, despite Shoka's frequent attempts at dissuasion, to kill Gitu.

The book is well written, the characters and their various relationships thoughtfully worked out. Shoka and Taizu both slowly develop away and toward each other and their interplay is by far the best thing in the novel. Quite simple, but recommended.

Anne Rice - - THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED (Futura, 1990, 573pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

This is the third of the Vampire Chronicles and continues the story of Lestat and his fellow vampires. INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE and THE VAMPIRE LESTAT were modern gothic novels, mildly interesting investigations of the vampires' emotions and motivations which I confess to finding dreadfully overlong, with repetitive descriptive passages and tedious romantic homosexuality. This volume trims down some of the excesses of the previous books. There's less of the Gothic element - which may upset some fans - and much of the action is set in ancient Egypt as we learn of the birth of vampires and especially of Queen Akasha and her nemesis. The Queen, awakening in the present-day, sets out to destroy most of the Earth's men...

More interesting than the plot, however, is Rice's development of her original conception. The vampires are acquiring super-powers: levitation, teleportation and telepathy are now commonplace. As in the second volume they're more acceptable morally: malefactors are Lestat & Co's prime victims - and note their (far-fetched) defence of mankind. There's also a belated and rather too convenient explanation as to how they can disguise their kills. Indeed, "convenient" is the key word: I have the feeling that, having exhausted the possibilities of her earlier, traditional and largely amoral creations, Rice has felt impelled to jazz things up a bit.

THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED won't be to everyone's taste but if you are tempted to sample the Vampire Chronicles, perhaps this is the volume to sink your teeth into.

Rudy Rucker, Peter L Wilson &
Robert Anton Wilson (Ed.s) - - - - - SEMIOTEXT(E) SF
(Autonomea. 1989. 384pp. £6.95)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

SEMIOTEXT(E) is American samizdat, an underground magazine that has had such contributors as William Burroughs, John Cage, Sol Yurick, Philip Glass and Robert Anton Wilson among others. And when the editors decided to do a special SF issue, the result was SEMIOTEXT(E) SF: an anthology of 46 stories "rejected by the commercial SF media for [their] obscenity, radicalism or formalistic weirdness".

The contributors to SEMIOTEXT(E) SF roughly fit into three categories (according to the editors): the remnants of the old New Wave, the cyberpunk movement, and finally, the underground contributors - writers/artists/poets "so radically marginalised that they could never be co-opted, recuperated, reified, or bought by the Establishment". The end result of this is a number of strong stories by some surprising writers.

Is SEMIOTEXT(E) SF obscene? Oh yes, some stories definitely qualify as this: T L Parkinson's 'The Sex Club' (the author himself describes this as "approx. 4000 words of pointless sex and violence"), Ernest Hogan's 'The Frankenstein Penis' (the title says it all), Michael Blumlein's 'Shed His Grace'. Rachel Pollack opens her lesbian/bondage/feminism/neo-cyberpunk story, 'Burning Sky', with the line "sometimes I think of my clitoris as a magnet...". But... With the exception of Blumlein's typically sick but excellent story, it all seems a bit gratuitous. Rudy Rucker provides the other memorable "obscene" story: 'Rapture In Space', a tale about the first XXXX-rated video made in zero-gravity and its (hilarious) consequences.

Is SEMIOTEXT(E) SF radical or formalistically weird? There are those stories that fit into this category: t winter-damon's 'Lord Of Infinite Diversions' is fairly typical of his stuff. Most of the "radical" stuff, however, qualifies as such by its contents: gnostic visions, anarchic politics, sufi alchemy, tantrism, etc... Some of these can be passed over; others work, notably: 'Genocide' by Richard Kadrey, 'Your Style Guide' by Marc Laidlaw, 'The Great Escape' by Sol Yurick.

Does SEMIOTEXT(E) SF shock? 'Fraid not. When the editors include diary extracts from Robert Shekley, an essay by Colin Wilson on (one of) his philosophies (based on something Abraham Maslow wrote, for Christ's sake!), or even an over-lengthy joke by Philip Jose Farmer, 'St Francis Kisses His Ass Goodbye' (Ass = Donkey = Arse. Geddit?...), then you're going to dilute your shock appeal. Most of the stories/poetry in this anthology are good, and work in what they're trying to achieve: a lot don't succeed. Good contributions come from Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Sol Yurick, Lewis Shiner, Barrington J Bayley, Paul di Filippo - ie, most of the cyberpunk writers. William Burroughs is atypically weak, William Gibson's 'Hippie Hat Brain Parasite' just plain daft.

For the rest, bar a couple, SEMIOTEXT(E) SF is an entertaining read, not quite as shocking as intended (Rucker's use of the language is more inventive in his Introduction than in most of the stories/poems), and in places unintentionally amusing. "Helpful note for lazy reviewers: SEMIOTEXT(E) SF is DANGEROUS VISIONS for the 90s" say the editors. Is it? Not really. But it's still worth every penny.

James Tiptree Jr. - - CROWN OF STARS (Sphere, 1990, 340pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Ten stories on a number of themes written in a mixture of styles, ten stories, as you might expect of a retrospective collection, whose success is varied. Most of the tales here first saw print in the late '80s, though a couple date from the early '70s; 'Come Live With me', which is unacknowledged and thus I assume previously unpublished, reads like an early effort with its wooden dialogue and characters.

But I don't want to dwell on the failures because there's more than enough here to do justice to the late Tiptree/Sheldon. 'All This and Heaven Too' is a delightfully humorous modern fairy tale. There's a comic ending to 'Second Going', which story neatly mixes First Contact, gods and overpopulation; 'The Earth Doth Like a Snake Renew' is one long, erotic, cosmic joke (I defy you to guess the denouement to this one!). 'Yanqui Doodle' starts off as black comedy but moves into gritty realism with its believable scenario of drug-induced "berserker" GIs. Fully into the darker side of the psyche now, Tiptree offers us the crude but disturbing 'Morality Meat' (a powerful anti-abortion plea) and the downbeat 'Backward, Turn Backward', a cautionary time-travel tale.

Comedy and concern; aliens and the alienated; angels and devils; life and death. CROWN OF STARS has all of this and serves to remind us that, sadly, there won't be any more.

Dean R. Koontz - - NIDNIGHT (Headline, 1990, 502pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

The seaside town of Moonlight Cove is a quiet place with virtually no crime, seemingly set apart from the rest of California. But all is not what it seems. A "mad scientist", Thomas Shaddack, has been using the town's population in an experiment, the Moonhawk project, designed to

create a new superior race by marrying humanith to advanced microspher technology. He is intent on engineering the next step in humankind's evolution. The result is, predictably, catastrophic.

Four people, a young girl, an FBI agent, a disabled Vietnam veteran and a documentary film maker find themselves on the run from the nightmare monstrosities that Shaddack's new people have become. The book is given a certain distinction by the tragic figure of Moonlight Cove's police chief, Loman Watkins. He has himself been changed but actually realises the enormity of what Shaddack has done to them all. "You're not God," he tells Shaddack, "you're Dr Moreau".

As one would expect from Dean Koontz, this is a workmanlike horror thriller. He lets loose a variety of monsters: the werewolves are somewhat routine but I must admit I found the cybernetic mutations genuinely disturbing. The book attempts to achieve a certain psychological depth in its exploration of Shaddack's personality and in its account of the reasons for the Project's failure, but this is very much subordinated to the demands of the narrative. Not a great book, but a reasonably entertaining one.

Ray Bradbury - - THE TOYNEE CONNECTOR (Grafton, 1990, 227pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

These twenty-three stories make up Ray Bradbury's first collection since 1980, and a pretty mixed bunch they are. Bradbury is an acquired taste, a lot of his stories are homey and comfortable on first glance but a second look reveals a centre that is sharp-edged. This collection contains SF that is unconventional, 'The Toynee Collector'; horror in which the illusion of normality is beautifully maintained until it is suddenly destroyed and nightmare is revealed, 'The Thing at the Top of the Stairs'; fantasy which is compellingly different, 'West of October'; all threaded together with a selection of Bradbury's mainstream writing.

Bradbury is a poet, and his use of words and structure might not be the ones that you would hear in real life, but they are always well chose to suit the meaning and aesthetics of the things that he is saying. 'Long Division' is a vignette about a couple who have split and who are dividing their property,

"Cut the critiques. You make me feel like I just failed my lit. exam. You think you're taking all the good books and leaving me the dimwits?"
"Could be. All those Connecticut writers picking lint out of each other's navels, logrolling down Fifth Avenue, firing blanks all the way!"

Perhaps not the way you would hear it, but it says just what it means, and entertains into the bargain. Like Ray Bradbury himself, really.

Gene Wolfe - - - - - ENDANGERED SPECIES (Orbit, 1990, 231pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

I began to read Gene Wolfe in the wake of the hype which greeted SHADOW OF THE TORTURER and that was a disappointing experience. The division between the volumes still seems to me to be commercial rather than artistic and the conclusion, THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN left me much less than overwhelmed. My mental jury is still out on Gene Wolfe. He can write, oh yes, he can write. Words drip from his pen like manna from an angel's lips. He can write in any mode he chooses, from throw-away quips to the densest of tomes (try PEACE, not that it will give you any). To describe his work as 'eclectic' is to give a faint indication of his breadth and he is, of course, a serious writer, an 'artist'.

Yet his work always leaves me feeling cheated, like a chinese meal. Is THAT all there is? His magnum opus, the URTH sequence, contained philosophical and theological musings which, I am sure, were meant to convince that here was a great mind at work. I found them neither original nor profound and, so far as I could judge, untrue to their origins. There seemed to me to be less to Gene Wolfe than met my eye, leaving me with the uncomfortable sensation of being had. Wolfe is an artist, but what sort of artist?

The short story is Wolfe's acknowledged metier and **ENDANGERED SPECIES** is a big book of very short stories ranging from the beginning of his career up to the present. The breadth of interest is there, from one line jokes to contemplations of the horrors of existence. The quality of writing is there. Wolfe, more than any contemporary SF writer (and most writers of any description), writes prose like poetry, flowingly, beautifully, dazzlingly. And yet again and again I completed the stories feeling short changed, led to expect an insight and given an advertiser's hook. This is a carefully selected and constructed volume, and the first story, 'A Cabin on the Coast', is wonderfully typical. The mood and characters are established, the mystery set running, and tragedy is poignantly inevitable. Everything, however, is devalued by a limp, semaphore end. As I say, a typical story.

All of which should not prevent anyone from reading this book. For all the disappointments Wolfe remains one hell of a writer.

Craig Shaw Gardner - - - - **BRIDE OF THE SLIME MONSTER**
(Headline, 1990, 248pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

With its Josh Kirby cover and its blending of sf and cinema **BRIDE OF THE SLIME MONSTER** invites comparison with Terry Pratchett and Kim Newman respectively. Unfortunately, it's not as funny as Pratchett's *Discworld* series, and although it is certainly funnier than Newman's superb **THE NIGHT MAYOR** it lacks depth and wit by comparison.

That's the end of the bad news though, for taken on its own terms as a rather limited 'entertainment' **BRIDE** is pretty successful. It's the second in Gardner's *Cineverse Cycle* and picks up the action where **SLAVES OF THE VOLCANO GOD** left off. The *Cineverse*, a series of B-movie inspired parallel worlds, is threatened by the plans of the archfiend Dr Dread, and his henchmen Menge the Merciless and Professor Peril.

Gardner certainly makes the most of the possibilities afforded him by the *Cineverse* as the action moves through various B-movie scenarios, including a Beach Party Musical world (featuring Bix Bale and the Belltones), a foreign art film world complete with subtitles, and Bunnyland - an animated cartoon world. Each world has its own internal logic: in Bunnyland no-one can be killed and the chief weapon is the cream pie. Despite the differences between these worlds they are united by their inhabitants' ability to recognise Dwight the Wonder Dog and by the threat from Dr Dread who, it seems, can only be successfully stopped by the elusive Captain Crusader.

BRIDE successfully recreates the B-movie conventions of the 40s and 50s and filters them through 90s eyes with affection rather than condescension: the slime monster's quite a sweetie really.

Barry Hughart - - - - - **THE STORY OF THE STONE**
(Corgi, 1990, 272pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

THE STORY OF THE STONE is strongly reminiscent of **THE NAME OF THE ROSE**. Both deal with religious orders and are centred upon a wise teacher with forensic talents and his young apprentice/assistant. There are further similarities: both involve a mystery centring upon a missing artifact of a great age for which murder has been committed, the wise-teacher figure in each novel is at odds with the religious orthodoxy of the day, and both books feature a maze/labyrinth at their climax.

However, the atmosphere of the two books is quite different: in place of Eco's brooding medieval Italy we are presented with a China that never was, teeming with light and people, a place of magic, of talking pools and walking corpses.

STONE is the sequel to Hughart's World Fantasy Award Winning **BRIDGE OF BIRDS**, and features the characters of Master Li and his disciple Number Ten Ox. It is the disciple (as with Eco) who is the narrator of the story, and Hughart uses the story-teller's relative ignorance to pleasing effect.

Although derivative **THE STORY OF THE STONE** is an enjoyable novel - it's certainly nice to see a fantasy which deals with magic and places like hell and yet avoids simplistic moral categories and sees good and evil as primarily human, rather than supernatural, qualities.

J G Ballard - - - - - **THE DROUGHT**
(Paladin, 1990, 188pp, £3.99)
- - - - - **THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY**
(Paladin, 1990, 220pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Rereading **THE DROUGHT** after twenty-five years reminds one of what was then so startling about Ballard novels. We knew from the short stories that he was 'different' and 'New Wave': but two characteristics of the novels set them apart. Superficially they were about global disasters, but for the main character these disasters were sources of inner liberation and he gladly colluded with them. Equally striking was Ballard's total lack of interest in 'how to put matters right': no Heinleinian technological fixes or secret Asimovian plot-twists: disaster becomes the norm.

In this novel (revised and reworked since I read it as **THE BURNING WORLD** in 1964, but essentially unchanged) a decade of intermittent drought has become total and global: in chapter six we get a brief, dismissive explanation and that (apart from the book's unsettling final sentence) is that. We meet Dr Charles Ransom mooring his houseboat after a last sailing expedition on the vanishing lake. The city is being evacuated, the hospital is closed, his marriage is collapsing: he makes only minimal responses. He becomes involved with the remaining local people, individuals as oddly obsessive as himself. He is beaten up, joins a trek to the sea, lives for a while bleakly reunited with his wife on the appalling beach, returns as we know he must: yet he is never a victim, never an underdog, always a professional man surrounded by a world that images his inner self. Naturally we feel uneasy.

I had forgotten its hugely visual quality, every moment imagined through the eyes and described in strong, elegant sentences. Equally visual and elegant is **THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY**, first published fifteen years later. Blake crashes his stolen aircraft into the Thames, refuses to accept his death, and in a brilliantly realised fantasy totally transforms and takes over the town of Shepperton, whose inhabitants he eventually teaches to fly. A colourful, happy, sexy, bizarre story coming to a final acceptance of his dying.

At first I thought, 'How different from **THE DROUGHT**'. Certainly **DREAM COMPANY** has a playfulness the other lacks. But acceptance runs like a thread through so much novel-length Ballard: that's why the main characters never try to change anything (they like it) and that's what disturbs and challenges. Well, somebody had to do it. Once you've got **THE DROWNED WORLD** and **CRASH**, buy these two next.

Terry Pratchett - - **PYRAMIDS** (Corgi, 1990, 285pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

A year ago I decided to start reading Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, and soon became his devoted admirer. **PYRAMIDS**, no. 7 in the series, has just won the 1989 BSFA award for Best Novel. More than humour, I believe, was needed to win. **PYRAMIDS**, though of course witty in its way, is also deadly serious, differing also from its companions in its science-fictional, as opposed to fantastic, content. Supernatural events in **PYRAMIDS** derive mainly from deities, religious rites, and perversions of mathematical theory, not from wizards casting spells.

Teppic, our young hero, is about to take his final qualifying exam to become a member of the Assassins' Guild. He's good at scrambling across rooftops, etc., but he just doesn't want to kill anyone. After he passes the test he is summoned back to the desert kingdom of Djelibeybi after the unexpected death of his father, the king. Djelibeybi is not the *Discworld* equivalent of Ancient Egypt - that, we know from earlier books, is Tsort - but it is a 7,000 year old small kingdom which gave the Tsortians the idea of building pyramids as graves for their kings, and worshipping animal- and bird-headed gods.

Teppic is persuaded by the mysterious high priest to commission a super-pyramid for his father, twice the normal size, thus setting in motion events which result in "the fabric of time and space being put through the wringer". Teppic flees to the country of Ephebe (The *Discworld* equivalent of Ancient Greece) where he finds a group of philosophers bust testing axioms like the hare and the tortoise (as in Tom Stoppard's play **JUMPERS**).

Along the way there are literary and contemporary allusions to spot, like the first-night-in-the-dorm scene from **TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL DAYS**, and Teppic's obsession with improv-

ing the lives of his subjects in the inner cities. The serious core of the book to which Pratchett keeps returning is its satire on organised religion, not only in the kingdom of Djelibeybi where the people are in thrall to a ridiculous number of gods and their high priests, but "Throughout the history of the Disc where most high priests have been serious, pious and conscientious men who have done their best to interpret the wishes of the gods, sometimes disembowelling or flaying alive hundreds of people in a day to make sure they're getting it absolutely right".

Read, enjoy, meditate!

Allen Steele - - ORBITAL DECAY (Legend, 1990, 414pp
£3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

We're out in Space. "There's no such thing as summer out here, you know, not unless you're keeping track of the baseball season," the author tells us ungrammatically through the mouth of Our Hero.

he then indulges in page after page of long paragraphs, full of self-explanatory asides, weak excuses for life stories and amazingly boring passages of introspection. But before that we are given the apparently obligatory list of NASA-type and SFnal friends without whom...etc., and (can you believe?) a quotation from President Reagan on the commercial exploitation of Space which is, of course, the sole prerogative of the United States.

"Scientists are not responsible to the people," we are told by one character, in mitigation of accusations aimed at the people whose activities we have been following; "they are responsible to whoever has bankrolled their research." Of course, Our Hero is at pains to distance himself from this belief; in his closing (and dying, as it happens) moments in a crevasse on the Moon, he reveals that Space exploitation has been wrecked by drug parties and "sex escapades" and goes on to unveil that he calls (complete with capitals) the Greatest Discovery Ever Made, which is "the view of Earthrise... No matter how far away we go, no matter what we do out there, we have only one real home, our common heritage." After this bathetic and anti-climactic revelation, mercifully he expires.

If you're beginning to feel, as I was, that this book is "as pulpy as hell," a mere poor pastiche of forties he-man adventure SF, you are in complete accord with Gregory Benford, whom the blurb writer reports as saying that it "reads like golden-age Heinlein." I count that an insult to the memory of Heinlein, but find it sad that to the publisher - and presumably to Benford - the words were meant as praise!

Stuart Gordon - - THE MASK (Orbit, 1990, 368pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

In ARCHON, the first Book of the Watchers, Sam and Chrissa Joyce's nightmares were set against the mundane reality of the 1980s. In THE MASK, in 1991, the "real world" has itself become a nightmare of high-tech political oppression, social disintegration and environmental disaster. The Millennium is imminent, and with it humanity's last chance to destroy the Beast before the Shift.

ARCHON and its sequel, THE HIDDEN WORLD, focussed on the Joyce family, but THE MASK widens the scope of the story of the Watchers, and the reader learns that Sam and Chrissa are not the only humans to have passed through the Gates to the world of the Elohim or the past. Pyramidology, the Gaia hypothesis and celtic mythology are added to the Gnostic and Apocryphal elements of the earlier books in the series.

Inevitably the proliferation of characters and plot-strands has led to a dilution in intensity, with new characters and situations being sketched rather than fully developed - although Gordon's writing talents are again revealed in his evocation of atmosphere, whether it be a description of a flight from a volcano or the dissipation of Last Days London. Compared with ARCHON (which was exceptional) THE MASK is unextraordinary science fiction. However, this comparison is unfair, as the book is not meant to stand alone. It is the last third of the Watchers' story and should be read as a continuation of its predecessors. Overall the trilogy is successful and it does reach a conclusion in this volume - although the last page contains the possibility of a revival if the author is so inclined.

Rachel Pollack - - ALQUA DREAMS (Legend, 1990, 246pp,
£3.50)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

This novel was published first in 1987, before the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning *Unquenchable Fire*, and is, on the face of it, very different and much more conventional. The protagonist is Jaimi Cooper: "for seven years Cooper had worked for the Company, two in training, five in service, visiting planets, making contact with local populations, negotiating contracts. Alone, he visits this planet, to find a small, poor, primitive population, and also a quantity of the rare mineral rhovium, which powers space flight. He becomes deflected from his commercial mission, and obsessed with a personal mission: to convert the population to his own view of reality. For the Lukai believe that they are dead; Cooper is an alqua, someone who believes in delusions. In good *Analog* fashion, of course, the resolution would be simple; the Lukai would come to believe in reason and scientific reality, Cooper would wed his native girl, and all would end happily. But where reality lies is no longer so obvious. Cooper gets more and more obsessed by his mission, but the Lukai are equally convinced of their own version of reality. Only at the end does he realise that the Lukai's reality is indeed valid: "he no longer believed so fervently in rationalism." This is a tightly plotted book; a book full of ideas; a book full of stunning images. In my view it is a better book than *Unquenchable Fire*, with, of course, a similar message: that things are not what they seem, and that the science of today is the nonsense of tomorrow. But the message in some way has more power when it is presented from within the familiar images and scenarios of sf.

Ben Bova - - CYBERBOOKS (Mandarin, 1990, 282pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

Carl Lewis, a wide-eyed innocent from Boston, enters "a Hemmingway kind of day", in a Manhattan that is bristling with new technology, imposing skyscrapers and streets full of murder. Tucked under his arm is his labour of love, an eco-friendly electronic book, with which he hopes to prevent the destruction of the rain forests and make Dostoyevsky affordable to everyone. These ideals go awry when the invention is put into the hands of the, literally, backstabbing world of the publishing industry, populated by people disfigured by their vanity and who are constantly jockeying for their corporate position.

CYBERBOOKS is a tame satire against the fiscal priorities of the publishing industry destroying the integrity of the author, and, perhaps more importantly, the reluctance of the male-dominated printing industry to adopt information technology.

Unfortunately, Bova's medicine is a little weak and the "spoonful of sugar" is too sickly. There are some likeable but twee moments in the melodrama; however, they are marred by crude sex-stereotypes and banal race gags. Perhaps more successful as a satire is the unrelated subplot running parallel to the main action in the form of rejection slips and reviews. It is about the respective fortunes and failures of a blockbuster horror novel and a WWII Historical fiction. The erosion of the "mid-list" of American publishing is effectively illustrated in this way. However, I can't help considering CYBERBOOKS as more akin to the blockbuster, with its garish cover and easily swallowed plot, than the mid-list that it is defending!

Harry Harrison - - - - - BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO
(Gollancz, 1990, 160pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by NIK Morton)

Harry Harrison can write well - MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! is still an excellent example of future extrapolation. But sadly he doesn't always write well: in fact sometimes he is very sloppy. The fact that this book is purported to be humorous, (originally published in 1965 and hailed by Terry Pratchett as "Simply THE funniest science fiction book ever written") a lampoon on SF greats like Asimov and Heinlein, is no excuse. For example: "They were at the door. Inside of it a tired looking KP in ..." (p31). Poor KP, inside a door - not the doorway, you understand! He also lapses into lack of punctuation to dissuade comprehension: "He turned around and saw that

Eager was holding his arm up so that his wrist-watch pointed at the guns and was pressing on the crown with the index finger of his other hand." (p34). Gollancz appear slapdash too: there is a BOOK TWO (p65) and BOOK THREE (p124), but no mention of BOOK ONE! (Not that there's any literary reason for separating the book into three portions - though it increases the page-count...)

The above may appear pretty harsh, and it's not Harrison's fault that his book has become so popular over the years; he doubtless did it for a lark, without any pretensions to artistic merit. And, after all, it sells ... It is not his fault that Pratchett is either mistaken or hasn't read any better humorous SF books since 1965 or whenever he read BILL.

It has been called the CATCH-22 of SF, and again this is not Harrison's fault. The story concerns Bill, a peace-loving farm boy enlisted into the Empire Space Corps. His adventures result in him accidentally becoming a hero... There are some nice touches, Harrison's anti-war stance is never preaching, but conveys the horrors and stupidities of conflict, armed or otherwise; (though he doesn't eschew cartoon violence if it might get laughs, thus he attempts to wring humour from his hero getting beaten up). Bill is a simpleton, but is not in the league of the Good Soldier Sveik - now, there's a classic criticism on the stupidity of the military and of war... Perhaps when it was written it was ground-breaking, poking gentle and not-so-gentle fun at the serious ultra-right-wing writers of military SF, but now..? Now I'm sad, really: to think that if this is the BEST humorous SF book we have, then SF is in a bad way... But that's not Harry Harrison's fault, either.

Jack L. Chalker - - LILLITH: A SNAKE IN THE GRASS (Penguin, 1990, 250pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Originally published from 1981 onwards, each book of this series (*The Four Lords of the Diamond*) is set on one of four "Warden Worlds", the others being Charon, Cerberus, and Medus. The Warden Worlds, known also as "The Diamond" because of their occasional spatial configuration, are habitable planets of the same sun and originally seen as a uniquely attractive place for human settlement.

Unfortunately, the planets are home to an alien organism. Anyone who spends more than a short time on one of the planets has their body cells invaded by the organism, and from then on can only survive except within the Warden system. The Galactic Confederacy is forced to abandon the Warden planets for normal settlement, but uses them instead to create the Warden Diamond Reserve, a penal colony from which convicted criminals can never return.

At the time the series is set the Reserve consists of four sophisticated societies, all different because of the different forms the Warden organism takes on each planet. Each is ruled by one of the four Lords of the Diamond. These Lords, though unable to leave the system, now head galaxy-wide criminal organisations, and are extremely wealthy and powerful.

The human galaxy is facing attack from a yet untraced alien civilisation, technologically more advanced, and has determined that their spying activities are being planned from the warden Reserve, with the collusion of one or more Lords. To discover the conspirator, agents of Confederacy Security have their personalities impressed on four brain-wiped criminals, with a neural transmitter implanted so they can communicate with Security off-planet. In this first book the agent has taken over the body of Cal Tremon, a former space pirate, and is landed on Lillith, the so-called "Paradise Planet", but where there is a "snake in the grass".

Forget the introverted and cerebral stuff, this book rattles along at breakneck pace with clearly-defined goodies and baddies, and tremendous action. Mind, you, the clean-cut hero is rather complicated by the fact that the new process of brain imprinting is not perfect - not only does Cal Tremon's personality start to reassert itself in his pilfered body, but the agent himself, in telepathic contact with his alter ego on Lillith, starts to question his life and motives...

Needless to say, although the book concludes the 'Lilith' episode and gives the story of Tremon a happy ending, nothing concerning the aliens is resolved at its close. However, you'll enjoy it so much you won't mind, and will finish it looking forward to the next volume in the series, CERBERUS: A WOLF IN THE FOLD, which the last page informs us will be available in 1982. (Don't you spot things like that when you're editing, Penguin?)

Elisabeth Vonarburg - - THE SILENT CITY (Women's Press, 1990, 247pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

The underground City where Elisa grows up has preserved scientific knowledge, but Outside civilisation has been destroyed and the remnants of humanity have become genetically damaged and savage. Out of this familiar SF scenario, Elisabeth Vonarburg has created an original, many-layered and thought-provoking novel.

Elisa is the result of her mentor Paul's genetic experiments. One day, Paul tells her, her descendants will leave the City and revitalise humankind. When Elisa discovers that Paul has lied to her, she flees the City, and the plot of the novel - Elisa's interaction with the people Outside and her beginning her own genetic experiment - becomes a vehicle for the exploration of free will and manipulation, of questions of gender and relations between the sexes, of truth and illusion.

A summary of the plot cannot do justice to THE SILENT CITY's complexity. However, the rich mixture of ideas contained in the novel in no way obscures the flow of the narrative, nor does it prevent the reader empathising with the characters. When Elisa revisits an Outside community after a gap of twenty years, there is a tremendous poignancy as she realises that their lives have moved on without her, and her anxiety as she recognises the limits of her control is entirely understandable. The creation of characters that live and breathe, the placing of them in extraordinary yet convincing situations, then using them to examine a range of ideas while retaining the reader's interest in them as people, all in the context of a compelling story, makes THE SILENT CITY exemplary SF that shows just what the genre is capable of achieving.

P Christin & A.C. Knigge (Eds.) - - BREAKTHROUGH (Titan, 1990, 88pp. £7.95)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

In BREAKTHROUGH 27 comic creators from around the world describe pictorially their feelings at the momentous events of 1989 when the Wall came down and the people of Eastern Europe finally rejected Soviet communism. The result is a curious mix of the trite and the moving which never quite succeeds in becoming more than just the sum of its parts.

With so many contributors each contribution is necessarily short. The best, though, tend to be longer, where the writer has room to develop an idea. My favourite contributions are from Zeljko Panek and Matthias Schultheiss who are both given several pages to develop a real story. The short one-pagers, where the artist tries to convey the idea solely visually, do not really work. Most were simply too crude although Bill Sienkiewicz's colourfully fragmenting Wall was an honourable exception.

The list of contributors is truly international, with 11 countries represented, and national differences were not as obvious as I had expected. If anything, the East Europeans tended to be more cynical than their Western counterparts, but generally there was a healthy refusal to get too carried away. Most saw the events of 1989 as the beginning of a process that is still fragile and needs to be taken further. Several took up the theme of the continuing walls in our minds that still need to be broken down.

This measured response may partly be the result of the age of most contributors: the youngest is 30. This is a shame. The prime movers throughout Europe in the events of 1989 were the young. It would have been nice to see what they make of the Breakthrough Europe is now experiencing.

Mike Ashley(Ed.) - - THE PENDRAGON CHRONICLES (Robinson Publishing, 1990, 417pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum)

Ashley has compiled a handsome volume based around what the publisher's accompanying notes rightly calls "one of the most enduring and powerful myths that the western world has created". It consists of a brief examination/identification of the major characters in the Arthurian cycle; 16 stories of varying length from 8 to 80 pages; an extensive listing of other works in the field over the last century preceded by a brief overview.

The editor does not claim to have selected the best

stories from an admittedly wide field so criticism of his choice would be a subjective action that I'm not well-read enough to take. In any event, he has presented this reader with a fascinating collection that was both a delight and an education to read.

Joy Chant's 'Chief Dragon of the Island' starts the anthology on a traditional note. Written in a high style it contrasts with the more accessible pieces that predominate the collection - although I should mention Alfred Elwes' Victorian translation 'Jaufry the Knight & The Fair Brunissende' which reads, though is not set out, as if it were written in iambic verse form! Also of scholarly interest is Ashley's illustration of how the character Lynette is portrayed in three disparate traditions - respectively chronicled by Roberts, Chapman and Guest.

Most enjoyable were the historical and historical fantasy pieces, most of which provide an original slant on one or other aspect of the subject; I'd commend the editor both for his introductory notes and the concluding listing - they allow the intrigued reader to use the collection as a stepping stone to a greater appreciation of this rich tradition. I'm already on the lookout for other work by Keith Taylor, whose 'Buried Silver' was of particular note and can recommend Mike Ashley's collection.

R.A. MacAvoy - - THE THIRD EAGLE (Bantam, 1990, 261pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Wanbli is an innocent barbarian master of martial arts, with a burning ambition to work in the movies. Breaking with the rigid traditions of his backwoods planet, he leaves his job as a bodyguard and starts "riding the strings" of interstellar travel in search of fun and adventure.

Unfortunately, what he finds is Civilisation, which has its good points and its bad points too. Other sentient beings prove both surprisingly human and shockingly alien, as do members of Wanbli's own species. Eventually Wanbli returns to his own people, more experienced, aware of his native culture's limitations, but also of its strengths. He has matured, and manages to use his talents to secure a real gain of lasting benefit to far more than his own people.

At its most superficial level, the story is a cracking good space-opera yarn. It's also far more self-aware than many of its kind, full of gently mocking humour, with a Zen flavour. For example, the book is a running parody of the "cowboys and indians" genre. Wanbli's culture and physical appearance is Sioux. He speaks Hindi (which turns out to be Hindi without h's, repeating Columbus's confusion about exactly who the Native Americans were). It's also traditional for Wanbli's people to speak with bad grammar.

I enjoyed this book, re-read it several times in quick succession, finding something new on each encounter. Great Literature it's not, but entertaining, diverting, relaxing, thought-provoking and instructive it certainly is.

Robert Charles Wilson - - GYPSIES (Orbit, 1990, 312pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Siblings Karen, Laura and Tim discover as children that they can open doors between universes. They are stalked by a mysterious figure they call the Gray man. Their father, Willis Fauve, a Christian fundamentalist and strict disciplinarian, is terrified of these powers and intimidates his children into not using their powers (not with complete success). Karen suppresses her abilities until adulthood, only to find that her teenage son, Michael, possesses powers greater than her own. Re-enter the Gray Man...

Its cover tells us that GYPSIES is a "blend of science fiction, mystery and thriller..." - an apt description of the rather familiar plot elements. Whilst readable and entertaining enough, I'm not convinced that the claims made for it ("spellbinding" etc.) are entirely justified. It has that rather bland, made-for-(American) television feel about it, with a tired nostalgic affection for the laid-back 60s (Kennedy, the Beatles, hippies, beat-up Gibson acoustic guitars...)

But, to be fair on Wilson, this is not a carelessly thrown-together mish-mash of a novel. He takes an obvious interest in his characters. Willis Fauve, a comparatively minor character, is a convincing portrait of a man driven by his fear of the unknown into maltreating his children.

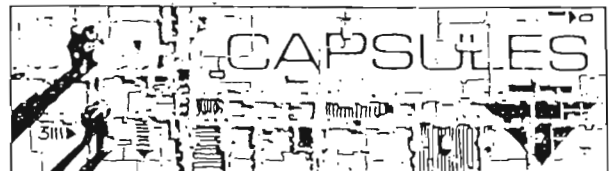
Tim, who rebels against him, is perhaps a rather more stereotypical angry young man, Laura an ex-hippy generic type. Karen is looked at in more depth, particularly in her relationship with Michael, whose powers she attempts to suppress not with violence, as did her father, but with ignorance. Wilson makes some attempt to explore the motivations of his characters. Like the plot, though, the characters, while not entirely one-dimensional, are a little too neatly packaged.

Patrick H. Adkins - - LORD OF THE CROOKED PATHS (Orbit, 1990, 216pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This book tells the story of the age of the Titans, the Elder Gods of Greek mythology, who ruled before the Olympians, and who were deposed by them. The Lord of the Crooked Paths is Chronos, who rules Olympus with the aid of Thanatos, Lord of Death, whose experimental investigation of divine immortality and regeneration (the secret's in the ichor, the Titan substitute for blood) threaten to end the human race before it has decently started...

The author stresses his extensive mythological research and faithfulness to the (confusing, contradictory and fragmentary) classical accounts of the Titans. However, he writes in an updated and demythologised style which portrays Thanatos as a typical Evil Mad Scientist, and renders much of the Olympian power-struggle in the pedestrian style of a boardroom meeting. Gaia, Mother of the Titans, is described as "a vision of loveliness, lying upon her back in fields of flowers and thinking her unknowable thoughts". In my opinion, this book fails through its style (see Ursula Le Guin's essay 'From Elfland to Poughkeepsie' on the crucial importance of style to fantasy writing) to transcend mediocrity.



Robert Lynn Asprin & Lynn Abbey (Eds.) - - SOUL OF THE CITY (Titan, 1990, 242pp, £3.99)

Book 8 in the Thieves' World series; the stories in this volume form a continuous narrative thread, with individual authors dealing with different aspects and characters. This works surprisingly well, but I think that things would have made more sense if I'd read the other seven volumes. (Jon Wallace)

Richard Awlinton - - WATERDEEP (Penguin, 1990, 341pp, £3.99)

Fantasy Role Playing archetypes conclude their struggle to find The Tablets of Fate, in a race against time, the evil gods and their double-crossing buddy. High adventure is diluted by a rather pedestrian narrative that never changes its pace. It reminded me of adolescent summer nights; listening to Marillion and rolling ten-sided dice across the kitchen table, but apart from that WATERDEEP is nothing spectacular. (Chris Hart)

Clive Barker, Murray Close, & Stephen Jones - - THE NIGHTBREED CHRONICLES (Titan, 1990, £5.95)

Anyone familiar with Clive Barker's work will know what to expect from this lavishly illustrated film tie-in. Not the story of the film, but biographical background on the main characters plus a little bit of explanatory text on how the make-up was designed and realised. (Jon Wallace)

Humphrey Carpenter (Ed.) - - THE LETTERS OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 463pp, £6.99)

Don't think of this as part of the fascinating but minority-interest 'Tolkien industry' which has reproduced variant drafts of his life's

work with extensive scholarly apparatus. Less committed fans - lovers of THE LORD OF THE RINGS who may not require the close scrutiny Christopher Tolkien, who assisted in the selection of these letters, gives to his fathers manuscripts - will find this book very rewarding. An extensive collection addressed to his children, publishers, friends and fans, it sheds much light on his books and on Tolkien himself. In this current era of sub-hobbitry it's hard to remember just how original LOTR was, and how dark and melancholy its ending actually is (see pp 325 -32 of this book, for instance). These letters provide a valuable link between Carpenter's biography and Christopher Tolkien's editions of 'Unfinished' and 'Lost' Tales and, as all good collections of letters should, provide a three-dimensional picture of this Roman Catholic Oxford don with his passion for philology and myth-making. A sometimes moving picture of the man emerges: if he remains enigmatic, that is perhaps the nature of his suburban-mystical genius. (Andy Sawyer)

Adrian Cole -- WARLORD OF HEAVEN (Unwin, 1990, 356pp, £6.99)

This 3rd volume of the Star Requiem sequence needs the previous two to flesh out the picture of Mankind enslaved by the warlike Csendook race. It's old-fashioned science fantasy, with no attempt to explore its sometimes interesting universe, and its lack of the baroque elements of the sub-genre at its best gives an arid feeling of hollowness at its centre. Wait for a cheaper mass-market edition. (Andy Sawyer)

Brian Daly -- FALL OF THE WHITE SHIP AVATAR (Grafton, 1990, 368pp, £3.99)

This 3rd comic-space-adventure of Alacrity Fitzhugh and Hobart Floyd is very like the second. Once again our aimable, roguish heroes set out on a quest, once again various heavies try to kill them and once again they meet some lucious ladies. Probably they will have similar adventures in the next book in the series, and the next and... Literature it ain't, but it will just about do for reading on the beach this summer, as long as you leave your critical faculties at the airport and don't take it seriously. (Lynne Bispham)

Richard Engling -- BODY MORTGAGE (Headline, 1990, 254pp, £3.50)

As Chicago nears the end of the twentieth century detective Gregory Blake walks the mean streets in search of corruption. A BLADE RUNNER-influenced yam concerning the sale of body organs; could do with some spikier dialogue and an original idea. Dull rather than inept. (Colin Bird)

Esther Friesner -- HERE BE DEMONS (Orbit, 1990, 231pp, £3.50)

Take an archaeological site; throw in a desert saint, ill-assorted American academics and students, the media in desperate search of a headline, and a band of demons eager to be re-admitted to Hell, Horrogenise the ingredients and you have this book. Rarely can so many promising situations have been so assiduously ignored by flat writing, weak jokes and sheer lack of imagination. I bet it seemed like such a good idea at the time. Someday we'll have to answer to the Ents for books like this... (Martyn Taylor)

Sheila Gilluly -- RITNYM'S DAUGHTER (Headline, 1990, 314pp, £6.95)

Conclusion of the Greenbriar Queen trilogy, it is entertaining despite the whimsy and feyness because the focus is less on Darklordery and more on the characters - especially the relationship between Kursh the dwarf and the now-teenage Prince Gemrit. Still too pastoral for my wholehearted appreciation, though. (Andy Sawyer)

Joyce Ballou Gregorian -- THE GREAT WHEEL (Orbit, 1990, 307pp, £4.99)

Sibby returns to Tredana in this sequel to THE BROKEN CITADEL and CASTLEDOWN which owes much to Marlowe's TAMBURLAINE with its lame world-conquering warlord and theme of the Wheel of Fortune. How are the mighty fallen!, for this is firmly of that familiar mix of epic fantasy and (sorry to say this) Women's Romance: sort of sword-and-horsery, in fact. It moves through a complicated plot at a brisk pace but I've forgotten it already. (Andy Sawyer)

John G. Jones -- THE SUPERNATURAL (Sphere, 1990, 374pp, £3.99)

Writing horror potboilers can't be that difficult; one wonders why so many authors make such a mess of it. The moderately interesting first hundred pages of THE SUPERNATURAL are scuppered when the plot grinds to a halt as the hero discovers his titular abilities. Amongst some irksome metaphysics the last remaining vestiges of suspense dwindle away. And that name must be a pseudonym! (Colin Bird)

Harry Adam Knight -- THE FUNGUS (Gollancz, 1990, 220pp, £3.99)

This is a book you love and loathe in turns. It begins as a spoof horror about rampant, all-consuming fungi, an idea previously explored by John Blackburn in A SCENT OF NEW-MOWN HAY. Written in 1985 by the

pseudonymous H.A.K., among what may be fannish in-jokes is a scene set in the ex-haunt of London fandom, the One Tun. The plot construction of the first half is dire and the humour pale, but towards the middle the humour disappears and an entertaining, if familiar science-fiction story emerges. The tedious start is compensated for by a light, refreshingly spare style - for which we should all be grateful. (Terry Broome)

Megan Lindholm -- THE REINDEER PEOPLE (Unwin, 1990, £3.50)

Mass-market edition of the book reviewed by Steven Tew in P180. If you like CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR, then you'll go for this: if you didn't, then don't be put off by the "glorious tradition of..." because this certainly seems to give a much more believable prehistoric world than my memories of CLAN suggest that book did. (Andy Sawyer)

Brian Lumley -- MAD MOON OF DREAMS (Headline, 1990, 248pp, £3.50)

Another of Brian Lumley's attempts to undermine the appeal of Lovecraft's dream-fantasies; the irony being that his gung-ho adventuring would have gone down very well in Weird Tales in the '30s. This retrades the Lenglunar links of 'The Dream-Quest of Unkown Kadath'. Happily forgettable, but I like the collective term a grim of night-gaunts. (Andy Sawyer)

Anne McCaffrey -- DRAGONSDAWN (Corgi, 1990, 473pp, £3.99)

Mass-market edition of the story of the first settlers on Pern, and how they developed the dragons to combat Thread. (Terry Broome reviewed the trade paperback in P181). A must for fans; I found it too close to Mills and Boon for my liking although I've a soft spot for McCaffrey's Dragon books as a whole. (Andy Sawyer)

Robert R. McCammon -- BLUE WORLD (Grafton, 1990, 464pp, £4.50)

As evidenced here, McCammon's writing is inventive but crude - late-night TV fare. Of the 13 stories here, 'He'll Come Knocking At Your Door' and the apocalyptic SF 'Something Passed By' are outstanding, though the title story, concerning a Catholic priest in love with a porno actress, is worth reading despite its melodramatics. (Andy Sawyer)

George R.R. Martin (Ed.) -- DOWN & DIRTY (Titan, 1990, 518pp, £3.99)

Against a fairly tedious background of gang warfare and an extremely confusing mosaic structure, DOWN & DIRTY sparks into life two-thirds of the way through with some genuine progression to the Wild Cards plot. Croyd, the Sleeper, awakens with the power to re-infect people with the Virus and abilities and curses are reuffled. Too many subplots compete for the reader's attention, but the stories are better than they have been, with Edward Bryant's 'The Second Coming of Buddy Holley'(sic) a neat allohistorical rock fantasy. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Moorcock -- THE ETERNAL CHAMPION (Grafton, 1990, 203pp, £2.99)

First published twenty years ago, this is the first book in Moorcock's Eternal Champion sequence which encompasses the vast majority of his writing. While not as interesting as his Elric books, this has a lot to say about the nature of humanity and heroes. Since Moorcock first switched me on to SF & F when I was 13 I'm probably not the most clear-sighted judge, but he's one of the three or four serious (as opposed to comic) fantasy writers I can read without feeling nauseous. (Brendan Wignall)

Peter Morwood -- THE WARLORD'S DOMAIN (Legend, 1990, 283pp, £3.50)

Another in a fantasy series following THE HORSE LORD, THE DEMON LORD, and THE DRAGON LORD. To me this is the somnolent literary equivalent of televised snooker but for those with a hardy constitution this is reasonably well-crafted and (thankfully) self-contained. (Colin Bird)

Paul Preuss -- THE MEDUSA ENCOUNTER (ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S VENUS PRIME, 4) (Avon, 1990, 302pp, \$3.95)

All you need to know of this misbegotten novel is Clarke's original short story. The adaptation and expansion only dissipates Clarke's sense of wonder among a ramshackle mess of SF thriller situations which have nothing to do with the original. Production for the sake of it. (Andy Sawyer)

Mike Shupp -- MORNING OF CREATION (Headline, 1990, 304pp, £3.99)

The second part of the Destiny Makers trilogy, a hybrid of time travelling, far future fantasy with a Vietnam veteran as its hero. Shupp tries hard to create complex cultures that are in conflict. However, rather than being exotic, the result is laborious. (Chris Hart)

Robert Silverberg -- PROJECT PENDULUM (Beaver, 1990, 139pp, £2.99)

A Millenium book - juvenile fiction for older readers. A time-travell-

ing twins' travelogue describing their encounters as they see-saw from 2016 to past and future, eventually ending up with one twin 95 million years in the past and one 95 million years in the future. Initially confusing, but soon picks up. Enjoyable, if a little inconsequential. (Ian Sales)

Judith Tarr -- *A WIND IN CAIRO* (Bantam, 1990, 262pp, £2.99)

Tarr has clearly researched her period, medieval Egypt (around 1170AD) and it shows; she has a growing reputation for scholarly historical adventure yarns and this is no exception, to be enjoyed on more than one level. Hasan is transformed into a spirited stallion by a sorcerer, retaining his intellect. At once a love story, and an adventure yarn, to be enjoyed. Good value. (Nik Morton)

Bernard Taylor -- *THE MOORSTONE SICKNESS* (Grafton, 1990, 235pp, £3.50)

Originally published in 1982 this effective chiller is evocative and crisply told. It features occult happenings in a rural setting and the author handles the business of telling his slight story with much skill. (Colin Bird)

Nancy Thayer -- *SPIRIT LOST* (Sphere, 1990, 198pp, £3.50)

We've been here before - artist with rich wife rediscovering his muse in Nantucket after too many years in advertising - only the creaking of the attic is a pretty young ghost with a severe case of lust for aforesaid artist while down below dutiful wife waits for him to come back to his senses, and makes a lot more money from her art than he does from his. As a Silhouette novel it is too creepy and written too much from the man's point of view while as a horror novel the dread shade of Stephen King looms dark and heavy. All stools are fallen between and no amount of extremely competent writing and mood setting can obscure the fact that there really isn't any story here. An honourable failure. (Martyn Taylor)

David Thomson -- *THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA* (Arena, 1990, 222pp, £4.99)

Reprint of a 1954 book which brings together stories from the West of Ireland and the Scottish Isles concerning seals and the lore involving these fascinating and magical creatures. Thomson relates these stories as if in the words of those who told him them, and produces a beautiful document of the Celtic storytelling tradition; the pacing, gift for the telling phrase and simple but gripping narrative, honed over generations to something we're beginning to appreciate as we lose it. This book, which you will close with regret when you finish it, is worth far, far more than a dozen 'Celtic' fantasies by American academics (no names, no pack-drill). Superb. I loved it. (Andy Sawyer)

Margaret Weiss & Tracy Hickman -- *THE WILL OF THE WANDERER* (Bantam, 1990, 464pp)

From the authors of the popular *Dragonlance* series, this is the first of a new trilogy *The Rose of the Prophet* not set in that world. *THE WILL OF THE WANDERER* features not dragons but djinns, and is set in an Arabian Nights world of desert wanderers, where two warring tribes are forced to make peace to fight a common enemy. Award-winning stuff this isn't, of course, but I found it humourously written, fast-paced, and ideal for holiday or travel reading, even if you do give it to the jumble sale on your return. (Alan Fraser)

T.M. Wright -- *THE WAITING ROOM* (Gollancz, 1990, 342pp, £3.99)

A sequel to *A MANHATTAN GHOST STORY*, but narrated by a different character, this explores the ambiguous world of the dead as shown in the previous book. If it's to lesser effect, it may be because there are more "thriller" elements in it, but even so, Wright is one of the oddest ghost story writers around. Certainly different, so far Wright is a writer worth more than a moment of your time. (Andy Sawyer)

Janny Wurts -- *STORMWARDEN (CYCLE OF FIRE, 1)* (Grafton, 1990, 447pp, £3.99)

Perhaps I'm satiated on fantasy trilogies. I found this ponderous in prose and movement, lacking in a real sense of otherness. Her co-writer on other works calls Wurts "A gifted creator of wonder" while L. Sprague de Camp says she is "a great natural storyteller". They're doubtless right and I'm wrong; buy it if you like: I didn't. (Nik Morton)

Roger Zelazny -- *A DARK TRAVELLING* (Beaver, 1990, 109pp, £2.99)

Another Millennium book. A strange trio of teenagers - werewolf, witch, and martial artist - visit a parallel world in order to rescue the werewolf's parents and help the rebels of that world in their fight against the evil oppressors from another parallel world. Although fairly typical juvenile fiction (teenage protagonists, rites of passage, moans against the unknowable motives of parents, etc.) and too short and quick to make much impact, it is a fun read. (Ian Sales)

"Upon the rack in print"

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
and *ANALOG*, JUNE and JULY 1990

reviewed by Edward James

The June *Analog* was, accidentally perhaps, a showcase for new writers, and for one or two who hardly ever appear outside the pages of *Analog* itself. The cover story was Tom Ligon's "Funnel Hawk", a well-crafted and interesting story, full of technical detail. The narrator is a tough (female) pilot (and Assistant Professor of Meteorology), flying plane and metering equipment as close as possible to tornados in order as part of a research project. Read it to learn more about tornados. The plot revolves around designing the perfect plane for this exercise; the conflict, typically, is with unimaginative bureaucrats who won't take risks. A similar message comes across with rather more force from the short-story "Breakdown" by David J. Strumpfels: the Greens have triumphed, and have banned genetic research -- a destructive raid on Berkeley's biology labs was regarded by a judge as legitimate self-defence. Because of the decline of biological research, AIDS has become a bigger killer than lung cancer. The need to take risks in order to progress is what the politician protagonist realises by the end of the story. Quite effective, but preachy (and one-sided).

The other novella is "The New Land" by F. Alexander Brejcha, a sequel to the April 1990 story "Star-Step". That story ended with an intelligent feline alien (again!) watching Earth colonists arrive on the planet, though the story itself had been taken up with the beginnings of star-flight after nanotechnological warfare had almost killed off humanity. In "The New Land" we begin the process of colonization, with the help of people unfrozen after years in hibernation; the problem of how to communicate and make piece with the tiger-like aliens is the main one. All rather familiar and ordinary, I am afraid, though readable enough. Much more enjoyable, partly because of its refusal to go along with the Campbellian line that technology and human endeavour will always win out against whatever an alien planet can throw at us, is L.A. Taylor's "The Flowers, the Birds, the Leaves, the Bees". We keep on thinking we are on the verge of solving the problem; but no, as with life, most problems are simply too big.

The other shorts in June include an effective little story from Amy Bechtel called "Look Closer", about how a young New Zealander woman, about to go off exploring a new planet, is brought to realise how little she knows Earth itself. Alexis G. Latner's "Wanderers" is on a not unrelated theme, although treated more sentimentally and predictably: it is basically a dialogue between a space traveller and an Earth-bound woman of American Indian extraction, and this time the Amerindian loses the argument. Finally, an amusing enough little squib from Grey Rollins -- "To the Victor Go the Spoils" -- about a fairly standard private eye and his pretty unstandard (and implausible) alien sidekick. That, together with an editorial by Stanley Schmidt on the "Oldtimer Effect" (the problem of coping with novelty after a certain age) and Geoffrey A. Landis's fact article about air pollution on the Moon, makes a full and above average issue.

The lead and cover story in the July *Analog* went from page 14 to page 80 -- with ads and illoes, but even so, a very long story. It is John E. Stith's "Naught for Hire", about Nick Naught, a fairly standard private eye, in a not quite standard world. It is a few years in the future: cinemas are showing *Aliens 9* -- *In Space No-One Can Hear You Vomit*. The standard of rather too many of the jokes is as low as that, but others work very well, and it is not a bad example of that rarity: a humorous sf story with genuine sfnal ideas. The trend towards automation and computer-controlled gadgets with anodyne

voices (and irritable personalities) has continued: the technology rarely works, and coping with its flaws occupies much of the tale. It is reminiscent of Dick and Shekley, and some of it is indeed very funny. But it does go on a long time, and begins to pall, while the whodunnit plotline is not really strong enough or interesting enough to hold the attention. Had it only been half the length...

George Harper's "Madummudra's World", covering some five centuries, is an investigation of how an accidental confrontation between human space-travellers and an alien priest brings enormous social and technological changes to a primitive world. It is quite an interesting use of sf to explore some of the impulses which change societies over time, and the unforeseen potentiality of ideas: "It is safer and leaves fewer ripples on the waters of time to bring a thousand ideas to an old, established civilization than to introduce a single idea to a nascent one." Kevin O'Donnell looks at a similar problem in a rather more lighthearted way, as spacemen who have contravened alien laws try to save themselves by introducing human ideas. Charles Sheffield's "Godspeed", concerning aliens who arrive in Earth orbit and almost immediately depart, leaves so many questions unanswered (including the question of what happened to the Earth spaceship who followed them) that it reads like the prelude to a novel. If it is, the novel could be worth reading; but as a short story...

In June *Asimov's* featured James Patrick Kelly's "Mr. Boy" on the cover: a young boy sits on the bonnet of a futuristic car, next to a dinosaur-like alien, while in the rural landscape behind stands the Statue of Liberty. Beware: all is not as it seems. The young boy (Mr. Boy) is not young; the dinosaur is not alien; the three-quarter lifesize Statue of Liberty is Mr. Boy's mother. All have gone in for the latest fashion of paying surgeons large sums of money to give them their chosen bodies. It makes little sense scientifically (to me), and the story (to me) seemed long and rambling. The whacky pseudo-scientific explanations of how the Statue of Liberty (alias Mom) manages to operate were, on the other hand, extremely funny. Maybe it all was; maybe reading it between marking examination scripts was a bad idea.

The first story in the issue was Larry Niven's "Madness Has its Place", which turned out to be about the first meeting between Man and Kzin (intelligent feline aliens!), in Niven's Known Space series (subsequently hired out to other authors), even if they are not named. Interestingly the kzin suffer a major transformation between page 31 ("big sort-of cats, orange, more than eight meters tall") and page 36 ("Do you believe in murderous cats eight feet tall?"). *Asimov's* copy-editors please note. I enjoy Known Space; Niven makes you believe in it, and works the sociological details out carefully. And I enjoyed this. Pity it is the first he has done in years.

Other stories in this issue were not so interesting, at least for the science fiction reader. Another fantasy set on a fairground, this time "For a Price" from Mary Rosenblum. A typical Anglo-philic story from Avram Davidson, "Limekiller at Large", set in a decaying British colony on the Caribbean, featuring an absolute minimum of fantasy but certainly entertaining. Lisa Goldstein offers "The Blue Love Potion", investigating neatly the potential problems for human relations that a real love potion might cause. And Lewis Shiner's "White City" is a little alternate history fantasy, in which real-life scientist Nikola Tesla transforms the world with electricity in truly megalomaniac fashion: fun but rather slight.

The July *Asimov's* begins with another of Mike Resnick's novelettes about the Kikuyu, called "The Manamouki". He no doubt knows his Africa (viz. his recent novel *Ivory*) and as a story of Western cultural contamination of African tribal ways of life it is quite interesting. The fact that it is sf -- the Kikuyu in question are living on Kirinyaga, a space habitat -- seems totally irrelevant (not to say implausible and unnecessary). It is followed by another "George and Azazel" story from Isaac Asimov, called "Wine is a Mocker", in which it is neatly demonstrated that having a perfectly discriminating palate would be a terrible curse. "The Recital" by Nancy Sterling next: a nicely observed story about a meeting between a young girl and a mermaid, which all those who have not read too many mermaid stories in *Asimov's* and *Fantasy and SF* will probably like. The three other short stories were rather more interesting. R. V. Branham's "And Ghost Stories" is

an effectively chilling story of the nasty ghost of a Vietnam vet and his sister, who has the unnerving ability to sense the violent deaths of others, and it manages to transcend the clichés. Michael Corbett's "At Risk", an investigation of a sexual culture in San Francisco obsessed and oppressed by AIDS is quite well done, though one feels that the discovery (and subsequent loss) of a sexually transmitted virus which develops against AIDS and other diseases is both wishful thinking and bordering on the tasteless. Karen Jay Fowler's "Lieserl", a story of Einstein and his wife (followed by a poem by Geoffrey Landis on the same theme) is as finely written as usual from Fowler, but its point was somewhat lost on me, since I have not been keeping up with recent revelations about the role of Mileva in Einstein's life. The climax of the issue, in every sense, was Lucius Shepard's long "Skull City" -- a Grand Guignol saga of sex, violence, drugs and demons in New York and in its Satanic mirror-image, Dys or Skull City. It has some beautiful (and beautifully nasty) images, plenty of action, and some good fantasy/sf ideas, which keep you reading and make you forget that it is basically "just" a tough-guy story touched up. One senses that it is going to be lengthened into novel form; but don't wait -- it is worth trying in this form.

INTERZONE 36/7 (June/July 1990)

INTERZONE 36/7 (June/July 1990)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

A handful of excellent stories are to be found in IZ 36. 'The Original Dr. Shade has a witty, flowing narrative and displays yet again Kim Newman's ability to weave fiction around fact so adroitly as to make you doubt your ability to distinguish the two. In this story, a 40's comic book character is resurrected in the 90's but, despite the writer's and artist's intentions, the strip reverts to its fascist beginnings. Greg Egan's 'Eugene' is also a quality story, linked to his earlier 'The Cutie' by its topic - the creation of artificial life. It is related very much in the manner of some of Stableford's work in this magazine, with a deadpan sense of humour. Increasing levels of ultra-violet radiation play an integral part in 'Eugene' and this is also a feature of 'Nunivak Snowflakes' by Alastair Reynolds. An intriguing puzzle (why are dead fish containing cryptic messages falling from the sky?) but a story which fizzles out over the last pages. More successful is Steven Widdowson's 'The Nexus', which takes as its basis the end of the NARRATIVE OF A. GORDON PYM. Poe's figure in white here becomes an alien visitation which somehow binds all living things together. NARRATIVE... is revealed as a prophecy, which the graven caverns being replicated in the shapes of skyscrapers. A difficult, but at times lyrical, piece. Finally, Simon D. Ings provides the disgustingly quirky 'The Braining of Mother Lamprey'. Can the powerful necromancer Tringhoul be thwarted? And if so, how? Ings neatly rounds off a fine issue for fiction.

Less satisfying, though, is IZ 37. The outstanding contribution is by Greg Egan (yes, that man again!) with 'Learning to Be Me' which asks, with style and verve, what constitutes consciousness and identity. We are also given the first part of 'Heads' by Greg Bear. IZ's first attempt to split a long story came at a time when the magazine was published quarterly; in my opinion the gap of three months between issues was the reason the attempt was unsuccessful. This situation no longer applies and presumably we'll see more longer fiction being published in IZ. Certainly the first installment of Bear's novella is enjoyable, mixing as it does a lunar society, cybematics, political intrigue and mystery. The remaining three stories, however, are minor efforts. 'A Lot of Mackerel, A Lot of Satellites' is Ian Lee's least successful IZ tale which never really develops its characters. Keith Brooke's 'The Mother' has a twist-in-the-tail ending but remains only mildly interesting, whilst I was bewildered as to why Charles Stross's time-travelling drug producer/pusher in 'Yellow Snow' couldn't sell his wares.

On the non-fiction side, I'm glad to see that in both issues author interviews have accompanying short stories, though in all honesty the two articles in question aren't that hot. That on Kim Newman isn't really an interview, more a somewhat superficial appraisal of Newman's output; that on Greg Bear flits from Bear's future plans to the influence on his work of James Blish. David Gemmell is featured within the 'Big Sellers' series (which surprised me - I didn't realise Gemmell was a big seller) in IZ 36 but the best of the articles is Charles Platt's get-rich-quick experience with IZ editor David Pringle's Warhammerbooks - though it's probably sheer coincidence that Bruce Sterling takes over the 'Comments' column in the July issue!

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