



Paperback Inferno

86

The Review of paperback SF

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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to *PI* 87
is **Saturday November 10th**.

HELP WANTED

Volunteer typists (Amstrad PCW preferred) with time to spare for working on *PI* reviews are welcome to contact the *PI* address.

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *PI* are available from MAUREEN PORTER, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ.

Paperback Purgatory

Just a brief word before I hand over to Ken. First, *PI* is again looking different inside; somewhat like a jigsaw but, I hope, less so than last time and more so than next time. This is the first issue processed mainly through an Amstrad PCW 8256, and is very much a "learning experience" for me. Any comments - particularly regarding the look of the magazine and how I can improve it - will be gratefully received.

Second, you will notice that we have a "guest editorial" from Ken Lake. This is not the first such from Ken, so perhaps I'd better say that anyone with an idea can join in - in fact Ken's piece replaces at the last minute another which has had to be deferred indefinitely because of the writer's recent house-move. I don't want thematic articles as such - that's the province of *VECTOR* - but glances behind the contemporary paperback SF scene. One point which does strike me, though; both Ken and I have recently used our soapbox stances to be critical of some of the practices of leading publishers. Surely there must be something positive happening somewhere? There are still some imaginative publishers and editors fighting against the rule of the accountants and the Lowest Common Denominator, and it would be good to hear about them - or even from them. With uncertainty hovering over the future of such excellent lines as that produced by the late Unwin Hyman, and the disappearance of some of the original anthology series, we need to be cheered up.

Looking through the pile of reviews for this and next issue, there's still no shortage of good, imaginative SF. But for how long, people, for how long...?

PROBLEMS WITH (U.S.) PAPERBACKS?

Ken Lake investigates

For me, it all began very simply. I somehow missed a new book by a favourite author. In 1987, Canadian Leslie Gadallah's first novel, *CAT'S PAWN*, appeared from Del Rey/Ballantine; I bought it through a British SF shop, and eagerly awaited her next book.

In 1990, *CAT'S GAMBIT* appeared; after I read it, I wrote her a second time, and was surprised to learn from her that another novel, *THE LOREMASTERS*, had been published in 1988. I tried every source I could think of, but couldn't get a copy; finally Leslie wrote to her publisher, and out of the blue I received a free copy with a most pleasant letter from the Del Rey/Ballantine Vice-President.

How could this happen? Surely with US publishers printing something like 100,000 copies of some thousand new SF and Fantasy titles every year, they must be keen to sell as many as they can? Why was I finding so frequently that new SF paperbacks were just not available in Britain at all?

I've done some digging, and to be honest the situation is far too complex to be explained simply here. I can, however, give you some pointers, like the fact that one major US publisher has a British "agent" - which will only supply its own stores and outlets and refuses

orders from competing booksellers; hardly a sensible course of action I would have thought. Four US paperback SF publishers have a single agency handling their books; if you approach the London office you are told the books cannot be imported, but if you order through the same agency's US office you'll find them keen to export to you.

Publishers are constantly changing hands, and with such changes often come policy decisions that affect us all. One British publisher regularly releases four SF titles every month, another releases two titles. Both have come under the same management now, and the word has come down from on high: from now on, only two SF paperbacks a month - so the second part of a trilogy, ready for publication and eagerly awaited, has been postponed to the first available slot... July 1992. Don't hold your breath!

Some US publishers, it seems, do not want their US editions to appear on sale in Britain at all, in case this undermines sales of a British edition in the event of their selling the title to a UK publisher. A reasonable worry? Not so - any generally attractive SF or fantasy title will sell up to 6,000 copies in the US edition, some to collectors who refuse to buy UK editions on principle, some to those who don't want to wait what may (as we've seen) turn out to be years before the title appears over here.

But the average UK publisher's print order today is for 10,000 copies, and many titles sell 15,000 copies, regardless of previous US imports. Furthermore, thanks to the massive size of the US market, their publishers release upward of 1,000 titles every year - from UK publishers we get no more than 50 SF titles, so some 950 new books will remain unsold in Britain unless copies are imported.

The reader suffers all the way round. Unless importers can obtain all new titles, you miss out on books by your favourite authors, or at best have to wait a very long time before they become available. And while US editions mostly suffer from that terrible misnomer "perfect binding" - which means the pages fall out as you read them - they are priced significantly below British versions. In fact with recent price rises, you can get most new £4.50 titles in the original versions for no more than £3.25, including the importer's mark-up to cover shipping costs and currency fluctuations. The reason is simple: those vast US printings keep costs lower.

But then the Americans have another problem: they cannot usually reprint a popular title for at least six months, so to cover possible sales they print too many - 100,000 copies, as I've mentioned, where normal sales potential may be no more than 40,000 to 60,000. Having printed them, they don't want the high cost of storing them - so having checked out advance orders, they may decide to pulp vast unsold stocks, or to release them at knockdown remaindered prices. Back in 1973, a US paperback was on sale in British Woolworth stores countrywide for pence the month before serious importers were due to receive their full-price advance orders. Guess how many they sold, and how happy they were!

Most British importers are not keen to import too many US editions anyway, preferring to encourage sales of titles to UK publishers and simplify their own acquisition problems - believe me, almost anything can happen to an order across the Atlantic. So they order a token quantity, an already announced UK sale falls

through, no British edition appears - and by the time they discover this, the importers find the rest of the US edition has been pulped and no more can be obtained. I have several "rare" paperbacks, thanks entirely to good luck in snapping up new books from advance lists, but how many fans have the time and patience to keep that close an eye on advance listings?

Like, I imagine, most keen SF and fantasy readers, my wants are simple: I have a short-list of a couple of hundred authors whose every book I want to read as soon as they appear. I'm also prepared to try the first book of many new authors, provided the advance listing makes them sound interesting. All I want from booksellers is that they should be able to offer me, reliably, every new

title from my chosen authors - but they can't, and the delays and gaps, the waste of time and money, the frustration and the fury drive me to distraction.

I would love to read - and indeed write - reviews of all the fine SF and fantasy books published annually in the United States. I can't, because the publishers don't send out review copies in case they can sell the titles to UK publishers. But as we've seen, they can't hope to sell more than 5% of them. Isn't it shortsighted of them to rob us, and themselves, of the possibility of vast new sales, more recruits to our field, and hence to a demand that will encourage more UK firms to publish more new books?

I think the whole situation is crazy. I found Leslie Gadallah's first and third books astonishingly good, and want to commend them to you; I found the second title very readable, quite different from the others, and doubtless more attractive to many readers who don't share my particular tastes. Yet Leslie is unable to profit from considerable income through UK sales - because Del Rey/Ballantine titles are "hard to get" over here.

Why don't we all drop a line to the US publishers of all our favourite authors? Tell them the facts, ask for free access to US editions - and while we're at it, remind them all that come the relaxation of EC trade barriers in 1992, things should change anyway!

Oh you didn't know about that? Well, it goes like this: at present, vast quantities of US editions are exported to major European cities where no English is spoken - there is no attempt to muzzle or restrict sales at all. It's only in a mistaken attempt to "protect" their chances of making outright sales of UK publishing rights, that is to say of English-language editions, that the present trade restrictions exist. But under EC laws such unequal treatment of member countries is illegal - so will the US publishers relax their policy on UK exports, or will they cut off their noses to spite their faces and try to ban exports to Europe as well?

Whatever the answer, I believe the present position is scandalous as well as stupid. Let's see some action, before sales shrink even more!



Dean R. Koontz - - CHASE (Headline, 1990, 214pp, £3.50)
DARKNESS COMES (Headline, 1990, 351pp, £3.99)
STRANGERS (Headline, 1990, 710pp, £4.99)

Dean R. Koontz, Edward Bryant, Robert R. McCannon - -
NIGHT FEARS (Headline, 1990, 308pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Craig Marnock)

Reading the publishing news in *Matrix*, it isn't always clear how this will affect what ends up in the bookshops. But in this case the results are plain to see. These three books were originally published by W.H. Allen, who recently went down the tubes, and now Headline are reissuing all of Koontz's work in what looks like being a very nice uniform edition.

The first thing you notice about them is, the later they were written, the smaller the typeface is, yet the higher the pagecount. CHASE (1972, originally published under the pseudonym "K.R. Dwyer") is a slim fifty thousand words or so; DARKNESS COMES is a good novel length at about a hundred thousand; and STRANGERS weighs in at around a stonking quarter of a million words.

CHASE is a thriller, though its subject matter - a serial killer - brings it close to a lot of modern horror. Ben Chase is a Vietnam veteran hailed as a hero after a suicidal attack on enemy positions. But the attack really was an attempt at suicide, after having taken part in a massacre of North Vietnamese civilians. Chase attempts to stem his feelings of guilt through rigid self-control, withdrawal from society at large, and lots of Jack Daniels. However, this routine is shattered when he saves a young girl from the psychopath who calls himself Judge. Judge rapidly passes judgement on Chase himself, who must break out of his self-denying regime to track down Judge and save his life.

CHASE has elements common to all of the books here - its hero wins through in the end by his innate abilities (in this case, no-one else will believe that Judge isn't a mental hallucination), he and the love interest are apparently made for one another (three perfect romances in as many books strains the credulity just a little), and parent-figures are depicted as smothering and repressive; the protagonists of the three novels are nearly all orphans - or at the very least have no history prior to the start of the book.

But this is not to say that CHASE is formulaic; it is a very taut and directed narrative with little or no wasted space, and thankfully no "thrillerese" hack writing. I found that it read very smoothly at a single sitting.

DARKNESS COMES is probably the poorest of the books reviewed here, disappointing not so much because it's at all badly done, but because it sticks so closely to the form of a standard genre horror novel, and doesn't break out of it at any point.

Jack Dawson and his partner Rebecca Chandler are New York detectives investigating a series of murders of a Mafia family, all of whom have died in "mysterious" (i.e. supernatural) ways. As the story develops, Rebecca falls for Jack in a manner familiar from CHASE, and the supernatural/horror element becomes increasingly more overt, causing a series of confrontations that build to a climax where Jack finds in within himself to save the day. (Interestingly, Jack's children - like the kids that appear in STRANGERS - are portrayed as being tv-perfect, in sharp contrast to the rough ride that characters' parents get.)

What saves the book from being a potboiler, though, is its intricate and detailed use of voodoo - the most in-depth that I've seen in fiction - which gives it a certain distinctiveness that marks it out from all the Christian-based novels with the same theme.

STRANGERS is a much better book. As well as being much more expansive, the quality of writing is much higher, with far fewer of the easy fictional platitudes that cropped up in the first two. Also the range of characters is much wider and fuller - though having read CHASE and DARKNESS COMES you can see the archetypes showing through. Much more importantly, the novel carries a genuine thrill with it, a Gothic overtone that makes you sit up and look behind you occasionally.

Dominick Corvaisis, a writer; Ginger Weiss, a surgeon; and Brendan Cronin, a priest, are the three main players in a cast of about a dozen drawn to a motel in Nevada by the vague but disturbing memories of a shared event there the previous summer, that left psychological problems in its wake. The various characters reach the motel during the first two-thirds of the book, and it is this heavily moody section that is the most effective, with its unsettling echoes of the past. The conclusion - a burst into plot and counterplot before a revelation of sorts - is, in retrospect, a bit gimmicky and unsatisfying, sitting oddly with the early part of the novel. But its vigour is such that you're unlikely to notice this until after finishing it.

Lastly, Koontz fans should note that Headline have also reissued last year's NIGHT FEARS (featuring short stories by Koontz, Edward Bryant and Robert R. McCammon) in a wallet-friendly mass-market edition, including all the illustrations. Bryant's third of the book is particularly strong, making this a good buy for anyone with a taste for short horror fiction.

DEAN R. KOONTZ - - THE VISION (Headline, 1990, 270pp, £3.99); TWILIGHT EYES (Headline, 1990, 478pp, £4.50); NIGHT CHILLS (Headline, 1990, 334pp, £3.99); WHISPERS (Headline, 1990, 502pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Another four books from Headline's recent purchase of Koontz's backlist, showing the strengths and weaknesses of Koontz as a writer. The strengths are easily summed up; Koontz writes damn good page-turner thrillers which effortlessly cross genres so that they can appeal to not just horror or SF fans. The weaknesses are less easily pinpointed, but have much to do with this same strength: there is a definite tendency to duplicate motifs and situations which may be something to do with the author's personal obsessions or fondness for an idea or may just be the old adage about if a good idea's worth using once it's worth repeating. Thus some of the points made by Craig Karnock in his review of the previous batch of Koontz novels can be made of these, and THE VISION, for example, contains a recurring memory in one of the central characters which is extremely similar in structure, horrific effect, and even detail to that which haunts another character in WHISPERS, while the shocking revelation at the heart of that novel is almost identical to that at the heart of the new hardback, THE BAD PLACE.

Most people, however, will not be reading large quantities of Dean R. Koontz novels in a short period of time, and if so, then he remains very readable. THE VISION is an adequate thriller, about a clairvoyant able to foresee murders who becomes personally involved in the quest for a particular killer, spoiled for me by the heavy-handed "signposting" Koontz engages in when he wants us to decide upon the killer's identity. TWILIGHT EYES is a better written but less original read: parallel to humanity is a race of "goblins" - unnatural monsters who live off pain and terror. Stan Mackenzie can see these creatures and eventually strikes back with his friends from the carnival. It's a familiar scene and the carnival descriptions (though good) are hardly original (remember Ray Bradbury?) while if the "goblins" are so powerful, why aren't they actually ruling? Why so much taking and torture of individuals where whole populations are available?

Melodramatic, even overwritten, the book at times is, but an answer to that last question may come in NIGHT CHILLS which again is about the exercise of total power, this time in a small town where an experiment in subliminal influence has put the whole population (almost: there's always an "almost") under the control of the scientist who has developed the drug which has made this possible and the business tycoon who has funded his work. Salsbury blows the whole thing because given unlimited power over people he ends up getting far too overwrought and going into the houses of beautiful women and making them take off their clothes and - well - do the sort of things that spotty male adolescents fantasise of making them do if they had the chance. I don't know if it's encouraging or not that given the opportunity the horny male triumphs over the demonically evil (there's a bit of explanatory guff later on about Salsbury's psychological damage as an abused child but basically he's just a naughty little boy with a big dick). Still, all ends happily (well, there's a hefty slice of 70s angst there) if not memorably.

WHISPERS fuses the suspense and menace of the other three books with a plot which makes you actually want to keep reading despite the fact that you're going to anyway. A beautiful, successful scriptwriter is almost raped by a slight acquaintance. She calls the cops, but Bruno Frye is, it seems nowhere near Los Angeles at the time. Shortly afterwards, he returns. This time, she kills him. Then the whole thing starts to happen again. This is incredibly confusing for the cops, especially the nice, sensitive cop who handles the case and, naturally, falls in love with the scriptwriter, and even more for the reader. The conclusion is superbly macabre, with some chilling twists as Koontz piles on the Gothickry in the Frye family history. This is really what Koontz is good at and he, here, is very good indeed.

R E V I E W S

Ramsey Campbell - - THE FACE THAT MUST DIE (Futura, 1990, 238pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is the first UK paperback publication of the uncut text of this novel, published together with a darkly farcical short story ('I Am It And It Is I') which springs from a mood encompassing that of one of the novel's characters and (apparently) Campbell's at the time of writing the book. The fiction stands framed by an introduction and afterward which covers ground described elsewhere in interviews and introductions to other collections but in starker, confessional detail.

It's arguable whether this autobiographical delving into the reasons behind THE FACE... 's darkness (which indeed is almost as disturbing as the novel itself) adds to its impact. It has a voyeuristic attraction, but it's probably worth pointing out that the darkest whirlpools of an individual's psyche don't automatically produce art. It's interesting if chilling to read THE FACE... in psycho-analytical terms and see Horridge and Peter as different expressions of an individual's alienation, but where the real horror lies is in seeing that they are really part of you as well.

THE FACE THAT MUST DIE has claims of being one of the best psychological horror stories of the past 20 years. Unlike much of Campbell's work, it is not a supernatural story, eschewing the crutches of such symbolism to confront paranoia and psychosis naked. The risk it takes in focussing upon the thought-processes of a psychopath are considerable: that it succeeds is due to the author's skill in presenting anger and poignancy. Campbell blends environment, heredity and personality in creating the mind of the unfortunate Horridge, a kind of spirit of the decayed Liverpool of the 1970s, trapped in the depressing streets of urban chaos; a monster, yes, but a monster considerably more sympathetic in all his unpleasantness than the self-centred student Peter, a caricature of post-hippy dope-and-comix hedonism. (But so many people choose to live as caricatures...)

Horridge's paranoia is sparked off by a series of killings of young male homosexuals into murderous obsession, and scene by scene progresses via bleak irony and the tensest of gallows humour to a journey at razor's edge from Liverpool to North Wales and the eventual climax. The reader is left with an almost suffocating sense of pain and compassion unusual in any kind of fiction but particularly so in horror which is not supposed to be about identification with people - according to those who don't read it. It's really not often that a new edition of a book is essential buying for those who have a copy of a previous edition, but it's certainly so in this case.

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - THE CYBORG AND THE SORCERERS (Grafton, 1990, 279pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Vernon Leigh)

Spaceship arrives at old colony. On board is a cyborg with a bomb implanted in his head and a computer with orders to detonate the bomb if the cyborg goes against the original mission orders. The computer detects anomalies in the planet's gravitational field. It decides to investigate, so sends the cyborg planetside.

And so it goes on. It gets more complex about a quarter of the way through. The cyborg, who wants to escape the computer's neurotic control, discovers that the thing has a self-destruct wish which it can only enact after he is dead.

Everything's there, but nothing really comes off. The book falls flat perhaps because Watt-Evan's attempts at description are rather flimsy. There is little or no atmosphere and in a book where so much of the plot relies on travelling, in this case between cities, this is a vital missing element. We get no feeling for a civilisation risen up after a nuclear war. The best picture we are able to glean of this world is the front cover illustration.

Watt-Evans's prose is a mixture of the awkward and the reasonable. Nothing is really bad in this book, but everything could have been so much better. The reactions of the colonist's descendants are unbelievable in the extreme, even given their psi abilities (again the descriptions of these were lacking somewhat). This is not good literature

and good literature is something science fiction/fantasy writers should strive to create. THE CYBORG AND THE SORCERERS is a one-time read.

Grace Chetwin - - THE ATHELING (Corgi, 1990, 416pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

THE ATHELING, the first of a new four-volume series (The Last Legacy) by an American author new to me, is an intriguing and attractive mixture of straight SF and fantasy. The book is set in 2047, after a "limited" nuclear war has devastated the Earth. The remnants of civilisation live mostly underground, while big business has moved into space. Incredibly, a new war is threatening to start and put paid to the Earth. The controller of the PanAmerican Federation, Pitar Ellison, is fighting to keep the peace while Manfred Hengst, the head of the strongest industrial grouping in space, is manipulating all sides in order to increase his own power and wealth.

To Ellison's Eastern White House comes a religious leader, the hesikastor, who offers PanAmerica an advantage over its rivals: he claims to have the power to see into the future. A psi expert is brought hastily from Denver with a machine he has developed that can pick up thoughts, record them, and project them on a video screen. The intention is to capture the Hesikastor's visions, but instead scenes are projected of an alien planet, with human-like people living in a medieval civilisation.

The inhabitants of the planet Phrynys, now extinct, are broadcasting episodes from their history psionically to Earth. In the story being transmitted, Torc, the heir apparent or Atheling, is shown as he prepares to leave his father's capital city on a traditional pilgrimage to make himself worthy of the crown. Unknown to him, his treacherous younger brother is plotting to overthrow the king and seize the kingdom for himself. We meet Torc as a selfish and hedonistic young man, but he eventually determines to make his spiritual training more than just symbolic, and put his new beliefs to work to become a better ruler of his people.

Chetwin's story shows us in parallel the struggles of Ellisen on Earth to stave off war, and Torc on Phrynys to claim his birthright and introduce a better order. At the end of the book the situation on both planets looks extremely bleak. Although irritated by Chetwin's use in the Phrynys sections of "alien" words where perfectly good English ones exist, I was genuinely spellbound by this book, and put it down almost in anger at having to wait an unknown length of time for the sequel. Please hurry the next one out, Corgi!

Gene Wolfe - - THERE ARE DOORS (Futura, 1990, 313pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

It is over ten years now since Gene Wolfe redefined epic fantasy with THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER. When the Book of the new Sun had been completed, FREE LIVE FREE appeared as a totally different work, though still fantasy. In a sense it was difficult to realise that the man who was responsible for the one could also be responsible for the other.

THERE ARE DOORS belongs to the second category of Wolfe's work - a fantasy about little people in urban America, usually with a justified reason for paranoia. However, it is not a new type of fantasy:- Wells was writing this sort of thing, and then they became a type of mainstream bestseller - Hollywood turned Thorne Smith's Topper books into films in the thirties.

THERE ARE DOORS describes the hunt of a shop assistant named Green for his missing girlfriend who, as the story develops, seems to have passed into another dimension. Stepping through a door Green also steps into another dimension, a slightly different, slightly more paranoid America.

Green ends in a mental hospital in the other world, but it then turns out he was having treatment in this world as well. Then the kick occurs in the story - a doll (which Green has bought because she reminds him of Lara the missing woman) comes to life. Green eventually finds happiness with her.

THERE ARE DOORS is an odd book, and it is difficult to know whether Gene Wolfe has taken the easy way out with a fantasy or whether we have an intelligent novel about the problems of mind and perception.

Piers Anthony - - BATTLE CIRCLE (Corgi, 1989, 537pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Charles Stross)

Ho hum: it's trilogy time again. No, BATTLE CIRCLE isn't the first volume of the long-awaited Piers Megabuster series that finally breaks the bookshelf... it's the complete item. A reissue. And not his best.

Originally published as SOS THE ROPE, VAR THE STICK and NEQ THE SWORD, with copyrights between 1968 and 1975, this book describes a rather weird post-holocaust world. Those humans who have survived are divided into two groups, warrior tribes and the town-dwelling, civilised "crazies" upon whom they depend. The warriors follow a rigid code of honour and specialise, variously, in using certain classes of weapons which are supplied to them (along with food, clothing, etc.) by the crazies. They fight each other in the appropriately-named battle Circle, and tend to die young.

The book comprises the tale of a warrior, Sol, who founds an empire among the tribes. It then follows various tribespeople through the aftermath of this empire, which is brought low through a bizarre chain of events, and then follows some of them out into the much broader post-holocaust world created by Anthony.

The trouble with this book is that the author displays an excellent story-telling skill ... and then proceeds to misuse it. As escapism, it's so-so; a light read. The dialogue tends towards the wooden, the characterisation is either maudlin or cursory, and the book teeters all the time between self-indulgence and militaristic self-glorification. All the characters apparently share an outrageously misogynistic outlook with the author, which should make this a sure-fire hit with a certain type of spotty adolescent male. The background is Anthony's usual bizarre mixture of the logical and the ridiculous, and requires a superhuman effort in order to maintain suspension of disbelief.

In summary, if you like Piers Anthony trilogies you'll *lurve* this one. But otherwise, steer well clear.

Richard Cowper - - CLONE (Gollancz, 1990, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

I enjoy and admire Richard Cowper's work so it is with some regret that I have to admit that this book doesn't work completely successfully, that as a satire it shoots arrows armed with rubber suction pads rather than barbed points. It is not that the arrows miss their targets but rather that the force of the impact is dissipated into a gentle vibration rather than a sharp stab.

It is set in a future where intelligent apes assist an overpopulated mankind with the work, centring on the persons of a clone, Alvin (one of four clones with eidetic memories who have accidentally had their memories and personalities wiped after exhibiting a paranormal gestalt power). The story follows Alvin and the revival of his powers, his adventures in getting together with his clones; aided by Worbert, an ape, Cheryl, a Samaritan (whose job is to help people commit suicide) and Dr. Poynter who created the clones in the first place; and what happens when they all get together.

It is humorous, sniping at birth control, trade unions, sexuality, and bureaucracy, but never quite boosts itself from the humorous to the downright funny, which is unfortunately also why it doesn't altogether succeed as a novel.

Paul J. McAuley - - FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS (Orbit, 1990, 253pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Dorothy Yoshida has (or is) a talent. She can sense minds, distinguish their level of intelligence. In order to survive human society, she's been given an implant to suppress the Talent, and her chosen career, astronomy,

was selected at least partly for the distance it puts between her and most other minds.

Human interstellar exploration has run into an Enemy. Apparently confined to one stellar system, little is known about the Enemy because they always commit suicide when capture seems likely.

Human explorers have also found an anomalous planet. An unknown intelligence has caused the planet to rotate, seeded it with oxygenating bacteria and higher life-forms from half a dozen known worlds. This might be the work of the Enemy. They may be still on the planet. Dorothy Yoshida is "volunteered" to investigate.

Dorothy's personality, background and motivation are explored in some depth as the book progresses. Both the Enemy, and the planet's dominant life-form, remain enigmatic and imperfectly understood. The book's flavour is very much that of a "realistic" slice of life, with all the omissions, limitations and skewed viewpoints that implies, rather than following a clearly patterned mythic or archetypal structure. I found it in many ways a curiously disturbing and unsatisfying book, full of anomalies, loose ends, unexplained events and observations. But obviously, life's like that.

Patricia Geary - - STRANGE TOYS (Corgi, 1990, 248pp £2.99)

(Reviewed by Dave Langford)

This is a winner of the Philip K. Dick award for best (U.S.) paperback original, which seems somehow appropriate. Patricia Geary writes smoothly and very differently, but there's a Dickian flavour in the elusiveness of reality here, in the gallery of quirky characters with not a world-shaker to be seen, and in the "never apologise, never explain" confidence with which ambiguous fantasy elements are handled.

At nine years old (which she is for most of the book) the heroine Pet operates with convincing young logic. Her black-sheep teenage sister has plugged the family into big trouble, through both criminal and occult tinkering: Pet "knows" how to construct defences, starting with the magical deployment of her collection of 37 small plush poodles and leading logically enough to voodoo charms. Traversing 60s America with the rest of her bickering family, she gets in deeper, and out of her depth, and wins, and (proleptically) loses.

What happened emerges as years later we meet her in her teens and her 30s - by which time she's gained strength (in the most literal, weight-lifting sense) and confidence, and can at last settle the old ghosts. Not being nine any more, she doesn't spend time rehearsing details for the benefit of readers. In this final section, sex and ceremonial magic happen; the bad sister makes a farewell appearance; Pet can close the book she disastrously opened as a kid, but the logic of settlement is left as a hinted, elliptical thing.

An unusual and low-key fantasy, without the too common Tolkienian or Manichean division between black and white; the morality might be grey, the fluid writing is anything but.

SAMUEL R. DELANY - - THE MOTION OF LIGHT IN WATER (Paladin, 1990, 581pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The subtitle of this book is "East Village sex and science fiction writing: 1960 - 1965". Delany is known for placing his words in the most appropriate order to provide the most accurate representation of his imaginative reality. This subtitle is no different in this respect from other phrases he's written. You will notice that "sex" becomes before "science fiction writing".

This is not to say that this is not a wonderful book as an autobiographical account of the formative literary years of one of the most impressive science fiction writers we have, merely that we can read Delany's SF as itself an example of the "marginalisation" he talks about along with being Black, gay, dyslexic: as such, science fiction is only part of Delany's biography.

It's a major part nevertheless, and one which most readers of this review will be primarily concerned with.

The section of his life-history Delany describes covers the five years between his marriage to Marilyn Hacker and his first trip to Europe. It offers insights into the nature of a "gay community" in a culture still dominated by a 50s mind-set, the East Village "Bohemian" scene, and Delany's own writing. But it's also - Delany being Delany - a meditation on the nature of biography and history and how we can talk about them through one person's limited recollections. The first section, 'Sentences', for instance, is based upon Delany's memory (for an autobiographical essay in 1978) that "my father died ... in 1958 when I was seventeen." A statement which he later discovered was wrong on two counts. The book ends with a dense and virtually incomprehensible written interview where the questions are as obscure as the answers but which does make some interesting points regarding the symbolic politics of Sword and Sorcery, sexuality and AIDS within the "market" of contemporary capitalism. By then, though, the reader will have noticed Delany's account of his youthful sexual stimulation by R.E. Howardian sword and sorcery and be wondering just what came first, the symbol or the stimulation.

Those who know Delany's work will be aware of the increased fusion of the fictional and the personal in his novels. Here we see how many of his symbols, his highly detailed images of individuals and their attributes, come from his own (sexual) experiences and meditations upon them. Or so implies the writer of erudite and elusive fictions...

THE MOTION OF LIGHT IN WATER is beautifully written and remarkably un-seamy. It contains a number of extracts from the published and unpublished poetry which Marilyn Hacker was working on at the time (including a delightful limerick concerning Delany's own lack of poetic prowess) which offer yet another outsider/insider comment on Delany's own version of events. (Or is it vice-versa?) Collectors of biographical trivia will be charmed by how the folk-singing Delany was top of the bill over the even more obscure Bob Dylan - for about five minutes. But admirers of Delany's rich and challenging and often infuriating novels will find much to admire here.

Tanith Lee - - *FORESTS OF THE NIGHT* (Unwin, 1990, 299pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Twelve of the 20 stories in this collection have been previously published in magazines or anthologies; the rest have not. Ranging in subject-matter from retellings of well-known fairy tales and legends, to dream-based archetypal fantasies, close-to-home science fiction, magical realism, and "inner glimpse" character studies of women we might walk past in any contemporary street, the stories are united by a spare, powerful prose style that pays close and careful attention to significant detail, but spends no time on unnecessary. Personal favourites from the collection include 'Bloodmantle', a cruel but cathartic reworking of the *Red Riding Hood* story blended with various snippets of wolf lore; 'Nicholas', about an unconventional love relationship; 'The Hunting of Death' an archetypal drama based on the Unicorn Tapestries; 'By Crystal Light Beneath One Star', a terrible evocation of dissidence, Disappearance (in the Argentinian sense) and personal integrity under the kind of extreme psychological torture that warps the boundaries of (perceived if not actual: who can separate the two?) reality; and 'The Tenebris Malgraph', a story about the meeting of Self and Shadowself as polar, antipathetic opposites which cannot survive in each others' presence. Very highly recommended.

Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Vaughn (Eds.) - - *THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF VINTAGE SCIENCE FICTION SHORT NOVELS OF THE 1950s* (Robinson Publishing, 1990, 503pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

By weight this has to be a bargain - but you will have read the contents many years ago. I hope you still remember them - some are among the alltime gems of the

genre. Written between 1950 and 1959, these ten stories appeared first in *ASE*, *F&SF* or *Galaxy* and brought a whole new image with them.

Though the traditional trappings of space opera can be found here, mostly the stories present imagined worlds in which some aspect of sociological change distorts our perceptions. Aliens appear, and a section of mankind starts to talk gibberish - and teleport, and create new inventions, and honk and snort! In the famous 'Baby is Three', a gestalt human form is painfully created; a lone diplomat gambles his life in the Second Game with an alien species, and a Neanderthal recessive wreaks havoc around a city dump.

My favourite is of course Eric Frank Russell's hysterically funny 'And Then There Were None' which bequeathed both the "ob" and "nyob" to our speech and took a poke at most of mankind's pet economic theories, but there must be something for everyone here.

However, doubtless you have all ten titles already, so what can I advise you? The answer is simple: lash out on a dozen copies and present them to promising teenagers of your acquaintance: adult fiction of the fifties is now well within the grasp of today's more sophisticated readership, and in any case, how young were you when you read them first?

James Patrick Kelly - - *LOOK INTO THE SUN* (Mandarin, 1990, 280pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

Phillip Wing is the architect of the Glass Cloud, one of the Seven new Wonders of the World, but the Cloud has run into financial difficulties, and only the messengers, representatives of a galaxy-wide culture, can bail it out. But there's a price. Wing is commissioned by them to go on a one-way trip to the planet Aseneshesh and build a tomb for the Goddess there. *LOOK INTO THE SUN* is the story of that trip, and Wing's adjustment to the people, culture and conditions that he finds on Aseneshesh.

Kelly creates three cultures which succeed in varying degrees in being alien. First is Wing's Earth, recognisably ours in outlook but subtly changed by the influence of the Messengers. Then there is Aseneshesh, its people humanoid, but in no way human, its conditions unsettling to an architect, and to the reader. Last is the culture of the messengers, only glimpsed through Ndavu, Wing's guide. All three are portrayed with enough skill to convince us that they are real. The characters too are well-drawn, and Wing's struggle to come to terms with the culture that he has to understand to do his job, and their struggle to cope with him makes for fascinating reading.

Arthur. C. Clarke - - *TALES FROM PLANET EARTH* (Legend, 1990, 313pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

There is a very traditional feel to this anthology, which is hardly surprising as most of the stories date from the 50s and early 60s. In some cases, the stories have been overtaken by the advance of science in the years since their publication, but for all that, the majority remain very readable, and while some, such as 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' in which a child looks on Earth from the surface of the moon, have been frequently reprinted, others are less well known.

Several stories deserve particular mention: 'The Road To The Sea', which explores man's dreams of adventure and his fear of change, 'Hate', in which a Russian-hating Hungarian refugee discovers a crashed Russian space-capsule, and an opportunity for revenge, and 'The Cruel Sky', a splendid example of a story woven around a single scientific invention. Most notable, however, is 'Wall of Darkness'. Shervane's planet is encircled by a great Wall built of the ancients. the Wall has always been an impenetrable barrier, but Shervane is determined to discover what lies on the other side... this deceptively simple tale actually contains the most thought-provoking ideas in the book.

Admittedly not all the stories have survived the passage of time as well as others - the trigger-happy

earthlings and aliens in 'Publicity Campaign' belong firmly back in the 1950s, even though the story is written in a humorous tone. Overall, however, this book does constitute a good read. For those familiar with Clarke's writings, there is the added interest of tracing themes which are further developed in his novels; for the newcomer to Clarke, or to SF, this book is a useful introduction.

Arthur C. Clarke - - **TALES OF TEN WORLDS** (Gollancz, 1990, 245pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

As Pavarotti was knocking out 'Nissan Dormobile' and the newspapers were knocking the sweeper system, I was hoping that someone would make the World cup Tournament more interesting by reducing the referee to "a small smouldering heap" - as happens in one of the fifteen short stories in this collection. Clarke makes the impossible seem reasonable, the solar system seem very small and the earth minute.

A character in 'Death and the Senator' reflects that the year 1984 loses its significance when it has harmlessly passed by; similarly these stories that were previously published in magazines from the 50s and early 60s could be considered as nothing more than optimistic fantasies. Planet-hopping and in-space surgery still seem like pipe dreams. SF always fails as prophecy, but this is not a problem with Clarke's short stories. They are enduring because he is involved with inter-planetary myth making by weaving in various Classical and Biblical allusions in relation to pioneering new spheres of human/animal perfectability.

However, these themes are never quite convincing. It is the ingenious scientific explanation that is the real pleasure of these stories; casually debunking the popular ideas of Saturn's rings, comets, and death rays with a self-satisfied glee. The stories are contrived to illustrate these clever extrapolations and don't synthesise beyond them, so there's less to this collection than meets the eye.

Richard Laymon - - **RESURRECTION DREAMS** (Headline, 1990, 352pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Martin R. Webb)

Melvin Dobbs, school creep extraordinaire, shocks an entire town by publicly trying to resurrect a decapitated cheer-leader, who had died some weeks before in a horrific road accident.

Vickie Chandler had once stood up for Melvin, though she didn't really like him, when he was picked on by several boys in school. When she returns to her home town, ten years later as a qualified doctor, she is bothered by two things: one, Melvin has been released from the mental home and, two, he has returned to his parents' home and inherited the family business, a service station.

Infatuated to the point of obsession, Melvin soon becomes a pest. Knowing she doesn't have a car, he gives her one. She refuses it, so he drops the keys down the front of her dress. The reader is led to believe that it is only the presence of Vickie's long time friend and flatmate, Ace, that stops her cracking up. Ace suggests that Vickie go on a date with the smitten Melvin, and return the car keys. Actually going out with him might put him off; destroy his fantasy image of her. Ace would go along, in case he turned nasty. In the course of the evening they meet Dexter Pollock, the town's ex-Chief of Police, who insults Vickie. She pours her beer down his trousers: he throws his in her face. Melvin stands up for her, telling Pollock he'd like to kill him.

Vickie is suddenly suspicious of Melvin when, that very night, Pollock is murdered - his body is covered with human bites and an intimate part of his anatomy has been removed. Vickie and Ace, convinced that Melvin was the killer, tell the police that before his murder they heard Melvin threaten to kill the man. They are not taken seriously.

Slowly, they discover what the reader is already aware of. Melvin has murdered a nurse, successfully

resurrected her and instructed her to kill for him.

Legally, Vickie has no way of proving her theory that Melvin is the killer. The police won't listen to her because, they say, she has no proof. One man believes her. Jack is a lawyer, Vickie's late partner's lawyer, and too, he has reason to believe in Melvin's guilt.

There are echoes of Mary Shelley's **FRANKENSTEIN** in a modern day setting. Effectively written with lots of gory detail and sexual explicitness. Laymon is definitely someone to watch.

Isaac Asimov - - **THE BICENTENNIAL MAN** Gollancz, 1990, 211pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

...Publication Data

Asimov, Isaac, 1920-
The bicentennial man.
1. Title.
813'.54 (F)
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And that's about all seasoned SF fans need to know, really. If that... For the record, however this collection is made up of twelve stories, four of which concern robots and/or computers:

'Feminine Intuition' (F&SF, October 1969); 'That Thou Art Mindful of Him' (FINAL STAGE, ed. Malzberg, 1974); 'The Life and Times of Multivac' (The New York Times, 5 January 1975), and; 'The Bicentennial Man' (STELLAR SF no. 2, ed. del Rey, 1976). I'm happy to report that they were all written long before Asimov dreamed up the clumsily entitled and - in my opinion - impractical 'Zeroth Law' ("... the prevention of harm to human beings in groups and to humanity as a whole comes before the prevention of harm to any specific individual"). How can any robot, even with built-in *utilitarianism circuits* be expected to decide upon the Benthamite "greatest good for the greatest number"?... "My positronic brain hurts!"

The title story covers much the same ground as "All the traps of earth" (F&SF, March 1960), by Clifford D. Simak - but in a bathetic, clodhopping sort of way. 'That Thou Art Mindful of Him' is much stronger fare. TTAMoH may not be the FINAL STAGE in Asimovian robot stories, but it (arguably) ought to have been. FI and TTAMoH, though spry and well-written, won't overtax most people's little grey cells. Of the remaining eight stories, I particularly liked 'The Winnowing' (ANALOG, January 1976) - a grisly little fable about the overpopulation problem and triage ("... a system of choosing whom to save and whom to allow to die when conditions do not allow of saving all", p.125). Also... 'Birth of a Notion' (written for the 50th Anniversary issue of AMAZING STORIES: April 1976) is a playful "shaggy pup" story.

James White - - **FEDERATION WORLD** (Orbit, 1990, 283pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

James White's latest SF novel, **FEDERATION WORLD**, depicts a future in which there are a large number of Galactics who all live in what is known as a modified Dyson Sphere, situated at the centre of our Galaxy. These Galactics travel around the confines of the Galaxy in search of new races of intelligent beings, whom they can then contact and more or less force them to be moved en masse, by the use of matter transmitters, into the Dyson sphere. In order to take up what the Galactics call "the status of full citizenship", for purposes only they know. **FEDERATION WORLD** echoes a slight similarity to Bob Shaw's **ORBITSVILLE**, and whereas **ORBITSVILLE**'s Sphere deigns to trap its potential inhabitants, the sphere in **FEDERATION WORLD** offers any race that qualifies as citizens its full technological expertise and growth.

James White's novels to date have mostly been related to his popular *Hospital Station* series and his attempt at something different like **FEDERATION WORLD**, although it also has one or two similarities to that series (i.e. his exotic aliens, particularly the Burrowing ones), has shown that he is not as yet short on imagination and wit.

Scott Grønmark - - - - - STEEL GODS
(Corgi, 1990, 287pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

Grønmark has written (as Nick Sharman) books such as THE CATS, THE SURROGATE, SWITCH and NEXT. This isn't strictly horror, more a blend of horror-sf-thriller. It's like Dennis Wheatley without the verbiage, fast-paced, un-put-down-able, with plenty of plot-twists to keep the pages turning. David Cauley is the father of Anna, whose unusual powers and talents make her the target of two bitterly opposed factions. The realisation that there are people with remarkable earth-shaking powers unfolds gradually for David and the reader: people who shaped - and still shape - the world, for good or ill, who thirsted - and still thirst - for power, for dominion over lesser mortals: Gods, steely gods pitched against each other, seemingly heedless of who they hurt in their titanic struggle... You can believe the gods were (or are) like these...

Among these gods is JAMES LORD, An American destined for the White House - if he can survive the conniving faction led by the sinister Dragon Man, Spear... The brooding menace of Spear permeates the pages, his presence is felt even when he is pages away from the text you are reading. The villain's two henchmen are almost as reprehensible, evil ignorant killers. Certain scenes may not be for the squeamish, but Grønmark has created characters about whom you care. Some of the plot twists may seem inevitable and can be out-guessed, but you will still carry on reading because you care about the people: the twists and turns are always logical, hardly ever contrived or strained. The blurb tells us that Grønmark is a "chilling new talent" - and so he is. Good value, a good chilling read. Yes, it would probably make an edge-of-seat movie, too! A writer to watch out for.

Frederik Pohl - - - - - THE DAY THE MARTIANS CAME
Grafton, 1990, 300pp, £3.50

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

An entertaining collection of connected stories, five from 1986/7, three originals, and one each from 1972 and 1967, tied together with bogus reports and a coda.

The first story and the coda deal directly with the Martian revelation, while the others are only peripherally sf. Pohl is back on familiar ground with his satires on advertising and consumerism, beginning in the first story with the uncovering of what the survivors of an exhibition to the planet call a Martian Macy's. The returning astronauts decide to bring the aliens back with them and except for the DANGEROUS VISIONS story, 'The Day After The Martians Came', the rest of the book concerns the interest in and exploitation of the discovery back on earth during the expedition's year-long return flight.

Among the characters are a screen-writer who naively imagines the aliens as Burroughsian creations, a Russian refugee whose desire to resume work as a rocket engineer in the United States is exploited by tax dodgers, two con-men who see in the Martians a way of regaining their past glory, a space consultant whose pretty wife is having an affair with his corrupt boss and a revolutionary party who hire an advertising executive believing him to be an expert on Martians.

None of the stories are funny, or even very humorous, but the disappointment one feels in the shift from mainstream to borderline sf is soon overcome as Pohl's characters, captivating in their simple-mindedness, transcend the written page.



Richard Maynard - - THE QUIET PLACE Grafton, 1990,
283pp, £3.50

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

A textbook example of how to ruin a perfectly reasonable plot, albeit an old one, by presentation. First of all, you set it all in the past tense, writing your diary of what happened. You tell us what you did, what they did, what you thought, and you throw in some philosophical, albeit hackneyed, afterthoughts.

You keep actual speech to an absolute minimum - a couple of lines a page is enough, peeping out of solid paragraphs written in an earnest, schoolboyish and plodding style. You describe scenes in wearisome detail and without discrimination, but you make sure you shove in some violence, some perversion, some gore to back up the elegant front-cover illustration of a nude woman with a javelin pinning her to the weed-strewn street of a decaying city.

This is one of those "we came back and long ages had passed on Earth and we were overcome by disasters we could easily have avoided with a bit of sense" stories. The author comes from Romney marsh, now lives in Queensland, has given us three earlier books but still writes like a sheltered child from a traditional grammar school. Surely it can't be this easy to get a book published?

A.A. ATTANASIO - - WYVERN (Grafton, 1990, 640pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

The blockbuster is taking over. Shelves are straining under the weight of books that take almost as long to read as they did to write. They usually begin with a quotation, generally Heraclitus, and then a prologue ending with the birth of the hero. The first section follows the hero as he is trained by a wizened old sorcerer. The first section always ends with the mentor dying, usually by the hand of the chief villain making his first appearance. The traditional plot then continues with a second section in which the hero gets laid followed by the third section in which the hero kills the villain. If you want to win the Booker Prize only sections one and three.

This is not a prelude to an attack on Mr. Attanasio's book which follows most of these cliches and rattles along in a most entertaining fashion. The characters are well defined and suitably larger than life, the language is florid, the location exotic and the action well handled. The mystical elements of the hero Jaki Gefjon's powers as a soul-catcher are loosely defined and do not interfere with the lusty swordfights and sweeping sea battles. The author maintains admirable control over a narrative which could have become sprawling by keeping in close-up on the handful of leading characters throughout. My only caveat being the rather wimpy climax, I recommend this to anyone who enjoys historical adventure novels. But I could do without the self-important quotations from Shakespeare et al.

Terry Pratchett - - ERIC (Gollancz, 1990, 126pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Andy & Harriet Sawyer)

At the end of SOURCERY, Rincewind and the luggage are trapped in the Dungeon Dimensions, and we have had to wait through three other novels before we now find out how they escape.

Thanks to a mistake in Hell, Eric, a fourteen year old demonology hacker, manages to summon them instead of the demon Lord who was to offer him forbidden pleasures and dark delights. Rincewind ends up in a magic circle in Eric's bedroom trying to explain to the spotty youth that he is not, in fact a demon, can't grant three wishes and anyway ruling the world, meeting the most beautiful woman who ever lived and living forever aren't all they're cracked up to be.

The rest of the book just goes to prove that point.

ERIC is a large format novella rather than a novel, with plenty of Josh Kirby's glossy pictures. The story itself is quite thin, although there is the usual Terry Pratchett sharp humour to flesh it out. The targets range from the Trojan war to modern management techniques. We see how the Discworld was created, and the possible influence of a cheese and cress sandwich on the progress of evolution. We meet a jungle civilisation just waiting for the ruler of the world to turn up, a whole hell-ful of demons who have learned Customer Care from the human race and really know how to torture a damned soul, sorry consumer, and a neurotic parrot with a restricted wosname. (We disagree about how funny this character is, but that's the problem with doing collective reviews). Rincewind does a lot of running away; the reader does a lot of laughing.

Philip K. Dick - - **MARTIAN TIME-SLIP** (Gollancz, 1990, 220pp, £3.50)
(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

The main theme of **MARTIAN TIME-SLIP** might be summed up as: "You don't have to be mad to live here, but it helps." Of course, the same thing could be claimed about every other novel by Philip K. Dick, but MT-S states the position in no uncertain terms (or does it?) There is even a happy ending - of sorts. as Professor C.E.M. Joad (probably) once said: "It all depends upon what you mean by 'happy'."

MT-S is now regarded as a key novel in the Dick canon, but - for too many years - it had all the rarity value of spots on Jeffrey Archer's back. The magazine version was serialised in **WORLDS OF TOMORROW**, August-September 1963 as **ALL WE MARSMEN**. Ballantine published the complete novel in April 1964, but they didn't exactly overdo the initial/only (?) print run. MT-S remained little more than a title to most people until New English Library reprinted it in 1976, with an appreciative introduction by Brian W. Aldiss. This VGSF Classics edition will introduce MT-S to a new generation of readers, who might well believe that Dick wrote little else apart from the novelisation of **BLADE RUNNER** (joke - I think).

The plot is ingenious, but MT-S is not just about "isolated homesteaders" who "buddle along the lines of the great canals, in thrall to the powerful plumbing union which controls the water supply" (*blurb*). It features the archetypal Dickian hero/villain/fall guy, Goodmember Arnie Knott - an "Arthur Scargill on Mars" who heads the aforementioned plumbing union. The other - equally memorable - characters include Jack Bohlen, the slightly schizoid electronics repairman (another Dickian archetype!), and Manfred Steiner, the "time-slipping" autistic child whose ultimate withdrawal may (or may not) represent the only sane way out of a world gone mad.

Or... does Manfred Steiner merely represent one narrow band in a continuous spectrum of universal insanity: "... Arnie said he wasn't in a real world; he was in the fantasy of a schizophrenic, and that's been preying on my mind. It never occurred to me [Jack Bohlen] before how much our world is like Manfred's - I thought they were absolutely distinct. Now I see it's more a matter of degree.

Footnote: MT-S is set on a preposterously unrealistic Mars (in 1994!), with an atmosphere rich enough in oxygen to support life and thick enough for helicopters (!!) to be aerodynamically viable. And - like the "Marses" of Bracket, Bradbury, Clarke, Heinlein, Wyndham, Zelazny, etc. - it doesn't matter a tinker's damn.

Anna Lively - - **SACCHARIN CYANIDE** (Onlywomen Press, 1990, 146pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Less than half of the fourteen short stories in **SACCHARIN CYANIDE** could reasonably be described as science fiction or fantasy. In those stories that are SF, the science fiction element is less important than the radical-feminist-lesbian stance that the stories share with other Onlywomen Press publications. Any

author who writes from a particular social, sexual or political standpoint runs the risk of turning fiction into a polemic, but with a couple of glaring exceptions, Anna Lively keeps the ideological basis of the stories subordinate to the storytelling. Indeed, the power of stories, fables and the imagination is a theme that reappears throughout this book; in 'Differently Motivated' and 'Outrageous Fortune' it is the ability to tell tales that enables the protagonists to escape difficult situations. 'Outrageous Fortune' also has what is surely one of the most arresting last sentences in short fiction.

In fact, although these tales vary in tone from the disquieting title story which deals with pornography and violence against women to the wryly humorous 'Jennifer, or the Secret of My Success', and although they vary in quality from the gems to the flawed to those that simply fail to engage the reader's interest, most of them have a telling "cuncline" or final paragraph which brings them to a conclusion with a memorable flourish.

However, despite the panache of much of the writing, I would hesitate to recommend this book to the reader who is specifically looking for science fiction as it is usually defined. Many of the stories are well worth reading, but as speculative fiction they are very much on the periphery of the genre.

Gregory Benford - - **TIDES OF LIGHT** (Gollancz, 1990, 362pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

This novel is a sequel to **GREAT SKY RIVER** in which a ragged element of humanity battles to survive against a cruel and galaxy-encompassing civilisation of thinking machines, the Mech. The band of humans escape aboard an old starship and travel to another star system where they hope to find refuge, only to encounter a further threat - alien cyborgs of awesome power.

This is large-scale hard SF, and full of wonders; the tone is set by the opening scene, where the interstellar "sky" near the galactic centre is not dark but glows with turbulent molecular clouds and the accretion disc of a black hole. Space science, planetary engineering and other technical details fascinate. In two or three places Benford over-reaches himself and this reviewer, unable to believe in what he'd just read, was left wondering if he'd strayed into a fantasy novel by mistake.

The humans are reduced to the status of gypsies, slavaging and improvising among technology they understand only with the aid of micromind chip implants. This isn't a novel about character: all the humans except the hero, Cap'n Killeen, are sketchily drawn and the alien cyborg, Quath, is almost as interesting. The writing is workmanlike and the story, partly told from Quath's point of view, moves briskly from one action-filled crisis to another, and the ending makes it clear that a third volume is to be expected. I don't usually read hard SF, but I found this better than most.

Nicky Edwards - - **STEALING TIME** (Onlywomen Press, 1990, 190pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

Laurie S. Keller (1988) made some interesting observations and speculations on the hacking fraternity in an essay that explores some of the motivations behind the predominantly male obsession. The whole ethos of hacking is concerned with the display of expertise at "penetrating" or "overcoming" systems for no constructive reason. Keller concludes from this that hacking is a form of machismo which, as a result, casts women's role in new technology as passive and vulnerable. Popular SF has worked within this ideology; look at Gibson's misogynist future in **NEURONANCER** for evidence.

It is refreshing therefore to read a novel like **STEALING TIME** that is working against this background. Nicky Edwards has carefully extrapolated a vision of London at the end of the millenium, based upon popular issues from the late eighties, to write a radical feminist polemic. The novel is concerned with a lesbian

sisterhood involved in hacking into accounts and transferring money to support women's organisations. In the cashless society other means of fund raising have been made impossible and access to the necessary "Cash Transfer Facility" is restricted. The ruthless uniformed police are a caricature of patriarchy; incompetently attempting to expose their illicit activities by engaging in thinly veiled voyeurism.

The novel attempts to cover a great deal of ideological work at once and consequently Al, an adolescent computer prodigy, becomes lost within the lacklustre dialogue - you want to know more about her hearing disability and developing sexuality. The dialogue is used to such an extent that I suspect that the book was originally intended as a script.

Nevertheless, *STEALING TIME* is a worthy SF novel, as it addresses the issue of women and new technology which is very much ignored by the genre. I hope that other male readers are not discouraged by the proscriptive name of the publisher because *STEALING TIME* does not need to preach to the converted - it deserves a wider audience.

Melissa Scott - - *THE KINDLY ONES* (Gollancz, 1990, 372pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Can you accept these things in a novel: (i) a spacefaring civilisation 1,500 years after the invention of an FTL drive, still unable to mend nerve damage or regenerate a lost arm; (ii) a planetary civilisation in which minor infractions of a social code are punished by total ostracism, creating whole areas of "ghosts"; (iii) addressing a female ship's captain as "sir"; (iv) rather than introducing you to the salient aspects of two planets as the need arises, providing you instead with heavily technical "encyclopedia entries" at the front of the book, to be absorbed before you even know who or what is involved in the plot?

If none of these deters you, and if you are looking for a well-plotted, tautly written, sociologically-oriented adventure story by an established and well-liked author who does not allow genuine sexual equality to overlap into bitter feminism, then I think you will enjoy this book. Naming the planets Orestes and Electra, and interspersing quotes from Aeschylus' *ORESTEA*, may amuse, intrigue or annoy you depending on your grasp of ancient Greek theatre; spotting the parallels in the story and the way the author has adapted them to interstellar civilisation may give you an added kick, but you don't need to be that erudite to follow, and enjoy, the story.

I just wish I didn't get the feeling that hardly any of the described ambiances would actually exist in such a futureworld - there's too much sleaze to persuade me, I'm afraid.

Clifford D. Simak - - *RING AROUND THE SUN* (Mandarin, 1990, 205pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

I can think of few authors who deserve to have their work in print more than Simak. His writing, although from the Golden Age, is set apart from his contemporaries' by the realism and smallness of the settings (by smallness I don't mean in imagination, but in ordinariness). Simak's characters are real, they live in real places, usually small places. This is small town SF. And this isn't a bad thing, it makes his stories accessible to a wide audience.

RING AROUND THE SUN opens in just such a small town, in a world where there are everlasting razor blades and lightbulbs and Forever Cars starting to undermine the economy. Jay Vickers is a writer who is gradually drawn into the heart of the plot and who eventually brings the whole goings-on to a head.

It would be easy to dismiss this book because of the homeliness of the settings and characters but Simak doesn't really pull any punches, and when things turn nasty, they turn very nasty indeed.

"They had tipped the car over and rolled it into the

middle of the street... Someone threw a brick or stone at it and the sound of the object striking its metal boomed through the early morning street like a cannon shot.

Someone picked up whatever had been thrown and heaved it through the door of a hardware store... Men streamed in and came out again carrying mauls and axes."

Diana Wynne Jones - - *THE HOMEWARD BOUNDERS* (Methuen, 1990, 224pp, £2.99); *FIRE AND HEMLOCK* (Methuen, 1990, 341pp, £2.99); *HIDDEN TURNINGS* (Methuen, 1990, 183pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The two novels by Diana Wynne Jones here reviewed are perhaps her finest works - indeed among the finest of any kind of fantasy whether published under "adult's" or "children's" imprints. *THE HOMEWARD BOUNDERS* is one of the earliest of that subgenre which uses as its touchstone role-playing games. Jamie discovers Them engaged in their game (which, in brief, is us) and is thrown to the boundaries, doomed to wander from world to world as They make their moves. The rules state that Jamie may return home if he can, but will he recognise it? Discovering that there are other Homeward Bounders, Jamie strikes against Them is a conflict which has wider implications than he thinks. Inventive and witty, with sharp and humorous interplay of characters, *THE HOMEWARD BOUNDERS* says it all about "gaming" adaptations by sticking to the metaphor rather than the actuality.

In contrast, *FIRE AND HEMLOCK* is a larger, deeper book. This outstanding novel is less a retelling of border ballads such as "Tam Lin" and "Thomas the Rhymer" than a reflection of them in a contemporary love story. Again, it is about reality and manipulation, but while reflections are often blurred and shimmering, both the structure of the story and the relationships of its characters hold an ambiguity which may not be fully resolved even on the last page: but then, we are in the realm of faery, and can we expect otherwise?

At ten years old, Polly gatecrashes a funeral party and meets Thomas Lynn, recently divorced from Laurel, one of the powerful Leroy Perry clan. The girl and the young man strike up a friendship - to the wary disapproval of Polly's grandmother - which is sustained by an imaginative love of "hero business" in which they weave intricate stories involving fictional alter egos. Through the years they meet infrequently and exchange correspondence, even though the perry's warn them off each other and Polly becomes more and more affected by her parents' divorce. At one point Polly, tossed like a shuttlecock between one self-centred parent and another is only saved from potential tragedy by the fortuitous presence of Tom in the same town.

It becomes clear to the reader - less so to Polly, although she is, in a way, given more clues than we are - that we are in the presence of the Elf-Queen herself who just as in the ballads takes up young men and uses their life-force. The ballads, though, are at best only a tentative guide to the identity of the Perry clan and how to deal with them. Despite the name, Thomas Lynne is nearer to Thomas the Rhymer than Tam Lin, although Polly makes a creditable Janet at the climax of the novel.

Diana Wynne Jones's success with the book is bound up with her giving us real twentieth-century people with real concerns, often quite different from their "parts" in a recurring myth. Janet is concerned with her school life and domestic instability, Tom with his career as a musician. When Laurel eventually causes Polly to forget about Tom (until, at 19 she begins to discover a "double memory") it's not clear how much this "spell" is merely a glamour (the traditional gift of faery folk) or a true reality change. While motives are hidden, actions frequently have startling results. I doubt if any reader will discover all the implications of the book after a first reading, but it well repays a third and a fourth. *FIRE AND HEMLOCK* is a superlative book, on a level with the very best of Alan Garner (*RED SHIFT: THE OWL SERVICE*) but few others.

HIDDEN TURNINGS is a collection of a dozen stories edited by Diana Wynne Jones. Her own 'The Master' offers a rare grimness, and Douglas Hill's 'True believer' is a suitably OTT evocation of the occult leading to a conclusion you're long expecting. Robert Vestall's

'Fifty-Fifty' and Helen Cresswell's 'The Sky Sea' are based on folk anecdotes. All these stories have a loose theme of how the fantastic in some way touched the lives of the characters - Westall's, most interestingly, taking this realistically, i.e. without a "supernatural" element but making his contribution (along with Lisa Tuttle's 'The Walled Garden', about the ironic effect of a glimpse into the future, the joint second-best in the collection. The best? Well, that has to be Terry Pratchett's 'Turntables of the Night' in which an obsessive record collector meets Someone Else who is also a collector. But not, it appears, of records...

James Blaylock - - **THE LAST COIN** (Grafton, 1990, 399pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

James Blaylock seems to specialise in writing eccentrically different fantasies, and **THE LAST COIN** is no exception. Imagine a head-on collision between **ILLUMINATUS** and John Irving, and you have a fair idea of the framework on which Blaylock hangs his tale of conspiracy and character.

The plot is simply told (and given away in the prologue): the mysterious Pennyman is gathering together the thirty silver coins of Judas Iscariot, to make himself immortal. He is five short of success but only one remains hidden. He settles himself into the Californian boarding house run by Andrew and Rose Vanbergen, where the fun really begins.

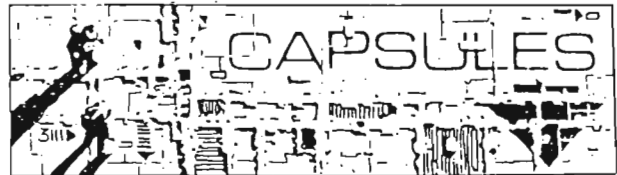
In Andrew Vanbergen, Blaylock has drawn a unique fantasy character - the hero as complete fruitcake. Andrew is an impulsive, obsessive guy and, along with his conspiracy-theorist friend Pickett, he steadily becomes more entangled in Pennyman's plans, as nature takes a hand in preventing the collector achieving his dastardly aims. Cats, pigs, toads, turtles, parrots, squids, possums (and even Leviathan itself) all take a turn at helping the story along, with the Wandering Jew making a decisive appearance.

Blaylock's magic lies as much in the superbly drawn characters as in the basic idea and plot-line. Andrew is a priceless creation, and Pennyman coozes evil from behind a respectable facade very convincingly. An excellent book, and one that would make a great film in the mould of **THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK**. Are you listening, Hollywood?

Barbara Hambly - - **DARK HAND OF MAGIC** (Unwin, 1990, 309pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This is the third book following the adventures of Sun Wolf, a supposedly retired mercenary and inadvertent wizard, and his erstwhile second-in-command and lover Star Hawk (the first two are **THE LADIES OF MANRIGYN** and **THE WITCHES OF WENSHAR**, probably better read first if you don't already know them). A sub-theme of the earlier books was an exploration of the attraction (particularly for Star Hawk) of the Warrior Myth. Warriors are tough, competent, ruthlessly realistic people with tremendous loyalty, courage, personal honesty, insight and integrity. They are utterly dedicated to their art, which is literally life and death to them. This book changes all that, by exploring the seamy side of life as a mercenary, from betrayal to bad food, in merciless detail. Star Hawk's love-at-first-sight for the warrior life is wearing thin. She sees her enemies, friends, and people she doesn't know and never had the chance to care about killed. She sees lots of mud and futility while trying to back up Sun Wolf in his attempt to locate and nullify a curse on his former troop. She also sees enough magical atrocity to convince her that her fellow mercs are right in considering wizards dangerous to know, even when neither mad nor bad. Especially half-trained but powerful wizards, like Sun Wolf. This is fantasy that thinks; taking stock of situations and events and exploring them with disturbing honesty.



Robert Lynn Asprin & Lynn Abbey (Eds.) - - **THIEVES' WORLD 9: BLOOD TIES** (Titan, 1990, 238pp, £3.99)

Nine more chapters from the usual gang and an interesting afterword by C.J. Cherryh, all written in 1986. According to a note at the back it is the penultimate volume, which may mean that in the 10th, **AFTERMATH**, the authors will no longer be constrained to keeping most of the major characters alive. It's been more interesting than most such fantasies, let down by a bewilderingly confused plot which never seems to go anywhere, but has maintained a good, excellent standard due to the talents of its many creators. (Terry Broome)

Gael Baudino - - **DRAGON SWORD** (Legend, 1990, 452pp, £4.50)

Aging hippy research assistant Suzanne Helling is transported to conservative Professor Solomon Braithwaite's archetypal yet anachronistic "fantasy" world, Grylth. Occasional creaky plotting and dialogue do not extinguish the original twists contrived by Baudino, but I am not sure that the subject matter can be stretched successfully to the promised (threatened?) trilogy. (Benedict S. Cullum)

Marion Zimmer Bradley (Ed.) - - **SWORD & SORCESS 5** (Headline, 1990, 184pp, £3.99)

A workmanlike but uninspiring/uninspired collection of short stories relating to female S&S protagonists. None of the stories stand out although nearly all are readable enough. These are all right if you like that sort of thing, but are very short on originality. (Helen McNabb)

Nancy A. Collins - - **SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK** (Futura, 1990, 253pp, £3.50)

Lots of explicit violence and gore as the vampirish heroine struggles against her demonic other self, and battles with thugs, zombies and other vampires in a sinister alternative underworld infected with the supernatural. An original, energetic and exciting horror novel; with more than a touch of black humour. Terrific stuff. (Geoff Cowie)

Hugh Cook - - **THE WISHSTONE AND THE WONDERWORKERS** (Corgi, 1990, 448pp, £3.99)

Volume six (yes, you'll need your other hand to count them) of the **Chronicles of an Age of Darkness: The Text**, we are assured, had been accompanied by a "full two million words of explication and interpolation". We should be grateful, I suppose, that "most of this overgrowth has been cut away". This tome, along with others which put a considerable weight upon the shelves of my local W.H. Smith's, is for fans only and does nothing for me at all. (Steven Tew)

David Gemmell - - **THE LAST GUARDIAN** (Legend, 1990, 279pp, £3.99)

Continuation of Sipstrassi Tales set in a post-holocaust America. Weak attempt at fantasy explanation of the Bermuda Triangle, and vague characterisation doesn't help Gemmell's cause. Disappointing ending. Unbelievable plot. Leave it on the shelf. (Vernon Leigh)

Thomas Harris - - **THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS** (Mandarin, 1990, 352pp, £3.99)

If you have to classify, this is a "crime" novel rather than a "horror": no dark fantasy, no supernatural, just a suspenseful plot and a chilling analysis of the mind of a highly intelligent psychopathic serial killer whose professional expertise (he is a psychiatrist!) is needed to track down another mass murderer. Yet it's been well received in the horror field and justly so. Like the best horror, it illuminates places we'd rather not see lit up while -unlike the worst horror - its shocks seem never to be dictated by the market rather than the story. Harris's pacing is masterly, his characterisation superb and elegant. Above all, the tale doesn't just horrify - it scars. (Andy Sawyer)

Douglas Hill - - **THE FRAXILLY FRACAS** (Gollancz, 1990, 220pp £3.50)

Alan Fraser reviewed the trade paperback edition in PI 82 and found it disappointing. I did too. It's straightforward adventure SF, with a cowardly amoral hero transporting a small container across the galaxy one jump ahead of an assorted band of cops, pirates, mobsters, revolutionar-

ies and supermen, and is reminiscent of Eric Frank Russell and Harry Harrison in the Good Old Days. Or of a more adult version of Hill's *Galactic Warlord* books for younger readers: but not that much more adult, when one considers the heavily camp and giggly sex scenes which yes, are meant to be funny but so is Bruce Forsyth. Postscript: my daughter pinched the review copy and thinks it's great. Perhaps Alan and I have just read too much. Try it for yourselves. (Andy Sawyer)

Bernard King -- *BLOOD CIRCLE* (Sphere, 1990, 312pp, £3.50)

In this S&S (Satan 'n' Sadism, that is) drama there's a line about something going beyond the simply unpleasant into the downright nasty. Exactly. (Andy Sawyer)

Angela Littler -- *THE DREAD* (Simon & Schuster, 1990, 95pp, £2.99)

Witty children's novel written in diary form from the viewpoint of 14-year old Eve. Simple but effective account of how two youngsters, abetted by benevolent "blob", battle against an unseen potential invader from outer space. (Benedict S. Cullum)

M.S. Murdoch -- *HAMMER OF MARS* (Penguin, 1990, 279pp, £3.99)

All I can add to Ken Lake's review (PI 85) of previous Buck Rogers books is that whatever its literary failings, the old pulp-SF had a panache and confidence about it which is absent in this modern re-working. This stuff makes *Dragonlance* seem positively refreshing. Give it to a friend who thinks all SF is moronic trash: it'll make them feel so good to have their prejudices confirmed. (Andy Sawyer)

Jennifer Roberson -- *DAUGHTER OF THE LION* (Corgi, 1990, 372pp, £3.99)

Jennifer Roberson is a wriet whose work has appeared in several of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Swords and Sorceress* anthologies. *DAUGHTER OF THE LIONS* is the sixth of a series of what is now eight published books in Roberson's dynastic saga of a family of the Cheysuli race of shepe-changers, a sort of cross between the Forsytes and *BORN FREE*. It deals with one woman's battle against an evil sorcerer who wishes to combine the Cheysuli power with his own by forcing her to bear his child. I found the book too predicatable in format and sombre in tone for me, but I am sure it will not disappoint fans of this long-running fantasy series. (Alan Fraser)

James R. Silke -- *LORDS OF DESTRUCTION* (Grafton, 1990, 319pp, £3.99)

Run-of-the-mill fantasy novel about death-dealing warriors bent on rescuing georgeous maidens in distress, witches that "spell" mayhem, and mischief in the night. Story is set in the abysmal depths of Earth's dark prehistoric "Atlantean past". The second in the Frank Frazetta's 'Death Dealer' series and strictly for fantasy fans only. (Chris C. Bailey)

David VanMeter Smith -- *TRINITY GROVE* (Avon, 1990, 277pp, \$3.95)

Cambridge University is the scene for a series of ritual murders which occur with shocking regularity from time immemorial. A sinister commune, an American student, a mysterious girl with a Celtic name and a wily police inspector have bit-parts: the main focus appears to be the University itself. (Andy Sawyer)

Guy N. Smith -- *THE UNSEEN* (Sphere, 1990, 268pp, £3.50)

Brought back from near-death after a crash, bank manager Ed Cain finds that there was something nasty in the life-support machine. Something for the melodramatic end of the horror market. (Andy Sawyer)

James V. Smith jr. -- *BEASTSTALKER* (Grafton, 1990, 398 pp, £3.99)

In this violent thriller (sequel to *BEASTMAKER*) the monsters, though horrific, are secondary to the conflict between the quasi-governmental Corporation determined to keep their existence secret and Kirk, the Vietnam veteran caught up in the Corporation's murderous plans. Plenty of gore and chewing-up of peoples' limbs, though. (Andy Sawyer)

Kevin Stein -- *BROTHERS MAJERE* (*Dragonlance Preludes 3*) (Penguin, 1990, 349pp, £3.99)

The relationship of the illustrations to the text is the same as that of the text to the English language. The heroic era may have been pre-literate, it was not illiterate. (L.J. Hurst)

Keith Taylor -- *THE WILD SEA* (Headline, 1990, 202pp, £3.50)

A Dark Ages swords & sorcery novel set around the Channel Islands. The main characters in this volume (third in the Bard series) are Gudrun Blackhair the pirate (a sort of female Conan) and her lover Felimid the Bard. It's tosh, and the prose suffers from a risible excess of adjectives, but S & S addicts may enjoy it. (Geoff Cowie)

J.R.R. Tolkien -- *THE RETURN OF THE SHADOW* (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 497pp £5.50)

Why are initial drafts of best-sellers so fascinating? Is it a way of sharing the author's frustration as he writes himself into a corner and starts again, or suddenly realises that an idea would be even better if ... Once more Christopher Tolkien returns to his father's papers and presents the origin of *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* up to the end of the first volume. We see Frodo start off as "Bingo", possibly even Bilbo himself, and the identity of the Ring slowly revealing itself to the author. Most interesting of all, Strider/Aragorn was originally a hobbit, Trotter; a personage strangely familiar to Frodo. But why? As Tolkien struggles to find out, his conception slowly crystallises, but his increasing dissatisfaction with the original idea becomes more obvious.

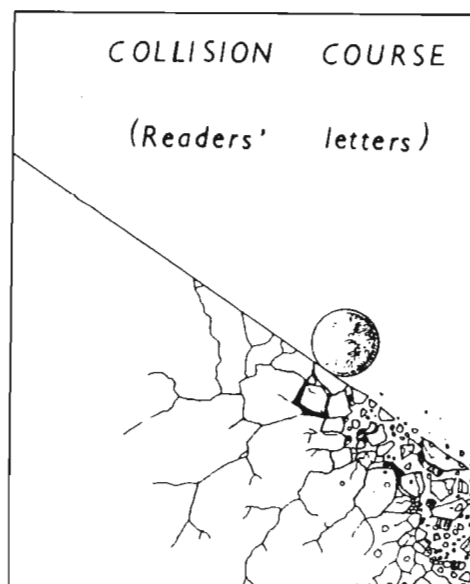
Christopher Tolkien's notes take the reader ably through a mass of confusing material to chart the development of a mere sequel to *THE HOBBIT* into something deeper, wider, and darker. If you're planning a Ph.D. on Tolkien I hope you're buying all these background books: if not, they are still of great interest. (Andy Sawyer)

Kurt Vonnegut, jr -- *THE SIRENS OF TITAN* (Gollancz, 1989, 224pp, £3.50)

Reprint of vintage Vonnegut, circa 1959 and not showing its age. If you haven't read it already, go out and buy it. If you can't buy it, steal it. If you can't steal it, despair. If you find you need a well-worn cliché to work up your interest, the first one that springs to mind is "Vonnegut compares with Dick at his best." No, let me rephrase that ... "Dick at his best compares with Vonnegut." Well, you get my meaning. Honest, this is the Right Stuff. (Charles Stross)

Angus Wells -- *THE WAY BENEATH* (Orbit, 1990, 345pp, £4.50)

Taws the Messenger has been defeated once too often and the god Ashar decides to take personal revenge on the Kingdoms, cutting short Kedryn's plan to establish a constitutional monarchy with a Parliament. Perhaps the idea of the god discarding his underlings, perhaps the unexpected political liberalism, perhaps the increased development of the characters, makes this much more gripping than *WRATH OF ASHAR* or *THE USURPER*. Certainly we feel for Wynett, trapped in the netherworld with a considerate helper whose identity we 99% know - but it's that 1% which makes all the difference between monotony and suspense. Will fantasy readers enjoy this? Mayhap, as the characters keep saying. (Andy Sawyer)



((As I keep saying, space prevents us from publishing all the letters received for PI, but in the interest of fair play we must here let it be declared that some writers do have interesting lives. In fact, it beats me how some people actually get any writing done. Let Arthur C. Clarke explain...))

Laughed my head off at Ken Lake's review (PI 83) of CRADLE, which, still chortling, I've rushed to Gentry Lee.



His "simple sampling" is simplistic indeed - how the hell does he know what's "outside my experience"? I spent much of 1955 - 75 watching some pretty exotic fauna at work and play in 23rd Street's famous Hotel Chelsea. Some of the action that took place during my residency:

Andy Warhol filmed THE CHELSEA GIRLS - and was shot by Valerie Solinas, who I always liked, though not necessarily for that reason.

The Irvings forged Howard Hughes' diary. I'll never forget dining with Cliff and Edith while we watched a character on TV, wrapped up like Claude Rains in THE INVISIBLE MAN, claiming that he was H.H.. The studio forcibly unveiled him when we got to the dessert - revealing, I think, Mel Brooks. (Some time I'll describe the occasion I accused Mel of stealing my Oscar, and his disarming reply.)

Robert Mapplethorpe had his nipple pierced. I was happy to miss that historic event, but attended the premiere of the resulting movie at the Theatre of Modern art. (In a word: Yuck!)

My good friend Charles (LOST WEEKEND) Jackson, accidentally (?) OD'ed. When I met him on the sidewalk next morning, his lover confided to me "I'll never get over it." I hope he did.

Sid Vicious murdered his girl, and then killed himself.

Other memories are less fraught, but may suggest to Ken that my inputs - and acquaintances - cover a wider range than he seems to imagine (and the following are only the Chelsea ones!)

Andy's star Viva suckling her baby in the elevator, while we all smiled approvingly.

Running into Paul Bowles (whose SHELTERING SKY is being filmed even as I write this) in the same creaking box - after we'd last met on his little island in Ceylon. (Gore Vidal later told me: "He invited me there, but I missed the boat.")

Chatting with Tennessee Williams when the switch-board put him through to me instead of Paul.

Encountering Timothy Leary in the lobby, and thinking he looked like a magnificent ruin.

Introducing "Hair's" far-out authors, Rado and Ragni, to a NASA astronaut; they made a delightful contrast.

Getting Norman Mailer to pose for my very first Polaroid shot (wish I still had the photo, dammit).

Introducing Bill Burroughs to Alan Ginsburg, or vice versa, in the Mafia-haunted bar next door.

Hypnotising pedestrians from a hundred feet overhead by shining my laser on the sidewalk in front of them; they would follow the mysterious spot like puppets on a string. Among the VIP's I entertained with this harmless amusement: The President of the United Nations; Stanley Kubrick; Walter Cronkite...

This is making me horribly nostalgic for a place (and a city) I don't expect to see again. So I'll stop before I get too maudlin, though not before giving some friendly educational advice to Ken:

1. Read the "Afterword" to RAMA II, which explains exactly how my collaboration with the energetic and prolific (two wives, six children, plus key roles in Viking, Voyager, Galileo...) Gentry Lee arose- and who did what and to whom...

2. Read "A House of Good Repute" and related sequences in THE GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS - which, I assure you, is All My Own Work. It may teach Ken (Dare I suggest that his experience is limited?) a thing or two.

Incidentally, a major theme of GHOST is the Mandelbrot Set, which I see is featured on the cover of Matrix 87. Bantam have a superb version on their dust-jacket, and Gollancz use it as a recurring motif in their edition. It must be one of the few novels with a mathematical appendix. (Don't worry - nothing more complicated than addition and multiplication.)

[[There are reviews of two reprinted Arthur C. Clarke collections elsewhere in this issue. CRADLE has now been issued as a mass-market paperback from Orbit (£3.99) and there will be another look at the book in a future issue.]]

"Upon the rack in print"

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
and ANALOG, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER 1990

reviewed by Edward James

The August Asimov's is an issue well worth taking note of -- and buying, and reading. It has some excellent stories (two by British writers, if Ian McDonald will allow me, with apologies, to include Northern Ireland in that adjective), and an extraordinary essay by Harlan Ellison -- the longest ever published by Asimov's, I think, and one of Ellison's angriest (and that is saying something). "Xenogenesis", the article is called, and it is about the aliens whom sf writers have spawned. All fans, or those who want to know about fandom, ought to read it, and some, at least (maybe all in the US, rather than here ... maybe), ought to start searching their consciences. It is a detailed, bitter account of Ellison's experiences, and those of many other writers he has canvassed, at the hands of the psychotic elements in fandom: about the petty, and not so petty, abuse that writers have to put up with, the major inconveniences (fans applying in writers' names for subscriptions to dozens of journals), the major incivilities (kidnapping Spider Robinson and driving him huge distances to a Callahan's Diner), the straight criminalities (theft, blackmail), and the appalling incidents (a fan searching out Allan Dean Foster at a con in order to throw a cupful of vomit in his face). "And those of you in the sane, courteous ninety-five per cent (it ends) ... well, perhaps this concentrated jolt of nastiness will alert you to the other five per cent who roam and foam among us... Warm vomit. Xenogenesis. Have a nice day."

Of the stories, Ian McDonald's "Towards Kilimanjaro" is a must. We've seen it before, I suppose: aliens landing, and changing humanity into something different. It is reminiscent of *Blood Music*, among other stories. But the writing is far superior to anything that Greg Bear, or most other writers, can do. Its poetic tone, its intelligent worldly-wise voice, its cosmopolitan manner (the Irish in Kenya), its genuine scientific speculation, are like those of Brian Aldiss at his very best. McDonald (particularly if he learns to discipline his novels better) is surely going to be the big British (sorry) sf name of the '90s. Almost as enjoyable is Keith Roberts's "Mrs Byres and the Dragon": a quiet, evocative story about a fairly ordinary, but beautifully visualised, woman, and the little dragon that took up residence in her garden, and the havoc which strikes both their lives. A lovely story, and it is good to see Keith Roberts back in a major American publication.

The other stories are above average too. The promising writer Alexander Jablovkov offers "The Death Artist", about a World in which some achieve their status by the manner of their (clones') magnificent deaths: an attempt at a far future alienness which rivals those of Silverberg (the master in that field). M. Shayne Bell's "Dry Niger" is an effective story about a twenty-first century (?) Africa, and its struggles against drought, Western technology and Western exploitation. Terry Bisson's "Bears Discover Fire" is a delightfully written short tale about the encounter between some Americans and intelligent bears. Dafydd ab Iugh's "The Coon Rolled Down and Ruptured his Larinks, A Squeezed Novel by Mr. Skunk" was the one I liked least, partly for its gimmickry. Though it had its good points too: an interesting scenario (intelligent animals seeking a way of coexisting with humans in a post-holocaust California), and the most tasteful scene of bestiality between a boy and his dog in the whole genre of sf.

The September Asimov's was almost as good as the previous month's: seven stories and three poems hiding behind a splendid astronomical painting on the cover by

Michael Bates. The first story is a novella by R. Garcia y Robertson, whose "The Wagon God's Wife", an excellent re-creation of the generation in which Viking Norway turned to Christianity, was in Asimov's last December. This time he brings us "Not Fade Away" -- Dark Age Irishmen (for once fairly authentic), a time-traveller from the future and a woman from our world. All in a wonderful gallimaufry, well-characterised and with a classic and clever manipulation of time paradoxes. Garcia y Robertson is a writer worth watching out for. The other novella, "Solip: System", by Walter Jon Williams, is rather more familiar, set in an oft-visited cyberpunk world of ruthless businessmen, orbital habitats, and transplant personalities. The protagonist Reno's mind has been read over the forebrain of a master-criminal businessman Roon; the resulting plots and counter-plots build up relentlessly up to a satisfyingly enigmatic resolution: recommended, like G. y R. In addition there is Charles Sheffield's chilling look at the life of a geriatric megalomaniac, in "Health Care System"; Esther M. Friesner's amusing tale of a fairy-tale giant in modern New York, "Blunderbore"; and Patricia Anthony's "For No Reason", a neat little story about a scientist investigating ants, whose mindset begins to be taken over by his study-material. But perhaps the best story in the issue is by the Australian writer Greg Egan, well-known to readers of *Interzone*, whose "The Safe-Deposit Box" recalls Eric Brown's "The Time-Lapsed Man" in its relentless investigation of a man in extraordinary circumstances: someone who finds himself waking up in a different body each morning -- always in the same locality. The safe-deposit box holds his memories. A classic sfnal situation, reminiscent not just of Brown but of Dick and other greats. Another must.

The August *Analog* led with a novella by Paul Ash, called "The Hornless Ones": about the encounter between a human mission and a race of horned winged humanoids who had, generations before, been created by a human scientist. The point of view is that of one of the winged beings: there are no frills, but it is well told, with a cleverly constructed alien society, and a morally satisfying plot. The other novella also concerned the exploitation by man of other beings: Bernard Deitchman's "Lord of Fishes" is an action story about the attempt to use orcas (killer-whales) in the course of Soviet-American hostilities. The stuff on the orcas (dolphins, not whales) had the ring of authenticity about it; the story appealed to my subconscious urge to bring back the didacticism to sf. The other stories were all perfectly readable, but not as entertaining as the novellas. J. Brian Clarke's "Return of the Alphanauts" concerned the psychological problems of interstellar voyagers readjusting to people on Earth: not psychologically at all convincing. Marianne J. Dyson's "Fireworks in Orbit" is a barely fictional story about a fatal accident in orbit. And "Matchmaker" is a short by Thomas A. Easton, set in the same world as in other *Analog* and *F & SF* stories recently, in which most transport is via genetically adapted animals (genimals). Here some bulldogs, bred as trucks, revert to type. Amusing enough, but scientifically rather silly (as Pete Kozziar points out forcefully in "Brass Tacks", the letter column).

In September *Analog* saw the start of a new two-part serial, W.R. Thompson's *Outlaw*. There were a couple of novelettes: Grey Rollins's "Something in the Air", a rather nice extrapolation from everyone's frustrations with the public utilities, involving a determined inventor on the Moon who develops his own oxygen-generating device and tries to secede from the system; and Doug Larsen's "Only the Weatherman", a rather dull tale about future weather control. The shorts were not that much better: Jeffrey G. Liss's "A Robot in Every Job" is a like a fictionalised editorial, offering a solution to the unemployment problem created by the excessive use of robots; while Rob Chilson's "Yearning: Morning, Forenoon, Evening" is yet another look at the romantic figures of star-men through the eyes of an adolescent. If you buy this issue, you will probably be buying it for the serial by W.R. Thompson. It's a sequel to two earlier stories -- "Maverick" in December 1989, and "Varmint" in Mid-December 1989 -- and while knowing the relationship between unorthodox ambassador Nancy McDonough and her husband John Baxter McDonough (if you knew Nancy, you'd know why he took her name rather than the other way round), and their earlier adventures with

two alien races, the Kya and the Nomads, would certainly help, it is not necessary. *Outlaw* is the story of the impending war between Nomads and humans/Kya; the gradual understanding that there were two groups of Nomads involved; and the (inevitable) saving of Earth, by a combination of deduction, action and good old human determination. Rather conventional, with an *Analog* emphasis on problem-solving rather than literary fireworks, but readable enough.

The October *Analog*, apart from the conclusion to *Outlaw*, had a novella, a novelette and a couple of shorts. The novella was Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff's "Heroes", a story of time-travel and an attempt to change history which could have come from *Analog* anytime in the last thirty years, even down to the Kelly Freas illustrations. Mind you, the crucial event is the attempted assassination of Gorby in 1992. Otherwise it is routinely written, but cleverly plotted and a good read. Much the same can be said of British writer Ian Stewart's contribution: "Wall of Death". Intriguing science, as usual with Stewart, this time in relation to a nuclear power station, and the solution found to foil a plot by Green extremists to blow it up if their demands were not met. And not an unsympathetic treatment of Green aims, and of some of the dilemmas that Greens are faced with, unlike some earlier *Analog* stories which deal with them. I enjoyed both the shorts: "The Man on the Cover", editor Stanley Schmidt's own amusing version of the old paranoia that aliens are with us, masquerading as humans. It is written in the first person: the alien plot is discovered as a result of a cover painting published on the March *Stupefying*. The aliens are not so different from us after all (or are they?): they are businessmen looking for a quick buck. The best of the stories, though, was "To Tame a Tiger", another in Mary Caraker's series of gentle (and pacific-ist) tales about Morgan Faraday, interstellar school-teacher with a gift for understanding the alien. There have been half-a-dozen or so now; presumably coming out one day in book-form, if they haven't already done so.

Finally there is the October *Asimov's*. The longest story, over fifty pages of it, is Silverberg's "Lion Time in Timbuctoo", an alternative world story set in the same time-line as *Gate of Worlds*, back in 1967: the Black Death wiped out most of Europe, the Renaissance never happened, Aztec and Inca Empires survive, and the Turks are the dominant power in Europe and beyond. This story is set in the 20th century, when the Turkish Empire has begun to decay; England (no mention of Scotland, Wales, or Ireland, I think) has regained its independence, and other powers are pulling away. The story is set in Timbuctoo, capital of a great African kingdom; the plot revolves around the international power struggles which erupt on the death of the old king. Complex, colourful, witty, thoroughly readable, as, for me, almost all Silverberg is. And his alternate history is a fascinating one. Phillip C. Jennings's "The Betrothal", a fantasy style sf story set on the planet of Ping (?): the only magazine novelette I can recall to require (or at least to attain) a map. The image of the enormous creaking royal palace moving across the plains is a memorable one, and there's some splendidly mysterious alien biology, and some quite good writing. Worth trying. As is the other novelette: our own Ian Watson's "Gaudi's Dragon". The crescendo, high-up in the towers of a sort-of completed Sagrada Familia (Gaudi's great church in Barcelona, which they are at the moment desperately working on in the hope that a bit more of it will be finished by the time of the Barcelona Olympics), is fantastic, in every sense of the word; the build-up, with a great deal of local Barcelonan colour dragged in a bit too obviously, I found rather too long. But the story gives one more good reason for buying this issue. In addition you'll find a slightly twee story from Kathryn Cramer, "The End of Everything"; a fun tale about a hobo gang taking over a circus -- "A Half-Dime Adventure", by Don Webb; a superb story from Nancy Kress about a new adventure sport adopted by the orbitals that circle an Earth totally destroyed by pollution and/or war -- which involves teams trying to travel to and identify as many of the annihilated cities as possible in a given time -- a wry, or bitter, look at the way in which humans can accept the unthinkable as the norm in no time flat; and a poem by Bruce Boston which commits a serious solecism in Latin grammar in the very first line. What is American education coming to?!

INTERZONE 38 - 40 (August - September 1990)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

IZ 38 could well prove to be a much sought-after issue, by Aldiss collectors at least. Not only is it a BWA "special" but it also contains a "freebie" booklet, a strange concoction of prose and pictures by Aldiss entitled 'Sex and the Black Machine'. The magazine itself has a wide range of Aldiss material - including an illustration - the best of which is the short story 'A Life of Matter and Death'. Here the life of one Alec Grayhorn is examined via the account of his brother. Alec accidentally introduces the beautiful Odonata, alien "dragonflies" whose life-cycle influences human attitudes both to the dead and the living. It's a thoughtful, finely-crafted work. Of note too is Colin Greenland's illuminating interview with Aldiss. The remainder of this sixty-fifth birthday celebration is so-so: an overview of some of the highlights of Aldiss's career; an extract from his "literary autobiography" BURY MY HEART AT W.H. SMITH'S (great title!) and one from DRACULA UNBOUNDED. The latter I found to be most unsatisfying, but then I find that extracts from novels usually have this effect on me.

Away from Aldiss, there's Greg Bear's 'Heads'. If you can ignore the convenience of having both the featured lines of scientific research reaching fruition simultaneously, Bear has drawn together neatly all the threads of his story: part two, then, certainly lives up to the promise of the first installment. Minor pieces are Susan Beeston's tale of exploitation, 'Heart of Santa Rosa', and Brian Stableford's alternate worlds short-short, 'Minimoments'. Finally, the illustrations this issue are by Ian Sanderson, one of whose photographs was the cause of some protest in one of the earlier IZs.

IZ 38 is a mixed bag; #39 is more pleasing - a varied yet consistently good mix. Topping both the fiction and the non-fiction is that old IZ favourite, Brian Stableford. 'The Invertebrate Man' is the story, simply yet effectively told, of a man whose early experience shapes his career, through which he eventually comes to terms with himself. Oh, there are giant, deadly spiders in here too. As part of the 'Big Sellers' series Stableford looks at Raymond E. Feist, examining his work first as an example of roleplaying games being translated into fiction, and then using Tolkien's functional analysis of fantasy. Most interesting ... As a counterpoint to this serious examination David Garnett's 'Now read On ...' is a hilarious maickeytake of fantasy and writers. Also on the lighter side, Bruce Sterling takes an amusing look at workshop stories - in effect, a how-not-to-write-sf guide.

The rest of the fiction is anything but light-hearted. At times powerful and disturbing, Lisa Tuttle's 'Lizard Lust' is a tale of sexual power and dependency, lizard being a metaphor for penis. Keith Brooke's fictional corporation, GenGen, is going strong in the future and Man's exploitation of space is matched by GenGen's exploitation of Man. In 'Beefcake' Brooke's skill is in his successful depiction of Maria's dignity despite her condition. Ian R. Macleod in 'Past Magic' maintains his earlier form; here a woman reclaims her past by cloning her dead daughter. The story is sensitively handled by Macleod, though it's marred in the end by his having a clone reach adulthood in only a few years. With 'Dilation Sleep' Alastair Reynolds provides a tighter, more conventional tale than that of his debut. This one deals - like Macleod's - with loss, this time that of a starship's crew member who, fleeing a biocybernetic virus, leaves his wife behind. On the remaining non-fiction, an interview with Larry Niven and Steven Barnes is best when examining their method of collaboration. It's good to see Charles Platt back, though I think he's mistaken in his contention that the notion of minority and conservative groups being space colonists is one which hasn't been explored in SF (Stableford's *Daedalus* series springs to mind). One final comment - in the past I've been most unimpressed by the battered condition IZ has arrived in through my letterbox. A pat on the back, then, for the new, thicker and - I'm happy to report - effective cover. Pristine copies at last!

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