

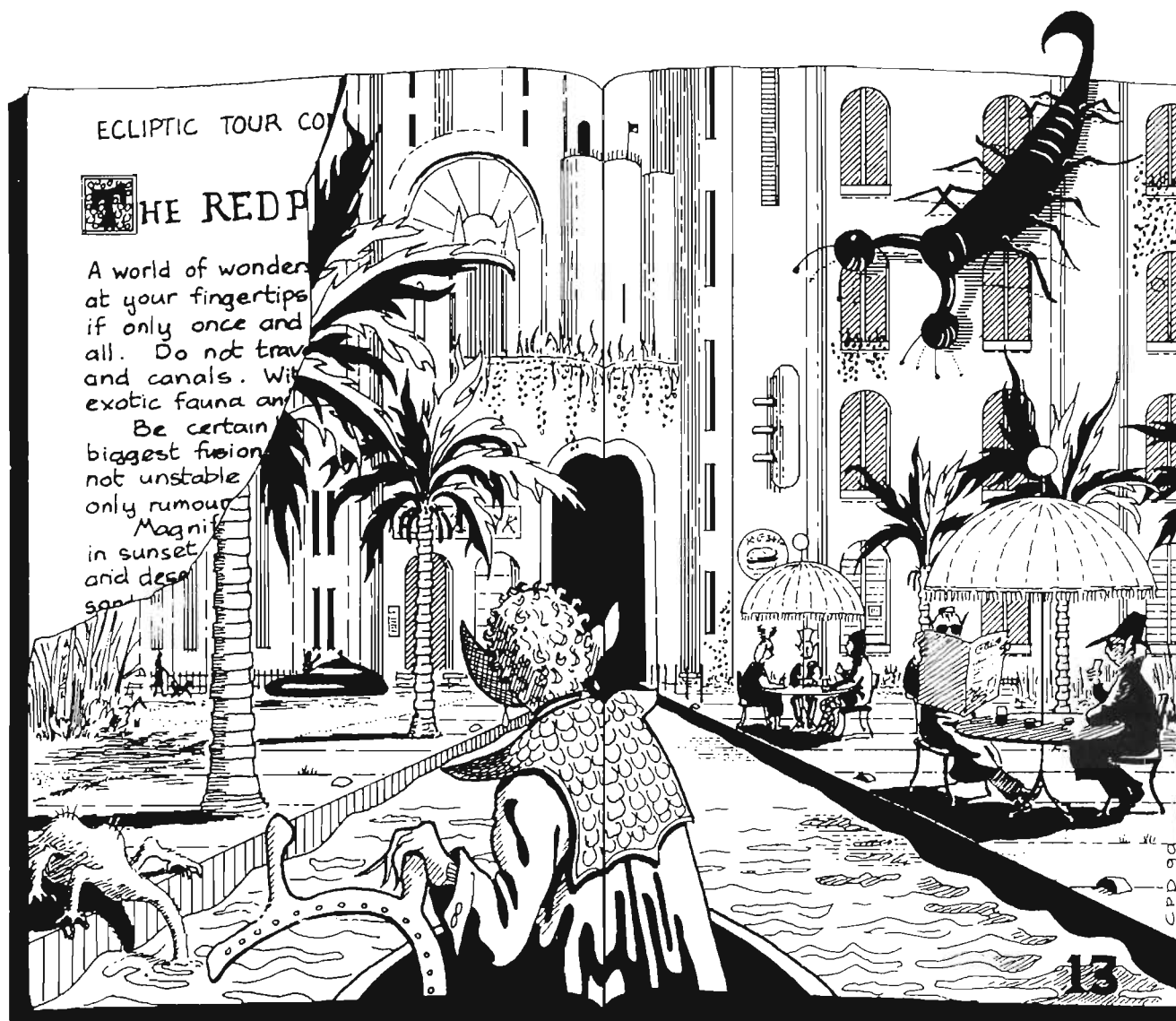


Paperback Inferno

87

The Review of paperback SF

Dec. 1990 - Jan. 1991





Issue 87, December 1990/January 1991

A publication of the British Science Fiction Association, edited by Andy Sawyer.
ISSN 0260 - 0595
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Printed by PDC Copyprint, 11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4AF.

Production Assistants: Steve Grover, Kev McVeigh.

CONTRIBUTIONS: *PI* reviews are commissioned in advance, but BSFA members who wish to join the reviewing team may write to the Editorial address. Contributions of cover/interior artwork and fillers are particularly welcome. *PI* does not normally accept feature articles, but is inclined to look favourably on ideas for short pieces with a specific reference to the paperback SF scene. Please note that there is no payment for publication.

Membership of the BSFA costs £12 per year and is available from JOANNE RAINE, 29 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW.

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Paperback Purgatory

This being the time of year when the advertisements for exotic summer holidays suddenly appear on our TV screens, what can *PI* do but follow suit. Book now for our cover feature. (Incidentally, that may not be as far off as you think, according to a new book by David Ashford and Patrick Collins, *YOUR SPACEFLIGHT MANUAL* (Headline, £10.95). The authors suggest that, given the right development, tourism in space could be possible for a hefty but not exorbitant price within twenty years, and suggest designs for a tourist industry based upon a "Spacebus" or "Spaceliner" whose construction and operation is quite possible given existing technologies. They also claim that "Spacebus" would be considerably cheaper and safer. Start saving now. While I'm not sure of all their claims, the book is well-researched, well-illustrated, and a fascinating glimpse into a possible future. Let's hope it's one without hijackers and terrorists planting bombs.)

For those with more limited horizons, the *Closer Encounters* section this issue looks at some of the books you might want to take with you; some of the recent anthologies, especially the big blockbuster ones just right for holding down one corner of your beach blanket. Before that, however, we return to the subject of last issue's feature article, which provoked the biggest reader response that we've had for some time. In fact, not only was there Dave Hodson's letter, which I decided to run as a second feature, but a most interesting account of similar difficulties in France from Hervé Hauck, which will appear in the same slot next issue.

There's not much *in* the lettercolumn this issue but that's partly because of space and partly because I've subsumed letters elsewhere. But thanks to all who wrote, especially those already mentioned and STEVE GROVER who sent an account of troubles with faulty copies of Joe Haldeman's *MINOBRIDGE*, and JIM PROVAN, with apparent discrepancies between the UK and US editions of Samuel R Delany's *THE MOTION OF LIGHT IN WATER*.

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REVIEWERS THIS ISSUE:-

Grahan Andrews, Chris C. Bailey, K.V. Bailey, Norman Beswick, Colin Bird, Terry Broome, Geoff Cowie, Benedict S. Cullum, Chris Hart, L.J. Hurst, Ken Lake, Vernon Leigh, Craig Marnock, Nik Morton, Joseph Nicholas, John D. Owen, Ian Sales, Steve Tew, Neale Vickery, Jon Wallace, Brendan Wignell, Jessica Yates,

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Steve Bruce: p.3; p.12.

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to *PI* 88
is Saturday January 12th

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.

Problems with Paperbacks?

David Hodson replies

(Ken Lake's article last issue generated the following reply from David Hodson - former paperback buyer for Titan Distributors: such a speedy response, in fact, that it arrived before my own BSFA mailing!)

I suspect the UK agent Ken refers to is Titan and the publisher Avon Books and the picture is certainly not as black and white as Ken would have you believe.

In the time that I did the job there were endless problems with books being subbed to us as available to be sent to the UK, but when the orders were placed the rights department of the relevant publisher would come back to us with a "No Rights" message.

Basically what this means is that the sales departments were trying to do their job and get maximum coverage on the titles, whilst the rights departments were also doing their job and making sure the books were not being sold into territories that their contracts didn't cover. Del Rey, who publish *THE LOREMASTERS*, are in even greater problems than most because, although they have world rights to most of their new titles, they are distributed by Ballantine who often don't and are not geared for large international sales.

Books that Ballantine do have world rights to are often published by their overseas subsidiaries, Random House UK, in our case. In the case of Tor Books, the situation seems to be improving as a great many of their titles are imported into the UK now by ABS via Worldwide Media Inc. of New York. This, of course, depends on

whether the relevant title has been sold or not to a UK publisher. Other publishers have equally strange systems and quite large minimum order tallies, so most UK outlets have to go through US wholesalers who, to say the least and in my experience, are not altogether competent even when shipping routes etc. have been provided for them.

If one wants to make absolutely sure of getting US paperback editions, it's wisest to find a good US mail order dealer. The best in my experience, and I've bought books from him for a great many years, is Robert Weinberg Books, P.O. Box 423, Oak Forest, Illinois 60452. Robert takes all credit cards and parcels take about a month to get here from him via sea mail, although he'll happily arrange air mail for you.

1992 should improve the situation for US paperback buyers in this country as a number of publishers use the Netherlands as a distribution centre, and once the titles are in Europe they can and should be sent to any other member country of the EC, but we're already seeing action against such a situation with publishers in the UK buying more extensive rights to books where they might expect competition from the US editions and thus trying to shut the titles out. We really won't be able to tell what will happen until it happens.

Ken is also inaccurate with his estimates of US paperback print runs on titles such as those by Leslie Cadallah. These are treated as mid-list titles with no large promotion, so the print-run would more accurately be about 35,000 - 45,000 copies to achieve an approximate 45% - 55% sell through on initial orders and first three month re-stocks. In the UK an equivalent title would only have a print-run of about 10,000 - 12,000 copies on the same sales estimates.

Even in an ideal world there will always be titles that go out of print too quickly and do not get reprinted. I have had a bee in my bonnet for years over Gardner Dozois' STRANGERS, which has only had two printings in the US and one in the UK despite being one of the finest books I've ever read in any genre and I actually own a hardcover copy!



Gardner Dozois (Ed.) - - BEST NEW SF 4 (Robinson, 1990, 598pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

This is a big book - tradesized paperback with nearly 600 pages. There are 25 stories as well as an introduction and a five-page list of Honourable mentions to give you your money's worth if you can afford the time. You might, though, look at that list of mentions and think that some of them should have been in, and something else omitted. "Best" is a subjective term.

Outstanding in this collection is 'Tiny Tango' by Judith Moffett. Some of the weaker stories in this book are weakened further still by comparison with 'Tiny Tango', which describes the life into the twenty-first century of a rare AIDS victim who survives, and works on plant genetics, growing melons resistant to disease. Along the way, there are anti-AIDS riots, vaccination against AIDS, nuclear disaster and the arrival of aliens from space, nevertheless the main theme is the life of a plant geneticist, and it is a portrait remarkable in its honesty and sympathy.

Some similar themes are covered by Charles Sheffield's 'Out Of Copyright', which is about cloning with a comic kick to it, and Gregory Benford's 'Alphas',

which comes complete with diagrams and is so hard it is like making contact with an iron bar.

Mike Resnik's 'For I Have Touched The Sky' is a good portrayal of cultural change and stagnation, and Brian Stableford's 'The Magic Bullet' is a gripping thriller.

Some of these stories are fantasy rather than SF, though not to be sneered at because of that: Robert Silverberg's 'Tales Of The Venia Woods' (sic) is a sideways view of politics in an alternate world where the Roman Empire never fell, and Michael Swanwick's 'The Edge Of The World' has overtones of magic, as well as other implications for today (a middle-east conflict has dragged in the GI fathers of three teenagers who go to the edge of a world that has a cliff-like edge).

Dozois has also included two or three stories whose ideas were so familiar as to be hackneyed, and what he has not done, although I felt that several stories could do with it, is abridge them. In general, those which suffered from one problem also suffered from the other. Given the size of this collection, though, you can afford to skip. The others will make up for it.

Stephen Jones & Ramsey Campbell (eds.) - - BEST NEW HORROR (Robinson, 1990, 390pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

This is one for all those folk out there who won't read horror because it's full of blood and gore and other such tasteless stuff. This book contains 20 stories, very few of which have blood in them at all. Most of them, on the other hand, kept me awake at night, both to finish them, then worrying about them afterwards.

"... the one thing that I couldn't make out was a face that appeared in one picture, peering round one of the tombs. It wasn't my face, and it certainly wasn't Dorinda's. Far too ugly. And as it had a bald head, it certainly wasn't one of the children's." ('The Last Day Of Miss Dorinda Molyneaux')

The stories in this collection all date from '88 - '89 and come from such diverse sources as Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine and Weird Tales. These stories are as different as Robert Westall's ghost story 'The Last Day Of Miss Dorinda Molyneaux'; Donald Burlson's fantasy, 'Snow Cancellations'; Robert McCammon's intensely psychological 'Pin' and the scary monsters of Richard Laymon's 'Bad News'.

What they all have in common is a tautness and depth of imagination which holds the reader's interest right to the end.

"Then, when I'm filled up with all that glare and heat and my brain is on fire like a four-alarm blaze I'm going to take my Winchester rifle down to the McDonald's on the corner and we'll see who says what to who when." ('Pin')

As a bonus, the collection kicks off with a perceptive round-up of the horror writing scene in 1989, and it finishes up with a Necrology, a list of the dead in the horror, fantasy and SF genres in 1989.

"A rat-like, snouted face poked out of the middle of the folds of the newspaper . . ." ('Bad News')

Richard Dalby (Ed.) - - THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF GHOST STORIES (Robinson, 1990, 654pp, £4.99)

Robert Silverberg & Martin H. Greenberg, (Eds.) - - THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF FANTASY ALL-TIME GREATS (Robinson, 1990, 431pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Craig Marnock)

Fifty-two ghost stories for less than ten pence a shot? Can't go wrong with that, surely?

And basically, no. What editor Richard Dalby has tried to do with THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF GHOST STORIES is present a summation of the ghost story from its establishment as a conscious genre in Victorian times right up until the present day. Or very nearly, at least.

There seems to have been something of a falling-off in ghost stories recently, with only a handful of the stories drawn from the last decade (including one from Ramsey Campbell) and a few more from the Seventies. Consequently, the anthology has a very "traditional" feel (i.e. no gore), which can be quite a bonus for some of the older stories, particularly the Victorian ones, which gain a lot in atmosphere.

However, in such a big collection, so much tradition can get a bit wearing - not *another* old book/unearthed manuscript/accidentally disturbed grave/deserted old house/old church/the-narrator-is-a-ghost twist. But I don't think this is really the narrator's fault. Dalby has tried to seek out rarities and represent well-known authors by less well-known stories. By and large this works, though there are a couple that could have done with being left mouldering where they lay.

As well as authors well-known for their supernatural fiction, such as M.R. James, Le Fanu, and Poe, writers such as Kipling, Saki and Wilde are represented, making this more than a roll-call of the names of the genre. Not one for gorehounds, but ghost story fans should definitely check it out.

Reissued along with it, *THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF ALL-TIME FANTASY GREATS* is quite different, an anthology based on votes cast by members of the World Fantasy Convention about a decade ago to create a "Hall of Fame" of fantasy stories. As a result, the selection and tone of the anthology is much more uneven, ranging from the wildly overblown mighty-thewed stuff of R.E. Howard's 'The Valley of the Worm' to Harlan Ellison's 'Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes' (about a fruit machine in Las Vegas).

Most of the big names get an entry (Dunsany, Poe, Bradbury, Lovecraft), though perhaps not always with the stories you might expect. But all of the stories have something to recommend them, and a book containing 'Gonna Roll the Bones' (Leiber) and 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas' (Le Guin) is probably worth having if you haven't read them already.

David S. Garnett ed. - - *THE ORBIT SF YEARBOOK 3*
(Orbit, 1990, 361pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

One thing that one could be sure of in the last couple of years has been that Orbit would produce two of the best three annual anthologies, with their *SF YEARBOOK* and *ZENITH* (the third, obviously, being the *INTERZONE* anthology). Orbit has turned itself from hero into villain with the news that it is stopping the *ZENITH* series, a decision rendered even more philistine when one realizes that Macdonald (to whom Orbit belongs) are responsible for publishing Whitley Strieber, while Orbit itself has inflicted Terry Brooks on us and have plans to re-publish Heinlein's truly pathetic *FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD*. It's enough to make a reviewer want to damn all their publications.

Such a response would be pretty unfair to Orbit's writers however, and certainly to David Garnett, the editor of *ZENITH* and *YEARBOOK*. The *YEARBOOK* is an anthology of the best stories of the year, with an introduction by Iain Banks and high-quality articles by Aldiss, Clute and Garnett himself. The stories are all American, a decision which Garnett justifies by arguing a preference for a British-published anthology not to repeat material easily available in Britain, which is fair enough, and by claiming that no British material demanded a place anyway, which is, given the quality of the material published in *INTERZONE*, contentious to say the least.

However, judged as an overseas collection this is easily worth the money: no-one's ever going to agree entirely with an anthologist's choice (I'm sorry not to see Silverberg's 'Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another' in preference to 'The Asenion Solution' printed here, for example), but as a collection this is outstandingly good. The best comes from Shepard, Card and Sterling, whose 'Dori Bangs' is a simple but deeply moving development of the alternative history story.

Buy this now. Before you know it it may be gone as Orbit dumps it so that it can publish yet another fourth-rate Tolkien-imitator; if we're really lucky we might be treated to a reissue of the collected works of L. Ron Hubbard.

David S. Garnett (Ed.) - - *ZENITH 2* (Orbit, 1990, 320pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

"The best in new British science fiction" it says on the cover of this collection. I assume the "new" refers to the fact that the stories are published here for the first time, since the anthology contains both old and new authors. Sandwiched between the old hands such as Michael Moorcock, Brian Stableford, and Garry Kilworth, and those that were first published in the Eighties (e.g. Ian MacDonald, Storm Constantine, Colin Greenland), we have the writers of the Nineties, S.M. Baxter, Eric Brown, and Simon D. Ings.

The stories are a good indication of the style and quality of current British short fiction. Several stand out in particular: Steve Baxter's Victorian scientific romance 'A Journey To The King Planet' is one of his best. 'Winning' by Ian MacDonald is a gripping story of corporate athletics with bio-enhanced runners. Eric Brown's 'The Death Of Cassandra Quebec', Simon Ings' very strange 'Different Cities', and Colin Greenland's 'A Passion For Lord Pierrot' are all well-crafted and examples of the sort of SF that *should* be filling the shelves of bookshops. Moorcock contributes an excellent novella 'The Cairene Purse', his first since 'The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle'.

Unfortunately, anthologies are by definition variable and I found some of the stories disappointing. But these were the minority. *ZENITH 2* is still worth every penny of its cover price.

It has recently been announced that there won't be a *ZENITH 3*. There should be. Why stop now? *ZENITH 1* was critically acclaimed and *ZENITH 2* will be; the series also has an important function, namely introducing new writers. But perhaps this is the reason for its folding as well - after giving several new writers valuable exposure, the publishers do not need any more and would rather spend their budget on promoting what they have.

Roz Kaveney (Ed.) - - *MORE TALES FROM THE FORBIDDEN PLANET* (Titan, 1990, 268pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

This is an anthology of fifteen short stories, each with a superb illustration by a different artist, perfunctorily introduced by Roz Kaveney.

Two of the stories are frivolous satires on life involving idiot-savant poultry (Terry Pratchett's 'Hollywood Chickens' and Ian Watson's charming 'The Human Chicken'). John Sladek's 'Dining Out', on the other hand, is a stylish satire on the superficiality of American life, encapsulated by a bizarre event in a fast-food restaurant.

Two are well-worn. Mick Farren's apocalyptic 'Fun In The Final Days' and Jamie Delano's tiresomely predictable tale of a man made pregnant after a bugging by a demon, 'The Horror In Our Lives'. Equally predictable is Rachel Pollack's heavy-handed feminist parable mirroring the fall of Adam and Eve from Eden, 'The Woman Who Didn't Come Back'.

Storm Constantine's hip and superficial ghost story has some rough edges, while John Clute's stylish but tedious 'Death Of A Sacred Monster' defied my understanding. Colin Greenland's 'Best Friends' is another supernatural tale, about an easily-suggestible man led by his gonads and an unknown waif into giving up his marriage for her. It is weakened by a lack of any explanation, while R.M. Lamming's slight story 'Wasp Songs' is damaged by a style too manic for the plot.

Neil Gaiman's and Larry Niven's stories are both fantasies; Gaiman's heroine in 'Webs' killing her enemies too easily for belief, Niven's 'The Portrait Of Daryanree The King' packing too much into too little space to do his subject justice, but nevertheless both enjoyable retreats from reality.

The longest story, Mary Gentle's 'Black Motley', set in the same world as *RATS AND GARGOYLES* is *FORBIDDEN PLANET'S* gem. A wonderfully rich and amusing tale of a conspiracy amongst rat lords to enslave another nation through the trading of a highly addictive drug. Fans of

Fritz Leiber's *SWORDS* series and *THE THREE MUSKETEERS* will love it.

To conclude, one gem and several worthy stories, but in general a disappointing volume with many of its contributors barely coasting along on a dead sea. Read it for the Gentle: avoid the rough.

David Sutton & Stephen Jones (Eds.) - - *DARK VOICES 2* (Pan, 1990, 223pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

DARK VOICES 2 is really the umpteenth *PAN BOOK OF HORROR* - and they make sure you know this: "For 31 years *THE PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES* has turned the blood in your veins to red ice".

In this book we have fifteen short stories from a wide selection of authors, including John Brunner, Brian Stableford, Guy N. Smith, Ramsey Campbell, and Brian Lumley. None are horror of the buckets-of-gore kind - in fact, several only just qualify as macabre.

Brian Lumley brings new meaning to the term "night of the crabs" in 'The Sun, The Sea And The Silent Scream' - guaranteed to make you paranoid about drinking tap water when holidaying abroad. Adrian Cole's 'Face To Face', a sort of computer mystery, ends on a particularly sick note, although the strange condition of the main character is never fully explained. Thomas F. Montealeone provides a lesson in obsession in 'The Pleasure Of Her Company', and Michael Marshall Smith's 'The Man Who Drew Cats', although reading a little like a Callahan's Bar tale, is one of the better ones in the collection.

I suppose the fact that you could cheerfully read this collection whilst sat in a dark room at midnight on a night of a full moon should mean that they've failed. The stories are easy to read, not overly chilling, and not particularly memorable. Most are too short for their ideas; a couple are too long for their premise, even at a thousand words. *DARK VOICES 2* is homogenised horror; it has no shock-value, all the danger has been taken out - in that sense, it is a disappointment.

Douglas E. Winter (Ed) - - *DARK VISIONS* (Gollancz, 1990, 381pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

This book is described on its cover as "an impressive showcase from three masters of the macabre" - said masters being Stephen King, George R. R. Martin and Dan Simmons. Stephen King's name is plastered in big letters across the cover, so the book could conceivably be confused for one of his - judging by how well most of King's novels sell the publishers probably wouldn't be too upset if this actually did happen.

The stories: King's 'The Reploids', a tale of alternative universes colliding and crossing over, confusing both the crossee and the investigating Hollywood cops, doesn't do anything or go anywhere. 'Sneakers' is a relatively harmless ghost story about a haunted toilet cubicle at a music studio. Roger Daltrey gets a bit part in this one. 'Dedication', however, is amongst the best Stephen King has ever written and, according to Douglas Winter's introduction, "was not well met with editors". Despite this (or because of it?), it's a strong story with a particularly grotesque premise.

Dan Simmons fares better with an outstanding story 'Metastasis'. This describes a man's discovery that cancer is caused by "tumour vampires" - creatures only he can see after suffering brain damage in a car accident. This story is almost surreal in its premise, and it works extremely well - Winter likens it to Philip K. Dick, and I almost agree. 'Iverson's Pit', set during the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, is a well-written dark fantasy with a historical motif. 'Vanni Fucci Is Alive And Well And Living In Hell' is, unfortunately, a bit hit-and-miss as a "biting satire" - even if TV evangelists are open more than most to ridicule.

George R. R. Martin's 'The Skin Trade' is worth the price of admission alone - and it won the 1989 World Fantasy Award for Best Novella. A mix of Joseph Wambaugh and gothic horror, it has a lot in common with Martin's novel *FEVRE DREAM*, but deals with lycanthropy

rather than vampirism. It's easily the best of the lot - which is more or less what I would have expected.

As horror anthologies go, this is a good 'un. The stories are more disquieting than chock-a-block with buckets of gore - the sort of stuff you don't need a sickbag for, but they're not to be read after dark in a big empty house when there's a full moon...

David V. Barrett (Ed.) - - *DIGITAL DREAMS* (N.E.L., 1990, 347pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Twenty stories about computers, specially written for this collection, all of them British, and gathered together by David V. Barrett: the standard's reasonable and if you like this sort of thing it's not a bad bargain for the price.

There are several well-known names to tempt you: splendid Terry Pratchett (a corpse "looked like God would look if he was on really serious drugs. And dead, of course."), Josephine Saxton with a legend of the future where a child finds her destiny, Keith Roberts with a tale of an artist who finds a computer out-conceiving him, Storm Constantine turning a project for human-computer linkage into office politics. David Langford tries horror, Andy Sawyer goes back to the Elizabethan stage, Paul Kincaid stores data in human brains, David Barrett looks at the love-life problems of a hacker, Ian McDonald finds a way of looking at personality types.

So you can see there's variety. Fellow jazz fans will share my enjoyment of Phil Manchester's 'The Reconstruction of Mingus'. John Grant uses conventional story-form for a conception of the poor little android that was new at least to me. Religion nudges its way into several tales, notably when Ray Girvan and Steve Jones combine for a story of computers that need exorcism (I loved the evil spirit-program escaping down the modem). No item is an absolute dud, and there's little repetition.

But nor, for that matter, did I learn anything very new about computers, or find a story that took my breath away with its mould-breaking excellence or sensawunda. David Barrett is proud of them, but I hope not very proud; and bookshop browsers should note that the scene-setting in his introduction bears little relationship to the much more imaginative findings of his authors.

Eric Brown - - *THE TIME-LAPSED MAN & OTHER STORIES* (Pan, 1990, 216pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

Eric Brown's *THE TIME-LAPSED MAN* is that *rara avis* - a "paperback original" collection of SF stories by someone who has yet to bring out his first novel, although that (to-be-hoped-for) event cannot be long delayed. The contents list might well have been taken from a *BEST OF INTERZONE* anthology, with the exception of 'The Karma-Kid Transcends' (first published in *OPUS*). I could just say that there isn't a duff story in the book, then hie myself off to the pub. However...

'The Time-Lapsed Man' (*INTERZONE* 24, 1988, is one of the best short stories ever to win the BSFA Award: in my opinion, it should also have at least been short-listed for the Hugo, Nebula, and... anything else going at the time. It contains a "flux-pusher" (like Cordwainer Smith's "pinlighters" only a bit different, if you'll pardon the Irishism) named Thorn, whose senses start slipping "out of synch" with everyone else's real time. It's a variation on an old theme (see *THE ISOTOPE MAN*, by Charles Eric Maine - if you can find it), but Brown has struck just the right note of cumulative angst, while avoiding the "Mills-and-Boony" morass that could so easily have swallowed him up.

Of the remaining seven stories, I particularly enjoyed 'Big Trouble Upstairs' (*INTERZONE* 26, 1988) which contains the following sensawunda(?) paragraph: "The first bolt amputates Minnie's tail at the rump with a quick hiss and a coil of oily smoke. The second bolt misses me by a whisker and roasts a passing Donald Duck at short order" (pp. 51-52). And I have a special liking for 'The Inheritors of Earth' (original?), which reads

like a "steam-punk" collaboration between John Wyndham and H.P. Lovecraft, with a dash of Richard E. Leakey thrown in for intellectual seasoning. But I don't - can't believe that the young H.G. Wells could have been such a paranoid twit...

I agree (with Bob Shaw's blurb) that "Eric Brown has an enviable talent for writing stories which are the essence of modern science fiction and yet show a

R E V I E W S

Brian Stableford - - *THE EMPIRE OF FEAR* (Pan, 1990, 520pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

THE EMPIRE OF FEAR is set primarily in an alternate-history 17th century, where immortal vampires rule the world: as befits the writer of such a big book Stableford is concerned with big themes. Immortality and vampires are inextricably linked, and yet these vampires are not invulnerable in their longevity. Edmund Cordery dedicates his life to scientific pursuits which the ruling vampires rightly see as a threat: he dies at the hands of his vampire lover having deliberately contracted the plague and mortally infected her; his son, Noell, continues his father's activities (in more ways than one).

In some ways this is similar to Keith Roberts' *PAVANNE*: both are very "English" books; both have an episodic feel to them (unsurprisingly, in the case of a fix-up like *PAVANNE*); and both "round off" their history with a section set in an alternate present. However, unlike Roberts's final story which comes close to reducing his alternate history to nonsense, Stableford's is an effective brief working-out of what sort of world his history would lead to.

In comparison with his more recent writing (*EMPIRE* was first published in 1988) - for example, *RAIDERS FROM THE CENTRE*, his work for GW books as Brian Craig or his short stories for *INTERZONE* - this is lacking in intensity, the parts being greater than the whole. There is little complexity of plot, and it almost seems at times that what we are really being offered is a series of related short stories or novellas rather than a fully-integrated novel.

Having said that, *EMPIRE* is pretty good. It's the best treatment of vampirism I have read, and one of the best alternate histories. Its world is fully-realised, detailed and plausible. It may not be up to Stableford's highest standards, but it's much better than most paperbacks published this year.

Octavia Butler - - *IMAGO* (Gollancz, 1990, 264pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

The third in the *XENOGENESIS* series about the vampire-like asset-stripping Oankali invasion of Earth follows the fortunes of Jodahs as it becomes the first human/Oankali construct Ooloi, a third gender and expert gene manipulator who is sent into the wilderness to sort out its sexual problems. *IMAGO* is about adolescent pangs and reads like a heavy dose of wish-fulfillment as Jodahs seduces and manipulates every human, male or female, with whom it comes into contact - alone, in pairs and a whole settlement (the latter with *some* help).

It sees nothing wrong with and indeed cannot help drugging its intended human mates, tampering with them so they become physically and emotionally addicted to it. It heals human afflictions at the cost of mental, if not physical enslavement to the Oankali race, whose apparent compassion derives from a ruthless self-interest and uncontrolled biological programming (incidentally making their view of humanity's flaws an astounding hypocrisy).

Butler's use of Jodahs as the narrator means it is hard to clarify whether or not we are supposed to be galled by this or to take it simply as an aspect of Oankali alienness. The result is that a friction develops

passionate concern for the human predicament and human values". Unlike some over-hyped writers I could mention (in the pub, perhaps, but not here), Brown *deserves* to be praised to the skies - and beyond. As Kingsley Amis once said (about Wyndham's *TROUBLE WITH LICHEN*, but what the hell?); "If even a tenth of science fiction were as good, we should be in clover."

between Oankali actions and thoughts, making it difficult to believe in Jodahs as a sympathetic character. The schism remains unreconciled, the series incomplete. It is less about the meaning of and quest for self-identity which it skirts around and should have been, than a description of an isolated string of incidents; well-written if slow to begin with and flawed - like a humar - to its core.

Robert Anton Wilson - - *SCHRODINGER'S CAT TRILOGY* (Orbit, 1990, 543pp, £5.90)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

This is not an easy book to describe. It has no real plot to speak of. It takes place across dozens of parallel universes. And even its main characters keep changing - nothing serious, just such incidentals as sex, colour and personality. But it is funny.

It is not even a trilogy, really. I believe this is a fix-up of three stories originally published in the late 1970s in an American men's magazine (probably, like Wilson's previous book *ILLUMINATUS!*, in *Playboy*. Each book is 'Book One'; each part of each book is 'Part One'; and there is no real plot progression as you work your way through nearly 550 pages.

That there is no real plot is appropriate since one of the central planks of the book is the impact of quantum mechanics on our understanding of the world. As interpreted by Wilson, the mathematics of quantum mechanics show there are as many universes as there are possibilities and that simple notions of cause and effect (not to mention time) are utterly irrelevant. So, in an essentially non-linear universe, what use is a simple linear plot? Indeed, what use is a plot, period?

This can make for difficult reading, but the whole thing is carried by Wilson's wicked humour. This is one of the funniest books I've read in a long time. I particularly liked Markoff Chaney's secret society, "Christians and Atheists United Against Creeping Agnosticism (a non-prophet organisation)"; but there is a ludicrously funny line on every page.

Its 1970s *Playboy* origins show in the cocaine sniffing and oversexed characters, and all the time I was reading it I wasn't sure if I was being conned and that Wilson wasn't sitting somewhere laughing at anybody foolish enough to take this even half seriously. He has clearly tries to create a "cult" book, with its intimations of secret knowledge and cryptic wisdom. In many ways, though, it is archetypal SF, taking a scientific idea to its apparently ridiculous logical conclusion. But if you don't want to take his quantum mechanics seriously, just read it for its humour. It's worth it.

Philip Mann - - *PIONEERS* (Grafton, 1990, 352pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

PIONEERS deals with the experiences of two genetically-engineered 'rescuers', whose job it is to go out into space and bring back to Earth the Pioneers - genetically-altered explorers sent out generations earlier to colonise other planets - as their gene stock is needed to bolster an increasingly sterile humanity.

It's basically a straightforward space adventure story, although the relationship between the two central characters, Angelo and Ariadne, is sufficiently well-drawn to make them seem more human than the usual space adventure protagonists (paradoxically, one of their overriding concerns is that because of their genetically-

engineered natures they are not human). Unfortunately none of the other characters are nearly as believable; this would matter less were it not for the contrast with the rescuers.

Mann is at his best when dealing with Angelo and Ariadne's experiences of space travel, the technology of which is described simply and without fuss but with great plausibility. He is less good when writing about their planetary experiences and I found the Earth scenes very jarring.

PIONEERS has a very good book about the nature of humanity and the value of relationships lurking inside it, but this is sometimes obscured by the demands of the space adventure format: on the whole I'm glad I read it, but I'd rather have read the book which this one had the potential to be.

C.J. Cherryh - - **SUNFALL** (Mandarin, 1990, 158pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

SUNFALL (first published by DAW Books in May 1981) is a "dying Earth" *montage* novel in the worthy tradition of - well, **THE DYING EARTH** by Jack Vance. It deftly follows the fortunes and - more often - misfortunes of dwellers in six once-mighty cities that are nearing the end of their individual and collective tethers.

"On the whole land surface of the Earth and on much of the seas, humankind had lived and died . . . it was simply old, this world; had scattered its seed like a flower yielding to the winds. they had gone to the stars and gained . . . new worlds. Those who visited earth in its great age had their own reasons . . . but those born here remained for that most ancient of reasons: it was home. . . . And the cities were the last flourishing of this tendency, as they had been at its beginning" (from the *Prologue*, pp. 7 - 8).

The six clapped-out cities are: (1) Paris ('The only Death In The City'); (2) London ('The Haunted Tower'); (3) Moscow ('Ice'); (4) Rome ('Nightgame'); (5) New York ('Highliner'), and (6) Peking/Beijing ('The General'). For me, the Paris and London segments held the most interest - especially the latter, with its eerie Tower of London location, engaging (if initially over-naive) heroine, and sympathetic ghosts-with-a-purpose.

Derek Slade - - **INVASION** (Oriflamme Publishing, 1990, 502pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Nothing can beat the chance to meet an author and, armed with one's critical review, take up the cudgels and fight it out before submitting one's final thoughts for publication. Derek Slade's book annoyed me intensely: after that meeting, I am much mollified.

Begin with a detailed, informed survey of the military situation in Britain and Germany early in 1940; postulate that the invasion actually happened, and figure out how successful it would be. tell this story logically, carefully, in the style of any military report, up to the point where Churchill sues for an Armistice, and hostilities cease. Not, I think, the sort of thing the average SF reader would find enthralling reading - and unfortunately the first chapter is in this dull, dry, didactic style which must deter many a potential buyer.

Now intersperse these quasi-historical chapters with others, looking at the war and its effect upon the protagonist - a young Home Guard, based on the author's father - and his antagonist, a young German soldier named Adolf (after guess who?). These begin excellently, giving the feel of the time (I was there, I remember) but gradually moving into the realms of high drama as young Don becomes batman to a returned Duke of Windsor, fighting as a general and later offered the crown by Hitler after the death of King George VI. Meanwhile, young Adolf meets him, is alternately captured by him and works at a POW camp where he is interned, and in time rises to the dizzy heights of Hitler's personal entourage.

To be honest, the many perhaps individually trifling but cumulatively annoying errors - Roosevelt and Nuremberg spelt wrongly, military titles on both sides incorrect - helped break into my willing suspension of

disbelief to the point where I found the plot unbelievable. Putting these points to the author, I was shocked to discover that the errors had been *introduced* into the final text by skilfully sabotaging proof-readers - with friends like this, who needs critical reviewers too?

Perhaps I should tell you that Derek Slade is a partner in the publishing company, which also offers standard texts on mathematics and English for the 9 - 14 year age group; with partner Derek Sawyer, he also wrote **THE SCEPTRE MORTAL** under the pen-name of Derek Sawde. I complained to the author that I felt he grossly under-estimated the rhetorical power of Sir Oswald Mosley - only to learn that a sequel is planned in which the noted British fascist is to play a star role.

Bearing in mind the shortcomings of **INVASION** as a novel, I suggest you ignore the first section completely, and merely skip-and-browse your way to page 164. By then you should be well into the real feel and aim of the book, and can return for historical background later if you wish. It really is worth the effort, but at times the militaria gets in the way of the average reader's entertainment. I await the sequel with pleasurable anticipation!

Jack Finney - - **TIME AND AGAIN** (Legend, 1990, 399pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

The timeslip romance, it's claimed, is a rare branch of the time-travel subgenre; if so, this is perhaps due to the challenge of writing about love (or lurve) without falling into the mawkish sentimentality the subject usually provokes. Finney gets round this by foregrounding a rosy nostalgia (itself a form of romance) for the Manhattan of 1882, thus cleverly misdirecting the reader, and then making the real love interest incidental to the machinations of the plot rather than the cause of them.

Despite which, **TIME AND AGAIN** is never really believable, since the method of travel back to 1882 is essentially mental; a variation on the way Burroughs's John Carter used to get to Mars by thinking about it, in this case requiring Simon Morley, Finney's protagonist, to develop sufficient empathy for the past era that it feels more real to him than the present. Presumably as part of this attempt to heighten feeling, Finney spends a lot of time describing things, especially what people wear and how they act, to show how the present (or the past) differs from the past (or the present); but since this is a description of surfaces rather than interiors the effect is not to generate empathy but only to make the book longer.

The plot is nicely complex, and based around an event that actually happened; although there are none of the paradoxes usually found in time travel novels, to say more about it would still give too much away. However, I feel that the book's denouement cleaves too strongly to the idea that historical events are caused primarily by single individuals instead of impersonal societal forces (albeit in this case Minor rather than great Men). If individuals do influence events, they do so as participants caught up in them, not as guides acting on them from outside, and for that reason I can't believe that arranging to discredit a forgotten Presidential advisor could have the effect hoped. The alternative outcome (a Castro-less Cuba as part of the USA) is intriguing, even if now (the novel first appeared in 1970) politically irrelevant.

Janie delano, Richard Piers Rayner, Mark Buckingham & Mike Hoffman - - **HELLBLAZER**, Vol 4 (Titan, 1990, £6.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Here at last are the traumatic experience of the night in Newcastle referred to in earlier episodes as a vague but catastrophic event in John Constantine's past which resulted in the eventual betrayal and death of the friends who were there on that fateful occasion. The climax of this particular Satanic saga is presented in the next story in the collection, a masterly fusion of

Black magic and cyberpunk which concludes with an obvious but true moral about the need to face the demons *within* us. A dream-sequence concerning the ecological rape of the planet modulates part of the previously dealt-with themes in a minor key, while the final episode sees Constantine meeting and learning from a group of travellers with a new magic of their own in a prologue to a new encounter with some of the (metaphorical and other) demons infecting contemporary Britain. Here we have hints that Constantine (now firmly Delano's own character) is set to go through fundamental changes: check the lengthening of his hairstyle and the comments about his "silly jokes".

Constantine is still sharp, sardonic, and haunted by the flaws in his own character, and the stories - particularly the second and fourth - superb. Uncannily enough, the subject of the first, "Newcastle" story - Satanic child-abuse - reached the media at time of publication with allegations of widespread cult involvement. This is perhaps disquieting in its implied overshadowing of the fact that most child sex abuse has nothing to do with ritualism or black magic and one can expect future "revelations" owing much to this story, if American experiences are anything to go by. Not pleasurable reading, but then, HELLBLAZER ought not to be pleasurable reading, and even though its symbolism is garish its narrative and characterisation is virtually unmatched in comics.

Michael Scott Rohan - - CHASE THE MORNING
(Orbit, 1990, 334pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Pirates and voodoo, it seems, are now fair game for fantasists. I thought Tim Powers' excellent ON STRANGER TIDES might deter other authors from stepping into these salt waters so soon, but Michael Scott Rohan has hoisted the Jolly Roger over his first fantasy since THE WINTER OF THE WORLD trilogy, and found the buried treasure too.

Unlike Powers' 17th Century hero, Rohan has taken a more imaginative route, beginning in the present and moving into a fantastic dimension beyond the fields we know. From there, voodoo practitioners reach into our core reality and drag the hero, Stephen, into adventure on the mythic high seas at the Rim of the World in search of his colleague Clare, kidnapped by the repulsive Wolves and spirited off to the voodoo isle, Hispaniola.

Rohan's developing narrative skill is shown by his superb handling of the details of the sailing ships (and their battles), and by his characters, especially Stephen, whose struggle is not just with the Wolves and their master, but also with himself. There is a deep-seated streak of self-hatred in Stephen (he regards himself as a hollow man, despite his successful career), and so the adventure becomes a rite of passage, leading to his ultimate salvation.

CHASE THE MORNING is well worth the reading time, a rollicking good story with enough psychological bite in it to satisfy once the swash-buckling has lost its immediate appeal.

Colin Greenland - - TAKE BACK PLENTY (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 359pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Vernon Leigh)

This book bills itself as "a space extravaganza" and comes recommended by both Brian Aldiss and Michael Moorcock. More importantly the reviewer's copy comes with a confidence-building recommendation from Greenland himself, who tells you everything the book should be but isn't.

In fact, Greenland promises us so much that 't is impossible not to wonder whether the blurb got written before the book. What we should get is a "magnificent galaxy-shaking plot", a "vibrant, complex and variegated universe". We don't. What we do get is an okay, weirdly written (witness the sudden changes in tense, from present to past to future, without any positive contribution to the book as a whole) space opera.

The plot is complicated. Confusingly so. Sometimes it's funny. But most of the time the overall impression

is of a book that would have worked better as a film. One problem is that Greenland's writing doesn't support this kind of grandiose vision: as a consequence visualising the places he describes is difficult. From time to time you do get hints that Greenland can do much better - certain images do work very well indeed - but for most of the book the reader is lost and largely unable to sympathise with any of the book's central characters, who despite Greenland's claims are stereotypes.

Overall, TAKE BACK PLENTY isn't a bad book. But it's not a very good one either, and doesn't live up to its initial promise. Very much a quick, light read.

Charles de Lint - - MOONHEART
(Pan, 1990, 485pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

John Tucker, an inspector with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, is in charge of security at Project Mindreach which is funded by the Paranormal Research Branch to find Tom Hengwr and his apprentice, Kieran Foy, both suspected of being sorcerers. Hengwr takes refuge in The House, the Ottawa home of rich Sara Kendell and a group of social misfits, who are soon drawn into a battle against a centuries-old evil.

It starts shakily, with "the Way" self-consciously introduced and never adequately explained, and it is hard to overlook the place the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have as figures of fun in popular culture. Other stumbling blocks include a credibility problem regarding the P.R.B., who have an incredible \$8 million budget, a predictable outcome and the short shift given to some of the characters (for example, Lawrence Hogue, the scientist in charge of research at Project Mindreach isn't seen doing anything much apart from being assassinated).

On the whole, however, this goodies transported to parallel world fantasy overcomes its problems, largely due to its imaginative use of Amerindian and Celtic mythology. It goes along to a rip-roaring climax as The House is breached and hordes of beasties decimate the characters like some too- neat, but well-crafted Ridley Scott and John Carpenter production, complete with an Alan Stivell, Andreas Vollenweider and Klaus Schultz soundtrack. The expensive yuppieback could better have had a cover illustrating the painting Sara Kendell finds at the start, but that would be icing on the cake.

Geoff Ryman - - THE CHILD GARDEN (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 388pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

This is a novel I wanted to like and looked forward to reading, yet ultimately found a struggle to finish. One problem is its structure - as many readers may be aware, THE CHILD GARDEN is based on the novella 'Love Sickness' which appeared in INTERZONE in 1987 and is reprinted here as Book One, leaving the whole of the rest of the novel, effectively three-quarters of the text, as Book Two. This imbalance might not be so bad were it not for the additional fact that shorter works require different narrative strategies than novels - the novella, needing to get the details of the greenhouse-effected future London and the complications of its plot across in a limited space, was a very compressed piece of work; but the second part is under no such constraints. It's a sequel; it sprawls, and sprawls, and sprawls.

There also seems to have been a change in auctorial tone between the two parts, replacing the comic ironies of the former with a heavier, more serious approach. Those who knew the author enjoyed the novella speculating on the identity of the real-life person on whom the character of Rolfa was based, and everyone savoured the contradiction of a political system, Marxism-Leninism, which claimed to be progressive yet whose cultural outlook was so static that it couldn't conceive of artforms more recent than about 1910 and other than opera and classical music (as true in the real world as Ryman's future, of course) and then ensured these artforms remained static by encoding them in viruses so that performances were simply repeated ad

infinitum; but the second part is almost entirely taken up with the plans of Milena, the protagonist, to stage a planet-wide operatic version of Dante's THE DIVINE COMEDY with giant holograms projected into the atmosphere from orbit. Somewhere in this is an awful pun about bringing THE DIVINE COMEDY down to Earth, but the whole thing is swamped by an expectation that because we share the same cultural enthusiasms we'll be as excited by an operatic Dante as the author. Frankly - although I'm sure that I'll now be condemned as a philistine - I doubt it; opera is as much an acquired, minority taste as science fiction, and if the audiences for each overlap at all they must do so only barely.

But the human biology of Ryman's future is interesting, and I wish that its implications could have been more fully explored - implanting knowledge via viruses and fitting people for their roles in life aren't new ideas, but in an era when the make-up of the human genome is being unraveled and the threat of genetic manipulation is consequently coming closer, the assertion of human free will (and human creativity and eccentricity) probably demands more than a plot which ends by presenting Milena's difficulties and deficiencies as a deliberate ploy by the Consensus to escape the stasis into which its policies have led the human species. Very science fictional (and as usual in SF vastly overstating the influence of the individual); but very unconvincing.

Laurence Watt-Evans - - THE WIZARD AND THE WAR MACHINE
(Grafton, 1990, 285pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

I usually hesitate to read this sort of speculative fiction-fantasy (despite the claim by the publisher that this is "Pure" Science Fiction), mainly due to the type and contents of their covers and blurbs, which tend to put me off at first glance; and so I was rather surprised to discover a reasonably well-written, fast-paced plot, with well fleshed-out and believable characters, which kept me reading from start to finish. THE WIZARD AND THE WAR MACHINE is the sequel to Laurence Watt-Evans' novel THE CYBORG AND THE SORCERERS, and concerns interstellar warfare between Mother Earth and her (apparently) disobedient colonies who have tried to break away from Earth's suffocating grip and become independent, much to both the colonists' and Earth's grief alike.

Nothing new there? you ask, and you're right. How many authors have had published this sort of story in the past: fifty, a hundred, two hundred? Well, however many, Watt-Evans' attempt in this category has at least been partially successful. A must for Watt-Evans fans.

Robert Cormier - - FADE (Lions 'fracks', 1990, 246pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Robert Cormier is one of the most celebrated and controversial American authors of Young Adult thrillers. Having begun his writing career as a journalist, and produced a new adult novel, he was told by his agent that THE CHOCOLATE WAR ought to be published for Young Adults instead. Since then he has written five more thrillers of high literary quality, but strong on pessimism and violence of which FADE is the newest, and the first with a supernatural theme. However, all his books portray the leading character's thought-processes in detail, some of them being or becoming quite warped or totally insane. In FADE we see a "mainstream" author using a fantastic theme (inherited invisibility) in a way typical of his other writing: emphasising the seeming powerlessness of "good" adults in the face of evil and the vulnerability of adolescents.

In the same Massachusetts setting of "Monument" as in Cormier's other books the narrator recalls the poverty and ethnic solidarity of the French-Canadian community which was Cormier's own background. Young Paul is told by his uncle that he has inherited the power of the "fade", which he must keep secret. At 13, Paul is tempted to use the fade to eavesdrop on a girl he likes, and

becomes a voyeur, witnessing a scene of incest, then paedophilia. Then he murders the French-Canadian quasi-gangster who wields the real power in his community. Disgust, remorse, and a family tragedy which he sees as God's judgement on him, make him refuse to "fade" again, though it still overtakes him involuntarily, and he becomes a recluse.

Years later, hearing of an illegitimate nephew who might be a fader, Paul goes to find, warn and protect him, and discovers he is already a brutal, teenage killer who has lost his idealism. There's only one solution for the good of the community... This is the kind of teenage book one has to keep away from the children, both for its voyeuristic scenes and the insights into the minds of two murderers, but it's on a higher literary plane than the usual supernatural thriller for teenagers, and Cormier's admirers will be glad to know that his new book maintains his usual standard and employs SF/fantasy themes in Cormier fashion instead of becoming just another teen shocker.

Ian Watson - - THE EMBEDDING
(VGSF, 1990, 254pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

THE EMBEDDING is one of my all-time favourite SF novels. Not only is it well-structured and, for the most part, well-written but it is also intellectually stimulating, packed with everything from structural linguistics to alien contact.

There are three main plotlines. Chris Sole is a linguist at a research establishment raising four children in a hermetically sealed artificial world. They are forced to use an embedded language utilising a syntax that packs far greater information into language, pushing the possibilities of language to the limits. In the Brazilian rain-forest his one time associate, Pierre, has discovered a tribe of Indians who have already achieved an embedded language assisted by mind-enhancing drugs. Meanwhile, aliens have arrived in Earth orbit offering contact with the stars and the means of interplanetary and even interstellar flight. In return they demand working human brains competent in six diverse languages. The plotlines are thus neatly linked by the aliens' almost mystical preoccupation with language.

The plot is generally strong, with a definite and effective conclusion. Too many of Ian Watson's later novels begin promisingly but tail off as the plot rums into dead ends. THE EMBEDDING, however, sustains its suspense and surprise all the way through and reaches a conclusive, if tragic, finale.

As with all Watson's SF, though, the ideas are the strongest point of the book. The Chomskyan linguistics, the anthropology, sociology and politics all combine to create a heady intellectual mixture. Many of the ideas; the structuralism, the fascination with consciousness-raising drugs and the Latin American liberation movements, are directly traceable to the politics of the late sixties. However, although THE EMBEDDING was written in the early seventies, it shows surprisingly few signs of its age. Many of the issues, particularly the environmental concerns, are still directly relevant today.

This is a good sign for a would-be classic (though not for the state of the world!). And THE EMBEDDING is a classic. It remains one of the best SF novels of the past twenty years and is a worthy addition to the Gollancz classic SF series.

Katherine Kurtz - - HIGH DERYNI
(Legend, 1990, 369pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

When I hear the words 'high fantasy' I reach for my sword (or magic amulet, subject, of course, to the ancient laws of challenge). The cancerous growth of this sub-genre continues apace, although there are exceptions, such as GW Books' 'Warhammer' series.

Katherine Kurtz's HIGH DERYNI is not, however, one of those exceptions. It is the third of 'The Chronicles of the Deryni' and suffers even more viciously than usual

from the faults common to this sort of book. It carries four appendices, replete with the usual spurious scholarship, best characterized by the fourth, "The Genetic Basis for the Deryni Inheritance"; the first two appendices offer an index of characters and an index of place names, presumably on the grounds that even the most ardent fan will be unable to commit such dull stuff to memory.

The dialogue is the most painful aspect of the novel (loosely used as there's nothing novel about it): a character near death from loss of blood greets a friend: "Well, me boyo, it's about time ye found me. I feared one 'o them cutthroat rascals would get to me first an' finish me off t'get me sword".

The story? It's the usual type: evil sorcerer-king fights boy-king to the death in a duel by magic, and lots of minor characters (although in one sense they're all pretty minor) meet unpleasant ends. But this is volume three after all; if you've bought the first two you're probably a lost cause already. If you've yet to be corrupted, don't succumb; try sniffing glue instead, it's cheaper, probably more enjoyable (no, I've never tried it myself) and will do less damage to your brain.

DOUGLAS E. Winter (Ed.) - - *FACES OF FEAR* (Pan, 1990, 334pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Who writes horror - and why? Douglas E. Winter tries to answer this in interviews with 17 contemporary writers including Clive Barker, W.P. Blatty, Ramsey Campbell, James Herbert, Stephen King, T.E.D Klein, Whitley Streiber and Peter Straub. Each conversation is revealing, sometimes ironically so. Bloch, author of *PSYCHO*, finds modern explicitness in horror disturbing: "Violence has become not only a cop-out in terms of being presented as self-explanatory... but it is also a drug". Clive Barker, meanwhile, exults "Show me, show me." Some of the writers are carefully reacting to a market demand, others are charting territories which - in less symbolic forms - are the domain of the kind of writers who get on college reading lists. Ramsey Campbell would like to be a stand-up comic. Charles L. Grant's ambition is to write a comic novel. W.P. Blatty has been a top Hollywood comedy scriptwriter. Odd, this. But then, to quote Bloch again, "comedy and horror are opposite sides of the same coin."

Perhaps the most interesting writer included is the late Virginia Andrews, the only female writer interviewed, whom many would not regard as operating in the same sphere as the others. Winter offers a plausible reason for her inclusion, as does Andrews, despite her occasional resentment of the "horror" tag. Certainly Andrews has been particularly disturbing to mothers of female 13-year olds who would not think twice about their male offspring reading James Herbert.

Originally put together in 1985, the book now has brief updates where necessary, with the added bonus of a recommended reading/viewing list of books and films. Are horror writers thoroughly peculiar? Judging from this, no more so than the rest of us, though that's weird enough.

Ray Bradbury - - *FAHREHBREIT 451*
(Grafton, 1990. 172pp, £2.50)

(Reviewed by K. V. Bailey)

The title, like 2001 and 1984, has acquired symbolic status; though equally with the book-burning its seminal image is surely the four-wall-screen embrace of "the family" (*THE NEIGHBOURS!*). A re-reading of 451 is corrective of any fashionable patronising of Bradbury's nostalgias and poetically heightened prose. His dystopian vision and latent optimism remain pertinent; his stylistic 'highs' can still move; his extrapolations seem now more cathartic than prophetic. For example, the reader has to be, together with the underground vacuum train passengers, half-hypnotised by the "Denham's Dentifrice" radio jingle fully to appreciate Montag's counterpointing it with the "lilies of the field"

verses from the Sermon on the Mount.

Narrative never flags - from Guy Montag's (the incendiary fireman's) first encounter with the doomed Clarisse ("seventeen and crazy"), who initiates his apostasy, through to his final journey, after the bombers' obliteration of Technopolis, towards the ideal "city". Cunningly integrated are the ideological set pieces - lecturings, diatribes, manifestos: Clarisse's on the blessings of slowing things down; Fire-Captain Beatty's on speeding things up to obviate "unnecessary time-wasting thought"; the recusant professor's gospel that the meaning contained in books "stitched the patches of the universe into one garment for us"; and the cosmic perspectives of Grainger, leader of the mnemonical subversives and the one who carries Plato in his head. Those wandering academics are to a man anti-technological humanists; though the fact that their transmitting brains hold Darwin, Einstein and Bertrand Russell, as well as WALDEN and ECCLESIASTES, may indicate a 'fifties authorial faith in some ultimate cultural synthesis under the sign of the Phoenix.

Andrew M. Greeley - - *ANGEL FIRE*
(Legend, 1990, 304pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Neale Vickery)

This is an insidiously entertaining book. Greeley's easy facility with words, his wit and superficial intelligence, almost succeed in disguising the sexism and racism rampant in *ANGEL FIRE*. It's an easy book to read, but its fast-paced humour covers a weak and condescendingly complacent plot.

The story itself relies upon a hackneyed idea - aliens as biblical 'angels' - and revolves around the relationship between nobel laureate Professor Sean Seamus Desmond and his 'guardian angel' Gabriella Light. Gabriella, an advanced alien lifeform, employs her 'angelic' powers to protect Desmond from various threats to his life from unscrupulous ex-Nazis who are attempting to control all 'angel-kind' and to subvert the next stage of man's evolution to higher consciousness predicted by Desmond's nobel winning work. Needless to say, victory goes to the angels and good is triumphant over evil.

The theological questions Greeley raises (he is also a Roman Catholic priest) are never seriously pursued. They simply provide additional opportunities for (admittedly witty) one-liners and a series of tired von-Daniken style reinterpretations of Judaic-Christian mythology. The effect is lightweight.

More seriously, Gabriella's character is an idealised male fantasy figure used simply to feed Desmond's over-inflated ego; and the ridiculous racial stereotypes (lovable Irish rogues, boring Swedes, Nazi Germans) are almost too silly even to be insulting.

If I believed this was intended as satire I might feel more charitable toward *ANGEL FIRE*. As it is, Greeley chooses the cheap laugh too often and I can't bring myself to give him the benefit of the doubt. Funny but flawed.

Douglas Hill - - *THE COLLOGHI CONSPIRACY* Gollancz, 1990, 238pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Vernon Leigh)

THE COLLOGHI CONSPIRACY is the second of Hill's *Del Curb* books. Not having read the first, and being promised by the back blurb that the earlier book (*THE FRAXILLY FRACAS*) was in the "humorous tradition of Eric Frank Russell and Douglas Adams", I approached with caution.

My reservations were justified. A comedy is supposed to make you laugh. Perhaps even cry. *COLLOGHI CONSPIRACY* does neither. In fact it does nothing. Nothing at all.

The problem is that Hill isn't funny. Perhaps it's personal taste. Comedy, more than any other form of entertainment, depends very much on the reader's sense of humour. but even so, in a book such as this, the writer should at least get a smile. Unfortunately not.

The reason why Hill falls on his face is that the way he writes isn't funny. It isn't bad. It's just not

funny. Hill is not a natural comedian, and when he tries to force himself to produce a joke it shows. Douglas Adams is funny because he is honest with himself and with his reader, but Hill is lying to us and (probably) deceiving himself when he forces out the humour. Perhaps if he let the story come naturally the jokes would follow.

David Eddings - - **THE DIAMOND THRONE** (Grafton, 1990, 496pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Confession time: despite the urgings of several friends I'd never read any of David Eddings' books until now. If **THE DIAMOND THRONE** is typical, it's a mix familiar to all genre-fantasy fans (and, dressed in a different garb, to readers of other genres, for that matter). The cast-list includes - in no particular order - the sombre Exiled hero and his Boisterous Companion, the Renegade Knight, the Sharpwitted Urchin, the Enigmatic Child, the Scheming Ecclesiastical Villain, the Cunningly Machiavellian but Good Prelate, the Golden-hearted Whore Who Enjoys her Work, the drunken Physician, the Good Queen in Danger and the Magic Talisman. There's also a Dark Lord skulking offstage, but just as we only realise the significance of the Talisman towards the end of this volume, so he can wait until we've milked what we can out of the richness just described. Oh, and there's also an Ageless Sorceress who mothers her order of fighting monks so effectively we expect her to tuck them into bed every night with a cup of hot cocoa and check that they've washed behind their ears before they go on any quests.

Above all, there's a good line in slapstick and wisecrack: by no means the sharp deconstructionist satire of a Pratchett, but warmer and more effective than any of the Pratchett imitators. **THE DIAMOND THRONE** is a B-movie book; a very enjoyable read which manages to combine a safely conventional story with a tongue-in-cheek way of telling it. It's no epic, and appeals to the essential soap-opera/sitcom audience rather than the lovers of a strange and unusual story which many fantasy readers *think* they are, but given that, it's value for money. I expected something more portentous, and was pleasantly surprised.

Robert Reed - - **BLACK MILK** (Orbit, 1990, 327pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

Genetic engineering has come along way by the time this novel begins: Dr Florida, genius, super-scientist and philanthropist saw to that. Young Ryder is the result - one of many - of this engineering. Most children have some kind of special talent courtesy of the new science. Ryder's is a phenomenal memory, which he uses to tell his story and that of Dr Florida. Unfortunately, Dr Florida wanted to go beyond Earth, to seed the planets, and for this aim he created Sparkhounds - incredible, almost indestructible creatures designed to colonise planets in hostile environments; of course the creatures go wrong, and pose a devastating threat to Earth...

The action is far from space-opera stuff, and most of the confrontations with the Sparkhounds occur off-planet; this is a tale about a boy growing up in a world he doesn't particularly understand, a world where he has to learn about relationships, sometimes being scarred by the interaction of other people and friends. It is about hopes, loves and ideals. This time the blurb writer has it right: it is a mixture of Mark Twain and SF; hints of Bradbury, too. It may not command as much appeal in GB as in the US, because our literary traditions don't tend to reflect the outdoors/backwoods adventures typical of Twain and Bradbury, but Reed's creatures live in a credible future society, with its ills, its litter, its everyday scientific marvels rubbing shoulders with children's tree-houses. It is well-written and offers interesting characters and insights. Reed was acclaimed for **THE HORMONE JUNGLE** and this is his third book; I can't find any mention of his second (clearly it isn't published by Orbit!) Worth keeping an eye on this writer.

Kim Stanley Robinson - - **THE GOLD COAST**
(Orbit, 1990, 389pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

THE GOLD COAST is set in Orange County, California, in the 21st Century. Jim McPherson, a young writer barely making a living out of part-time teaching and word-processing for a real estate firm, drifts through the urban landscape, going to endless all night parties, taking designer drugs. He becomes ever more estranged from his conservative military researcher father.

Jim is a poet - his poems are sprinkled throughout the text, reflecting the story and its setting - and a historian, writing a history of Orange County from pre-historic times, the early settlers, the orange plantations, and its eventual destruction at the hands of real estate developers, freeways and the defence industry. He is a socialist and eager to hit out at the madness of the arms industry and his father's values, so he becomes a minor league saboteur. His targets are weapons, not people, and no-one gets hurt. Life, of course, is not as simple as that. 21st century Orange County brings modern civilisation and affluence: it also brings poverty and squalor; slums built in the shadow of miles of multi-layered freeway systems, people preserved by medical science to live their old-age in prison-like old folks' homes in segregated parts of the city.

There are different responses to this. Sandy, drug designer and dealer, keeps up a facade of boundless energy. Abe, a paramedic daily digging people out of freeway pile-ups, edges toward nervous collapse. Tash drops out altogether, camps on the roof of a building and communes with nature on the surf beach. Jim's mother, Lucy, works for her church, bringing comfort and aid to the poor in the slums - whilst the vicar hates the poor and gives sermons on "stand-on-your-own-two-feet" lines. Jim, despairing, and unable to share his mother's faith, turns to wreaking havoc at military bases, cleanly and without harming anyone. But all is not as it seems: the suppliers of his saboteur's hardware don't share his principles, and have reasons of their own for destroying military bases.

The true protagonist of the story is Orange County, a microcosm of modern urban civilisation, with its destruction of nature and its debasement of humanity from the early days of the settlers to the corruption and deceit of corporate madness, real estate development and military escalation; people made powerless by aimless addiction to drugs, videos, shopping malls or simply imprisoned by poverty or old age. The city temporarily prevails over nature, burying the past under parking lots.

This is a powerful and poetic book which deserves to be widely read.

Michael Bishop - - **UNICORN MOUNTAIN**
(Grafton, 1990, 495pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

Long novels featuring unicorns on their covers are almost invariably witless: they involve quests, swords and a whole host of animated garden statuary. They rarely feature anything resembling a realistically drawn character and are usually concerned with infantile battles between good and evil.

UNICORN MOUNTAIN, despite its cover, has none of these faults. It deals with four characters whose lives are affected by the presence of unicorns from another dimension: Libby looks after her ex-husband's cousin, Bo, who is dying from AIDS; Sam, a native American Indian, lives on Libby's farm as the hired help and is estranged from his daughter, Paisley, who still lives on a reservation with her mother (who kills herself near the beginning of the novel).

These four work towards each other throughout the novel, and come together just before the death of Bo, which is movingly described. The unicorns are also dying, as Bo discovers when he watches TV broadcasts from another dimension. In that dimension nothing can be done to save them from the AIDS-like disease which is gradually wiping them out, so Libby sets out to save them with the help of a local veterinary surgeon.

The depth of characterization in the novel is at least as great as any you might find in the bourgeois 'novels of character'; but this is faint praise: UNICORN MOUNTAIN is a work which celebrates the human spirit without glossing over its faults; if any fantasy novel deserved to transcend genre categories it is this one.

Mike McQuay - - THE NEXUS (Headline, 1990, 474pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

McQuay's MEMORIES (1987) ranks among my alltime Top Twenty, and apparently I am not alone. THE NEXUS, hailed by Zelazny as his "best book to date", isn't quite that, but it's a taut, convincing, frightening and enthralling read.

Initially I was deterred by the TV-script-style presentation, until I realised that this reflects the viewpoint of Dennis Stiller, TV newsman who unveils a genuine miracle maker - and brings about his head, and hers, the massed venom of virtually every aspect of modern American life.

I give warning that one of the worst of these defilers is a fundamentalist Christian preacher, an unpleasant breed almost unknown and certainly far less powerful in Britain. Yet even this somewhat over-the-top character speaks and acts, as do all McQuay's people, completely honestly and reasonably within the confines of his personal makeup - no chance of McQuay pulling that trick of using characters simply to reflect the way he wants the plot to go.

you can become truly involved in the events in this book. You can find yourself actually caring what happens, and rooting for the goodies, if you can only decide who they are, and indeed if anyone or anything "good" exists. How it all comes out in the end is another question; suffice it to say that McQuay is a powerful writer and one to watch. And if you've still not read MEMORIES, get it now!

Poul Anderson - - THE BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS (Orbit, 1990, 604pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

The story kicks off in 310BC at a place called Thule and concerns a group of eight isolated individuals, four men and women of differing national origins who, after growing to adulthood, quickly discover to their various degrees of dismay and bewilderment that - barring accidents - they are (effectively young-looking and) immortal. The reader is then taken on a journey of the many early life-times of each immortal in turn, and the story as a whole develops. The eight are gradually, after much world-girdling travel and soul-searching, brought together to a point in time that would correspond to about the year 2000. The Immortals' adventures continue endlessly into the future, by building a monstrous spaceship which takes them all to many different parts of the galaxy, where they then meet up with other spacefaring civilisations.

Anderson has certainly done his homework before putting pen to paper with this novel, as we are given historically correct detail after detail in order to make the story credible. However, the story itself does seem to echo parts of other well-known SF novels, such as Heinlein's METHUSELAH'S CHILDREN (1958) and TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE (1974) as well as Brunner's THE TRAVELLER IN BLACK (1971). Anderson's attempt to produce what could become a best-seller and a nominee for an award, has left the ending open, for a possible sequel. Well-written, and a must for everyone and Anderson fans alike.

Ian Watson - - SALVAGE RITES (Grafton, 1990, 252pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

This is a collection of short stories all of which have appeared previously in magazines or in original

anthologies. 'Lost Bodies' was also reprinted in Datlow and Windling's THE BEST FANTASY AND HORROR 2. Those who have read Watson's work will know that he is both an SF "ideas" writer and an author of some literary skill.

There is, it seems, a dark strand in much of Watson's work, and one or two of the stories - it would be unfair to disclose which - finish with the gruesomeness of a full-blooded horror story. 'The Moon and Michaelangelo' is about a baffling group of aliens who produce sculpture seemingly without tools. Most of the other stories are set closer to our own time and place in locations which evidently reflect Watson's own travels, e.g. 'Day of the Wolf' is set not far from where I live in country once forest, now mostly farmland and in Watson's story, forest again. 'The Resurrection Man' concerns a severed ear and other unsavoury things.

COLLISION COURSE

[Arthur Clarke's reminiscences of the Chelsea Hotel last issue also sparked some reader comment, among which was the following from KEN LAKE, who started it all.]

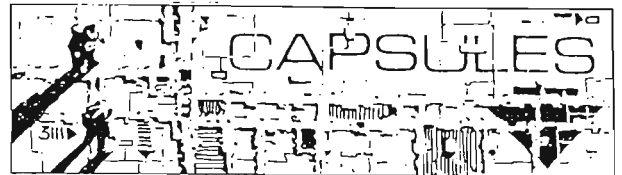
PI 83 lacked an index; readers will find my CRADLE review on p. 4, and discover that virtually the whole of Arthur C. Clarke's ecstatic outburst about his experiences in my third favourite city (Manhattan) has no relevance to that review.

I freely confess that I have not yet read RAMA II or THE GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS: I await the availability of paperback editions but can assure him they are on order: I wouldn't willingly miss anything he writes.

But I have to confess myself disappointed that the ACC whom I recall from the mid-forties at St. Martin's School of Art meetings of the British Interplanetary Society is obviously submerged under a heavy layer of sixties-type psychedelia, now revealed by it nostalgia de la boue.

I stand by my review of CRADLE: it is overwritten, boring, hackneyed and unnecessarily prurient, and I still don't know who actually named Canthor; its politics are predictably dated, its ecology faulty and ACC should wash out his mouth already!

For all that, I wouldn't be without at least half of all ACC's writings: does that mean I should accept the rest without thinking, reacting or observing? In PI 84, p. 4, Arthur Clarke can read my adulatory review of his ASTOUNDING DAYS. I hope it makes him feel a lot better.



Richard Austin - - THUNDER OF HELL (Pan, 1990, 217pp, £3.50); NIGHT OF THE PHOENIX (Pan, 1990, 216pp, £3.50)

Third and fourth volumes of THE GUARDIANS, a survivalist series described on the back covers as "Male adventure" rather than SF. It is set in the USA after a USA-USSR nuclear exchange, and the plotline involves much guerilla action and a high body count. The books contain considerable description of authentic-sounding military hardware and its effects, and military methods, but rather less of human interest. "Richard Austin" is a pseudonym. (Geoff Cowie)

Lynne Reid Banks - - MELUSINE (Penguin Plus, 1990, 190pp, £2.99)

The blurb invites us (or rather teenagers) to "discover Melusine's sinister secret", which, those familiar with folk-tale will know, is that she can turn into a serpent. Roger, on holiday with his family in a French chateau, is the only one to suspect this quality in the daughter of the chateau's owner. But Melusine has another secret.

Although one might think that child abuse is too topical to fit into a story about legends from the past surviving into the present, father-daughter incest does have a folktale resonance: it lies at the back of the Cinderella story. A well-constructed teenage read in the OWL SERVICE tradition. (Jessica Yates)

Elizabeth M. Boyer - - **THE CURSE OF SLAGFID** (Corgi, 1990, 398pp, £3.99)

This is volumesix of a series, and represents almost everything that is wrong with the majority of fantasy novels. It begins with "Some Hints on Pronunciation" and goes rapidly downhill. The prose-style is so basic it reads like a children's book, the dialogue is flat, and the characterisation is of the "tell-not-show" variety; the plot is unoriginal. Given the fantasy market, it's a certain best-seller. (Brendan Wignall)

Terry Brooks - - **THE SCIONS OF SHANNARA** (Orbit, 1990, 502pp, £5.99)

And here we have the full range of garden statuary from gnomes and dwarves through elves to trolls. This is Brooks' first *Shannara* novel for five years (well, time flies when you're having fun), picking up the action in the Four Lands several generations on. The Federation has enslaved the dwarves, the elves have vanished and magic is outlawed (sounds good to me)

As might be expected this is achingly predictable and morally simplistic - another mega-seller, no doubt. (Brendan Wignall)

Bruce Colville - - **THE DUNGEON 2: THE DARK ABYSS** (Bantam, 1990, 311pp, £3.50)

Despite masquerading as a Philip Jose Farmer book, he did not write it, Colville did. It's a cross between RIVERWORLD and THE WORLD OF TIERS, over-rank with uninspired episodes of violent conflict, heaving bosoms, and bulging trousers, written with the sparsity of detail associated with rpg books. It's one of the more obnoxious examples of the current trend in publishing, but I dare say rpg fans won't be disappointed. (Terry Broome)

Hugh Cook - - **THE WAZIR AND THE WITCH** (Corgi, 1990, 448pp, £3.99)

Imagine a fantasy after Jack Vance full of exotic peoples, polysyllabic names, neologisms and digressions . . . which almost but not entirely fails utterly in every comparison, "By now the reader may be getting restless," chortles the insufferable narrator on p. 27 after a series of stream-of-consciousness diversions from the business of actually telling what story there is. You said, chum; you said it. (Andy Sawyer)

Sonni Cooper - - **BLACK FIRE: STAR TREK 37** (Titan, 1990, 220pp, £2.99)

The *Enterprise* succumbs to an unexpected and aggressive act of sabotage by an unknown race. Its bridge is almost completely destroyed in the resulting bomb-blast, and most of the crew are either dead or severely wounded - all this is the first two pages! Keeps you reading from start to finish at warp-speed. (Chris C. Bailey)

Chris Dixon - - **WINTER IN APHELION** (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 238pp, £3.50)

Awkwardly written heroic fantasy that follows the "poor boy makes good" pattern. The well-intentioned environmental message is lost with bad plotting and forced character stereotyping. (Vernon Leigh)

John Farris - - **SHATTER** (Gollancz, 317pp, 1990, £3.99)

Tut tut! The chaps at Victor Gollancz Ltd really should try reading their paperbacks before they package them. Beware of blurbs bearing terms like "psychological horror" - apparently it means the author usually writes horror but they couldn't find any gory bits! In fact SHATTER is a fairly compelling thriller with bluff and double-bluff aplenty leading to a shoot-out in a castle. Well plotted and enjoyable but it ain't horror. (Colin Bird)

Kenneth C. Flint - - **ISLE OF DESTINY** (Bantam, 1989, 438pp, £3.99)

Working through the legends of ancient Ireland to convert them into popular novels, and having published

trilogies about Lugh and Finn, Flint has now reached the Tara and Ulster legends. You wouldn't know from the title that ISLE OF DESTINY is actually a novelisation of the epic "The destruction of Da Derga's Hostel". Presumably planning a trilogy about Cuchulain, Flint has given important roles to that young hero (as Santana), Queen Maeve, and the wizardly druid Galatin, all of whom are brought into this story from the more famous "Cattle-raid or Cooley". This is a welcome popularisation of a great but little-known epic which I hope will do well. Celtic fantasy purists, however, will shudder at the liberties Flint takes with his characters' biographies, and his prosaic style. (Jessica Yates)

Christopher Fowler - - **THE BUREAU OF LOST SOULS** (Arrow, 244pp, 1990, £3.99)

Twelve adroitly told tales in which Fowler reveals a considerable talent for the macabre. The author mixes horror and comedy across urban landscapes with great verve. Good stuff. (Colin Bird)

Michael Gray - - **THE ROOM** (Corgi, 1990, 239pp, £2.99)

Something nasty is found in a secret Room in the house left to the Briars (Dad and two girls) and Halifaxes (Mum and two boys) leading to Masochism In The Family and murdering spree described in graphic detail. The author seems particularly fond. Of. Short. Staccato. Sentences. Not for the squeamish or discerning reader. (Ian Sales)

Simon Green - - **NO HAVEN FOR THE GUILTY** (Headline, 1990, 213pp, £3.50)

Hawk and Fisher are the toughest - and only honest - guards in haven, and having defeated a vampire are at once sent on a bodyguarding assignment which turns into a locked-room murder mystery with a sorcerer, a witch and a Conan-type hero among the suspects. Not much depth, but a fun read for murder fans slumming among sword-and-sorcery. (Or vice-versa). (Andy Sawyer)

Barbara Hambly - - **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** (Unwin, 1990, 242pp, £3.99)

Transplanted Tarzan figure in basement city New York fairy-tale melodrama. Hambly works competently within the confines of this morally "decent" TV script, but you would need a genius to turn the series, created by Ron Koslow, into a decent book. (Terry Broome)

Robert E. Howard, L. Sprague de Camp & Lin Carter - - **THE CONAN CHRONICLES 2** (Orbit, 1990, 535pp, £4.50)

Omnibus edition of CONAN THE ADVENTURER, CONAN THE WANDERER, and CONAN THE BUCCANEER. A mixture of Howard's originals, and de Camp and Carter's additions. It's powerful stuff which makes modern heroic fantasy seem effete, but ought to be read in small doses to avoid the essential sameness of the plots. And while Howard's literary unsophistication makes for refreshing, no-frills storytelling, examples such as 'Shadows in Zamboula' are straight red-neck Texan racism, sword-and-sorcery or not. (Andy Sawyer)

Judith Kelman - - **WHILE ANGELS SLEEP** (Grafton, 1990, 280pp, £3.50)

Not so much SF or horror or fantasy, more your average psychological thriller. Raises itself a bit by virtue of the fact that the characters are fairly believable, but falls again when they become so believable that they are downright irritating. (Jon Wallace)

Katherine Kerr - - **DAWN SPELL** (Grafton, 1990, 461pp, £4.50)

If you haven't read the first twobooks in this well-written, well-researched series you may feel you're missing a great deal of information. It's a love story that spans, through a kind of reincarnation, many centuries, mainly concerning nevyn, Rhodry and Jill and the Dweomer, a system of magic aimed at personal enlightenment through harmony with the natural universe. There's dark and light fantasy here, and plenty of action and love to satisfy most readers. (Nik Morton)

Megan Lindholm - - **WOLF'S BROTHER** (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 234pp, £3.50)

The sequel to THE REINDEER PEOPLE, and chronicles Kerlew's rites of passage into shamanhood. the rites

and customs of the tribe are accounted in meticulous detail. Unfortunately this isn't enough; the narrative seems toamble along without any sense of place or direction, so the overall effect is bland. (Chris Hart)

Brian Lumley - - **DEADSPeAK** (Grafton,1990, 556pp, £4.50)

Fourth in the *Necroscope* fusion of vampire horror and spy thriller, with a touch of Lovecraft as one might expect from Lumley. The conventions are more those of the thriller than the vampire or Lovecraftian genres: frequent crude writing, but occasional compelling ideas among the metaphysics. (Andy Sawyer)

Dan McGirt - - **ROYAL CHAOS** (Pan, 1990, 246pp, £3.99)

I suppose this could be described as a post-Pratchett fantasy. Unfortunately, it's far too bloody. There are jokes in here which would suggest that it's supposed to be a light fantasy, but I've never felt that hundreds of people dying horribly was funny. If you've read and enjoyed the first in the series, JASON COSMO, then I suppose you'll enjoy this. (Jon Wallace)

Adrienne Martine-Barnes - - **THE SEA SWORD**(Headline, 1990, 292pp, £3.50)

Self-standing novel in a series featuring the various elemental swords foisted on generations of d'Avebury family members by goddesses wishing to effect their plans for humanity. Despite a rather clumsy distribution of 'plot coupons' early on, this work can be recommended for its engaging and sensitive portrayal of its protagonist(e). Especially if you are enjoying Gene Wolfe's "SOLDIER OF ..." series read this. (Benedict S. Cullum)

Michael Moorcock - - **FORTRESS OF THE PEARL** (Grafton, 1990, 269pp, £3.50)

A further 95,000 words are added to the depiction of Elic's incarnation of Moorcock's Eternal Champion. There should be sufficient nourishment for most of his fans although this is more of a consommé when compared to the broth of, say, a "GLORIANA" or a "MOTHER LONDON". (Benedict S. Cullum)

Charles Platt - - **SOMA** (Grafton, 1990, 239pp, £3.50)

This is set in Piers Anthony's world of Cthon, a place where women have had their telepathic intuitions scrambled so that they feel love as hate, and anger and cruelty as love. This philosophically untenable idea provides the basis for a novel which will appeal only to deviants and masochists. (Brendan Wignall)

Fay Sampson - - **BLACK SMITH'S TELLING** (Headline, 1990, 275pp, £3.50)

Third in the *Daughter of Tintagel* series, re-telling the story of Arthur's ascension to the throne as seen from Morgan's side. While competently handled and well-rooted in Celtic lore, Sampson's story has little to distinguish it from other attempts at the cycle, and is certainly no match for the biggies in the field. Does the world really need *another* version of the Arthurian myth, or is it something each generation has to work out for itself? (John D. Owen)

Guy N. Smith - - **PHOBIA** (Grafton, 1990, 252pp, £3.50)

Even before you open this book you know what is happening: a haunted house is feeding on the phobic fears of its residents. It is not until half-way through that the author begins to ask why, and the answer comes as no surprise to anyone. (Neale Vickery)

Bernard Taylor - - **SWEETHEART, SWEETHEART** (Grafton, 1990, 351pp, £3.99)

SWEETHEART, SWEETHEART is a ghost story, described on the back as "slow-burning" and this is certainly true: the book shows its age a bit (first published in 1977) and takes a long time to get where it's going, but once there the suspense grips to the end. (John Wallace)

Roger Taylor - - **INTO MARSINDAL** (Headline, 1990 533pp £4.99)

Fourth and final volume of the *Chronicles of Hawklan* in which the war is concluded and Hawklan and Gavor turn out to be... but that would be telling. (Andy Sawyer)

Paul B. Thompson & Tonya R. Carter - - **RIVERWIND THE PLAINSMAN** (Penguin, 1990, 313pp, £3.99)

Noble Savage Riverwind and comic relief soothsayer Catchflea fall down a shaft to come across some underground elves. There's a Blue Crystal Staff to find as well. Preposterous fantasy in the *Dragonlance Preludes* series; they even pull that old "Help, help, she's ill!" trick to escape from captivity and they *take it perfectly seriously*. Books like this give literacy a bad name. (Andy Sawyer)

Della Van Hise - - **KILLING TIME: STAR TREK 38** (Titan, 1990, 311pp, £2.99)

The Romulans, in an attempt to alter Galactic history in their favour, transport the *Enterprise* and galaxy into an alternate space-time continuum, an alternate reality which has Mr. Spock as captain of the *Shikahr*, (an alternate *Enterprise*, and our good old reliable Captain James T. Kirk finds himself in the lowly (and insufferable!) position of... Ensign! Good. (Chris C.Bailey)

Margaret Weiss & Tracy Hickman - - **THE PALADIN OF THE NIGHT** (Bantam, 1990, 372pp, £3.99)

"You've been listening to Meddah's stories with ears soaked in qumiz!"

I didn't feel like I'd been bathing in "fermented mare's milk" after reading this portmanteau of Arabian-fantasy stories, but it certainly seemed more appealing than buying the next (third) volume of the trilogy. The authors have abandoned D&D scenarios for a series of tales concerning the interplay concerning the interplay between gods and mortals within the world of Sularin, complete with a mind-aching maze of unpronounceable names and a typically silly lexicon. (Chris Hart)

Patricia C.Wrede - - **SHADOW MAGIC** (Orbit, 1990, 279pp, £3.50)

Third-rate sub-Tolkienesque mish-mash in the *Lyra* series, about a princess who makes good, becomes Queen and weds. It likens itself erroneously to Bradley's *Darkover* fantasies, but its xenophobic plot and style are moreakin to and indistinguishable from so many other identikit good-triumphs-over-evil-using-magic-talismans-armies-of-fuzzy-dwarves-and-a-bard fantasies. (Terry Broome)

"Upon the rack in print"

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
and ANALOG, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1990

reviewed by Edward James

The November *Asimov's* is a newly devised double issue: 320 pages (including all the adverts, of course) for \$3.95: £2.50 instead of £1.80, according to Ken Siaters' latest *Fantast* (Medway) Ltd catalogue. Whether it is worth that depends rather on the quality of the stories and features. Well, if you like Avram Davidson's "let-it-all-hang-out" school of scholarship you might like latest discursive "Adventure in Unhistory", about the Moon, which fills 32 of those pages. Informative, but desperately rambling. The two novellas are by Allan Steele and Kim Stanley Robinson. Steele's is "Trembling Earth", a readable, suspenseful story about the results of recreating, from genetic material, three particularly nasty dinosaurs: not particularly original, however, but perfectly competently told. Robinson's "A Short, Sharp Shock" is of a different order entirely: as memorable as his splendid "Green Mars", but far more way out. It too features mountains -- Robinson's best stories do -- but this time a thoroughly weird mountain ridge that runs for ever across and around a watery globe. The story, sf in tone but with little attempt to make the amazing plausible, follows the journey of a mysterious stranger across this world, meeting one marvel after another. A

dream-like and (as I have demonstrated) indescribable story that is almost worth the price of the issue. In addition, however, there are five novelettes: "Getting the Bugs Out", Janet Kagan's latest enjoyable story in the saga of Mama Jason, genetic engineer, as she meets more of the strange biomass of the newly colonised planet. Richard Paul Russo's "Liz and Diego", quite a moving story about an American woman in Latin America, an old Italian (called Diego?!), and the mysterious alien artefacts they discover. Alexander Jablov's "The Place of No Shadows" confirms my opinion that he is one of the best of the newish writers: full of inventiveness and strangeness, as usual, featuring some really alien aliens, some pretty alien human academics, a half-drowned Boston which is the centre of communications between human and alien, and a who-(or what-)dunnit. Melanie Tem's "Reunion" is a moving story about the ending of a woman's grief; and Andrew Weiner's "Eternity, Baby" is, for me, a not entirely satisfactory story about an aging rock group and the ghostly return of its former inspiration. Of the four shorts, I particularly enjoyed Robert Reed's "The Utility Man", a Dick-like tale of an encounter between a factory worker and one of the aliens he has romanticised and fantasized about, and Terry Bisson's intriguing little vignette of how Owensboro, Kentucky, is invaded by the New York literary scene, "The Two Janets".

The December *Asimov's* (there is going to be a Mid-December as well, which in terms of pages now means an equivalent of 14 issues a year) had Judith Moffett's "The Ragged Rock" as the sole novella. Not as good as Moffett at her best: fairly conventional in treatment and contents, but as readable and competent as always. It is another in her series about the meeting of mankind with the alien Hefn (the first, "The Hob", was set in Yorkshire); this time we have a teenage boy obsessed with memories of his dead best friend, who gets involved

in a time paradox. A time paradox is involved in Connie Willis's "Cibola" as well, in which a reporter finds herself looking into the history of the first Spaniards in Colorado: quite an effective and amusing story, but rather lightweight. "Cibola" was one of the *nine* short stories in this issue. The only novelette was Mark W. Tiedemann's "Targets", obviously the product of a holiday in northern Spain: set in a plausible sub-cyberpunk future, against the background of the San Fermín bull-run, it is quite an effective story of industrial espionage and skullduggery, with a satisfying twist in the tail. Of the other short stories, I particularly enjoyed Brian Stableford's "Bedside Conversations" in which Gerald learns to cope with the fact that he is one of the very rare occurrences of *fetus in fetu* (or *foetus in foetu*, as Brian probably wrote it), in which one twin embryo is engulfed by the other and has its development suspended for several years (in short, Gerald discovers he is going to have a baby); Cherry Wilder's "A Woman's Ritual" is an enjoyably nasty tale of peasant eccentricity and pre-Roman religion set in Wilder's adopted Germany; and Lewis Shiner's "Wild for You", a very short tale about an eerie encounter on a freeway. For those who still like mermaid stories there is Bridget McKenna's "Evenings, Mornings, Afternoons"; and for those who want an Abraham-Merritt-meets-Indiana-Jones scenario (quite fun, too) there is Phillip C. Jennings's "The Gadarene Dig".

The cover story in the November 1990 *Analog* was a nostalgic breath of *Astounding* days, as Christopher Anvil, in "The Underhandler", looked at how the wily Earthman defeats the scheming and nasty aliens. Fun. John Campbell would have loved it; he *did* love it when Anvil did almost exactly the same stuff back in the '50s. And he would have adored Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff's "Blythe Magic", in which a woman paralysed by a debilitating disease has the will power to develop her latent psi powers. Better written than it might have been back in the psi-obsessed '50s, but still... However, I am not at all sure Campbell would have liked the novella, by one of *Analog's* very best current writers, Michael F. Flynn: "Mamma Morgan Played the Organ; her Daddy Beat the Drum". If the Jennings story above was Merritt-meets-Indiana-Jones, this is Lovecraft-meets-the-Ghostbusters. Mamma Morgan, it says, is a real-live early 19th-century figure in local Pennsylvania politics; the title quotes a contemporary children's rhyme. The story, though, revolves around an attempt to

find scientific basis for the ghostly appearances around her tomb, interweaving a story of a man and his dead brother. The scientific gobbledygook didn't obscure the fact that Flynn knows how to set up a plausible scenario, knows his American history, and knows how to tell a good story. It was the best thing in the issue, despite a couple of perfectly competent shorts by F. Alexander Brejcha and Julia Ecklar.

Cover story for the December *Analog* was Alexis Glynn Latner's "Glorystar", a very routine space adventure. And the novella, Daniel Hatch's "Den of Foxes", a tale of pioneer colonists on a fairly forbidding planet could, with a very few judicious changes, be made into a story about pioneer colonists in the American or Canadian West in the nineteenth century. "Victor Victorious" by Grey Rollins was another of his stories about a fairly mediocre private detective and his alien side-kick, whose special powers end up solving the crime: amusing enough, but nothing special. The best stories in the issue were Brian C. Coad's short story "Johnnie Wong's Tangrams" and W. R. Thompson's novelette "Life Among the Immortals", both of them taking a standard, but still successful, sf gambit: imagine one technological change, and envisage how it might change things. The Coad story is more about the intrigues behind the invention of a radical new form of photography; W. R. Thompson's is a much more careful analysis of the way in which people might behave if nanotechnology could produce microscopic gizmos which would live in our insides, keep us healthy, and, indeed, keep us practically immortal. The story is told from the point of view of two of the very rare people whose allergies make it impossible for them to use such techniques. It's a good example of the way in which *Analog*, almost alone, keeps alive the traditional "What If?" sf story, and keeps it up to date with current ideas of technological progress. I'm old-fashioned (and old) enough to like it.

INTERZONE 40 - 41 (October - November 1990)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

IZ 40 is, it must be said, disappointing - fiction-wise at least. The showcase story is the longest piece of work IZ have published within a single issue. It's by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, and it's set in 1855, in an alternative England where the industrial and information revolutions coincided, where Britain has been transformed by the Industrial Radicals and the USA is divided. An intriguing scenario, so why doesn't 'The Angel Of Goliad' work? Well, for one thing, it's the first part of a novel (THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE) and - even allowing for my prejudices against extracts from novels - it barely works as a free-standing story. Gibson and Sterling have laboured hard to produce a Victorian flavour, with lots of period slang (unfortunately, some of the latter is of the wrong period, or smacks of Americanisms, whilst the Mancunian drifts into Cockney). In fact, the prose is altogether too self-conscious for its own good. Of the remaining fiction, Chris Beckett's 'A Matter Of Survival' is a very crude and unconvincing Battle of the Sexes. John Gribbin's hero in 'Don't Look Back' goes back in time from a future where Buddy Holly hadn't died in a plane crash and inadvertently changes history. Predictable, perhaps, but smartly written with a nifty ending. 'Culprits' by Kim Newman, Neil Gaiman and Eugene Byrne subjects a string of (mostly) fictional characters to the "Whatever happened to..." treatment. A mixed piece. Best of the fiction is 'The Allure' by Richard Calder. A deposed African king plots his restitution using an army of living clothes. Calder's tale is colourful and quietly menacing.

The non-fiction is of a higher standard. In IZ 25 Ditch demolished Whitley Streiber's COMMUNION; here, in the 'Big Sellers' series, Brendan Wignall covers - more conventionally but in as enjoyable a fashion - the same ground as well as examining later works and giving snippets of an interview with Streiber. Dave Langford develops the UFO theme with a comprehensive resume of the 'MJ-Balls' affair, whilst an interview with Terry Bisson provides a sound introduction to this author's work and motivations.

Index of books reviewed

IZ 41 is a stronger issue, mainly due to two excellent stories from Nicholas Royle and Greg Egan (definitely names to keep an eye on in the future). Egan continues his investigations into moral dilemmas with 'Axiomatic', in which a man seeking revenge turns to the use of an implant which overrides his own feelings on the sanctity of life. In Royle's 'D.GO' a mysterious, pervasive advertising campaign turns ostensibly into an exercise in paranoia of THEY LIVE, with the hero refusing to accept his fate, and leads to a heady climax. Marvellous tales, both. Also of interest are the accomplished Eric Brown's 'The Pharagean Effect', set on the same planet, and with the same leading character, as that of 'Star Crystals and Karmel'. here Ben Henderson finally comes to terms with a distressing episode from his past. Paul J.McAuley's 'Exiles' deals with the degree to which people change with time, and reads more like a series of vignettes than a story. Glenn Grant provides a fast-moving, entertaining read about "teleoptered" fighting robots with 'Suburban Industrial' (I've complained in the past about the use of book jacket illustrations on the front cover, so although it's nice to see - as in this case - a story being visualised, why choose such a weak painting? The Coleclough illustrations to 'D.GO' are far stronger). Don Webb's 'Djinn' is a futuristic fantasy which works in places but ultimately doesn't deliver because Webb's city never really comes alive for the reader. Of note among the articles are Stan Nicholl's interview with David Brin, drawing out the author's political perspectives, and part one of a series of interviews with SF book editors. This insight into publishers' thinking is both thought-provoking and depressing, with the consensus being, among those interviewed, that SF lines will be cut in the future. Why? Read it and see.

FANTASY TALES Vol 12 no. 5 Autumn 1990

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Dearer but bigger than the last issue I saw (#3 was 98pp for 99p; this is 202pp for £2.95) FANTASY TALES goes from strength to strength, though not everything here is to my taste. In fact the most arresting sentence is the editors' blurb to Garry Kilworth's 'Networks' - Jones and Sutton carry on the old pulp tradition of hooking the reader before you start the story, and can you really believe "The toilet was temporarily insane"! Me, I'll make sure I've "been" at home before I next go on an InterCity...

After that, what are the stories like? Well, Kilworth's is good, naturally, and there are two stunners: Elsa Beckett's wry 'Family Ties' nods homage to ROSEMARY'S BABY without the "nice supportive network of urban satanists", and David J. Schow's 'Night Bloomer' is a dark sexual drama of office politics: ambition, revenge, sex and death. There are two atmospheric stories, Jean-Daniel Brèque's 'On The Wing' and J.N. Williamson's 'The Bridge People' which need careful reading to tease out just what is happening. Nik Morton's 'Dead On Time' offers a tense drama on board a hijacked aircraft flying into a hurricane. Samantha Lee's 'Scoop' gives us a newspaperman in the South American jungle who never finds out that he could have got one of the biggest stories of all time (a bit obvious, this one! Ramsey Campbell gives us another sword-and-sorcery tale which is good but I say that as someone who enjoys a good S&S story now and again: there's not a great deal to 'The Changer Of Names' apart from being a suitably nasty such tale, and in particular the hero Ryre is not *distinguishable* enough to rank with S&S's memorable heroes.

FANTASY TALES' main fault from a literary viewpoint is a certain sameness of tone to many of the stories, even the good ones: this is the darker end of fantasy. But when all's said and done, it's a specialist magazine and its readers expect a certain style. More serious, I think - but it's my personal view - is the lack of the kind of non-fiction input which makes the difference between an anthology and a magazine. The occasional article would make for more varied reading, now that the increased page-count gives more fiction.

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