

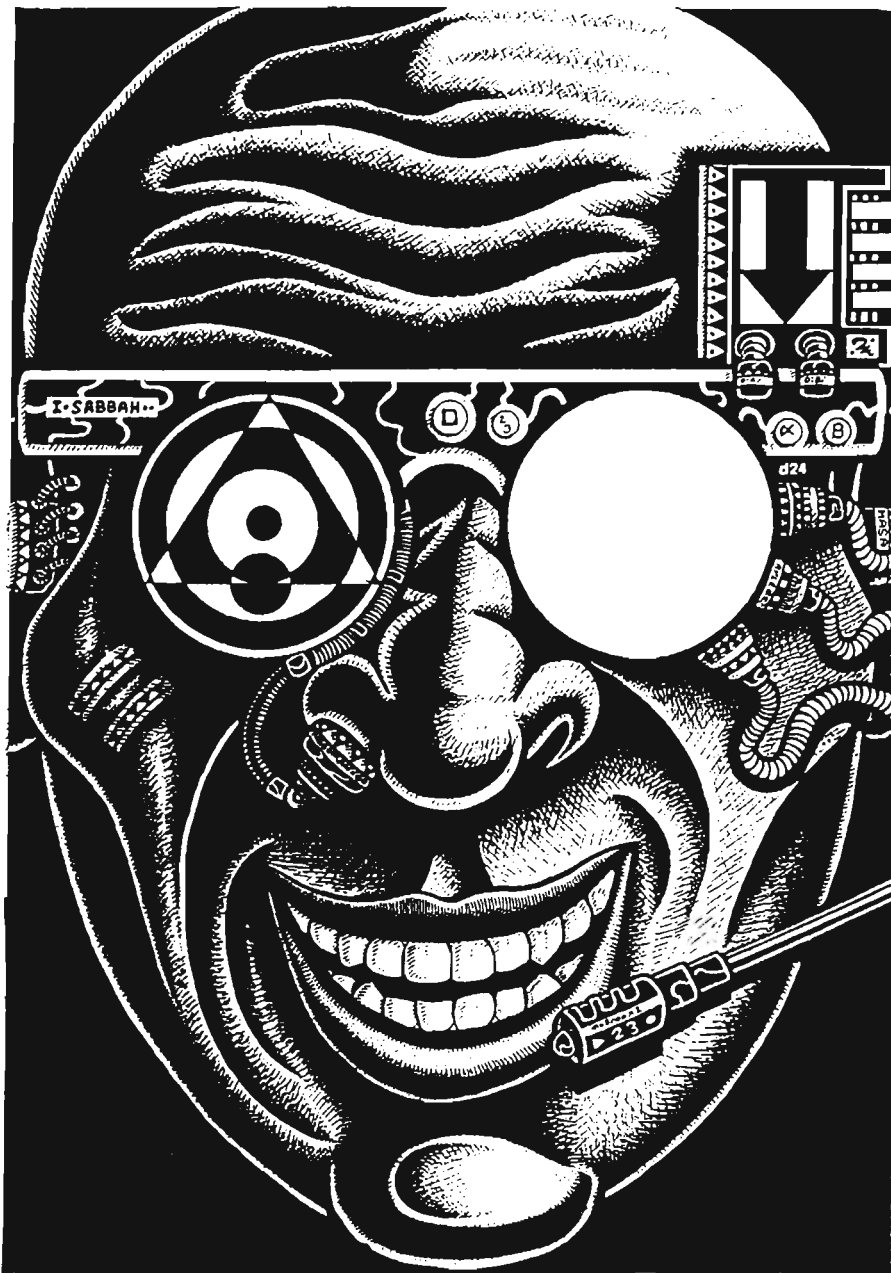


Paperback Inferno

88

The Review of paperback SF

Feb. - March 1991





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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to *PI* 89
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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.

A happy and war-free (I'm writing this two days before the January 15th deadline) New Year to you all...

Paperback Purgatory

The most interesting magazine I've read recently hasn't actually been SF-oriented, although you might be forgiven for a certain flash of *deja-vu*, as it's edited by David Pringle and contains contributions from Brian Stableford, Lisa Tuttle, Kim Newman, Paul McAuley and David Langford, as well as Mark Morris, Stan Nicholls and Brendan Wignall. While *MILLION* is not, well, a million miles from *INTERZONE* in appearance, it has a much broader brief. Subtitled *"The magazine of Popular Fiction"*, it is aimed at lovers of everything from thrillers to romances (but, yes, taking in SF and Fantasy), offering reviews, interviews, studies and bibliographies - even the occasional short story. The first (January/February) issue seems to stress the crime genre, with an interview with Colin Dexter and a new "Morse" short story, a profile of "noir" master James Ellroy and further interviews with Sue Grafton and Dick Francis. David Langford provides some examples of how even the most ingenious crime writers can come up with howlers, and Kim Newman writes about British gangster films.

Other traditions are not forgotten; Brian Stableford writes about the overblown but once immensely popular novels of Marie Corelli, and Andrew Lane gives an interesting view on "Sequels By Other Hands" - currently a controversial topic within the SF field, but one which, it is clear, is widespread outside it. There are also articles on the graphic novel and the ubiquitous "Turtles" (who have shot no less than 14 books into the top 100 "fastsellers" of 1990, but more on that in the next *PI*).

MILLION is available (£12 for six issues) from Popular Fictions, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU, UK. Further issues should contain profiles of George MacDonald Fraser, Judith Krantz, Kurt Vonnegut and P.C. Wren (among others). It's a welcome and worthwhile venture; please give it your support.

Problems with Paperbacks?

A FRENCH PERSPECTIVE

by Hervé Hauck

Your guest editorial by Ken Lake in *PI*86 was a slight shock to me, because it seems that some of his reflections on the current state of English publishing and English imports of US material applies exactly to what is now happening in France. Let me show you how:

First of all is the case of the French publishing policy in the SF (and Fantasy; I'm not a racist) field. Nowadays, about twelve to fifteen SF books are published each month. They divide thus: five low-level (although the general quality is steadily improving) French novels primarily sold on railway bookstalls which seem to me similar to your *Venture* series; six or seven paperbacks with half reprints and a few Frenchmen; and one trade paperback which is nearly always a US or UK text. So you see that there is not much in the way of SF. But this sheer low number is not the problem. There is also the price: some paperbacks cost about £5 and are sometimes split in two for the French edition (e.g. *LAVONDYSS*, or *ISLANDS IN THE NET* which cost about £11) and the trade paperback costs about £13 for a book without any particular cover, without a jacket and not as solid as your hardcovers although they are at the same level of price.

As we have something close to your Net Book Agreement it's perhaps the reason for these quite high prices in our countries. You can also question the choice of the French managing publishers especially when you see that some recent Hugos and Nebula winners are still not translated (and probably never will be) but that we can have the delight of reading in French such immortal books as *BREAKING STRAIN*, *THE THIRD EAGLE*, or *THE SON OF SPOCK* (and we even have some *Dragonlance* novels - but are they really novels?).

The last annoying thing is the time-lag between the English and French edition of one of these rare books. In fact, here we need to wait about a year (sometimes more) after the US or UK paperback to be allowed to read it. That's why there is a growing number of French fans who try to read directly in English.

And it's at this stage that they're facing the problem of finding US or UK books in France. A few facts here:

- As in the UK the cost of postage almost prohibits the buying of books directly from the US, I can also mention the difficulty of paying by Giro transfer (not allowed) or postal order (long).

- The only English bookshops which have a significant amount of SF (I mean SF other than a few Asimov, Bradbury and Tolkien) are all located in Paris. For example in Marseille, the second town in France, there is not even a standard English bookshop.

- There is one French bookshop which sells some US or UK books by mail, and its catalogue is not very big and the owner (F. Valery, a well-known French writer and fan) faces the same problem of supplies as the English ones.

- When you can find them, the books are also very expensive; in WH Smith in Paris, INHERIT THE STARS (Grafton) priced £2.99 is

sold at £5, and a US book at say \$4 is at around £4.50. This compares badly with the Netherlands where I was for Confiction, when you see that I bought HYPERION in Bantam Spectra for 11 Guilders (about £3.30). So selling English editions in France is quite a lucrative business.

The only easy way left for the non-Parisians to buy such items is to use British mail-order firms like Fantast or Andromeda (I use the latter and I'm quite satisfied with it).

XXXX

(Before leaving this topic, here's some information passed to PI by JAMES ODELL after Ken Lake's original article (PI 86). James noted an advert in THE ECONOMIST from a service named Book Call, which claims to be able to supply "Any US title in print . . . bestseller or hard-to-find". Address is 59 Elm Street, New Canaan, CT, USA, 06840 (Tel. 1-203-966-5470))



Stanislaw Lem -- RETURN FROM THE STARS (Mandarin, 1990. 247pp. £4.99)

-- HIS MASTER'S VOICE (Mandarin, 1990. 199pp. £4.99)

-- THE CHAIN OF CHANCE (Mandarin, 1990. 179pp. £4.99)

-- TALES OF PIRX THE PILOT (Mandarin, 1990. 206pp. £4.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

By any count, Lem is one of a small handful of truly outstanding SF writers: clever, committed, deeply sceptical, linguistically brilliant, highly individual - the adjectives pile up and if we're not careful we shall trip over them as we stumble towards him. Writing as a scientist in Poland meant interacting with the prevalent Marxism; a passionate aversion to closed systems is endemic throughout his work. But this means any closed systems, and as he wrestles with dilemmas of society and modern science he insists on the impossibility of 'solutions' themselves; as in SOLARIS where the study of Solaristics proliferates in a comically bewildering variety of competing sub-disciplines that reach no resolution whatsoever, and where the main character eventually glimpses the idea of an imperfect God.

Yes, yes, yes, you cry, we know some of that already, what about these four books? Shall we enjoy them?

I began with RETURN FROM THE STARS (copyright 1961) and found it the most straightforward and accessible. Astronaut Hal Bregg returns from a ten-year expedition to the stars; one hundred and twenty seven years have passed on Earth and he finds it bewilderingly different. There's a marvellous episode where he gets wildly lost among gadgets and language and transport systems and changed customs. Eventually he meets up with a fellow astronaut, probes the reality of the soft, denatured society they are in, falls disastrously in love, finds a new role, and comes awkwardly to terms with his predicament: it all makes a satisfying, gutsy read.

TALES OF PIRX THE PILOT (first collected together in 1964) starts as early satirical Lem, and for me the humour of an accident-prone cadet piloting a spacecraft in a tricky manoeuvre while trying to swat a fly has limited appeal. The tales improve somewhat; Pirx as fallible man has his point to make (genre SF was not exactly riddled with quirky characters at the time) and the last tale, of the 'ghostly' tappings in an old, once-wrecked spacecraft with a broken-down old robot called Terminus, has an oddly down-played poignancy.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE (copyright 1968) is more ambitious, and the tedious first pages nearly lost me; don't let them lose you. The prosings of Professor Peter Hogarth can be a trial but it's worth the labour. A recording of the background emission of neutrino radiation from outer space seems to be some kind of message; a huge and secret project is established to resolve it. The scientists brilliantly analyse their conceptual problems (to understand a message one must be able to envisage something about the sender) and various teams make intriguingly partial breakthroughs. But this is a Lem novel; you know they'll quarrel, you know they'll each have their own cleverly analysed stances and insights, and you know they'll never get The Answer. What's compelling is that Lem never seems to suggest giving up; he's just as upset about the dilemma as we are, just as committed to the scientific endeavour and to humanity itself, with all its flaws and limitations. Finally, THE CHAIN OF CHANCE (copyright 1975), a scientific detective story with a retired astronaut as the private eye. Clever, well conceived and written, full of action, this quite heartless book argues its way along towards a solution that either makes you cackle with amazed joy or throw the book at the wall. I have to confess I missed.

C.S. Lewis -- THE COSMIC TRILOGY (Orbit, 1990, 753pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

THE COSMIC TRILOGY is a grandiose but appropriate omnitrilogy under which to group OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET (1938), PERELANDRA (1943) and THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH (1945): for Lewis wrote, "if you have a religion it must be cosmic"; and, although he said that those looking for his religious views should read his theological essays and not his fiction, these novels have at their heart a Christian/quasi-Zoroastrian (?) concept of an evilly "occupied" world alienated from a diversely harmonious cosmic "heaven".

The "silent planet" of the opening novel is Thulcandra (Earth), virtually in quarantine, from which Weston, the "Imperialist" would-be exploiter of Malacandra (Mars) breaks out - only to be sent back by the Malacandrian Oyarsa (= tutelary spirit), while the right-minded Ransom, spiritually and ecologically re-educated during the course of his Martian adventures, is given safe-conduct home as a newly enlisted ally of the powers of light.

When Ransom is next encountered on Perelandra (Venus), he has been brought there by the angel-like *eldila* to be antagonist to the Evil (or "Beast") One, who now, as the Un-man, possesses the body of Weston. Ransom triumphs to preserve an unfallen planetary Eden. PERELANDRA climaxes in Ransom's participatory vision of the "Great Dance" of light, matter and consciousness, in which "Plans without number interlock and each movement becomes in its season the breaking into flower of the whole design". Lewis is here recollective of past cosmic concepts and prescient of future ones, hierarchical and holistic, where each part mirrors the whole of which it is a part, as do themes and variations within a symphony.

Returned to earth in THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH, a Charles Williamsesque "Matter of Britain" fantasy, Ransom is the eternal Pendragon of Logres. There is a barely acceptable measure of didacticism in the novel's mixture of realism (dystopian and positivistic bureaucracy) and allegory (a "Tower of Babel" overthrown); but the descent of the planetary gods, breaking through the telluric *cordon sanitaire*, is perhaps the best fragment of poetic drama in the entire trilogy. Evil is frustrated in each novel, though at a price. Their respective moods are of pastoral, idyll, and apocalypse. Cumulatively, they stimulate thought and the imagination. They are, above all, to be enjoyed as the work of a consummate storyteller.

Guy Gavriel Kay - - TIGANA (Penguin, 1990, 688pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Guy Kay has impressed many with his trilogy *The Fionavar Tapestry*, and now follows it up with a massive epic complete in one volume. Penguin are giving the book a real push, even advertising it on bus-shelters, so they must be expecting it to sell well, including to people who don't normally read fantasy. My view is that the hype is justified this time, and TIGANA deserves to be a bestseller.

TIGANA was written partly in Tuscany, and inspired particularly by Carlo Ginzberg's *I BENANDANTI* ("Night Battles"). I do not know this particular book, but would be surprised if it were not about, or had as a background, the liberation and unification of Italy in the 19th Century. TIGANA is set on a peninsula, pointing north instead of south, and (although called the Palm), shaped like a hand instead of a foot. At the start of the book the Palm is fragmented into separate provinces, most of it being occupied by the forces of two opposing Great Powers, just as Italy was divided into squabbling states, and fought over by the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs.

You can also make the same comparisons with a certain famous book of fantasy as did Jessica Yates in her review of Kay's *THE DARKEST ROAD* in *PI80*. TIGANA is primarily the story of Alessan, whom we first meet disguised as a journeyman musician, wandering round the provinces of his occupied land. It is his destiny to restore the realm of Tigana, claim his birthright as its ruler, and to bring freedom and unity to the Palm. Who does that remind you of?

Aragorn = Elessar perhaps?

Having said that, we can leave the comparisons and word games behind, because the book does not depend upon them for its power. Just as Jessica found in Kay's earlier book, he combines familiar fantasy elements and historical parallels with original writing and strong characterisation to create a book that becomes extremely compelling.

Kay starts the book with chapters devoted to characters living under many circumstances in different parts of the occupied peninsula, and draws their stories together gradually, as the tale proceeds towards its climax. Because he treats his characters hard, not flinching from killing them off if the story requires it, we are in doubt as to the outcome until virtually the last page, which makes for exciting stuff. When the story is concluded, we as readers know much more about what has gone on than the surviving characters, which is a matter of some poignancy.

As in the best fantasy, magic, though present here, is both fallible and restrained, and Kay's wizard Erlein is very different in character and motives from Gandalf. The prime "villain", Brandin, King of Ygrath, is no Sauron, either. He has good points as well as bad, and commands the loyalty of some of the book's most noble characters. We cannot take it for granted that Alessan, who certainly has his flaws, will prevail.

I found TIGANA absolutely gripping, driving my family insane as I took advantage of every convenient (and inconvenient) moment to read a bit more of the story until I'd reached the last page. I can write no more emphatic recommendation than that. Save up your pennies, and buy it!

Philip K Dick - - SECOND VARIETY (Grafton, 1990, 493pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

This second of five projected collections draws 27 stories from magazines of the period 1952-54. Written though they were at speed, science-fictionally naive as a few of them now seem, thematically repetitious as some may appear to be, they are entirely and rewardingly readable. Once started on one you are held through to the (usually) open or (occasionally) clichéd ending. Perhaps it is wrong to say that any are repetitious; rather there are themes and variations. A prevalent theme presents the earth as a wilderness of ruin and slag. Later science fiction, Dick's own included, may have blunted that cold war-heightened image's impact a little, but not his virtuoso short story treatment of it. Both the title story and its sequel, 'Jon's World', portray a devastated planet, but in each qualities of human empathy and awareness persist: in the classic 'Second Variety' is found the urge to succour the young and the injured - which, ironically, the humanly designed and proliferating androids exploit: in 'Jon's World' a wild talent, and later a human choice, realise the possibility and implications of better - or worse - parallel universes.

'Jon's World' is one of two narratives employing time travel. In 'Breakfast at Twilight', the suburban home pays its involuntary traumatising visit to a war-violent desolation lying ahead, investigating troops as bewildered as the family. Alternatively, some metaphysical shift may be used to question the nature of reality, the viability of perception, the coherence of identity. This is mythopoeically / humorously so in 'A Present for Pat', the story of an intrusive, feuding, alien god; disturbingly so in 'The Trouble with Bubbles', involving planetary simulacra as playthings; and hauntingly so in 'The World She Wanted', a fantasy of schizoid solipsism. 'Planet for Transients', which contributed later to the novel *DEUS IRAE*, is, in effect, the cry of the outsider, the excluded one. Certainly, as Norman Spinrad says in his Introduction, the stories are "windows... into the future, into the fully developed vision of the mature master..."

Robert Aickman - - THE UNSETTLED DUST (Mandarin, 1990, 302pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

If I had to pick just one writer in the Horror or Dark Fantasy field to stand for excellence it would be Robert Aickman. Here, (compiled from earlier collections *THE WINE-DARK SEA* and *SUB ROSA*) eight stories show his unerring ability to unhinge by means of a quiet hint, an oblique suggestion. Aickman was the absolute master of the kind of story which the reader finishes as puzzled by the characters as to what exactly is going on, but aware of a glimpse into a beyond which may not be logical or rational anyway. Each story has the disturbing illogic of dream. Geography changes to suit the whim of some peculiar fate in 'The Next Glade'. 'Bind Your Hair' is in form, but form only, the story of the observer who accidentally comes across pagan ritual in a conventional English village. 'The Stains' is a love story which never quite explains just who the mysterious "Nell" is: a few references to a vengeful father puts the story on the lip of an abyss. The terror of the ending is almost as great as that of 'The Cicerones', in which the story ends just before we are told exactly what happens to the protagonist. Perhaps it is just as well.

Aickman shares with M.R. James the ability to tell brilliantly well a supernatural story based on the "quiet desperation" of traditional English prose. (It's no accident that many of his characters are middle-aged, middle-class misfits who break through the veneer between superficial normality and nightmare.) But his scope and storytelling ability is, I think, far wider than the pure 'Jamesian ghost story'. Aickman's stories make much of what is classified under "horror" look pretty silly, in fact, and his books should be on the shelves of anyone interested in supernatural fiction.

R E V I E W S

Robert Charles Wilson - - **A HIDDEN PLACE**
(Orbit, 1990, 212pp, £3.50)

- - **MEMORY WIRE**
(Orbit, 1990, 219pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

Both of these novels were completely unknown quantities as Robert Wilson was a writer I had never come across before. After reading them I was left wondering why we had to wait three or four years for such an accomplished American writer to be published in this country, and how many other authors have yet to swim the Atlantic.

The first novel, *A HIDDEN PLACE*, is a marvellous story of small-town America in the grip of the Depression. Wilson superbly evokes a sour, crippled land where violence is just beneath the surface, a land without solidarity or compassion and where people are eaten up by their own inadequacies and frustrations.

Two young outsiders, Travis Fisher and Nancy Wilcox, find themselves put to the test, charged with the protection of an alien changeling until it can return to its own universe.

Wilson is a powerful atmospheric writer, skilfully portraying the human predicament: "You start out, Creath thought, you are in a river in full flood, but life meets you with its dams and deadfalls and all its interminable arid places. You lose speed, depth, urgency, desire. You become a trickle in a desert." Great stuff!

MEMORY WIRE is even better. Its main character, Raymond Keller, is a recording angel, a human camera emotionlessly recording everything that passes before his eyes. He accompanies an old friend and a woman artist, Teresa, on a smuggling trip into Brazil. They are to acquire a dreamstone, a fragment from a huge cache of alien artefacts that is being mined up the amazon. These artefacts are also being hunted down by an obsessive US intelligence agent, Stephen Oberg, a man whose hands are red with blood.

Instead of 1930s America, Wilson offers a vision of Brazil as Hell, as a Third World toxic wasteland oppressed and exploited by its North American neighbour. While escaping Oberg, Keller and the others begin to recover their humanity, to become more fully human.

Both these beautifully written melancholy tales are concerned with small-scale redemption. No worlds are saved, no tyrannies overthrown. Instead Wilson shows convincing characters continuing to survive with decency in a hostile world. Both books are highly recommended. Wilson is an author to look out for.

Jonathan Carroll - - **A CHILD ACROSS THE SKY** (Legend, 1990, 268pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Carroll tackles a cinematic landscape of iconic imagery through the medium of a more traditional horror/thriller narrative. Film director Weber enters the curious world of his dead friend Philip Strayhorn whose video messages from beyond the grave. Weber begins a quest to find the secret in one of his friend's seedy horror films and along the way meets a pregnant child/angel and watches his tattoo of a bird come alive and fly away. Amongst a profusion of flashbacks and stories within the narrative Carroll jettisons the horror element for ruminative metaphysics.

The book starts promisingly but a welter of ideas and heavily laboured symbolism compete with needlessly parenthetical episodes to frustrating effect. The author's coy artifice may appeal to some readers and at the heart of the story is an ambitious dark fantasy but multilayered books like this suffer badly from glimpses of the banal. In *A CHILD ACROSS THE SKY* Weber is

totally unconvincing as an award-winning film maker; references to his "masterpieces" are just about the only insight into his character.

Your appreciation of this novel will depend largely on your reaction to Carroll's other books. He has a remarkable talent for sneaking fantastical elements into the flow of the story and creates a surreal mood throughout. The climax does go some way to clarifying some loose ends but Carroll can't resist a final meditation on the perpetual nature of evil. An unclassifiable book, in many ways, but the bookshops are full to the brim with them these days. Carroll writes with no regard for genre boundaries and you have to have a strong voice to succeed at that - so far he seems to be getting away with it.

Paul Preuss - - **BREAKING STRAIN** (Pan, 1990, 265pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

This is the first of six *Venus Prime* novels and is based on Arthur C. Clarke's novella 'Breaking Strain' (1948). Here the heroine escapes from the shadowy organisation which has enhanced her mental powers and fitted her body with concealed cyborg-type equipment, and hires herself as an investigator for the Space Board. The events of a spacecraft accident, and her investigations, form the bulk of the novel. The extent of the heroine's mental and sensory powers, and the ease with which she hacks into complex computer networks, are rather unbelievable.

Once in space the story assumes the form of a hard-SF thriller with much description of fairly plausible hardware. Before that, it has episodes of the paranoid secret agency thriller and a bit of shopping-and-fucking. On this sort of level it works efficiently enough; the plotting is skilful but the writing lacks any real flair. Despite Clarke's endorsement, it's distinctly inferior to his own work.

Jeanne M. Dillard -- **STAR TREK: THE LOST YEARS** (Pan, 1990, 307pp)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

It is Stardate 6987.31 and Captain James T. Kirk and crew of the *Enterprise* prepare to return to Earth-Orbit Spacedock, after their five-year mission nears its final completion. Kirk finds himself being pressured to give up starship command and accept promotion to Admiral, much to his vehement objection and disgust...Spock decides to resign his position as science officer against Kirk's recommendation that he accept a captaincy on the ship *Grissom*, and becomes a postulant in Kolinbar, on Vulcan... "Bones" McCoy relishes the chance to get out from under Star-Fleet's eyes for a change and to go places, and discovers to his chagrin that his actions could (and do!) lead to an interstellar bloodbath...

THE LOST YEARS is a brave attempt to tie up the loose ends from where the "five-year mission" finishes to where the crew get together again in *STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE*. While it goes a long way to accommodate this, it does leave open a lot of unexplored territory for further exploits of our intrepid trio.

Jane Palmer - - **MOVING MOOSEMAN** (Women's Press, 1990, 150pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Anyone who has not read Jane Palmer's first book, *THE PLANET DWELLER*, is likely to find the plot of its sequel,

MOVING MOOSEVAN, somewhat confusing, but this hardly matters as most of the characters in this light-hearted comic novel are in a permanent state of confusion.

Our heroine Diana, having survived the menopause and saved the Earth in the previous novel, now has to deal with Kulp, a particularly obnoxious alien, and an army of androids intent on planetary conquest. Meanwhile, Moosevan, the Planet Dweller, an intelligent and amorous entity currently living inside planet Earth, embarks upon a programme of home improvements - such as moving the British Isles to warmer climates. Fortunately for Diana, help is at hand in the various forms assumed by two intergalactic super-intelligences . . .

This is not a novel that demand to be taken at all seriously, although it does provide a pleasant enough light read. Jane Palmer has created some amiable quirky characters that the reader simply cannot dislike, and their incongruous adventures do succeed in raising a smile. What the book lacks is the comic bite that provokes a roar of laughter, and the inclusion of several minor characters from the previous novel in walk-on parts only serves to further confuse the proceedings. The reader of MOVING MOOSEVAN could do a lot worse, but could also do a lot better.

Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers - - THE POWER OF MYTH
(Doubleday, 1989, 233pp, £12.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Although the book was published over a year ago, Doubleday are bringing attention to it once again after the recent TV series (on which it was based) was shown on BBC2. Campbell, who died in 1987, was the author of such classic studies of mythology as THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES and THE MASKS OF GOD. This book - a profusely illustrated glossy production which shows Campbell in conversation with journalist Bill Moyers - is full of the inevitable references to Campbell's previous work and may stand as an introduction to it. Not the least interesting aspect of it is the frequent citation of George Lucas's STAR WARS as an aspect of the "New Myth" which we need in an era when the ossified Judeo-Christian-Islamic-Communist myths have been shown to have failed.

Cynics may point to Campbell's running refrain of "follow your own bliss" as yet another example of another ossified tradition, for THE POWER OF MYTH may well be found in large quantities on the coffee-tables of people who play New Age music on their CDs. Certainly the argument could have benefited from some good old-fashioned philistine poking at the contradictions between Campbell's rejection of "Marxist sociology and behaviouristic psychology" and the determinism of the myth-patterns which apparently govern our psyches. But there are some powerful and beautiful insights in the way Campbell assembles myths from disparate cultures as aspects of the human need to make sense of and respond to existence. The scholarship and sense of awe brought to the subject are impressive. And the colour plates between pp 108 - 9 are astonishing.

Lois McMaster Bujold - - BROTHERS IN ARMS
(Headline, 1990, 338pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Eric Brown)

Occasionally a book comes along which combines wooden prose, leaden pacing and settings so unrealised in the author's mind that no attempt is even made to relay local colour to the hapless reader. Sometimes these disadvantages are overcome by an innovative storyline or by psychological interest: we have all read books which are badly-written and slow, made readable by novelty of subject and genuine human insight. Sadly, BROTHERS IN ARMS combines all the former weaknesses with none of the latter strengths. The book has a certain flaccid quality reminiscent of bad SF circa 1950.

Miles Vorkosigan (first encountered in THE WARRIOR'S APPRENTICE) in his disguise as Admiral Miles Naismith, Commander-in-Chief of the Denderil Free Mercenary Fleet, is wanted dead by the Cetagandan Empire. The action takes place in 24th Century London, though it might as well be anywhere. There is love

interest - Vorkosigan, a hunchback, falls for his beautiful female bodyguard - cosmic political intrigue, and much thud and blunder. In the final 150 pages, the action hots up, with some neat plot twists and turns, and some genuinely witty moments - but this never redeems a limp first half.

Lois McMaster Bujold has won the Nebula award (for her last book, FALLING FREE) and after reading good reviews of THE WARRIOR'S APPRENTICE, I was looking forward to reading this book. I was sadly disappointed.

Fred Saberhagen - - THE ULTIMATE ENEMY
(Gollancz, 1990, 242pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

This is a book of short stories from the early Seventies, plus a recently tacked on silly voice-over, masquerading as a new novel. All the stories are based around Saberhagen's most well-known creation, the Life-hating Berserkers.

This is real formula stuff. Each story goes as follows: 1) Introduce situation; 2) Introduce main character(s); 3) Introduce puzzle (usually a Life or Death one); 4) Character(s) solve puzzle. And, of course, the Berserkers are always duped. It seems they can't match good ole Mankind when it comes to fussin' and fightin' - after all, Man is the routinest, tootiest, horneriest critter in the Universe. Even the back blurb says so: "of all the starfaring races, only Man has retained the instincts of battle" - even if Man is the *only* starfaring race in the book. Only one story, 'Some Events At The Templar Radiant', bucks the formula and, funnily enough, proves to be the best one in the collection - even if it is all tied up a bit too neatly. Best avoided.

Jack Williamson - - MAZEWAY
(Mandarin, 1990, 290pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Had this been written in the forties, its title would have been what is now that of chapter 6: The Way of Earth. In the seventies, it would have had the chapter 1 title: The Game of Blade and Stone. Neither would have given you less idea of the plot, the ambience, the characters or the book's possible appeal than the current title of MAZEWAY, and I'm getting very tired of snappy one-word labels on SF books.

If you want some idea of whether the book is likely to appeal to you, the answer lies in the author's name. Williamson has been turning (no, not "churning") out novels and stories since 1928. Some, like 'With Folded hands...' and '...And Searching Mind', show genius; the STARCHILD novels are imaginative and innovative, but much of his work tends toward the juvenile.

The present book would have made an excellent novella; its plot is far too stretched here, dealing as it does with the old struggle between "warlike" mankind and "peaceable" aliens who insist that representatives of our and other races should compete in an "arena" situation to prove their people's fitness to join the "elderer" civilisation. The characters tend to be created to express attitudes, their activities merely reflect plot requirements, and you can if you wish sail through this on fast-forward, or take a leisurely stroll with the brain switched to neutral.

Summary: A pot-boiler. Can do a lot better.

Piers Anthony - - TOTAL RECALL
(Legend, 1990, 224pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

'In the beginning, the world was without form and void.' Then along came Philip K. Dick and all that seemed like the good old days. Dick spent most of his writing life trying to *un*-create the world, or in trying to prove that it had never been created in the first place. Meanwhile, back at the review... in April 1966 F&SF

published one of his better whose-mind-is-it-anyway? short stories, 'We Can Remember It For You, Wholesale'.

TOTAL RECALL ('Now a major motion picture from Columbia/Tristar', featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger -- the thinking man's Dolph Lundgren) is based upon *WCRIFY, W* -- more or less (but mostly less). For some reason, the hero's name has been changed from Douglas Quail to Douglas *Quaid* -- perhaps to invite semantic foreplay name resonances with that otherwise staid (?) actor, Randy Quaid. (I haven't seen the film, but, judging from the novelization -- the Ambling Alp probably gets to flex a lot more than his pectorals.)

It would be next-door-to-impossible for me to give you a detailed synopsis of the plot, in the available space, but boy-gets-Mars, boy-loses-Mars, boy-gets-Mars is all you really need to know. The main thing I want to get over is that the story *moves*, with a narrative drive that never lets up for a paragraph. And it isn't just thick-ear shenanigans -- there are enough wee thinky bits to satisfy Philip K. Dick ('...is Dead, Alas').

TOTAL RECALL: THE NOVEL is one of the best books ever written by Piers Anthony -- and I'm not being facetious. It doesn't read like the average alandeanfoster/craigshawgardner fill-in-the-blanks type of 'novelization'. Anthony has obviously put some hard thought into making the scientific background acceptable, if not quite plausible (though Margaret Thatcher would approve of the 'privatized atmosphere' wheeze), and his writing style is much more *succinct* than usual. Snap judgement: THIS IS A GOOD READ.

Chris Morgan (Ed.) - - DARK FANTASIES
(Legend, 1990, 319pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Morgan sets out to bring us a collection of atmospheric stories avoiding the graphic excess which he finds in too much of modern horror fiction. In his introduction, 'No Slime, No Chain-Saws', he gives his definition of dark fantasy as having its horror suggested rather than spelt out. My only argument with this is that much of the best horror mixes subtle chills with visceral elements and its the blend that is important.

Whatever generic definitions we apply, the fact is that many of these stories fail to reach a very high standard. Too many of my favourite authors (including Ramsay Campbell, Lisa Tuttle and Ian Watson) turn in lacklustre performances. Christopher Evans' long 'lifelines' reads as if the writer has only just thought of the concept of time travel and it develops in such a predictable way that it barely scrapes in as a slightly greyish fantasy.

Not all the stories are misfires. Garry Kilworth's 'Usurper' deals playfully with the battle between a man and his shadow and the same vein of dark humour is mined by the editor's own 'Interesting Times'. John Brunner tells a neat tale about a man's obsession with an allegedly bottomless pit entitled 'Dropping Ghyll'. Fine stories all but smiles are more often engendered than prickly napes.

The handful of new names unfortunately offer the weakest stories. One more 'dark fantasy' about the horror of filling in forms and wandering around empty DSS buildings and I'm heading out to the garage to wipe the slime off my chainsaw!

Mike Resnick - - IVORY
(Legend, 1990, 374pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

IVORY is a tix-up of ten connected stories. Entertaining, if on the whole slight and superficial, one can see the influence of Frederik Pohl in these predictable but engaging tales of inexperienced gamblers, unscrupulous archaeologists, treacherous sons and ruthless warlords, charming lady thieves, idiotic and manipulative politicians, dedicated curators, foolish hunters, megalomaniacal potentates beloved of Allah, fragile artists and self-serving hypocrites.

There is also the story of the last Maasai, Bukoba Mandaka's search for the tusks of the Kilimanjaro Elephant, which artificially acts to connect the other stories and provides a direction and conclusion to the

plot. Hiring Duncan Rojas, a researcher and foil, to find them, we are presented with a series of age-spanning tales which eventually shed light on the reason for the Maasai's determination to have the tusks in his possession. The simple, space-operaic tone is offset by the inevitable, mystical eco-warning elements in the Kenyan chapters, Mandaka's story and the story of the Kilimanjaro Elephant itself, which also serve to guide the direction and resolution of the plot. These chapters raise IVORY above its pulp roots, but it cannot hope to totally escape them, as the outdated style is not completely at home with the more modern subject matter.

However, the weaknesses of the novel are minor, due solely to the author's reach not quite matching his ambition, and bearing in mind that IVORY is only Resnick's fourth SF novel, it won't be long before he writes one to stun us all.

Terry Pratchett - - GUARDS! GUARDS! (Corgi, 1990, 317pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This time it's the chance for a few lines of their own from those poor buggers who rush onstage at the villain's call only to be cut down one at a time by the hero. A naively well-meaning foundling brought up by dwarves reaches a slight problem with cultural assimilation when he reaches the height of six feet six. He joins the Watch of Ankh-Morpork whose main duty is to patrol the less dangerous streets and proclaim "twelve o'clock and all's well" in tones quiet enough not to disturb anyone. Captain of the Watch is Vimes, who in the best tradition of hardboiled crime novels is a drunken idealist whose ideals are put to the test when he has to deal with something which is incinerating bits of the city. It can't, of course, be a dragon, because dragons have been extinct for hundreds of years.

The cunning plans of a secret society to restore to Ankh-Morpork a monarchy which has also been extinct for hundreds of years turn out disastrously wrong - although the king they *does* end up with has all the characteristics of royalty as previously described, so no-one can say they were cheated. It's Vimes and his shambolic crew who clean up the mess - with the help of the Librarian (naturally, this reviewer's favourite character, and please tell us more about L-space!) and Lady Ramkin, an aristocratic breeder of swamp dragons (the small, smelly, un-extinct variety). We're left with a particularly bleak conversation between Vimes, the good guy who will always be a loser in the Great Scheme of Things, and the Patrician, for whom life is merely a series of choices between various kinds of evil, and a joke concerning foundlings and rightful kings for which the reader has been waiting in horrified fascination for about 300 pages.

Some have used this as evidence that Pratchett is getting more serious - in the same way that many great comedians offer mournful views upon life. That's true: but you have to laugh, don't you?

K. V. Jeter - - FAREWELL HORIZONTAL
(Grafton, 253pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

Cylinder -- Vertical -- Horizontal -- Dead Centres -- Lineal Fairs -- 'Ny Axxter' (Our sort-of Hero; a freelance 'graffex artist' who scrabbles about on Vertical) -- Norton (!) motorcycle (for riding along the Vertical surface of Cylinder; what else?) -- 'gas angels' (free-floating energy entities; or whatever) -- 'Lahft' (Our Hero's 'guardian' angel) -- 'ghosts' (nothing to do with Lady Cynthia Asquith) -- 'Guyer Gimble' (the Cylinder bicycle; almost literally!) -- Ask & Receive (data-bankers for hire) -- the Small Moon (satellite in a Clarke orbit above Cylinder) -- Wire Syndicate -- DeathPix -- Grievous Amalgam ('biker gang' that controls the top of cylinder, and just about everything else) -- Havoc Mass (rival bikers on Vertical who believe that there is 'room at the top') -- 'Cripplemaker' (the Geriatric General who leads the Havoc Mass) -- etc., etc..

The whole of FAREWELL HORIZONTAL is like that -- one thing after another, with little (or no) time devoted

to capsule explanations, let alone 'deep background' material. I know that modern SF readers are supposed to take future societies for granted, but -- in this case -- it's the reader who appears to have been taken for granted. It'll take more than 'slings' and 'python lines' to hold most readers' suspension of disbelief (pun unintended -- honest!). And I got fed up with the way certain key characters bust their guts to help our sort-of Hero -- who is a Selfish Git, if not a Right Bastard. However, I tended to enjoy the book while I was reading it, which you can take as a left-handed tribute to Jeter's headlong, hell-for-leather style.

REDEEMING FEATURE: I did like many individual scenes, especially this one (from p. 77): "A cartoon face, recognizably a man's, showed on the biofoil, its broad neck terminated in a ragged collar and tie. The face's big oval eyes grew larger, as if in astonishment; a speech balloon appeared above, its tail tapering to the flapping mouth... WILMA! YOU... AND BARNEY?! WELL, I'LL BE DIPPED!"

Robert A. Heinlein - - **FARMER IN THE SKY**
(Gollancz, 1990, 224pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

An all-American family decide to emulate the Founding Fathers and become colonists, settling and farming a new frontier. The difference is that their Mayflower is a spaceship and their New World is Ganymede, one of Jupiter's moons.

The story is told by Bill, a decent if somewhat unimaginative lad who recounts their trials and tribulations with a complete absence of literary flair. He tells of the heart-searching before the journey, the actual spaceflight, the hardships experienced on arrival, the difficulty of carving a farm out of barren rock, of a great catastrophe and a marvellous discovery.

What we have here is really nothing more than THE LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE IN SPACE, a painful juvenile story of down-to-earth American folks making their way in the world by sheer grit, determination, hard work, common sense and neighbourliness. It is a reworking of the foundation myth of the United States, suitably cleaned up and without complicating factors like the extermination of the Indians or the introduction of black slavery. What it does have is the presence of Boy Scouts as the embodiment of Americanism.

Heinlein attempts to give young Bill some psychological depth by showing his difficulty in coming to terms with his father's remarriage after his mother's death, but the attempt miscarries. In one appalling scene, the troubled Bill hears his dead mother telling him to 'stand tall'!

Why Gollancz chose to republish this dross is anyone's guess. The book has a certain sociological value as evidence of American values at the end of the Eisenhower period, but as literature all it demonstrates is that science fiction can be as unimaginative as any other literary genre.

Neal Adams, Bob Haney & Denny O'Neil - - **BATMAN: RED WATER, CRIMSON DEATH**
(Titan, 1990, £5.95)

Clive Barker - - **TAPPING THE VEIN, Book Three**
(Titan, 1990, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

TAPPING THE VEIN 3 is the third comic book from Clive Barker. There are two stories in it; the first, 'The Midnight Meat Train', is illustrated by Denys Cowan and Michael Davis and the second, 'Scape-Goats', illustrated by Bo Hampton. Both stories are crude and stylised, with Cowan and Davis's illustrations being more in keeping with the material than Hampton's. Barker's prose is spare and stark, and this perhaps is the problem with this book. Illustrated, and with little of Barker's writing, the stories become defused, just ideas with pictures, not really any different to the sort of thing that used to be in UNCANNY TALES and comics of that kind. These just aren't as creepy or shocking as Barker's written work.

RED WATER, CRIMSON DEATH is a collection of four Batman strips from 1969-1970. All feature the work of artist Neal Adams, and in fact this collection completes Titan's series of Adams' Batman strips. This time round sees the Batman teaming with Sgt. Rock (The Angel, the Rock and the Cowl), the Green Arrow (The Senator's Been Shot), Deadman (You Can't Hide From a Dead Man) and the supernatural (Red Water, Crimson Death) to battle various villains. Neal Adams is perhaps the best known of the artists involved with the Batman, and in this volume he is teamed up with Bob Haney and Denny O'Neil and together they confirm that the Batman is one of the best heroes of our time.

Mick Farren - - **THE LAST STAND OF THE DWA COWBOYS**
(Orbit, 1990, 283pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum)

If you could envisage Enid Blyton on acid collaborating with, say, Roger Zelazny on his most "off" day imaginable you might just be able to conceive something of the nature of this novel; jolly adventuring with a dash of half-baked mysticism. Added to this there is an initial tendency towards excessively descriptive passages which fizzles out after the first few chapters as if the author had run out of ideas.

The eponymous heroes - Billy Oblivion, Minstrel Boy and Reave Mekonta - are thrown together for one final adventure. There is a world of disparate city-states separated by life destroying regions known as "nothings" by those who survived this breakdown of reality.

Chapters are similarly divided by vapid utterances from a portentous tract retrospectively written, we learn, by one who has left the terminally disrupted universe in favour of a "non-reversible discorporation to a malleable afterlife"!!!

Is there any point in describing the linear "action"? Too often, assuming he had any idea in the first place, Farren seems to have forgotten where he was going. One's intelligence is frequently insulted when various characters make allusions to 20th century referents unintelligible to their companions but uniformly referred to as "arcane cultural references". It's painful to read the dialogue and I'm forced to observe that this is the worst SF novel I can remember having come across.

Arthur C. Clarke & Gentry Lee - - **CRADLE** (Orbit, 1990, 373pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. BAILEY)

Says the hero about two-thirds of the way through: "This is turning into the most amazing shaggy dog story I have ever heard." He refers to the robot-carpets and slit-mouthed carrots actioning an interplanetary conservation/seeding zoo-quest; but his comments could equally describe the whole book. Actually, those bizarre episodes, located in an alien-created under-sea ecosphere to which Carol, the heroine, has been abducted, are the novel's most entertaining. Her naming goes well with the several "Wonderland" allusions and analogues.

A crippled spaceship lands on a planet alien to it. Poul Anderson used the ploy anciently in THE TROUBLE TWISTERS; Eric Brown recently in 'The Pharagean Effect'; and Blish combined seeding with crash-landing in 'Surface Tension'. In CRADLE, providing repair materials for the seeder is mixed-in with a journalistic scoop, a treasure hunt, and the cover-up of a misdirected test-missile. The chases, break-ins, military flaps etc. are standard stuff, often caper-wise over the top, sometimes absurdly running into bathos - as in the purple-painted Lolita-like affair between a guilt-ridden middle-aged naval commander and a schoolgirl amateur actress. ("He looked into her eyes and saw the flame of adolescent passion.") Such prose is hard to take seriously, let alone associate with Arthur C. Clarke; but vicarious pleasures that readers may find in the novel could include the hedonism of its Mexican Gulf milieu, and acquaintance with its intelligent whales (possibly due to Mr. Clarke?). The novel is paced by fits of hectic action and slowed by extended flashbacks, designed doubtless to give its characters some much-needed psychological authenticity.

Jack Vance - - *SHOWBOAT WORLD* (Gollancz, 1990, 171pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum)

"Big Planet lies beyond the frontier of terrestrial law, and has been settled by... non-conformists, anarchists, fugitives, religious dissidents, misanthropes, deviants, freaks."

Captain Apollon Zamp sails his showboat past assorted village communities made up of - and with an acting company-cum-crew composed of - the types detailed above. It might be his own likeable roguish character acting in tandem with the big boats, but one is put in mind of an idealistic Elizabethan age despite the odd science-fictional trimming.

Zamp's main travelling companions, the mysterious Damsel Blanche-Aster Wittendore and Theodorus Gassoon - the pompous windbag that his name suggests - have their own reasons for making the journey, precipitated by a command performance before the Court at Mornune. Zamp's primary interest is the chance of winning the lucrative prize for best show but his worldliness stands him in very good stead in the face of numerous hazards.

As has been said about journeys generally, the travelling was better than the arriving: the novel's denouement is somewhat perfunctory. However, this book made me *laugh* with its mannered style and witty observations. It showed me a side of Vance that I'd not before witnessed and I'd recommend it to anyone who doesn't mind chuckling out loud on the bus and would appreciate a change from hi-tech action.

Paul Preuss - - *STARFIRE* (Orbit, 1990, 306pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

I first read the prologue to *STARFIRE* when it was published in *INTERZONE* some time ago, without being that inspired to seek out and read the book. Straightforward space adventure is, after all, pretty old hat. Preuss himself compares the story to *DESTINATION MOON*, and the plot is just that. Travis, astronaut hero (or reckless prat) and petro-geologist, uses his fame and his senator uncle's influence to bully his way on to an experimental spacecraft's flypast a newly discovered asteroid. Things go wrong, as they do, and more opportunities for heroics present themselves.

Scientific explanation and theorising are the mainstays of the book, which is full of highly technical bits with diagrams - all bemusing to the non-scientifically trained (me). Preuss is also interested in the politics of the space programme; both the internal politics of NASA and the wider political scene. He also takes care to make his characters rather more than cardboard cut-outs: I'm not sure that I like Travis, with his macho cowboy gold-medallionary, but at least his character is real enough to respond to.

John Brunner - - *CHILDREN OF THE THUNDER* (Orbit, 1990, 390pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

The setting for *CHILDREN OF THE THUNDER* is a world of the near future which seems not to differ from the world of the present: ecological disaster and increasingly right-wing British government ever more willing to curb the rights of the individual in favour of the dominance of the establishment, using the ever-more-effective tools of intolerance and military might. Peter Levin, a scientific journalist with radical tendencies, and Claudia Morris, an American sociologist, investigate various reports of children who have frightening powers over adults. It turns out that they have one thing in common - their mothers conceived them as a result of involvement in an artificial insemination project at a top London clinic.

What we have here instantly reminded me of *THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS*, an essentially British near-future scientific horror story, but Brunner's grim vision of the

future has none of Wyndham's cosy domesticity. The Britain in which Levin lives, with the environment damaged, overcrowding, unemployment, and racial attacks even in provincial towns, is a frightening place in which to live. The world is in a mess, and the fascist elements of British and world politics are seizing their chance to take control by harnessing the fears and hostilities of the masses. Brunner seeks to disturb us with this vision, to make us ask, what can be done about this - and how far should we go?

This is very much a political novel, but not a piece of propaganda as such, though Brunner's views regarding nuclear weapons, racism, fascism etc. are clear - clear, too, is the notion that something needs to be done about these evils. What is not clear is, are we prepared to accept the alternative offered by the New Race of Man fore-run by these children?

Diane Duane - - *SPOCK'S WORLD* (Pan, 1990, 310pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Helen McFabb)

This is, as you might guess from the title, a *STAR TREK* novel. That in itself will make some people buy it at once and other people avoid it at all costs, so this review should, I suppose, be directed at those in the middle, who read some *STAR TREK* novels but don't qualify as Trekkie completists.

The book has Vulcan staging a debate leading to a referendum to decide whether or not to secede from the Federation. Taking part in the debate are Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Sarek with T'pol and others putting in appearances as well. That storyline is quite well handled (although I had trouble believing in a Vulcan-speaking and nearly omniscient McCoy) with a fair degree of tension and interest in the story and some interesting background and characteristics of Vulcan and Vulcans. In addition to that alternate chapters pluck out formative incidents in Vulcan history from the prehistoric to Sarek's meeting with Amanda, which are quite nicely thought through and also relevant to the main plot.

It is a very readable book, better than many Trekkie stories, although it does fall a long way short of the best of them. It is worth reading if you are a *STAR TREK* fan, but not worth searching out if the doings of the crew of the *Enterprise* hold little interest for you.

Dean R. Koontz - - *SHATTERED* (Headline, 1990, 245pp, £3.99); *VOICE OF THE NIGHT* (Headline, 1990, 340pp, £3.99); *PHANTOMS* (Headline, 1990, 446pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

Headline seems determined to re-issue Koontz's entire back catalogue, and *SHATTERED*, written in 1972, suggests that the reasons for doing so are mainly commercial.

Alex Doyle is driving his future stepson, Colin, from Philadelphia to San Francisco. Colin is the kind of smartass wimp kid that you'd love to see being chopped to pieces by a mad axe-wielding maniac during the course of the novel. Funnily enough, there is just such an axe-wielding maniac following them in a Chevrolet van.

In an attempt to create an air of suspense, Koontz slowly builds up Doyle and Colin's awareness of the danger. Throw in some superfluous padding, and you have the novel. There is probably a competent short story hiding in there, but, as it stands, *SHATTERED* effectively captures the boredom of long distance travelling.

Up until, and during, the writing of *VOICE OF THE NIGHT*, Koontz had only had *SHATTERED* published under the pseudonym of K.R. Dwyer. As the earlier novel had been quite a success, Koontz seems to have been unable to resist the chance to tease his readers. Thus *VOICE OF THE NIGHT* has another version of Colin turning up, this one being in his early teens. However, this novel is a lot more rewarding - characters actually evolve, and the plot is not a simple linear trip from A to B.

Colin is the new boy in town and, though shy and awkward, is befriended by the All-American Roy. Only it turns out that Roy is a severely disturbed individual.

This is basically a novel about a boy's coming of age. The book follows Colin as he discards Arthur C.

Clarke novels for girls and responsibility, and the final couple of chapters come on like a mutated rewrite of the climax to *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*. Not a bad novel, if you can handle Koontz's journeyman prose.

PHANTOMS is a trip into Lovecraft territory. An ancient, evil creature (responsible, it seems for everything from the Mary Celeste to the extinction of the dinosaurs) has taken over the small town of Snowfield and destroyed the inhabitants. Two sisters arrive the next day to find the place deserted except for the odd corpse, and decide to hang around and phone for assistance. Help reaches them several times throughout the novel - partially due to an escalation of the perception of the danger, but mostly due to the high bodycount. There are a few glitches - such as radios that work underground - and the villains are flatter than a three day old pint, but, overall, *PHANTOMS* is a lightweight piece of fun.

Stephen King - - THE DARK HALF (N.E.L., 1990, 468pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martin R. Webb)

Thad Beaumont was a "serious" writer, but such writers never make a lot of money. So, to supplement his income, Thad wrote pulp fiction under the name, George Stark.

Eventually, Thad had had enough of fiction and decided to give George a Christian burial; a publicity stunt I believe King used when disposing of his own pseudonym, Richard Bachman. The problem was, George did not want to die. George was real. George was Thad's twin. And George killed all those who conspired to kill him off.

The fact that seven in ten babies are conceived as twins, that the stronger foetus absorbs the weaker, is explained when young Thad has a fir in the street and has to be operated on. What the surgeon found embedded in the boy's brain were the remnants of the absorbed twin. This phenomenon is not unknown in the real world, but King has twisted fact to create an enjoyable tale that (for those familiar with the story of Richard Bachman) has a ring of familiarity about it. This is the first (King says) of a planned "Castle Rock trilogy", but it is more obviously a second attempt to explore the writer's nightmare; in which his pseudonym demands a life of its own.

More readable than some of King's earlier books, *THE DARK HALF* is worth twice its price.

Daniel Evan Weiss - - UNNATURAL SELECTION (Black Swan, 1990, 240pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Kev McVeigh)

Be warned! This is the funniest, most disturbing, blackest comedy I have read since *THE WASP FACTORY*. Like Iain Banks, Daniel Evan Weiss knows just where the limits of good taste are - two steps behind him. This is the anthropomorphic fantasy that should put an end to cute bunny rabbits and happy endings, this is the modern biblical epic tale of a group of cockroaches suffering a famine. Their host has a new girlfriend so he tidies his kitchen, causing hardship and misery amongst the roaches. Numbers, their self-appointed leader, takes it on himself to break up the happy couple and bring back the former girlfriend, the one who used to throw food when she got mad.

The biblical references come thick and fast, the jokes are black and outrageous, and the ending is truly apocalyptic, followed by a bad joke. Weiss has written a powerful satire of sexual mores that is allegedly unpublshable in his home country, the USA. The reasons behind this are reputedly suggestions of racism, which I confess I couldn't see. What I did see is that Weiss, in his taking of sexual attitudes to a satiric extreme, might just once or twice have missed his footing on the finest line and slipped into sexism. Might. These things are notoriously difficult.

Read *UNNATURAL SELECTION*, laugh, frown, squirm and flinch, then decide for yourself. One thing is sure, you'll find that a burning desire to clean your kitchen comes free with every copy.

V.T. Quick - - DREAMS OF GODS AND MEN (Orbit, 1990, 302pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

The trouble with cyberpunk is that if you come to it uninitiated it is almost incomprehensible. What is a metamatrix? What is a meatmatrix? This problem is compounded in the particular case of this book because it is a sequel (to *DREAMS OF FIRE AND SAND*) so the characters and story of the first volume have to be inferred from the text as they are never explained. However, if you've read a lot of cyberpunk then the first problem is unimportant and if you've read volume one the second doesn't matter. As someone who has done neither I struggled with the first half of the book before piecing together enough of the plot for it to make sense, but much of the cyberpunk jargon remained meaningless, so I just skipped over it and concentrated on the story.

The story is basically the good(ish) guys versus the bad guy - who is part god, part human and part of the metamatrix (Arius by name). There's lots of ninja-style violence, lots of clever machinery, a weirdo religious sect the purpose of which never gets satisfactorily explained over what is actually a fairly simple plot. This is OK if you like this sort of book, but it seemed to me to be lacking in originality and very much making use of a bandwagon.

David Eddings - - SORCERESS OF DARSHIVA (Corgi, 1990, 396pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Unable to wait for a year before reading Book Four of *The Malloreon* in mass-market size, I decided to borrow *SORCERESS OF DARSHIVA* from the library in hardback and write my review months before you'll read it!

The questers have travelled as far east as they're going, to the island of Melcene off the east coast of Mallore, where the wealthiest Malloreans live (and Silk maintains a sort of palace there, too). The questers discover why Zandramas went there, and find an important clue about the Sardion, after interviewing the senior member of the Faculty of Applied Alchemy. The reference to the Grolim who used to give lectures in the College of Comparative Theology is a bit of an in-joke if you know what Grolims are like!

Our heroes and heroines find out more about the prophecy concerning the New God of Angarak. If matters go ill, Garion's son will become a new Dark Lord, but if matters go well, the New God will be . . . ? Eddings is obviously saving this one for the climax of the epic, but his fans should already have guessed the New God's identity. If you've got this far, you'll enjoy Book Four. The characters continue their usual banter and there are newtasks for Zakath and Durnick. No point starting here if you haven't read Books 1 - 3, of course.

Tad Williams - - THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR (Legend, 1990, 930pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Now here's an oddity: a derivative epic, drawing very heavily from Tolkien. Here there be elves ("Sithi"), dwarves ("Trolle", though very hobbit-like), great wars against a re-awakened enemy, frantic scurrying through dangerous forests - High Fantasy as laid down by Big JRR, in fact. *THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR* follows the formula so closely, there is barely a moment in the book that you cannot second-guess the story. And yet, Williams has come up with a real page-turner, which fastens onto readers and drags them through 900+ pages in an eye twinkle. The story moves with increasing speed - that which initially seemed slow quickens to a breakneck pace, and is filled with the casual detailing that quickly sets a scene.

Williams creates characters that hold the attention. Simon, the hero, starts as a dreamy, scatter-brained boy and grows throughout the book without losing his

essential awkwardness, the sense of not knowing what is going on but just being carried along by events. It makes him much more human than some great hero who, with one bound, is free and settling scores with his mighty sword, etc.

So, **THE DRAGONBORE CHAIR** is very much an essential read for fantasy fans - suffice to say I went straight out and bought **STONE OF FAREWELL**, and now frustratedly await Volume 3.

C J Cherryh - - **RUSALKA**
(Mandarin, 1990, 374pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

C J Cherryh is a prolific and professional author. Everything she writes is solidly constructed and, at worst, competently written. These qualities are insufficient, however, to rescue **RUSALKA**.

To get one gripe off my chest immediately - this appears a 'big' book for the price in the contemporary vogue, but really only the print is big, and well-spaced too. Not a nice one, Mandarin.

Our two heroes - the social climbing Pyetr and the stable boy with latent **POWER** Sasha - are on the run from the consequences of Pyetr's casual and ill-considered lechery. Deep in the forest and deep in Winter they are forced to take shelter with Master Uulamets, who turns out to be a wizard. Uulamets has a secret - his murdered daughter Eveshka is the eponymous **Rusalka** - that most feared of all spirits in the entire Russian canon of evil things that go bump in the night. The **Rusalka** proves surprisingly domesticated as the quartet seek Uulamets' revenge on the lover who spurned, his renegade apprentice Kavi Chernovog.

The ingredients are all present but I have to say that the book reads like a first draft, written to fix the story with the colour to be added later. As a horror story it is less than terrifying. As a mystery it lacks any suspense. At no time does Ms Cherryh succeed in invoking the implacable hostility towards humankind of the immeasurable Russian forest in Winter. Worst of all, she did not involve me with any of her characters. I didn't care if they lived, and rather hoped they would die. I cannot recommend this book.

Kim Stanley Robinson - - **ESCAPE FROM KATHMANDU**
(Unwin Hyman, 1990, 314pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

This is one of those books that presents itself as a novel but turns out to be a collection of four novellas about George Fergusson and George Fredericks, two US climbers on permanent holiday in Nepal who make a living guiding parties of trekkers around the Himalayas but otherwise spend their time rescuing a yeti from some zoologists, climbing Mount Everest by accident, preventing a road being built through Shangri-La and helping to overthrow bureaucratic corruption in Kathmandu itself.

This sounds fun, and the first two stories are certainly the best, told with just the right air of knowing tongue-in-cheek cleverness that makes you think they could almost be true. (After all, Robinson has lived in Nepal, and the ascent of Everest is far too detailed to have been wholly invented...) But something goes wrong in the third, when the narrative viewpoint shifts from the first person of George Fergusson to the first person of George Fredericks, who is but a cardboard facsimile of the first George and whose previous experience, while necessary to get the first George into the new situation, does not carry the plot. Things drag, the cleverness palls, and when the narrative viewpoint switches back again for the fourth story the book's impetus and mood have been lost. In consequence, one never really accepts the premise of an extensive network of underground tunnels throughout Nepal built by the monks of Shangri-La over the centuries; and thus the story seems more silly than amusing.

I might add that real-world events have demolished the fourth story's political sub-plot, in which King

Birendra gives secret financial aid to the democrats plotting against the bureaucracy; because the King, like all absolute monarchs, repudiated compromise and hung onto power to the end, and so is now likely to lose everything rather than become the constitutional sovereign Robinson imagines. But then guessing the immediate future is always a risky business; after all, who ever believed that Thatcher would go, until she did?

Christopher Hyde - - **EGYPT GREEN**
(Headline, 1990, 442pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

This book belongs to a very popular sub-genre of the thriller of which Tom Clancy is the most successful practitioner. I'm talking about the near-future thriller bristling with realistic military hardware and continent spanning action. Unfortunately such books with their meticulously researched political backgrounds date very swiftly. **EGYPT GREEN** suffers from a number of credibility lapses which the author attempts to dispel in a two page 'Can you prove it isn't true' afterword.

Firstly you have to accept the CIA and KGB cooperating with each other in 1968, still hard to accept in these post-glasnost times. The major world powers come together to discuss global overpopulation and hatch a plan to cull whole portions of mankind, repopulating with genetically selected groups. Attributing the governing methods of Pol Pot to the western powers seems a trifle far-fetched if only because the politicians would never agree to wiping out so many potential votes! The plan is stumbled upon, years later, when exceptionally smart kids start being kidnapped. They are taken to a remote Pacific island where they are trapped in the eponymous underground military complex.

The bulk of the book is an entertaining thriller with the author slowly revealing his silly but well worked out plot. He rounds off the book with another lapse: the characters walk away from a plane crash with their thermos flasks of bubonic plague intact. Entertaining enough tosh.

John Gribbin - - **FATHER TO THE MAN**
(Gollancz, 1990, 221pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

This novel suffers from two main flaws: the info-dump, in which the author tells the reader about the rest of the world via long chunks of background factoids thrown into the narrative; and characters who spend parts of their conversations telling each other what they ought to already know, again to help fill in the background and keep the reader up to speed. It doesn't help, either, that the prose style is sometimes clichéd: characters are always putting their feet up on their couches, holding whisky glasses up to the light, thinking to themselves that they feel either tired or old...

It lopes along smoothly enough, Gribbin's long experience as a science journalist having taught him how to engage and keep the reader's attention, but I wonder if this experience might also have made him see things in too black-and-white terms. Research scientists are invariably the good guys, their bureaucratic superiors invariably dissembling, their animal rights opponents invariably hateful and malicious, and (of course) science journalists invariably dedicated to nothing more than the truth. This is rather a shame, because in these days when we stand on the verge of being able to map - and thus manipulate - the human genome the novel's central premise, the closeness of the genetic link between man and chimpanzee, is perhaps more than just the evolutionary puzzle Gribbin presents it as.

Half the eventual revelation can be seen coming half the plot away, but it's interesting that despite the pessimism of one of the central characters about the evolutionary value of human intelligence - echoing Steven Jay Gould - the epilogue suggests that Gribbin himself sees it as an inevitable development. This is perhaps a hopeful counterpoint to the thrust of his plot; but thus slightly negates it.

SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS - - - - - Mary Gentle
(Orbit, 1990, 192pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

This is subtitled "A Story Collection": three of the stories are credited with being reprinted from *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, three others are from different collections, and three are uncredited and thus give the impression of being previously unpublished -- although at least one of them ("The Tarot Dice") was in fact first published also in *Asimov's*, in Mid-December 1989, so one does wonder how accurate the information is. The two longest stories, which are the two remaining uncredited stories, frame the whole book: "Beggars in Satin" and "The Knot Garden". They are both set in the same pseudo-Renaissance world, with splendidly sinister Renaissance magic, and with the ultra-competent Scholar-Soldier Valentine as the heroine. Both are marvellous stories, and if these are from the same world as her latest novel, *Rats and Gargoyles* (as the blurb says), then I shall try to read it as soon as possible (despite the somewhat crabby comments of John Brunner in *Foundation* 50). Other high-spots of the collection are "The Harvest of Wolves", a nasty glimpse of post-post-Thatcher Britain; "The Crystal Sunlight, the Bright Air", a story from Orthe, the *Golden Witchbreed* planet; and "The Pits Beneath the World", an above average alien ecology puzzle story. Other stories I found unnecessarily obscure, or simply uninteresting; but five good stories out of nine is far more than most writers can manage in their first collection. Definitely recommended.

David Wingrove - - CHUNG KUO:THE MIDDLE KINGDOM (VEL,
1990, 726pp, £3-99)

(Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum)

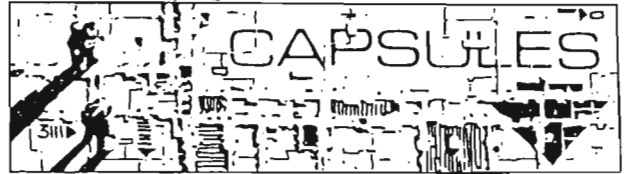
Wingrove has postulated a world where China became the dominant power and population pressures have resulted in the construction of huge cities built from a virtually weightless material of immense strength. Society is thereby stratified both literally and metaphorically.

Not surprisingly there are tensions and divisions and these are exacerbated when Wingrove's characters begin to tamper with the order of things to achieve their own ends: the Westerners want a greater say, the hereditary Chinese rulers want to maintain the status quo, which might best be described as a benevolent dictatorship. History has been re-written by the Chinese in order to legitimise their predominant position and remove a source of discontent amongst the defeated Westerners.

The plot is too large to be analysed fairly in such a brief space, but one's interest is engaged in spite of the knowledge that there are at least six more volumes to follow. As with a "Dallas", for example, one is aware that the groundwork is being laid for future twists, surprises and double-crosses: so long as one's incredulity is not stretched too far, the anticipation of future developments is something to savour.

I would however point out that there are rather too many mysterious sons waiting to take over from their fathers for my liking. A stronger criticism would be of Wingrove's depiction of a particularly sadistic assault by one of the major protagonists, De Vore. The reader is well aware of the man's character by this time and I found the episode gratuitous, sickening and altogether unnecessary.

That said, I'd recommend the work at this stage, and hope that Wingrove can maintain the pace throughout the entire series.



Richard Austin - - THE GUARDIANS (Pan, 1990, 182pp,
£3-50); ARMAGEDDON RUN (Pan, 1990, 217pp, £3-50)

Respectively fifth and sixth in the "blistering new series". Post-nuclear US patriots defending their President against various internal and external subversive forces. Although at times humorous this is less SF and more a mindless action adventure: if you still treasure your Action Man doll this may just appeal to you... (Benedict S. Cullum)

Carmen Carter, Peter David, Michael Jan Friedman &
Robert Greenberger - - DOOMSDAY WORLD (STAR TREK: TNG
12) (Titan, 1990, 276pp, £2.99)

More "beam-me-down" escapades with the characters of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The actions take place on the artificial planet Kirllos, when the Trekkies arrive to help an archaeological team recover alien artifacts. Bland, superficial novel designed by a committee. (Eric Brown)

A.C. CRISPIN - - THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER (STAR TREK
TNG 13) (Titan, 1990, 243pp, £2.99)

Spaceships galore go missing on a newly-opened trade route and Captain Beard has the task of finding out why. Incomprehensible and utterly alien artifacts come to light as the possible cause not only of the missing ships but also of some apparently incurable form of space-madness as well. (Chris C. Bailey)

Carole Nelson Douglas - - SEVEN OF SWORDS (Corgi, 1990,
380pp, £3.99)

Book Three of the *Sword and Cirlet* trilogy; Irissa, seeress, has to save Kendrick, a warrior mage from a cosmic taint. Yawn. (Steven Tew)

Dave Duncan - - THE COMING OF WISDOM (Legend, 1990,
337pp, £3.99)

The second in the *Seventh Sword* trilogy continues the exploits of Wallie Smith, resurrected on his death in our world into a fantasy world with Japanese overtones where he must adapt to a rigid social code in which everyone is ranked according to their status in their particular vocation. As a swordsman of the seventh rank Wallie alias Shonsu is one of the most powerful in his new world. Here he encounters sorcerers who are taking over city after city, intimidating the population and overthrowing Goddess-worship together with the "policing" function of swordsmen. Enjoyable recreational reading if you don't mind the sexism which celebrates male-bonding and women with curves in the right places, whether they are slaves or "female swordsmen". (Jessica Yates)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - REVENGE OF THE FLUFFY BUNNIES
(Headline, 1990, 270pp, £3.50)

The "Final Take" of another prepubescent trilogy from Gardner. Delores, Roger, Wonderdog and the others continue their genre-hopping romp through the Cineverse, pursued by Doctor Dread. It's a Hanna-Barbra cartoon directed by Mel Brooks; and like Brooks, Gardner tends to over-parody the parody. On the whole it's silly rather than funny. (Chris Hart)

Sheila Gilluly - - GREENBRIAR QUEEN (Headline, 1990,
439pp, £4.50)

The Dark Lord is back and he's pissed off! Lightweight fantasy is readable enough but file under harmless escapism. (Colin Bird)

Sharon Green - - **DAWN SONG** (Avon, 1990, 373pp, \$3.95)

A superb initial setting - reminiscent of Zelazny's fantasies - is not lived up to by the story. The insufferable heroine spends so much time losing her naivety (and virginity) that the plotline concerning a stolen Great Flame and the Evil Lord of the Realm of Earth lags several paces behind her brattishness while the freshness of the allegory never gets a look-in. Pity. (Andy Sawyer)

Christopher Hinz - - **ASH OCK** (Mandarin, 1990, 308pp, £3.99)

Book two of the *Paratwa Saga*. Almost 250 years after the Earth was destroyed by nuclear/biological warfare, humanity resides in orbital colonies, pirates, Punk-types, and designer violence abound in an overwritten tale of hi-tec politico-military intrigue. (Eric Brown)

Robin Jarvis - - **THE FINAL RECKONING** (Simon & Schuster, 1990, 305pp, £3.99)

The third volume of the *Deptford Mice* trilogy closes a story of evil and possession beneath the streets of London as the good Mice defeat the wicked spirit of the cat Jupiter. Harrowing and twee by turns, this reads like Beatrix Potter meets H.P. Lovecraft; I suspect that if Jarvis or his editors hadn't followed the line of "talking animals = children's story" something very horrific would have emerged. As it is, the mix is uncertain enough for this not to be a success, rich enough for it to be memorable. (Andy Sawyer)

Rosemary Kirstein - - **THE STEERSWOMAN** (Pan, 1990, 299pp, £3.99)

Filled with unlikely middle-class warriors, sailors, etc., and improbable background details which are introduced with the subtle credibility of a mugger in diapers, this feminist-oriented fantasy (in which wizards tend to double-up as oppressively rich and male) looks to be the first in a series. However, Kirstein rings some pleasant changes along the way, despite confusing some important moral issues, and her style offers some hope for a largely stagnant genre. (Terry Broome)

Richard A. Knaak - - **ICE DRAGON** (Orbit, 1990, 248pp, £3.50)

If you are one of those people who object to Game Oriented Fantasy and "maw" implying "mouth" rather than "stomach" (P. 46), then stay away from *ICE DRAGON*, the second volume of the *Dragon Realm* trilogy. The cold war between the colour-coded dragons, avians and humans begins to get really chilly when the Ice Dracon decides to cast a devastating spell. It seems to lack the punch of other G.O.F. novels and the action is much more sober than the blurb has it up to be. Sosome sibilant dragoness ssshould ssee their dentistssss. (Chris Hart)

Majliss Larson - - **PAVNS AND SYMBOLS** (Titan, 1990, 277pp, £3.99)

The Klingon and Federation Empires both face interstellar war on a huge and unprecedented scale if diplomats on both sides cannot come up with a few peaceful answers to the ownership of both a newly-discovered agricultural planet and its most vital commodity. (Chris C. Bailey)

Penelope Lively - - **THE VOYAGE OF QV66** (Mammoth, 1990, 173pp, £2.50)

Now known for her mainstream adult fiction, Penelope Lively began her writing career in the early 1970s as a post-Garnerian writer of Celtic fantasies for children. This (first published 1978) is the nearest she's come to writing science fiction. The world has suffered drastic flooding (though no change in climate, apparently) and all surviving humans have been evacuated to Mars. Some animals are becoming more intelligent, especially Stanley, a monkey who teams up with a cow, horse, dog, cat, pigeon and parrot to voyage to London and find his relations in London Zoo. A highly satirical view of human society as seen by a dog, especially cutting when the animals they encounter, particularly the monkeys, look like repeating our first faults. (Jessica Yates)

Brian Lumley - - **ICED ON ARAM** (Headline, 1990, 244pp, £3.50)

More adventures in Lovecraft's Dreamworld in a series of old-fashioned romps that perhaps owe as much to Leiber's *Fafhrd/Gray Mouser* stories as to Lovecraft himself. (Andy Sawyer)

Mark Morris - - **TOADY** (Corgi, 1990, 702pp, £4.99)

Four teenage members of the "Horror Club" are brought to face real horror as something from *Outside* joins them. Morris's first novel is a gripping and imaginative read, flawed perhaps by too diffuse a focus on the title character, a convincing picture of the unpleasant, friendless, unattractive victim we all knew and bullied at school. His temptation to embrace evil and get his revenge on his environment is central to the book, and his decision important, yet somehow this real moral centre is not given the emphasis it deserves. However, *TOADY* is a superior horror novel which avoids many of the clichés of its type, and the author is one to watch. (Andy Sawyer)

M.S. Murdoch - - **ARMAGEDDON OFF VESTA** (Penguin, 1990, 279pp, £3.99)

The third installment of the *Buck Rogers Martian Wars* trilogy turns out, unsurprisingly, to be another badly written piece of hackwork. Do the kids a favour and buy them something else for Christmas. Penguin, eh? (Jim Steel)

Roberta Murphy - - **THE ENCHANTED** (Mandarin, 1990, 230pp, £3.50)

In some ways this reminded me of Alan Garner's *THE OWL SERVICE*, which is not to imply that it is derivative, and is intended as a compliment. With the death of her grandfather, Olwen is menaced by ghosts and the Enchanter from the *Cwm Woods*. Rooted in the past, her story unfolds as she discovers more about her family and her dead mother. Slow-moving at first, it develops into a powerful and gripping encounter with the ghostly. Recommended. (Brendan Vignall)

Ed Naha - - **ROBOCOP 2** (Penguin, 1990, 234pp, £3.99)

I hope thr photography and special effects in the film are good, because the plot is hackneyed: Robocop saves the world. It reads quick if you don't think. (L.J. Hurst)

Douglas Miles - - **IRONHELM** (Penguin, 1990, 314pp, £3.99)

Another *Forgotten Realms* novel, commencing a trilogy set in an analogue of the invasion of Astec America by the Spaniards. Each parallel is lovingly and mechanically detailed. (Andy Sawyer)

Mike Shupp - - **SOLDIER OF ANOTHER FORTUNE** (Headline, 1990, 396pp, £4.50)

Book Three of *The Destiny Makers*: Headline have embellished the book with a virile, air-brushed cover, dressing it up to be a spermcount-boosting action-epic. Instead it maintains the standards set by the previous novels, only longer. I really thought that something was going to happen this time.

Tim Harper (Timmial Ian Haaper, etc.) the 'Nam vet. is still lost in time and working towards the general good of the Algerian people. It's a long, hard, (. . . boring) fight and what's more, it's going to take another novel to finish it. (Chris Hart)

Cara Lockhart Smith - - **PARCHMENT HOUSE** (Mammoth, 1990, 159pp, £2.50)

Grotesque adults preying on seemingly powerless children: one is reminded of Joan Aiken or Roald Dahl, and before them, Dickens. However, *PARCHMENT HOUSE*, Ms Smith's first novel, still deserves the epithet "original". The thirteen orphans of Parchment House are supervised by four peculiar adults including the Reverend Slipper and Mrs Padlock. One day, they are told, they will go out and serve the Empire. Slipper obtains a prototype robot, Archibald, to teach the children, and beat them if they fail. The brightest orphan then plans to subvert the robot . . . A more experienced writer would have explained the climax and tied up the loose

ends - I'd be hard put to it to "explain" the book to a puzzle child-reader - but might have been too cautious to write such a vivid, violent book in the first place. (Jessica Yates)

Melinda Snodgrass - - **THE TEARS OF THE SINGERS** (STAR TREK 39) (Titan, 1990, 252pp, £2.99)

Captain Kirk and crew go where no one has gone before yet again, as they battle to save the universe from being destroyed by a runaway Space/Time Warp, created by a race of musical, yet Genius grade, non-verbal telepathic aliens who turn out to be quite hard to communicate with . . . (Chris C. Bailey)

Midori Snyder - - **SADAR'S KREP** (Unwin Hyman, 1990, 362pp, £3.99)

Book Two of *The Queen's Quarter* trilogy. You know the sort of thing. The Fire Queen and her allies are slaughtering and torturing anyone with magical powers and most of the peasantry besides. Those who seek to oppose her, mainly low-life types who say "frigging shit" a lot, are attempting to join the rebels of the New Moon. Someone accidentally discovers an ancient sword . . . And yet the central idea of the queen's quarter knot and the old magic based on the elements of fire, earth, air and water is actually quite interesting. Perhaps in every run-of-the-mill fantasy trilogy there is a work of originality and imagination trying to get out. (Lynne Bispham)

Keith Taylor - - **RAVEN'S GATHERING** (Headline, 1990, 235pp, £3.50)

Dark Age fantasy, fourth in the *Bard* series, typical of the ever-expanding Dark Age/celtic/Arthurian fantasy sub-genre. The bard Felimid mac Fal and his lover, the female pirate Gudrun Blackhair, hack and slay various Danes, saxons and Jutes. Also features merfolk and berserkers. If you are into fantasy series, you might as well read this as any other. (Lynne Bispham)

Patricia C. Wrede - - **DAUGHTER OF WITCHES** (Orbit, 1990, 215pp, £3.50)

Routine fantasy in which bondswoman Ranira escapes from the evil city of Drinn with a trio of foreign witches and conquers her fear and loathing of magic in just enough time to save the world. If most SF/Fantasy books could be compared to TV programmes, this one would be the commercial break: it looks pretty, but you'd much rather go and make a cup of tea. (Ian Sales)

COLLISION COURSE

[PI 87 inspired a comment regarding Neale Vickery's review of Robert Anton Wilson's *SCHRODINGER'S CAT TRILOGY*, aka *THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR*, *THE TRICK TOP HAT*, and *THE HONING PIGEONS*. JOHN D. RICKETT suggested a more complex relationship between the parts.]

In an initial note (labelled Caveat Lector) to the reader in each volume, Wilson clearly signals that the series is not linear, since he tells us that the three can be read in any order at all. In other words, we do have a trilogy in the sense of a connected set of three books without this needing to imply an on-going or developing set of three books without this needing to imply an on-going or developing plot-line from one to another. And Wilson's glossary of quantum mechanics terminology (not mentioned by Neale - maybe it doesn't figure in the new edition?) makes it perfectly clear that he's having his fun by treating the "universe" of his characters and events as subject to the "rules" of quantum mechanics and then applying a different set of "rules" or model of quantum mechanics as the "form" for each book. Thus, UNIVERSE works on the Everett-Wheeler-Graham model, where anything that can happen to a quantum system does happen to it: TOP HAT utilises Bell's Theorem, to which the E-V-G Model is an alternative, whereby any two particles that once were in contact will continue to

influence each other however widely separated thereafter (and the hell with Special relativity): and the "form" of PIGEONS is yet another alternative to Bell's Theorem, that of Non-Objectivity whereby there is no reality apart from observation.

I'm not sure I understand all this myself, but it seems clear enough that Wilson is NOT in the least trying to take his quantum mechanics seriously, nor is he trying to make us take them seriously, not even on a "what-if" level as Neale Vickery would have us believe. He's having a fine old romp with some way-out ideas of physics that in any case apply only on the quantum level, and, as Neale points out, writing some very funny books as a result.

[JIM PROVAN comments on my review of David Edings' *THE DIAMOND THRONE* that I have "both the patience of a saint and a good dose of magnanimity . . ."]

If your justification was the fact that THE DIAMOND THRONE is 'an enjoyable read' then you are obviously overlooking the excruciating nature of such things as puppet-type characters and cliché-ridden writing, to say nothing of the blatant cynicism of the release format." Any book featuring words along the lines of "the nth book in the (insert suitably ridiculous name, with a Dragon/Mage/Lord/Sword thrown in for good measure)" provokes instant scepticism in me which, nine times out of ten, is totally justified.

[I wouldn't disagree, and I certainly wouldn't want to go overboard defending Edings (whom I've avoided for years) on the basis of one book which I mildly enjoyed. But I *did* mildly enjoy it, and having spent the last few months coping with a 12-year old addict of his books, I'm inclined to understand the reasons why some people like his books and wonder whether I should give them more of a chance myself. . . WAHF: well, various people, but I appreciated the note from Robinson Publishing thanking PI for the exposure of their recent books (p.3 last issue). Well, thank YOU; glad to know the magazine is read in the publishing houses . . .]

"Upon the rack in print"

ISAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
and **ANALOG**, MID-DECEMBER 1990
and JANUARY and FEBRUARY 1991

reviewed by Edward James

There are some good things in the Mid-December *Asimov's*. One of the best of Asimov's robot stories for a very long time, for instance, "Kid Brother": a successful story partly, perhaps, because it is not about logic or about robot psychology, but, for once, about human psychology. There are a couple of short-shorts: a fun variant on time-travel paradoxes in Deborah Wessell's "Time Considered as Hellix of Lavender Ribbon" and Geoffrey A. Landis's nasty little look at the possible future of mass entertainment. The novelette is by new British writer Ian R. MacLeod, called "Green": an evocative fantasy about a garden and its varied pests, set in a kind of 19th century never-never land. Allen Steele's "Hapgood's Hoax" is an in-joke about an oldtime sf writer, H. LaPierre Hapgood, and his abduction by UFOs: difficult to enumerate all the targets Steele is aiming at here, and most of the shots are bulls-eyes. Both Karen Haber's "3 RMs, Good View" and Tony Daniels' "The Passage of Night Trains" are investigations of the emotional impact of time-travelling, in very different ways. None of these stories are exceptionally original; none are award-winners; all are well above average, and well worth reading. And the issue ends with the first part of a two-part serialisation of Michael Swanwick's latest novel *Stations of the Tide*: a space-operatic tale of galactic intrigue on a back-water planet, absolutely bubbling over with ideas and images. If you can't wait for the full version in book form, this issue (and the next) are worth buying for Swanwick alone.

There's not quite so much enticing material along with the second Swanwick instalment in the January *Asimov's*, however. Kathe Koja's short "Bird Superior", a fantasy about a man who discovers he can fly, is certainly superior writing. Avram Davidson's "Death of a Damned Good Man" is an assured little tale about the mysterious death of Lawson, an ex-sailor: "Stuart had a poor memory for names. Lawson collected bugs and lizards and things. Hughes couldn't jump. There you have it all." But the other stories -- Michael Kallenberger's "White Chaos", about a chaoticist's preoccupation with Jupiter's Great Red Spot; James Patrick Kelly's "Pogrom", and Steven Uttley's rather trite little novelette of time-travelling tourists -- did little for me. All in all, not nearly as good as Mid-December.

The February *Asimov's* leads with Greg Costikyan's short story "Bright Light, Big City", a tense and largely believable reportage story of one family's search for survival when a terrorist group sets off a nuke on Manhattan. Apart from an editorial in which Asimov describes his lunch with Gorbachev, and an interesting (as ever) review article by Norman Spinrad on "North American Magical Realism", the issue is mostly taken up with five novelettes. "The Better Boy", by James P. Blaylock and Tim Powers is sf only in so far as the main character, a very eccentric and engaging inventor, thinks in sfal terms: it is, however, great fun, and worth reading just to find out what the third paragraph means: "This morning he could surely allow himself to forget about the worms and the ether bunnies." Lisa Mason's "Hummers" is no more sf and fantasy than the Blaylock and Powers (unless one is to take the last half-page or so literally), but again well worth the read: a moving story about coping with dying and death. Neal Barrett's "Under Old New York" takes a look at poverty and starvation in the New York of the 21st century. Pat Murphy offers "Travelling West", a perfectly well-written but pretty unoriginal tale about a were-wolf in the American West in 1849. None of these four stories is below par; but none of them stand out -- but the fifth, "The Happy Man" by Jonathan Lethem, certainly does. It is about a man whose consciousness periodically departs to his own "psychic landscape", or Hell, as he thinks of it, leaving behind his zombie-like body with his family. The story concerns his attempts to cope with Hell (and one of its devil-like inhabitants, the Happy Man), and his changing relationships with his wife and son: it's effectively written, involving, and disturbing.

The December *Analog* led with "Shaman", a novelette by Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff (who figures in all three of these *Analogs*). I know I spend a lot of time in this column complaining about the traditionalism of *Analog*, but the complaints are rather more than ritual. In terms of theme, ideas and narrative treatment, this would hardly have been out of place in *Astounding* in the '50s. OK, so the boss would not have been a woman then. And, OK, I quite enjoyed reading it (back in the '50s, or, to be more honest, in the '60s, when I bought my back stock of '50s issues, I really loved *Astounding* too). But sf is supposed to be innovative... And, anyway, it annoys me when there are characters called Rhys Llewellyn who have Irish accents. (Or was that supposed to be a joke? Who knows?) (But see below for my comment on Amy Bechtel.) Much better (though not much more original) was Doug Beason's "Ben Franklin's Laser": an attempt to change the future by trying to tell Ben about modern technology. Jeff Hecht's "Rehearsals for Retirement" was a competent enough story about conflicting loyalties; William S. Davis's "Turkey Day" an amusing enough (and horribly convincing) parable about how a bureaucracy would go about putting a Thanksgiving turkey in everyone's pot. The best read in the issue, though, was W. R. Thompson's "Lost in Translation", another in his series about the disconcertingly human aliens, the kya. This time a publisher gets the idea that it would be a good idea to translate a hack kya sf story into English: plenty of opportunity for not very demanding satire.

Back in November *Asimov's* issued a double length edition, making it effectively (with mid-December) 14 issues a year. Its sister Davis publication *Analog* has followed suit with their January "Double Anniversary Issue": 320 pages (including all the ads and usual features). The fiction includes four short stories, four novelettes, a novella (by John Barnes) and a "novel" by Orson Scott Card. Well, whether 78 pages of text constitutes a "novel" is up to

you: but, whatever it is -- and what it is, of course, is a section of Card's next novel -- "Gloriously Bright" is one of the best things *Analog* has published for a long while. Spoiler warning: a warning because it is not at all obvious immediately, as Card takes some time to sketch in the ancient Chinese culture -- this novel is a sequel to *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*, books which, despite myself, almost, I enjoyed. Some of Card's quirks are there: a somewhat unpleasant love of describing cruelty to children for instance (remember his "Mikal's Songbird"?). (And remember Ian Watson's critique in his article "The Author as Torturer", in *Foundation* 40?). But it is a rich and exciting story, told with plenty of skill; the fully published novel should be worth reading.

Another writer I have problems with is John Barnes: but his novella in the November *Analog* I also enjoyed: "Canso de Fis de Jovent". It's a rather nutty idea having a high-tech planetary civilisation reproduce the language, culture and mores of Southern France (Occitania) in the Middle Ages: but the varied cultures and resultant psychologies are well done, and as an exercise in world-building it's an intriguing one. (And if you want to know more about the background, read Barnes's article "How to Build a Future" in the March 1990 *Analog*.) Of the others, we'll gloss swiftly over Amy Bechtel's "A Story of Saint Brigit" (there's an Irishwoman in it called Meave -- presumably meant to be Maeve: why is it there's something wrong every time an American sf writer tries her hand at something "Celtic"?); Joseph H. Delaney's "Nugget" (yet another tale of plucky free enterprise miners out in the asteroids/ comets); Michael Flynn's "Spark of Genius", looking at the future of computer authors; and Harry Turtledove's piece of wishful thinking about the right and proper status of school-teaching, "Gladly Wolde He Lerne". Rick Shelley's "Eyewall", about experiments to break up powerful hurricanes (by nuclear explosions...) was an interesting story in the best *Analog* manner, however, as was Brian C. Coad's "Stabilizing Gamma Prime", a very plausible tale of aircraft safety standards. And I also enjoyed Grey Rollins's "The Victor", the latest in his series about a not-very-hardboiled detective and his wisecracking alien sidekick: very lightweight, but why not, once in a while? Even better, as comic sf, was Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff's "If It Ain't Broke...", looking at some of the disastrous ways in which nanotechnology could work in home and studio. All in all, an issue with many different moods, and enough good material, probably, to warrant the increased price.

The cover story for *Analog* in February was Alexis Lynn Latner's "The Listening Glass", a competent-enough engineering-and-astronomy novelette about a giant radio telescope on the Moon, and efforts to ready it in time to observe a supernova. Charles V. De Vet's "Third Game" is a sequel to an earlier story -- but perchance you may not remember it... "Second Game", by De Vet and Katherine Maclean (though this issue of *Analog* does not mention MacLean) was published in *Astounding* in 1958 (March US edition, June British edition). The original story was archetypically *Astounding*: a human challenges an alien race to a series of chess-like games, and finds out their weaknesses. He recommends that the human worlds surrender to the alien, knowing that the latter would be swamped by human culture and human genes. (The alien women are fertile only once every eight years; the aliens would soon intermarry with human women.) Was it worth waiting over 32 years for the sequel? Well, much of it is merely a reprise of the earlier; except that the description of one of the major characters has changed, and there is much more explicit description of how the alien women change as they come on heat: that would never have got past Kay Tarrant in 1958! Otherwise it is as if the world has not changed at all; still the same sexism and speciesism. And the story was fresher in 1958 (without having to be weighed down with tedious background filling, for a start). Also in this issue was an entertaining lightweight tale of free enterprise on the Moon, in Grey Rollins's "Magnolias, Mint Juleps, and the Moon"; an effective short story about future religious dictatorship from Michael F. Flynn, "The Blood upon the Rose", with a fine twist in the tale; a routine child-meets-aliens-in-back-garden story from Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, called "Hobbits"; and Daniel Hatch's "Childhood Escapade", a story of rejuvenation, told from the point of the amnesiac rejuvenated person. Two good science fact articles complete the issue: Marc Davenport on hydrogen as a fuel, and John G. Cramer on the Hubble Space Telescope. *Analog* enters its 61st year in style.

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

INTERZONE 42 - 43 (December 1990 -
January 1991)
(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Women are underrepresented in the ranks of SF writers; IZ 42 attempts to redress the balance somewhat by highlighting female talent. The results, though, are mixed. Most successful are Sherry Coldsmith's 'Faking It' and Carolyn Ives Gilman's 'Glass Angel'. The former mixes two technological developments - androids and "The Slice", a brain operation which makes people super-efficient but as a side effect causes blackouts - and interweaves these with the story of a woman finding her independence. It's challenging and has a hint of menace. The latter story is a fantasy about an angel who leaves his stained-glass window to walk upon the earth, where he discovers both Good and evil have departed. Lisa Tuttle's 'To Be Of Use' allegorises the experience of women who leave their former lives behind when they marry and submerge themselves in their husbands' lives (rather an outdated concept, I would have thought). In this case men are represented by aliens but Tuttle overstates her case by the realistic portrayal of the same idea earlier in the story. The notion that love is a virus forms the basis of 'The Eradication Of Romantic Love' by Pat Murphy. An interesting idea, to be sure, but the treatment - excuse the pun - is hardly rivetting. Karen Joy Fowler's 'Sarab Canary And The Mermaid', on the other hand, is a vignette which contains some quirky, Blaylockian characters and is both rich in detail and intriguing. But as it is an extract from an unpublished novel it has, naturally enough, neither beginning nor ending. I'm sure that the idea behind Martha A Hood's 'Learning The Language' - that a girl wakes up to find that English has disappeared and everybody in the world apart from herself is speaking gibberish - has been used before, but I can't remember where. Never mind, this is a smoothly-written tale, though the protagonist has too easy a time of it - until the end. As to Gwyneth Jones's 'Forward Echoes', I confess its opacity meant that it failed to hold my attention.

The fiction in IZ 43 (an all-male issue with a great cover picture) is less earnest but more entertaining. 'In The Air' by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne is a deserving lead story. It starts slowly, setting the scene for an alternative reality where the communist revolution took place not in Russia but in the United States. The pace and excitement really picks up when it concentrates on the story of a teenage Buddy Holly who engages in an air duel with some famous air aces. There's a host of famous names in here, such as Jack Kerouac, Howard Hughes, Joseph McCarthy and Al Capone, humorously and skillfully treated, making up for the fact that this is the second Holly story to appear in the magazine within the last few months. Also both witty and readable is Ben Jeapes's 'Memoirs Of A Publisher', the publisher in this case being an anthropomorphised AI. Neil Jones's 'Hands' is pure goodies v baddies in a polluted future where dolphins and humans can talk to each other. David Langford has an intriguing concept, that of aman who suffers from attacks where time stops and he is left looking at the last scene he was viewing for what seems like eternity. As a muse on the possibilities of a form of eternal life, though, it doesn't quite come off. Bob Shaw's self-deprecating 'Incident On A Summer's Morning' is a slight but amusing piece.

Of note amongst the non-fiction are the interviews with Pat Murphy (IZ 42) who possesses a refreshingly positive attitude towards her craft, and Ray Bradbury (IZ 43) who also retains a zest for his work along with a penchant here to name-drop. Wendy Bradley provides a sound analysis of the works of her namesake Marion Zimmer, and Colin Greenland romps through Mary Gentle's background, fiction and opinions (IZ 42). Nick Lowe makes up for his absence in the December issue with a wonderful review of ARACHNOPHOBIA the following month.

As the the best fiction of the 1990 INTERZONES, I'll opt for Greg Egan's 'Learning To Be Me' (#37) closely followed by Nicholas Royle's 'Negatives' (#35). But it's a difficult choice and it will be interesting to see the final poll results.

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