

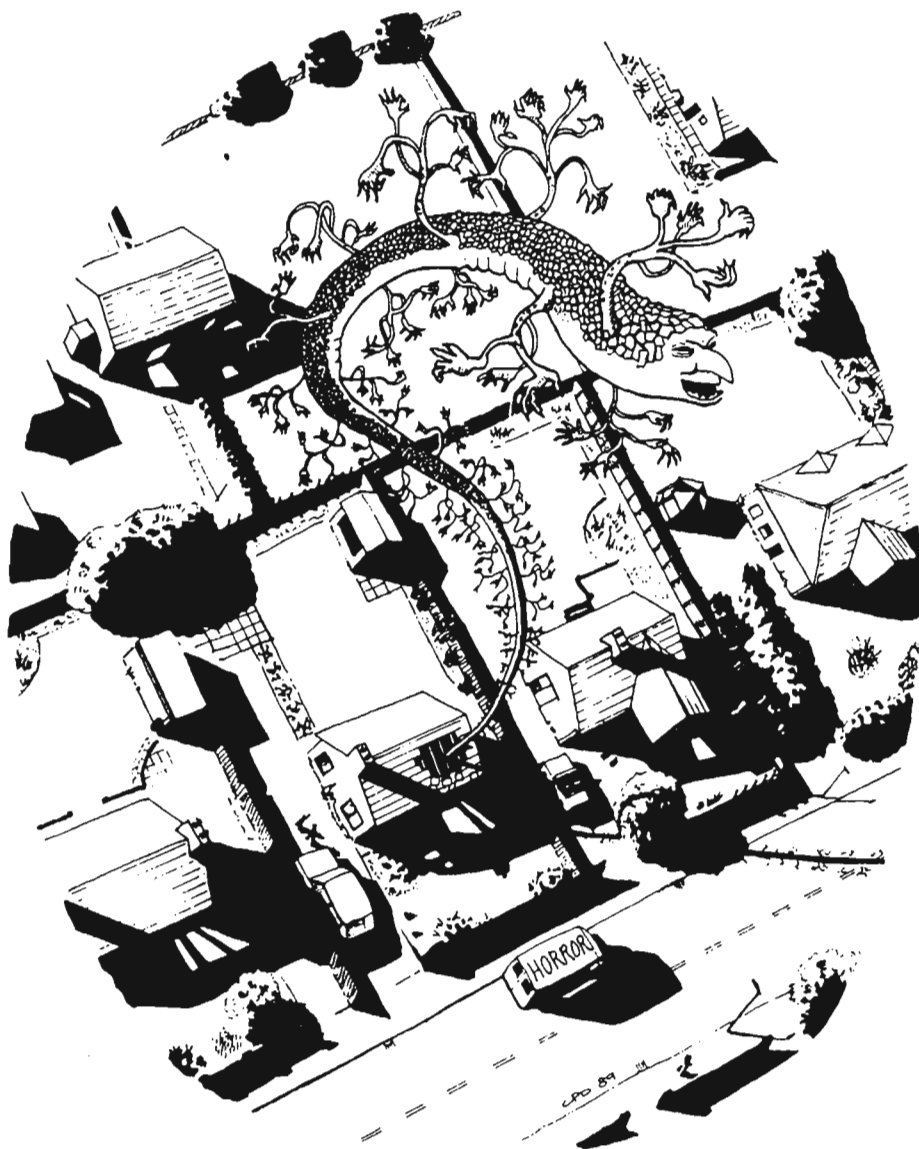


# Paperback Inferno

90

The Review of paperback SF

June - July 1991





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#### REVIEWERS THIS ISSUE:-

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\*\*\*\*\*  
DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to *PI* 91  
is Friday July 5th  
\*\*\*\*\*

#### 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 SPELLER, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ.

## Paperback Purgatory

As with last time, there are no reviews of *ANALOG* and *ASIMOV'S* this issue. Because of the still unresolved health problems which caused the non-appearance of the last batch, Edward James has requested to bow out of magazine reviewing for *PI*.

Edward has reviewed magazines for *PI* since 1984 - over 175 individual issues and some 30,000 pages carefully read and resulting in detailed, comprehensive and entertaining summaries - and feels that it is now time to call it a day. I'd like to thank Edward for his efforts in presenting the contents of the American mags to BSFA members, and his support generally for *PI*. His magazine reviews will be missed, but we will, I'm sure, keep on seeing him in these pages with book reviews; and he is, of course, still editor of *FOUNDATION*, which all right-thinking SF fans subscribe to.

This will mean changes in the *PI* magazine review column, which will no longer appear in quite the form that it has over the past few years. Instead of a column each issue, I'd like to feature occasional but regular overviews of the American magazine scene, which should free space for more book reviews or longer pieces on associated topics. In the first instance, anyone who feels they could produce such a column is invited to contact me at the *PI* editorial address. (British magazine reviews and notices will follow more or less the present format).

Searching for an editorial topic, for *this* issue, I suddenly found one when not so long after I'd mentioned to someone that I wouldn't in fact be featuring very much about new magazines in the foreseeable future because indeed this was *PAPERBACK INFERNO* whose brief was *books*; I discovered that I would be having to make changes in the any case, and in fact there were considerably more such magazines on my desk than I thought. After the apparent renaissance of a while back when you couldn't *move* for ads in *INTERZONE* and articles on or from the New SF Alliance, things got a bit quieter when the threatened revolution - not to mention actual hard copy - failed to appear. Now things are moving again. Chris Hart tells me that he is about to edit an anthology of stories from magazines associated with the NSFA, and there have been several new launches this year.

I've absolutely no evidence to support this idea, but the recession in book publishing might be a factor in this; certainly there are a lot of good and hungry new writers about who are looking for markets, and the standard of the magazines they are turning to in place of the megacorporations is considerably higher than that of the fiction-fanzines of a few years ago in literary as well as production terms. There are many more magazines available than the four I mention here - I haven't seen the first issue of *NEXUS*, (£10 for 4 issues from PO Box 1123, Brighton, BM1 6EX) for example and there have been launches and relaunchees of others - but together they cover a good spectrum.

In fact, the last issue I've seen of *BBR* (£6.30 for 4 issues from Chris Reed, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY) is #16, dated

Summer 1990, but the magazine has now secured a newsstand deal, I hear. *BBR* has been consistently good and has been around long enough to build up a solid reputation. Its establishment here is shown by its strong editorial line, a lively lettercolumn, and wide review coverage of books and (especially) other small-press magazines. Of the fiction, I particularly liked Paul di Filippa's 'Fleshflowers', a story of Martian infection brilliantly illustrated by Kevin Cullen, while Tim Nickels gives us a yeti-type creature with strange powers in a Slavic environment in 'Colder Still'. Both Don Webb ('Beach Scene') and Wayne Allen Sallee ('Sometimes We Come back') provide stories whose technical differences underline the strangeness they describe, yet are far from that by now hackneyed term "experimental".

*THE GATE* is certainly the most colourful of these magazines; issue 3 has an Eddie Jones cover with a bright red-on-yellow design for the title lettering. Dated December, it promised issue 4 speedily, but so far, no news. Its erratic scheduling even by small-press standards, almost total lack of editorial presence, and drab interior appearance are more unfortunate because of the high quality of the stories in this issue. Ian Watson's 'From The Annals Of The Onomastic Society' is a wry comment on the importance of names. David Redd's 'Please Sir, Can We Kill Something?' is an old-fashioned school-story brought viciously into the post-holocaust realm. David V. Barrett's 'Les Temps Étrange Sur L'île Fisseau' is a romantic, atmospheric story of realities on either side of a painting, and more modern SF comes from Storm Constantine with 'The Vitreous Suzerain' - how a colonialist bureaucrat finds joy on an alien world - and James A. Corrick's 'Honky Tonk Man', a lovely sad wish-fulfilment tale about the last of the travelling singer/songwriters. Sarah Lefanu's association with The Women's Press (this issue's feature) is no more, and Kim Newman's film review column refers to flicks you missed months ago, but the quality and variety and balance of the fiction makes *THE GATE* seeking out; (£6.00 for 4 issues from V Publishing, 28 Saville Road, Westwood, Peterborough PE3 7PR).

Two first issues are *THE LYRE*, edited by Nick Mahoney and Ian Sales (of *PI* reviews and *TURKEY SHOOT*, and *R.E.M.*, which had been announced as imminent several times over the last year but has only just materialised. Rather unfortunately, both contain stories from Eric Brown and Keith Brooke, which immediately sets up direct comparison. Brown's stories, also, are both about death; 'The Phoenix Experiment' (*THE LYRE*) scores over 'Star of Epsilon' (*R.E.M.*) which is more inventively baroque but far too rushed towards the end. Keith Brooke's stories are more varied: 'To Be Alone, Together' (*R.E.M.*) is a fantasy which gives the adolescent agnost of the "alone in a crowd" cliché a neat twist, but 'Small Steps' (*THE LYRE*) is real science fiction, a superb story of the first landing on Proxima 2 by an astronaut who is a closet extremist: the best Brooke I've yet seen and a worthy reason for buying the magazine.

Other stories in *THE LYRE* include Simon Clark's cinematic retelling of the Crucifixion and C. N. Gillaore's 'The Miracle Worker', an unusual story of sexual reversal. There's a strong non-fiction content - except for a silly "astrology" column - with Andy Darlington interviewing Ramsey Campbell and five reviewers (including yet another *PI* connection: do I declare interest?) arguing the case for each book on the BSFA Award shortlist. The magazine is let down by the quality of the artwork, which is less than striking, but it's a strong first issue: available £5.75 for 3 issues from Nicholas Mahoney, 275 Lonsdale Ave, Intake, Doncaster S. Yorks DN2 6HJ.

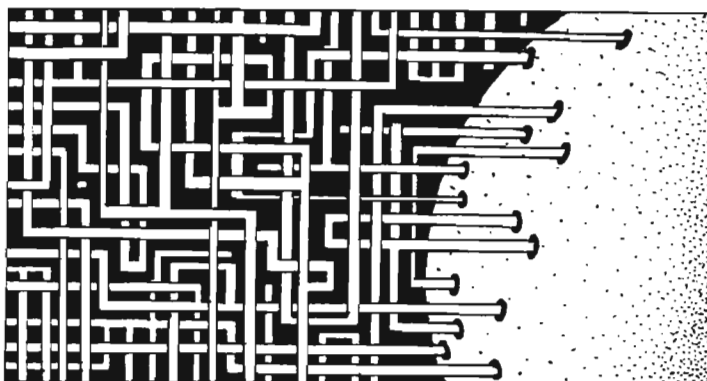
In contrast, *R.E.M.* fairly screams "Desk-top publishing!" but is a good example of the medium even though the contrast needs work. The designer falls into the trap of overprinting too much; the contents list is indecipherable and Arthur Straker's capsule reviews need a second or third look to prove that they haven't been blocked out by reproductions of the book covers. (How wonderful if this could be a literary parallel of current Greatest Human Being Michael Stipe's famous vocal technique!)

*R.E.M.* is well worth the wait, with a novella version of a forthcoming novel by Simon Ings - 'Hothead': a fast-moving story of high-tech porn and possible alien contact - and a crash-bang glimpse of after-the-end-of-it-all chaos from Michael Cobley in 'Marbleye In Midnight Black'. Neither story quite hits the spot - Ings' in particular is too condensed, lacking characterisation and chronology, while both try hard to be "cutting edge" but that was then, folks, and this is now. Despite the rushed ending, Eric Brown's 'Star of Epsilon' does it better. Andrew Ferguson in 'Replicator' takes an old theme (that of the "duplicate") but makes something gripping of it, apart from some dubious interpretation of DNA and "memory cells"; Matthew Dickens' 'Byzantium' is an interesting fable about art and creativity, and William V. Nicholson, new to me, produces an excellent short about the problems of the assassins' trade in a world where just about

anything can be a weapon. Non-fiction is well covered with reviews from Liz Holliday and what I've been waiting to see for a long time, an essay about some of the small-press's major writers and artists (from Dave W Hughes) which gives people like Andy Darlington, Steve Sneyd, Alan Hunter and Kevin Cullen a chance to be talked about for once. Available from R.E.M. Publications, 19 Sandringham Road, London NW2 5EP; £7 for four issues.

It would be interesting to return in a couple of years and see what's become of these magazines. Given the quality of the stories, there's certainly potential for development if they can get to the right people. Each has its faults, but each is a real magazine with real stories. There are probably a good half-dozen contenders for 'serious rival to *INTERZONE*': the problem of course is that the market wouldn't stand so many. Which succeed and which fall by the wayside depend as much on the commitment and skill of the editors and their luck in the distribution battles as the intrinsic quality of the mags, which is why you're looking in vain for my tip for stardom. But it may be an interesting year or so.

## COMPETITION CORNER



## COMPETITION CORNER

Readers of *THE LYRE* and the *VECTOR* "Best of the year" column will know what I enjoyed most during 1990. This has nothing\* to do with the fact that *TRANSWORLD PUBLISHERS* Ltd. have kindly set aside half a dozen copies of the forthcoming paperback edition of Mary Gentle's *RATS AND GARGOYLES* (published July 18th), which YOU, TOO, Gentle Reader,\*\* can win if you prove to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the author's works. Just send to the *PI* Editorial Address the answers to the following questions:

What was Mary Gentle's first published novel?

Name the two stories in *SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS* in which characters from *RATS AND GARGOYLES* appear.

On what world does the action of *GOLDEN WITCHBREED* and *ANCIENT LIGHT* appear?

\*Well, not much.

\*\* No, no, not YOU . . . oh forget it, it's far too complex a pun and anyway people have made it before . . .

## LATE NEWS

Too late to include in the editorial proper, two press releases wing their way. *PI* does NOT generally cover news items, but these are relevant enough to pass on before they go out of date.

\*\* *PEGASUS IN FLIGHT* \*\*

Pegasus Publishing, who produce the media/fantasy magazine *FANTAZIA*, are expanding their interests in forthcoming magazines to cover all forms of games in *GAMESMAN* (monthly from the end of

June), "alternative music" in SIREM (monthly from the end of July), and TV heroes in - well - TV HEROES (bimonthly from the end of August). Fantasy gamers should find their interests catered for in GAMESMAN, while FANTASIA will have a strong SF content; the latest issue I've seen has a Terry Pratchett interview, while Grant Naylor is promised for the future.

\*\* THE DOCTOR GROWS UP! \*\*

Virgin Publishing under the WH Allen imprint are releasing a new series of DR WHO novels which are original productions, not based on previous TV programmes (though they will stick closely to the DR WHO universe and involve many former WHO-writers and editors). They are aimed at a wider audience than the previous novelisations, and editor Peter Darvill-Evans wants to attract adults and 'general' SF fans with real novels with more sophisticated themes and more complex plots which are not bound by low-budget TV special effects. We will NOT, however, be seeing any revelations about secret goings-on in the TARDIS, so keep your rude fantasies to yourself.

The first series is entitled TIMEWYRM, the first of four novels - GENESIS (by experienced WHO-writer John Peel) - will be published in June, followed bimonthly by EXODUS, APOCALYPSE, and REVELATION. A second series, provisionally entitled CAT'S CRADLE, is ready for launch, while a third series is planned but not commissioned.

Peter Darvill-Evans promises that the New Who will not change the characters or their histories to any great extent but will set them in greater depth and more imaginative possibilities, and he will be working with the producers of future TV series to ensure continuity is kept.

For more on this - AND DON'T MISS OUR NEXT EXCITING COMPETITION! - see the next issue of PAPERBACK INFERNO.



Stanislaw Lem - - THE FUTUROLOGICAL CONGRESS (Mandarin, 1991, 149pp, £4.99); IMAGINARY MAGNITUDE (Mandarin, 1991, 248pp, £4.99); MEMOIRS OF A SPACE TRAVELLER (Mandarin, 1991, 153pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

Mandarin continue to plough the Stanislaw Lem backlist with these three, first published in the UK in 1975 (CONGRESS), 1985 (MAGNITUDE) AND 1991 (MEMOIRS), although the latter formed part of the Polish edition of THE STAR DIARIES (1971).

It's appropriate to dwell on such bibliographical details because bibliographic completeness has to be the principal justification for the publication of these three. Lem has a deserved reputation for a number of works - EDEN and SOLARIS spring to mind - but one can't help an unworthy suspicion that his personal circumstances and foreign name have also helped.

Certainly the availability of these works will do little to add to Lem's reputation and they should not be regarded as a good introduction to Lem at his best.

However, CONGRESS and MEMOIRS do serve as a reasonable introduction to the humorous elements in his writing of which THE STAR DIARIES is probably the best-known example, although unless you have a particular penchant for over-laboured 'folk-humour' recycled for the space age (for this is how they come across in translation), the "humorous" epithet may be stretching a point.

CONGRESS and MEMOIRS share a principal protagonist with THE STAR DIARIES, the veteran cosmonaut Ijon Tichy. In addition to being a reliable introduction to Lem's humour they also provide an introduction to the philosophical-speculative Lem, although they are not particularly representative of his best work in this vein. It's particularly unfortunate that the cover of CONGRESS carries a description from TIME magazine describing Lem as 'the Borges of scientific culture'. Insofar as this description makes sense, it shows Lem up badly: CONGRESS is a lighthearted and rather obvious romp around the questions of appearance and reality; the TIME description calls to mind some of Borges' stories on this theme ('The Circular Ruins', for example) which are vastly superior in treatment and far more original in the questions they raise.

MAGNITUDE is a different sort of joke; it bears a relationship with his A PERFECT VACUUM, a collection of reviews of books which have never been written: it is a collection of introductions to non-existent books. The books cover erotic X-rays, communication between humans and bacteria, non-human literature, an encyclopedia of the future and a rebellious supercomputer. This is a more successful and entertaining work than either CONGRESS or MEMOIRS, but there is the same quality of overworking to be found here also. Unless you are a committed fan I think it is unlikely that these three will exert any great hold; very much minor Lem, I'm afraid.

Clifford D. Simak - - CITY  
(Mandarin, 1991, 260pp, £3.99)

- - CATFACE  
(Mandarin, 1991, 252pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Simak, of course, has been best defined as SF's pastoral writer. Nearly all his books are set at least in part in his beloved rural Wisconsin, the Great Lakes State that shares the peninsula between Lakes Michigan and Superior with northern Michigan. Simak brings to his work an affection for the country "where each man, for the price of a city lot, could own broad acres", a folksy style and, in the main body of his work, an optimistic, pro-humanity point-of-view.

CITY was Simak's first award-winning novel, and is made up of stories published in Astounding between 1944 and 1951. Those of you who already know the book may be interested to know that this printing is a reissue of the 1980 edition of the novel, and contains an additional story, 'Epilog'. The latter was written in 1976 for a memorial volume of stories published in honour of Astounding's outstanding editor John W Campbell, who died in 1971.

Being early in the canon of Simak's work, CITY is not entirely typical of anything that followed, as it was written by a man then fresh with disillusionment about World War II, the dropping of the atom bomb, and the subsequent Cold War. It depicts a future history starting with the decline of the cities (in 1990) and ending with the passing of the human race and the Earth overrun by ants, while a series of parallel worlds is ruled by dogs.

The most enduring and endearing character throughout the stories is Jenkins the robot, who serves the Webster family for generations, and eventually ends up serving Man's canine inheritors. (The Webster ancestral home, built by the first of the dynasty to leave the city for the country, is situated somewhere remarkably like Wisconsin!)

CATFACE is almost a Simak archetype, being set explicitly in northwest Wisconsin and, like the Hugo-winning WAY STATION, featuring visiting aliens. Catface himself is the immortal pilot of a crashed spaceship, who can travel to-and-fro in time but cannot return home. Simak's hero is Asa Steele, the small-town boy who became a college professor, but has returned to his roots to buy a forty-acre smallholding, and dig for prehistoric artefacts. Together with his old flame Rila,

the town simpleton Hiram, and his beloved dog Bowser, Asa embarks on an adventure to the cretaceous to hunt dinosaurs. Good old American greed over the profit to be made from time-travel takes over, of course, with schemes for dinosaur safaris, as well as a plan to

resettle America's urban disadvantaged as pioneers in the wide-open past. Asa thinks that everyone is out for what they can get, even his girlfriend and the taxman! After many adventures, however, his faith in human nature is restored and they all live happily ever after.

Although CITY is crafted with less skill than Simak's later work, the stories in it have an uncompromising voice that has endured better than most of those others. FI readers, I think, will find the ending in CATFACE, and many in the Simak catalogue, just a little too comfortable and cosy for their taste. My recommendation therefore is that readers new to Simak should buy CITY, and perhaps also WAY STATION, as an introduction to his best. Books such as CATFACE are for the committed fan.

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Ed. Ben Bova & Byron Preiss - - FIRST CONTACT  
The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence  
(Headline, 1991, 478pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

It is a sad reflection on popular attitudes that, at one of my local bookshops, FIRST CONTACT is displayed in the occult section. SETI is a serious scientific endeavour, and FIRST CONTACT treats the topic as such. In a broad range of essays by scientists and writers, it gives much insight into the science, history and philosophy of the search for aliens.

The hostility of the general public has largely been matched by the hostility of the orthodox scientific community. Copernicus and Galileo were persecuted for attempting to usurp Man from the centre of the Universe,

and religious fundamentalists still preach the uniqueness of life on Earth. But the revolution caused by the telescope's opening up of the Universe, followed by such apparent discoveries as Lowell's Martian canals, fired the popular imagination in the last century. The invention of the spectrometer enabled astronomers to study the chemical composition of far-off bodies, and radio gave hope that the first signs of extraterrestrial life could be found well before we could cross interstellar distances. Thanks to the attitudes of many scientists and a general lack of political support, however, it is only in the last twenty years or so that SETI has got off the ground on any practical scale.

So: Is SETI a credible endeavour? In 'The Dolphin: An Alien Intelligence', Diana Reiss argues that intelligence cannot be defined by technological achievement. Asimov points out that the detection of an alien community capable of signalling over interstellar distances is clearly the only option open to us at the moment. Whilst SETI has begun to gain credibility, if only as a means to answer the question "Are we alone?", some see the fact that we haven't yet discovered alien signals as a sign that we are alone. David Brin explores this in 'The Mystery of the Great Silence'. Gregory Benford argues that there may already be signs of extraterrestrial life (Daniken nonsense apart!), if only we knew where to look.

This is a fascinating collection of articles on a subject which deserves serious consideration. My one reservation is that the scientific details in such articles as Clement's 'Alternative Life Designs', and discussions on the best radio frequencies to use, are a little over my scientifically-illiterate head. I'm sure that won't put any of you off.

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## R E V I E W S

George Alec Effinger - - WHEN GRAVITY FAILS (Bantam Spectra, 1988, 276pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

I can't understand the fuss. WHEN GRAVITY FAILS comes bedecked with praise from reviewer after reviewer, yet to me it seems a plodding, repetitive, non-developing set of events rather than a great novel.

Marid Audran is something of a private eye in the Budayeen, an Arabian ghetto. While everyone around him wallows in sleaze, their personalities totally overwhelmed by drugs and cybernetic add-on modules, Audran remains his own man, independent and aloof. A series of murders drags Audran into the sphere of a kind of Arab godfather. To put the world to rights, he must receive surgical implants and take on the killer...

What's right with this book: Effinger adopts the right tone for the story; it's futuristic Raymond Chandler. Its Middle Eastern setting is somewhat novel (not to mention topical). Its hero stands apart from the dehumanisation around him, retaining his own personality. He takes a few drugs, but always remains in contrast to the twisted self-contained characters around him.

But these same things are also what's wrong with the book. Chandler we've seen before. True, there aren't many extrapolative novels set in the Middle East, but neither does Effinger's characterisation of the Arab race strike a new note. It's not so much that his Arabs are unpleasant, because all his characters are unpleasant; it's that I feel there must be more to the Arab view of the world than ritualised greeting and suspicion of the infidel.

As for our hero, he stands so far back as his friends and acquaintances are bumped off one by one, taking an age to get involved, that his outlook doesn't substantially change during the whole first half of the book.

Perhaps cyberpunk fans will find something of interest here, but I'm afraid I can't.

---

Grant Naylor - - BETTER THAN LIFE (Penguin, 1991, 229pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is more accurately the sequel to the novelised RED DWARF rather than a novelisation of the second TV series, and is funniest when it keeps to the one-liners which are the best features of the interplay between Rimmer, Lister and the Cat. Like the first book, it begins extremely well but then develops a plot. Unfortunately this kind of humour is best kept as plotless as possible, and there are times when BETTER THAN LIFE skirts too near real action-adventure SF and becomes a parody of stuff which is parodied too much already. Worse, the characters become almost real at times, and the extended joke at the end which depends on our heroes losing their defining characteristics is almost unfunny, a sort of metaphysical mirror-reversal gag which only works because Lister, Rimmer & co. should only be their defining characteristics.

Nevertheless, there are enough gags of the ordinary kind to keep you going, and I particularly enjoyed one supporting character, a Brave (if obsessed) Little Toaster who may well owe nothing to Thomas R. Disch but is a worthy supporting act to the drippy Kryten. If you enjoyed the TV series and you're a fan of the Pratchett-Adams axis, this is worth the money.

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Pierre Boulle - - PLANET OF THE APES (Mandarin, 1991, 223pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

Because of this book, Pierre Boulle may be the only French author of SF to have exceeded the sales of his compatriot Jules Verne, and many people will welcome this reprint of a classic novel and film story. The

book was changed only slightly for the film, though in some ways the film was an improvement because it became slightly more of an adventure story.

Does Boule bear comparison with Verne? I think Verne would reject it, mainly because POTA belongs to an older writing genre - the imaginary voyage, to which books like GULLIVER'S TRAVELS belong - and is not especially concerned with the hardness of its science. Like Lemuel Gulliver, Ulysse Merou, who narrates this book, is a very ordinary man (where ordinary means quite stupid), and so the story takes on some of the qualities of a moral tale.

In the land of Houynhnhms there is racism between breeds of horse and on the planet Soror the apes are divided into classes based on species. On Earth man is destroying the planet and the other species; on Soror man has destroyed the planet and been superceded by apes he had trained as workers.

On the other hand, would you know that you were reading a fable? Almost certainly not. You want to know how Merou escapes and what he finds. You'll be surprised.

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Allen Steele - - CLARKE COUNTY, SPACE  
(Legend, 1991, 302pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

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Accompanied by a singularly ill-compiled press release from which one learns that the author has a wife named Linda and a dog named Zack, this second book by Allen Steele (his first was ORBITAL DECAY) opens with a vast array of acknowledgements to people I've never heard of, all of whom have apparently had a hand in the compilation of this quite unbelievable farrago of Mafia adventure and death on a tourist-trap space colony threatened by a nuclear missile.

"In the grand tradition of Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein" trumpets the blurb; since few writers are further apart than these two, the publishers are setting the writer an impossible task which he manages to bodge with aplomb.

Steele has no feel for character, but a penchant for writing about unbelievable behaviour. He provides far too much unnecessary explanation about irrelevant or obvious topics, and makes a grotesque attempt to weave Navajo indian attitudes into a thud'n'blunder potboiler.

If you would still like to sample the book, I suggest you address yourself first to a quotation from Gurney Norman (who he?) printed as an introduction on page 9, wherein is revealed the connection between space colonies, Canterbury cathedral, Indian Coyote stories, wines, computer consoles, folk life and country music. If the mixture appeals, maybe the novel will.

Summary: pretentiousness and corn in an uneven pastiche.

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Harry Harrison - - BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO... ON THE  
PLANET OF ROBOT SLAVES  
(Gollancz, 1991, 236pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

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A sense of humour can be a funny thing. One chap can leaf through Viz breaking into helpless guffaws while the next chap says "It's just a comic with swearing". Presumably, somewhere out there, somebody does not find Terry Pratchett hilarious. But try as I did, my laughometer recorded nary a giggle at this follow-up to BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO. I must admit to not having read the first book, probably too busy laundering my underwear after reading a Robert Sheckley story. I see that Mr Sheckley is teaming up with Mr Harrison for the next book in this series, though, so things could be looking up.

SF has not been blessed with too many successful humourists, perhaps because much of it is close to self-parody anyway. This book often seems to slip into straight space opera, and the author takes pride in throwing in every cliché except the kitchen sink. We have a character called JonKarta who inhabits a world (well, a plateau) called Barthroom, for instance. And a

short tale within the narrative is provided by a character called Cy BerPunk (get the idea?). Yes folks, it's all been done before, and it wasn't funny then either. It is short, at least, and reasonably well paced and therefore over quickly. The main difference between Bill and this author's more successful creation, the Stainless Steel Rat, is that Bill just doesn't do anything. I prefer parodies that have a tad more characterisation (or any at all!).

Having said all that, I wish to point out that I also don't find Douglas Adams' work funny. As I said, a sense of humour is a funny thing.

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Joe Donnelly - - BANE (Legend, 1991, 461pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

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Joe Donnelly is a journalist living in the Glasgow area, and BANE appears to be his first novel. Not surprisingly, it's written in a punchy, journalistic manner. It also deals with a reporter returning to his childhood home to write his first novel.

Nick Ryan arrives at the Highland village of Arden to find that the Cu Saeng, an entity that predates the Romans, is re-awakening. He also discovers that he, along with his childhood friends, holds the key to its destruction.

BANE is one of those horror stories that details the effects of the supernatural on an entire community, such as 'SALEMS'S LOT and GHOST STORY. Donnelly's not as polished a writer as King or Straub, but he captures the feel of the people and landscape of the Kilcreggan district, an area that does exist, and one that I'm personally familiar with.

This can hardly be called a ground-breaking novel, and the reader can never be in any real doubt that it'll have a comfortable resolution, but BANE is an enjoyable book, and what more could you ask for?

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Ben Bova - - VOYAGERS III - STAR BROTHERS  
(Mandarin, 1991, 341pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

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This is the last volume in a trilogy, but stands alone as well, fortunately.

Keith Stoner has had his body invaded by incredibly small self-reproducing sentient machines. Luckily, their intentions are benevolent, and Stoner thinks of the nanotechnology as his 'star brother'.

When he returns - invaded - from space, Stoner finds that the world has gone on much as before with its problems growing but, although he has become a superman, like Clark Kent he has to keep it a secret. The world is not ready for the absolute goodness the star brothers represent, so Stoner can only reproduce his secret through transfusions with a few select leaders, who then act as benevolent dictators of Africa, Brazil or wherever.

Corporations have continued to grow too, but luckily Stoner is married to the chairperson of the largest. The only drawback is that company law has not changed very much, and more malevolent shareholders could vote her out of office. At the same time a horrific disease is beginning to sweep the world as peoples' stomachs eat them.

How Stoner saves the world, keeps the secret safe and turns a multinational company into a pan-galactic one is all recounted in this one volume. Nanotechnology is a new-ish idea but this book, with its echoes of Doc Savage and his secret wealth, seemed rather old-fashioned.

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John Barnes - - SIN OF ORIGIN (N.E.L., 1991, 269pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

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Imagine for a few moments you are a time traveller, who has just materialised, upstream, into the late 29th century. You will soon notice that Earth itself is a small

backwater planet, having been drained of people and superseded by its stronger, more resilient sister planets and thousands of self-sufficient colonies spread throughout the Galaxy. You will also notice that not all colonies see eye-to-eye, especially on matters of state religion. In fact, you can't help but have this fact all but rubbed into your face as most colonies are controlled and run by fanatical Rulers who, being strong-willed emigrants from Mother Earth in the first place, have a stranglehold on their millions of inhabitants. Travelling round these colonies, you will note that each and every planet has its own version of indigenous inhabitants, who in the course of colonisation by humans, have been forced to convert to "our" religious orientation, or suffer dire consequences.

This, then, is the contents of SIN OF ORIGIN, which is a taut, fast-paced, moody and often bloody and violent depiction of our possible future. Barnes is a very good writer who I hope will endeavour to produce a sequel as dazzling as I found SIN OF ORIGIN to be. Excellent reading.

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Jack L. Chalker - - CERBERUS: A WOLF IN THE FOLD  
(Book 2 of the FOUR LORDS OF THE DIAMOND series.)  
(Penguin, 1990, 248pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

This series of adventure SF books is about a threat to the Confederacy of civilised worlds from a more advanced alien race, in league with the four Lords of the Diamond, the criminal overlords of the Warden solar system. These worlds are used to exile incorrigible criminals because they contain a native organism which forms a symbiotic relationship with humans but which cannot exist outside its own solar system. As people sent there can never return, the Confederacy's top agent has his mind impressed into the brains of four criminals being sent to each of the Warden planets. Each of these must investigate whether the Lord of their particular planet is involved in the conspiracy and, if so, do something about it.

I was very impressed by the first book in this series, LILITH: A SNAKE IN THE GRASS, but confess to having been disappointed with the second volume. I knew before I picked it up that the outcome would leave the primary plotline unresolved, but that hopefully enough would be revealed to keep the reader wanting to carry on to the next book, CHARON: A DRAGON AT THE GATE. My disappointment stems from the fact that Chalker sets up a very interesting scenario, and then doesn't make enough of it. The effect that the Warden organism has on the Cerberans is that it enables them to swap minds, or rather bodies, but Chalker just uses this as a clever disguise mechanism, without exploring any more serious implications.

Despite this fault, Chalker is still a good storyteller, and the books have much of the flavour of Vance's DEMON PRINCES series, with the bonus of a hero who lacks Kirth Gersen's certainty about his cause. Although I didn't enjoy the second volume in the series as much, my interest in the outcome is still keen, and I look forward to reading a stronger book 3!

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Jack L. Chalker - - CHARON: A DRAGON AT THE GATE (Book 3 of the "Four Lords Of The Diamond" series) (Penguin, 1991, 248pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

At the end of my review of what I felt was a rather disappointing second book in the series, I hoped it would pick up again in the third, and fortunately it has. Chalker's "Agent With No Name" hero, who has his mind impressed on the brains of four convicts to accomplish his mission in the system of criminal worlds known as the Warden Diamond, had a fairly straight-forward run in the first book. He had some identity problems in the second book, starting out as a woman, but here in his third persona he becomes a diminutive ex-serial killer with a confused sexual identity. Not only that, but he gets changed by "magic" part of the way through the book into

a large green carnivorous lizard rather like a Tyrannosaurus Rex!

How the Agent gets out of this mess, attains god-like masculinity, and accomplishes his mission to bring down yet another of the Lords of the Diamond is great fun. We learn more about the aliens who are organising the threat to the human Confederacy with the Diamond Lords' help, and are set up for the final instalment, MEDUS: A TIGER BY THE TAIL, when who's behind it all will be revealed. I still think Chalker doesn't face up to all the implications of his inventive material, but I enjoyed the book, and am sure he'll bring the series to a climactic finish.

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Stephen Jones (Ed.) - - THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF TERROR  
(Robinson, 1991, 587pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Robinson have published a range of 'Mammoth' anthologies featuring every genre under the sun and some that I never knew existed. This one gathers together some eighteen stories, including two pulp novels, most of which have appeared in previous collections. All the names you would expect to find are here plus a couple of lesser known figures, Hugh B. Cave and Manly Wade Wellman, who provide the aforesaid short novels from the pulp magazines of the thirties. The editor has a reputation for knowing his Horror fiction so the variable quality of this material may be due to availability.

Anyone who wants to read Clive Barker's 'The Last Illusion' should really be seeking out his BOOKS OF BLOOD collections from whence it came. 'Out Of Copyright' from Ramsey Campbell has also been around a bit. If the editor could not get original or rare stories I would have thought better examples of these two writers could have been found.

David Schow fares better with his pungent gravedigging yarn 'Bunny Didn't Tell Us' which is representative of his work. As is 'The Late Shift' by Dennis Etchison and Stephen Law's excellent 'Junk', both previously anthologised. One story which has not previously seen the light of day, with good reason, is F. Paul Wilson's 'Buckets', a reprehensible attack on the right to abortion in the form of a gory horror story. Well written, truly disgusting and not at all right on.

More enjoyable are the two gothic novels 'Murgunstrumm', a vampire tale heavily influenced by Bram Stoker and 'The Black Drama' a horror drama mythologising Lord Byron. Both are written with some verve and dashes of melodrama, the dark deeds are outlined with relish and the effect is pleasing if wholly forgettable.

A readable collection but most of the better stories are available elsewhere and tiresome efforts from authors such as Brian Lumley, Karl Edward Wagner and Robert Bloch make heavy going.

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C. J. Cherryh - - EALDWOOD (Gollancz, 1991, 432pp, \$4.40)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

EALDWOOD consists of two fantasy novels, THE DREAMSTONE and its sequel, THE TREE OF SWORDS AND JEWELS, previously published separately. Together they make an outstanding and imaginative continuous narrative.

Magic is fading from the world. Mankind has tamed the land with axe and plough, but one small forest remains untouched, Ealdwood, where the power of Arafel, last of the Daoine Sidhe, the elves, holds sway. Arafel's concerns are not human concerns, but when men enter her woods she is drawn into their lives and their battles, and when she is summoned she gives them her aid - although the cost may be high, to men as well as herself. A man like the half-elven Ciaran Cuilean, who has the favour of the sidhe, may find his lands blessed with abundant crops, but he will also incur the envy and fear of other men, even his brother, and his king.

This is a world where the Daoine Sidhe are fair but perilous, being immortal and indifferent to the cares and hopes of mankind, where the lesser sidhe, the creatures

of folklore that haunt stream, wood and fields, must be propitiated with saucers of milk. C. J. Cherryh writes EALDWOOD in her typically concise style, and yet the book is more evocative, more lyrical even, than the author's science fiction novels, conjuring up a mythical age of mounted warriors, of harpers and kings, of stone holds and haunted forests. The plot does become somewhat frantic towards the end, but EALDWOOD is a reminder that fantasy, in capable hands, is a genre that can stir the reader's imagination like no other.

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Robert A. Heinlein - - **TIME FOR THE STARS** (Gollancz, 1991, 244pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

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The late Robert Anson Heinlein, I'm sure most of you will agree, has to be considered one of the most prominent, prolific and consistently successful writers that ever graced the history of SF the world over. He will be sorely missed. **TIME FOR THE STARS**, originally published way back in 1956, deals with that dark and almost unbelievable side to humanity, psi or occult abilities, said to reside latent in some humans. **TIME FOR THE STARS** also depicts a future crowded Earth, desperate to shed in any way it can some of its excess population. This means shipping them off across interstellar space, via experimental sub-light spaceships, to unknown inhabitable planets.

This is the setting for a group of identical twins who, having been drafted by the "Long Range Foundation", find themselves torn apart by the vastness of space. These telepathic children are used as special communicators as they travel from planet to planet, searching in vain for somewhere to continue the human race while one of the twins stays behind on Earth, growing older at a faster rate than the other twin on the spaceship. A novel most deserving to be called a classic.

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Terry Pratchett - - **DIGGERS** (Corgi, 1991, 173pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

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The paperback cover is subtitled "The marvellously witty sequel to **TRUCKERS**", and that just about sums this book up. It is witty; it's one long dry, understated, deadpan comedy routine. The language is full of the raw energy of real life, and the timing is impeccable. The nomes are still confused, desperate, living from crisis to crisis in a hostile world. Just like us, in fact. They evoke our amused sympathy because they're **SMALL**; their insurmountable problems are commonplace of our lives. They don't threaten us, so we can relax and admire their pluck. If we are children, we can feel good in two directions, we are bigger than the nomes (and we know more than they do about the human world) so we feel superior. But we also identify with the nomes who articulate for us the problems of being small, and of living in ignorance of things that adults take for granted.

What's missing is originality. This is a sequel, more of the same. The nomes are still living in the interstices of human life; this time in a quarry rather than under the floorboards of a department store. There are the same hilarious misinterpretations of human culture, the same arguments, the same resourcefulness and determination. I found it highly entertaining, but somehow unsatisfying. Even so, I shall look forward to the story's conclusion...

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Ramsay Campbell - - **SCARED STIFF** (Futura, 1991, 177pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

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We know what we are letting ourselves in for when this collection is subtitled 'Tales of Sex and Death', which gives away the main title's intentional pun. Most of the stories come from previous anthologies which appeared in the mid-seventies, but two were written for this book's

original 1987 publication. This edition has moody illustrations by J.K. Potter as a frontispiece for each story.

I was going to begin by saying that all horror fiction is about sex, but Mr Campbell has pre-empted such glib critical statements in his frank and informative afterword. Here he details the effect his repressive Catholic upbringing had in nurturing an appetite for banned books, culminating in a raid on the author's home by the boys in blue. Such corrupting influences as Samuel Beckett and the Marquis de Sade were discovered by our brave lads, and this incident may well have stirred up Campbell's well-known dislike of censorship.

The stories herein are uniformly excellent, suffering little from the overlap in mood and subject matter. In 'Dolls' a sense of dread permeates a tale of a witches coven set in a pastoral religious community. 'The Other Woman' presents a study of sexual obsession and creative dysfunction when an artist who paints lurid book covers finds power over his creations transferring to real life. My favourite, 'The Seductress', is a typical Campbell story of urban witchcraft told with his usual attention to detail, and building to a genuinely uneasy and apposite dénouement.

A couple of the more conventional stories are salvaged by warm characterisation and atmospheric writing, although 'Stages', concerning an hallucinogenic drug trip, is not very convincing. Generally terrific stuff.

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Robert Silverberg - - **THE QUEEN OF SPRINGTIME** (Legend, 1991, 519pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by K. V. Bailey)

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The mainspring of the preceding novel, **AT WINTER'S END**, was the "Coming Out" of the people from their cocooning during Earth's long freeze, and their establishing a springtime presence on its surface. A fresh dynamic was needed to sustain the sequel, and it is provided by contention between the newly-emerged, furry, anthropoidal, highly intelligent People, and the hjjk, the aeonian Queen-controlled Insect-folk, who in their great Nests have lived through and survived ice ages and comet-falls. It ends in an insecure treaty following military onslaught by the People and the hjjk attempts at subversion and psychic infiltration.

Silverberg's settings, landscapes and visions are colourful and impressive as always. While much of the palace intrigue, the romance, and the campaigning is pretty stock sf/fantasy fare, the chief characters have sufficient individuality and appeal to make their fates not a matter of indifference. Even more interesting, however, is Silverberg's imaginative narrative exploration of the oppositional yet complementary natures of two life-forms: the People, perpetually in flux, curious, adventurous, ever-expanding, but vulnerable, and the hjjk, static, stratified but unitary, conservatively changeless and long-enduring. What, ask various characters in conflict, are the gods really up to: or do both streams of being flow in common from a one-time human creative initiative? And where are the humans: will they some day return to earth? One anticipates revelations.

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David Gemmell - - **DRENAI TALES** (Legend, 1991, 756pp, £9.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

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**DRENAI TALES** is an omnibus edition of Gemmell's Drenai stories, consisting of **WAYLANDER**, **LEGEND** and **THE KING BEYOND THE GATE**, plus an extra 15,000 word short story, 'Druss the Legend', which fits chronologically between **WAYLANDER** and **LEGEND**, and fleshes out a central character who appears in **LEGEND**. If you haven't read any of Gemmell's Drenai books before then this is a good place to start, as you get the first trio for a tenner, instead of the £12 it would otherwise cost you, and the short story as a bonus. If you've already got them, a £10 seems a bit steep for just 'Druss the Legend', good, muscular stuff though it is.



Gemmell's attractiveness as a purveyor of excellent sword & sorcery is that his heroes are never portrayed as Conan-types, always on the lookout for a bloody battle, but as people who fight for their own lives and their homeland instead. When the fight is over, the survivors are more likely to return home than go looking for the next war.

With the exception of 'Druss the Legend', each of the Drenai tales features a different cast of characters, and the heroes of the previous book are the legends of the next, a device that works very effectively. Gemmell could go on for years just filling in the (considerable) gaps between the existing tales, let alone writing new stories.

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David Gemmell - - LION OF MACEDON (Legend, 1991, 416pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

It's hard to say whether it's good that the fantasy genre is keeping the historical novel alive or sad that historicals now need to have dashes of fantasy in them to appeal to a mass market. LION OF MACEDON is a case in point. Although David Gemmell is well-known as a writer of epic fantasy, this novel is something different. Gemmell's books are celebrated in some quarters, though I admit to not enjoying the one other of his novels that I've read. The reason for that was a feeling that there was no centre to the story; like so much fantasy, it was unreal, do-it-yourself Dark Lordery.

LION OF MACEDON, however, is a more or less straight historical novel, more reminiscent of Mary Renault than Robert E. Howard. Set in the Greece of the Peloponnesian War and the rise of Macedonia under Philip II, it is the first installment of the saga of Parmenion, a half-Spartan who rises to become Philip's chief general. It's a gripping account of a time which was turbulent enough for any lover of intrigue and bloody action, and there's just enough fantasy stuff about Dark Gods and Chaos Spirits to keep any genre addict reading right up to the climax in which Parmenion defies Hades itself to ensure the birth of a child (no prizes for guessing who) who will embody the warring spirits of both good and evil.

Whether this is necessary is anyone's guess, but it qualifies a good book for review here and certainly presents a powerful symbolic reading of the age. The appearance of Aristotle as a wizard strikes a resounding false chord, and someone with a liking for pop psychology ought to count the number of wounds in groins suffered throughout the action, but Gemmell records his hero's romantic and ambiguous history with terrific pace and a dramatist's attention to shaping. This, I did enjoy.

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T. M. Wright - - THE PLACE  
(Gollancz, 1991, 278pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

The horror novel, at least on the evidence of this example - which might be presumed to be typical - and on the evidence of the lavish praise from Stephen King, Ramsay Campbell and Dean Koontz, is a deeply conservative form. Its message is that one should never depart from the straight and narrow, that any venture away from familiar routines is doomed to terrible punishment. Additionally, it tells us that America's woods are absolutely crammed with dangerous lunatics, and that bright children are in danger of going to the devil.

The story, such as it is (even the writer keeps losing interest in various strands of his tale and lets them fade away or be resolved in a slapdash way so that he can move on to something else), concerns your typical American family which ventures off the main road. The father is shot at by a madman. The mother and son are kidnapped by a fanatical cult which lives secretly underground. And the ultra-bright daughter has an imaginary world which starts being invaded by the madman. (This last is the only fantastic element in the book, and it is dealt with in such a lacklustre way that the writer clearly has no interest in the power, potential or symbolic weight of his creation.)

There are plenty of bodies, but since the dead are never brought centre-stage we feel nothing for all the mayhem. There is certainly no horror, nothing to make you feel even slightly uncomfortable. The characters are from stock, the plot is loaded with coincidence, the writing occasionally rises to the heights of a Jackie Collins, and there is no sign of any controlling intelligence behind this mish-mash.

Wright is being lauded as the new master of 'quiet horror' (whatever that is). On the evidence of this book I feel sorry for the future of the genre.

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Joan Slonczewski - - THE WALL AROUND EDEM  
(The Women's Press, 1991, 288pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

Armageddon has come, and gone. Human enclaves survive within alien domes, their less fortunate (?) fellows merely bones piled outside - *pour encourager les autres?* The aliens may have facilitated our termination, as they preserve the few for their own purposes, but we are never told. In fact, the aliens are pretty damned elusive throughout. Their protection is incomplete and so the survivors die by inches. Their mechanical (?) observers, the angelbees, may have turned on them, and the 'queen' may not have endured - if she/he/it ever existed.

If you like bleak conclusions then the possibility that the superior species run on as empty a tank as the human survivors is about as bleak as bleak comes.

This is not a didactic work. Of course the protagonist is a woman, but Isabel is as headstrong and daft as any juvenile male. All the characters are recognisably 'real' people, struggling to survive in an awesomely hostile and ambiguous environment (by which sly trick of good writing Ms Slonczewski makes her message the more vivid). As unusual as the lack of feminist dialectic is the absence of neat and tidy plot conclusions. Even the deus ostensibly in charge of the machine is less than godlike in capacity or appearance - but can alien species ever communicate effectively, and do the means ever bring with them the wisdom to use that ability? Just two of the matters raised in the course of a compelling narrative which defies any attempt to summarise.

This novel may not have the 'right stuff' (there is no technological fix) but it is definitely good stuff. Serious it is, but closely argued and superbly crafted. You are urged to read it.

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Gene Wolfe - - THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER  
(Legend, 1991, 303pp, £3.99)

- - THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR  
(Legend, 1991, 301pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

Legend is now handling the Arrow catalogue and has taken the liberty of repackaging these books in tacky Sword & Sorcery covers (you should also see what they've done with recent re-issues of some of Philip K Dick's novels).

Gripes aside, what of the books themselves? They are the first two parts of THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN, a four volume epic which initially comes across as a marvellous work of fantasy. All the usual tropes are here; the travelling players, the frozen medieval society, the swords with names, etc.. Even if viewed simply on this level, Wolfe has produced a work which transcends the genre. But THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN also functions as science fiction - everything can be explained rationally. All the clues are there, though sometimes only to be found in a later volume.

The series is set on Earth at a time mankind, having reached the stars, has retreated and entrophied. Virtually nothing of our own age is remembered. It is the narrative of Severian the Torturer - not someone who could be described as a traditional hero, but certainly a man who is the product of his own time.

THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER details his expulsion

from the Guild of Torturers and the start of his journey to Thrax to become an executioner. The pacing of this novel is seriously flawed - hardly anything happens, and most of what does happen can be second-guessed by the reader - but the power of Wolfe's prose makes it worth sticking with.

THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR is a lot more rewarding with regard to adventure, and Severian's clinical observation of events is frequently chilling. Wolfe has crafted an amazing work of fiction, and there are few other writers with his grasp of character or language.

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Clare McNally - - HEAR THE CHILDREN CALLING  
(Corgi, 1991, 320pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Sometimes it can be heartwarming to find a particular favourite cliché being dusted off and reused. In this case it's the one where drug experiments by an evil corporation produce kids with paranormal talents. The titular children are kept from their real parents and brainwashed into using their abilities for the benefit of corrupt Doctor Adams. I assume the slipshod plotting only appears so if one fails to allow for the familiarity of the reader filling in the credibility gaps in this kind of book. What does nasty old Doctor Adams intend to do with the powers he commands via the kids? How did he organise plane crashes to cover up the disappearances when there must be easier ways to get hold of babies to experiment with? These and other questions are left unanswered.

The novel is an enjoyable read, which just goes to show the pointlessness of analysing this type of book - which is meant for a long train journey, not to be the subject of a literary thesis. The style is clear and readable, the characters consistent and the action moves at an agreeably fast pace. If only the author had shown some originality I could have safely recommended HEAR THE CHILDREN CALLING, but in this respect, like most other books, it is sorely lacking.

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Orson Scott Card - - PRENTICE ALVIN (Legend, 1991, 436pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

'... he who does not recognize what is in the universe is a stranger to the universe ... Watch how all things continually change, and accustom yourself to realize that Nature's prime delight is in changing things that are ...'

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus  
To Himself, Book IV.

The above quotation was used by Manly Wade Wellman as an epigraph to his 1959 thudder, THE DARK DESTROYER, which I re-read the other day. It ahem, seemed like a good idea at the time, and -- anyway -- I haven't been well, lately. But it could (much) more profitably be applied to PRENTICE ALVIN, the third volume in Orson Scott Card's six-decker novel about 'Alvin Maker'.

All good fantasy (like all good science fiction) should be the literature of *change* -- not just a paper teat for back-to-nature pastoralists, dogmatic feminists/masculinists/whatever-ists, or wet-dreaming 'barbarians'.

And, while Card seems to have gone overboard on the 'noble Amerindian' bit (see my review of RED PROPHECY: PI 83), his alternative America is -- despite surface appearances -- in a continual flux. Nothing comes easily. 'God' (for the want of another, though not necessarily better, word) does not perform any 'acts of grace'. Men and women must attain their own 'salvation' if the human race is ever to build the 'Crystal City' of (near-perfect) peace.

Alvin himself acts like an ordinary human being who has been blessed (or cursed?) with extraordinary gifts. He is neither a goody-goody van Vogtian Superman nor a baddy-baddy Hubbardian *Übermensch*. Chapters 5 to 9 relate, with turn-of-the-screw effectiveness, how a fit of pique leads him into an unequal struggle against the 'Unmaker' (aka THE DARK DESTROYER?). Fortunately, Alvin

has a guardian angel (of sorts); Peggy Guester, the precognitive 'torch', who (in my mind's eye) resembles the teenage Janet Leigh.

PRENTICE ALVIN also tackles the slavery problem, combining liberal attitudes with an almost total avoidance of easy sentimentality. 'Uncle Tom' doesn't get a look-in through the cabin window. Oh, I nearly forgot -- Alvin Miller finally serves out his apprenticeship and becomes 'Alvin Smith'. (Flippant question: If himself took up astronomy, would he be called 'Alvin Stardust'?).

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Raymond F. Jones - - THIS ISLAND EARTH  
(Grafton, 1991, 191pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Born in 1915, Jones first appeared in *Astounding* in 1941 and was a frequent contributor to the magazines until 1956 when, apart from a few later novels between 1969 and 1977, he disappeared from view.

THIS ISLAND EARTH was one of his better known novels, sharing with most of his oeuvre the slick, snappy style of Golden Age American SF and the simplistic, totally unsexual and unpolitical attitudes of most characters of the time.

For readers of the pre-space age, however, brief sentences like that which opens Chapter 22 - "The spaceship came at midnight." - had an irresistible appeal, and THIS ISLAND EARTH made enough of a stir to persuade Universal to turn it into a surprisingly entertaining and impressive movie. The story appeared first in *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, serialised in 1949/50 and published as a fix-up in 1952; the film followed only two years later.

The story was aimed straight at the developing technological and computer-orientated beliefs of post-war readers: engineers ordering standard electrical components receive fantastically advanced ones instead; they are persuaded to build a futuristic 'intercitor', and find themselves catapulted into interstellar conflicts which ultimately threaten Earth with destruction. Plotting is taut, the story still acceptable to less sophisticated readers today, and the dénouement believable - just!

Summary: good for nees and juniors.

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Howard Waldrop - - THEM BONES  
(Legend, 1991, 218pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

Madison Yazoo Leake steps through a time-portal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, hoping to emerge in 1930s Louisiana. Yaz is point man for a US Army special group, commissioned to prevent the outbreak of World War III. (This isn't really a time-paradox story: the usual grandfather-snuffing speculation is dealt with rather dismissively.) The easy-going, adaptable, likeable Mr Leake has actually ended up in a different time-line in which, for instance, the Roman Empire never existed, and where he settles down with a tribe of woodpecker-worshipping mound-builders. The rest of the time-jumpers are lost to Leake, as is their equipment. He is stranded.

The characterisation is delightful, the humour marvellous and the detail rich - I'm still chuckling at 'He was a wiry old man, and he was farting so much I thought he had frogs in his breechcloth'. The story is interesting, of how mankind's common humanity can allow an honest fellow to find home in an alien place. Unfortunately, I thought this was somewhat obscured by the intrusively choppy structure, which jumps constantly between three different viewpoints. I would much rather have stuck with Leake, and his fascinating friend Took-His-Time (named for his mother's long labour). In particular, the plot strand dealing with 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeologists, gradually unearthing Yazoo's story, struck me as unnecessary and slow.

The paperback is publicised with outrageously enthusiastic quotes from genre stars. Well, it is a good book, and I'll certainly read more Waldrop; but THEM BONES doesn't conclusively prove its author's divinity.

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**Neville Steed - - HALLOWES' HELL**  
(Headline, 1991, 310pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

I don't read much horror fiction, so when I'm presented with a horror novel to read I'd prefer it to have some substance or, at least, entertainment value. It also has to be more than competently written for, whatever the anti-literary brigade say, when there's so much crap about, the badly written crap isn't worth the time of day. So, how does HALLOWES' HELL meet the challenge?

The basic plot - a local GP and a reporter investigate mysterious events and weird deaths connected with the new telephone system - is entertaining enough and, with a bit of self-discipline, I found it quite readable. The story unfolds like a whodunnit, and Steed builds enough suspense for the reader to ask *Why are the telephones playing back compromising conversations to those who weren't meant to hear them, and how does the impending visit of American TV evangelist Bobby Quick, and events during WWII, come into this?*

Having finished it, however, I feel curiously unsatisfied. Perhaps it's because the writing is generally flat, the characters, dare I say it, cardboard cut-outs. Who can take a writer seriously when he defines character by the cars they drive (2CV = pseud-environment conscious lefty etc.)? Perhaps it's the incredibly badly written pass-the-bucket, pin-a-medal-on-my-chest ending. Perhaps it's the general lack of anything more original and interesting than an episode of Hammer House of Horror.

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**Robert Charles Wilson - - GYPSIES** (Orbit, 1991, 311pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

As a child, Karen White discovered that she, and her siblings, had the ability to open doors into alternative worlds (the American usage, "alternate", never sounds right to me). While her brother embraced the ability enthusiastically, and her sister at least accepted it, Karen spent years suppressing even the memory of it, which resurfaced only in dreams.

When she begins to suspect that her teenage son, Michael, has the power, Karen is gradually forced to stop telling herself that it was all a fantasy. Both of them seem to be in danger from the mysterious Gray Man (or Grey Man, in the cover notes), who has haunted Karen for years.

GYPSIES is a very entertaining thriller, but doesn't work quite so well as a parallel universe story. Much of the fun to be had from alternative worlds is the time spent in them, comparing their reality with ours, and there isn't nearly enough of that here. Wilson's style is frustratingly slow and deliberate, and his depiction of a family that isn't a family sits uneasily with the action. For a novel dealing with inherited paranormality, I prefer FADE by Robert Cormier.

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**Octavia Butler - - MIND OF MY MIND** (Gollancz, 1991, 221pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

A sequel to WILD SEED, this book is nevertheless a complete story in its own right. Doro has survived for over 4,000 years by serial possession of the bodies of other humans. He is breeding humans for psi talent. He feeds from them, obtaining much more energy from possessing a psi-talented human (and killing the body's original personality in the process), than from a normal "mute" human. But he's also lonely. He is trying to breed a race of people more like himself. Unfortunately, psi-talented humans are unstable and dangerous, liable to destroy themselves and each other without careful help and management.

Mary is a product of Doro's breeding program. She becomes a telepath of a previously unknown type, multi-

talented, powerful, able to forge a permanent bond with other psi-talented people and "feed" from them without killing them. She thus becomes Doro's rival -- his people tolerate him only because they must, because he will kill them if they disobey him. Mary doesn't need to kill, either to feed or to lead. She is perhaps the person Doro should have become, without his catastrophic experience of puberty. Doro is Mary's father, her wise teacher, her experienced protector, her lover... and her enemy. I won't reveal the outcome of the conflict between them.

The book is a deep and subtle study of emotional and psychic maturation. It deals with empathy, survival, the different kinds of strength, relationships. It's well worth reading.

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**Greg Bear - - QUEEN OF ANGELS** (Victor Gollancz, 1991, 384pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Maureen Speller)

Here's a book I didn't expect to enjoy. I'm not overly fond of Greg Bear's dogmatic emphasis on the need for 'proper science' in science fiction, and I've sometimes felt that he sacrifices the art of storytelling on the shrine of a good idea. I'm happily prepared to say that QUEEN OF ANGELS goes a long way towards changing my opinion.

This is a densely-written, intricately-plotted, near-future murder mystery, in which seemingly unrelated elements mesh together as satisfyingly as one could wish in a startling display of imaginative writing. In exploring the central mystery, Emanuel Goldsmith's motives in cold-bloodedly murdering eight young people, Bear provides the vehicle for a masterly exploration of what we mean by identity, in humans; people engineered and altered by surgery; and in machine intelligences, in a world where psychotherapy has become the norm in order to tolerate the pressures of a hi-tech life, and only in the rarest cases are untheraped people allowed the privileges of the therapied. For anyone who thinks that America already dances too much at the whim of the psychiatrists, the future as conceived by Bear will probably bear out all their worst fears. That hi-tech life is perhaps my only quibble, with seemingly too many changes in under fifty years in the future, but this is a common failing of near-future settings, and Bear has done better than most. And if he has fallen down in endowing the near future with too much hardware, the emotional and spiritual preoccupations of our own time still seem very much in evidence - who am I, what am I, and is there anyone else out there in the universe?

Read this novel slowly, don't gobble it, digest and think, be patient, and QUEEN OF ANGELS will reward you handsomely.

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**Dan Simmons - - HYPERION** (Headline, 1991, 502pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

This first volume of Simmons' majestic space opera/dark fantasy hybrid won the Hugo and Locus awards for best Science Fiction Novel in 1990. Simmons marries awarring galactic empire theme and battle between its three components, the human hegemony, the rebel space-faring Ousters and the secessionist AT Technocore, with a killing-machine horror known as the Shrike, a creation not far removed from the author's vision of evil in SONG OF KALI as a god of destruction.

Upon this broad canvas apparently insignificant pilgrim faces can be picked out, expressions pulled by the warp of the cloth and the tug of a thread as they journey hopefully towards the Shrike, recounting lives of horror and corruption in their desperation to unravel themselves from the forces which control their lives.

The vast impersonal machinations of the Hegemony and its enemies are thus ideally counterpointed by a series of connected stories of great personal significance to the players who, in their anguish, reveal the empire as a vast collection of distrusting, disillusioned and decadent strangers, potential anarchists striving to retain their identities in a stiflingly regimented system.

The tales, themselves, are much less than the whole, being fairly predictable in their progression and resolution. However, they are told with an invigorating fervour which disguises and overcomes the strictly linear weakness of the plotting, and - especially in the Scholar's Tale - can pack an intense, almost unbearable punch.

Throughout, the Shrike dominates the planet Hyperion, like a dark descendant of Lewis Carroll's Snark and Morbius's manifested Id, able to grant wishes in a bizarre game of Russian roulette. But we never view the monstrosity unsullied by the memories of the protagonists and the book ends on one of the greatest cliff hangers in the history of science fiction.

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Graham Masterton (Ed.) - - SCARE CARE (Grafton, 1991, 496pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

"Every day, every night, children are dreading the sound of approaching footsteps, the key in the lock, the door handle turning. Not because of ghosts, or vampires, or monsters from hell, but because of their ownparents or guardians. because of beatings, because of relentless mental persecution, because of starvation, because of sexual abuse.

These children experience unending terror that makes THE EXORCIST seem cosy by comparison." - Graham Masterton (Foreword)

This book was edited and published and sold in aid of The Scare Care Trust. All royalties earned will be paid to the Trust and then distributed to children's charities. That in itself is a good reason for buying it. But we are all mercenary at heart, and we really want to know if we are getting value for money. Are we?

There are 38 stories in this book, by the likes of Harlan Ellison, Ruth Rendell, Roald Dahl, Ramsey Campbell, James Herbert and Kit Reed. It's impossible for a reviewer to say something about every story in any anthology, but one this size makes the job very difficult. Not just because of the number of stories, but because of the sheer diversity of them. From Ruth Rendell's psychological 'Loopy' to Peter Tremayne's ghostly 'The Last Gift'; from John MacLay's moving 'Models' to the monstrous crabs of Guy N. Smith's 'Crustacean Revenge', there isn't a bad story in this collection, and even if you find a weak one, it's buoyed up by the rest. If this wasn't being sold for such a good cause, I'd still recommend it.

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Robert Jordan - - THE EYE OF THE WORLD (Orbit, 1991, 670pp, £7.99)(Trade)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

The cover illustrations show some characters, armed, and on horseback, and the blurb calls the book "A splendid epic of heroic fantasy". Inside it's much as you'd expect of Book One of a fantasy trilogy. The rustic hero, Rand, caught up in events beyond his village, is sought by rising dark forces and hunted by various foulnesses called Trollocs, Darkfriends, etc. while a sorceress and Warden aid him and his young companions. Magical power is centred in distinct male and female powers; while the female is still ineffective the male half is tainted with evil and drives its wielders into madness.

The characterisation is a weak point in this otherwise diligently constructed epic; even after 300,000 words one has little insight into these people. The author tends to label them with single attributes, so that one is "obstinate", another "broadshouldered", another "mischievous" and so on. Possibly the best invention in the whole book are the Whitecloaks, a truly sinister bunch of armed religious fanatics and sorcery-haters.

The book is something of a page-turner; but the mechanical plotting is at the same time an irritant. As soon as some trouble is outlined one can be sure that our young heroes will do the most foolhardy thing and fall right into it, and then be rescued by some *deus ex machina* means. At the end of the volume their immediate problem is overcome with unconvincing ease.

Recommended for fantasy quest addicts and uncritical adolescents only.

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Christopher Hinz - - THE PARATWA (Mandarin, 1991, 436pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

Hey, I wanna write a space opera! Let's see . . .I'll need stacks of characters (leave out characterisation, though - don't want to give myself too much work), a totally evil enemy with no redeeming features (don't want to confuse the readers), and lots of intrigue and confrontation - I'll just give it pages and pages of dialogue. Might as well turn it into a trilogy while I'm at it. God! Why not make it a cyberpunk space opera? means I'll have to throw in some sex, violence 'n' computers. Don't know too much about computers, so I'd better keep that to a minimum. Also better keep the sex restricted to innuendoes and hints of sadism, otherwise it might not get published. And I'll life the violence from that James Bond movie that was on TV last night.

Here we go . . .

Damn. Christopher Hinz has beaten me to it. Probably first draft too, judging by lines like the following:

" . . . their gowns clasped by identical crystal broaches shaped like spiders, with each of the six legs of the arachnids terminating in a phosphorescent emerald."

"The poodle leaped from its back,performed a perfect backward somersault, and landed on Sappho's shoulder. Its teeth sank into her neck, piercing the jugular in one mighty bite."

Aced again.

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Jefferson P.Swycaffer - - WEB OF FUTURES (TSR, 1991, 312pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

This is a distinctly oddball fantasy novel, more reminiscent of A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT than any book by TSR. A nineteenth-century Irish idler, drinker, liar and fisherman, Maddock O'Shaughnessy, confronts one night a mysterious being washing souls in a forest stream and is borne off into the future along a web spanning an endless airy gulf. they collect another time-traveller and the scene changes to the geography of the USA, and later to a future California (the author lives in San Diego).

The mission of the mysterious furry being, Sthenelos Magus LTV is seemingly to save men's lives, collect their souls and to roam through time. Maddock and his companions have desperate adventures as Sthenelos tries to carry out his endless task, hindered by the sceptical and reluctant Maddock. There is a moral to the story, but not too much is made of that.

The book is quite well written and frequently amusing, and makes a welcome change from the mindless violence of much fantasy fiction. While it's not a major work, if you want something a bit different you could ignore the TSR logo and the awful cover and give it a try.

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Isaac Asimov - - ROBOT VISIONS (Gollancz, 1991, 383pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

ROBOT VISIONS is (yet another: ho hum! yawn!) collection containing 36 well known short stories and essays from the distinguished writing career of Isaac Asimov . . . or is it? Look very carefully at the "Acknowledgements" page, and you will count a total of only 33 copyrighted entries. Shocking, you say? but it gets worse. Moving along, you then check the Contents page overleaf, and you see there are a total of 34 entries. The blurb on the back cover reads ". . . Now at last in ROBOT VISIONS, Asimov has collected 36 of his most important and entertaining robot short stories and essays, stunningly illustrated by the genius of Star wars artist, Ralph McQuarrie . . ." Now, I don't mean to criticise the author or the publisher (after all, they both have a

successfully proven track record, don't they?) but surely anyone who cares to buy and read this collection for themselves can see there has been a major cock-up somewhere along the line? I would have thought that with Gollancz's vast expertise, they could at least have added their sums together correctly.

While ROBOT VISIONS does contain some of Asimov's classic robot stories, 'Robbie' and 'Runaround' being just two of the favourites I cut my teeth on, I cannot really see just why Victor Gollancz or any other publisher for that matter should feel the need to keep on churning out the same old stories time after time after time. You only have to pay a visit to your local W.H. Smith's to see just how often Asimov's collections are republished, to the detriment of other, perhaps more deserving, stories. I would like to be able to pop into my local bookshop and pick up some fresh, new material, in the shape of short stories - be they of a robotic theme or otherwise - by the same author.

Overall, a good read for Asimov fans, but nothing to write home about otherwise.

Robert Asprin - - MYTH-ING PERSONS (Legend, 1991, 172pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Fifth in the nine-so-far series, this one has our hero Skeeve trying to free Aahz from prison in the vampire city of Blut where his magic just won't work. Gags and puns proliferate, action is fast and furious, and basically this is the mixture as before.

I like these stories, though I prefer them in the superior Starblaze editions - Fangorn isn't a patch on their artists, and the Legend editions have no interior artwork. The front-cover subtitle, "A series to take very, very seriously," is pointless. The four earlier titles are ANOTHER FINE MYTH, MYTH CONCEPTIONS, MYTH DIRECTIONS and HIT OR MYTH, with the sixth title LITTLE MYTH MARKER also now available. Start with the first, and if you like it buy the rest complete before this or that goes out of print.

And if you have a spouse, partner, friend or business contact who shares your tastes, buy an extra set as a gift: they are cheap enough and you could be helping cement a long and interesting relationship. At least you won't annoy each other by hogging the only available copy and sniggering unbearably.

Dean R. Koontz - - THE SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT (Headline, 1991, 499pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Yet another reprint from Koontz's pseudonymous days (this time as Leigh Nichols') this could be taken as evidence that he could fairly turn out a cracker when the need came upon him. On the face of it, a fairly standard suspense thriller, with a young woman in terror of losing her six-year-old who has been dubbed the Antichrist by a crackpot religious cult being helped flee from the loonies bent on murder by a solidly dependable detective who like so many of the author's heroes has fought his way up from a background of poverty and physical abuse. (Don't blame me for drawing the obvious pop-psychological conclusions: I've got the author's biography as told in press-release form in front of me.)

Once more, this is another mix of genres - add a bit of ROSEMARY'S BABY-cum-EXORCIST type of black magic with a lot of 'suspense thriller' and just a touch of the paranormal for SF-fantasy fans and some knowing references to TV copshows for crime fans who've strayed along. However, what distinguishes THE SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT from so much airport bookstall-fodder is the way Koontz cleverly muddies the moral standpoint by showing part of the action from the point of view of the cult members who are terrified of this Antichrist who as far as we know is just a six year old boy who wants his mum. Together with the main 'heavy' being a man teetering on the edge of renouncing his own violence because the religious indoctrination is actually showing him that his



past life has been evil, this makes us actually care about what is going on. There's a real issue to be resolved; the standard good/bad form is transcended by a climax which hinges on a moral choice, and it's this more than the shooting and chases and occasional heavy sex which makes the book so readable

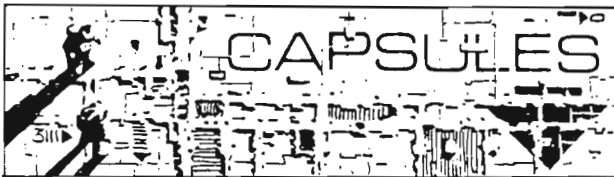
Philip K. Dick - - THE DAYS OF PERKY PAT (Grafton, 1991, 494pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

An illuminating feature of this collection (the fourth, covering years 1954 - 1963) are notes written by Dick himself for earlier anthologies. Of the title story he says "[It] came to me in one lightning-swift flash when I saw my children playing with Barbie dolls." Such imaginative genesis probably accounts for the ultimately upbeat sprightliness of that story, as contrasted with an oppressive obsessiveness in others. It was a period when Dick's amphetamine-sustained energies were turning to the

novel. Many of these stories foreshadow his mid-sixties masterworks - yet are themselves mini-triumphs of irony and socio-political discrimination. Thus, the controlling, illusion-producing governmental lie, thematic to 'The Mold of Yancy', is basic to THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH; and the doll "layouts" of 'Ferky Pat' presage PALMER ELDRITCH.

Sometimes a story was destined to become in detail integral to a novel, as is 'Novelty Act' to THE SIMULCRA. 'Novelty Act' is a tale both grim and funny (an example of what has been described as Dick's talent for "sinister farce"), reaching a critical point when a nation-upholding, nation-deceiving spurious First Lady is bitten at a White House performance by a counterfeit extinct Martian furry creature. Fakery and fraud are motifs strongly present in these stories, as are those twin Dickian motifs, paranoia and conspiracy. All four, tintured with a maverick hilarity, inhabit the related stories of presidential substitution, 'Stand By' and 'What'll We Do With Ragland Park?'. There is, too, Dick's counterpointing of 'reality' and 'unreality'. In a gloss on 'If There Were No Benny Cemoli', he says "perhaps even Karl Marx was invented, the product of some hack writer". He plays that game with counters of identity, 'branching worlds', and time-travel paradox in his bitter little self-referential joke, 'Orpheus With Clay Feet'. Read these eighteen stories for (an often disturbed) enjoyment, and as quintessential keys to the PKD complexity.



Marc Alexander - - SHADOW REALM (Headline, 1991, 438pp, £4.99)

Rock-bottom genre fantasy (Vol. 3 of WELLS OF YTHAN) where cliché piles upon cliché and only the obvious adjectives need apply. This is real slush-pile material, where criticising the author is hardly the point because faults go beyond generic stereotype to lack of any standards of quality in the people who sanctioned its publication. (Andy Sawyer)

Charlie Bell - - THE WRITER'S GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING (Dragonfly Press, 1991, 24pp, £2.25 (inc. p & p))

Several books reviewed by PI have come under this category, and as the publishing recession bites among the majors I wouldn't be surprised to see more. While DIY publishing is no guarantee of quality, it is not to be confused with "vanity" publishing and in my experience almost always produces better and more interesting work; if you feel that your writing is good but not commercial or your market is a small but specialist one then self-publishing is one way to go. This slim volume is a useful guide. It doesn't answer quite all the questions (it tells you about obtaining an ISBN but just what is the function of a bar code (p.10) and how do you generate one?) However it's a handy basic introduction which points out some of the pitfalls and offers hints on that most important but often last-minute factor: selling the thing after you've published it. "Be generous in sending out review copies . . ." (Available from 2 Charlton Cottages, Barden Road, Speldhurst, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0LH: cheques payable to WORDS & IMAGES) (Andy Sawyer)

Randall Boyll - - AFTER SUNDOWN (Corgi, 1991, 336pp, £3.99)

Child dies falling off a skateboard, grieving parents go to holiday in snowbound cabin, where spirits of frontier party who died in snowstorm in the last century take the

form of enormous bears and tear them apart. The good-for-nothing brother survives and is redeemed and becomes a company director. (L.J. Hurst)

Sean Costello - - THE CARTOONIST (Pan, 1991, 248pp, £3.99)

THE CARTOONIST is a scarifying nice-guy-who-makes-one-serious-mistake-and-the-has-to-pay-for-it-ten-times-over-everything-end-in-tears-(almost) horror novel. It should carry the following endorsement: "I wish I'd written this book!" - - Stephen King. (needless to say, it doesn't). (Graham Andrews)

Frank de Felitta - - THE FUNERAL MARCH OF THE MARIONETTES (N.E.L., 1991, 303pp, £3.99)

A Hollywood psycho is improving on Hitchcock's top ten homicides, in real death. Our hero is the pursuing cop, and what we have is a police procedural being marketed as horror, presumably on the strength of de Felitta's previous work. Horror it ain't. A pretty decent police procedural it is - except . . . It begins with a model aeroplane murder (NORTH BY NORTHWEST) which as described is impossible and requires a degree of aerobatic skill which would make Hanno Pretto seem like me stirring the sticks. True, no one expects to be reviewed by a model aircraft enthusiast but if an author gets such details wrong what else can we trust in his work? (Martyn Taylor)

Penelope Farmer - - THICKER THAN WATER (Walker Books, 1991, 189pp, £2.99)

Moving to Derbyshire to live with his cousin Becky and her family, Will discovers that more than grief for his poor, feckless dead mother is haunting him; a betrayal in the countryside's Industrial Revolution past still has its effect. A beautifully told ghost story with a grippingly slow build-up to a satisfying climax. Neat references to Will's love of science fiction, too! (Andy Sawyer)

Brad Ferguson - - A FLAG FULL OF STARS: STAR TREK 46 (Titan, 1991, 241pp, £3.50)

The historic five-year mission is over, and Admiral James T. Kirk is now Chief of Starfleet Operations, where he is overseeing the refit of the Enterprise. Kirk's new life is soon shattered dramatically as his path crosses that of a Klingon scientist, G'dath, whose revolutionary invention threatens the very fabric of civilisation. (Chris C. Bailey)

Esther Friesner - - DEMON BLUES (Orbit, 1991, 280pp, £3.99)

Sequel to HERE BE DEMONS, which I found hilarious enough to be unbelievably believable. This is as good and as funny, and very welcome. Think of it as Prettchett with demon sauce and yankee brashness, or forget thinking and just enjoy it. MORE, please! (Ken Lake)

Leo Giroux jr. - - DARK ASHRAM (Grafton, 1991, 411pp, £4.50)

leaden, insipid sequel to THE RISHI, by an author who died in 1990. Dan Simmons' World Fantasy Award winner, SONG OF KALI, handled the subject of the Indian Goddess aspect of destruction and the cult of the Thuggees so much better it is like comparing a crude pencil drawing of the horror with the real thing. (Terry Broome)

Douglas Hill - - THE COLLOGHI CONSPIRACY (Gollancz, 1991, 238pp, £3.99)

Mass-market edition of the book reviewed in PI 87. Hill's thoroughly amoral anti-hero Del Curb serves to send up the "lone entrepreneur against space pirates and the law" tradition something rotten but only through exaggeration: Del Curb really is a loathsome creep. The New Space Opera Wave has polished irony and mordant playfulness. This is old-fashioned interplanetary skullduggery which entertains as it (faintly) repels; its reliance on the old stereotypes leaves you feeling guilty for liking it but then you didn't actually like it that much, did you? (Andy Sawyer)

**Robert and Frank Holt - - PEACEMAKER** (Headline, 1991, 499pp, £4.99)

PEACEMAKER is a near-future (1998) thriller based around the deployment of a US Star Wars defence system. It's a fast-moving book in spite of the writers' tendency to pad things out with large chunks of technical and other non-essential prose (a description of a car journey through Washington sticks in mind). An idealistic American president spars with a suspicious Russian one, the whole thing complicated by a computer system which may just be more intelligent than its users think. If you like large-scale techno-thrillers with cast lists at the start, then you'll probably enjoy this. (Jon Wallace)

**Richard A. Knaak - - THE DRAGONREALM: WOLFHELM** (Orbit, 1991, 251pp, £3.99)

A third adventure into the world of the Dragonrealm, which does not apparently have any connection with the *Dragonlance* series. The plot could best be described as a partial patchwork from three or four children's jigsaw puzzles, where the pictures from most of the pieces have been removed and the author's sketching-in of the missing details has underscored his inability to do them. (Terry Broome)

**Douglas Niles - - VIPER HAND** (Penguin, 1991, 313pp, £4.50)

Part of the new trend in fantasy trilogies is to set them in adventure game worlds. This (Book Two of *The Maztica Trilogy*) is owned by TSR. I really can't see the point of it all. (Steven Tew)

**Dan Parkinson - - THE GATES OF THORBARDIN** (Penguin, 1991, 310pp, £4.50)

Amiable quest story forming part of TSR's successful *Dragonlance* saga. (*HEROES* vol. II). Replete with the requisite clichés, maps and references to the other parts of the saga but highly readable. (Colin Bird)

**Diana Paxson - - THE SEA STAR** (N.E.L., 1991, 374pp, £4.50)

Fairly standard example of the "young, bewildered wizard prince against ancient evil sorcerer" sub-genre. As such it is well constructed, well characterised, well written and if you like this sort of story you will like THE SEA STAR. What it lacks, however, is that spark of otherness which divides great fantasy from the merely good. (Marty Taylor)

**R.A. Salvatore - - EXILE** (Penguin, 1991, 306pp, £4.50)

Drizzt the dark elf learns more about the meaning of friendship and comradeship and killing monsters in the sequel to HOMELAND. (Andy Sawyer)

**Hugh Scott - - THE HAUNTED SAND** (Walker Books, 1991, 149pp, £2.99)

A medieval curse, unnatural murder, and psychometry make for a melodramatic but authentically creepy ghost story as three young people foil an unscrupulous museum curator bent on disturbing the bones of a Saxon king and perhaps releasing the Black Death upon Norfolk once more. Hugh Scott's spare, honed-down prose (he wrote the superb WHY WEEPS THE BROGAN?) cools down the shocker element while heightening the tension. (Andy Sawyer)

**Bernard Taylor - - CHARMED LIFE** (Grafton, 1991, 366pp, £3.99)

"Move over, Stephen King," said the *New York Daily News* reviewer; in fact this is a darn sight more civilised and thoughtful, with some attractive characters and believable hocus-pocus as well as some genuinely chilling horrorscapes. For the thinking horror fan, a worthwhile experience that leaves you with that little "what if?" feeling that marks the best supernatural writing. Might even please alternate-history SF fans, in fact. (Ken Lake)

**Derek Taylor - - THE MIRRORWELL EXPRESS** (Droylata Books, 17 - 11 King St., Ipswich, IP1 1EG), 1991, 63pp, £3.99)

The crew of a spaceship on their way to a pop festival

find their ship taken over by a ghost with a passion for rottweillers and end up taking sides in a battle between rival tabloid proprietors "Mirrorwell" and "Whopping" (geddit?). As you can guess from the format, this is a privately printed novella. The back cover refers to poetry and a previous novel from the author, but the standard of writing, imagery and invention displayed here is little more than that of the junior school composition class. However sympathetic I may be to the aims of small-press publishers, it's hard to know who would really need to buy this. (Andy Sawyer)

**Paul B. Thompson & Tonya R. Carter - - FIRSTBORN** (TSR, 1991, 305pp, £3.99)

Volume One of the *Elven Nations* trilogy of the *Dragonlance* saga. High-born elvish clans fall out. Characteristic line: "Open the Tobril! Find for Speaker Sithel the fates of his two sons, born this day!" (Mat Coward)

**John Vornholt - - CONTAMINATION: STAR TREK:TNG 16** (Titan, 1991, 273pp, £2.99)

Murder, mystery and suspense plague Captain Picard and the crew of the *Enterprise* as they attempt a delicate diplomatic mission. Lieutenant Worf and Counsellor deanna triol are assigned to solve the problem, and soon uncover a complicated web of deceit and corruption amongst a tight-knit group of scientists working aboard the *Enterprise*, with fatal results. (Chris C. Bailey)

**J.N. WILLIAMSON (Ed.) - - HOW TO WRITE TALES OF HORROR, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION** (Robinson, 1991, 242pp, £4.99)

Various writers explain how to write - or how they write - the kind of fiction they do. It's stronger on fantasy than SF, with contributors such as Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, Marion Zimmer Bradley Colin Wilson and Dean R. Koontz as well as top editors. It covers most of the things beginner writers should know, and there are interesting "Contributors' top 10" appendices, but wide range occasionally leads to superficiality. Ray Bradbury's piece stands out though as a superb self-examination well worth reading by fans. Like all such handbooks this won't make you a great writer but browsing through it will be an enjoyable way of avoiding the obvious pitfalls. (Andy Sawyer)

**Jenny Wurts - - SHADOWFANE** (Grafton, 1991, 352pp, £3.99)

A have-it-both-ways story of quest, maturation, and slugging it out with the bad guys, in which demons=aliens, magical power=advanced technology (except where it really does seem to be magic) and Our Hero learns how to cheat death (and the reader) about three pages before the end. Characters are the usual sexist stereotypes, and a lot of people get killed without generating much catharsis for this reader. (Sue Thomason)



"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 46 - 47  
(April - May 1991)  
(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

I shall look at these two issues separately, for reasons which will become apparent. The lead story in IZ 46 is Paul J. McAuley's 'Crossroads', a time travel/alternate

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history tale set in the United States. Alternate history has been somewhat of a prevalent theme of late in the magazine, though it's interesting to note that it's the British who've been examining American history and vice versa. (It's also of interest to observe that they share the common premise that the same talented individuals will rise to the fore in any society, though perhaps that's merely a writer's ploy to hook the reader rather than a considered theory in operation). McAuley's is a sound, enjoyable treatment of an old SF idea, that of the intervention, by a time traveller in the past, which goes badly wrong. 'Relocation' by Paul M. Grunwell also features time travel; in this case an experimenter is both locked in stasis and made invisible by an accident. As the story of a man coming to terms with his plight, though, it doesn't succeed - the pace is too rushed for that. Also disappointing is Michael Moorcock's 'Elric: A Dragon Wakes' which reads like an episode from a larger adventure and is thus unsatisfying.

'La Macchina' by Chris Beckett flows very nicely indeed. Here a tourist, whilst on holiday in Italy, realises that robots are human too. It was only after finishing this short tale that I asked myself why his conversion hadn't occurred earlier . . . More successful are Glen Grant with 'Storm Surge', a morality tale set in a future Canada beset by unemployment, immigration and a changing weather system, and Diane Mopes with 'Shallow Grave', where one unhappy woman's dialogue with herself, her sister and her husband reaches an appropriate climax following a very weird event in the shower. Finally, an interview with James Morrow in part examines the pros and cons of a novelist coming to SF late and with little knowledge of the genre's conventions.

IZ 47 is a different kettle of fish altogether - actually it holds the contents of the May/June edition of a US magazine, ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION. In a unique venture, IZ and ASF have swapped contents in a bid to expose their wares to a wider readership. For my money at least, the experiment is most worthwhile, not only because change is in itself refreshing but also because it offers a direct comparison between the two magazines.

Presumably ASF have showcased as strong a line-up as they can muster, so let's look at the fiction first. Apart from a two-stanza poem by William Jon Watkins ('Reason is a reptile', which isn't exactly complimentary to reason) there are six short stories. Best by far is Lois Tilton's 'The Cry of a Seagull'. Set twenty years after Hong Kong has been returned to China, the story centres on a freighter full of refugees which for all that time has been sailing the world's oceans in the vain hope of finding a permanent home. The despair, and finally the horror, graphically depicted by Tilton exists sadly for many boat people today. Runner-up for me is 'Targets' by Lawrence Watt-Evans, in which a man befriends a crippled self-aware tank in the desert. Gary Mitchell and M. Alan Clarkson's 'Like a Flithiss From Its Shell' has a signposted ending as well as a poor title, though it's amusing enough. The resolution of Frederick Pohl's slight but humorous 'The Matter of Beaupré' is also given away, this time by the illustration (all the internal illustrations are full-page and in colour. Charles C. Ryan, ASF's editor, claims his SF magazine is the first to produce full-colour illustrations within its covers - not so, I'm afraid. Technically the art is fine, though it lacks the verve and originality of the best IZ drawings). Through personality overlay drugs, a dead policeman seeks revenge for his and his wife's murder in 'Amerikan Hiaika' by Wil McCarthy; a neat idea marred by that common cop-out - a fount of all underworld knowledge provides our investigator with all the answers. Harlan Ellison's 'Darkness Upon the Face of the deep' features an Indiana Jones-type expedition. It is rich in atmosphere though the finale is somewhat hackneyed.

The quality of the prose in all these works cannot be disparaged and overall an enjoyable read is provided. The non-fiction side, though, is certainly inferior to IZ. The layout of the ASF book reviews is far superior, and stylistically they're plainer and chattier (less pretentious?) than IZ's, but I get a trifle concerned when the worst of Janice M. Eisen's ratings come out at Good/Very Good . . . Robert A. Metzger provides an amusing 'Did You Know?' survey of science news. And that is really all there is, apart from some nonsense about a crazy alien being the publisher and some cracking lines in the letters column ("I wanted to write and let you know I'm on board"). Yeah, man, right on!

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