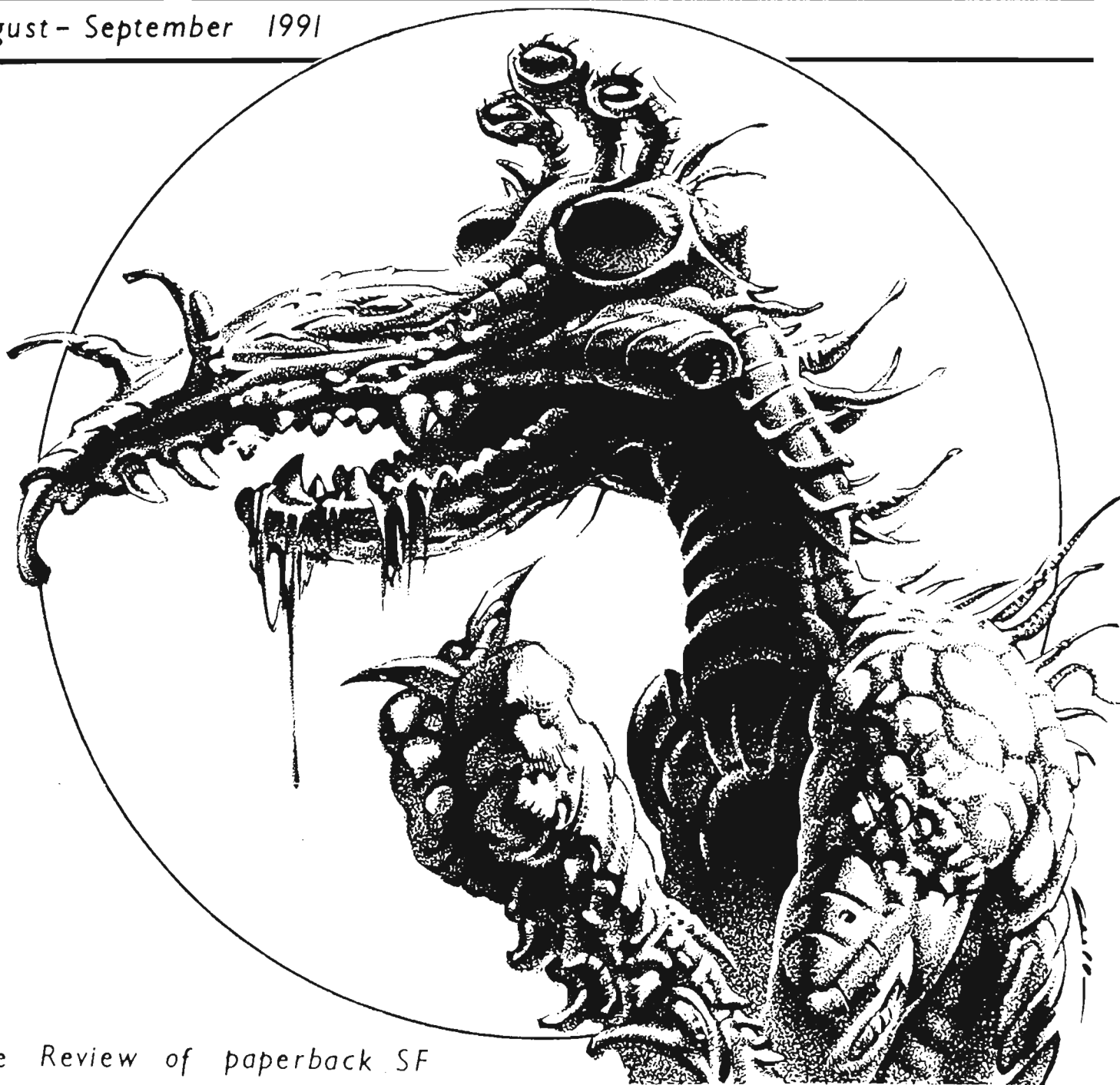




# Paperback Inferno

91

August - September 1991



*The Review of paperback SF*

A British Science Fiction Association magazine

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\*\*\*\*\*  
DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to *PI* 92  
is Friday September 6th  
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#### HELP WANTED

Volunteer typists (Anstrad PCV 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

One discouraging thing. During the last month (June) I've received for review in *PI* approximately half the books I received during 1990. This, combined to an earlier-than-normal deadline for *PI* 91, has led to a slightly embarrassing situation whereby I either present you with two blank pages or read and review a lot of books. If this issue seems to have too much *ME* in it, just think of what it's actually like to read four books you don't really *want* to read in two days . . .

The recession appears to be biting deeply, and there seems to be no true end of it in sight. There are still some good books about, and we're still living in a time of promise and potential when it comes to the new writers who have appeared on the scene over the last few years. But how long will it take before these people are able to *fulfil* their promise and potential?

One encouraging thing. Probably the saddest thing in recent years was the decline of the Penguin SF list from a stable for some of the authentic classics of the genre to a mish-mash of stale hackery. Now someone has at last decided to tackle the neglect and take on the prospect of facing the 1990s.

From August, Penguin will be publishing a new imprint: ROC Books, which "aims to bring together writing from some of the hottest names in the genre". There will still be role-playing game books - one of the first is to be *SHADOWRUN - CHOOSE YOUR ENEMIES CAREFULLY* by Robert M. Charette - but at least it looks like something more intrinsically interesting than *FORGOTTEN REALMS*. There appear to be, erhh, echoes of the same in R.A. Salvatore's

*ECHOES OF THE FOURTH MAGIC*, "an exciting sub-aquatic fantasy", but Tom de Haven's *WALKER OF WORLDS* looks to be an interesting fantasy, and making up the first batch of books to be released is *TEMPS*, described as "the cutting edge of superhero fantasy", the first in a new series from *Midnight Rose*.

*TEMPS* - which sports a flying Swiss Army Knife on the cover for reasons I've yet to discover ('cutting edge?') - is a shared-world anthology focussing on British superheroes. (According to one of the *Midnight Rose* team, American superheroes are worldwrecking titans while British superheroes are paid a £10 retainer by the DHSS and can force a hole-in-the-wall bank machine to disgorge £20 notes. On a good day. And no, I don't know what that means either). Behind *Midnight Rose* are Mary Gentle, Neil Gaiman, Alex Stewart and Roz Kaveney, while associated with forthcoming anthologies are Brian Stableford, Storm Constantine, Colin Greenland, Geoff Ryman, Terry Pratchett and John Clute. It looks as though there is some hope for the future, and I'll be looking at ROC books with interest.

#### COMPETITION TIME

Thanks to all who entered the competition in the last *PI*. The winners - who each receive a copy of the new paperback edition of Mary Gentle's *RATS AND GARGOYLES* - are *FAM BADDELE*; *ANTHONY THOMAS*; *P.T. ROSS*; *CRAIG MARNOCK* and *ANDY MILLS*. By the time you read this, you should have received your copy; if not, send me a rude letter. Those who *don't* win might care to look at page 5 for this issue's competition. Many thanks to Julia McMeans of Transworld Books for kindly arranging the prize books, and to Mary herself for not demonstrating medieval swordplay too violently during the Chester Literature festival. (Next time, I sit at the back . . .)



## KEEPING TRACK OF SF TITLES

by Ken Lake

That's me in the convention bookroom, frantically trying to balance my large and essential SF booklist on crumbling piles of paperbacks while others push to grab the goodies before I can discover whether I have read them or even want to. Charming femmefen stop, look, listen to my garbled explanations and immediately view me as an expert; their jealous male friends, called over to examine my superbly crafted system, are abruptly dismissive.

Either they have done it better themselves, or don't want to admit they haven't; or they "have it all in my head, I don't need lists" which has to be the world's most asinine claim in these burgeoning days of overpublishing; or they believe - probably rightly - that I have an eye on their companion and am simply using my tool of management to sweettalk her away for an evening's intensive practical experience.

Yet without that list I really would be lost. I am a computer illiterate, and in any case regard printouts as cumbersome, virtually illegible and prone to instant explosion all over the damn place. My old-fashioned (can you believe foolscap?) hardcover edge-indexed all-purpose office book was picked up cutprice in a stationer's shop ("everyone wants A4 sizes now") and demanded of me no more than the ability to divide each page vertically into two with a pencil and ruler. From there on, the record is self-creating - complex and, as I have said, multi-purpose, but logical and simple to use. Let me share with you the results of many years of building up to this almost-perfect system.

### THE NO-NO LISTS

Each section (i.e. each letter of the alphabet) begins with two or three pages devoted to a "no-no list" - this shows, in strict alpha order, every SF, fantasy or horror author whom I do NOT want to read. The list is constantly being improved, and occasionally modified. Plenty of space between the names means that only every three or four years do I need to stick self-adhesive labels over a crowded section and rewrite it. The occasional discovery that a hitherto disliked author has produced books that I find are worth reading is handled either by removing the name completely, or adding "but see" in red to guide me to the later entry of acceptable titles.

These lists allow me to zip through booklists in no time, skipping all the writers I've already discarded without mixing them up with almost-identically named authors in good standing. It alone is worth the time spent creating the entire book.

### THE BOOK LISTS

For every other author, I have a separate entry under the initial letter of his/her surname. You can't keep these alphabetical, but so long as they are in there somewhere, they can be found. The author's name is in capitals, with a single-letter code denoting nationality, thus: MEAD, Shepherd (A).

Below that, in a vague attempt to keep them chronological (though that never works) are two lists. First, titles I do not want - these are written in black biro, crossed through with a single red-biro line, so that I never buy a rejected title twice. That too saves me vast sums.

Below that, every book actually on my shelves, with

classification details. This gives (a) alternate titles, (b) title on my copy, (c) hardcover indication (most of my collection is of paperbacks), (d) type of story, (e) my own rating, (f) date of first publication. Each of these deserves a quick look, as each has a reason.

**Alternative titles:** From this, I learn that A, B, and C are titles of a book which I own under title D, or which I do not want to own anyway, or are incorporated into another book with title E. The system is simple: each title is in black, all those not in my collection are ruled out in red, there is a "=" sign between each, and compilations are shown as "(all in F)."

Until you have seen such a cross-referenced list, you can have no idea of the massive amount of renaming that publishers use to try and sell titles two or three times over to unsuspecting fen: beware!

**Title on my copy:** There is no suggestion that this one is better than any other - it's the one I happen to own. That's how I find it on my shelves.

**Hardcover indication:** Hardcover are filed separately for reasons of size. The "[H]" after a title shows me where to find it, and - since I prefer paperbacks - is a constant reminder to buy a paperback if one exists and get rid of the hardcover for a profit.

**Type of story:** I have my own classification, using mostly single-letter codes. Thus "F" = fantasy, "H" = humour, "TT" = time travel, "AH" = alternative history. I like to know these things - that's reason enough for me. I do *not* read horror, and virtually the only fantasy works on my shelves are "F/H" = fantasy, humorous. For something to be listed with the code "SO" (space opera) it would have to be a specially good example of that much-maligned class.

**My own rating:** This is very simple. -1 means crap, so is never listed. -2 is very poor and again never remains on my shelves, but gives me a useful tool for evaluating books I am asked to review. -3 is my standard classification: most of the books on my shelves are "good". -4 is "excellent" and is most unlikely to be weeded out at a future date, no matter how many -3 books I decide to sacrifice to keep the collection within bounds.

The number of -5 books is very, very small, for this means "work of genius" and indicates that I will go utterly over the top in praising it to friends. I fully accept that *all* these classifications are subjective - that's what "taste" and "liking" are all about. If such judgements could be universally agreed, no -1 book would ever get published for a start!

**Date for first publication:** This would not suit a "completist" who wants every single published edition. I want just one - any one so long as it is in good nick (no loose pages, no bad creases, no dirty marks or marginal annotations). I need to know the date so that I can file my collection under each author in chronological order, and to avoid confusion. If a book is substantially rewritten, I may have both on my shelves: for example WOLFBANE (59) and WOLFBANE (rev. 86) meaning both the 1959 and the revised 1986 editions.



### OTHER INFORMATION

Occasionally I need to add further details. Thus every pseudonym is shown, together with the author's "other" name (i.e. the one under which I have decided to file the books). Lewis Padgett appears with the added comment "= KUTTNER, Henry" and regardless of the name on my copy of any book they are all filed under Kuttner so there's just one place to look.

Where two or more writers collaborate, the "main" author's listing has the book with assign indicating the second writer, thus: *KUTTNER, Henry (A) . . . [\*+C.L. Moore] . . . "The Proud Robot . . .*

C.L. Moore would appear alphabetically, marked "see *KUTTNER, Henry.*" And so it goes. If she wrote any books alone, these would appear under her name, with "see also *KUTTNER, Henry*!" alongside her name.

I mentioned filing books in date order. Obviously this cannot work with collections. These are coded "C" and are listed - and filed - at the end of each author's listing. If I can identify initial publication dates, these are shown "59/76" for example, but this is not essential. The real problem is where collections have appeared in several forms with differing contents; here I do my best. Sometimes it's not easy to boil down the details.

#### NOT ON MY SHELVES YET

There are two classes of book which cannot be found on my shelves, but which will (I hope) appear there some day. To avoid confusion, these are always listed, but in pencil.

First and most obviously, the three tall piles of "awaiting reading time" titles must be listed - no point buying them twice when I have a copy already.

Secondly, I have a large and constantly changing list of books "on order" or "wanted". "Wanted" titles are out of print - as for my listing and I'll send it you, and be happy to fill my gaps; and to show that I really want them, they appear under the author in pencil with the word WANT alongside.

Books which I have ordered from this or that dealer may take years to reach me. Perhaps I have ordered from reading a hardcover review - my dealer friends know this always means "wait til a paperback appears, then send me that!"

Maybe the US edition cannot be imported, or the dealer knows a UK publisher has bought the rights; I will buy either edition though I'm in two minds about this. First of all, despite importation costs US editions are almost always cheaper and usually appear first; on the other hand, most are "perfect bound" which means the pages drop out! British paper is usually of a better standard, but on the whole I refuse to fall for the overpriced "B-format" editions, with which publishers seek to swamp the market before falling back on the half-priced normal paperbacks to mop up the demand from the cheapskate Ken Lakes of this world.

Each title is listed in pencil the moment I order it, with a note showing from which dealer: this avoids duplicate orders or impulse buying on railway stations - provided I have the listing with me!

And that is, of course, the trouble. To create a loose-leaf small-format version might be simple but would be flimsier (my LP listing is that way, and constantly falls apart in record shops, scattering pages across the floor and giving me frustrating hours of re-sorting). So the famous large-format Ken Lake "red book" is seen everywhere, and while it annoys readers trying to get at the books on which it's resting, on the whole it meets with the approval of dealers who often ask me to substantiate alternate titles, publication dates or even the contents of collections.

#### PROBLEMS

There are really only two. The first is titles and authors I just haven't encountered yet in any meaningful context - should I buy them or not? All I can say is that without the ten-years-in-the-making lists, I would make a darn sight more mistakes.

The second problem is how to list anthologies - compilations of the works of more than one author. (The same goes, of course, for magazines).

After trying to provide cross-references from all over the place, I simply *banned* all anthologies from my shelves. I dislike them on principle, preferring to settle with a book that provides me with the work of a single writer. But I confess to a slight weakness: there are

half-a-dozen or so anthologies scattered around the place. Each is listed only under its *editor* (thus: "*ED: title*") and I have made no attempt to cross-reference except (yes, I knew there'd be an exception) that where a specific story or one of my all-time favourites and is available *only* in an anthology, the relevant author listing will have a cross-ref to that anthology.

Which brings me to my final plea for help: can anyone, please, offer me any original US or BRE *Astounding Science Fiction*, or any paperback anthology, containing Anthony Boucher's novel BARRIER?



THE NEW  
DOCTOR WHO

"Doctor Who finally grows up!" says the publicity.

Actually, there's a flaw in the logic there somewhere. It's not so much that *Doctor Who* has grown up but that the show's audience has grown up with it. People who watched the first episodes as children are - well - as old as I am. While the audience for the TV series was getting on average older and older, the *Doctor Who* novelisations were being published as children's books.

Now they're not.

The Doctor now has his own imprint. Virgin publishing, having taken over W.H. Allen, are now issuing a series of *Doctor Who* books which are not tied to previous TV series and are also aimed specifically at the adult SF fan.

This could be alarming, particularly as there's now so conservative as an adult with a favourite childhood fiction, but series editor Peter Duvill-Evans sets a few facts straight. He must be awfully tired of fielding questions about how far the "adult" approach extends to relationships between the Doctor and his (traditionally female) companion, but when I asked him the obvious question, he politely squashed any idea about dramatic revelations: "The guy's a Gallifreyan, not even a human."

The "adult" emphasis will be along the introduction of more sophisticated, complex themes, offering a chance to develop ideas not able to be developed within the context of a limited TV special effects budget. The books will be written by experienced *Doctor Who* writers and new talent, set firmly within the *Doctor Who* universe, and continuing the tradition of exciting adventure SF laced with humour and suspense for a readership which has grown up with the Doctor.

How will this take place?

The *Timewyrm* series opened in June with GENESYS, by John Peel, and will be followed by EXODUS (Terrance Dicks), APOCALYPSE (Nigel Robinson), and REVELATION (Paul Cornell) at bimonthly intervals. They follow a scenario beginning in ancient Mesopotamia, moving to twentieth-century Earth, the edge of the universe at the end of time, and finally "a little on the Earth and the Moon but

mostly within the Doctor's mind". The Doctor inadvertently helps to create the "Timewyrm", a creature he must track down and destroy.

A second (three-volume) series, working title *CAT'S CRADLE* is already under way, set inside the TARDIS, in New York in the near future, and on the planet Tir Na Nog.

The new *Doctor Who* books will be sticking closely to the traditional concept, although only using characters copyrighted by the BBC - hence, no Daleks. Peter Darvill-Evans hopes to liaise closely with the producers of the next TV series to establish continuity, so there'll be no

independent exploration of the Doctor's past. "*Doctor Who* works because he's *mysterious*. During the '80s there were too many hints as to what Doctor Who was", the extensive dossier on the Doctor's nature and origins will only be brought out to exclude revelations which don't actually fit.

So how does the first volume slot into the new concept?

John Peel - - *TIMEWYRM: GENESYS* (*Doctor Who*/Virgin, 1991, 230pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

*TIMEWYRM: GENESYS* (the spelling is the publisher's/author's) continues from the point where the Doctor (as played by Sylvester McCoy) and Ace escaped from the planet of the Cheetah people when the 1989 TV series ended. After some cryptic warnings from the TARDIS, they find themselves in Mesopotamia tracking down an alien who has crashlanded and is masquerading as the Goddess Ishtar. Among the cast of secondary characters is the legendary hero Gilgamesh, neatly characterised as a macho muscle-man whose twin obsessions are fighting and sex. The usual running-about and confrontations occur (related with wit and panache enough to stop the reader reflecting how standard this all is) and although the Earth is saved it's only through a cock-up by the Doctor which transforms Ishtar into something more potent and evil - you've guessed what!

The book works extremely well at its chosen task. What always appealed to me about *Doctor Who* was the relationship between the Doctor and the other characters, and here we have some nice verbal interplay in a fast-moving adventure with touches of slapstick that don't go too far over the edge into total farce. This is the Doctor as we know him, one of the great characters of popular literature. The "adult" approach comes over mainly in some low-grade violence and some light-hearted sexual references. Yes, Ace is first encountered nude, but there's nothing particularly salacious here and in the end Ace - the best companion for a long time - is gutsy and independent enough to sort out her own sex life, you feel, as shown by the way she handles "gonads-for-brains" Gilgamesh.

The female costumes as described would never pass on TV, and we all know about the temple prostitutes, don't we . . . ?

Altogether, an enjoyable book which creates an independent foray into a familiar set-up far more successfully than, say, the *STAR TREK* novelisations.

But you don't have to believe me, because it's

### COMPETITION TIME

once again.

We have five sets of the first two "New Doctor Who Adventures" from Virgin Books as prizes for the first five correct answers to the following questions:

Who plays Ace in the TV series?

What does TARDIS actually stand for?

Between which two rivers lay the land of Mesopotamia?

Answers please to the PI editorial address by the copy deadline as indicated on page 2.

Mary Gentle - - *RATS AND GARGOYLES* (Bantam, 1991, 507pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Mary Gentle is one of those much-praised writers who are well known throughout British fandom - she was a regular contributor to BSFA magazines during the '80s and is still seen at conventions - and it's hard to tell how much this status affects reaction to her books. It's not so much praise going where praise isn't due as familiarity breeding a lack of recognition of quite what her importance is.

*GOLDEN WITCHBREED* appeared in 1983 at a time when it seemed that SF - even "literary" SF, never mind what was being churned out in the pulp end of the market - had become remarkably formulaic and themes were being repeated *ad* incredibly *nauseam*. It was clear that here was an outstanding book, not necessarily in plot or setting but certainly in the hard-focus contemporary approach of the author. Yes, it was a SF book about aliens and cultural conflicts, but it was written by someone who appeared to have present-day clashes in mind rather than clichés of 20 - 40 years earlier and someone who also appeared to have spent more time among the grubbier undercurrents of the Jacobean than is usual among SF writers. It was a real science fiction adventure novel and it was good.

This was confirmed by *ANCIENT LIGHT* in which it became horribly clear that the ending which was being prefigured was precisely the ending that you didn't want to happen, and the tension which rose when you wondered how the hell the author was going to get out of *this* was jerked up a quantum level or two at the realisation that she had no intention of getting out of it, thank you, but this is how the logic of the entire double-decker novel leads. For this unwillingness to compromise to sequelitis, we could forgive those passages almost entirely composed of alien language, or a somewhat irritating tendency to remind us just how many fingers and/or nipples her Ortheans possess every time she mentions them.

And so - via the collection *SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS* - to *RATS AND GARGOYLES*, Mary Gentle's best book yet. Less than charitably reviewed in *FOUNDATION* 50 by John Brunner (who nevertheless praised the author's imagination and inventiveness), it's been the subject of otherwise extravagant praise. It's set in "the city which is the heart of the world", where sword-bearing rats rule over human subjects and incarnate gods mastermind the construction of vast temples. We meet again Valentine and Casaubon from the two long stories 'Beggars in Satin' and 'The Knot Garden' in *SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS*, and other characters such as Lucas, a prince incognito, and Zaribeth, a tailed human with a photographic memory and a lesbian crush on her landlady.

This is not altogether the stuff of which traditional adventure-fantasy is made of.

This is a world where the tenets of Renaissance hermetic magic hold true - that dimensions of buildings and constructions of gardens have their effect on the universe, that above reflects and encompasses below; interior, exterior. But here, the social conflict which powers the novel is not only industrial - militancy exists among Masons - but metaphysical (if the prefix *meta* can be applied to a world where transmigration of souls is a given, and where humans, rats and gods can converse and conspire).

The author refers to the "adventure playground" aspect of her fiction, and *RATS AND GARGOYLES* will be enjoyed by anyone who's never thought of the possibilities of combining Dumas with Paracelsus, C.S. Lewis with Ben Jonson, occult freemasonry with industrial anarchism. But it's prevented from being frivolous by the fact, simply, that Mary Gentle makes it work on its own terms. The intense physicality of characters like Casaubon and the carnal romanticism of Lucas and Zaribeth and the heat and the squalor and the physical nastiness anchor such casual grandeurs as adding another cardinal point to the compass. Yes, there's slapstick: the practicalities of omnipotence among a committee structure of multiple godhood, the actualities of how those old standbys of sword and sorcery, serpent-headed cthonic gods, actually *speak*, but there's a chilling grotesqueness about some of the novel's implications. The pig-hanging with which the story opens may be horribly funny, but the fate of the Bishop Theodoret emphatically is not.

To use the obvious metaphor: *RATS AND GARGOYLES* is a gothic cathedral of a novel from foundations to

superstructure with all the murkinesses and metaphysical spaces that implies. While I wouldn't like to enter it into contests with John Crowley's AEGYPT (which covers similar if less grotesque territory) I've actually read it more times already and it has to set up its author as possibly *the* fantasy author of the '90s.

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# R E V I E W S

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Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman - - GOOD OMENS (Corgi, 1991, 383pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

The trouble with Terry Pratchett is that he obviously thinks that people are basically nice and that even the most treacherous, evil and sadistic individuals are at heart OK. This rather limp humanism has informed all of his interminable Discworld series and now it pervades his collaboration with Neil Gaiman, GOOD OMENS. The very title of the book is a dead giveaway: here we have a benign spoof of that rather superior horror film, THE OMEN, a spoof in which a demon and an angel, who have both gone native, join together with the Antichrist and various other characters, not so much to save the world, as to keep it as it is. The Antichrist himself is a rather weak send up of the 'Just William' character.

There are, of course, some excellent jokes and the story reads well enough, but for me Pratchett's works are vitiated by their underlying niceness. Even the disasters are harmless and don't really hurt anyone. His is a comic universe where there is no pain, suffering or even real disappointment. Has the man no malice? One might have expected Neil Gaiman, the writer of the marvellous THE SANDMAN comic, to toughen the book up but obviously not. There is a rumour that GOOD OMENS is to be filmed. Even John Major will enjoy it.

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 therapy. 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.

Rachel Pollack and Caitlin Matthews (Eds) - - TAROT TALES (Legend, 1991, 303pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

An original anthology of sixteen stories based on Tarot cards. The editors both have considerable experience of using Tarot cards to unlock creative intuition, hence the genesis of this book: "We contacted a group of writers, some of them students of the Tarot, others fiction writers with an interest in the cards or in divination, still others storytellers who enjoyed an experimental challenge. There were no restrictions on the kind of story -- and so we find adventures, contemporary satires, historical comedies and far future science fiction, realism and fantasies. We only set one guideline: Tarot cards had to be involved in the creation of the tale."

As you might expect from such a project, the result is a very mixed bag indeed. I would guess that almost nobody will enjoy and respond to every story in this collection; it is diverse, it is mind-stretching. It almost certainly contains stories of types that you don't normally read. It is both exciting and infuriating.

The book contains 26 pages of black and white illustrations; reproductions of the Tarot cards which form the "seed images" of each story. Cards from a wide variety of traditional and modern packs are shown. In some cases the style of the cards has an obvious echo in the style of the accompanying story; in some stories I found it easy to recognise the Tarot figures or events. In others not. This in itself provides an intriguing set of intellectual puzzles for a discerning reader.

All in all, well worth looking into; an intriguing and successful experiment.

Raymond F. Jones - - RENAISSANCE (Grafton, 1991, 383pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

First published in 1944 in *ASF*, Raymond F. Jones' first novel appeared in book form in 1951 under the title MAN OF TWO WORLDS. Generally regarded as his best work, its dated literary style reveals its age while the several SF themes were already old and well-worked when Jones wove them into his plot.

If SF's written style remained today as it was in 1944, our many critics would be right in denouncing the genre as juvenile, jejune and lacking in challenge. If Jones is still around and writing, I cannot believe he would not have wished to scrap this version entirely and give us something to catch and hold the attention of the modern reader.

What's wrong with it? Well, note the use of expressions like "fantastic exultation," "a wild and wonderful scene," "the enormity of his mistake," "the obscene horror within it was quivering with spasmodic motion as though an electric current were flowing through a corpse" (and who knows to use the subjunctive these days, for that matter?).

If you are creating a "representative collection" of the SF works that formed and influenced today's writers, this one might well feature some way down the list. If you are looking for a crisp, thought-provoking, gripping hardcore SF novel, look elsewhere: there's plenty of it around these days.

I have to admit that I read this in ASF when it appeared. I wasn't much impressed then, finding it prolix, melodramatic and well below the standard of the best 1944 SF. I see no reason to change that opinion.

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James Lovegrove - - THE HOPE (Sceptre, 1991, 232pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Maureen Speller)

Perhaps the greatest problem with James Lovegrove's novel is its setting - a ship, one mile high and five miles long, sailing inexorably into a rosy future which never comes, filled to bursting with desperate immigrants. The analogy with the Titanic is irresistible and yet the shipboard setting is irrelevant, quite apart from being structurally impossible. We never learn what is beyond the ship's side and life on board ship could easily be carried out in a council estate. And there, of course, is the clue. Lovegrove is writing about people, in all strata of society, with The Hope itself as a clumsy iron metaphor, rusting, travelling in circles, and very clichéd. More than that, there is a strong sense that the linked stories (for this is not a novel, despite the publisher's claims) are in fact writing exercises, embodying a wide range of familiar images and stereotypes, not to mention genre conventions - the horror, the kitchen sink, the magic realist and so forth. To be frank, there is nothing here that the well-read BSFA member has not encountered elsewhere. And yet, for all that, there is a sense that Lovegrove has the potential to develop into something more than the average. Whether he can truly be classed as an SF writer is uncertain, and perhaps undesirable. If he continues in a similar vein, refining his skills, it is likely that he will be found lurking in the inter-genre void from which so much high-quality writing emerges.

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Stephen King - - THE STAND (N.E.L.), 1991, 1421pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is the kind of book you walk around holding in the hope that someone'll ask you what it's like and you can reply "Well the first 200 pages are a bit slow, but after that it goes like the clappers . . ."

It's a tribute to Stephen King's storytelling ability that you can pick up a book of damn near 1500 pages and put it down a few days later not only having read it but also having read it with ease and enjoyment. THE STAND never was a slim volume anyway, and the story of how King cut it for original publication has been well rehearsed. Now King tells us that most of the cuts have been restored (what haven't, he says, deserve to stay cut). They were, it seems, largely scenes deepening our perceptions of the book's characters rather than "new" material - although it does in retrospect seem a shame that the passage featuring The Kid and his ultimate fate had to be sacrificed to please the accountants. What King doesn't dwell upon is that he has taken the opportunity to update the novel by adding a multitude of post-1978 references from Reagan's presidency to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. There are also interior illustrations by Bernie Wrightson which add considerably to the book's atmosphere.

The changes don't make THE STAND a different book: it's even arguable whether they make it a better. But it's still a good book, a slamming apocalyptic bible-belt epic of good versus evil after a plague has wiped out 99% of Americans, leaving only a random core of survivors to choose sides between Randolph Flagg, the Walkin Dude, and Mother Abigail, who may be God's channel on Earth. It's flawed by King's good-ole-boy moral stances and his inability to present a convincing case for a God who - unlike the dark demon Flagg - is offstage all the time, but in a way, these murky moralities are the book's strengths, too. Two key characters, especially, show how ambiguous the human character is. Larry Underwood, minor-league rock star, is told that he "ain't no nice guy": his journey is to recognise his egocentricity and outgrow it. In contrast, fat, brilliant, adolescent Harold Lauder (you can tell he's a King villain because he writes arty) wavers several times on the edge of becoming a "nice guy"

and falls back, seduced by sex and power. On the larger scale, King is careful not to have all the nice guys on one side and the nasties on the other; there are those in Flagg's kingdom who are capable of all the ordinary human decencies and kindnesses.

King's multifarious cast does not escape two-dimensionality or stereotype, but still, you feel when some of the individuals you've spent a thousand pages or so getting to know get killed (who? come on, you don't expect me to tell you?). And Flagg, seductive, supernatural, mysterious, and banal, the embodiment of evil, stands out. THE STAND remains one of King's best novels, and if you haven't got a copy, the revision makes a perfect excuse to get one. Don't give yourself a hernia picking it up, though.

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Anne McCaffrey - - THE RENEGADES OF PERN (Corgi, 1991, 385pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Despite the popularity of Anne McCaffrey's Dragons of Pern saga, there hasn't been a sequel to THE WHITE DRAGON for 11-12 years! Her fans have been happy with several prequels: three books about Menolly for the young adult readership, concluding with DRAGONDRUMS, and others going back to Pern's earlier history, MORETA, NERILKA'S STORY, and the triumphant DRAGONSDAWN - which explained how the dragons were genetically engineered by colonists from Earth. THE RENEGADES OF PERN is both prequel and sequel to THE WHITE DRAGON; and wisely, McCaffrey has developed a fresh cast of characters with a new young couple in leading roles, and a vintage villainess, Thella, the dispossessed elder sister of the Lord Holder of Telgar Hold.

The new book continues to explore the socio-economic background to the Holds and Crafts, and although it starts off as the story of Jayge Lilcamp of a clan of traders, it develops into a chronicle covering the first Seventeen Turns of the Present Pass of Thread. As a boy, Jayge experiences a Threadfall which destroys his father's prosperous wagon train, his father having laughed off the threat of Thread as an old legend. As a young man Jayge's path crosses Thella's as she leads an outlaw band which ambushes his own wagon train. Years later, after he has rescued and married another of Thella's victims, she comes after them for revenge.

The story is told in sequence with those events drawn from DRAGONDRUMS and THE WHITE DRAGON which involve Piemur, Toric, Jaxom and Sharra fitted in chronologically, and right at the end the archaeological excavations to discover artefacts left by the first colonists, return as the main theme of the story. One might wonder, returning to THE WHITE DRAGON, why it doesn't mention the renegades, if their misdeeds were so important! An inconsistency impossible to remedy! I felt that I would have preferred those flashbacks which rehearsed events we'd already read about, to be shorter, and wanted to read more of the love story of Jayge and Aramina instead. A love interest for Piemur is conveniently worked in, and Thella is sufficiently bloodthirsty to make the happy ending in doubt. I did miss, however, those strong romantic moments of revelation and telepathic bonding for which McCaffrey is renowned.

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Valter Jon Williams - - ANGEL STATION

(Orbit, 1991, 393pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

This is rivetting space opera. Ubu Roy is four-armed bossrider of the starship Runaway, with his two-armed sister, Beautiful Maria, an ace star-shooter with a talent for cybernetic witchcraft. Bankrupt after their father's suicide, they tangle with the law and the big interstellar cartels, but escape hectically across the galaxy where, of course, they discover alien traders, enter into a series of corrupt contracts, cheat everyone and end up fabulously rich and powerful. In the process, emotions run high and hard lessons are learned.

The pace is fast and the pages are dense with



surprise twists, technological marvels and unexpected cultural references. You hardly have time to boggle as the story pulls you along, very capably sketching in the background, the changing economic structures, the shifting perceptions of the different groups, the power struggles. The aliens too are believable, and just that little bit unexpected, and one of them, Volitional Twelve, is quite touching. The haunting, seemingly random holographic appearances of the humans' dead father add an imaginative touch.

So yes, there's plenty to enjoy of what the cover calls "a flamboyant deep-space adventure", right to the end. It's then that I found the problem. Ubu and Maria win overwhelmingly, as you always guessed they would, but although Maria does try to make amends with good works and kind deeds, the emotional high is a bit too triumphalist, with the uneasy feeling that it couldn't last, and that the author's copped out of facing it. Or maybe (oh dear) he's just getting ready for a sequel?

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Anna Wilson - - HATCHING STONES (Onlywomen Press, 1991, 131pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

There are probably people of both genders who will read the words "radical feminist lesbian publishers" on the back of books like this and shuffle away, embarrassed. Interesting, really. HATCHING STONES is a good story in the (more interesting) speculative/investigative rather than gosh-wow adventure mode of SF, but it's no use saying that the above description doesn't fit. Just don't think of media clichés when you're using it.

The ability to clone one's descendants gives the men of Lelaki the ability to produce sons in their own image, while the women flee to the inhospitable island of Baba-1. There, they too develop the process. Both men and women change over the generations. Later, women from Baba-1 observe conditions in a tropical country where the Lelaki are considering sharing their reproductive technology with the men. The book ends with a barely resolved decision concerning the question whether the women should share *their* technology with their island sisters, knowing that this could mean violent repression.

Anna Wilson uses SF to suggest possibilities, painting a subtle watercolour of the implications of reproductive technology, which is itself a metaphor for the current political relationships between men and women. It's reminiscent of Olaf Stapledon's description of class rather than gender politics, not least in form. Most of the prose is descriptive-historical or transcripts of "reports", but it is vivid enough to bring to life the conflict it represents, and subtle enough to probe rather than slash. The ending is curiously and hauntingly tentative. Thinking people's SF. Why not?

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Peter Straub - - MYSTERY (Grafton, 1991, 548pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Maureen Speller)

This book embodies many of the distinguishing features of the blockbuster novel, which ought to be a genre in its own right. It's a long novel, set on an exotic Caribbean island, among a group of rich, corrupt people. A mercifully almost complete lack of sex'n'shopping is more than compensated for by a very strong detective story, suffused with just the slightest hint of the supernatural, and a broad streak of morality. And yet none of it seems to connect with real life, which once again illustrates the theory of fiction as escape, and perhaps explains the popularity of this type of novel. To my surprise, I really enjoyed MYSTERY - the mystery at the heart of the novel was complex and intricate, and Straub handles it very well. His characters are mostly stereotypical, but Lamont von Heillitz and Tom Pasmore, central to the action, are well-drawn and as believable as one is likely to find in this kind of writing. What I cannot cope with, however, is the reams of unnecessary description, apparently aimed at people who cannot exercise their own imagination, requiring every last thing to be spelled out for them. This may be fine for some, but I found that it slowed the self-proclaimed mystery so much that I began

to lose interest less than halfway through the novel. Not a book for those who like to work at their reading, nor a thing to be read at one sitting, but it is an excellent bedside book, to be read slowly in instalments, and definitely a good example of this putative genre

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Isaac Asimov - - PUZZLES OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS (Bantam, 1991, 254pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Provan)

To be honest, I'm completely mystified by this book. To start with, it defies categorisation, which is no bad thing in many cases, but even more questions continually cropped up as I read on. Look upon this review as an attempt at mutual enlightenment.

But first, an outline of the general scheme of things.

Every month six characters, our eponymous arachnid adventurers, meet at the Milano Restaurant along with a single invited guest who provides a rather pointless snippet of information which becomes the focus of some incredibly contrived cerebral detective work. In this book homonyms, praseodymium, and four-leafed clovers (amongst others) get the same stale formulaic treatment until Henry, the faithful waiter, invariably clears up the whole case, presumably just in time for last orders at the bar.

Perhaps Dr. Asimov can enlighten us?

"Sometimes, if I feel really lazy, I think of one thing and see if I can't build a story around it..."

It would seem that in this case, reader satisfaction and intellectual input are directly proportional.

But still there remain many unanswered questions...

What type of person would get any aesthetic pleasure from a book like this? Is there any to be derived at all? Why "disguise" them as straight detective fiction? And, most importantly, would these books have been published had they not been written by "The Master of Mystery"?

Puzzles of the Black Widowers? Tell me about it - I'm still stumped.

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Isaac Asimov - - FRONTIERS (Mandarin, 1991, 390pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Provan)

Everybody over the age of twelve knows that Asimov's sf is utter bollocks. Take for example, his two most famous creations - the Foundation saga and the Robot stories... Psychohistory is fundamentally flawed, relying on purely casual forces and ignoring the not inconsiderable influence of human free will, whilst his positronic robots have for years lived by "Laws of Robotics" which bear more resemblance to Brownie laws. Plots are incredibly contrived and characters range from the clichéd to the totally ridiculous.

Not quite so many people (of any age) know that the same author's non-fiction works are actually rather interesting and on the whole entertainingly written. FRONTIERS is a collection of articles written over the last few years on various subjects and in the introduction, Asimov himself points out that the subject matter mainly follows his own interests i.e. less on the medical sciences and more space (the final Frontier!) devoted to physics and astronomy. Like the author, I graduated in biochemistry with a head full of quasars, black holes, neutrinos and the like and in this case, familiarity has bred little contempt.

Asimov manages to make even the most mind-busting concepts of cosmology and astrophysics - which really take science into the realms of the abstract - accessible to all whilst very rarely patronising. His obvious enthusiasm for the subject material does, however, occasionally become excessive, giving the writing a surprisingly annoying naive tone in places.

On the whole, though, a very interesting and entertaining read. Unfortunately, comparison with his fiction would suggest that Asimov really does suffer from some form of literary schizophrenia.



C.J. Cherryh - - - - - RIMRUNNERS  
(New English Library, 1991, 288pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

I already enthused about this in a joint review of *Cyteen* and *Rimrunner* in *Vector* 158, but I was glad of the opportunity to reread it. It confirms my view that C.J. Cherryh is one of the very best sf writers around; and that she is at her best at a rather shorter length than her Hugo-winning *Cyteen* or *Downbelow Station*, when she isn't trying to write large chunks of future history. It could be argued that this book need not have been science fiction at all; those of us brought up on books about life in World War II navies would find much of this very familiar. There is the claustrophobia, the problems of getting on at close quarters, the petty politics and power games of men and officers, the final battle. But this has the extra complication of gender-politics built in. Because this *has* to be sf, of course; where else but in the far future are we going to find women crew-members accepted as equals alongside men; where else can we explore the way women might operate in a very traditional male preserve? The action takes place at a specific point in Cherryh's future history, a time of particular tension, and the action centres on Elizabeth Yeager, "an outsider in a crew of brutalised misfits operating on the edge of legality and the far rim of interstellar civilisation", as the blurb says. She is a marvellously rounded and believable character, and the people she reacts with and conflicts with are just as believable. There are no new science-fictional ideas here; no fancy tricks. Just a very tense and rewarding novel.

Frederik Pohl - - NARABEDLA LTD. (Gollancz, 1991, 375pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Completely reset in a more readable typeface than the US paperback, this edition quotes Asimov on Pohl and mentions his Hugo and Nebula awards. For all that, this is still a worthwhile book.

Basically we're in make fun of the aliens mood here. Classical concert artistes - stretching back 200 years and more - are signed up for a tour, disappear, find themselves part of an interstellar entertainment circuit, and have a lot of problems.

Neither the theme nor the treatment is new, but don't let that deter you: Pohl is more than competent as a hack writer, all his cardboard characters stay in character, his aliens are more than adequately varied and often quite inventively amusing, and all in all this is a good long read with some light chuckles and a few bellylaughs for those who know the concert hall grind.

In any case, were it not for the relatively large sales that books like this will undoubtedly make, enterprising firms like Gollancz would not be able to finance less obviously attractive but often far more rewarding works of new authors which they release for our pleasure. Though not in the masterclass, Pohl is more than a cut above the fantasymongers. Give copies of this book to neos and young adults, help spread the word about real SF, and tell them the title is really Aldebaran backwards.

Margaret Weis - - THE LOST KING (Bantam, 1991, 458pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This, Margaret Weis's first solo outing, is "galactic fantasy" rather than the Tolkeinian fantasy of her collaborations with Tracy Hickman. This means that it has a vaguely science-fictionish feel - i.e., there are spaceships and computers - but the rest is straight fantasy. There is an Empire which has crumbled, and a young boy who is the missing heir. Military ranks and fashions are modelled after the Romans, and combat is, by choice, by blade; "bloodswords" which are similar to the "light-sabres" of *STAR WARS*.

In fact, there's a certain amount of *STAR WARS* several of the characters; Derek Sagan the Warlord could reflect Darth Vader, Dion the callow heir is of course Luke, and the cynical mercenary Tusk is Han Solo, with the computer XJ taking the place of Chewbacca. Of course, these were hardly original characters when George Lucas gave them those particular names; the problem here is that they very much remain stereotypes rather than archetypes (naturally, the computer is the most interesting "person" by miles).

The plotting seems remarkably unbalanced; no sooner is Dion's secret revealed than he *joins* the Warlord, negating the loyal sacrifice of those who died and suffered to keep him hidden, including the recently rediscovered Lady Maignrey, former - pre-Revolution - colleague (and lover?) of the Warlord. What explanations that are given are weak; given the ingenious and tantalising structure of the concurrent *DEATHGATE* sequence, I suspect that it's Tracy Hickman's talents which are missing here.

All this is incidental, perhaps; we do enjoy a bit of escapism, don't we? The problem here is that the underlying ethos is divine-right monarchy of such a virulent and uncritical form that you end up cheering the bad guys as a matter of principle. This is all very unsettling for a piece of popular fiction - here's an author trying to add ambiguity to her story by presenting the dorkish side of her Forces of Light and you think they're dorks anyway. . .

Larry Niven - - MAN-KZIN WARS II  
(Orbit, 1991, 306pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

The two stories here are 'franchised', ie written by people other than Niven but using his 'universe', with his introduction saying what a marvellous idea it all was. So 'Briar Patch' is by Dean Ing and 'The Children's Hour' is by Jerry Pournelle & S. M. Stirling. Each story includes the Kzin, ferocious feline warriors who fortunately always turn out to be not quite clever enough for us humans.

The result shows, I suppose, how easy it is for a formula writer to copy another formula writer's formula. Ing tricks his story out with gentle Neanderthals, stored away 40,000 years earlier on Newduvai in stasis cages (a Neanderthal female obligingly has sex with Locklear, the main human character, within minutes of release). Locklear then fights human mutineers as well as Kzin, but is helped by Kzin goodies. Pournelle and Stirling have two humans despatched to kill an unusually bright Kzin general; his eventual manner of death is well signalled.

I read with faint repugnance and increasing boredom. This goes on the heap for the next jumble sale. For Kzin completists only.

Fritz Leiber - - THE KNIGHT AND KNAVE OF SWORDS  
(Grafton, 1991, 361pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Leiber's stories of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser have been a constant source of enjoyment for fantasy fans for fifty years now, with their own brand of wide-ranging inventiveness, where genre cliché is stood on its head. With the seventh volume of stories, however, there are distressing signs that Leiber's imagination has run out of steam.

THE KNIGHT AND KNAVE OF SWORDS consists of two short stories ('Sea Magic' and 'The Mer She'), a novella ('The Curse of the Smalls and Stars') and a short novel ('The Mouser Goes Below'), all first published between 1977 and '88. The duo have left Lankmar behind them and settled down on Rime Island (as related in *SWORDS AND ICE MAGIC*), and now face middle age with their women Afreyt and Cif. But trouble follows them, naturally. . .

The real trouble is that the plotting, pace, wit and sheer panache of those earlier stories seem to be

largely missing in these later examples, showing only infrequent flashes in 'The Mer She', and being entirely absent from the main course here, 'The Mouser Goes Below'. This novel shows a Leiber with rather leaden prose and a terrible propensity for lapsing into soft porn. Anyone coming to THE KNIGHT AND KNAVE OF SWORDS as their first experience of Leiber's work might very well never venture further into his considerable body of superior work.

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T.M. WRIGHT - - THE LAST VAMPIRE (Gollancz, 1991, 221pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

After a war which has killed off the human race apart from a dwindling handful of survivors, Elmo Land, the last vampire, reminisces about how he became one of the undead.

As usual with a Wright novel, THE LAST VAMPIRE is oblique - oblique to the point where you can never quite trust the narrator. Certainly, his memories of the past - his seduction into vampirism by an older woman and his life on the killing road with his retarded friend Lemuel - never quite gell with his post-War existence and his ambiguous conversations with a fellow- "survivor", Jeff. Around Land, a living corpse, flutter the ghosts of the dead. Land can sense the thoughts of the living, can, it seems, only perceive through a living brain: He is reduced, eventually, to seeing the world through the eyes of a cat or a rat). As a vampire, he is neither romantic nor horrific; merely obsessive and squalid.

Wright's prose is subtle to the point of obfuscation. As the story progresses, it is clear that something uniquely horrible is being described, but what it is never brought out and presented to the reader. Hints and allusions and echoed phrases form a counterpoint to Land's narration which in the end becomes the main theme. Wright's horror is at the other end of the spectrum to splatterpunk and its strengths and failings are that sub-genre's mirror-image. One welcomes the oblique approach (undercut by the publisher here by a most inappropriate cover), but one would like to know, sometimes, just what the hell is happening . . .

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Allan Scott - - THE DRAGON IN THE STONE (Orbit, 1991, 301pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

Peter Brockman is visiting Denmark as part of a personal genealogical research: it is a therapeutic means of distracting himself from the memories of a recent tragedy. While visiting an ancient church site in a suburb of Copenhagen, he helps a wounded man, Erik Larson. As a result of his charity he becomes embroiled in a cosmic battle between the dark elves, under the leadership of Kialdi (the bad guy), and the light elves (the good guys). Peter and Erik enter the gateway to another plane, with the aim of controlling the powerful Watcher, a hideous demon splendidly realised by Ian Miller on the cover. With the help of the Watcher they wish to destroy the forces of the dark elves.

The novel combines a sense of Gothic with a blend of Scandinavian mythology. Scott shares the enthusiasm for all things Norse with Michael Scott Rohan, with whom he has a collaboration planned for the future (so take Scott Rohan's endorsement with a pinch of salt). The early part of the novel succeeds in creating a sense of mystery with an enriching use of ancient mythological trappings within a contemporary environment. As the flow of dramatic incident begins, however, the unfamiliar becomes rather commonplace. As the novel progresses there is a sense that he is labouring too hard to maintain the momentum. The descriptive pyrotechnics that accompany each incident are subject to diminishing returns.

After a promising start, THE DRAGON IN THE STONE is disappointing.

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William Shatner - - TEKVAR (Corgi, 1991, 300pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

"Writing a book is both an agony and an ecstasy," says William Shatner (*Acknowledgements*: TEKVAR). "Wrestling with an empty page and a barren brain is the agony. Putting a period on the last sentence of a well-constructed paragraph is the ecstasy. Between the two lies the abyss of the novel... Ron Goulart, a wonderful writer, showed me the way out... He did an enormous amount of work and I shall be grateful to him for a long time to come."

A case of 'credit where credit is due'. Well done, Mr Shatner.

"It was a hot, hazy morning in the spring of ~~1944~~ the year 2120..." The basic situation is stripped-down simple: Jonathon 'Jake' Cardigan, an ex-cop unjustly convicted of dealing in Tek ("the ultimate computerized drug"), has been sentenced to fifteen cold-sleep years on a satellite prison module. But, after only a four-hour snooze, the now partly-exonerated Cardigan is returned to Greater Los Angeles, where he becomes an operative for the Cosmos Detective Agency.

Jake Cardigan is marginally more human than R. Daneel Olivaw; the personal crises which he weathers with ease would make Mike Hammer cry into his beer. But TEKVAR was meant to be a future-cop-thriller, not some introspective novel-of-character, and it's a good future-cop-thriller. Having said that... I enjoyed this wry exchange (in the Dalton-Walden American Faxbook Center, Acapulco):

Jake: "Exactly how many books can anybody buy in your store?"

Carmelita: "The list is down to seven. President Romero isn't especially open-minded."

(p. 255)

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Dave Duncan - - THE DESTINY OF THE SWORD (Legend, 1991, 338pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jessica Yates)

Having read this trilogy *THE SEVENTH SWORD*, Book 1 *THE RELUCTANT SWORDSMAN*, Book 2 *THE COMING OF WISDOM*) as it was published months apart, I eagerly awaited the conclusion, and devoured the whole set in a second reading. This is a good escapist read for the holidays, with no stylistic pretensions but several surprises in the plot. A modern American dies fairly young of a virus infection, and his soul is transported into the body of a heroic swordsman of high rank in a fantasy world ruled by a Goddess. He is given a riddling task and a legendary sword, and soon acquires six companions, the regulation number for a quest.

The difference is that this fantasy world is not Tolkienian, but echoes our real-world Chinese and Japanese cultures: in a Dark Age setting. Our hero must use his brains as well as barwn, and finds his modern scientific background essential to solve the riddle. It's in the tradition of Twain's *CONNECTICUT YANKEE*, and with its emphasis on how technology alters cultures and speeds history on, it reads as if the author had some admiration for J.W. Campbell.

In *THE DESTINY OF THE SWORD* Shansu, with the brain and soul of Wallie Smith, discovers indeed his destiny to lead a band of swordsmen against the mysterious sorcerers who are gradually taking over the Goddess's world. Duncan has come to published writing in his fifties, with only two novels published before this trilogy, which will please those who like a good read and appreciate its differences from the typical North-European saga. However, I do not recommend it to feminists who would find the traditional slave-owning set-up a bit much. Wallie criticises the sexism of his World - but, as Shonsu, takes advantage of it, while the author frequently comments on the female characters' costumes and curvaceous bodies seen through Wallie's eyes.

Bob Shaw - - - - - DARK NIGHT IN TOYLAND  
(Orbit, 1991, 190pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

This is Bob Shaw's first collection of short stories for nearly ten years, and it contains some stories considerably older than ten years: according to the fly-leaf, "Dissolute Diplomat" was first published in IF in 1960. There are also two stories that see publication here for the first time: "Courageous New Planet", a short humorous piece about the confrontation between the Savage and the Controller as Huxley *ought* to have written it, and "The K-Y Warriors", a black story about women who, literally, drive their husbands to death. The title story, from *Interzone*, is the archetypal sf story, like "Light of Other Days", weaving technological innovation seamlessly together with human tragedy: it is not surprising it was chosen as the title of the collection. But as a collection this does not fit together as well as it might: there are rather too many shared tricks, that give an air of sameness to the book. The humorous stories nearly all depend on puns, for instance, or at least on word-play or ambiguity which, for instance, tricks the man who deals with the Devil, or the man who tries for the perfect universe. And the darker stories all seem united by a fear of dominant women: women who kill, women who lay eggs in male bodies ("Love Me Tender", a chilling story), women who oppress by their obesity. Not, perhaps, a collection to be read through from beginning to end at one sitting; but it is certainly worth sampling.

Ray Bradbury - - I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC!  
(Grafton, 1991, 331pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

This is a splendid introduction to Ray Bradbury and his fictional worlds. Originally published in Great Britain in 1970, this book, like his other short story collections, is an eclectic mix. "I sing the body electric..." is cited from Walt Whitman, and it is a fitting epigram for Bradbury, for he shares many of the concerns and themes of the poet: a passion for America and the search for the soul are recurrent in both.

It is not only the themes that are characteristically Bradbury, but the landscapes that the characters inhabit are typical of his work. He writes about Mars, the Mid-West and Ireland with equal aplomb and a characteristic use of laconic sentences. The terseness of his prose style brings to the surface his enchanting ideas: an electric grandma looking for love, a chicken with the power of divination, and a sentient sea. The highlight of the collection must be 'Tomorrow's Child', which concerns a couple who have had a child born into another dimension. They are literally drawn into a surreal, nihilistic existence to be with their son.

The simplicity of the telling and the one idea scenarios go against the trend of recent releases, such as Ryman's idea-packed THE CHILD GARDEN. Nevertheless, there will always be a place for Bradbury's imagination.

This is a likeable collection which is worth a read.

Harry Harrison & Robert Sheckley - - BILL THE  
GALACTIC HERO... ON THE PLANET OF BOTTLED BRAINS  
(Gollancz, 1991, 236pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

...ON THE PLANET OF BOTTLED BRAINS (Avon, 1990) is the first 'shared universe' sequel to Harry Harrison's tickling stick attack on militarism; BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO (Doubleday, 1965). Unlike STARSHIP TERRORISTS TROOPERS, BtGH was written by someone who has actually seen 'line' service and noted the effects of war upon 'ordinary' combat personnel.

I'm sorry, Colin Bird (see PI 90) but ...BOTTLED BRAINS is (even?) worse than ...ROBOT SLAVES, the 'solo'

sequel to BtGH. It's impossible to tell which parts have been written by whom (just as well, probably - for the authors): the whole thing is ritten (sic) in a back-of-the-beermat style that makes R. L. Fanthorpe seem like the natural successor to P. G. Wodehouse. However, those people who piss themselves laughing at such funny names as 'Commander Dirk' (Captain of the Starship Gumption) and 'Sploock' (Science Officer, ditto) will come away with a po-full.

I'm sorry, Harry and - to a lesser extent - Robert (I've never quite forgiven you for DRAMOCLES), but BtGH should have been allowed to remain a one-off tour de force/farce. ...ROBOT SLAVES and ...BOTTLED BRAINS, by their very existence, vitiate its strength. And Bill himself, whose initial naiveté was understandable, but who seemed to be Learning Better, has now degenerated into a sub-Norman Wisdom.

Moreover ...BOTTLED BRAINS is just too damned l-o-n-g. Possible subtitles: A QUIP TOO FAR? THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE PUNNER? I like puns as much as the next man (especially if the 'next man' happens to be Bob Shaw or James White) but this book displays all the subtlety of a sawn-off shotgun. There is an upbeat way for me to end this more-sorrow-than-anger-type review, however: Gollancz have omitted the puerile 'bonus portfolio of combat sketches by acclaimed illustrator Michael W. ~~Palooka~~ Kaluta'.

Paul J. McAuley - - SECRET HARMONIES (Orbit, 1991, 333pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

The human colony on the planet Elysium depends for its relatively sophisticated lifestyle on regular cargoes from earth. It is centred upon the one city on the world, Port of Plenty which is sufficiently developed to boast a university, albeit one dedicated primarily to technology rather than pure science.

A crisis is provoked on Elysium by the non-arrival of the expected spaceship from Earth: the latent authoritarianism of the city becomes manifest in response to the threat from the settlers; war ensues.

Two of the main protagonists in the novel are academics at the university and the story is told principally through the eyes of one of these characters and Miguel Lucas, a settler who lives wild, beyond even the normal boundaries of settler life. Miguel becomes embroiled in events which he would normally avoid when he is possessed by the city computer and pressed into its service.

McAuley's training in the life sciences is presumably at least partly responsible for the convincingly-related alien life forms which occupy the planet; the ecology is one of the highlights of the novel and it is a measure of McAuley's confident handling of his material that he feels able to leave us wanting to know more about the lives of the native inhabitants.

SECRET HARMONIES is certainly successful: while it is not particularly original in its plot or principal villain and there is a certain naivety in the academics = nice (if incompetent)/politicians = nasty equation which manifests itself, the telling is gripping and well-controlled and, as already noted, is set against a convincingly-realised alien environment.

Robert Asprin - - LITTLE MYTH MARKER (Legend, 1991, 167pp, £33.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

There must be something quite unnerving, if not positively obscene, in the sight of Ken Lake chortling uncontrollably. With that thought in mind, I decided not to re-read this book on public transport.

This sixth book in the MYTH series dates from 1985, and even without the superior Starblaze format and illustrations it's very funny, a pastiche of a Damon Runyan story which is itself a classic of humorous writing.

Asprin's approach is of course a lot broader: slapstick rules, along with magic, and if you would care to imagine the result of the impact Little Miss Marker, alias markie, has upon a household that already includes the Wizard Skeeve, his bodyguards Nuncio and Guido, his partner Aahz who is a Pervect, Tananda the freelance assassin, the troll Chumley her brother who works under the name of Crunch, Buttercup the war unicorn, Gleep who is Skeeve's pet dragon, Massha his pretty vast apprentice (that's "pretty" as an adverb qualifying "vast"), Bunny who is a guaranteed moll and the niece of Mobster Don Bruce who has donated her to Skeeve for services rendered (except that they haven't really been rendered at all, and no way is anyone supposed to discover this), and almost finally Luanna who is Skeeve's own true love . . . and who somehow disapproves of Bunny, and who wouldn't; then the scene is set for you to discover how it all falls out - and it does, it does, aided and abetted by Asprin's delightful cod quotes at the head of each chapter - on this occasion I particularly approved of one attributed to "R. McDonald" which goes "Bring the whole family . . . but leave the kids at home" which of course brings us back to Markie who, in addition to an innocent appearance and a gift for honesty that causes more trouble than anyone would have thought, also has a mean way with certain magical skills . . .

I don't normally write sentences that long, but one can get quite carried away by Asprin's plots and their ramifications. I solemnly adjure you not to start this book until you have read the first five; after that you will doubtless wish to buy a few sets for gifts. I only wish each book had twice as many pages.

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Isaac Asimov, C.G. Waugh, & Martin Greenberg (Eds.) - -  
THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF NEW WORLD SF SHORT NOVELS OF  
THE 1960s (Robinson, 1991, 506pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

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Rather an odd collection to match the odd title: what is "New World" SF? Is it SF from the US? (Well, in this case, yes.) Or is it meant to suggest *NEW WORLDS* in the '60s? Or perhaps "new wave"?

The answer is probably a qualified "yes" to the latter two, but since Asimov et. al. can't be bothered with writing an introduction one can't be sure. However, the stories are only "new wave" in a watered-down American sense: there is little sign of the sort of experimentation which might be associated with the New Wave in the '60s.

The collection opens with a very average Roger Zelazny piece, 'The Eve Of Rumoko'; why this story merits inclusion above his many better stories (for example the original version of *THE DREAM MASTER*, 'He Who Shapes') is a puzzle; similarly the closing story 'The Suicide Express' by Philip Jose Farmer, while excellent, is easily available as the final part of *TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO*. Admittedly between these two are a couple of good stories by Robert Silverberg (about an amnesia-causing drug) and Gordon R. Dickson, 'Soldier, Ask Not', but otherwise it is a collection of also-rans, with only Keith Laumer's 'Night Of The Trolls' worthy of note.

How any collection of novellas which aims in some sense at definitiveness can leave out Ellison's 'A Boy And His Dog', or Moorcock's 'Behold The Man' is beyond me; there is a need for a collection of short SF novels of the '60s, but *THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF NEW WORLD SF* does not satisfy it in any way.

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Ursula Le Guin - -*THE EYE OF THE HERON and THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST* (Gollancz, 1991, 301pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

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These two novels, now published in one volume, are on the surface unconnected, yet it soon becomes apparent that they share the theme of outrage at the injustices of which mankind is capable.

The planet Victoria, in *EYE OF THE HERON* (first published 1972) is a penal colony. One group of colonists,

descendants of criminals from Earth and inhabitants of the City, have created a hierarchical society in which women are second class citizens. A second group, inhabitants of the Town, are descendants of the People Of peace, adherents of the principle of non-violence, deported from Earth as undesirables. Theirs is a democratic community in which women play a full role. Although the City folk despise the folk of the Town, they need their labour, and when the Town's people want to found an independent settlement, conflict ensues. Events are seen through the eyes of Luz Marina, daughter of one of the City bosses, who, despite her awe of her father, comes to embrace the values of the Town.

*THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST* tells of the planet Athshe, one vast forest inhabited by gentle humanoids to whom war is unknown. Terran colonists are treating Athshe as a source of timber for a deforested Earth and brutally exploiting the native population, despite the protests of the scientist Lyubov, who is painfully aware of his own inadequacies as the Athsheans' defender. The arrival of representatives from the League of Worlds seems to herald the end of this situation, but not before the Athsheans have learned to kill. The novel was written in 1969 as a specific protest against the Vietnam War and the policy of defoliation, yet it is relevant to the environmental concerns of the '90s, and universal in its anger at Man's inhumanity to Man.

*EYE OF THE HERON* has a subtler message, but both novels powerfully convey their own sense of despair and hope in the face of tragedy, and both remind the reader why Ursula Le Guin has won so many awards.

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Annette Curtis Klause - - *THE SILVER KISS* (Doubleday, 1991, 198pp, £6.99)

Richard Laymon - - *THE STAKE* (Headline, 1991, 506pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

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*THE STAKE* is a story which will probably be brought to the attention of people who like vampire stories quite readily; *THE SILVER KISS* may, as a "young adult" novel, slip through the net. Yet it's one of the best vampire stories I've read for a long time, less for its originality than its almost over-the-top whiff of the hothouse.

Grieving for her dying mother, Zoe meets a beautiful young boy who turns out to be a vampire and has been pursuing his murderous brother since the seventeenth century. Simon, the vampire, realises that he is in love with Zoe, and through her comes to terms with the unnaturalness of his existence. Zoe helps Simon defeat his brother, and is tempted by vampirism as a "cure" for death - her own and her mother's. But it is not an existence to which she can condemn anyone. There is only one possible ending, but it leaves Zoe more accepting of the fact that her mother will die.

The author is apparently a British-born American librarian and SF fan and she has produced a well-conceived impression of both vampirism (though it owes much to several modern classics such as Anne Rice's *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*) and a teenager raging against the impending death of a loved one. Although written for young adults it pulls no punches in its romantically macabre situations and sensual imagery. There's blood, and sexual tension, and the seductive beauty of the vampire at his prey and plenty of glossy grotesqueness, and yes, the stake is used. But as in all good vampire stories, it all adds up to something beyond video-nastiness. My only complaint is the price - £6.99 for a book which is slim even in large-format (large typeface fills it out) is excessive, particularly as I'm reviewing it from an approval copy for my library which I presume is the market for this edition. I can tell Doubleday right now that although I'm recommending the book for purchase I'm sure that few librarians will buy it. Maybe you lot out there are richer, but I doubt it. Shame, because this is a terrific book which deserves to be better known.

*THE STAKE* is firmly aimed at the horror market; a nicely chunky paperback with a quote from Stephen King on the cover. Larry Dunbar is a writer of horror stories who discovers, hidden in a ghost town, the corpse of a young girl with a stake through her heart. Obviously, someone

has murdered her, believing that she is a vampire. But what if *the stake was pulled out?*

Larry's friend Pete persuades him that he should write a sub-AMITYVILLE HORROR book describing their experiences, culminating in the withdrawal of the stake. At first reluctant, Larry goes ahead with the plan and is soon caught up with the history of the ghost town and the identity of the murdered girl. Could she *really* have been a vampire; or merely the innocent victim of a madman? There is only one way to find out.

More suspense is added by the appearance of someone who is obviously the killer. Meanwhile, Larry's involvement in a seemingly crazy murder is counterpointed by the involvement of his daughter in equally horrific events which are taking place in his own home town.

Finally, of course, the stake is pulled and here my summary stops, save to say that the ending has a hell of a kick to it. Generally, I prefer *THE SILVER KISS* and its somewhat overblown romanticism, but if you like fast-moving suspense with plenty of action and bursts of violence then you'll find *THE STAKE* a worthwhile experience.

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Zenna Henderson - - *THE PEOPLE COLLECTION* (Corgi, 1991, 594pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

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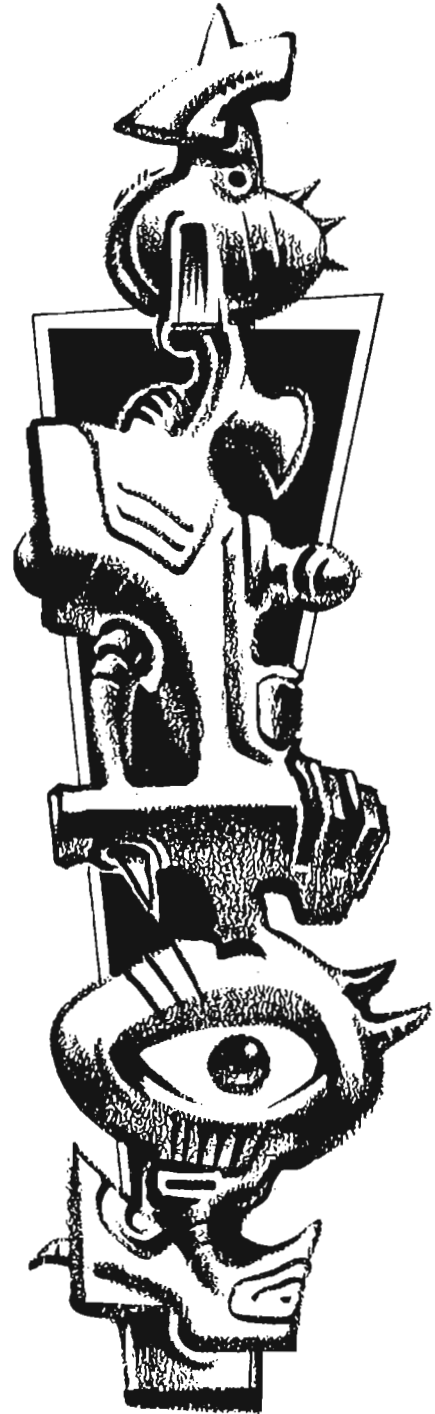
This omnibus edition, including four previously uncollected stories and the novels, *PILGRIMAGE* and *THE PEOPLE: NO DIFFERENT FLESH*, was originally published earlier in 1991 by Drunken Dragon Press. The two novels, both comprised of short stories appearing in *THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION* between 1952 and 1965, were originally published in book form in 1961 and 1966 respectively. According to Anne McCaffrey's introduction the latter was filmed for television with Kim Darby and William Shatner by Francis Ford Coppola.

McCaffrey's introduction is an impassioned appreciation of Henderson's work, not surprising considering their similarity of styles. Henderson's extraterrestrial Superwomen (and men) have become Pern's inhabitants, the same treacly self-important preciousness growing in the stories as one progresses through them. Where McCaffrey is cloyingly old-fashioned and moralistic, Henderson is old-world religiose. And both have a penchant for melodrama.

Henderson keeps it under a tighter rein, though if she had not died in 1983 it is possible that the over-sentimentality which so flawed *THE PEOPLE*, bringing it at times to a virtual halt with long, lingering descriptions of events mentioned as background in *PILGRIMAGE*, would have become unbearable. As it is, sentences like "By the Presence and the Name and the Power, lift to good and the Glory until your Calling" (pp 312 - 313) come close to being unendurable.

Superman-like, the People flee their planet just before its destruction, only to crash in 19th-Century America and be hunted down for witches. Taking refuge in an out-of-the-way canyon they help out humans in distress and are not above some morally-dubious mind-tampering to do so.

The final three stories have taken on some of the stylistic tricks of the New Wave, which divorces them from the novels and can make them difficult to comprehend at times, but on the whole the book, despite all its many appalling typing errors, is a joy to read.



Thomas Tessier - - **SECRET STRANGERS** (Futura, 1991, 317pp, £3.99)

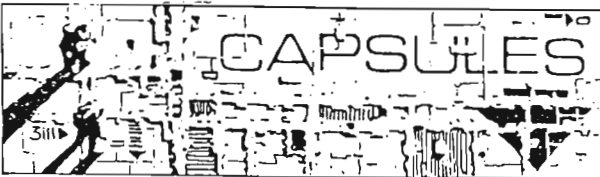
(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Tessier is known for his horror novels and short stories, and although **SECRET STRANGERS** has no elements of the Fantastic about it, it's a terrific thriller with elements of the shocker suspense novel as unconnected events in a small American town add up. 17-year old Heidi's father has taken most of the family money, left home and disappeared, with no apparent motive, leaving Heidi to make sense of what has happened to her life while her mother withdraws into apathy. Then, while babysitting, Heidi discovers photos showing her neighbours engaged in under-age sex sessions. She persuades her boyfriend to help her set up a blackmail attempt which will, she hopes stake her while she too leaves home and finishes school.

Things go wrong.

Gradually, a network of illicit sexual activity is revealed; one which goes further than a bit of kinky sex with willing teenagers, and Heidi and Gary are drawn in over their heads. The network will not stop at murder, and several apparent suicides appear to have more sinister connections.

In a genre horror novel, the network behind all this would no doubt have supernatural, even satanic, connections. **SECRET STRANGERS** focusses more simply on the elementary but devastatingly powerful idea that behind tragic but apparently explicable events are darker forces which arise merely from the warped interior of the human soul. Tessier is at his best when he lets us realise that a young teenager with whom we sympathise is extorting money from people who, whatever their immoralities, have done neither her nor, apparently, anyone else, any harm, or when he suggests areas of unknowable motive in people's actions. When he describes a vast network of something nastier, its all-powerful nature seems far too melodramatic, and there are too many confrontational talk scenes for realism: he has not been altogether successful in avoiding genre cliché. Nevertheless, **SECRET STRANGERS** is far superior to most books of its class in storyline and infinitely so in psychology.



Piers Anthony - - **MAN FROM MUNDANIA** (N.E.L., 1991, 343pp, £3.99)

**MAN FROM MUNDANIA** is the umpteenth chapter in the *Xanth* series, being the third part of the *MAGIC OF XANTH* trilogy. While Anthony has lost none of his ability to spin a tale, the grinding ever-smaller of the bones of the original *Xanth* books means that this is largely unoriginal to anyone who has read earlier volumes. Once the initial amusement with Anthony's pun-ishing conceit is over, only the malady lingers on. (John D. Owen)

Glen Cook - - **THE TOWER OF FEAR** (Grafton, 1991, 375pp, £3.99)

Cook has a rather uninspired literary style but this is compensated for, at least to some extent, by the political insight that informs this tale of collaboration and resistance in the city of Qushmarrah. His realism with regard to motives makes a refreshing change. (John Newsinger)

Diane Duane - - **THE DOOR INTO SHADOW** (Corgi, 1991, 334pp, £3.99)

The second volume of *THE TALE OF THE FIVE* (copyrighted

1983/4) is an alarming, barely adequate mess. How Duane's muse could have so quickly abandoned her may remain a mystery, but when she does depart from the cover-to-cover battle the purple scenes and boorish reminiscences seem doubly absurd. Gone is the leisurely exploration of character which would have given this sincerity and depth, and without Herewiss as the centre the book loses all sense of direction in the multi-foci of the other characters. This lack and the never-ending battle (really a series of them, but with no readily identifiable dramatic pauses) leaves the structure shot to hell, giving the impression of a stale sandwich made with *FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* paste and *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* bread. I was devastated. (Terry Broome)

Dennis Hamley - - **CODED SIGNALS** (Deutsch Adlib, 1990, 114pp, £3.99)

Ghost stories for teenagers on such popular themes as the seance, a pop song with a curse on it, the ghosts of a murdered cyclist and a jogger, a haunted hospital bed, and some more original ones inspired by role-playing, like the tough boyfriend who fantasises that he's a Viking and finds the local burial mound opening to welcome him home. Also: a nice Tolkien spoof about a computer adventure game which comes to life. (Jessica Yates)

Christopher Hyde - - **WHITE LIES** (Headline, 1991, 501pp, £4.99)

Near-future cold war thriller involving a plot to assassinate a mentally decaying US President and his fellow-travelling deputy. As far as plot and characterisation go, an exercise in puppetry. (Andy Sawyer)

Guy Gavriel Key - - **TIGANA** (Penguin, 1991, 688pp, £4.99)

I was persuaded against my better judgement by Alan Fraser's review of last year's trade paperback edition of **TIGANA** (PI 88) to read it. All I can say is that I found the book as gripping as he did. A refreshingly different (Italianate) setting and a strong cast of characters make this one of the year's best fantasies, and the theme of suppressed nationhood, while by no means original, is particularly topical as Eastern Europe fragments. Key has proved that he can write and is more than a Tolkien imitator. **TIGANA** is a rich, well-crafted, colourful and moving novel, and has not one but two stunning shocks at the end. Try it. (Andy Sawyer)

Michael Lasalandra & Mark Merenda - - **SATAN'S HARVEST** (Futura, 1991, 290pp, £4.50)

The story of the demonic possession of Maurice Thierault (credited with his wife Nancy as co-author) and its investigation by troubleshooting demonologists Ed & Lorraine Warren (also given a bit of the authorial action). Apparently a true story, but anything which begins "Police Chief Sean LeBoeuf wondered why he was out freezing his ass off on this bitterly cold morning," ought to arouse anyone's suspicions, never mind the sub-EXORCIST confrontations. For readers who never stop to wonder why fact should be written like cheap fiction. (Andy Sawyer)

Brian Lumley - - **TARRA KBASH: HROSSAK!** (Headline, 1991, 246pp, £3.99)

I thought this might be a talking animal book at first because my dog says this as he throws up (I understand why now). However, it turns out to be "the epic adventures of a near-barbarian": suitable only for those of a similarly limited intellectual outlook. (Brendan Wignall)

Patricia A. McKillip - - **THE SORCERESS AND THE CYGNET** (Pan, 1991, 219pp, £7.99)

Simultaneous trade paperback edition of the new hardback from World Fantasy Award-winning author; an evocatively symbolic pagan fantasy. (Andy Sawyer)

Douglas Niles - - **FEATHERED DRAGON** (Penguin, 1991, 316pp, £4.50)

Book three of *The Maztica Trilogy*. Take the history of



the fall of the Aztec Empire, add a few monsters and supernatural beings, and change the names. Look, I've a better idea. Why not take Aztec history and mythology straight and cut out the middleman? (Andy Sawyer)

**Paul Preuss - - HIDE AND SEEK** (Pan, 1991, 281pp, £4.50)

Sparta, a woman whose mental and physical abilities have been artificially enhanced, alias Inspector Ellen Troy of the Space Board, travels to Mars to investigate a murder involving the theft of an alien artifact, and finds her life threatened by characters from her extraordinary past who know her true identity. This SF-detective-thriller, a novel in the *VENUS PRIME* series, is an undemanding but fun read, in which space travel is taken for granted. Good beach reading. (Lynne Bispham)

**Barbara Siegel & Scott Siegel - - TANIS: THE SHADOW YEARS** (Penguin, 1991, 320pp, £4.50)

There are, of course, much better juvenile novels around but this Prelude from the *Dragonlance* saga is not too bad. Strictly for fans though. (John Newsinger)

**James Silke - - TOOTH AND CLAW** (Grafton, 1991, 316pp, £3.99)

Before the coming of TSR. Before the coming of airbrushed, gaudy dragons, all S 'n' S covers looked like this: bilious green paintings of muscled poseurs with varicose veins mapping out their biceps. James Silkin has dramatised Frank Frazetta's *DeathDealer* paintings with the usual mix of baldheaded sorcerers, cat women and reptilian monsters. Strictly for depressed adolescents only. (Chris Hart).

**Jean Ure - - PLAGUE 99** (Methuen Teens, 1991, 150pp, £3.50)

Jean Ure is mainly known for her teenage love stories and school stories: *PLAGUE 99* is an unexpected disaster novel for teenagers about the catastrophe of a major, possibly European if not global, epidemic (which might be the result of the accidental explosion of a germ bomb). Three London teenagers try to survive: one goes barmy and joins a nihilist gang to party the time away; the other two, a white girl and Bangladeshi boy, overcome racial and cultural differences to make the decision to leave London together. We may claim this as SF (the title refers, presumably, to the year 1999) but the Guardian review quoted on the cover "better written than anything by Wyndham" is a bit excessive. The book carries a passionate message for young people to *do something* - protest about the weapons build-up before such a ghastly accident happens. (Jessica Yates)

**Robert Westall - - THE PROMISE** (Pan Piper, 1991, 170pp, £3.50)

In a shorter, more popular style than the literary fantasies with which Westall made his name, *THE PROMISE* revisits one of his favourite settings, wartime Tyneside, in the story of a teenage boy who becomes fond of a girl (with TB?). After she dies, she returns to haunt him to his death as a kind of vampire, and he has to choose life or death when an air raid strikes. A useful book to recommend to a reluctant teenage reader, combining authentic background details with a direct appeal to the emotions. (Jessica Yates)

**Michael Williams - - GALEN BENIGHTED** (Penguin, 1991, 317pp, £4.50)

Humorous one-liners ("So much for smoothing my path into command. Now even the horses would hate me.") fail to raise this D&D-type fantasy, volume three of the *DRAGONLANCE HEROES II* trilogy, from the quagmire of pulp fiction. The cowardly Weasle of *WEASLE'S LUCK*, now Sir Galen Pathwarden Brightblade, Solamnic Knight, sets off on a quest to save his brother from the clutches of the evil shaman Firebrand who dwells in tunnels beneath the Vingaarde Mountains. Meanwhile, beneath the foundations of Castle di Caela, home of Galen's patron, something stirs . . . Galen survives floods, earthquakes and trolls - alas, this novel is quite overcome by fantasy clichés. (Lynne Bispham)

## "Upon the rack in print"

**INTERZONE 48 - 49**  
(June - July 1991)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

In my review of January's *IZ* I plumped for Greg Egan's 'Learning To Be Me' as being the magazine's best story of 1990. I'm glad to say that others were of the same opinion. Egan's story has indeed won the *IZ* readers' poll (though my "close second" was Nicholas Royle's 'Negatives' which came twenty-second - but you can't win 'em all). The June *IZ* is the one whose contents have been reproduced within the pages of *ABORIGINAL SF*, so let's see what the Americans have got for their money.

Greg Egan leads off with 'The Infinite Assassin' in which a drug allows dreamers to pass through an infinite number of parallel worlds. Occasionally a disastrous "whirlpool" effect occurs as a dreamer actually transfers to one of these worlds. Egan's narrator is an assassin - one of an infinite number of alter egos - sent to kill the source of a whirlpool. Ingenious but not, in the end, effective. Egan's hero spends much time musing on his other selves and it becomes difficult to identify with him. 'The Nilakantha Scream' almost - but not quite - has Eric Brown returning to past form, the story tells of a telepath discovering her lover's fate, but the horror which causes the scream of the title fails to come across. More disappointing is Garry Kilworth's 'Hamelin, Nebraska' which is fast-moving enough but is really no more than a hackneyed idea with stereotypical characters. Not one of Kilworth's best by any means. More pleasing is the salutary lesson given in Paul J. McAuley's 'Gene Wars', charting the life of a Company molecular geneticist.

But the best of the June bunch are 'Song of Bullfrogs. Cry of Geese' by Nicola Griffith and 'Ten Days That Shook The World' by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne. In the former story a variant of ME has wiped out 95% of humanity and debilitated the survivors. As in *GREYBEARD* nature takes the forefront in a depopulated world and Griffith uses her observations as a metaphor for her protagonist's life - a metaphor which is ultimately rejected. This excellent story works because the author keeps the tragedy personal and doesn't try to show us the whole disaster. The equally good 'Ten Days . . . ' works on the opposite scale, mixing both real-life and fictional characters as it details the birth of the USSA in 1917. Delightful. Finally for June, *ASF* readers will see an interview with David Wingrove (who presumably can't be too well-known

over there) and an incisive article on cyberpunk by Bruce Sterling (who they may well have heard of).

*IZ* 49 kicks off with the first part of a Xeelee novella by Stephen Baxter. 'The Baryonic Lords' is certainly ambitious - it's set over a million years in the future. Such awesome vistas are not normally my cup of tea but judgement shall be reserved until the concluding part has been read. However, I am in no doubt that the remainder of the issue is very good indeed - there isn't a dud amongst the following stories. Something strange is happening to womankind in Elizabeth Hand's 'The Bacchae': women are becoming more violent, more primeval. Hand moves her story from unease to horror with assurance. In 'Something To Beef About' by John Gribbin a variant of BSE is killing people. A researcher discovers the truth about the disease and has to make an ethical decision - an interesting one this, particularly as scientists aren't often depicted making such decisions. Don Webb's short 'Reach Out' begins with a mysterious, tantalising phone call and has a genuine surprise ending. Chris Beckett's 'The Long Journey Of Frozen Heart' tells of a woman who

retreats from the paradise she inhabits within a computer memory bank in order to return to the real world. A quiet, human tale, skilfully told.

Possibly - just possibly - the best fiction in this issue is 'A Sensitive Dependence On Initial Conditions' by Kim Stanley Robinson. This makes for fascinating reading even though it is hardly fiction - actually, it examines models of historical explanation which are themselves based on scientific models, and looks at how these differ depending on which scientific theory is used as their base. To illustrate his arguments Robinson uses the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and its consequences, thus drawing on and examining the rationale behind an earlier short story of his, 'The Lucky Strike'. On the non-fiction side, Tad Williams is interviewed; he makes some interesting points about Tolkien and displays a down-to-earth attitude towards the large advance paid for his trilogy.



FANTASY TALES vol. 12 no. 6  
Spring 1991

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

It's always good to see another FANTASY TALES and there's a welcome editorial in this issue in which the editors defend the unity of fantastic fiction and - citing Clive Barker's essay - argue that it's time we reclaimed some of the major writers of the Fantastic who have been spirited away by "Literature" and forget about the increasing fragmentation into subgenres which makes good marketing but limited reading. Take away several Pretension Points for using the word "fantastique", though

Barker writes about his personal sources and includes Marlowe, Machen and Blake among them. Are the stories in this issue up to those standards? What a silly question that is, but there certainly is a welcome range. Neil Gaiman's 'Foreign Parts' is a modern fable in which that old warning about the dangers of masturbation turns out to have a lot of truth in it - it's a shame the denouement is so similar to something else I've read recently because apart from that it's a terrific story. There's actual science fiction here too! Well, William F. Nolan's 'Gobble Gobble' about a predatory alien is only SF for about half a sentence but is still a good horror story, while R. Chetwynd-Hayes' 'Monster' is fairly basic SF-horror (the twist is obvious as soon as Uncle Carl starts preaching). Still, Marvin Kaye's 'Happy Hour' is a "real" science-fictional idea about body-swapping as a management counselling technique.

FANTASY TALES has always been strong on the kind of modern sword-and-sorcery which adds a touch of horror or dark fantasy to the recipe. Mike Chinn's 'Day of the Dark Men' depends too much on a known background to be totally successful, though it's a neat idea to have not one but two enigmatic men in black. Janet Fox's 'How Jacquerele Made War In Belazhurra' is notable for its cryptic heroine and a jewel with a sinister gift. The story's amorality is understated but, I think, significantly there.

More definitely 'dark fantasy' is Thomas Ligotti's Lovecraftian 'The Spectacles in The Drawer'; where a kind of dark Zen is exercised upon an annoying disciple. Michael D. Toman's 'The Old Laughing Lady' gains several status points by being about a librarianship student, and it's easy to see that it owes as much to Neil Young as

Robert Aickman - can't be bad! But in the tradition of leaving best story til last, Kim Newman's 'Mother Hen' successfully fuses the hardboiled detective story with modern horror to partially rewrite 'The Maltese Falcon' from several different viewpoints. One pictures Newman surrounded by icons of popular literature, feverishly trying to add new and disturbing life to them. But that's what the Fantastic - or *ique*, if you like, is all about, and FANTASY TALES is full of such distorting mirrors.

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