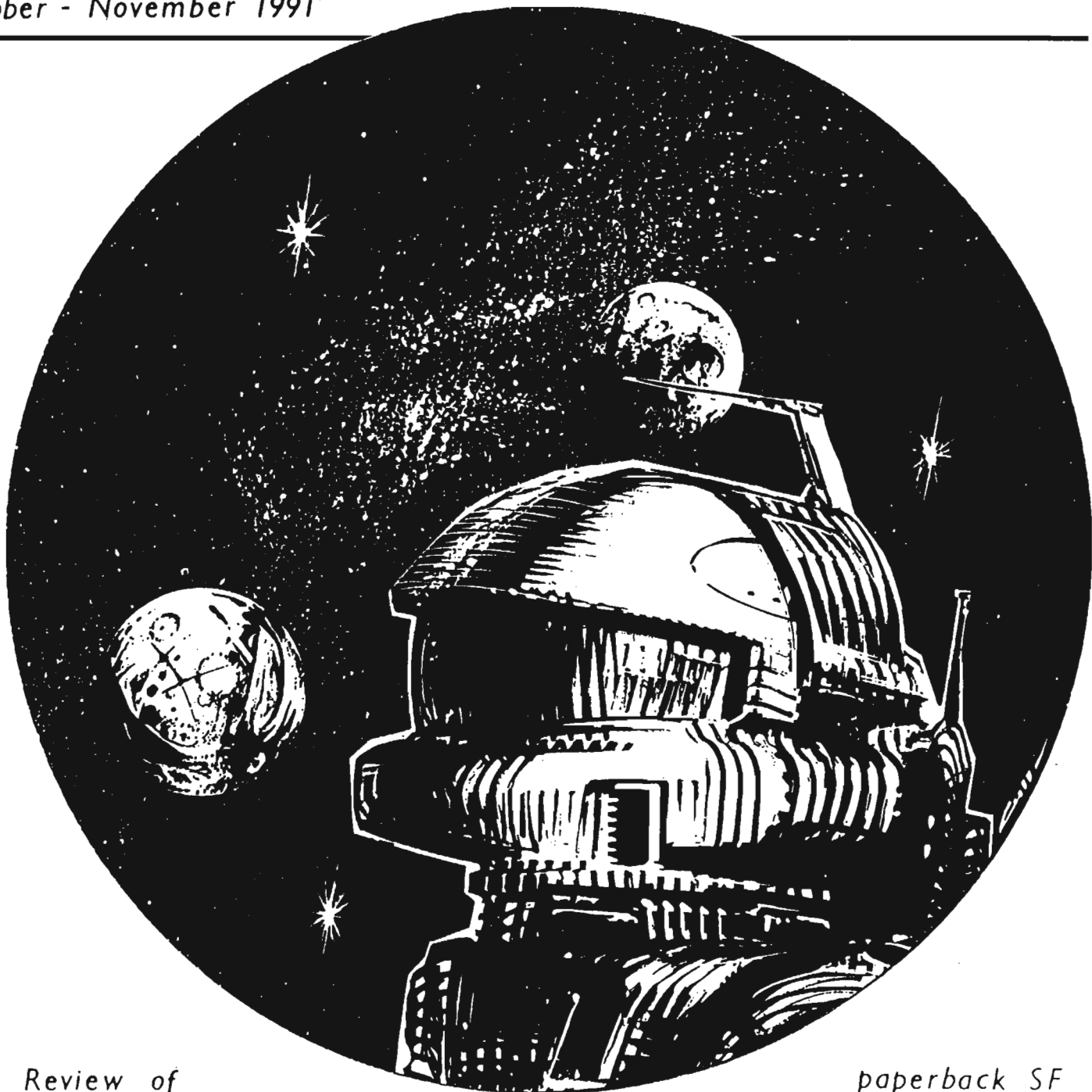




Paperback Inferno

92

October - November 1991



The Review of

paperback SF

A British Science Fiction Association magazine

95p.



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ARTWORK: Kevin A. Cullen, Cover;
Colin P. Davies: Logo.
Steve Bruce: p.3; p.13

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to PI 92
is **Friday November 8th**

HELP WANTED

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

BACK ISSUES

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

Paperback Purgatory

Er, yes. Why was there a duplication of Maureen Speller's review of Greg Bear's *QUEEN OF ANGELS* in *PI*s 91 and 90? No excuses, no smart repartee: it's just that after years and years of intensive and expensive training in the noble art of shuffling documents your editor is unable to tell the difference between an "in" tray and an "out" tray...

More serious, and as far as I'm concerned, more annoying, cock-ups have taken place, though. Last issue I mentioned not having received as many books for review in *PI* as had arrived last year, with the implication that this led to a shortfall in reviews. With time to spare, I did some checking... and discovered that, while the decline in publishing was accurately charted, it would have helped no end if a) books which I had sent to reviewers had actually arrived, and b) reviews posted to me had in fact got to me. At least a dozen reviews this year have not appeared, it seems, because of the inability of the Post Office to carry out its contract. I find this not satisfactory at all. All I can do is apologise to publishers, authors, and reviewers of books which have not been mentioned in *PI*, and hope that this frustrating situation will not be repeated too often. Meanwhile, if you're a regular *PI* reviewer and you either haven't heard from me for a while or you've sent reviews which haven't appeared, it might help if you got in touch.

PI reviewer Chris Hart has recently produced a magazine called *THE PSEUDO-NYMPH* which is a selection of material culled from the New Science Fiction Alliance magazines *Auguries*, *BBR*, *Dream*, *Nova SF*, *The Scanner* and *Works*. It includes fiction by Peter T. Garrett, Dave 'W' Hughes, Dorothy Davies, Andrew A. Eastwood, Chris Naylor, David Hart, and D.F. Lewis, with poems by Andrew Darlington, J.P.V. Stewart, Elizabeth Hillman, and Ann Keith and an article on Michael Moorcock's *BEHOLD THE MAN* by Joe Radford. Many of the stories are newly illustrated by Kevin Cullen, Dreyfus, Colin P. Davies, Arthur Moyses, Nik Morton, Alan Hunter, David Stephenson, Steve Walker and James Koehline.

Quite a star-studded magazine, although Chris is at pains to point out that *THE PSEUDO-NYMPH* is not a "best-of" collection as such but "a sample of what the magazines have to offer". Peter T. Garrett's 'Voices of Other Times' from *DREAM* (which I believe has been relaunched under a new title) makes a justifiably strong lead story: in an alternate-historical setting an experiment with hypnotic regression shows evidence for something other than reincarnation. Considering that *DREAM*, with its sometimes hysterical anti-experimental stance, was a magazine I always felt the weakest of the NSFA stable, for it to have published stories of this quality suggests I should have stuck with it.

Also outstanding was Dorothy Davies's 'Night Games' (from 'Nova SF') which successfully managed to fuse several genres from Dark fantasy to Cyberpunk - it's tough on the streets in this peculiar dreamworld! Davies tended to

show up David Hast's 'Crime Watcher' (BBR) which tended to seg in the middle due to shifts of viewpoint. Andrew A. Eastwood's 'The Crime Of John Stroud' appeared as a two-parter in *WORKS*. There, I didn't feel it was strong enough to stand the split given the long gap between issues. It works much better now that the reader is given the chance to see it as a whole. *WORKS* editor Dave W Hughes appears in his own right as an author with 'The Song of the Shapes' (*THE SCANNER*: an interesting exercise in synaesthesia. The ubiquitous D.F. Lewis appears with a short-short entitled 'Madge': the contents page classes it as "poetry" and this is not wholly inaccurate, for the main characteristic is atmosphere rather than plot (it is graced with a superb Kevin Cullen illustration). Finally, a nice change of tone is given by Chris Naylor's ghost story 'The Regged Boy' (*Auguries*).

An excellent realisation of a good idea, *The PSEUDO-NYMPH* is available for £2.25 from Chris Hart at 16 Walker Ave, Great Lever, Bolton BL3 2DU. Individual NSFA magazines can be ordered from Chris Reed, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY (a s.a.e. for the latest catalogue might be a good idea).

Also from the NSFA stable is the latest *AUGURIES* (#14) from Nik Morton (£1.75 or £7.00 for four from Nik Morton, 48 Anglesey Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants Po12 2EQ). This is the "Green issue" and contains fiction and poetry with an ecological/conservationist slant. People do tend to get all mystical and po-faced when caring for the Earth and one or two pieces here don't escape that, but there's an interesting father/son dialogue in the diptych 'Dreams and Raspberry Wine' and 'The Paradisical Dangers' showing the same confrontation written by Duncan Adams and his son. *VECTOR* reviews editor Chris Amies has powerful undercurrents in his story 'Zero Summer' but I think someone got there with the image of the mysterious monolith before . . . ! Eliot Smith's 'Consumer Goods' has a bioengineered mother of the future ticking her son off for eating unsuitable foods - in this case, fresh vegetables! 'The Ice Child' by Ian Arden is the issue's best story, though, with a message as much about misunderstanding the past as exploiting the planet.

And now the moment you've all been waiting for: it's -

COMPETITION CORNER

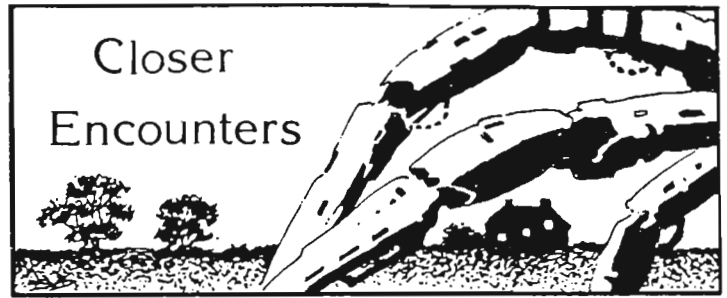
Thanks everyone who entered the competition in PI 91, and special thanks to Virgin Books: the winners, who correctly identified Sophie Aldred, Time And Relative Dimension In Space, and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, were - Geoffrey Pitchford, C.P. Jones, Philip J. Knight, W. J. Powell, and Steve Jones. By the time you read this you should have your prizes; if not, contact me.

This issue's competition is based around Orbit Books' August 1991 SF & F promotion, which features five paperbacks: *RAMA II* by Arthur C. Clarke & Gentry Lee; *SONG OF THE DANCING GODS* by Jack L. Chalker; *KNIGHT OF SHADOWS* by Roger Zelazny; *GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE* edited by Virginia Heinlein, and *ORPHAN OF CREATION* by Roger MacBride Allen. Reviews of these books will appear in the next issue of *PI* if I can't squeeze them in here: although the review copies did not arrive until I was on holiday, L.J. Hurst has done wonders in reading and reviewing the books in the short time I gave him. Unfortunately it looks as though I won't have the space to feature them without a thoroughgoing redesign of the issue. (Reader's voice: "And last issue he was complaining because he had not enough material!")

Thanks to the kindness of Orbit books, we have FIVE sets of the featured books set aside for five people who can answer the following incredibly difficult questions and survive an encounter with the Lords Of Chance:

- 1) Name another Arthur, C. Clarke/Gentry Lee collaboration.
- 2) What does the 'A' stand for in Robert A. Heinlein?

Answers please to the PI editorial address by the copy date indicated on p. 2.



Robert N. Charrette - - CHOOSE YOUR ENEMIES CAREFULLY (ROC, 1991, 373pp, £4.50)

Tom De Haven - - WALKER OF WORLDS (ROC, 1991, 342pp, £6.99)

Neil Gaiman & Alex Stewart (Eds) - - TEMPS (ROC, 1991, 354pp, £4.50)

R.A. Salvatore - - ECHOES OF THE FOURTH MAGIC (ROC, 1991, 318pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This is the first package from Roc, the new SF & F imprint from Penguin mentioned last issue, and comes with plenty of glossy publicity, an author tour, a fan club, and invitation to yet another launch party I don't get to. (Memo. to all publishers: Chester or Liverpool make jolly good sites for launch parties, I mean, why should the London-based critics and reviewers have all the fun . . . budgets, pah! I sneer at 'em!)

I think Penguin have acknowledged that their SF & F line has for a long time been sadly unimaginative, and I'm speaking politely. My glossy publicity folder declares ROC to be "where man meets magic and machine at the limits of the imagination" so the necessary question is, is it?

On first sight, the artwork of three of the four books doesn't seem designed to attract the "upmarket" SF fan. *ECHOES OF THE FOURTH MAGIC* shows a comic-looking dwarfish wizard gazing upon some green-skinned goblinoids riding ill-drawn reptiles, which I must say is a good reflection of its contents. A submarine gets caught in the Bermuda Triangle (are people still reading books about the Bermuda Triangle?) and flung into a far-future world which has passed through a nuclear holocaust to a sub-Tolkienian world of Brown wastes, Black Worlocks, and Crystal Mountains. Incredibly clumsily written, riddled with cliché, this is the same as before so far as a "new look" is concerned. It's a completely pointless book, which would be rejected as bogus by anyone over the age of ten.

CHOOSE YOUR ENEMIES CAREFULLY is slightly slicker - there's a fetishistic hint of sombre shaded menace and tight clothing about the cover, as befits a story based upon the *Shadowrun* RPG which fuses cyberpunk and traditional fantasy genres in what could be an explosive mixture. I've not seen the game, only reports of it, but it seems to have an interesting scenario. This book is the second part of a series, and has some good moments hidden in the background (I liked the Druid-dominated Britain, and the cyberjock elf) but the words on the page and the story those words tell don't live up to the intriguing premise of the gameworld itself.

I still haven't worked out why a shared-world anthology of superhero stories should have a flying penknife upon the cover unless there's to be introduced a character whose power is that he can transform himself into small useful instruments (if there isn't, perhaps there ought to be . . . Hello, Midnight Rose people . . . ?) Once you've got over that, there's a collection of good, witty stories reminiscent of the American 'Wild Cards' series but more sardonically downbeat, less melodramatic: *British* superheroes are kept on a monthly retainer by a government department and have powers which don't necessarily lend themselves to posturing in colourful costumes anyway: Liz Holliday's character can make people fall in love with each other, while David Langford's can teleport beer. Both writers produce cracking stories out of this unlikely scenario. Most of the stories, in fact, have a resonance outside the basic settings which makes them successful as something other than "gimmick"

stories: Colin Greenland's "Nothing Special" is a wry story about an Asian youth; Brian Stableford's "The Oedipus Effect" is about scientific theory, and Roz Kaveney's "A Lonely Impulse" opens with some neat lesbian-feminist parody with one of the characters ending up living the debate between paranormal power and ideology.

Most stories share this if not humorous then certainly oblique approach, with David V. Barrett's "The Rose Garden" offering a more lyrical counterpoint to the main theme. Occasionally, it goes slightly over the top: "Pitbull Brittain" by Jack Yeovil (Kim Newman) is a lovely parody of the *Bulldog Drummond* stories but there really ought to be a competition appended: to identify the number of in-jokes about fellow contributors to the *TEMPS* concept . . . !

TEMPS is an excellent anthology: full marks to ROC for this, at least.

WALKER OF WORLDS is a fantasy, part one of a series, and features a sword on the atmospheric cover (which, however, doesn't seem to illustrate any of the characters in the book) but is as different from *ECHOES OF THE FOURTH MAGIC* as chalk from cheese. To say it's a fantasy about characters from our world finding themselves in another, and trying to prevent the walls between worlds being breached, and the ensuing chaos, would be true. It wouldn't, however, highlight the magnificently quirky nature of the story, told partly from the viewpoint of the characters from *Lostwithal* - Jack, a walker, Squintik, a Mage - and partly from the view of twentieth-century Americans including Jere Lee, a bag lady, Herb, the chauffeur to a drug millionaire who has some very nasty skeletons in his cupboard (but is not, actually, the villain that this description suggests), Money Campbell, the millionaire's mistress, and Greebo, who we first meet cleaning car windows after having had his memory erased.

De Haven's staccato writing style sometimes grates, but underlies the imagistic revelation of his strange world where animals can suddenly be invested with human consciousness and a veritable bureaucracy of magic exists. Most fantasies set up the world and moral conflict in the first three chapters; by the end of this first volume you, like the characters, are still confused about how all this jigsaw fits together, and suspect that while Eugene Bowman, a sad, stupid, weak and guilty man, is not exactly the villain of the piece, his adversary (an investigative journalist) is not exactly the hero - yet. *WALKER OF WORLDS* offers welcome strangeness to the fantasy genre.

To sum up Roc: a fifty percent hit-rate, but by the standards of Penguin's previous output that's a huge increase in quality.

Gardner Dozios (ed.) - - *THE LEGEND BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION* (Legend, 1991, 672pp, £8.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

This is a best of, or sampler, "an excellent contemporary collection" it says on the cover. Gardner Dozios brought together twenty-six stories, beginning with Damon Knight's "The Country of the Kind" (1955), and ending with Bruce Sterling's "Dori Bangs" (1989). Broken down by decade the count is: fifties - 4 stories, sixties - 8, seventies - 4, eighties - 10. This weighing is partly intentional - "the 1970s and 1980s are the periods that have been the least extensively mined for anthologies to date, and so I decided to lean slightly in their direction to compensate". He also avoided frequently anthologised stories, although several in here were in his *BEST NEW SF 4* published last year, and only four stories from the 70s decade seems low compared with one per year from the second part of the fifties. What availability partly has to do with is how many stories were published, and the dearth of SF magazines in the seventies - SF short stories and publishing economics have a very close relationship.

Is this a good sampler of SF? What does it tell us about SF? Most people who knew the names would think that a collection that included Cordwainer Smith, Samuel R. Delany, Brian W. Aldiss, Gene Wolfe and William Gibson would be a good one, and I'm not going to disagree. What this anthology seems to lack is a definition of what science fiction is - all the stories here made an impression on Dozios, but was it because they were SF? Is it only SF that impresses him? For instance, Theodore

Sturgeon's 'The Other Celia', about something that swaps skins at night and works as a shop assistant by day but is otherwise totally boring, could just as easily be called horror as SF. Cordwainer Smith's 'Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons' is introduced as being by a man who was an expert on psychological warfare, but the story is about invaders being wiped out by psy-war hate rays, scientific nonsense. (SF may have nothing to do with scientific accuracy, though). In Howard Waldrop's 'The Ugly Chickens' a young researcher discovers that Dodos were bred until the 1920s on a chicken ranch (not a brothel) in Mississippi, kept by hicks too stupid to know what they had, or not to eat them for a final banquet before the depression. It's fiction about science, but is it science fiction?

On the other hand, perhaps I'd say that a story like Jack Vance's 'The Moon Moth' shows the value of SF perfectly, a thriller based on cultural relativism, about a human consul on an alien planet, and the problems a stranger encounters with new standards, but also how those standards are intrinsic to society. And there are more like that.

So, this anthology brings together stories from several strands of SF, but without making it clear that SF is multi-braided, and without any attempt to relate these many limbs to a single heart. A lot of people who read this, though, may not notice that.

John Clute, Lee Montgomerie and David Pringle (eds.) - - *INTERZONE: THE 5TH ANTHOLOGY* (NEL, 1991, 208pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

On the evidence of this anthology, the final frontier is no longer at the outer reaches of the galaxy but back on Earth. Writers, both long established and relative newcomers, seem fascinated by the possibilities of bio-engineering. In 'Piecework' by David Brin, a bizarre form of surrogate pregnancy has become a means of industrial production, while in Ian McDonald's 'Listen', what appears to be a plague threatening humanity's existence is revealed as a symbiosis between man and machine that will lead to a new stage in human evolution. Phillip Mann's 'An Old Fashioned Story' describes an attempt to repair a female "Syntho companion", and makes a telling comment on sexist attitudes. The atmospheric and compelling 'Mosquito' by Richard Calder features "living dolls", some highly valued, some regarded as cheap whores, and a sad but memorable protagonist. Sadness also pervades Ian R MacLeod's 'Well Loved', in which characters can swap bodies with one another. The reader can guess the outcome of this story, but still pities the central character.

In contrast, in 'Looking Forward to the Harvest', Cherry Wilder gives us a pastoral future and the ability to look forwards and backwards in time. Stories from Brian Aldiss and Ian Watson consider man's attitude to death and the East-West divide respectively, and these themes also occur, although treated rather differently, in 'Visiting the Dead'. This impressive debut from William King portrays a fully realised near-future in which a woman from the "Overtowns" visits a decaying society on earth - here we also meet the products of bio-engineering.

This is not a thematic anthology, but a tendency to be earth-bound is apparent in all fifteen stories which go to make up this book. The majority of these stories are of a high-calibre, all are readable, and the book is certainly well-worth purchasing. Dating as they do from 1989/90 (all but two previously published in *Interzone*), they are perhaps the products of their time. Maybe the final comment on the end of the 80s should be given to Nicholas Royle whose 'Sculptor's Hand' is not so much science fiction as anti-Tory wish-fulfilment - a reminder that SF is still the genre of subversion, even if it lacks the optimism to reach for the stars.



Stephen Jones & Ramsay Campbell (eds)--BEST NEW HORROR 2
(Robinson, 1991, 433pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace.)

This collection follows the format set by its predecessor, an introduction examining the year (1990) in horror and an endpiece, a necrology of "those writers, artists, performers and film-makers who made many important contributions to the genre of the fantastique during their lifetimes, and who passed away in 1990..."

In between, the editors present 28 of the best horror fiction of 1990 culled from collections and magazines.

It's always difficult to review the second volume of a collection, especially when the first one was so good and groundbreaking. But this collection isn't worse than the first one, but it is different. The stories are less straightforward, more off-the-wall than in the last volume. This reflects a general change in the field, the easy stuff, the gore and the straight stories have been written, the innovative writer has to go somewhere else.

Harlan Ellison, for example goes to New Orleans and a new twist on the ghost story.

"The woman in the audience was almost transparent in the bleed of light from the baby spots and the pinlights washing Chris as she worked." 'Jane Doe #112'

Thomas Ligotti looks back a bit towards H. P. Lovecraft to give us a new look at strange rituals in a small Mid-Western town.

"My interest in the town of Mirocaw was first aroused when I heard that an annual festival was held there which promised to include, to some extent, the participation of clowns among its other elements of pageantry." 'The Last Feast of Harlequin'

While this book is maybe not as much for the non-horror fan as New Horror 1, it is definitely worth acquiring for the dedicated and borderline fan.

Storm Constantine - - THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT (Orbit, 1991, 344pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

It's some time since I've felt too embarrassed by the cover of a book to read it in public, but that was the case with this one: a scantily clad woman with large-nipped breasts standing amidst some fleshy pink flowers shaped like vaginal labia, with prominent clitoris. Apart from its dubious value as an adolescent wank object, it's irrelevant to the story, which concerns power relations between the sexes rather than sex itself.

THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT is set on the planet Artemis, colonised by feminists and their male supporters escaping the dominant patriarchal culture elsewhere to found a goddess-worshipping agricultural matriarchy. The matriarchy has since become oppressive and most men reduced to slaves; and the ruler now has plans to separate the sexes altogether and herd men into concentration camps. Against her stands a charismatic male without whom a rebellion can't succeed, but who spends most of the book on the run. Events are told mainly from the viewpoint of a young farm girl he encounters in the first few chapters; she is taken to the city to serve at the ruler's court and naturally falls in with the insurrectionists. The rebel male, meanwhile, encounters the planet's ancient inhabitants, who transform him into an alien equipped with various superpowers; he eventually returns to slay the ruler.

The pace of this rather improbable narrative is hugely uneven. The action scenes are compressed, so that what ought to be climactic stages on the way to the denouement are over almost before they've begun -- in one instance the events happen offstage and are summarised afterwards -- while in an attempt to develop the characters inordinate wordage is lavished on their conversations, thoughts and feelings (but to no avail; they all sound identical). The most detailed descriptions

in the book are of interiors -- clothes, hair, furnishings -- while descriptions of the exteriors (farms, the marshes, the forests) are so perfunctory that one has great difficulty imagining what Artemis actually looks like. This only highlights its unlikely economics -- like too many SF writers who build worlds of their own, Constantine doesn't seem to grasp the level of economic and social organisation required to sustain an advanced urban civilisation, and the proposition that her wealthy sybaritic city of Silven Crescent (where no one seems to do any work) could be supported by the hunter-gatherer agriculture practised by the marsh farms is absurd.

As if that wasn't enough, we also have the "smeerp" problem: the notion that to make a place sound alien you invent new names for the flora and fauna. Felids, smooms, dank beasts, shemble-frack: a meaningless raft of them. It's as tedious now as it was forty years ago.

Storm Constantine - - ALEPH (Orbit, 1991, 314pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

A fantasy/sf novel, ALEPH is a sequel to THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT. On the planet Artemis, Corinna Troitgarden and her friends have fled the feminist tyranny of Silven City to the uninhabited north, where they have established the new town of Freespace. Strange events, of a routinely mystical nature, occur in the community, which, Freespacers suspect, are connected somehow with the Greylids - Artemis' semi-mythical indigenes.

Meanwhile, back in Silven, the regime is reluctantly undergoing a process of glasnost, even to the extent of allowing a prospector for an interplanetary tourist company to explore the planet's outback. He, too, begins to experience the aforementioned strange events.

I can't quite put my finger on what's wrong with this book - and, on past form, many thousands of readers won't think there's anything wrong with it - but I found it almost unreadable. The characters, though well-enough drawn, bored my socks off; they all seem rather perfectly defined, with no rough or overlapping edges. The story is fairly interesting, if not exactly of mind-boggling novelty, but takes forever for anything to happen, and when it does it's exactly what (and how) you thought it would be.

The whole book seems to take place in slow-motion, so that even when the action is actually going on, there is no quickening of the blood; and while the plot contains the requisite amount of conflict, it seems to be only on the surface, like a duck swimming upside-down.

Storm Constantine - - HERMETECH (Headline, 1991, 502pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Hermitech, as you probably know, is the science of organic energy potential. Ari Famber is the product of a secret, probably illegal, genetic experiment conducted by her long dead and revered father, Ewan. Ewan's theory was that sexual energy can forge a link with the fundamental energies of reality: in the height of sexual stimulation, Ari will be able to step outside the bounds of space and time. The book opens as Ari reaches the onset of puberty in a state of more than usual sexual disorientation. The plot concerns Ari's leaving of her childhood home in the sticks, journeying through the ecologically ravaged deserts to the domed city of Arcady where she has to deal with the tremendous power she has access to.

The strengths of HERMETECH lie in its compelling narrative, fascinating background, setting and colourful characters. I am always wary of near-future horror stories, given media and commercial exploitation of 'green' issues, but Constantine's tackling of the issues as a background to her novel is wholly convincing. Her political factions include those who seek to tackle the ecological death of the planet by the use of technology, and those who believe humanity should leave the planet altogether so that Gaia can heal herself. Her desserts are reminiscent of North America at its most arid: the 'jellycrusts' who inhabit it - so called because of the

goo they wear to protect their skin from UV - are like Native Americans. The domed city of Arcady, with its high class brothels, seedy tattooists, mysterious underground passages, is peopled by prostitutes and pimps, ruthless assassins and unethical surgeons - it makes for entertaining reading.

The characters are varied and engaging. Ari's mother is a convincing broken-down lush. Ewan Famber is the genius scientist who sees his daughter as a scientific experiment, taking time to come to terms with her and others. Zambia Crevoceur is a fascinating portrait of a prostitute who finds dignity and self esteem after a most unusual 'sex change' operation. Constantine does a fine job of humanising her characters, giving depth and feeling to the homosexual relationship of Cabochan and Jordan. She brings the almost Heinleinian figure of Emanuel Hiram

Lazar IV - self-made, fantastically rich and powerful owner of an underground farm, who's basically a macho sexist boor of a man - into human perspective, without in any way destroying the attractions of the rural underground world he has created.

For me, HERMETECH is successful because of the richness and variety of its characters and the accuracy with which Constantine explores their motivations. Impressive, too, is the convincing portrait of varied settings - Ari's rural home, the parched and polluted deserts, the underground farm, the teeming city. Its blend of Hard science fiction and mysticism, and the skill with which Constantine makes a human story out of what lesser writers would turn into a power fantasy, makes for entertaining and engrossing reading.

R E V I E W S

James Blish - - AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE
(Legend, 1991, 730pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Science defines itself against other systems of thought. Science fiction cannot avoid, and is often stimulated by, the contrast with religion - and I suspect the reverse may also be true.

Blish found his title in T. S. Eliot's 'Gerontion' and applied it to a group of his own books which, though different from one another, collectively consider the spiritual dilemmas posed by the human quest for knowledge. "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" Now Legend has brought out all four together in a single, well-designed and inexpensive volume, and the books gain enormously from each other's company.

In DOCTOR MIRABILIS, a fine historical novel, the scientific idea takes shape in Roger Bacon, 13th century scholar: reading, lecturing, experimenting, travelling, always compulsively writing: trapped by church politics, imprisoned as a heretic for thirteen years: released and returning, too frail, too late, to his long-planned magnum opus.

Theron Ware, in the two linked novels BLACK EASTER and THE DAY AFTER JUDGEMENT, is a 20th century black magician who has risked his eternal soul for knowledge - of, among other things, quasars. A commission from an American arms magnate precipitates Armageddon, and Dante's City of Dis appears in Death Valley. Despite some unevenness there is sharp humour and a virtuosic use of precise science fiction language to describe magical and theological concepts.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE is "about a man, not a body of doctrine", but Father Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez is both a 21st century biologist and a Jesuit priest. One of a team investigating the planet Lithia, he comes up against an agonising spiritual dilemma, allowing Blish full scope for a humane exploration of the religious and scientific modes of perception. The subtle glimpses of evil in action show how deeply Blish understood the religious sensibility. Even if, like so many of us, a declared "agnostic with no position in these matters", he could not make a full commitment.

A splendid volume, therefore, and all praise to Legend - except for the proof-reading. The content of pages 520/521 should be reversed: similarly with pages 553/554, and 577/578. Roger Bacon's copyists did worse, of course, but Legend were desolate when I pointed it out.

David Brin - - EARTH (Futura, 1990, 751pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Described by the author as "a novel", this book is a patchwork of intercut long and short stories and quasi-factual reportage, describing life in, on, and around our planet and the significant factors affecting that life, set fifty years in the future from "now". As an exercise

in skewed extrapolation it is fascinating, as a multilevel fictional documentary of a planetary culture it is intriguing. As a novel it falls apart.

The book opens shortly after physicist Alex Lustig has created a small black hole and lost it somewhere in the Earth's mantle. He is convinced the black hole will decay harmlessly, others fear it will grow and consume the Earth. Monitoring equipment is rapidly developed and deployed -- to discover that Alex's hole is indeed decaying, but that there's another, much bigger black hole down there. (A third black hole turns up in another plot strand.) Throw in some nasty superpowerful aliens, the invention of the gravity laser, a devastated set of planetary ecosystems, rapid advances in IT and artificial intelligence, the transfer of a human mind to a support medium nobody has thought of before -- and you end up witnessing the birth of the Goddess Gaia. Brin has deployed FAR to many special effects to allow me to retain any belief in EARTH as a realistic depiction of a near-future world. But many of Brin's ideas and speculations are fascinating, his interpolated chunks of scientific description are well written, informative and entertaining, the vignette stories are captivating, and I was vastly entertained despite my annoyance.

Orson Scott Card - -THE FOLK OF THE FRINGE (Legend, 1991, 301pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This book comprises five loosely connected stories of varying lengths concerning America's future when society has collapsed under the weight of war, when civilisation lives on among the people whose bonds of faith are still strong. The predominant faith is Mormon; there is a 26-page author's note at the end, followed by a 6-page article by Michael Collings, the former affording an interesting insight into the genesis of these stories.

Michael Ashley has commented elsewhere (AUGURIES #14, Letters) that Card has in some ways taken on the mantle from Simak of pastoral SF writer. Judging from this collection, it could be true: 'West' concerns a scavenging mercenary who takes up with some Mormon trekkers who are heading for the New Land; he helps and guides them and in the inevitable process is taken into their religion; he is reborn, in fact. 'Salvage' is the shortest piece and involves a secret dive to the sunken Mormon temple to find lost gold; but of course the youths involved discover friendship - and experience that lack, too. 'The fringe' is almost an extrapolation into the future for Stephen Hawking, for a professor similarly incapacitated decides to risk his life to reveal graft in the community; he is dumped without his so-necessary computerised chair and left to die. 'Pageant Wagon' teams up a salvage rider (rides out into the desert to salvage old technology) with a wagon of itinerant players, and reveals the magic and mystery of travelling theatre, the wonder and love that can - if for a moment - be generated by these people. Inevitably, conflict and passion arise between the family and the strict Mormon communities they visit. 'America' is different; it is about an Indian woman who dreamed things that would come

about, including the rebirth of Quetzalcoatl, and a Mormon boy having difficulty coping with natural sexual desires. She and he are the future, and the Indians wish to reclaim their spirits, through the land.

Throughout, even when characters commit unpleasant acts - and Card states he finds it uncomfortable writing about sex - the tenor and "feel" of the book is pastoral, tame, and strangely transcendent. It is a heartening, uplifting change from the action-slam-bang space operas and survivalist crud. Certainly worth a look.

Clifford D. Simak - - **IMMIGRANT AND OTHER STORIES**
(Mandarin, 1991, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

IMMIGRANT... is the latest entry in Francis Lyall's multi-volume *homage* to the narrative skills of Clifford D. Simak (1904 - 88). Following: BROTHER... (1986), THE MARATHON PHOTOGRAPH (1987), OFF-PLANET (1988), and THE AUTUMN LAND... (1990). Five middling to good stories ('Green Thumb', 'Small Deer', 'The Ghost of a Model T', 'Byte Your Tongue!', 'I Am Crying All Inside') are bracketed by two unarguable classics: 'Neighbour' (*Astounding*, June 1954) and 'Immigrant' (*Astounding*, March 1954).

CDS was the unofficial Poet Laureate of pastoral sf (how's that for a theme anthology?) and 'Neighbour' may well be the best short story ever set in down-home Simak County, Wisconsin. It concerns 'Reginald Heath', an altruistic sodbuster-from-the-stars who - by degrees - turns his adoptive Coon Valley into a paradisaical land beyond the map. Thinks: The EC Common Agricultural Policy. You don't suppose...?

The oft-reprinted title story is about planet Kimon: "... a galactic El Dorado, a never-never land, the country at the rainbow's foot. There were few (*Earthlings*) who did not dream of going there, and there were many who aspired, but those who were chosen were a very small percentage of those who tried to make the grade and failed" (p. 132). Selden Bishop passes the gruelling entrance exam for gainful employment on Kimon, and he goes there, eventually finding out why *no* Terran immigrant has ever returned to Earth.

Simak's plain style was an "unvarnished medium to convey ideas" (as William Hazlitt termed this kind of "familiar" prose), and 'Immigrant' must be included among his most trenchant think-pieces. It is also a well-wrought tale; once effectively dramatised on ITV's sf anthology series *Out of This World* (1962).

Francis Lyall's six-and-a-bit page Introduction covers much of the same ground as in his previous overtures - almost literally. I, for one, have read enough about Grant County, Patch Grove, Millville Township, Glen Haven, Willow Bend, etc., etc. But he atones for this bucolic overkill by providing compact summaries that describe each story without *giving away* the PLOTS.

William Gibson and Bruce Sterling - - **THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE**
(VGSF, 1991, 38399, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

The year: 1855. The place: England, but an England hurled into technological revolution by the computational Engines of Charles Babbage and the political revolution headed by Byron and his Industrial Radicals. Now the Rad Lords - savants who have earned their titles by merit - rule the nation, whilst everywhere there is the incessant clacking of the engines.

This is the background to THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE, a substantial, ambitious alternate history. The first section, 'The Angel of Goliad', appeared in the October 1990 INTERZONE; I remarked in my review that the authors had "laboured hard to produce a Victorian flavour, with lots of period slang... [but] the prose is altogether too self-conscious for its own good." These comments are valid for the book as a whole, although I must say that on reflection Gibson and Sterling have done a remarkable job in creating their unique London - the language and setting feel absolutely right (though I've a few linguistic quibbles with the Americans - the word

'soccer', for instance, was not coined until much later). But one does get the impression that the authors have put so much effort into establishing the verisimilitude of their creation that they lost track of it as a novel. The novel's viewpoint shifts from Sybil Gerard, 'fallen woman', to Edward Mallory, savant, to Laurence Oliphant, secret policeman; and though they have major roles to play, there's too much happening off-stage for comfort, whilst links between these characters and minor players from other sections are sometimes too forced. The book concludes with the birth of a favourite sf-nal fear but in the end there are perhaps too many fascinating ideas and too much detail, too little coherency and too many convoluted plots.

A valiant failure.

Kit Reed - - **WRITER'S WORKSHOP: REVISION** (Robinson Publishing, 1991, 170pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

Why is it publishers think all prospective writers are rich? Most reference/how-to/guide books for budding authors tend to be expensive. Granted, non-fiction has a smaller audience so must cover costs per unit by higher price, but . . . really?

Reed has had 11 novels published and teaches student writers at Wesleyan University, Connecticut. Like most How-to books for writers, this talks a lot of common sense; it covers the ground any sensible practitioner should already be covering. Truth to tell, a writer's immortal prose is hardly ever that and can invariably be improved. Amazingly, a lot of off-the-top-of-head writing does get published, but it shouldn't!

Chapter 1 enshrines what I've just written: "Nothing you write is carved in stone". Other chapter headings typically outline what they're about. "How revision works for you", "How to find out whether you're finished when you think you're finished", "Building your story", "Reading for revision: character, detail", etc. It covers a lot of ground, from viewpoint of the characters to showing vs. telling, story and structure.

Even writers who have sold could benefit from this book which states the obvious; because it's often the obvious that we tend to forget, or ignore . . . Well worth a look - if you can afford it!

James Herbert - - **CREED**
(NEL, 1991, 364pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

The eponymous hero, Joseph Creed, is a paparazzo working for a tabloid newspaper of the Daily Sleazebag variety. When he focusses his attention, as well as his Nikon, on a mysterious figure apparently wanking over the grave of a Hollywood actress he's soon up to his neck in trouble. A group of powerful devil worshippers want the photographs and kidnap Creed's son to get them. Our man sniffs a chance of redemption and the distinctive whiff of a scoop, and sets out to play the hero. Being a devout coward, this proves difficult.

The tone is intended to be light, so it would be churlish to complain that the book doesn't seem to amount to anything, yet churl I will since churlosity is my best feature. Comedy chillers often have the habit of being neither funny nor scary, and this applies to CREED. The author's talent for gory horror is held in check at the expense of the lacklustre plot which would surely have benefitted from a few disembowelments. The fact is that Herbert just does not write very good characters, particularly women, and when he tries to get away from the bloody stuff that he used to write he produces unconvincing work.

There are some nice touches here. The rather feeble Fallen Angels, their powers waning, take their respite in an old folks rest home. The mob of unruly fellow photographers who actually act as the cavalry and save Creed by flashing away at the demonic bad guys. Some of Creed's hallucinogenic battles are also good fun. Herbert's imagination shows through in enough places to take this straight onto the bestseller list. It just is not very good.

Dan Simmons - - PHASES OF GRAVITY
(Headline, 1991, 334pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

This novel is clearly inspired by the real-life problems of astronauts who have walked on the moon: what could they do afterwards that would ever match or surpass that experience? Several Apollo astronauts have subsequently suffered various psychological problems (divorce, alcoholism, religious evangelism); others have become successful congressmen or aerospace consultants. The protagonist of PHASES OF GRAVITY, Richard Baedecker, is one of the successful ones, but nevertheless feels something lacking in his life; and with such an obviously symbolic surname it's no surprise to find the plot taken up with his quest for satisfaction and/or transcendence.

Indeed, the novel is full of the obviously symbolic; one event or character is invariably counterposed with another, intended to point towards the larger resolution. One subplot, for example, concerns Baedecker's son, who's skipped off to a Rajneesh-type ashram to experience his moment of epiphany. You know immediately that Baedecker will ultimately find his own, but this is delayed by his spending part of the story climbing a mountain in Colorado with a former astronaut colleague who now runs a religious ministry: a potential epiphany, the falseness of which is exposed by the real, final revelation delivered courtesy of an American Indian sitting outside a sweat lodge on another mountain in South Dakota. And of course the American Indians were once as much emblematic of the frontier as the Moon is now...

In other words, the plot is too obviously manipulated. And it has the additional drawback that an early section intended to demonstrate the ordinariness of Baedecker's upbringing - and thus the strangeness of his Moonwalk - fails because, for a British audience, it has no cultural resonance: both are as alien as each other. Thus we never really experience anything the character does later; and so the manipulation is even more obvious.

Nevertheless, I wouldn't suggest that this is a bad book: the prose isn't wonderful but is certainly workmanlike, there are several good jokes along the way, and Simmons tells the story with a good deal of vigour. (Although the blurb is dreadful.) But it's not particularly essential.

Colin Wilson - - THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF THE SUPERNATURAL
(Robinson Publishing, 1991, 567pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Adapted from Wilson's other books on occult matters, this is basically a source-book of "cases" described in a sometimes slapdash manner which makes it difficult to understand just what has happened. The sketchiness of references and footnotes doesn't help. Wilson works on the basis that even if half of what he describes may be fakery, then that leaves 50% which might be true. Given the incidence of mental instability, sexual frustration, attention-seeking and downright fraud in the cases he cites, it's possible to take quite another view.

Wilson discusses poltergeists, spiritualism, witchcraft, vampires, UFOs, crop circles, etc. and as a compendium of occult manifestations, the book is certainly a readable state of current concern, though it is not a substitute for any of the many serious or in depth examinations of individual cases or fields. Perhaps the most amusing summary is that of the "Cottingley fairies", where we are asked to believe that the fairies were real; it was just that the photographs of them were fakes...

Behind this is Wilson's philosophy of the confining nature of everyday consciousness and the self-reinforcing nature of a kind of optimism. Strangely enough, the obvious conclusion (I'm not saying that it's correct, merely that it's obvious from Wilson's apparent standpoint), that all the phenomena he examines are based solely upon humanity's desire to overcome the mundane state of consciousness, is not really discussed.

Overlooking the fact that pp 157 and 161 of my copy were transposed, this is worth the money for the breadth of its coverage, but don't buy it for its depth.

William Hope Hodgson - - THE BOATS OF THE 'GLEN CARRIG'
(Grafton, 1991 (originally 1907), 188pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

William Hope Hodgson is better known for THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND, but this novel, his first, is set at sea. Hodgson was a sailor for eight years and here he draws on the experience, and on sailors' tales. The story is an account of the ordeals of the survivors of the good ship "Glen Carrig".

"As told by John Winterstraw, Gent., to his son James Winterstraw, in the year 1757, and by him committed very properly and legibly to manuscript."

The crew and Winterstraw face many hazards in their struggle in the uncharted seas where their ship went down. The book never flags for action, but the modern reader might find the style a bit hard going, it was written in 1907 after all!

"Then George cried out, and ran round upon my side of the bo'sun, and I saw that one of the great cabbagelike things pursued him upon its stem, even as an evil serpent; and very dreadful it was, for it had become blood red in colour; but I smote it with the sword, which I had taken from the lad, and it fell to the ground."

Really this book is a curiosity, worth a read for those out-of-the-frying-pan-and-into-the-fire fans out there, but offering no real sophistication for anyone else.

Marion Zimmer Bradley - - THE HEIRS OF HAMMERFELL
(Legend, 1991, 300pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Hammerfell Castle is razed, and the Duke of Hammerfell slain, by Lord Storn. This is seemingly the culmination of an ages-old feud. However, Alastair and Conn, the twin sons of the Duke of Hammerfell, survive. Separated during the attack on the castle, one escapes to the city with his mother, one goes into hiding in the mountains with the family retainer. They meet and decide to act together to reclaim their inheritance by moving against the House of Storn.

This is a Darkover novel, which accounts for the fantasy elements of telepathy and psionic powers. If these aspects of the story were missing, what you'd have would be a Historical romance set in the Highlands. Worse, you'd have a bad historical romance and this is what THE HEIRS OF HAMMER essentially is. Much of the dialogue is stilted. There is some very odd sequencing of events and one incident - where Alastair meets a 'little man' - is completely pointless. The characters have no constant motivation and interact in a fashion which stretches the reader's credulity. The denouement of the novel can be predicted as soon as Alastair meets Lenisa, halfway through the story - but I'd never have guessed that the ending could be that schmaltzy.

Unless you are a Marion Zimmer Bradley devotee, or like bad romances, avoid this book.

Octavia Butler - - CLAY'S ARK (VGSF, 1991, 201pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

CLAY'S ARK is the third in the PATTERNMASTER series, following WILD SEED and MIND OF MY MIND. The crew of Clay's Ark returns from Promina Centauri carrying a deadly virus: those infected either die or are transformed into something other than human. The alien organism gives its victims incredible strength, augmented senses, and an uncontrollable urge to spread the disease. The pregnancies resulting from their almost animal matings give rise to inhuman children.

There are two interwoven story lines, 'The Past' and 'The Present'. In the past Eli, sole survivor when Clay's Ark is destroyed, chances on an isolated community: he decides to limit the spread of the disease by creating an enclave peopled by transformed infectees and their

offspring. In the present a doctor and his twin daughters are kidnapped by the community. By this plot device character and motivation is gradually revealed. As the victims of the disease begin to show symptoms they become at once driven by animal passions - a taste for raw meat, sexual urges unbound by family relationships - and horrified by what they have become. They are driven by the urge to infect others and propagate an alien race. Eli, whilst unable to prevent these desires nobly seeks to limit them, and hang on to the last vestiges of their humanity, by keeping the community isolated and luring only the occasional outsider to satisfy their alien lusts. The conflicts are explored convincingly and the tense and compelling narrative makes it well worth reading.

Steven Brust - - **TALTOS AND THE PATHS OF THE DEAD** (Pan Books, 1991, 181pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

I started reading this book with very low expectations. Quite understandable, really: it has a duff title, an uninspiring cover and comes complete with a blurb that makes you want to do something more interesting instead, like watch the Test Card.

I have to admit that I finished the book pleasantly surprised. I had been entertained. And what is remarkable is that Brust has achieved this despite a formulaic plot and some stock fantasy characters. (The plot, for what it's worth, has Taltos - human assassin and crook - accompany a Drageeren sorcerer on a quest to confront the Lords of Judgment. This story is interspersed with Taltos's earlier history). Also, this reader was frustrated by a lack of ambition on the part of the author. For instance, the relationship between Taltos and Malloran, the sorcerer, cried out for more substantial treatment. Yet still it is an entertaining work, largely due to Brust's unaffected style, his hero's affable voice and the deliberately fractured structure of the narrative which helps sustain the reader's interest.

An easy, undemanding read with sufficient evidence to suggest that - with more confidence and better material - Steven Brust will be a writer to look out for.

Jack Vance - - **LYONESSE I : SULDRUN'S GARDEN**
(Grafton, 1991, 436pp, £4.99)

- **LYONESSE II : THE GREEN PEARL**
(Grafton, 1991, 407pp, £4.99)

- **LYONESSE III: MADOU**
(Grafton, 1991, 544pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by K. V. Bailey)

Vance aficionados (and surely all fantasy fans) must welcome, along with this edition of **MADOU**, the reprinting of its two predecessors, all three volumes bearing well-imagined landscape cover paintings by Mick Van Houten.

Lyonesse occupies Hybras - the legendary Hy-Brasil - here supposedly islanded in Biscay and the Western Approaches. Although the period is the near-Arthurian Dark Ages, Lyonesse's material trappings, its technology, its military hardware, are basically Mallory-Medieval; but then there are palaces, with halls where the pavane is danced, lit by crystal chandeliers, and boudoirs furnished with Byzantine mirrors and majolica vases. Phoenicians and Romans have touched these Elder Isles; the Celts are there; the city of Ys proclaims a heritage more ancient still. Latin psalms are intoned and a cathedral is built, while Druids crowning King Aillas invoke Cronus, Lug and Apollo.

Grasp of this eclectic and fantastic historical setting is helped by an under-detailed map, an over-detailed genealogy, glossaries and footnotes. The a-historical, magical, elements are similarly clarified, but also enlarged on through narrative passages, as when the magician Shimrod distinguishes faery from "sandestrin" magic. These glosses are highly functional in view of the perpetual interface between magical and 'political' spheres of action. The wizards, constrained from decisive intervention, nevertheless bias their magic in 'political' directions. The narrative cores of each volume are picaresque journeys: in **SOLTRUN'S GARDEN** that

of Aillas to find his son, Dhrun; in **THE GREEN PEARL** that of Aillas and Tatzel, the Ska termagant - and later that of his future bride, Glyneith, through the surreal Earth-synchronous planet Tanjecterly. In **MADOU** the heroine's travels in search of her true father are combined with her stable-boy squire's improbable Grail quest.

The overall 'political/historical' scenario is Aillas's pacification of the Elder Isles. Crisis points occur, usually when the magical and the mundane interact. One such point is the siege of the stronghold of a witch's emanation, the homosexual Duke Carfilbiot; another is the submergence of Ys as a result of supra-terrestrial combat between 'good' wizards and an evil materialising from the dimension of Xabiste. Within the three-volume sequence are episodes and locales where readers may enjoyably linger (and Vance's descriptive virtuosity is a delight): the traffickings at Goblin Fair; the pastoral retreat of Sarris; the comedies and cruelties of courtly intrigue (Vance being adept at effecting transitions between humour, genial or sardonic, and sudden horror). **MADOU** closes with an almost Shakespearian feast of concord, families and lovers united, evil annihilated. That Vance contrives this while avoiding bathos and cliché is indicative of his skill in stamping the extravagances of fantasy with his own distinctive baroque originality, wit and panache.

Bob Shaw - - **ORBITSVILLE**
(Orbit, 1991, 219pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

The search for habitable planets for colonisation by the teeming population of Earth acquires a new intensity for Vance Garamond, captain of a Starflight exploratory spaceship. Whilst in Garamond's charge, the son of Elizabeth Lindstrom, President of the Starflight organisation, had suffered a fatal accident, and Garamond knows that the psychopathic President will seek not only his death in retribution, but also the deaths of his wife and child. While searching for a refuge for his family, Garamond discovers not a planet, but "Orbitsville", an immense Dyson sphere created by unknown beings of advanced technology. He hopes that his subsequent fame will protect him from Elizabeth's wrath, but the President's hatred is unabated.

ORBITSVILLE is traditional science fiction, with space travel and the discovery of new worlds. It is also a terrific read, fast-moving, with a plot full of tension and fully rounded characters. Garamond may be a Spaceship Captain, but he has his faults - he is not a traditional Hero. The author obviously takes a delight in the creation of convincing descriptions of the requisites of space-travel, and the effects of his creations on his characters are equally convincing. The sheer size of Orbitsville - its surface area is five billion times that of Earth - has unexpected effects on the folk who colonise it; soon after their arrival, Garamond senses a subtle change in his crew's attitude to his authority. Orbitsville may be the answer to Earth's over-population, but it may not be the paradise it seems...

David Hartwell (Ed.) -
- **THE DARK DESCENT: THE COLOUR OF EVIL**
(Grafton, 1991, 491pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

Hartwell's intentions for a definitive anthology charting the evolution of horror fiction in the short form are severely curtailed by the British publication of his mammoth collection in instalments, this being the first. The editor's scholarly introduction divides horror fiction into three strands: 1) moral allegorical, 2) psychological metaphor, 3) fantastic. Although I immediately see problems with these categories, Hartwell's analysis and reference to literary critics, past and present, is cogently argued. I presume this book represents the first section of the original anthology and therefore concentrates on the moral allegorical strand - my major clue being the use of the

word 'irony' in the introduction to almost every story.

And so to the stories themselves. You won't often find Nathaniel Hawthorne rubbing shoulders with Stephen King, and the range of authors presented here is the book's selling point. Unfortunately, the range of stories is limited by the need to comply with the editor's thesis - they all have to occupy the same stream! Very few monsters running amok through these pages.

The main problem for me is the familiarity of much of the material. Hands up who hasn't read Lovecraft's 'The Call of Cthulhu', or 'Yours Truly Jack the Ripper' by Robert Bloch. If you want to read Michael Shea's stunning 'The Autopsy' then seek out his essential collection POLYPHENUS. Most of the fiction is of a substantially high quality, with names such as M. R. James, Shirley Jackson and Robert Aickman all represented by excellent stories. But as a primer it fails to offer enough variety, and as a treasury of classics it simply is not substantial enough.

Gene Wolfe - - SOLDIER OF ARETE (NEL, 1991, 342pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

In the absence of a true race memory, history is all we have to give us cultural continuity. SOLDIER OF ARETE takes this idea one stage further: the story told by Latro in his scrolls serves not only as cultural history, but as a daily reminder of what has happened to him, for Latro has no memory.

This idea has been used before (in a vastly different setting, James Gunn used it in CRISIS, for example), but here it strikes me as a huge conceit. If who we are is the sum of who we have been, then Latro is not just a character in a book, but a man who can only amount to anything as long as he carries the book around with him.

I find the plotting of the novel sometimes quite tedious and - not being familiar with the first of the "Soldier" books (SOLDIER OF THE MIST) - occasionally difficult to follow. But then again, if our hero doesn't remember all the back story, why should the reader have to? What made me persevere with it, though, is the book's clarity when the expository lump is out of the way. How Hegesistratus lost his leg, the execution of Artayctes, even the simple depiction of a market scene all stick with me when the book is done with.

Given my general dislike of legends, myths and histories, SOLDIER OF ARETE did well to entertain me. It doesn't seem to live up to that central conceit, though, which I find disappointing. Readers of SOLDIER OF THE MIST may find it more compelling.

Jonathan Wylie - - DREAM-WEAVER (Corgi, 1991, 654pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Jonathan Wylie's previous books - the *SERVANTS OF ARK* and *UNBALANCED EARTH* trilogies - were written when "Wylie" was an editorial team at Transworld books. They were competent genre-fantasies, readable books for the fan which offered a few original variations for the jaded but which would probably make few converts. Nevertheless, they did well enough for Mark and Julia Smith to take Jonathan Wylie on the road as a full-time proposition.

DREAM-WEAVER is a large and occasionally shapeless novel (not part of a trilogy) which stands as fairy-tale fantasy *par excellence*: a beautiful heroine betrothed against her will, to the wicked son of a powerful Baron; a handsome young King; a pair of comic alchemists and an even more comic "Nurse" who flusters around like a wet hen and - guess what! - utters malapropisms when confused; doshings of magic; a prophecy, a demon-king, and a land buried beneath a rain of salt. Like rich seasoning in a fairly bog-standard pudding comes the custom of "capturing the People's Queen" by which Rebecca engineers her salvation from her nasty fiancé and the long section by which the sharp-witted Galen becomes an "archaeologist" searching for remnants of the lost city

beneath the salt. Potentially quite fascinating - to the point at which it turns several aspects of genre fantasy quite inside out - is the nature of the prophecy in which the actions of Rebecca and her allies are foreshadowed. Without revealing what is a brilliantly simple and obvious idea presented for the first time that I can recall, all I can say is that its implications are sadly overlooked.

DREAM-WEAVER reads as if written by an experienced editorial team who know their market inside out - and this is the case. However, "Wylie's" ambitions seem to lie solely within this market and there's little to make the novel memorable outside it. Dare I say that with more editorial cutting and highlighting, it could have stood out in much bolder colours.

James Morrow - - THE WINE OF VIOLENCE (Legend, 1991, 301pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

Four astronauts crash on a lost planet and immediately intervene in the non-struggle between the savage Neurovores and the peace-loving Quetzalians. Inevitably, this meddling creates its own form of chaos in the ordered society of the Quetzalians. This bald plot summary doesn't really tell you anything about James Morrow's novel. Inside the pulp plot is a serious core that examines the constraints of complete pacifism and the necessities of violence.

"It has something to do with why Burne Newman must kill your Neurovore for you, and why that man Zamanta couldn't defend his children"

Morrow peppers his narrative with the trappings of extra-planetary activity, (the yeastgun, the proximascope) the jargon that suggests different cultures and alien planets. His characters walk these landscapes easily and the overall feel that this gives to the novel makes suspension of disbelief a simple step in the reading process. And this suspension of disbelief becomes necessary as the plot unfolds and the culture and technologies that Morrow has created to frame his ideas become more fantastic.

As the book unfolds and we follow Francis Lostwax and Burne Newman through the new world of Quetzalia to the end of their quest, we are given a lot to think about, but it's done so smoothly (like the willing suspension of disbelief) that we don't notice and in the end the ideas are left with us.

Christopher Stasheff - - THE VARLOCK'S NIGHT OUT (Pan, 1991, 576pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Third omnibus edition of Chris Stasheff's 'Varlock' series, continuing on from *WARLOCK: TO THE MAGIC BORN* and *THE WARLOCK ENLARGED*. The series is set on the medieval world of Gramarye, cut off from the rest of the human universe for centuries until Rod Gallowglass is sent there, to discover that the inhabitants have developed a large number of esper abilities (which they, naturally, term as 'magic').

By this third volume, Gallowglass has married a pretty witch and had four talented children. In the first story, 'The Varlock Wandering', Gallowglass and his wife are captured by agents trying to disrupt the seeds of democracy spread by him, and they end up on a hectic chase through time and three worlds, before getting back to Gramarye. The account of what happened while they were gone is told in 'The Varlock Is Missing', in which the Gallowglass children foil a plot to subvert the kingdom using religion.

The Varlock stories are marked by their humour and characters, and their strange mix of sf and fantasy elements. They are marred by occasional lapses into saccharine sentimentality, and by the spoken language of Gramarye, which is mostly rendered as being sprinkled with Shakespearean words, all thees and thous, and doth this and doth that, etc., which can get a bit irritating at times. If you can filter out such nuisances then it's a good, entertaining, if unenlightening, read, almost perfect for hot summer nights.

Don Herron (Ed.) - - **REIGN OF FEAR - THE FICTION AND
FILM OF STEPHEN KING, 1982 - 1989**

(Pan, 1991, 254pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

Stephen King's biggest problem today could well be sloppy editors, so it shouldn't come as too great a surprise that critical works on the man suffer from the same flaw. For a start, there's no mention of the fact that this book is a follow-up to an Underwood & Miller volume, though this may well stem from the fact that the years supposedly covered bear only a rough correlation to the contents.

First of all, we have an excerpt from an interview that seems to have been included solely to set King up for the points that Herron raises later. Then we have a foreword from Denis Etchison, written from the my-buddy-Stevie angle. Then three gushing introductions (Whoopie Goldberg's is merely a reprint of a 'review' of IT, which is nothing more than a naive lot synopsis).

There's an article on King's sf, which is about as mediocre as its subject, an article on the use of (mostly pharmaceutical) drugs in King's fiction that turns into a train-spotting exercise. There's even a chapter on King's ubiquitous blurbs.

One of the few worthwhile pieces is an overview of Eighties horror from Thomas M. Disch. This is followed by Guy N. Smith writing about THE SHINING with his usual flair and insight.

Surprisingly, Herron's summation is one of the highlights. He perceived that King, at the start of the decade, was on the brink of greatness. In choosing to churn out blockbusters, King threw away this opportunity. Unfortunately, Herron's disillusionment shows in more ways than one.

Robert Asprin - - **PHULE'S COMPANY**

(Legend, 1991, 268pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

From the author of the wacky million-selling MYTH series (it says here), comes this hilarious tale of military science fiction. Wrong! Nice cover by Fangorn, shame about the book.

The plot concerns Willard Phule, whose career gets off to a bad start when he is court-martialled for strafing the ceremonial signing of a peace treaty. Unfortunately for the Legion, Phule is a member of one of the richest families in the galaxy, so he is sent to Haskin's Planet and promoted to captain. There he finds he has been given command of a company consisting of the dregs of the Legion's most inept troopers. Phule sets about building his outfit into the kind of oddball but efficient outfit ready for the flock of inevitable sequels. Send your wacky punning titles to Mr Asprin and the resulting book will appear on your local bookshelves shortly. (Phule's Gold? Phule's Paradise?)

I like a laugh as much as the next man, unless it happens to be Robert Asprin, who obviously thinks he's discovered a new vein of humour to mine. This stuff has been done to death. This book is so devoid of humour one wonders if the author actually intended it as (choke) a serious drama. After all, the press release tells us that Asprin's books are serious in their quest to explore human emotion!

If you imagine POLICE ACADEMY on another planet, and without the jokes, you've got it. And you're welcome to it.

Isaac Asimov - - **NIGHTFALL AND OTHER STORIES** (Grafton, 1991, 445pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

These twenty stories, originally published between 1941 and 1967, were previously issued by Grafton in two volumes in 1971. This new edition, according to the cover, "is issued to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the

title story, universally acclaimed as the best sf story ever written". That blurb can only, surely, have been approved by an editor unfamiliar with the fractious ways of sf fans, and who has never read Kornbluth's 'The Little Black Bag'.

Asimov is one of science fiction's nursery slopes; countless fans entered (and still enter?) the genre through the simply told, scientifically-anchored work of Doctor Isaac and his contemporaries - but I wonder how many continue reading him past their teens, having discovered more literary and adventurous authors? It would be ridiculous to say of such a famous figure that he needs rediscovering, but this excellent value book is a useful reminder that, despite his cardboard characters, irritating smugness, and complete inability to create an alien or futuristic atmosphere, Asimov can set down a straightforward what-if yarn better than almost anyone. Indeed, his blunt, let's-get-on-with-it storytelling is quite refreshing to return to, when so many modern writers seem capable of creating nothing but atmosphere.

The author has supplied short prefaces to each story, which are much more interesting than you might expect. The introduction to 'Hostess' tells how Asimov, dictating an argument between the married protagonists, became so emotionally involved as to render the tape incoherent. Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

Pat Murphy - - **THE CITY, NOT LONG AFTER** (Pan, 1991, £4.99, 319pp)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

A plague has decimated the population of the USA (at least) and in San Francisco the artists have taken over. Bit by bit they turn the city into one gigantic work of art made up of many individual works. The city being San Francisco, the artists - Danny Boy, Snake, The Machine, Ms Migsdale et. al. - are . . . well, individualists. If it is ever complete the work that is the city will be strange, unlike anything you have encountered in a post-Apocalypse tale not entirely, but more of that anon).

To the city comes Jax, a young woman searching for her mother who was taken to the city by an angel and whomay have been significant in the pre-plague days. Jax is just one of the interesting, recreated characters in this tale. She's just one step ahead of General Miles, one of those Bull Wright figures who stalk most such tales, following his vision of a bright, clean, sterile world where everyone will obey his commands. Fourstar commands a raggle taggle army with which he intends to subdue the city for the greater good, the nation and the revenant United States.

Artist again soldier, spray can against armalite; not much of a contest, except Danny Boy has read Sun Tsu and is determined to fight his war his way. All art is subversive, of course, and many and weird are the ways in which the artists subvert the morale, will and rationale of the army. Jax becomes a heroine of the night, and eventually everything comes to a conclusion in which everyone gets what they want - more or less. It is not a particularly happy ending, in a conventional way, but it is satisfying.

Pat Murphy is not a great writer - yet. The plotting and Fourstar are just a little too familiar, but the writing is entralling and the conclusion is something of a triumph. Comparisons are invidious, but I was often reminded of Steve Erickson's work - which is high praise in my mind. You are seriously recommended to read this book.

Frederick Fichman - - **SFTI**

(Headline Feature, 1991, 331pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence has inspired several very poor writers recently: can we take this as a hint that breakthrough is imminent? If so, I devoutly hope that it will not occur in any way similar to that sketched here.

Sam is an American youth incapable, like all his friends, of speaking clearly or grammatically, and his

garbled phrases are transcribed as accurately and boringly as possible, together with strings of unnecessary expletives, amazingly childish confrontations, arguments with relatives and all the paraphernalia of a modern American family, contributing nothing but padding to a story which is unfortunately quite unbelievable.

The FBI and various Russian spies are involved, the Cold War is still in progress, but our young 'ham' radio genius and his dim but dedicated girlfriend carry all before them. The adults seem mostly crooked but lacking in intelligence, the story turns into an archetypal chase sequence, and to top it all off the author brings in an extra-terrestrial cause for the Bermuda Triangle and the return from the dead of Sam's parents, who for no good reason then proceed to talk as though their lines had been written in Russian and badly translated - hardly likely to convince even the suddenly-weeping young Sam that they were not mere alien constructs. In a final cop-out we do not even learn the contents of the box of compact discs that the alien craft leaves behind for Sam to carry off to "an eagerly awaiting world".

I suppose this may appeal to emotionally under-developed twelve-year-olds with a scientific bent, but it's wasted on anyone with the slightest sophistication. A great pity - I had ordered this book myself, and I'm glad the receipt of the review copy has saved me £4.50 of wasted money.

Dean R. Koontz - - SHADOWFIRES (Headline, 1991, 598pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

"The naive child could not have guessed the true extent of the danger into which she had stepped, could not have conceived of the horror that would one day pay a visit and leave her dazed and mute with terror" (pp 123 - 4)

Originally published in 1987, as by Leigh Nicholis, this woefully contrived novel has to be the most bathetic reprint of 1991, with lines like "I'm getting the hell out of this place" (p.61) and "terror at the idea of anything, mouse or man, returning from the dead" (pp 176 - 7).

The story is totally described by cliché, from the nondescript settings, through the plot and characters, to the dialogue. For every page of essential detail there are three pages of padding. Un-dead Eric, a gene-devolving mutation, bent upon revenge against his ex-wife Rachael, spends his time examining himself in a mirror, his continued metamorphosis less to do with the plot than Koontz's inability to describe the horror he supposedly represents. Rachael (who wants to kill him) and her lover spend their time telling each other how frightened they are; one of the two cops trailing them unceasingly tells the other, "I'm in", and Sharp, a government agent trailing THEM, is interminably described as a psychotic paedophile.

Strict for fans of tacky covers.

Robert Reed - - BLACK MILK (Orbit, 1991, £4.50, 327pp)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

The city where Ryder, Cody, Beth, Jack and Marshall live is a company town, dependent upon the industries of DR Florida, a genius of a genetic engineer and businessman. The children have been engineered to be special - Ryder can remember everything, while Cody is an Amazon and Marshall is just plain special (according to his mother). Beth can sing like an angel and Jack . . . well, Jack is the ordinary one, youngest child of a family you wouldn't want living next to you and real good at catching snakes. They are a gang, with a tree-house cum impregnable fortress (it has a solar powered fridge to keep snowballs in all year long . . .)

Dr Florida is a philanthropist *sans pareil*, and at one of his annual jamborees he discovers the group. He takes them under his wing, Ryder in particular. Ryder's dad is in real estate and thinks this is just great. His mother is unconvinced (mind you, she would want at least three independent witnesses if she saw the second coming . . .) Much of the story is an examination of the children

growing up, of their easy relationship with Florida, of their hopes and dreams and, inevitably, the hopelessness of those dreams.

All this is seen against the background of an impending catastrophe. On the Moon's moon one of Florida's projects has got out of hand. Sparkhounds - designed to be just about invulnerable and therefore suitable to prepare the likes of Io and Callisto for human habitation - have slipped the leash and will soon be heading Earthward where they will destroy us weak humans. Once this becomes known the story switches to an examination of Florida's hubris and contrition and eventual demise.

In many ways this is a good book. If well detailed characters were enough, it would be a hell of a book. Even its symbolic baggage is carried lightly. But the dramatic section is out in space and the story never leaves the ground (I know it worked in Greek tragedy, it just doesn't work here). Then there is Florida's basic unbelievability - he is all human weakness and none of the strength needed to get him right to the top of the heap. And will someone please explain how he could run a project the size of the "sparkhound" one without any seeming official involvement at all.

At the end of the day I am left feeling ambivalent about this book. It has its strengths but it also has glaring structural flaws. Perhaps you should read it and make up your own mind.

Anne Gay - - MINDSAIL (Orbit, 1991, 378pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Keith Brooke)

In an inhospitable "Red" world of crystalline life-forms and harsh weather the Green is an oasis of terrestrial vegetation, tended by the descendants of a disastrous attempt to colonise the planet. MINDSAIL opens with the restivities of Longnight disrupted by the arrival of two prisoners from the Red, Edrach and the Axe. Over the ensuing months, the viewpoint character, Tohalla, is drawn to the chained prisoners and eventually they lead her out on the first of her two odysseys through the world of the RED. Particularly in the earlier parts of the novel, Gay's prose is wonderfully rich, the atmosphere magical and intense, but - perhaps inevitably - the story flags from time to time. The structure of the dialogue is carefully used to show the cultural divergence between Green and Red: in the Red, verb and object are switched ("I to the future must pass what they all in the past to me gave.") so that the reader, with Tohalla, must rejig the Axe and Edrach's speech in her head. This is effective until the viewpoint switches to Axe's mother, Marchidas, when everyone speaks in that way; here the only communication barriers are between story and reader.

More importantly, the balance of the book shifts dramatically over the last 100 pages or so. It's as if, with the end in sight, Gay couldn't hold herself back. The second great trek, certainly more arduous than the first and far less easy to believe, is over - with the helpful guidance of someone Tohalla happens to meet on the way - in barely twenty pages. The settlement Tohalla finds is given so little space to develop that many of the characters here seem sketchy; also the possible existence of the community is hardly even alluded to early on - no rumours, no myths - there is virtually none of the foreshadowing that would, perhaps, make the book fit more smoothly together.

Not, then, as complete a novel as the first hundred or so pages suggested but still one that, for its richness and maturity, no one should miss. My criticism is so hard only because the book, in every other respect, is so very good.

Terry Pratchett - - ERIC (Gollancz, 1991, 155pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

This is the small-format picture-free version of what appeared first as an oversized, illustration-packed story apparently aimed at a juvenile market but in fact written with all Terry's wit and spapstick humour for a

readership of any age that still retains a love of sheer exuberance in language and riotousness of plot.

This ninth book in the fabled *Discworld* series may not be the tour de force that *THE COLOUR OF MAGIC* was, but we usually eulogise the first book in any series and this will certainly keep you happy until the next comes along. Its only concession to the juvenile - apart from the puns that provide linguistic pitfalls at every turn - is the fact that Rincewind, abetted by his immortal Luggage, is entangled in a complex web of magic and deception by young Eric, who knows just enough to be a danger to all who encounter him and thanks to whom we are led through a bewildering network of diabolical and temporal extremities in search of fulfilment for Eric's "three wishes" fantasies.

Terry's style is as ever laid back, but seems to have gained from his experience writing those three enjoyable avowed juvenile books *TRUCKERS*, *DIGGERS* and *WINGS*. To be honest, I enjoyed this more in the present slim paperback than in the perhaps overblown splendour of the Josh Kirby-embellished original; lovers of eccentric artwork will doubtless disagree.

Terrance Dicks - - *TIMEWYRM: EXODUS* (Doctor Who/Virgin, 1991, 234pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This second "New Adventures" book is not as light as the first, *GENESYS*, but that's probably just as well considering the subject matter. The Doctor and Ace find themselves in The Festival of Britain, 1951 - when the Nazis won the war. It must be due to the Timewyrm's influence, but, thinks the Doctor, this isn't quite her style. He and Ace find themselves interrogated by a particularly nasty specimen of the British Freikorps (military collaborators) before discovering that not one but two alien influences have lucked upon Hitler and the Nazis as a way of achieving Universal domination. Ironically, the Doctor finds himself having to help Hitler in the 1923 Munich Putsch and again in 1939 to get history back on course to the train of events which result in the defeat of Germany in 1945.

This isn't really a good subject for slapstick and there's less of it here: the scenes where the Doctor outwits officious Nazi underlings by verbal jujitsu have the same appalling fascination as the TV farce 'ALLO, 'ALLO where you find yourself laughing at characters who in real life would be something utterly horrible. Albeit by implication, there are some quite chilling moments here. There are also plenty of the usual chases and hairs-breadth escapes and the book ends, possibly too quickly, once one set of temporal intruders are seen off with a reversion to the original plot and the Doctor finding that yet again he can only scotch the wyrm, not kill her. We're set up well for the next volume: I must say that I'm enjoying this series.

Diane Duane - - *DEEP WIZARDRY* (Corgi, 1991, 253pp, £2.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

A sequel to *SO YOU WANT TO BE A WIZARD*, the story begins almost catastrophically with some dotty wizardry among the almost obligatory whales and dolphins to emphasise its ecological message for young readers: I for one am getting heartily sick of bad "green" writing. Good intentions are not enough. Moral allegories about keeping a cleaner, kinder planet in children's fiction seem to be this season's issue: goodbye anorexia nervosa and sexual abuse . . .

Fortunately, however, Duane develops her tale into something darker and unusually powerful as Nita discovers that in taking on the part of the Silent Lord in an age-long undersea ritual she has agreed to more than she thought. And what is she going to tell her parents? The build-up to the story's climax is actually quite stunning - much better than the last book. C.S. Lewis may have covered the moral territory in *THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE* but he would never have created the chillingly amoral shark.

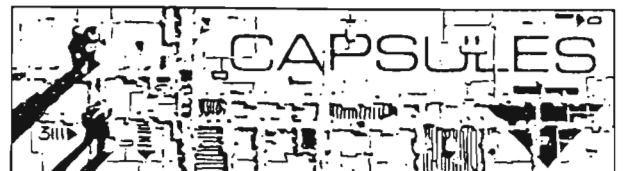
Valerie Kershaw - - *ROCKABYE* (Corgi, 1991, 283pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

It's not that often that a suspense/horror novel comes with a favourable quote from Bernard Levin on the back. A swift plot summary of *ROCKABYE* would reveal only that quite a lot of people have actually done this one to death - it's the one about the woman with a dead child who receives a Christmas card and phone messages from the child: is she going off her head or is something altogether more macabre happening? What saves this from the slushpile is really two things. First, the quality of Valerie Kershaw's observation is excellent: the vividly bitchy quality of life on a provincial radio station stands out in Kershaw's brief character studies. Again, these may be stereotypes - the Pushy Young Thing, the Screamingly Gay But Ultimately Nice Presenter, the Programme Organiser Who Makes Stalin Seem Cuddly - but they're both sharp and light enough to contrast with the growing suspense around Isobel's eerie dilemma. The author has worked in local radio, and one suspects that some of her wry incidental anecdotes of interviewers not knowing the first thing about their subjects, or trying to deal with someone who can only converse in impenetrable jargon, are not too far from what actually happens. Certainly they make amusing reading.

Secondly, Kershaw pulls off extremely well the difficult task of making the true villain of the piece someone who doesn't actually appear in the story at all, who in fact died shortly before the story opened: Charlie, Isobel's charming but self-centred ex-husband, whose desertion for another woman exacerbated her nervous breakdown.

Above all, Valerie Kershaw doesn't indulge in all the heavy-handed sub-Gothic nastiness that you see in so many manifestations of this plot. There are few confrontations: just quirks of character and an uncoiling menace. What happens isn't important - though I won't reveal the solution so that you can experience the suspense and occasional misdirection - but the experience of reading this neat and economical chiller is.



Douglas Borton - - *MANSTOPPER* (Grafton, 1991, 254pp, £3.99)

Timing is all: this was published in this country at the time the press were going rabid about pit-bull terriers, though it was first published in the US in 1988. There's

a pack of specially bred attack dogs: Cleo, Mr Dobbs, Bigfoot and their leader, Razor: bred to seek warm blood and fresh human meat . . . Not recommended for dog-lovers. (Nik Morton)

Jack L. Chalker - - *RIDERS OF THE WINDS* (N.E.L., 1991, 276pp, £3.50)

Interesting idea: unlikely events come about because of "changewinds" sweeping through the cosmos, but it's difficult to enthuse over a book whose characters are distinguished not by their actions and reactions but by their appearance ("big woman", "fat woman", "butterfly woman" . . .) Sequel to *WHEN THE CHANGEWINDS BLOW* - oh, and surprise! the story will continue in volume three. (Phil Nichols)

Louise Cooper - - *INFERNO* (Grafton, 1991, 241pp, £3.99)

FOR SALE: one copy of the second book in bog-standard fantasy series, *The Indigo Saga*. One Albanian lek ono. (Ian Sales)

Louise Cooper - - *NEMESIS* (Grafton, 1991, 246pp, £3.99)

First in the *Indigo* series. Anghara Kaligsdughter is naughty and opens (Pandora's) box, letting loose a host of demons. So she is ostracised, changes her name to Indigo, and has to go find and then defeat the demons one by one. She only kills off one demon per book, so expect a long series . . .

Stunningly bog-standard: Mills & Boon meets *Dungeon & Dragons*. It's even got a map in the front. (Ian Sales)

Louise Cooper - - *INFANTA* (Grafton, 1991, 318pp, £3.99):

NOCTURNE (Grafton, 1991, 291pp, £3.99): *TROIKA* (Grafton, 1991, 268pp, £3.99)

Mmm - editorial dilemma. I know Ian Sales (above) loathed the first two volumes of this reissued (originally Unwin Hyman) series. But checking my review of volume 4 (*NOCTURNE*) in *PI* 81 I see I found something to offer and the new installment, *TROIKA*, isn't bad. More and more fantasy writers are unable to construct a sentence that hasn't been written somewhere before, usually grammatically. The *Indigo* saga certainly doesn't celebrate these heights of awfulness and may well be enjoyed by those who like the idea of the ill-fated heroine and faithful wolf. Few surprises are presented, but, to be honest, few real instances of raw turkey. Perhaps it's a typical example of the kind of fantasy which fades from the mind when worse stuff refuses to leave no matter how much you wish it would. (Andy Sawyer)

John Gideon - - *GREELEY'S COVE* (Headline, 1991, 422pp, £4.99)

The editor who bought this book should be shot. It has all the faults that budding writers are taught to avoid: book-saidism, clichés by the handful, wafer-thin characterisation, and a plot that's been done before and better. Even Piers Anthony writes better than this . . . (Ian Sales)

Sheila Gilluly - - *RITNYM'S DAUGHTER* (Headline, 1991, 437pp, £4.99)

Mass-market edition of the conclusion to the *Greenbrier* trilogy (first reviewed in *PI* 85). A pastoral epic which treads the usual paces but presents the characters in more sympathetic mode than is normal with the result that it is far less twee than you'd think from having read the first volume. Despite characters called Brocklebur, Toby and Peewit, it is really quite effective. And it appears to have nothing to do with role-playing games. (Andy Sawyer)

Martin H. Greenberg (Ed.) - - *NIGHTMARES ON ELM STREET: FREDDY KRUEGER'S SEVEN SWEETEST DREAMS* (Futura, 1991, 289pp, £3.99)

Not having seen the films, these seven stories by the likes of Tom Elliott and Nancy A. Collins were my first encounter with ol' razor-digits. The tales are readable enough, but I suspect the anti-hero himself works better on the screen. (Mat Coward)

Katherine Kerr - - *DRAGONSPELL: THE SOUTHERN SEA* (Grafton, 1991, 495pp, £4.99)

This is the fourth volume in the *Devery* series, and if

you liked the others you'll probably enjoy it. Despite the title there are no dragons (unless I nodded off more often than I remember) but it's an intricately plotted supposedly Celtic fantasy full of journeys and magic (dweomer). The heroine ends up having to make an agonising choice, but her language and attitude are so modern I never doubted how she would decide. (Norman Beswick)

Rex Miller - - *SLICE* (Pan, 1991, 317pp, £3.99)

Serial killer thriller with good plotting and an ergetic style that works most of the time. When Miller really gets his shit together, he's going to tear the horror field apart. (Jim Steel)

Andrew Neiderman - - *THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE* (Legend, 1991, 313pp, £3.99)

This is one for everybody who thinks that lawyers who defend rapists and murderers by shredding their victims' testimonies in court are agents of the Devil. nasty lawyer Kevin Taylor joins a law firm who are agents of the devil. A mediocre plot, not helped by the fact that the characters are all so unsympathetic that you're glad when they get their comeuppance. Sub-standard stuff from the man who is also the current incarnation of Virginia Andrews. (Jon Wallace)

Mike Shupp - - *DEATH'S GREY LAND* (Headline, 1991, 322pp, £4.50)

Fourth of the *Destiny Makers* series, this has an ex-Nam vet an impossible 90,000 years ahead in time, using crude 20th-century tactics in an unbelievable future war, while others zip back and forth in time confusing matters. Space Opera, mayhem and rather a lot of chit-chat: disappointing. (Ken Lake)

Mary Stanton - - *PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN* (N.E.L., 1991, 307pp, £4.99)

A sequel to *THE HEAVENLY HORSE FROM THE OUTERMOST WEST*, this animal-fantasy is written by an author who has a great love and sympathy for the horses that are the characters in her book. Much of the plot concerning the stallion Piper's attempt to save the souls of his sire and dam from the evil mare El Arat, the Soul Taker, takes place in an equine Otherworld, but the chapters set in the "real" world are the more enjoyable, with their horses' eye view of life on a ranch. If you are a fantasy enthusiast who liked *WATERSHIP DOWN* and who has fond reminiscences of *BLACK BEAUTY* then this book might be worth trying. (Lynne Bispham)



"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 50 - 51
(August - September 1991)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

I've been reviewing *INTERZONE* for *PI* for five years now. In this time I've read and pronounced on issues I've considered excellent and issues I've considered poor, with most falling in the middle ground. But I have never before felt *angry* about an issue, that is, until I received the September edition. First, though, I shall turn to the August issue, no. 50. Bear in mind, however, the sound of knives being sharpened in the background. . .

THE MILLIZONE ISSUE

There are three strong stories here. Nicola Griffith scores once again with 'Wearing My Skin'. Clever this: Griffith makes everything in the story point to "possession" yet at the same time toys with the reader, so that you *think* you know how the story will end but you're not sure. Ian Lee and Greg Egan return to form with 'Pigs, Mostly' and 'Appropriate Love' respectively. The former is a comedy about a son who, returning to his parents' farm, discovers their odd secret. The latter is a disturbing tale of a future where surrogate bodies can be grown; due to financial constraints a woman has to carry the brain of her accident-victim husband in her womb whilst a new body is developed for him. 'Appropriate Love' is cutting-edge fiction from Egan and is the best story in this issue. 'Remnants' by Diane Mapes is similar to a recent story by Elizabeth Hand in that it features an "anti-man" conspiracy of women. More a dark fancy than a successful story. At one point in the concluding part of 'The Beryonic Lords' by Stephen Baxter a human discourse goes thus:

"I don't understand," Sura said. "What should we do?"
 "How could I know?" Erwal snapped. "We wait, I suppose."

The reader does much the same with the story, i.e. wait for the next development to be described and explained by the author. The concepts are such that there is little opportunity for anticipation or involvement by the reader. Thus, despite the imagination displayed, the novella - for me anyway - is a failure. Stephen Baxter is interviewed this issue, as is Rachel Pollock.

IZ 50 is a "normal" IZ. IZ 51 is most certainly not. It is in fact the fifth issue of *MILLION*, editor David Pringle's other magazine, with an IZ cover. The reason for this is given thus:

"INTERZONE has almost 2,000 subscribers, while *MILLION* has just over 500 . . . the bulk of *INTERZONE'S* readers have not read *MILLION* - and they don't know what they've been missing. We very much hope that they'll enjoy this sample issue and consider subscribing."

Pringle goes on to say that there would be financial savings by running the two magazines as one and that it would also enable he and his wife to take a holiday. Too, the contents are biased towards fantasy and SF, with interviews with Terry Pratchett, J.G. Ballard (albeit three years old - the interview, not Ballard . . .) and Anne Rice, a list of 100 "significant romances" from Pringle via Brian Stableford, Stableford again on Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* books, and 'The Snow Sculptures of Xanadu', a short story by Kim Newman set in an America where Charles Foster Kane really lived but the film about him was "killed".

However, there's a lot more besides which will probably be of little or no interest to SF fans - articles on thrillers, the creator of *Rambo*, popular culture, reviews of romantic and crime fiction, and other sundry items. Not the usual IZ fare.

IZ, would, I hope, regard itself as being a professional publication; if so the reasons given for this exercise ought to be discounted - the editor going on holiday, helping another magazine in the same stable and most especially that of introducing its readers to *MILLION*. We already knew what *MILLION* was all about - there had been sufficient advertising for that - so if David Pringle wanted to show us, then an insert would have been a suitable vehicle for this. At £2.25 a throw, IZ is not cheap. Subscribers have a right to expect the promised goods from the editor, not another product. I hope the "experiment" will not be repeated; as it is, I cannot recommend that you purchase IZ 51.



[[Feeling that Andy Mills made some points there which needed reply - and, also, being a subscriber to both *INTERZONE* and *MILLION* somewhat puzzled by receiving one magazine instead of two - I sent editor David Pringle a copy of the above review. He replied as follows; only the smartarse title is mine.]

Andy Mills is angry about *INTERZONE* 51 (which was the *INTERZONE/MILLION* "crossover" issue). We are sorry to hear that. Ironically we - that is, the editorial team of *INTERZONE* - were much more angry, regretful and apprehensive about the preceding two issues of *INTERZONE*, numbers 49 and 50, and we expected to receive many more adverse comments about them than we have done . . .

What happened with issues 49 and 50 was this (and bear with me, it does have a strong relevance to the question of issue 51): we commissioned a "design house" called Helter Skelter to typeset, art edit and redesign the magazine. They seemed to have good professional credentials, showed us impressive portfolios of their past work, etc. In the event, their work on issues 49 and 50 of *INTERZONE* WAS LITTLE SHORT OF ABYSMAL. In terms of typesetting, standard of illustration and overall production value, these are probably the worst two issues of the magazine we have ever published (they do contain some very good stories, though, marred as they are by typographical errors). Stricken by this disaster, and expecting an avalanche of complaints from readers, we sacked the new design people - see my further comments in the editorial of *INTERZONE* 52, just out this week - and reverted to our old production methods (typesetter Bryan Williamson was willing to resume the job, bless him). Oddly enough, few complaints from readers did in fact reach us; nor does Andy Mills seem to have noticed (or at any rate he has kindly refrained from commenting on) the severe shortcomings of the typesetting and artwork in #49 and #50.

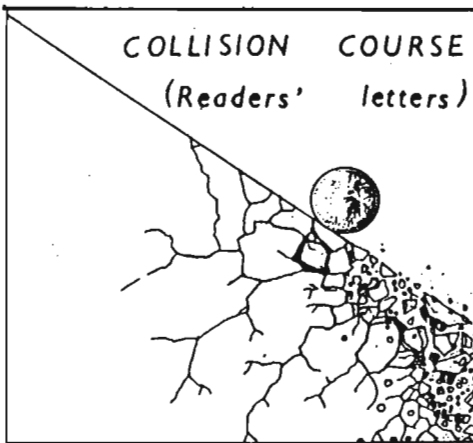
The sudden reversion to our old methods of production and art-editing left us with one immediate problem: we had no artists' illustrations on hand for the stories which were slated to appear in issue 51, nor did we have sufficient time to commission any for that issue. On resuming the art-editing myself, I did commission SMS, Kevin Cullen, Martin McKenne and others to illustrate the relevant stories, but their illustrations could not be ready until the normal deadline for issue 52. Hence, the idea of making number 51 a special "MILLION" crossover issue was a godsend: it allowed us to maintain our schedule and produce an issue in August where otherwise there might have been a nasty gap . . . (or, at any rate, we might have had to produce an issue without any illustrations).

So that is one major reason for the crossover - which, unfortunately, I did not mention in the editorial of *INTERZONE* 51 itself. Of course, the other reasons given there are also valid. Could I make a few further comments on Andy Mills's specific points about the contents of issue 51? Although he's perfectly entitled to his opinions, I think he's misleading in some of his remarks.

He says the J.G. Ballard interview is three years old. True, but what he doesn't add is that it is previously unpublished anywhere. Just to baldly state that it's three years old gives the strong impression that it's a reprint, which it isn't. He complains that we've included "articles on thrillers, the creator of *Rambo*, popular culture" and implies that none of these will be of any interest to SF/Fantasy readers. I beg to differ. The article on thrillers was by Daniel Easterman, whose own work in that genre verges on the fantastic and the science-fictional. (His latest novel, *NAOMI'S ROOM*, is a "ghost story"). David Morrell, the creator of *Rambo*, has written horror fiction; he also pays an interesting tribute in his interview to his literary mentor, SF writer William Tenn . . . The piece on "popular culture" by Toby Young is stuffed full of references to SF and horror movies, from *ROBOCOP* to *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*. All of this material, I would submit, is of potential interest to most SF/Fantasy readers; it certainly interested me.

Andy goes on to complain about the "reviews of romantic and crime fiction . . . not the usual IZ fare." True enough, but what he (crucially) doesn't add is that "the usual IZ fare", in terms of reviews, is also there. That is, there is an SF film review column by Nick Lowe, a TV column by Wendy Bradley. They are in fact all there, in *INTERZONE* 51, and Andy's review fails to mention them. He gives the misleading impression that all readers are going to get are Mary Cadogan's romance reviews and Mat Coward's crime reviews . . . not so: the latter items are a bonus, for those who might be interested - all the usual SF/Fantasy review material is also present!

Sorry to rant on, but it does make me annoyed that Andy Mills is criticizing this crossover issue so harshly when the real failings (which are a severe embarrassment to us) were in the typesetting, art and production standards of the preceding two issues. Ah, well.



[Various people kindly pointed out that I really must have liked Greg Bear's *QUEEN OF ANGELS* to have given it two reviews in two successive issues, and thanks to all the competition entrants who said nice things about the magazine. GENE ROWE, though, chose to comment at length about the content of one of the reviews . . .]

Jim Provan, reviewing *FRONTIERS* by Isaac Asimov, wrote everyone over the age of twelve knows that Asimov's SF is utter bollocks." This came to me as quite a shock. I rushed to check my birth certificate - born 1966 it said. Further proof? The document could be forged?! Digging a short, curled hair from my bar of soap the next morning - sign of post-pubesence - I decided that I had all the evidence I needed. And yet - I don't consider Asimov's SF "bollocks"! Sorry, Jim, but your assertion/hypothesis is refuted. As one who was weaned on the Good Doctor I feel I ought to speak out in his defence. While I would probably (no, definitely) agree that, alas, Dr Asimov's work over the last decade or so is not quite up to par (okay, okay, it's bollocks), I would not concur with J.P.'s assessment of the author's two most famous creations: the *FOUNDATION* saga and the Robot stories.

I'd like to make a point about the *FOUNDATION* series. J.P. considers it inadequate on the basis that *Psychohistory* is "fundamentally flawed", in that it relies on purely "casual" (sic) forces, [I suspect that was my own typo - sorry (Ed.)], ignoring human free will. The first point I'd like to make is that *Psychohistory* doesn't seem to me to be as purely deterministic in its inception as J.P. assumes - if it were then how could a random event like the appearance of the Mule have such an effect. Although Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle ensures that any predictive model or theory can only really be "deterministic" within certain limits or bounds - such that we must talk about the possibilities that events will take place because we cannot accurately measure everything - we can still make predictions. Human free will is one of those difficult-to-measure forces which is almost certain to bugger up any nice predictive model of human history - but it seems to me that Asimov recognises this, as do the *Second Foundationers*, who are seen as forever striving, actively, to keep events going in the direction their pet theory has predicted (i.e. they do not just sit back on their butts and let the causal forces have their day). If the predictions of

psychohistory are accurate, it just shows that the theory is a good one, or else that the limits in which the theory is seen to be successful and predictive are rather broad. No problem.

My second point is this: whosever said that SF was not allowed to be predictive, or to wax upon unlikelyhoods? Does J.P. consider all stories that employ unlikely technologies or premises or theories - like faster-than-light spaceships, time travel, or a really accurate discipline of *Psychohistory* - "bollocks" or "flawed" because they ignore present day theories or facts, and therefore appear scientifically dubious? Surely the key to good SF is not how valid or realistic its predictions turn out to be, but rather, the key is whether the author remains internally consistent within the bounds and rules that s/he has laid down in that initial premise or world? Science Fiction has always been a genre in which fantastical ideas and theories may be expressed, and to take away this privilege, and to limit the genre in this or any other way, would be to do SF a great disservice.

Now, if J.P. dislikes Asimov because of his cardboard characters - well, that's another matter . . .

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