



Paperback Inferno

93

The Review of paperback SF

Dec. 1991 – Jan. 1992



CONTENTS



Issue 93, December 1991/January 1992

A publication of the British Science Fiction Association, edited by Andy Sawyer.
ISSN 0260 - 0595
Contents copyright © BSFA Ltd, 1991. Individual copyrights are the property of the authors and artists.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

I, The Flaxyard
Woodfall Lane
Little Neston
South Wirral
Cheshire L64 4BT
(Tel. 051-336-3355)

Printed by PDC Copyprint, 11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4AF.

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

Membership of the BSFA costs £12 per year and is available from JOANNE RAINE, 29 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 3EW.

All opinions in this magazine are the views of the individual contributors and must not be taken to represent the views of the editor or the BSFA except where explicitly stated.

British Science Fiction Association Ltd,
Company no. 921500, Registered in England, Registered Address:- 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ. Limited by Guarantee.

EDITORIAL (<i>Paperback Purgatory</i>)	p.2
COMPETITION CORNER	p.3
CLOSER ENCOUNTERS: L.J. Hurst looks at the Orbit SF promotion: the <i>new NEW WORLDS</i> appears; Arthur C. Clarke	
Old and New: autobiographical Aldiss and what is real about Phil Dick?: Critic-proof King.	p.4
REVIEWS	p.7
CAPSULES:	p.14
COLLISION COURSE:	p.15
UPON THE RACK IN PRINT: Magazine reviews from Andy Mills	p.16

REVIEWERS THIS ISSUE:-

Graham Andrews, K.V. Bailey, Norman Beswick, Colin Bird, Lynne Bispham, Keith Brooke, Terry Broome, Mat Covard, Alan Fraser, Chris Hart, L.J. Hurst, Ken Lake, John Newsinger, John D. Owen, Andy Sawyer, Jim Steel, Sue Thomason, Jon Wallace, Brendan Wignall, Jessica Yates

ARTWORK:

Colin P. Davies: Cover, Logo.
Steve Bruce: p.4; p.14

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to *PI* 94
is **Friday January 10th**.

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.

Review copies of professional, semi-professional and small-press magazines in the SF/Fantasy fields are welcome - fiction/criticism only: we can't cover fanzines - but please direct them to "PAPERBACK INFERNO" rather than the editor personally.

Paperback Purgatory

All I can say following this terrific Colin Davies cover is:

"A MERRY WINTER SOLSTICE TO ALL OUR READERS!"

Far be it from me to use this space to predict what will be happening in SF in 1992, because given what has happened both within and without the genre over the last twelve months you'd need more than a cup of used tealeaves to come up with any firm suggestions. I suspect that even now people are scribbling furiously at stories with extrapolations of current Middle East and Eastern Europe tendencies, while we may well see changes closer to home. I wouldn't also be surprised to see more of the current "space-opera" revival as people throw up their hands in despair at the small stuff of the next fifty years or so and go for the big-screen in a big way - though, given the calibre of some of the people who are currently exploring these areas I don't think I'm talking about a total revival of SF-as-escapism.

The year closes with two interesting new magazines appearing - can I here repeat my plea for magazine publishers/editors sending review copies to *PAPERBACK INFERNO* clearly mark their mailing thus rather than sending them to me by name? This is simply because I receive several magazines either by subscription or trade on a personal account, and it's sometimes unclear whether mailings are intended for me or for *PI*.

First, we welcome *FAR POINT*: a new glossy A4-sized magazine available from Victoria Publications, PO Box 47, Grantham, Lincs, NG31 8RJ. Issue one (November/December) is out now, and features stories from, among others, Brian Stableford, Jo Raine (our membership secretary) and Marise Morland, with colour cover and centre-spread from Keith Page. There's a mixture of topics, from Stableford's unsettling narrative of a mediaeval hanging which goes on too long (the hanging, that is: not the story) to far-space SF stories by Duncan Long and Martyn J. Fogg and sword-and-sorcery and Arthurian-flavoured fantasy: the use by Nicola Ashton in 'Conspiracy of Souls' and Jo Raine in 'Do You Love' of the same character from the Arthurian mythos gives a touch of *deja-vu*. I have to say that Jo does it better. Many of the stories are first-publications, and of these the best - arguably the second-best in the issue after Stableford's 'Justice' - is Stephen Markley's 'Home is a House Called Percy', in which two pressing social problems are solved in one go.

FAR POINT is available on subscription for £1.95 or £11 for six issues, and is apparently also available from Menzies and other newsagents (though not yet W.H. Smith's). As well as the promising appearance and content of the magazine, one factor which I hope promises well for the future is the prompt and efficient way in which the magazine seems to have handled its launch: certainly all my inquiries have been speedily dealt with.

TERRITORIES is a new magazine aimed at exploring the

"slipstream" - those areas of collision between genre which, in the words of editor Erich Zann, produces "very strange stuff . . . that isn't SF but turns your head the same way." Issue one (available for £1.80 from Mcneir, 65 Middrie Road, Strathbungo, Glasgow, Scotland G42 8PT) features an unusually-formatted profile of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, a short story by Mike Mooney with considerably more depth by the ending that you'd think at the beginning, BSFA Mighty Leader Kev McVeigh on the short stories of Jayne Ann Phillips, Mike Cobley taking an iconoclastic view of S.M. Baxter's much-vaunted 'The Baryonic Lords', and a long interview with David Wingrove (conducted by, again, Mike Cobley). Although Wingrove is, perhaps, hardly "slipstream" in one sense, his *CHUNG KUO* sequence has been marketed more with an eye to the mainstream fans of big thriller epics than the SF fandoms. This has led to some risibility at the apparent publicity hype and considerable criticism (from some UK quarters) of the "thriller" aspects of the novels.

CHUNG KUO is now in its third volume (THE WHITE MOUNTAIN is just out in hardback), and in my opinion is outacing much of this criticism as Wingrove gets to grips with the nature of his complex and unstable society. In the interview, he has much to say about the role of SF as an exploratory genre, his attempts to regain for the genre a sense of speculation and ambition, and the reaction to his books both here and in the USA. He also has much to say about political and technological developments, and to what extent a writer like he can hope to dramatise some of the contemporary features of politics and power. It's an interesting interview which covers a lot of ground and is worth a look at. I'm sure the controversy over Wingrove's depiction of a small-minded UK SF-mafia will rumble on, but so, I hope will the books, which when all grounds for criticism are accounted for are still much more expansive and ambitious than much writing we see nowadays. (And they do seem to be getting more science-fictional, for what that's worth). TERRITORIES also includes two short comic-strips: one good one by Geoff Harrold and one bad one by Pete McGeogh. The editor calls for subscriptions and (especially) contributions and the magazine could develop into a useful force if enough people support it.

Now is normally the time when publishers realise that pretty soon people will be buying presents for other people, so why not produce some glossy books? My self-imposed deadline for this editorial means that we're not quite yet in the middle of things, and looking at the pile of not-exactly-within-the-PI-guidelines material which I get sent doesn't result in too many gems, although Terry Pratchett's *WITCHES ABROAD* (Gollancz) will bring back memories of your summer holidays, and should be near the top of your present list if you haven't got it already. Most obviously like a present is *ONCE UPON A TIME* (Legend, £9.99 - also available in hardback at £16.99), "A Treasury of Fantasies and Fairy Tales" edited by Lester del Rey and Risa Kessler. It even sounds like one of those annuals your godmother sent you every year without fail until someone tipped her off that you had actually left school three years ago, but contains new stories people such as Isaac Asimov, Terry Brooks, C.J. Cherryh and Anne McCaffrey, and glossy illustrations from Michael Pangrazion, former Lucasfilms special effects painter. It's these paintings which make the book special. It's a good present for a fantasy fan, and for once the trade paperback format is completely justified: you need the larger size to do full justice to Pangrazion's outstandingly colourful artwork; 'A' format would not be half so attractive. However, it is flawed by an almost complete misunderstanding of the difference between "fairy tale" and modern heroic fantasy - in *WITCHES ABROAD*, Terry Pratchett brings his satirical scalpel to the traditional fairy tale and I'll refer you to that if you really want to know what I'm talking about: suffice to say that Pratchett *does* know what fairy tales do. *ONCE UPON A TIME* is packaged to present the assumption that adult fantasies involving dragons, magic and even fairies is the same as fairytale: highly debateable. Barbara Hambly's 'Changeling' is by far the best and most original story; Isaac Asimov's amusing spoof 'Prince Delightful and the Flameless Dragon' is the nearest to traditional form. I did love the pictures, though, and shall return to them when the Christmas pudding is digesting . . .

COMPETITION CORNER

The last competition, featuring as prizes the five books from the August Orbit SF promotion, was the most successful yet. The winners correctly identified CRADLE as another Clarke/Lee collaboration (just to make sure, one person added GARDEN OF RAMA as well) and "Anson" as Robert A Heinlein's middle name. An embarrassing surplus of correct entries meant that one again a daughter and a hat were called in to make the final choice, and out came the names of *CHRISTINA BROCK; P.T. ROSS; P.ELLIS; STEVE GROVER* and *TOM FILBY*.

Orbit Books will shortly be sending you your prizes; please contact me if there are any problems and many thanks to Michelle Hodgson of Orbit for providing the prizes. L.J. Hurst reviews the books in a "Closer Encounter" elsewhere in this issue.

This issue's competition features the King of Horror, uncle Stephen himself, with two books (also reviewed in a "Closer Encounter" this issue) as prizes for five lucky winners. Now you too can stay up 'till *FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT* swotting up answers for the *STEPHEN QUIZ BOOK*, so long as you face the Lords of Chance and (of course) come up with the right answers in the first place.

Pay attention for the questions; one of them has a long preamble.

- 1) What is the name of Stephen King's wife (also a novelist)?
 - 2) Under which pseudonym did King publish five early novels?
 - 3) Yes, well this is a tricky one . . . In *FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT*, there is a story called 'The Library Policeman'. Having a certain professional interest in the title (no, I am not a policeman) I asked Jim Steel to let me have a synopsis of the story when he wrote with his review. Jim tells me that the story concerns a man who needs to go to the library for the first time in years - he has had a phobia about libraries after an encounter with a pervert while returning an overdue library book. He wanders into a "warped version" of the library and meets the ghost of a previous librarian who had killed some children and committed suicide. He loses the books he borrows, and 'The Library Policeman' comes after him to get them back. Jim writes 'The moral seems to be that You Should Always Watch Your Librarian. They're dangerous creatures that come on as a cross between hifi shop attendants and vampires'.
- Strikes me that King's got the right idea. It's about time that we stopped messing with outdated liberalism and the old-lady-with-a-bun image. You've got a book overdue? Then we send the Library Police around.
- Preferably disguised as orang-utans. That should cause a few heart-attacks among all those who are terribly sorry they've had the latest best-seller out for six months but it was a very long book wasn't it and then the weather was absolutely dreadful and of course I couldn't possibly have got out of the house while my little Yorkshire terrier was off-colour and Mrs Jones at Number 14 was so keen to read the book after me. . .
- Oh yes, you wanted another question? Well, I just couldn't resist basing it on this topic . . . So:-

- 3) In which Stephen King novel is a *librarian* in Derry, Maine one of the central characters?

One final point about entries; there are no barred categories of BSFA member from these competitions - i.e. PI reviewers, other helpers, and previous competition winners are all eligible to enter, and some have even seen success . . . but if you *are* a reviewer or are otherwise in postal contact with me, and enter the competition, please can you put your entry on a separate sheet of paper or card rather than in the text of a letter.

The prizes for this competition come with the very kind co-operation of New English Library (Hodder & Stoughton), who I'm sure would like me to point out that if you *still* can't think of what to give someone for Christmas there is also the new King hardback, *NEEDFUL THINGS*, at £16.99.





Closer Encounters

Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee - - RAMA II (Orbit, 1991, 496pp, £4.99)

Robert A. Heinlein, edited by Virginia Heinlein - - GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE (Orbit, 1991, 336pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

Most of the readers of RAMA II, I'll bet, will not have read RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA, and there is little need to have read it. RAMA II has an open end - it takes three heros with it as it sweeps out of the solar system, and, again I'll bet, we will eventually get a further account of their travels. What have they discovered for us this time? What has Gentry Lee added? Well, he has given us swear words and some bits of medieval history, and where Clarke's characters were some what wooden, now they have all appeared in American soap-operas

Seventy years after the first Rama visit another spacecraft, almost identical, appears. A crew of twelve is sent to explore - the crew, who all have high IQs and poor social skills, mostly consists of religious maniacs, political appointees, potential or real murderers, and general timeservers - just the people to re-introduce Earth to a higher civilisation, designed as they are to produce Dallas-style squabbling and evidence of our peaceful intent.

Rama, when it was first found, had two characteristics - firstly, that it was strange, and secondly, discoveries about it did make it neither more nor less strange. RAMA II (both the vessel and the novel) changes that - much more is discovered, and what is discovered makes it clear that Rama is much more like Earth than we'd thought. All the 'living' things found originally were robots or crystalline, something like real living things (a sort of bird) are found this time, and the Rama computers can be accessed and used by our human fingers. Since many readers will not have read the first book, and this one stands alone, that change will not bother them.

According to GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE, Arthur C. Clarke was one author that Robert Heinlein was prepared to praise, but whether Heinlein would have liked Clarke and Lee's work, I can't tell, and unfortunately there isn't as much about Heinlein's methods and critical tastes as I would have hoped, to see how he would have approached the subject.

Virginia Heinlein has posthumously collected and selected from Heinlein's letters (and some to him from John W. Campbell and from his agent), arranging them in theme chapters. The most interesting are the chapters on Heinlein's meteoric rise in the two years before Pearl Harbour, and his relationship with his publishers in the fifties when he wrote a children's novel a year.

Heinlein was a very clever man, with amazingly big blindspots. THE PUPPET MASTERS (written in 1949/50), for instance, is an allegory of the creeping communist menace - the slugs standing for the communists - and I infer that Virginia Heinlein still accepts that threat; but just try reading all of Heinlein's replies to Scribner's who published his children's books and who constantly wanted re-writers and toning downs and see how much of an independent spirit Heinlein remains. He could accept some sort of subservience and did.

He hated interruptions yet some fans would visit and stay all day; apparently he didn't ask them to leave but boiled up inside. Virginia Heinlein calls that chapter "Fan Mail And Other Time Wasters". And Heinlein would spend months on his own promotions - some like blood donating, I'd be in favour of but at the end of the 1950's

he opposed SANE and wanted more nuclear tests, and in the mid-sixties he worked on the Goldwater Presidential campaign.

At the end of RAMA II, the Earth powers try to destroy the spaceship with nuclear weapons. I wonder which side Heinlein would have been on.

Roger MacBride Allen - - ORPHAN OF CREATION (Orbit, 1991, 345pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

ORPHAN OF CREATION is at the edge of science fiction, since it is not predicated on some change being given, but whether that change has occurred. In the case of this novel the change to our world is the non-extinction of Australopithecus; their use as slave labour in the American Deep South in the 1980s; and the discovery of their survival in deepest Gabon today.

Most of the novel follows paleontologist Barbara Marchando, from her reading of her great-great-grandfather's diary reporting the strange beings brought to the family plantation; her dig for the bodies; identification of what they are; the discovery of the slaves' origins through the local newspaper archive; her journey to deepest Africa; return with a Southern Apewoman, who is made pregnant with the AID specimen intended by her husband for Dr Marchando's use; and the final acceptance by the United Nations of the sentience and equality of the Australopithecus.

Allen must have been writing this at the same time as John Gribbin was writing FATHER TO THE MAN, his caveman-alive-today novel; and I wouldn't like to say which is better. The problem with CREATION is that its plotting and motivation is station bookstore standard, and there is some mystery but no suspense.

Allen obviously admires his heroine, to the extent that he ignores her errors. When she discovers the remains she knows to be quite recent she fails to inform the local coroner, even though they strongly resemble human remains. And later on, Dr Marchando impregnates the Apewoman to prove her human - what does this say about a woman's right to choose?

For all that, this is a book about which you might enjoy making up your mind.

Jack L. Chalker - - SONGS OF THE DANCING GODS (Orbit, 1991, 322pp, £4.50)

Roger Zelazny - - KNIGHT OF SHADOWS (Orbit, 1991, 251pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

One of these is labelled Science Fiction, the other is labelled Fantasy, but since both have similar plots, and neither really begins or ends (SHADOWS is the ninth Amber novel, SONGS is the fourth in the Dancing Gods series) it is difficult to distinguish between them, or why one is called one thing and one called the other. Jack L. Chalker has included some humour, a more down to earth approach, and a bit of S/M sex; while Roger Zelazny has written a shorter novel, with physical descriptions left much more vague (a Lord Dunsany-ish approach) and some references to philosophy - it is slightly surprising to find two characters referring to Jean-Paul Sartre just after the spirit has engaged in a little spell-making slaughter on an altar.

On the other hand, both give you a journey by the hero and some sort of company, sword and knife-fights, characters from this world and timeline in alternate worlds and time, and enemies of implacable evil intention. Dialogue runs like this - "If that guy puts in appearance again and you sense him before I see him, give me the high sign", and like this - "Hey, look, Sauron, baby! You're the greatest evil god of all, but we have to face it ... ". Neither is set in a world of high-fairy. Chalker's is the longer book, but Zelazny seems like it. On the other hand something definitely happens in SONGS OF THE DANCING GODS, so that's the one I'd recommend.

David Garnett (Ed.) - - NEW WORLDS 1 (Gollencz, 1991, 265pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

When I reviewed the ORBIT SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK 3 last year for PI, I mentioned that Orbit had damaged their reputation by making the decision to discontinue the other David Garnett-edited collection they published, ZENITH, after only two outings.

It's pleasing to see that Garnett has had the chance to continue the sterling work he was doing with ZENITH in the form of the revived title NEW WORLDS; it's produced with Michael Moorcock's approval and published by Gollencz, which is probably the most stable home the title ever had.

Although this NEW WORLDS is dominated by fiction in a way that the few copies of the old sequence which I possess were not, two of the best pieces are non-fiction: Michael Moorcock's introduction is a cogent retrospective of the old NW and overview of the current scene. John Clute's 'SF novels of the Year' is a survivor of the SF YEARBOOK, another title "retired" by Orbit; Clute may not be to everyone's taste and his quirkiness can seem strained, but this column continues to be an indispensable guide.

Garnett continues to be a high-quality editor and there are no real weaknesses among the dozen all-new stories here. The best are from J. D. Gresham, Kim Newman, Matthew Dickens and that old NW stalwart, Brian Aldiss. Gresham's 'Heat' is a vaguely disturbing story about sexual attraction which explains nothing and works beautifully. Newman's 'Übermensch!' is a minor story by his standards but plays about with history and pop culture in a typically Newman way. Aldiss's 'Foam' mixes memory and desire cleverly, but the best story is by Matthew Dickens; his 'The Descent of Man', even with its weak final sentence, is something special. A fantasy about people in apparently permanent free-fall it lives on in the mind long after the story is ended.

The only weakness of this NW lies in its design; there seems to be an attempt to echo the old NW's adventurousness with layout: different typefaces for different stories, the occasional splurge of graphics and daft photographs of the contributors. It all seems a bit laboured and half-hearted, however. It would be nice to see something with the visual impact and sensitivity of the old NW, but the design-work of this edition is too tentative to have much impact.

Still this cavil aside, like its 'predecessor' ZENITH, the new NEW WORLDS is - and will probably continue to be - the best original anthology of the year (or nine month period).

Arthur C. Clarke - - 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (New Legend, 1991, 301pp, £8.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

As the eponymous year comes closer, the gnostic monoliths are back in an extravagant production of the Clarke classic, with a price tag to match. New Legend are probably hoping that this trade-paperback edition will be snapped up by Clarke, Kubrick, sci-fi (sic) collectors who have nothing better to spend their money on. They are probably right.

Although 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY is not Clarke's magnum opus, it is certainly the novel he will be remembered by, partly because of the Stanley Kubrick film. This edition features an introduction in which Clarke

takes a retrospective look at the collaboration with Kubrick, including terse diary extracts from the period. The collaboration was a spectacular symbiosis that is rare between the mediums; particularly within the SF genre where it is usual for literature to have the intellectual prestige over the younger 'upstart' film. Brian Aldiss frequently warns of the 'overwhelming iconography' of film, and, in any case, I think he is right because the novel's primary purpose is to elucidate the film. Kubrick's aesthetic trip through various outer-space tableaux to the tune of The Blue Danube etc. was slow and half-baked. The novel is not so-much a film tie-in but tie-up: fastening together the loose ends from the incomprehensible film.

'The Sentinel' and 'Encounter in the Dawn' are included in this edition for the completists, because these short stories were the basis for the novel. They are merely thumb-nail sketches for the big story that Clarke has to tell and he pulls it off effortlessly. The themes and the tone of exuberant ingenuity are implicit an all of his work.

Moon-Watcher is the Neanderthal Prometheus who seizes the power offered by the monolith to become a hunter rather than the hunted. The production of weapons and tools provides the impetus for the whole of human endeavour which culminates in the construction of the Heuristically Programmed Algorithmic Computer, also known as HAL. The development of such a sentient machine is the hybrid of the human odyssey. This is not a tragedy. The finale is a triumphant as it is enigmatic.

2001 ... remains convincing in a time of cynicism towards the excesses of space exploration. If only the cover was as durable as the story. When I was reading, I noticed a metallic sheen on my finger-tips - '2001' was slowly fading away ...

Arthur C. Clarke - - THE SENTINEL (Grafton, 1991, 319pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

This anthology is a retrospective of Clarke's short fiction from the 40's to the 70's, and includes some of his best-known stories, stories which retain their "sensewonder" after several decades. There are stories that have been developed into longer works: the title-story, which Clarke describes as "the seed from which 2001: A Space Odyssey sprang", tells of the discovery of an alien artefact on the moon. 'The Songs of Distant Earth' is the original movie outline which grew into the novel of the same name. 'Guardian Angel' which portrays the interaction between humans and their technologically-superior alien Overlords, became part of CHILDHOOD'S END.

Technologically advanced aliens also feature in the earliest-written story 'Rescue Party', which deals with the fate of Earth's inhabitants when the sun goes Nova, while the alien life-forms in 'A Meeting with Medusa' are of a rather different order. This story has a splendid ending - a telling conclusion being the hallmark of several tales in this book.

In 'Breaking Strain' a spaceship is damaged, leaving only enough oxygen for one of its two-man crew to complete the voyage, in 'The Wind From the Sun' space "yachts" compete in a race to the moon, while 'Jupiter V' a Professor and his graduate students investigate the remains of an alien culture. Amongst all this inter-stellar activity, 'Refugee' although it features space travel, remains a very British tale.

Anyone coming to these stories for the first time will find them a valuable and enjoyable insight into Clarke's writing, and will no doubt be encouraged to read his novels.

Arthur C. Clarke - - THE GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS (Orbit, 1991, 256pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

I thought I'd never enjoy a Clarke book again, and it just goes to show how wrong I can be. Just when I thought the old bugger was past it, he comes up with an exciting chunk of near-future melodrama, with inventive technology, convincingly extrapolated. For example, I

loved the bit where two characters make their livings using computer graphics to remove cigarettes, and all movements associated with smoking, from classic films to make them acceptable to a C21 audience! I think they'd probably be dubbing IN swear words too, but a writer of Clarke's generation probably wouldn't think that seemly.

This novel is about the efforts of two rival projects to raise the Titanic from its grave on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, on the centennial of its sinking, and preserve the halves in shallow undersea tourist attractions in Florida and Japan.

The Western and Eastern projects use very different technologies in the raising of their sections, and engage in an intensely competitive race to be ready to get them up on the right date: April 15th, 2012. As the back cover says, however, 'the wreck... may still hold a surprise or two...' The ending is perhaps not what you might have expected, but with hindsight fits in well with Clarke's view of the role of the sea in our world.

As always, Clarke's cast are primarily tools to push the events along with, or voices to explain the scientific reasoning behind the action, but he has definitely made the effort to provide more depth this time. Sometimes, to make the reader care about characters, authors have to hurt them, and Clarke does that too. It's a pity, though that we aren't allowed to share their hurt enough to make us feel more than we do, but he has moved in the right direction.

Books that might enhance your enjoyment of GHOST are Walter Lord's A NIGHT TO REMEMBER and Dr Robert Ballard's THE DISCOVERY OF THE TITANIC, both of which are credited by Clarke as sources of inspiration. Clive Cussler wrote RAISE THE TITANIC before Ballard discovered that the wreck had split in two, and his raising methods are berated here as impractical. The book is dedicated to Bill MacQuitty, who filmed A NIGHT TO REMEMBER in 1958, and who provided Clarke with a Titanic amount of material, including photographs and plans. The Mandelbrot Set was another source of inspiration, and plays an important part in GHOST.

Clarke has written a 'scientific romance', and I enjoyed it on that level as an enthralling read. More interestingly, however, he also manages to square the technological emphasis with more holistic concerns. Perhaps FI readers who have always regarded Clarke as a space cadet will appreciate that, and enjoy the book despite themselves.

Brian Aldiss - - BURY MY HEART AT W.H.SMITH'S (Coronet, 1991, 221pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

When reviewing an autobiography one is effectively passing judgement on the intrinsic interest of an author's life. Are Aldiss's memoirs really as captivating as novels like LIFE IN THE WEST and THE MALICIA TAPESTRY might lead one to presuppose? Or are we to take the view of his son, Tim, whom Aldiss assures us finds his father a "terrible bore" (page 111)?

Am I uncomfortable tackling this question because Aldiss rightly tells me that with reviewers, "one is maligned and misunderstood. All the relish the writing of the novel engendered disappears" (page 185), or because he reminds me of that embarrassing fan-letter I once sent him on THE SHAPE OF FUTURE THINGS, "A reader conspires with the author; they are two people rapt in a singular sort of communion" (page 52)?

Or maybe I remember, with anguish, the uncharitable comments I have made on Arthur C. Clarke's output when reminded that Aldiss, too, was distantly responsible for my reviewing their books: "I was elected its (the BSFA's) first president, and reviewed books for its magazine, VECTOR" (page 129)?

A few years ago, at one of the Novacons in Birmingham, I almost bumped into him in the fanroom, but it seemed a private gathering and I didn't intrude. Brian Aldiss leads us through his writing career, bringing colour to his reminiscences with the occasional window on his life as a bookshop assistant, and his yearnings for the East, whilst still, somehow, remaining a private person. But Aldiss does it with insight, wit and a great feeling of wary comradeship with his fans, the readers of his books. This alone, is worth the price of entry. In my opinion.

Between a writer's life and a reader's nothing can be viewed objectively. You won't find any miracle cure for bad writing or juicy piece of gossip to discuss at the next convention. You will find an eloquent writer talking eloquently about what it is like to be a writer, and in devouring his words are as likely to be damned as praised, "All readers really wanted was the same old thing they had before. They don't care about science or poetry or the nuances of human life. They just wanted cheap throwaway thrills...You disappoint us, he (Barry Malzberg) told his audience. We think better of you than you think of yourselves. You don't care about us. You don't love us...You starve us, he said. You starve us." (page 208).

Lawrence Sutin - - DIVINE INVASIONS: A LIFE OF PHILIP K. DICK (Paladin, 1991, 352pp, £8.99)

(Reviewed by K. V. Bailey)

This is a well organised - and readable - book. A chaotic life, so various in its liaisons and mood changes, needs all the framing and guiding devices provided. Chapter titles are, not inappropriately, synoptic paragraphs in the style typical of picaresque novels. Then, while there are no numbered Notes, a supplemental page by page identification of sources forms a kind of biographic chain, as does the 'Chronological Survey and Guide', summarizing and glossing the entire novelistic oeuvre, from RETURN TO LILLIPUT (1941-2) to THE OWL IN DAYLIGHT (projected, 1982). A full index completes this useful apparatus.

Towards the end of the book Phil (as he is called throughout), being interviewed on the planning of OWL, says: "You're catching me when I'm actually organising a novel. This is the most essential part of writing a book, what I'm doing now. We switch viewpoints." Switching viewpoints was for him an empathy-related process, originating with his boyhood "beetle-satori" experience; expressed, for example, in the creature - empathy of 'Roog'; and manifested in his care for cats and crippled lives alike. Phil himself is by his biographer regarded from a multiplicity of viewpoints, discovered in letters, interviews with friends, ex-wives, agent, editors etc; and in the subject's own Exegesis, where he views himself from ever-shifting angles, just as in VALIS authorial Philip Dick and Houselover Fat survey each other across the borderlands of sanity. Sutin's skilful narrative provides continuity, settings, and social and psychological context for a kaleidoscopic array of memories, impressions and documentations.

What is real? What is human? These are omnipresent Dickian obsessions. The individual consciousness, confronting social, historical and physical worlds seemingly exterior to it, is unsure of what can be trusted, what is mendacious, even fake. Are we cosmically, metaphysically, like the "tankers" of THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH, by deliberate misdirection led to accept a lie, kept ignorant of a hidden reality? It is in relation to such uncertainties that PKD's schizophrenic actions, his agoraphobia, his amphetamine-stoked paranoia, his Gnostic dualism are viewed. Uncertainties and symptoms together are matrix to that attitude toward the "koinos cosmos" which occasions Dick's diversity of personae. Lawrence Sutin documents the recurrent self-guilt/mother-hate syndrome, centred on the internalized dead twin sister, from its origins to a fictive reconciliation with the "anima" in the creation of Angel in THE TRANSFIGURATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER. He also considers the possibility of a correspondence between the 2-3-74 experiences and temporal lobe epilepsy. The biography, while exploring Jungian dimensions, describes rather than attempts interpretation of Dick's visions. In it Dick is no St. Phil, no John the Baptist of either a parousia or a postmodernism. He is a charismatic, loving, if mood-ruled, at times drug/drink ruled, genius, perpetually seeking a mother (or surrogate) to affirm him, an internalized sister (or surrogate) to be saved/cherished, and to absolve him. So many witnesses speak that the rewarding feeling the reader is left with simply echoes Browning's "Ah, did you once see Shelley plain...?" Phil Dick seems here at a hundred points to be tangibly present.

Stephen King - - **FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT** (NEL, 1991, 930pp, £5.99)

Stephen Spignesi - - **THE STEPHEN KING QUIZ BOOK** (NEL, 1991, 203pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

Stephen King is critic proof. One of the few worthwhile approaches of any relevance is to compare the man's current output to his previous work. **FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT** is a collection of four novellas (though each is the length of a slim novel), which brings in **DIFFERENT SEASONS** as an obvious point of reference. While nothing in the new collection comes near 'The Body' - surely one of King's finest stories - there is enough work of quality in here to assure his fans of a worthwhile read. Those bite-sized chapters just keep the pages turning, and King's character driven plots have less chance to drift than in his novels.

'The Langoliers' kicks off the collection, but quickly reveals itself to be a failure (the only one in the collection). It starts off as an aircraft disaster story, an artistically sterile environment at best, and plods its way through the character establishment phase. Count 'em off; the troubled pilot, the handicapped kid, the teenage prodigy, the nutter, et cetera. The plane then lands in a

place very similar to Philip K. Dick's creation in **UBIK** (token PKD reference).

However, 'Secret Garden, Secret Window' is much, much better. King claims to write 364 days a year, so it shouldn't come as too great a surprise that a large number of his protagonists are writers. However, write what you know and you can't go too far wrong. King's psychological portrayal of a writer haunted by a hick with claims of plagiarism is chilling, providing a different angle of attack for the themes utilised in **MISERY** and **THE DARK HALF**.

'The Library Policeman' seems to hang on what I assume is a myth used to frighten American kids - if you don't return your books, then the Library Policeman will come after you. Effective, despite a rushed climax.

'The Sundog' is, again, another powerful piece. It starts lightly, but rapidly develops a claustrophobic air. A boy is given a camera that takes nothing but pictures of a sinister looking dog walking along a fence. Events speed up when the brute notices the photographer.

Although, overall, this collection isn't as strong as **DIFFERENT SEASONS**, it is enjoyable and readable.

THE STEPHEN KING QUIZ BOOK is a spin-off from Spignesi's King encyclopaedia. The questions relate more to types of cars than to subtexts, so don't expect penetrating analysis. The instructions are repeated alarmingly frequently, so I'd guess that even the compiler doesn't think that anyone will want to plow all the way through this one.

R E V I E W S

Colin Greenland - - **TAKE BACK PLENTY** (Grafton, 1991, 528pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

After winning every award save the Wimbledon mixed doubles, Greenland's famous space opera is now available in a very reasonably-priced paperback - it costs just over forty-four pence per ounce, a bargain by anybody's standards.

This is the story of Tabitha Jute, captain and owner of the *Alice Liddell*, a space-berge controlled by a computer with a personality. Humans have spread out across the solar system, but not any further; the mysterious, highly-advanced Capellans are responsible for both mankind's expansion and its containment, through their apparently benevolent dictatorship.

Independent, short-tempered, put-upon Tabitha gets into trouble with unreasonable enforcers of rules and regulations - as space bergees always must in such tales - and, of course, finds that every step she takes to extricate herself from the problems only makes them worse, until she ends up liberating the galaxy, wondering what it all means, and so on and so forth.

There were long passages of this book that I enjoyed enormously; I have never, for instance, been on such a thrilling voyage through hyperspace, and I've been on a few, believe me. The literary style is so good, you can't quite believe it's science-fiction - not just literate, which anyone with the right software can achieve, but literature-like; well-informed, well-read, effervescent.

Greenland's characters are excellent company for a long journey through nothingness. Tabitha herself is as down-to-earth as a Simak hero, and very nearly as lovable. Her weird and wonderful fellow-travellers really are weird and wonderful, not just suburban types dressed in funny skins. Also, there are lots of wacky ideas, and I do love wacky ideas.

Even so, when I finally finished this book I was slightly more disappointed than satisfied. **TAKE BACK PLENTY** - not its reputation, but the novel itself - seemed to promise more than it quite delivered. I kept thinking that any page now it was about to become one of the best space stories I'd ever read, only to be distracted again by yet another dip into a sort of bran-tub of borrowings from every book and, especially, TV show the author has ever consumed.

It's too long, too meandering, and the plot - which doesn't pretend to be particularly original or meaty - needs to be much faster. It's still a fine read, and one which I would recommend, but I don't believe it's Colin Greenland's masterpiece after all: instead, I hope, it is the forerunner of a much better novel still to come.

Joe Haldeman - - **THE HEMINGWAY HOAX** (NEL, 1991, 155pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

"Our story begins in a run-down bar in Key West, not so many years from now", is the kick-start first sentence of Joe Haldeman's stretched novella, **THE HEMINGWAY HOAX**. Cheerless isn't the actual place where Papa drank himself sicker than his parrot, but "its cheap prices and rascally charm" fatally attract both the "scholar" and the "rogue". The probable date, according to later evidence, is somewhere in 1996.

John Baird is the "scholar"; he Hemingways for pin money at Boston University, while living off a trust fund that'll run out in the much-too-near future. The "rogue" is con man Sylvester Castlemaine ("Castle" for short) -- so bred-in-the-bone crooked that, if he swallowed a six-inch nail, he'd excrete a corkscrew. Before you can say "Clifford Irving!", these wildly dissimilar men have joined forces (along with Baird's beautiful-but-mercenary-but-redeemable wife Lena) to forge a 'lost' Hemingway manuscript à la the 'memoirs' of Howard Hughes and the 'Hitler Diaries'.

Haldeman tells us (through the eidetic John Baird) that Ernie's first wife, Hadley, accidentally(-on-purpose?) lost several Hemingway manuscripts at the Gare de Lyon, Paris, on 14th December 1921. The hoax is soon well under way. John Baird writes up a storm-in-a-teacup, using an adapted 1921 Corona portable typewriter and authentic period typing paper. After many false starts, he manages a likely opening paragraph:

"The dirt on the sides of the trenches was never completely dry in the morning. If Nick could find an old newspaper he would put it between his chest and the dirt when he went out to lean on the side of the trench and wait for first light. First light was the best time. You might have luck and see a muzzle flash. But patience was

better than luck. Wait to see a helmet or a head without a helmet" (p. 56).

It's good/bad enough to be the Reel Thing -- short, declarative sentences with doing words and no ~~funny~~ adjectives. Haldeman might admire Hemingway's style, but he is often (through ex-soldier John Baird) adversely critical of his subject matter -- for example (concerning self-proclaimed 'heroism'): "...I was hit in the knee by a machine-gun bullet myself (in Vietnam), and went down on my ass and didn't get up again for five weeks. He (Hemingway) didn't carry anybody one step" (p. 11).

From then on, we are treated to what James Blish called an 'extensively recompllicated plot' -- one that actually makes sense (unlike the fascinating, but fundamentally daft dream-workings of A. E. van Vogt). The Hemingway motif is embellished by chapter headings taken from canonical titles/working titles, e.g. 'The Torrents of Spring', 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place', and 'Dying, Well or Badly'. A radical plot-line is presaged in the chapter headed 'in our time: "Got a ripple in the Hemingway channel/Twenties again?/No, funny, this one's in the 1990s..."' (p. 15).

John Baird finds himself dogged by a not-so-little man who isn't there, most of the time, who seems hell-bent on stopping the Hemingway hoax before its even fairly begun. "He, it, wasn't really a person, though he could look like one; he had never been born and he would never die" (p. 47). The Man/Whatever from STAB (Spacio-Temporal Adjustment Board) materialises as Hemingway at various ages; he repeatedly "kills" Baird in manifold ways, precipitating ever-more drastic reality changes.

THE HEMINGWAY HOAX (IASFM, April 1990; expanded version published by William Morrow, also 1990) has won both the Nebula and Hugo awards for best novella -- and deservedly so. Haldeman is much better at 'capturing' Hemingway than Ray Bradbury, who, -- in 'The Kilimanjaro Device' and 'The Parrot Who Met Papa' -- sentimentalised this flawed-genius-if-ever-there-was-one out of all proportion. He has also written an above-average 'multiverse' yarn, ably doing in 155 pages what Heinlein botched in over twice the space (I am not one of JOB's comforters).

All the characters are well-realised. Sylvester Castlemaine seems to have stepped out of something by John D. MacDonald (high praise in my opinion). But the novel belongs to John Baird, who is -- at heart -- a decent man trapped in an anomalous situation which perversely hinders him from 'doing the decent thing'. Having said that...Baird himself might be the greatest 'Hemingway hoax' of all time -- no, all times. Or, there again, he might not...

Simon R. Green -- THE GOD KILLER (Headline, 1991, 187pp, £3.99)

Simon Green -- BLUE MOON RISING (Gollancz, 1991, 448pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Despite the lack of a middle initial when he writes for Gollancz, this is apparently the same person, and if your taste for fantasy runs to the oribeat then may I recommend him.

THE GOD KILLER features the same husband-and-wife cop team featured in NO HAVEN FOR THE GUILTY (there is also another book which possibly features Hawk and Fisher, DEVIL TAKE THE HINDMOST, which I have not seen). There's really only one joke in the idea (which fuses Chandlerian romanticism with the US TV cop series and injects them into the sword-and-sorcery genre, but it's a good joke, and will certainly produce a few wry smiles upon the faces of fantasy fans. Haven is a cosmopolitan city (in the vein of Lankmar, etc.) and magical crime is as big a problem as the non-magical variety. It's all, however, taken absolutely straight: so, for instance, the forensic expert at the scene of a murder is asked if there is any evidence of "a nonhuman assailant? Werewolf, vampire, ghoul?", instead of hightech weaponry cops are issued with magical amulets, and they don't have personal radios but there is a communications sorcerer.

Hawk and Fisher -- the only honest cops in Haven -- are called to investigate a crime in the Street of Gods. Someone is killing off divine beings, and the result could be catastrophe. Seconded to the Deity Division, Hawk and Fisher have to solve the crime before the panicking gods

and their followers tear the city apart. As usual, everyone they meet has a different guilty secret.

Green rattles his story along at such a pace and with such colourful but understated detail woven into the background it's hard to tell if his world is carefully worked out or whether he's making it up as he goes along. The crime element is grittily authentic and if Green can keep a steady variety to his plots and not allow the fantasy element to take over too much then Hawk and Fisher could well become a classic duo in the genre and Haven a location to rival Ankh-Morpork. Confirmed crime fans may well find Hawk and Fisher welcome additions to such exotic examples of the genre as Robert Van Gulik's Judge Dee, Ellis Peters' Brother Cadfael, and Leonard Tourney's Elizabethan detective, Matthew Stock.

Having decided to avoid simultaneous trade paperback-hardback editions to prevent too much duplication with

VECTOR, I at once break my own rule to plug BLUE MOON RISING on the grounds that it fits so well with THE GOD KILLER. It's an entirely different kind of fantasy, but the author's deconstructive humour is the same, beginning brilliantly with younger-son Prince Rupert riding through the Tanglewood on his unicorn on a quest partly to vanquish a dragon but mostly to rid the royal line of succession of such inconveniences as younger sons. Unfortunately, Rupert isn't as much of a wimp as he sounds, and he comes back, complete with dragon and a rescued Princess with a healthy line in fisticuffs.

There's a similar wryness to the genre clichés as in Green's books for Headline, although BLUE MOON RISING is at its best in the farcical bits, with some especially good repartee between Rupert and the unicorn. Despised Rupert, always under the shadow of his elder brother, the kind of nerd who (as one offstage character points out) is still qualified to ride a unicorn (geddit?) comes good at last, even after going on yet another quest to find an alcoholic High Warlock who can save the land from the Demon Prince. The novel does sag slightly in the middle as the plot-stuff about defeating the D.P. has to take prominence, but even after that you're left with fond memories of the cynical unicorn, the dragon whose hoard doesn't consist of all this tedious gold-and-jewels nonsense and the castle whose entire South Wing has disappeared and where you need to make sure what day it is before you can get the right directions to anywhere.

And it doesn't appear to be the first volume in the magnificent ----- trilogy. What more do you want?

Martin H. Greenberg, Ed. -- FOUNDATION'S FRIENDS: STORIES IN HONOUR OF ISAAC ASIMOV (Grafton, 1991, 511pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

This book celebrates fifty years of Asimov's writing. There are prefaces by Ray Bradbury and Ben Bova, and afterwords by Janet Asimov and the Good Doctor himself. In between, we have seventeen stories on Asimovian themes: the laws of robotics, the Hardin legend, the knowing detection, the chronoscope, thiotimoline...

It's fashionable to debunk Asimov; to young turks in fandom he is outdated and boring; to the old dodderers of my generation he is a phase we're sure we all grew out of. Sometimes his glib writing, cardboard characters and slick plots made him the Agatha Christie of sf. Yet memory retains the images: the corridors of Eternity where bureaucrats rearranged the contents of the centuries; the psychohistory that (in those easy, pre-Chaos days) plotted galactic decline and rebirth; those robots exploring their limits. Campbell gave him some of the themes, but it was Asimov who wrote them, and fascinated generations of unsophisticated readers.

Some of these contributions flatter by imitation, successfully writing an Asimov theme in an Asimovian way: Silverberg, Resnick, Pohl, Anderson, Zebrowski. Others (I won't name them) try the same but, to my mind, less successfully. Hal Clement is more typically himself, as is Robert Sheckley (who would want otherwise?). But the real eye-opener is Orson Scott Card, whose long-ish story, 'The Originist', in the Foundation universe, takes Asimov-type characters where only Card himself could so eloquently go, and just about makes the book worth your surplus fiver.

Jack L. Chalker - - SOUL RIDER - BOOK ONE:
SPIRITS OF FLUX AND ANCHOR

(Roc, 1991, 320pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Do readers really enjoy being thrown vast quantities of information without any background? Concepts like stringers, demons, spirits of Flux and Anchor, the Holy Mother, the church (nothing to do with Christianity), 'the Seven', 'the Nine Who Guard' and a whole new lifestyle on a world named (rather oddly) 'World'... all woven into the opening chapters with either no explanation at all, or possibly misleading explanations based on the one-eyed perceptions of a single character?

I confess I don't like it at all. No way do I want slabs of "let me explain" thrown at me, but there are ways of introducing concepts gently, with enough descriptive background to allow the reader to understand what s/he is reading. Jack Chalker doesn't give this at all, with the result that by the time you reach page - oh, let's say page 70 - you are still pretty much in the dark about all you've read.

In a mystery story the author is careful to establish the ambiance, to make you feel at home: without it, you cannot empathise with the victim, so you don't give a damn about the murderer. And if you aren't given enough clues to follow the plot, you feel totally cheated when the dénouement reveals that it was, as usual, the butler (who hadn't appeared until page 301 and whose activities were never properly explained away).

What's more, the cumbersome title indicates - as does the advertisement inside which lists the remaining parts of the series - that we are going to have all this information repeated over and over, in case we've bought Book Five first or have forgotten, among all that the author has thrown at us, what the story is about anyway. Can't we go back to simple tales, simply told - and preferably within the covers of a single book? By the time I've read the third or fourth book I'm fed up with the repetition, and the fact that most of the goodies were in Book One, and not even clearly presented there.

If I want a intellectual puzzle involving memorising thirty invented terms and an unexplained environment, I'll find something worthwhile: I should not be expected to make the effort over something like this. On the other hand, Chalker has complained that British critics seem unable to grasp that his books are supposed to be funny. Maybe all this is some strange coded humorous essay? If so, I'm afraid I missed the point again. Sorry.

Jack L. Chalker - - MEDUSA: A TIGER BY THE TAIL
(Penguin, 1991, 296pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

This series of sf adventures is about a threat to the Confederacy of civilised worlds from a more advanced alien race, in league with the four Lords of the Diamond, the criminal bosses of the galaxy. The four worlds of the Warden Diamond are used to exile incorrigible criminals because they contain an organism that forms a symbiotic relationship with humans, but which cannot exist outside its own solar system. As people sent there can never return, the Confederacy's top agent, whose name we are never told, has his mind impressed into the brains of four criminals being sent to each of the Warden planets. Each of these has a mission to eliminate the Lord of their particular planet, and also discover as much as possible about the alien plot.

In this fourth and final book of the series, the Agent With No Name, having seen off three earlier Lords, finds himself on the ice-planet of Medusa in the body of Tarin Bul, fourteen-year-old son of a planetary governor, sent to the Diamond Worlds for murdering the man who killed his father. Bul quickly adapts to life on the planet because of the Medusa organism, which changes people so that they can live in conditions worse than at our poles. There are other changes induced by the organism, but these come later in the story.

Only two thirds of this volume tells Bul's tale, as the final 100 pages are devoted to a lengthy 'Epilogue',

in which the Agent goes at last to the Warden system to join his four alter egos in the final struggle to defeat the alien threat, and solve all the puzzles of the Diamond. All loose ends are, as Chalker puts it, "neatly tied", so there should be no more Diamond novels from him.

This series is excellent space adventure, with a seasoning of scepticism from the characters that gives it a more modern approach. In my last two reviews I felt Chalker glossed over some of the implications of his tricks with the human psyche, but here I feel he does face up to some of these consequences.

Recommended.

Jack L. Chalker - - CHANGEWINDS 3:
WAR OF THE MAELSTROM

(NEL, 1991, 360pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Malcolm Muggeridge used to say that it was alright not to read a book that was sent for review, so long as you said that it was an excellent book. He used to quote Dr Samuel Johnson's verdict on Congreve: "Sir, I would rather praise him than read him."

Don't get me wrong: I like Jack Chalker. At least I thoroughly enjoyed THE WEB OF THE CHOZEN, THE IDENTITY MATRIX, DOWNTIMING THE NIGHTSIDE, and even (despite much critical complaint) the three-part G.O.D. INC. and the five-part THE SAGE OF THE WELL WORLD. I rather enjoyed a lot more of his books, too, and I would like to feel that WAR OF THE MAELSTROM would appeal to me as well, though somehow - based on the title and the cover illo mostly, I confess - I doubt it.

But Chalker has very clearly warned me off. In a careful and honest Prefatory Note - which would have gained by the substitution of the British publisher's name for that of Ace - he explains that this is not a series but the third book of what Victorians used to call a three-decker: a single story that outgrew the normal capabilities of bindery.

This is "the final part of a single continuous narrative... intended to be read after the first two..." The second volume had "concessions... to provide a measure of recap and rationale for those who came in late". "Little such is provided in this volume, since it would... take a very long time to explain."

Perfectly sensible, as is the author's injunction to "buy this one now, so you'll have it, then... buy the other two." Good advertising, good salesmanship. But he does warn us what will happen if we ignore his well-meant advice: "be aware that you're going to be thrown full-blown into the long and involved climax of a major plot. You might still have a good time, but you'll never get it all reading just this one."

Okay, I can take a hint. Look: if you've read the first two parts, you will know perfectly well whether you want to buy the final section. If you haven't, you wouldn't want me to spoil it for you by blowing the plot and ruining your chances of enjoying the earlier volumes. So take the author's advice: if you think that WHEN THE CHANGEWINDS BLOW and RIDERS OF THE WINDS will make WAR OF THE MAELSTROM appealing to you then buy them and see for yourself. Had I been sent them for review, I would have been happy to provide my own opinion.

Alan Dean Foster - - QUOZL
(NEL, 1991, 340pp, \$4.50)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Suppose aliens landed who were neither predators, ambassadors, preachers or galactic police? Suppose they were furry, long-eared, sociable, cuddly and pacific? Suppose they arrived unobserved and set up First Burrow in a remote part of Idaho, and later made accidental contact with a young boy by a lake? And suppose their final acceptance into partnership and citizenship was because of the overwhelming acclaim of the world's children?

This is QUOZL, and very cosy and Disney-like it all is. Quozi are sometimes naughty but never wicked; they

copulate amazingly often, but very discreetly, and are marvellously polite, signalling emotional overtones by their long, flexible ears; they meditate regularly, helped by their philosophic teaching, the Samizene, which has resolved all their social problems; they dislike alcohol but love fruit juice. I often (oh dear!) wanted to throttle them.

The trouble with the book is that the humans we meet are just as sanitized. The author knows there is such a thing as evil, but it's all off-stage, never confronted. The story is suitable for sheltered, middle-class, idealistic, rather shy teenagers who want to stay that way; I bob an ear as I say that.

David Eddings - - THE RUBY KNIGHT (Grafton, 1991, 444pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Here we continue the quest of the knight Sparhawk to track down the Shellion, the magical jewel which will save the life of the Queen. Yes, it's one of those fantasies. People either love Eddings or hate him, and without doing either I can see why: there's little in the plotting apart from its admittedly skillful interweaving of standard fantasy tropes into a complex pattern, but it is possible to enjoy the way Eddings allows his story to unfold, keeping enough in reserve for the next volume but ending this one on a dramatically satisfying note. Furthermore, his characters are fun. It's hardly to be taken seriously - but Eddings knows this and there's a light touch to his *dramatis personae*. I made a comment in my review of THE DIAMOND THRONE about the sorceress Saphrenia ("Little Mother") being the sort of person who checks that her order of fighting monks have washed behind their ears before going on any nasty rough quests and slap me if she doesn't as near as dammit do so in this volume.

There's an insectile monster and a mad troll-dwarf to provide the obligatory baddies, although the main human villain stays off-stage throughout. The main focus, though, is on Sparhawk and his comrades and the banter between them. Think of any romance of adventure involving a group of disparate characters from THE THREE MUSKETEERS onwards and you'll have a parallel to the tone. Without being in any significant way original, Eddings is certainly readable. Critics who dismiss him as rubbish (see PRIVATE EYE a few months back) are beyond the mark unless they take on board the quip and repartee between his characters, which may be insufferably cute but which I find amusing, the reason why I would recommend Eddings over half a dozen other best-selling fantasy writers. THE RUBY KNIGHT has less of this than THE DIAMOND THRONE and is by this measure a less good book, but unless you actively hate this sort of fantasy you may well find that you're gripped despite yourself.

Barbara Hambly - - DARK HAND OF MAGIC (Grafton, 1991, 309pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

This is the third Hambly novel recounting the adventures of the mercenary soldier cum wizard Sun Wolf and his companion and lover Starhawk. On this occasion, he is reluctantly drawn into helping his old comrades-in-arms lay siege to the city of Vorsal. Their efforts are being thwarted by a curse and Sun Wolf spends the book hunting down and eventually overcoming the wizard who is responsible for it.

As one would expect from Hambly, the story is told with considerable vigour and attempts to give a realistic view of the suffering and hardships of a soldier's life in a medieval society. She tries hard to convey to her readers the dirt and stink, the discomforts, the tiredness and the pain of life as lived by her characters. The trouble is that her formula has become too familiar, the piling on of the agony no longer has any novelty and has become mere repetition. She is going to have to do something new to keep this reader faithful.

One other point. Most fantasy novels have managed to celebrate dark age or medieval warrior types as heroes because they avoid coming too close to reality -

that is to the murder, torture, burning and rape that accompanied the real thing. Is it really acceptable to celebrate this kind of hero in fiction that does show that mercenaries rape and murder whole families as part of the spoils of victory? Once again, I think Hambly has exhausted the genre as far as her contribution is concerned.

HOFFMAN'S GUIDE TO SF, HORROR AND FANTASY MOVIES (Corgi, 1991, 432pp, £12.99)

(Reviewed by John D Owen)

"Great!," I said, when this book arrived. "I can look up all those odd videos." That's obviously the reaction that Corgi and the French outfit producing this guide want from punters. Unfortunately, the great idea is spoiled by bad production. What can you say about "...an invaluable reference book for both the movie buff and the casual browser..." that has no entry for THE TERMINATOR (bar a still from the film), PREDATOR (maybe they have it in for Arnie?), WARLOCK, or the Indiana Jones trilogy? It does try to be topical, reviewing TERMINATOR 2 and BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE II. Unfortunately, both 'reviews' look suspiciously like compilations from pre-release stories, even to the extent of getting the latter title wrong (it's BILL AND TED'S BOGUS ADVENTURE). I suspect that the rush to be topical explains where the originals went: a last minute cut and paste job, perhaps?

The book is organised alphabetically - mostly - with cross-referencing of alternative titles. Each main entry consists of title, release date, country of origin, duration, star rating (0 to 4, with halves), director, major cast members, and a short review of between 3 and 20 lines.

These reviews vary from snippets that pull no punches, to longer rhapsodies on favoured works. Unfortunately, the reviewer(s) and the star-rater have rarely met, as the reviews and ratings often contradict. Reading some of the plot synopses makes you wonder whether you saw the same film. Is the 1966 FANTASTIC VOYAGE really an "...overwhelming and fascinating sf story..."? Is Cheryl Ladd really a *man*, as the review of MILLENIUM maintains? And is A BOY AND HIS DOG really taken from a story called 'Harlan Ellison'? There are many other examples.

The book's organisation is no better. The three STAR WARS films are placed together, but in the sequence 2, 3, 1. The NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET movies share a similar fate. When it comes to SUPERMAN, with various movies and serials to consider, they simply give up and put them in random order.

If the book was only halfway decent, I would still want it, but it's not even that. The English is strange (translated, and never edited in Britain), there are multitudinous typos and all in all it's a bit of a mess. At that price, it's an expensive paperback too. Wait until this one's remaindered - then buy it for laughs!

Pat Cadigan, Karen Joy Fowler, Pat Murphy - - LETTERS FROM HOME (The Women's Press, 1991, 233pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

A collection of eighteen short stories; 6 by each of the three named authors, who are all Americans known for their science fiction writing. All but one of the stories have been previously published elsewhere, mostly in the American SF magazines (7 out of 18 in LASFJ).

Most of the stories explore interactions between what the authors see as ordinary women's realities, and the imaginative and symbolic Otherworld realms of SF, horror and fantasy. A woman stuck in a dead, conventional marriage shoots and alien far-traveller who wants her to stay at home and look after "him". A woman finds her baby has turned into/been replaced by a doll; everyone else apparently perceives her as mad. A man grows a vegetable wife and treats it cruelly; it kills him. I found most of the women's-viewpoint stories made me feel angry, resentful, bitter; they are stories full of pain. I preferred some of the gentler stories that didn't focus on women's pain; 'In the Abode of the Snows', for instance,

about a young man retracing his father's Himalayan journey in search of the yeti.

I can distinguish Pat Murphy's work as being, on the whole, gentler, more fanciful, less constrained by the bleakness underlying much feminist realism. I can't see or hear the individual vision and voice of the other two writers as clearly.

Overall I found this a strong and interesting collection, with some powerfully haunting stories among those which made less of an impact on me.

Harry Harrison - - *IN OUR HAND, THE STARS* (Legend, 1991, 217pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

An Israeli scientist discovers an anti-gravity force, and takes it to his native Denmark, where he hopes it can be exploited for the universal good. The Israelis want it back - well, he had been using their bunsen burners, after all - so that they can kill Arabs with it; the USA and the USSR are also murderously keen to get their grubbies on the formula. But the hero sees his invention as a way to the stars, not just another weapon.

First published in 1970 as *THE DALETH EFFECT*, this is, as the blurb says, "a thriller of tomorrow" - an espionage and adventure story. Science-fiction for the uncommitted, there probably isn't really enough to it to please Sf fans, although at one point HH does a good job of recapturing the goshness of a much earlier generation of romantic imaginers, when the danes fly a submarine to the moon to rescue some stranded cosmonauts. During that episode, Harrison's writing is deringly wide-eyed and exciting; most of the time, however, as fat as style is concerned it's the usual hit-and-miss.

The book is never less than thoroughly readable, of course, although it had dated rather badly. The message, as subtle as a thumping hangover, is that scientific advance could make the Earth into a paradise - but only if men will learn to stop killing each other, and work together for the mutual benefit of all. Undeniably true, but, as one of the characters says in the novel's penultimate paragraph, "One world or none. I seem to have heard that before".

Paul Preuss - - *THE MEDUSA ENCOUNTER* (Pan, 1991, 280pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

This book masquerades under the description of 'Arthur C. Clarke's bestselling *VENUS PRIME* series' but there's no more ACC about it than a five-page afterword about himself, and a passing reference to his novella *A MEETING WITH MEDUSA* (1952). Anyone feeling cheated has the opportunity of redress through the courts, as a recent case showed; this book is by Preuss, its title is merely an excuse, and its style owes nothing at all to the smooth, thoughtful, sensible, scientifically researched tales from the British Old Master.

What, then, do we get here? Well, it's straightforward Space Opera, and none the worse for that. Conversations are clipped, unrealistic and often comicbook in style, and activity centres around our heroine Linda, now known as Ellen although she thinks of herself as Sparta - and doesn't know why.

Linda is a Special Investigator with the Board of Space: when the book opens she is in the process of having vast amounts of undescribed gunge removed from her innards, and she is then handed over to the care of the man she loves, Blake, who wears "the dress-blue uniform of a full commander of the Board of Space Patrol".

Linda is also superhuman, having powers grafted into her by 'highly advanced biotechnology' - nothing supernatural about her superhumanity, it's all good Space Opera superscience; the ideal *deus ex machina* on which to fall back when the plot needs a quick solution to a pressing problem, like the imminent death of a major character.

It's all quite a lot of fun if you want a light, simple, pulp-fiction read for a quiet train journey or evening at home. I wouldn't knock it: it's just that it didn't actually do anything inspiring for me at all.

Greg Bear - - *HEADS* (Legend, 1991, 117pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Keith Brooke)

On the 22nd century Moon, the moody, enigmatic scientist William Pierce is searching for absolute zero. *HEADS*, first serialised in *INTERZONE* in the summer of 1990, opens with a three page summary of how Pierce's project was established. A few pages later, after the crudest of opening gambits ("Tell me about it," says Micko Sandoval, the narrator and strangely uninformed project manager; "You didn't study the files," says Pierce ... cue: lecture), the reader is subjected to one and a half pages of the history of the Quantum Logic thinking machine. This is a characteristic of bad SF which recurs later in *HEADS*: characters either don't know what they should know or, even worse, they do know about it and still receive the mandatory data-dump of historical background or pseudo-scientific justification.

On, eventually, with the story. Micko's sister, Rho, acquires 410 cryogenically preserved heads and brings them to the project's refrigeration plant where, as there just happens to be enough spare capacity, they can be kept on ice and eventually 'read' by a recently developed means of scanning the molecular structure of their brains. At this point, we are introduced to a religious sect called the Logologists, who want to prevent the reading of the heads. Another info dump reveals the Logologists to be rather similar in origins and beliefs to SF's own contribution to 20th century theology - the founder of Logology even ran his own Writers of the Future Contest ... sorry, a "programme of supporting young LitVid artists". Bear's attack on Scientology is all very worthy but, again, the space taken to dump data just slows things down: in the search for absolute zero, much is made of the need to break the third law of thermodynamics - perhaps Bear should have paid more attention to the one about conservation of (story) momentum ...

The plot proceeds in a somewhat predictable manner and yet, there is something there, something that makes you want to keep going. The premise is interesting, the conflict intriguing, the writing effective (except for those digressions). But then, can you accept that when a religious mind is confronted by proof that it has been wrong it will, in the space of a couple of pages, merely accept that proof? If you can, then the resolution is a fitting climax; otherwise, *HEADS* - although entertaining and stimulating - ultimately fails.

Robert Silverberg - - *SON OF MAN* (Gollancz, 1991, 192pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

Gollancz continue their series of reprints of Silverberg's sixties and seventies oeuvre with this 'creation myth', originally published in 1971. It is clearly situated in the fashionable contemporary themes of entropy and sexuality. The protagonist, Clay, is transported due to a flux in time to an era where centuries of evolution have caused the dissipation of the cosmos into chaotic, primal ooze. Like Silverberg's *Lord Valentine*, Clay has only vague memories of his previous life. He has to re-adjust to the disordered landscape, which is evocatively created with highly stylized prose. Clay's corporality is a deviant system of order in an environment where "logic is tyranny". Humans who are in various stages in the evolutionary chain co-exist - changing sex, appearance, inter-planetary location at will, causing a certain degree of confusion for randy Clay.

There is no plot to speak of because it would destroy the awesome chaos of the situation; it is rhetoric that pulls you alone. However, the style does become weary after a while, and there is a definite lull in the middle when there is an over use of alliterative antonyms eg. "He is dismembered, disintegrated, dispersed, dissected, disjoined, dis..." (*that's enough alliterative antonyms - Ed.*). The physical and the metaphysical trauma that Clay has to endure is compelling, nevertheless, beneath the gibberish, there isn't much depth.

Graham Andrews - - **DARKNESS AUDIBLE** (Excalibur Press of London, 1991, 213pp, £7.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This is a collection of ten short stories set in a framing narrative. The "frame" describes a series of encounters in the ongoing psychiatric treatment of Howard Saxon, a writer who has ceased to sell stories, and is now plagued by "overheard" voices. The embedded stories are presented as the narratives he hears. They often deal with death but otherwise seem to have little connection with each other. A lone spaceman enters a black hole and accepts the inevitability of his own death; a young couple contemplating a "mixed" (i.e. Catholic/Protestant) marriage are encouraged to continue by an older man who feels his own "mixed" marriage was blessed by a pair of druidic stones; a college professor plays academic-reputation games by producing a *vers libre* version of H. G. Wells' *THE TIME MACHINE* (substantial sections of this story transcribe the result, an embedding-within-an-embedding and for me perhaps the most interesting work in the collection); an IRA gunman faces death and an after-death judgement which involves reliving the experiences of his victims; a time-travel paradox story; a set of meditations on violent death by a hospital doctor; a medical-horror story about an organ donation; a young man's encounter with a couple of malignant feminine archetypes; a shaggy-God story, and a childhood reminiscence involving the adoption and death of a young seal.

Many of the stories make use of Andrews' Irish background. Apart from that, the collection as a whole seemed unremarkable to me, and I found the framing narrative superfluous and rather frustrating in its pointless non-progression.

Phil Clarke & Mike Higgs - - **NOSTALGIA ABOUT COMICS** (Pegasus, 1991, 68pp, £6.99)

Alan Moore & Oscar Zarate - - **A SMALL KILLING** (Gollancz, 1991, £8.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

In different ways, these show the strength in depth of visual narratives. The Clarke-Higgs compilation, one of a new venture into book publishing by Pegasus, who are known for the media glossy *FANTASZIA*, is perhaps of fringe interest to SF readers, but the history of comics is tied up with that of SF, particularly when it comes to the space opera or superhero subgenres. The editors have produced an attractive and fascinating album concentrating on British titles (or titles available during the forties and fifties); hence it avoids the major American publishers and tends to look at material which didn't attract a mass cult or lasting following. There are a few exceptions such as Tarzan, or The Phantom who I certainly remember guiding my own faltering steps into the world of literacy and the imagination in the late fifties. Most of what you see is reproduction of covers, with the occasional short strip to give a flavour of the contents, but enough information is packed in here to provide a fascinating chronicle of the fantasies of the times. There are quite a few examples of swashbuckling space heroes, trips to the moon, masked crime-fighters etc.; mostly hokum but with a garish energy which still fires the blood.

An unfortunately clumsily-written but informative introduction gives a background to the pictures which follow. The rest of the text is more or less captions to the illustrations: you feel that you are browsing among someone's collection: not surprisingly, because basically you are. It's a shame that the closely-printed pages of vituperative anti-comics propaganda which are reproduced for us as examples of the establishment attitudes couldn't have been printed larger, so that you could read them without eyestrain, because some of their arguments concerning the encouragement to aggression and hatred to be found in some comics are not to be simply dismissed as paranoia.

A **SMALL KILLING** is one of Gollancz's first steps into the new grown-up graphic novel. (There is also - mentioned on the back cover but not received for review - **THE LUCK IN THE HEAD** by M. John Harrison and Ian Miller). It's a world away from *CUTE FUN ALBUM* and *MARVELMAN*. Would Steve Storm, ace reporter, aka The Tornado, ever decide to send himself to sleep by having a toss, for

example? Timothy Hole (pronounced "Holly") is a working-class Brit who has made it to the top of the advertising world. With his origins safely put behind him, with emotional entanglements carefully severed from his life, he is about to tackle the biggest job of his life - selling a soft drink to the Soviets. Only it looks as though someone is trying to kill him. . .

Moore's hallucinatory story about betrayals and breakdown, about a literal and metaphorical "scene of the crime" is a dark fantasy atmospherically executed by Oscar Zarate, whose shades range from light pastel to brooding dark and smoky black-and-white to capture the various emotional textures of the story. There are asides - in Hole's soliloquies, in the crowded street and party scenes where we pick up disconnected snatches of thought and conversation - which show that we are in the here and now, in a Britain which has had the heart ripped out of it by the very values that Hole has embraced as enthusiastically as he pretended for so long that he himself will be untouched by them. It's hardly optimistic reading - one wonders what Hole is actually going to do in the end, but it's compulsive stuff; as so often with Moore the main character's epiphany hinges upon a little thing, a childhood incident which becomes a symbol of a much larger change in Hole and the world around him: a kind of "Rosebud" effect. If art is about seeing the world in a different way, then **A SMALL KILLING** - however derivative of *CITIZEN KANE* - is art and 99% of the material in **NOSTALGIA ABOUT COMICS** (which, however much fun it is, is about seeing the world in the *same* way) isn't. But that might be a bit deep for a review of a couple of comic books. . .

Robert B Vardeman - - **THE KEYS TO PARADISE** (NEL, 1991, 540pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by John D Owen)

THE KEYS TO PARADISE is pretty much yer average quest fantasy. Three adventurers set out to find the five keys that open the Gates to Paradise. Two they acquire individually, the others are somewhat harder to obtain. In their efforts, the three (an aging soldier, a foppish thief and a half-cat/half-woman, half-thief) journey west to the caverns of the fire sorceress, south to the desert lands of the Skeleton Lord and north to the frozen, demon-prowled maze of a minor god. Along the way, they fight off assorted foes.

Vardeman writes well and moves the plot along at a hectic pace. The situations occasionally smack of 'roll the dice and see what comes up' writing, but he strings everything together well enough to survive the reader's recognition of clichés. This is easy to read, and requires little effort on the part of the reader, other than to turn the pages. Vardeman's characters just about pass muster, though he misses quite a few opportunities to bring them more fully to life. With a little more attention to detail and motivation, Vardeman might have produced an imposing book: instead, he's delivered something that is competent but not compelling. The 'what happens next' reflex is there to keep the reader going, but gives no inclination to repeat the experience, so it's just as well he's put the whole story in one fat volume.

Bob Shaw - - **ORBITSVILLE DEPARTURE** (Orbit, 1991, 252pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

As science fiction, this sequel to **ORBITSVILLE** is staple fare. It covers familiar territory - spaceships, super-intelligent aliens - and innovation is not a part of its appeal. It is, however, an enjoyable SF-adventure that holds its readers' interest from start to finish.

It is 200 years since the discovery of the enormous Dyson sphere known as Orbitville and its subsequent colonisation. Gary Dallen, native of Orbitville, whose work has brought him to Earth, finds mankind's home planet to be in a state of decline, its cities either tourist attractions or deserted. Disappointed both by earth and his job, Dallen yearns to return to orbitville, and then his life is completely shattered when tragedy overtakes his wife and child. Despite his grief, Dallen finds himself attracted to the beautiful Silvia London whose terminally-ill husband has set up a bizarre experiment to prove that the life of the mind continues after death. A return journey to Orbitville on the same spaceship as Silvia and the man whose criminal activities were responsible for the destruction of Dallen's family gives Dallen the opportunity both to further his relationship with Silvia, now widowed, and for revenge. Meanwhile on Orbitville itself, startling changes have occurred . . .

It is not necessary to have read ORBITVILLE before embarking on this self-contained sequel, but ORBITVILLE DEPARTURE adds an extra dimension to its predecessor when, as all the threads of the plot are drawn together, the true nature of the sphere is revealed. As in the previous novel, the author has obviously put a great deal of thought into his depiction of the mechanics of everyday life in his imagined future. Admittedly this book is not going to stretch the reader's intellect, but on its own terms it succeeds admirably.

M. K. Wren - - A GIFT UPON THE SHORE (Roc, 1991, 375pp, £4.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

A nuclear-survival novel, and a tract against Christian evangelical fundamentalism. The story opens when Rachel Morrow, an educated humanist living on the remote Oregon coast, takes in and shelters Mary Hope, a young woman fleeing from the social and environmental disintegration of the cities. They begin a life of survivalist self-sufficiency, isolated from the plague, war and famine that increasingly affect the rest of the USA (and world). They survive a limited nuclear war and subsequent "nuclear winter", and live for some years in a pastoral idyll without contact with other survivors.

They are found by Luke, an explorer from the Ark, a Biblical-literalist community held together by the charismatic figure of "The Doctor", their preacher. Mary falls in love with Luke and leaves Rachel to join the Ark. Rachel continues her mission of preserving for future generations all the books she can find. Mary gets pregnant by Luke but cannot tolerate the logical inconsistency and limited world-view of the Ark's belief system. She leaves the community, it subsequently fails, and she lives the remainder of her life with a group of ex-community members, continuing to challenge the fundamentalist viewpoint as personified by Miriam, a fanatic, and to work for freedom of thought and expression.

The story is fluently told and the emotional drama of Mary's changing response to Rachel, Luke and Miriam is gripping. The survivalist pastoral idyll is, I fear, over-rosy, but the many challenges to Biblical literalism and a rigid Puritan morality are factually correct (for example drawing attention to inconsistencies in Biblical texts) and philosophically valid. A pleasant and interesting read, with something useful to say.

Margaret Weis - - KING'S TEST (Bantam, 1991, 450pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The average SF/fantasy trilogy goes like this. Volume one thrusts a certain amount of generic narrative hooks into the reader. Volume two is any old rubbish because the reader has already bought it on the strength of volume one. Volume three ups the ante to some sort of climax, but leaves a few loose ends in case the publishers call for another bite at the cherry.

Margaret Weis's *STAR OF THE GUARDIANS* trilogy cheats. It cheats because this second volume is actually

superior to the first, so if you thought the unbalanced plotting and generic hackery mixed with grasps towards High Culture was all there was to it, you might want to reconsider. The final paragraph to my review of *THE LOST KING* (PI 91, p.9) mentioned an ambiguity in the moral tone of the story which was at odds with the standard plot. It's still there in *KING'S TEST*, but here it appears to be more part of the construction than the result of slamming away at Golden Age revivalism. There's less rushing about establishing a galactic-fantasy milieu and the plot gets a chance to work, with each side working both ends against the middle, and it becomes more apparent that everything that's said about either side by its adversaries is lies. Probably.

The Callow Missing Heir, Dion, is still a prat (but then again, the author describes him often enough as "petulant") but there's anyway less straightforward goodies versus baddies in the structure of the basic conflict. Sagan is less Darth Vader than a Miltonic Satan who prefers to rule in hell rather than serve in heaven: an image conveyed not only by the verbal echo in his name but through the use of Miltonic quotations in the chapter-headings. The previous volume's puzzling lack of sympathetic behaviour by any of the main characters now appears to be what this whole imbroglio is all about. Half-way through the story we end up with a neat problem in which the four main components of a package which could wreck the galaxy - Dion, the Lady Maigrey, a spacewarp bomb and the triggering device (Maigrey's starjewel) are each in the possession of a different "side". The spirit of Machiavelli lives in the to-and-fro between Sagan, the evil genius Abdiel (another Miltonic echo), the weapons dealer Snaga Ohme and the rebels. The rest of the story is how the counters all get together; and what then happens, though this is delayed by a flashback-account of the revolution which started this whole business going, covering the story which was suggested obliquely in *THE LOST KING* and explaining the relationships between people more clearly.

This leaves space for what I can only read as some neat parodic touches. There are still references to *STAR WARS* ("May the spirit be with you") but Weis also throws up for ironic reconsumption the old scene where the victory is won by the self-sacrificing action of the Faithful Minor Character who reaches out for the discarded weapon at exactly the right moment only to - well, I said it was ironic.

KING'S TEST is much more gripping than its predecessor. The problem is that Galactic Fantasy is a funny hybrid. Despite computers and spaceships, one thing it isn't is science fiction, and like traditional sword and sorcery there's only so much you can do with it before the essential sameness of the situation dulls the reader. Weis shadows her plot with epigraphic references to High Culture - Shakespeare, Milton, Homer, Plato - which works, (though I'm less sure about the quotation from Fleetwood Mac . . .), and there are even apparent cameo appearances by God. After all this, I'm less inclined to take any of the characters at face value, which as far as I'm concerned is much healthier. I'll be looking to volume three to see if I'm right.

David Hartwell (Ed.) - - THE DARK DESCENT: THE MEDUSA IN THE SHIELD (Grafton, 1991, 607pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

OK. So I may have been too harsh on Hartwell's ambitious attempt to bring the disparate strands of horror fiction together in one massive collection (see PI 92). But I still think publication of the three story "types" in three separate volumes could be misleading since each promises "the many faces of horror". Here we have tales of psychological metaphor and to reinforce this the word psychological is used in the introduction to every story.

The editor's erudition is a welcome change from the usual inane statements about the horrors of the modern age. Hartwell unashamedly reaches back to the beginning of the century to gather his stories and, more interestingly, plunders lesser-known stories from leading literary figures. Once again we have the likes of D.H. Lawrence and William Faulkner next to Clive Barker and Stephen King. I will avoid the temptation of mischievous comparisons!

The lack of fresh new writers is a flaw when you have six hundred pages of stories stemming from the same area of the genre. Surprises are scarce among the metaphors and there is a dry atmosphere with too little humour. Also, the editor praises some stories, claiming them as modern in form. However, J. Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Schalken The Painter' turns out to be shamelessly allegorical and dated. Similarly, 'How Love Came To Professor Guildea' by Robert Hichens is billed as "one of the greatest of all horror stories" and is instead the greatest of all bores.

THE MEDUSA IN THE SHIELD has its share of masterpieces, amongst them Robert Aickman's surreal fantasy 'The Swords' and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's wonderfully understated 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Best of all are Richard Matheson's four-page vignette 'Born Of Man And Woman' and 'The Jolly Corner' by Henry James. Both are beautifully illustrative of the editor's "psychological metaphor" at its best.

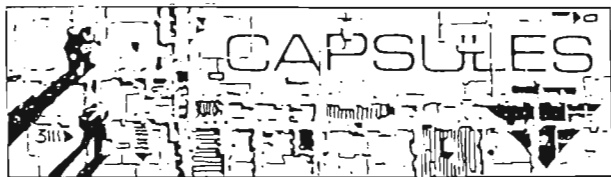
John Deekins - - BARROW (Pan), 1991, 336pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

"The Big Onion Gang . . . led by a faceless felon who was the most ruthless headbreaker ever to grace the bloody-minded pocket of crime west of the river. He has no name other than the Big Onion . . ."

There are similar passages scattered throughout BARROW, although it was intended to be a comic fantasy. Unfortunately it seems unable to make up its mind what it is - certainly the comedy is not sustained. The book consists of eight "Books", actually short stories, all set in Barrow, a town typical of down-market fantasy; it has a Prince, knights, clerics, merchants, innkeepers, wizards and more than its fair share of thieves, drug-runners, pickpockets and drunks. Minor characters in one story appear in a leading role in others. The reluctant monster-slaying hero of 'Loose Ends' casually tosses a gold coin to a slum girl whose own story is told in 'A Debutante in Barrow'. She exchanges a few words with a

[Cont. p. 15]



Piers Anthony & Robert E. Margroff - - DRAGON'S GOLD (Grafton, 1991, 282pp, £3.99)

Roundear Kelvin and his kid sister Jon fulfill prophecies galore amongst characters as idiotic as themselves, including dragons, usurpers, sorcerers, magic gauntlets, and laser-toting refugees from Another Universe. Lots of other people get raped, beaten, sold into slavery, tortured and killed, not not of course K & J, who just improvise their way through all the coincidences to an accidental triumph. Now they can start blushing exploring relationships with (gulp) the other sex, and oh dear, that does sound problematic. (Norman Beswick)

Allan Baillie - - MEGAN'S STAR (Puffin, 1990, 139pp, £1.99)

Australian children's author Alan Baillie has written several highly-praised adventure stories: this appears to be his first SF novel. A girl living in poverty in an Australian city receives telepathic requests for help from a boy on the run from a special secret school for psychics. She hides him: he teaches her to develop her powers, eventually to project their sight into outer space (a bit like astral bodies) where they make contact with aliens while leaving their bodies on Earth. A good introduction to SF for the reluctant 10 - 13 year-old. (Jessica Yates)

Greg Bear - - QUEEN OF ANGELS Legend, 1991, 471pp, £4.99)

You had two bites at the cherry of the B-format paperback; now this is the mass-market edition, and the

third review of this book in four issues! Be prepared for some uncompromising grammatical shifts in Bear's future, and the murder-investigation-cum-nature-of-humanity theme demands close attention. It's a complex book; not, I think, Bear's best despite its ambitious plotting and narrative shifts, and the task he sets himself at the end is actually impossible. Nevertheless, a brave failure can often be recommended over dozens of examples of joining the dots nicely. (Andy Sawyer)

Catherine Fisher - - THE CONJUROR'S GAME (Red Fox, 1991, 97pp, £2.50)

Having just read Ms Fisher's second Celtic fantasy FINTAN'S TOWER, I'd say that she could soon bid to be the successor to Alan Garner and Susan Cooper in the field of Celtic fantasy for children, noting also that her books are somewhat shorter and less elitist in style and presumed audience. The conjuror's game is "fidchell". A boy follows a mysterious man into a fairy mound and steals the central piece on a game-board - a magic tree - and sets the Celtic fairy hunt in motion, in the Great Wood where the Greenmire lies at the foot of Tolbury Tump . . . (Jessica Yates)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - THE OTHER SINBAD (Headline, 1991, 375pp, £4.50)

Humorous fantasy concerning the voyages of Sinbad the Sailor (eight, in all) told by Sinbad the porter. Quite enjoyable, but I'd rather read Pratchett. (Mat Coward)

David Gemmell - - DARK PRINCE (Legend, 1991, 451pp, £8.99)

Trade paperback edition (also available in hardback) of the sequel to LION OF MACEDON, about which I was enthusiastic in PI 90. This is less "historical" and more "fantasy", with Permenion and Alexander swept into an alternate world as the Chaos Spirit plans a sweeping conquest of death and blood. The difference between the two books is precisely that between a competent genre-fantasy and a superb re-creation of Ancient Greece. I am disappointed less in Gemmell's writing them than in the marketing background which forces his story into a mould which it doesn't need. 90% of the fantasy here is totally irrelevant to what would still be a gripping story. To my mind, it obscures Gemmell's talent. Dammit, I knew this was going to happen, but I did so hope it wouldn't. (Andy Sawyer)

Fay S. Lapka - - DARK IS A COLOUR (Hodder & Stoughton 'Gold'), 1991, 262pp, £2.50)

On the planet Clytie, one side always faces the sun; the other, the dark. Earth colonists settled on the sun-facing side have made forays into the Dark and found nocturnal beasts. They have operated on the most intelligent species to provide them with sight under artificial light, but this increases the creatures' ability to harm, even murder the colonists. Officially this danger is ignored by the ruling community. "Gold" is a new Christian imprint for children, and the book contains much Christian teaching about the importance of light and the need to know the truth, the main child characters and their parents being a Christian minority among the rest of the colonists. I do wonder about their decision, and thus the author's, to consider the natives as dangerous animals; with their potential for intelligence, aren't they part of God's creation? Students of religious SF should have a look at this one. (Jessica Yates)

Brian Lumley - - NECROSCOPE V: DEADSPAWN (Grafton, 1991, 586pp, £4.99)

"Even the dead are screaming now," it says on the cover of this fifth volume in Lumley's NECROSCOPE series. I don't blame them. This book is enough to make anyone scream. It is complete tosh. The worst book I have read this year. Who on earth reads this rubbish? (John Newsinger)

Kate Novak & Jeff Grubb - - SONG OF THE SAURIALS (Penguin, 1991, 315pp, £4.50)

Conclusion of THE FINDER'S STONE trilogy; another "Forgotten Realms" fantasy featuring an amoral Bard, a reptilian warrior and a female halfling (yes, they do exist) among the cast. (Andy Sawyer)

John Saul - - *SECOND CHILD* (Bantam, 1991, 355pp, £3.99)

A competent psychological thriller/ghost story. Young Melissa is being cruelly persecuted by her appalling mother and her homicidal step-sister. Her only comfort is an imaginary friend. Or is she imaginary? Would have benefited from some pruning, but still an enjoyable if slight read. (John Newsinger)

Robert Thurston - - *WAY OF THE CLANS* (Roc, 1991, 268pp, £3.99)

Volume one of the *LEGEND OF THE JADE PHOENIX* trilogy, this is SF in military mode. Rarely have cardboard characters been zapped against a background so devoid of local colour. Will Aidan succeed in the Trial of Position and become a warrior of Clan Jade Falcon? There is nothing in this book to make the reader care one way or the other. (Lynne Bispham)

Angus Wells - - *FORBIDDEN MAGIC* (Orbit, 1991, 586pp, £4.99)

The first door-stopper in the new *GOD WARS* trilogy. Calandryll, prince of Secca, spurned due to sibling rivalry, goes in search of his destiny in the form of a quest for a book. Assisted by Bracht, a barbarian from the horse clans, he travels across the lands accumulating enemies as he goes. Although I'm loathe to appear like yet another reviewer to criticise epic fantasy, this is the usual hack job. There are a few moments of elegance towards the end. (Chris Hart)

Chris Westwood - - *DARK BRIGADE* (Headline, 1991, 340pp, £4.50)

Rock 'n' roll horror-ish: Jim Doherty, a rock journalist coincides with the star Cora DeVille (subtle, eh?) and unleashes "dark forces". The grue is reasonably gruesome and this is probably a fairly successful example of the genre. OK if you like that sort of thing. (Brendan Wignall)

- I still maintain that the articles and reviews I alluded to were at best of peripheral interest to SF fans and I'm afraid that David's protestations to the contrary failed to convince me at least. I do think that this is rather a case of David Pringle having his cake and eating it. In IZ 48 he wrote:

"... we are running the two magazines as quite separate entities, with separate bank accounts... Interestingly, it's already becoming clear that the two magazines are appealing to quite different readerships."

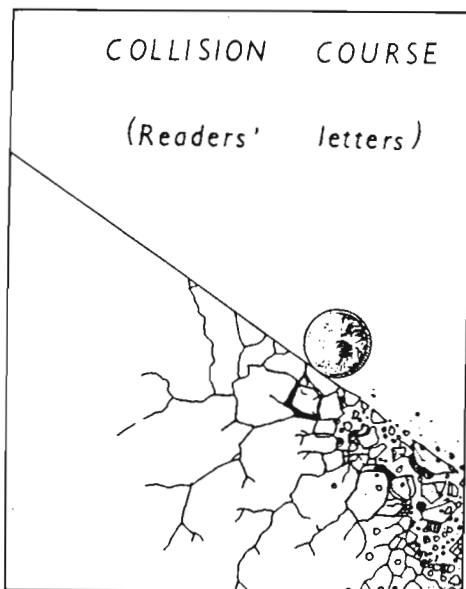
Whilst in the editorial to IZ 51/MILLION 5 he hopes that he doesn't run "the risk of boring those MILLION readers who are generally averse to SF & F; a few reviews apart, there's nothing in this issue which would not normally appear in MILLION." So we have two different readerships yet both are to be expected to be pleased by the same product? - As any regular reader of my IZ reviews (hi, mum!) will know, I rarely comment on the review columns (even though I very much enjoy them) so my non-mention of the SF reviews wasn't meant to be disingenuous. Yes, the reviews were there but the rest of the "usual IZ fare" was not; there were only two pages of fiction in the entire issue.

Secondly, regarding the typesetting and artwork, yes, I had noticed the typos, I didn't comment on them simply because they did not upset me in the slightest - such things aren't exactly uncommon in published material. In any case, to do so would perhaps have been a trifle superfluous as David had already apologised, in IZ 50, for the mistakes. (I confess that I hadn't noticed anything substandard about the artwork, though!) For me, it's the contents which are of paramount importance. As he is IZ's editor, I can understand David Pringle being upset by below-par production and I can comprehend his wanting to remedy the situation. But why on earth didn't he say all of this in his IZ 51/MILLION 5 editorial? Personally, I still wouldn't have liked the exercise but at least I could sympathise with this reason for it.

Essentially I suppose my argument is that I subscribe to one magazine but on this occasion received another. I'd be interested in hearing what other P/I/Z readers have to say on all this!

And if you haven't caught what this is actually about then I'm sure David Pringle would be pleased to receive subscriptions (*MILLION* £12 for six issues, cheques payable to "Popular Fictions"; *INTERZONE* £26 for twelve issues, cheques payable to "Interzone") from 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL. Back issues of *IZ* (including, presumably the infamous *MILLIZONE*) are available at £2.50. Back issues of *MILLION* are available as well, at £2.30 each (or you can get the first five for £10). For the record, I subscribe to both... so at least one person does. I do think that a magazine which takes an intelligent non-academic look at the whole range of popular fiction is one which is needed and worth supporting. And if you look carefully, you'll find half of the P/I review team moonlighting for *MILLION*. Track down issue four and find out what Dave Langford, Mat Coward, Brendan Wignall, Graham Andrews and I really read...

[cont. from p. 14]



ANDY MILLS replies to David Pringle's defence of *IZ 51/MILLION 5*:-

First, regarding David's specific criticisms of the review, some parts of which he found "misleading":

- True, I did not state that the Ballard interview had not been previously published, but I consider it more pertinent that it was not a recent interview. Although I concede that J.G. Ballard's themes and obsessions haven't changed much over the years, three years is a long time. A casual purchaser of the magazine may well have been under the impression that they would be reading a discussion about *THE KINDNESS OF WOMAN*, an impression they may well have got by reading the contents page and the introduction to the article. Both mention the new book; the interview (of course) does not.

guard - in the next story he helps rid the town of drug smugglers. One of the smugglers escapes, and becomes a reformed character whose efforts to win the hand of an inkeeper's daughter bring him into contact with a wizard. The stories are linked by "Interchapters" narrated by the Old man, seemingly just an aged teacher, but actually a Master of magic, who cannot resist intervening in the destinies of various inhabitants of Barrow to help them improve their lot.

The main problem with this book is its characters and plots. The reader has met characters and plots very like them so many times before - so no prizes for guessing the relationship between the Old Man and the evil wizard Fraximon. To breathe new life into this cosy, familiar sort of fantasy a writer must have greater ability than that displayed by Deakins. It may be permissible for one disreputable character to have a heart of gold, but in this book the reader loses count of the number of characters whose hearts melt at the sight of young love. Perhaps further injections of humour could have saved *BARROW* - as it is, it must take its place amongst the also-rans of the genre.

"Upon the rack in print"

Index of books reviewed

INTERZONE 52 - 53
(October - November 1991)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Normal service is resumed with the October *IZ*. The lead story of this issue is Mary Gentie's 'The Road To Jerusalem', an alternate-world story where the Knights Templar are still a force to be reckoned with and Burgundy is a powerful state. Gentle concentrates on one Templar who, at an enquiry, has to choose between obeying an order to tell the truth or keeping faith with her vows. This is the best part of an otherwise routine tale which has too many unremarkable combat scenes. Of more interest is 'George and the Comet' by Stephen Baxter, one of his more accessible stories and one which is part of the old sf tradition of having the hero waken in the future - the twist is that he's now a lemur and he's about to witness the end of the universe. Another story about a man turning into an animal is Ian Lee's delightful 'The Analogical Imago'. Sharp and humorous, it describes an experiment which goes wrong and succeeds despite a crucial flaw in the plot's logic. Also deserving of the label "quirky" is 'The End of the World' by Don Webb. Better though are Eric Brown's 'Elegy Perpetuum' and Martha A Hood's 'Dust To Dust . . .'. The former is a fascinating homage to Ballard's *Vermillion Sands* stories. Set in a similar environment, Brown's tale asks whether or not Art is more important than Life. Somehow, from the first appearance of the child in Hood's original time travel piece, you know that something awful is going to happen to her. And something does . . .

The fiction in *IZ* 53 confirms the suspicion that we're having a run on stories about transformations. Ian R. Macleod enters Ian Lee territory with 'The Family Football', an everyday story of ordinary folk (ordinary but for the fact that Macleod's people can shape-shift). Highly enjoyable, as is 'Paradigms Of Change' by Geoffrey A. Landis. This time, in what could be construed as a prequel to many of John Varley's stories, the transformations are from men to women, through a virus which "repairs" the Y chromosome. The story samples the effect the virus has on the lives of different people. Linked to this theme of transformation - though this time not of people - is 'Transmutations' by Christopher Evans. Part of the author's series of chimera stories, this one concentrates on the life of a woman called Shubi, whose protege turns out to be the callous, ambitious Vendavo, whom we have met before. Arguably Evans's best, the story packs a heavy emotional punch. Gregory Feeley takes time off from interviewing writers to produce his own 'The Boulevard Of Broken Domes' - and broken dreams too, as Gyro, an artificial world constructed around a neutron star, proves to be unstable with disastrous results. Interesting. Alan Heaven's 'The Hauler-In Susie M.' is set in a slaughterhouse and is a good advert for vegetarianism; the theme is degradation and limited horizons. Finally for the fiction, we have J.G. Ballard's 'Neil Armstrong Remembers His Journey To The Moon'. With his new book having just been published, Ballard is suffusing the media landscape at the moment, so it's perhaps understandable that this is only a vignette - the word-count of the title almost exceeds that of the contents!

On to the non-fiction now. *IZ* 52 has interviews with Robert Silverberg (explaining in detail how he collaborated with Asimov on *NIGHTFALL*) and Howard Waldrop (On the stories he hasn't written . . . but intends to) whilst those in *IZ* 53 are with the reclusive Jonathan Carroll and editor Gardner Dozois. The November issue has an advert for John Brosnan's *THE PRIMAL SCREEN* adorning its cover and Brosnan himself plugs the book with a light-hearted article.

So, two interesting and entertaining issues: it's good to see *IZ* back on track after the aberration of *IZ* 51. All in all, I'd rather see adverts on the front cover than the contents of another magazine behind it . . .

ALDISS, B.	BURY MY HEART AT W.H. SMITH'S (Coronet)	p.6
ALLEN, R.M.	ORPHAN OF CREATION (Orbit)	p.4
ANDREWS, G.	DARKNESS AUDIBLE (Excalibur Pr.)	p.12
ANTHONY, P. / MARGROFF, R.E.	DRAGON'S GOLD (Grafton)	p.14
BAILLIE, A.	MEGAN'S STAR (Puffin)	p.14
BEAR, G.	HEADS (Legend)	p.11
BEAR, G.	QUEEN OF ANGELS (Legend)	p.14
CADIGAN, P./FOWLER, K.J./MURPHY, P.	LETTERS FROM HOME (Women's Press)	p.10
CHALKER, J.L.	MEDUSA: A TIGER BY THE TALE (Penguin)	p.9
CHALKER, J.L.	SONGS OF THE DANCING GODS (Orbit)	p.4
CHALKER, J.L.	SPIRITS OF FLUX AND ANCHOR (Roc)	p.9
CHALKER, J.L.	WAR OF THE MAELSTROM (N.E.L.)	p.9
CLARKE, A.C.	THE GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS (Orbit)	p.5
CLARKE, A.C.	THE SENTINEL (Grafton)	p.5
CLARKE, A.C.	2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (Legend)	p.5
CLARKE, A.C./LEE, G.	RAMA II (Orbit)	p.4
CLARKE, P./HIGGS, M.	NOSTALGIA ABOUT COMICS (Pegasus)	p.12
DEAKINS, J.	BARROW (Pan)	p.14
EDDINGS, D.	THE RUBY KNIGHT (Grafton)	p.10
FISHER, C.	THE CONJUROR'S GAME (Red Fox)	p.14
FOSTER, A.D.	QUOZL (N.E.L.)	p.9
GARDNER, C.S.	THE OTHER SINBAD (Headline)	p.14
GARNETT, D.	NEW WORLDS I (Gollancz)	p.5
GEMMELL, D.	DARK PRINCE (Legend)	p.14
GREEN, S.	BLUE MOON RISING (Gollancz)	p.8
GREEN, S.	THE GOD KILLER (Headline)	p.8
GREENBERG, M.H. (Ed.)	FOUNDATION'S FRIENDS (Grafton)	p.8
GREENLAND, C.	TAKE BACK PLENTY (Grafton)	p.7
HALDEMAN, J.	THE HEMINGWAY HOAX (N.E.L.)	p.7
HAMBLY, B.	DARK HAND OF MAGIC (Grafton)	p.10
HARRISON, H.	IN OUR HANDS THE STARS	p.11
HARTWELL, D. (Ed.)	THE MEDUSA IN THE SHIELD (Grafton)	p.13
HEINLEIN, V. (Ed.)	GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE (Orbit)	p.4
HOFFMAN'S GUIDE TO SF, HORROR AND FANTASY MOVIES (Corgi)		p.10
KING, S.	FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT (N.E.L.)	p.7
LAPKA, F.S.	DARK IS A COLOUR (Gold)	p.14
LUMLEY, B.	DEADSPAWN (Grafton)	p.14
MOORE, A. / ZARATE, D.	A SMALL KILLING (Gollancz)	p.12
NOVAK, K. / GRUBB, J.	SONG OF THE SAURIANS (Penguin)	p.14
PREUSS, P.	THE MEDUSA ENCOUNTER (Pan)	p.11
SAUL, J.	SECOND CHILD (Bantam)	p.15
SHAW, B.	ORBITSVILLE DEPARTURE (Orbit)	p.12
SILVERBERG, R.	SON OF MAN (Gollancz)	p.11
SPIGNESI, S.	THE STEPHEN KING QUIZ BOOK (N.E.L.)	p.7
SUTIN, L.	DIVINE INVASIONS (Paladin)	p.6
THURSTON, R.	WAY OF THE CLANS (Roc)	p.15
VARDEMAN, R.E.	THE KEYS TO PARADISE (N.E.L.)	p.12
WEIS, M.	KING'S TEST (Bantam)	p.13
WELLS, A.	FORBIDDEN MAGIC (Orbit)	p.15
WESTWOOD, C.	DARK BRIGADE (Headline)	p.15
WREN, M.K.	A GIFT UPON THE SHORE (Roc)	p.12
ZELAZNY, R.	KNIGHT OF SHADOWS (Orbit)	p.4



NEXT ISSUE . . . will see reviews of more Asprin "Myth" books and Terry Pratchett's *MOVING PICTURES* among others already on file: Don Simmons' *SUMMER OF NIGHT*, Ian Watson's *THE FLIES OF MEMORY*, and Stephen Donaldson's *THE REAL STORY* - as well as David Wingrove's *THE BROKEN WHEEL* and Ann McCaffrey's *THE ROWAN*, which will definitely appear, honest, and I apologise to all concerned for the delay . . .