

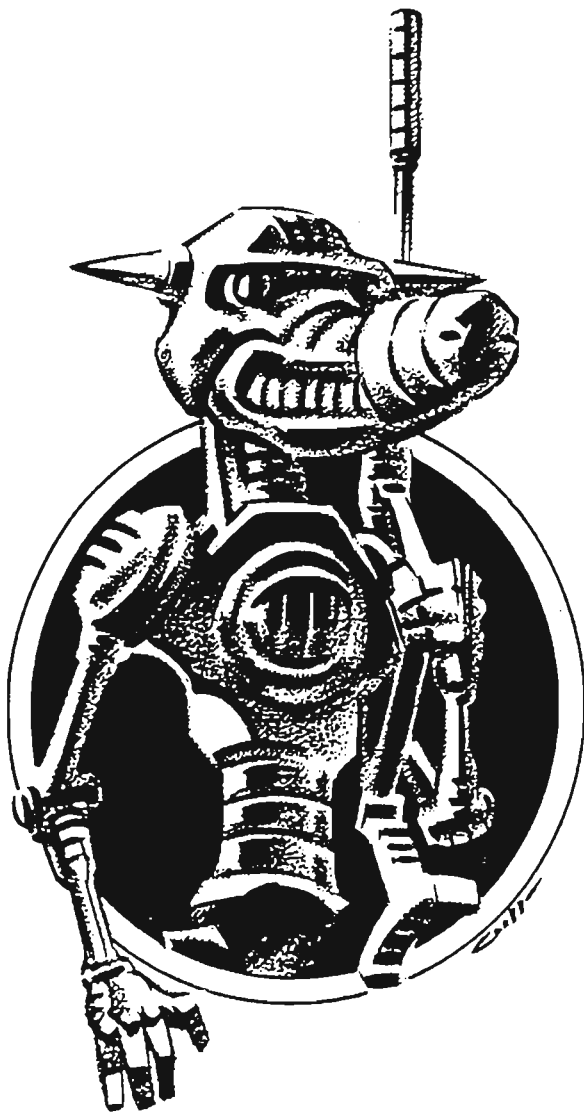


Paperback Inferno

94

The Review of paperback SF

Feb. — March 1992





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Paperback Purgatory

The New year starts with impending changes. As you will see from the adverts elsewhere in this issue, *PAPERBACK INFERNO* is looking for a new editor.

I took over from Joseph Nicholas with issue 55 in August 1985 - this is now #94 which means that by the time I depart I will have been at the helm for 40 or more issues. I think it's well time I stepped down to give someone else a chance to tackle the magazine: for one thing, I have other interests and plans I've put on the back-boiler for too long, and for another - well, with the best will in the world you get stale and I feel that the magazine - and its place in the overall BSFA scheme of things - will benefit greatly from some new ideas.

Who are we looking for? Someone with the equipment and commitment to produce the magazine to as high a standard as possible. (And if I can do it, with my Amstrad PCW and limited layout skills, there must be scores of you out there who can do the same, and better.) Someone who will meet deadlines and make sure that the camera-ready copy is delivered to the printers on time every two months. Someone who can organise distribution of books for review to the team of reviewers, and liaise with publishers to make sure that review copies of relevant books are received.

You don't have to already have an extensive list of contacts in the publishing world to be able to do this, by

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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to PI 95
is **Friday March 13**

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.

the way: when I took over I knew very little about that side of things and it's worked pretty smoothly - the major problems arise when publishers get taken over by larger conglomerates! And while there's a lot of postage to get involved with - better be on good terms with your local postal deliverer - the BSFA will handle your postal and production expenses

I've found working on *PI* the most enjoyable and rewarding of all my activities with the BSFA, and it's certainly made me a lot of friends (and I hope not too many enemies . . .). If you are interested in the job, please contact the BSFA Co-ordinator, KEV MCVEIGH, 37 Firs Road, Milnethorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF with information about yourself and what you'd like to do with *PI*: if you want to find out anything from me first, you're very welcome to drop me a line.

If you're interested but unsure: remember that the way I've operated *PI* is not necessarily the way the magazine has to be run "My" version of the magazine has been very different from that of my predecessor or that of Phil Stephenson-Payne, who started the magazine in the first place as "Paperback Parlour". And I will of course be on hand to give what help and advice I can to the new editor.

A couple of news items which may be of interest make up for lack of a "proper" editorial. This morning as I write the paper arrives with news that MACDONALD, the MAXWELL COMMUNICATION CORPORATION-owned group which includes Futura and Sphere, paperback publishers of some of Stephen King's books, as well as Arthur C. Clarke, Bob

COMPETITION CORNER

Last issue's "Stephen King" competition was won by P. ELLIS, TOM FILBY (familiar names? - well there are another 900+ of you out there to break their monopoly!) and BEVERLEY SCIBERAS, who each receive copies of FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT and THE STEPHEN KING QUIZ BOOK kindly donated by New English Library.

Two books from THE WOMEN'S PRESS are on offer this month. It was recently announced that CAROL EMSHILLER won the 1991 World Fantasy Award for her collection THE START OF THE END OF IT ALL, which The Women's Press published in 1990. We have three copies of this, as well as Suzy Mckee Charnas' THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY, which will appear in March this year. All you have to do is answer the following questions:

1) Name another book by Carol Emswiller published by The Women's Press.

2) The Women's Press published two of Suzy Mckee Charnas' novels in a single volume in 1989. Name one of these novels.

(Hint: copies of the PAPERBACK INFERNO Index covering issues 77 - 93 are available for a self-addressed envelope and 75p in stamps . . .)

Entries to be sent to the PI editorial address by the copy-date indicated elsewhere in this issue.

Shaw, and Paul McAuley, among many others, has gone into administration after three years of losses. At the moment, the future of the company is obviously insecure, although interest is being shown by other publishers. This news was gleaned from THE GUARDIAN, 11th January, in a remarkably silly article which concentrated on the fact that Macdonald also publish Enid Blyton's "Noddy" books.

1992 is TOLKIEN year. The Centenary seemed to officially open with an analysis on the Radio 4 *Bookshelf* programme by Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien's biographer, where he offered the backhanded compliment that Tolkien was a dead-end in literature because Tolkien fans read nothing but his books. This seems to have annoyed one or two Tolkien fans: certainly, there's a case for making the former statement but I have doubts about the latter. I think it's more likely that there are a great numbers of people who read nothing but Tolkien-influenced fantasy and gaming books - without having actually read the much more interesting works of the man without whom the genre may not have existed in the first place.

Naturally, Tolkien's publishers GRAFTON, have responded to the centenary with new editions of the major works impressively illustrated by Alan Lee and various peripherals such as a calendar, the TOLKIEN DIARY, the HOBBIT BIRTHDAY BOOK, and the TOLKIEN FAMILY ALBUM by his children John and Priscilla. I asked Mary Butler, the editor in charge of the Tolkien operation, if there was not a limited amount of mileage in the repackaging of books which everyone appears to have already, but apparently not: sales are going well - have doubled in some cases - and the market for books about Tolkien and his world appears buoyant. Grafton are, I believe, supporting the centenary with various promotions, although due to the simple inability of two people to be at the right ends of a telephone system at the same time before this section had to be written, I have been unable to find out. The Tolkien Society have organised a travelling exhibition which will appear in libraries throughout the country, as well as at events organised by

local "smials" and Post Offices (to back up a commemorative stamp book). There has already been extensive press coverage of the centenary.

I've just time to cast an eye over Alex Hamilton's annual GUARDIAN survey of the top 100 paperback fastsellers of 1991. Not that there's a lot to inspire a science fiction readership, or a writer wanting to make lots of money out of sf. Only one officially-classified SF novel makes the list: the tv-inspired BETTER THAN LIFE by Grant Naylor which is 60th in the list. Of related genres, top is Stephen King's FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT: the 13th fastest-selling book published this year. King also appears later on in the list with the revised THE STAND (44) and MISERY (71). James Herbert is 19th, with CREED AND David Eddings 45th with RUBY KNIGHT. It's been a good year for Terry Pratchett, who is at 47 with MOVING PICTURES, 61 with GOOD OMENS (in collaboration of course with Neil Gaiman) and at 76 with DIGGERS. (Sales of his "nomes" books may well increase due to the current tv adaptation of TRUCKERS). There's a mysterious Stephen Donaldson book (classified as ???) at 95 (GAP INTO CONFLICT) and Jean Auel's prehistoric saga THE PLAINS OF PASSAGE just scrapes in at 99. And apart from a few of Dean R. Koontz's marginal "crossover" thrillers (THE BAD PLACE (27); SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT (56) and SHADOWFIRES (58) that looks like it.

So what are people reading? Well, the top ten are GOLDEN FOX (Wilbur Smith), WOMEN IN HIS LIFE (Barbara Taylor Bradford), THE WINGLESS BIRD (Catherine Cookson), LONGSHOT (Dick Francis), DADDY (Danielle Steel), THE GILLYVORS (Catherine Cookson), MEMORIES OF MIDNIGHT (Sidney Sheldon), LADY BOSS (Jackie Collins), CIRCLE OF FRIENDS (Maevie Binchy) and SEPTEMBER (Rosamund Pilcher) with WEB OF DREAMS by Virginia Andrews and THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM (Robert Ludlum) filling the slots between them and Stephen King. In short, pretty much the same as last year and the year before, with sagas and thrillers being the mainstay of the reading public.

The Vampire Tapestry

by
Suzy McKee Charnas

Uncorrected proof copy
on proofing paper and
the property of the publisher
and not for sale


The Women's Press



Carol Emswiller

The Start of the End of It All

The Women's Press
sf



Isaac Asimov - - THE ASIMOV CHRONICLES (Vols 1 & 2:
edited by M. H. Greenberg) (Legend, 1991, 485pp/351pp,
£8.99 each)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Asimov is by few standards a great writer (but see later): arguably hardly a good one. The faults of this collection, however, are mainly due to its editor (M.H. Greenberg) and publisher. Despite that first sentence, I read it with great appreciation.

It's a celebratory two-volume trade paperback collection of 50 years of Isaac Asimov with one item for each year of his career from 'Marooned off Vesta' (1939) to 'I Love Little Pussy' (1988): the copyright date of the collection is 1989. It's a good idea, but bears the marks of being yanked up to fit the preconceived structure. Many of the stories are hardly scarce and don't really need another reprinting: others seem to be put in because there really wasn't much else for that year. Didn't Asimov write *anything* better than 'My Son, The Physicist' in 1962? A dirty limerick? A shopping list? And as for 'Light Verse' (1973), this is real slush-pile material. (There are also two non-fictional pieces, three including the spoof 'Thiotimoline and the Space Age, but this is no bad thing; again, see later.)

Why, in a celebratory collection is there no introduction? Even if notes to the stories might have been uneconomic, surely it would have been no bother to give their original publication sources with the copyright citations? Lastly, you are asked to pay 2p short of £18 for a collection full of minor typographical errors; strange punctuation, misspellings, dropped letters, often several to a page, some of which wrecks the grammar and meaning of the sentences. Would you buy a shirt with the same degree of faulty workmanship?

I emphasise this because Asimov deserves better.

As a representative collection of his stories, it's good. The robot stories - 'Catch That Robot', 'Evidence' and paradoxes like 'The Red Queen's Race' are, together with more sciencefictional tales like 'The Martian Way' and 'The Ugly Little Boy' Asimov at his most characteristic - ingenious puzzles or stories which present (as the back cover says) awe and wonder at the physical universe. Not Clarke's ecstatic awe: Asimov's reaction is essentially urbane; the word "delight" fits better. Asimov's writing is that of a man who ponders long and hard about a concept and then concludes "So *that's* how it works". Rarely other than crude, his characterisation is straight pulp, even his robots are mechanical lumps of transistors and condensers, yet there is heart at the centre of his paradoxes. The subtextual interpretation of Robots=Blacks may be outdated, even offensive today but it was admirably liberal at the time of writing and misanthropic Susan Calvin remains his best character with her "You just can't differentiate between a robot and the very best of humans" ('Evidence') a wry comment on the foible of humankind. The initial premise of 'Feminine Intuition' is very ideologically unsound - but notice how Calvin sarcastically turns that premise head-over-heels.

The "puzzle" nature of Asimov's stories is central. Particularly in the second volume with its high proportion of "Black Widowers" and "George and Azazel" stories, he writes tricky tales whose solutions are as likely to hinge on a verbal quibble or a literary allusion than a scientific concept. When he incorporates this sensibility into a long novel, more often than not the result is unstable whimsy. In short stories, as here, more often than not the whimsicality is delightful (that word again).

What comes out of this collection is that Asimov is not a great writer. But he's possibly more than that: he's an essential writer. Asimov opens up the channels of greatness to people who would otherwise run a mile at things like the thought of discussing the scientific background to Shakespeare's poetry ('Bill and I'). His SF is the science fiction of scientific ideas rather than gadgetry or worldbuilding and is all the better for this, while his facility for creating amusing tales on the flimsiest of foundations is astonishing. Time after time, I finished one of these stories with the feeling that "I liked that". Asimov may be an institution, complete with self-deprecatory egotism, but really, doesn't he deserve to be?

Ellen Datlow (Ed.) - - ALIEN SEX (Grafton, 1991, 333pp,
£3.99)

Michele Slung (Ed.) - - I SHUDDER AT YOUR TOUCH (Roc,
1991, 379pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

Fnaar! Fnaar! I was lucky. These two 'sex' anthologies landed on my doormat wrapped in plain brown paper wrapping, but you'll have to suffer the embarrassment in Waterstones when they catch your eye on the top-shelf. However, if you are expecting titillation from these books, you'd better look elsewhere, because they both contain thoughtful, challenging and often disturbing meditations on sexuality. The bulk of the stories owe more to Freud and Jung than the Kama Sutra. Most of their psychological theories have slipped into (dare I say) the collective consciousness of the 20th century and I expect most readers will recognise the more accessible theories illustrated in stories such as 'The Jamesburg Incubus', a story of narrow-minded sexual repression with a "Freudian dimension", in ALIEN SEX, and 'Psychomp', a metaphorical retrospection that ultimately returns to the womb, from I SHUDDER AT YOUR TOUCH.

In I SHUDDER ..., Slung has gathered together an eclectic bunch of authors, including a couple of mainstream heavy-weights, as well as major names from the horror genre. Steven King's 'The Revelations of Becka Poulson' is the crowd-pulling opener. Its typical small town morality satire that never improves on its highly suspenseful beginning. Jonathan Carroll's 'A Quarter Past You' is a personal favourite, that observes the interpersonal behaviour of a couple who take pillow-talk fantasies beyond the bedroom. The brooding violence behind the mask of innocence genuinely put the willies up me (if you excuse the expression). Carroll avoids the over-active viscera of Clive Barker's 'Jacqueline Ess: Her Will and Testament' and Robert Aickman's startling 'The Swords', yet still manages to shock. In the preface Slung makes the point that sex is implicated within all horror, and always has been. To underline this she includes some pre-1940's stories, of which 'How Love Came to Professor Guldea', written by Robert Hitchens at the turn of the century, is the best. Told mainly through dialogue, it is an eerie tale of a sceptic trying to find humanity and he loses himself in the process.

ALIEN SEX is an SF anthology with sex as its theme, but it occasionally wanders into horror. Because SF was squeamish about overtly sexual themes until the liberation of the 60's, Datlow is working within a narrower brief; the oldest piece in the collection is Philip José Farmer's dreary William Burroughs pastiche 'The Jungle Rot on the Nod', first published in 1968. Despite the relative naivety, the SF anthology is

extremely sophisticated. Leigh Kennedy's 'Her Furry Face' provides a splendid opening. She deals with a potentially ludicrous idea of a keeper having an affair with an orangutan, with tremendous compassion for the characters. The story manages to crystallise Datlow's concept of 'a template of human relationships'. The idea of the two sexes living in parallel realities, an other-world state relative to each other, is common in modern gender studies. Datlow is aware of ALIEN SEX as a post feminist anthology and has presented a fairly equal balance from both sides of the divide.

We repress sex therefore we find it funny, so amongst the pessimism of Lisa Tuttle et al, she has included some novelty items. 'Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex' is a much anthologised convention piece, by Larry Niven, that extrapolates the dynamics of Superman's sexual activity. Harlan Ellison's 'How's the Night Life on Cissalda' is the most satisfying of the novelties. It plays on the fascination we have with celebrities fornicating, as they are the first targets of the Cissaldian revers when they slip through a time flux looking for a lay and find the human race. The result of the visit is hilarious but disastrous, although discerning aliens snub William Shatner!

A.I.D.S. has put sex firmly back on the cultural agenda and these two anthologies are valuable in that they reveal SF and Horror as genres capable of discussing the taboos of Sex and Death dynamically. The anthologies are outrageous, weird and often oblique -- but none of the stories can be accused of being bland.

Gene Wolfe - - THE SWORD OF THE LICITOR (Legend, 1991, 301pp, £4.99)

THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH (Legend, 1991, 317pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

One of the most enjoyable features of THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN is that each volume is more rewarding than the last.

THE SWORD OF THE LICITOR details Servian's time as a Torturer in Thrax and his rejection of its values. This results in him being forced to leave the city and head north towards the war zone, where he imagines that he'll be able to hide from his past. The beings that he encounters on his journey are varied, but all serve to shape his growing humanity.

THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH (called THE CITADEL OF AUTARCH on the cover of this edition!) has Servian thrust into the war as a soldier, and the gradual discovery of his real destiny. The climax of this volume is a masterpiece of transcendental revelation.

Recent VECTORS serve to show some of the ways by which it is possible to approach THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN. It is put together with great care and, as realism isn't Wolfe's intention, questions concerning coincidence are effectively rendered irrelevant. Servian's world begins to approach that of a solipsist, and it is only through the absorption of other personalities - a process begun in THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR - that he is able to develop sufficient empathy to fulfil his ultimate role.

Wolfe's exploration of language in the book is something that deserves consideration. A people's mode of thinking creates, and is shaped by, their language, and Wolfe's use of archaic and esoteric terminology goes a long way to suggesting that the English language has to be really stretched to encompass this future society. Add to this the textual clues hinting that the story is set in South America, and it becomes all the more remarkable that it reads as comfortably as it does. Wolfe takes this to an extreme in CITADEL when Servian encounters one of the Ascian enemy. The prisoner has learnt Servian's language, but such is the alien nature of his society - analogous to an extreme Maoist state - that at first it is still almost impossible to communicate with him. The Ascian's own tongue has been reduced to merely quoting politically correct texts, producing a functioning system of Orwellian Newspeak. Wolfe's inherent optimism about the human condition is such that he then goes on to show that the Ascians have subverted their language until it has reached the stage where it is capable of great subtlety and meaning.

But this is only one of the minor themes. Basically, THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN is one of the best SF novels ever written.

Gene Wolfe - - PANDORA BY HOLLY HOLLANDER (N.E.L., 1991, 198pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

I have said before that Gene Wolfe is an author who presents me with problems. He is a magnificent stylist - his prose flows and is littered with euphony, and his imagery is often memorable. My problem is that I find this artistry all too often wielded in the service of nothing much. His magnum opus - the *Books of the New Sun* - were very well received but I found them almost empty of the emotional and philosophical contents such a self-proclaimed masterwork should contain.

PANDORA BY HOLLY HOLLANDER is a sublimely written small-town whodunnit, so much at one with its genre I half expected the titles to roll and "MURDER, SHE WROTE" to appear. Holly is the girl at the centre of the killings and Aladdin Blue is the "criminological consultant" follower in the footsteps of Holmes. The plot - who killed Holly's mother's lover, her uncle and an "innocent bystander" - is tricky enough, and Blue unravels it with the requisite adroitness and false starts. Yet the very expectedness of the twists and turns - there just have to be twists and turns - is the weakness. I was very much left with the impression that Gene Wolfe was trying to prove he could write a detective story. Yes, Gene, you can, but will you now go back to writing something which interests you enough for you to breathe some life into it?

Had this tale appeared in any one of the myriad detective tv shows I should not have switched it off, probably. As I say, the plot is strong. On the other hand, the actors would have earned their corn by putting characters into a story where there are none, just cutouts with labels. I don't mind reading film scripts - I read quite a few, as a matter of fact - but I don't like reading them masquerading as novels.

So Gene Wolfe goes on giving me problems, not that I would wish to put you off, but new readers would do better with PEACE or the SOLDIER books rather than this insubstantial soufflé.

Keith Brooke - - KEEPERS OF THE PEACE (Corgi, 1991, 252pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Jed Brindle, native of the independent space colonies, is a soldier in the Extraterrestrial Peacekeeping Force. Equipped with cyborg implants, he is a human killing machine and, as part of a small group of fellow 'EPs', he is sent to Earth to combat terrorism in what used to be the USA. Their mission to kidnap a top military expert goes wrong, and Jed finds himself leading his prisoner and two wounded comrades across the Dust Bowl Desert. Jed's narrative of these events is interwoven with diary extracts, news reports and interviews tracing his call-up and progress in the EPF.

Future War is a common and popular theme in sf, but Brooke eschews its false glamour and entertainment value, creating a thought-provoking and serious portrait of a man's transformation from ordinary human into an instrument of war. The novel's theme is dehumanisation, and Brooke explores this by what is effectively a sustained character portrait of Jed.

War has always had a stimulating effect on the development of technology, and Brooke envisages a future in which a soldier can be given implants giving direct control over adrenalin flow and weaponry. Jed becomes unusually adept at this, earning a reputation as an elite soldier. It isn't the hi-tech hardware that dehumanises him, though, but the ethos which turns him into a thoughtless machine, capable of killing teenage 'terrorists' and accepting that the aims of the mission are more important than the lives of your fellows. Only when he is forced into a situation where the army no longer has control over him is he able to recover his humanity and think for himself.

Brooke's technique is an effective use of plot and counter-plot. In the main narrative, Jed traces his disastrous mission and the trek across the desert: the interwoven snippets give the views of others on Jed, war and humanity. Using these different viewpoints on the

meaning and effects of war, Brooke builds up the kind of complex character portrait which was once rare in sf.

KEEPERS OF THE PEACE is Brooke's first novel, and well deserves the accolades it has received. If it did no more than provide a clear and effective anti-war statement (which it does) it would fail to engage the imagination and provoke thought. If it is the function of literature to throw up questions rather than to produce manifestos then Brooke succeeds admirably.



WANTED: A NEW EDITOR.

PAPERBACK INFERNO

needs fresh hands. Not much money (well, none, to be honest) but a chance to shape the BSFA's review of paperbacks.

If you think you have what it takes, write to the BSFA Co-ordinator, KEV McVEIGH, 37 Firs Road, Milnethorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF with details about yourself and how you would develop the magazine.

R E V I E W S

David Wingrove - - THE BROKEN WHEEL (N.E.L., 1991, 611pp, £4-99)

(Reviewed by B. S Cullum)

In the space permitted one cannot afford too closely to analyse the constituent parts of this novel - the second in a projected series of seven or eight - but at the heart of the series one can discern a calculated and conscious exploration of the PhilDickian theme(s) of *what is real?/what is human?*

Early on it is noted that "trust [is] a fragile thing. Break it and the whole world breaks with it". The ability to identify and rely on that which is true underlies any "normal" existence and it is an indication of how warped the fabric of life in the Middle Kingdom has become that so little reliance can be placed on any social relationship or interaction: the plot advances by means of a series of betrayals and/or deceptions, usually motivated by a desire for revenge for some real or imagined insult.

Few of the mainly teenage protagonists have both parents, usually having been separated at birth or early childhood, echoing the separation from Mother Earth by virtue of incarceration in the sterile yet corrupting environment of the continent-spanning Cities.

Characters are mostly either brutal or brutalised and there are numerous allusions to unnatural (often near-incestuous) sexual practices: frequently indicative of a society close to collapse.

The ruling T'angs, hitherto relatively benevolent in their absolute rule, have been substantially weakened and now quarrel amongst themselves and are becoming increasingly repressive. The bourgeois revolt consequently widens to encompass a more proletarian revolutionary movement exemplified by the Ping Tiao "terrorists".

Perhaps more so than, say, Eco, Wingrove's borrowings are fairly subtle - forming puzzles within puzzles such that one's enjoyment is heightened by the challenge involved in decoding the work through his various allusions and frequent repetition of ideas and events.

This reader is still hooked by the series and can recommend it to those who are not too squeamish where violence is involved and feel that they can commit themselves to seven or eight volumes. It will be interesting to see a) what surprises Wingrove has in store and b) although some form of synthesis seems the most likely outcome, which of the characters' prescient dreams will most closely mirror the reality that is gradually unfolding.

Anne McCaffrey - - THE ROWAN (Corgi, 1991, 320pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

An orphaned psi-Talent grows up on Altair, goes off-world, finds equally talented male from a backwoods world, saves the world from invading aliens, and they fall in love, marry and produce an extremely Talented baby. The aliens come back, but within a few pages they are sent

flying into a sun by massed mental forces, following a prophecy made by a clairvoyant when The Rowan was a baby. And that's it.

Anne McCaffrey is one of SF's bestselling authors and it's interesting to think what sort of review the book would have if by an "unknown". Probably pretty much the same, except straight in the "Capsules" section, because it's really nothing more than a competent adventure story with dashes of romance and tastefully understated sexual passion. There's little about the ESP "Talent" and the alien enemy is that useful standby, an insectoid hive-mind.

Pick it up, read it, forget about it within a day.

Tom Maddox - - HALO
(Century Legend, 1991, 214pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

In retrospect, cyberpunk was quintessentially an SF of the eighties, expertly capturing and reflecting the zeitgeist of the peak years of the decade, from the October 1983 US invasion of Grenada to the October 1987 global stock market collapse: the fascination with technology, the rise of the mega-corporation, the romance of the city, the importance of style, and loners making illicit deals to cut themselves loose from the system. To read it now is more an exercise in nostalgia than the gritty prediction of the future it seemed at the time; the ethos of the nineties is different enough such that the cyberpunk mode no longer convinces.

Which is unfortunately the case with Tom Maddox's debut novel HALO. As though recognising the economic and ecological absurdity of his high-tech, high-wealth, twenty-first century, Maddox makes perfunctory suggestions that humanity is painfully coming to terms with its environmental limits; but this only throws the absurdity into starker relief. This, and the rather drawn-out nature of his plotting - the novel contains several incidental descriptions and events which contribute nothing to the forward thrust of the story - mean that one reads it at some remove, never really caught up in what's going on.

HALO is intended to dramatise the difference between genuine (ie self-aware) artificial intelligence and machine simulations of intelligence. Much of the action is therefore intellectual rather than physical, and takes place inside a virtual reality created by Aleph, the AI, to keep alive a character who's been poisoned and is close to death; other characters enter the virtual reality for long durations to keep him sane. More characters swarm in the background; none can be told apart, and the motives of all are unclear. These events unfold aboard a giant L-5 station named HALO, run by Aleph. The poisoned character eventually dies and by absorbing his self-awareness Aleph believes it's become self-aware too.

The verdict, however, is that while there's certainly scope for a novel about the difference between self-aware AI and machine simulations of intelligence, HALO isn't it.

Brian Stableford, Ed.

THE DEDALUS BOOK OF BRITISH FANTASY: THE 19th CENTURY (Dedalus, 1991, 416pp, £8.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

Dedalus Books calls itself 'Britain's leading publisher of literary fantasy' and while one might reasonably want to take issue with the claim that some types of fantasy are objectively more 'literary' (ie more worthwhile) than others, if we accept 'literary fantasy' as just another marketing category - like sword and sorcery - which doesn't claim some sort of intrinsic superiority, then the people at Dedalus are probably right. They have already published a couple of noteworthy books edited by Brian Stableford, THE DEDALUS BOOK OF DECADENCE and TALES OF THE WANDERING JEW, as well as Meyrinck's THE GOLEM and THE ANGEL OF THE WEST WINDOW, and they have ambitious plans to anthologize European Literary Fantasy, country by country, to coincide with 1992 and all that.

THE DEDALUS BOOK OF BRITISH FANTASY: THE 19th CENTURY brings together works of fantasy which frequently go unrecognised as such, including such diverse figures as Charles Dickens, William Morris, Lewis Carroll and, of course, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats. Coleridge's opium-induced 'Kubla Khan' and Keats' 'Lamia' are the best pieces in the collection by some way. Keats, of course, has recently proved popular with sf writers, appearing in Dan Simmons' 'Hyperion' novels (in a way), and in Tim Powers' THE STRESS OF HER REGARD. This seems entirely appropriate: even a cursory glance at his narrative poems should be enough to show that were Keats writing today he would surely be a fantasy writer (or a 'magic realist', which is essentially the same thing).

There are some lesser works, which I suppose is the price we must pay to get a truly representative sample of the period, but the book is nearly worth the cover price just for Brian Stableford's excellent introduction, which ranges far and wide over the fantasy terrain. Along with his essays in Millon, this demonstrates that he is not just a fine novelist but an interesting literary historian. I recommend THE DEDALUS BOOK OF BRITISH FANTASY: THE 19th CENTURY unreservedly.

Mike Resnick -- IVORY (Legend, 1991, 374pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

IVORY is a vast, sprawling book; Space Opera in its setting of interstellar empires stretching across light years of space. But at its heart is a mystery. Who is Bukoba Mandaka? And why does he want the tusks of the Kilimanjaro Elephant, lost for three thousand years?

IVORY is set on several levels. First, the frame is the search for the tusks. Duncan Rojas is hired by Bukoba Mandaka to find the Ivory, last seen when it was lost in a card game in 3042 GE. In his search, Rojas discovers the history of the tusks. This forms the second level, a series of narratives, bound together by Rojas' search, detailing the history of the Elephant, and his tusks over the six thousand years since they were taken. The novel is also the story of Duncan Rojas, and the profound effect his search and discoveries have on his life.

"It was a picture of two white-clad men, each one supporting one of the tusks, which towered far above them."

As the search continues, Rojas gradually realises that the fate of the tusks and the fate of Mandaka are bound together in some way, and the knowledge that Mandaka is a full-blood Maasai only adds to the mystery.

"Can we safely conclude that the Maasai have been interested in the Ivory for more than four thousand five hundred years?"

Mike Resnick has integrated Space Opera and Myth together and created something larger than both. The novel, because of its structure, seems disjointed and bitty at first, but as Rojas, and the reader, become immersed in the story as it unfolds, gradually we become bound up in the search, the stories and fates of the Ivory's successive owners, and in the deeper mystery of Bukoba Mandaka's quest. And in its conclusion.

Mike Resnick -- PARADISE : A Chronicle of a Distant World (Legend, 1991, 323pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

"Before God made Peponi, he'd only been practising on all the other worlds. Finally he'd done the job right."

PARADISE is the story of the planet Peponi and its colonists and natives, from the early days of its settlement by humans to the periods of chaos after it achieved independence. It is an episodic novel, set in the framework of a writer's interviews with settlers, ex-hunters and natives.

Resnick skilfully uses this style to examine a wide range of characters and attitudes. From the romanticism of the early hunters:

"The second you set foot on the planet, it was like you were re-discovering Eden."

Through the hard-headed reality of the later farmers:

"The drought killed our first crop. Landships trampled our second. Our third crop came in - barely - and then floods washed our fourth away."

To the cynical pragmatism of native government after independence:

"Tax penalties were meaningless to a family that didn't make enough money to pay any taxes in the first place; and as for the birth control clinics on the Great Western Continent, if they existed at all, I could just imagine the Sentabels' reaction to being singled out for a population decrease."

In the foreword, Resnick says that "...this novel...is about the mythical world of Peponi rather than the very real nation of Kenya." and taking this disclaimer as such disclaimers are meant to be taken, PARADISE is an excellent tale of colonialism and all that it means, from destruction of the environment, to the very real attempts of immigrants to make lives for themselves, to the devastating effects of dragging a simple culture into an advanced civilisation that it is culturally ill-equipped to handle.

Joseph Sherman -- THE SHINING FALCON

(Corgi, 1991, 341pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

THE SHINING FALCON is a romantic fantasy with a medieval Russian flavour in the names and background.

Finist, magician prince who can turn himself into a falcon, yearns for true love, while his cousin Ljuba, her own sorcerer powers much weaker, schemes to become his wife for the sake of his power. Plain and practical Maria, meanwhile, copes with her father's exile through the treachery of his former servant.

There are no prizes for guessing who ends up living happily ever after, but there is plenty of action on the way, as Finist and Maria battle through danger, betrayal and their own misunderstandings. One problem is that the happy ending is a bit too clearly signalled, and though the good characters are convincing, the representatives of evil are never strong enough to pose a real threat.

The story is fast-moving, cutting from one set of characters to another to keep the reader wondering. There is warmth and humour and the occasional touch of fear. The background is vivid and varied. There is a lot to enjoy on a superficial level, but there is no real depth. There are a few indications that the writer has tried to dig below the surface, in her portrayal of Ljuba's mixed motives, for example, and in the religious horror felt by Maria's family towards Finist's magic powers, but these themes are never fully developed; this could have been a more complex book.

Steve Harris -- WULF (Headline, 1991, 595pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace.)

West Waltham is a quiet little village. (One road in, and the signpost has been taken away by a local vand.) God's Teardrop is a barren, blighted hill in the centre of the

arable land around the village. Things are about to change in these rural surroundings, primeval forces are reawakening...

Steve Harris has written a large novel which builds its characters and situations slowly from slightly skew (but perhaps just normal) through strange to horribly dangerous. Harris has created people that we can recognise, Heater Heatley, the 14-year old main character; Ember, his girlfriend; the old farmer, Sissy Butts and his wife Evelyn; Moses Walker and his cronies; are all not too different from folk anywhere, except that they have all been touched by the influences emanating from God's Teardrop. Oh, and there's Beetle the Biker...

The storyline twists a credible path, neatly weaving together the supernatural and the natural disasters (throwing in a little not too dodgy virology along the way) and never straying too far into the ridiculous.

Harris writes with a deft hand that is at once believable and sympathetic, with hardly any jarring notes to interrupt the smooth, inexorable flow of the story, and the viewpoint switches between the characters often enough to maintain a spanking pace which keeps the reader turning page after page all the way through to the climax.

Michael Moorcock - - THE REVENGE OF THE ROSE (Grafton, 1991, 233pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

"From the unlikely peace of Tanelorn, out of Bas'lk and Nishvalni-Oss, from Valaderia, ever Eastward runs the White Wolf of Melniboné, howling his red and hideous song, to relish the sweetness of a bloodletting . . ."

If you're a Moorcock admirer, I imagine that you will not only take pleasure from the apparently random arrangement of syllables reproduced above, but also make sense of some of them.

REVENGE OF THE ROSE is "a Tale of the Albino Prince in the Years of His Wandering" and takes place between those events described in THE VANISHING TOWER and THE BANE OF THE BLACK SWORD. So if that's what you've been waiting for all this time, then smile - it's arrived, and in a really well-designed and produced large paperback.

I'm afraid I still don't understand what all the fuss is about. There must be something here (cults can't usually live so long on hype alone), but whatever it is, I'm missing it. As far as I can see, Moorcock's just another troll-merchant, with an enormous stock of silly words full of apostrophes. I know that, to some of you, I might just as well describe Hendrix as a three-chord wonder, but honestly, this stuff irritates me to death: the present tense (or rather, slack) passages, the coyly archaic language, "The Third Chapter" instead of "Chapter Three".

Anyway, readers keen on Elric are sure to be keen on this, since it is, apparently, "a major event . . . the longest, richest and most haunting novel yet in the great saga", in which the Prince of Ruins and his sword Stormbringer quest across the multiverse for a box containing the soul of his dad, in order to avoid "a mystic doom".

Terry Pratchett - - MOVING PICTURES (Corgi, 1991, 333pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

If I were superstitious, I'd get worried about this tenth Discworld novel having 333 pages - just half the diabolical 666 - but with so much else happening between the covers this is no time to worry about things like that.

I cannot imagine any fan not having read at least some of the Discworld books - but then, I can't imagine anyone having read no more than one without rushing to buy all the rest anyway. So for whom am I writing this review, since all of you should have read the book before this gets into print?

David Pringle says he's beginning to think Pratchett is the best British humorous writer since Wodehouse, and the two have a great deal in common.

Where they differ is that Wodehouse's plots are familiar and predictable: I doubt whether even Pratchett can predict how his books will come out when he starts them. This time the last Keeper of the Door dies, letting the spirit of the movies escape to infect ordinary Ankh-Morporkians (if that isn't a contradiction in terms). The Alchemists start making films, the Patrician sends in his spies, the wizards of Unseen University don't know what's hit them, and Pratchett goes his happy way, casually referring to wizards as "bloated thaumocrats" and dropping not mere jokes but convoluted wordplay into every couple of lines.

No way do you trot through a Discworld novel: you need your wits (or somebody's) about you as on page 28 you stumble over a simple explanation of how the Discworld fits into the Multiverse, and how nine-tenths of this is outside itself, and how the appearance of the spirit of the movies forces out some more unreality and brings threatening Things to gather at the frontiers of the Multiverse, seeking a way in through the gaps.

Space, muses Pratchett, is often called the final frontier... "Except that of course you can't have a final frontier because there'd be nothing for it to be a frontier of, but as frontiers go, it's pretty penultimate..." Pursue thoughts like that, and you soon get to realise why this series is a must for every trufan. In fact, I would positively beg you to buy up a second and third set to give as presents to people you really like. Pratchett hardly needs the royalties, but the genre needs the new blood and this is the way to get it.

Steven Brust - - BROKEDOWN PALACE (Pan, 1991, 270pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

BROKEDOWN PALACE is about a royal family and their struggle against entropy. Disorder is increasing in their home palace and, by the time the book begins, it has already led to the previous king having to abdicate after having the palace ceiling fall in on him. This leads to a struggle between the eldest son, who has become king in turn, and his brothers, who have developed interests of their own, such as mythical-mink farming, faeries and reforestation. None of them sells their story to HELLO, mainly because printing doesn't seem to exist.

The twist in this book is the background - it is set in Fenario, a mythologised Hungary, where the Carpathians are called 'the Mountains of Faerie', and most of the real names and places are Hungarian. Faerie, of course, in an Anglo-French term, and sits a little uneasily on top of the Bolcseseg, Miklos and Laszlos. Although the book comes with an introduction giving lessons in Hungarian pronunciation, there is no indication as to whether it is based on Magyar mythology. Bolcseseg is a magic horse, for instance, but whether magic horses are common in Magyar literature, or Bolk is just a super Lippinzer, I'm not sure. Similarly with the tree that grows to replace the palace - trees are important in Celtic mythology, but are they in Magyar?

In the end I felt I was reading a poor man's GORMENGHAST or GLORIANA, but with a far weaker plot than either of those. What I did learn, though, when I showed the book to a Hungarian-speaking friend, was that Brust's mythical country of Fenario occupies all of Greater Hungary, parts of which are Rumania and Yugoslavia now. This is another part of central Europe to watch.

K.W. Jeter -- DARK SEEKER (Pan, 1991, 317pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace.)

Mike Tyler had been involved with a group whose drug-induced superiority complex had led to a series of horrific killings. Now, rehabilitated, it is only a regime of multiple sedative therapy which stops him regressing into megalomania. But he has successfully built a new life for himself, a life which he enjoys. This is threatened by a phone call from his ex-wife, another

group member who had evaded capture until now...

This is the situation at the start of Jeter's book. Gradually, as the action unfolds we are shown pieces of Tyler's old life, of the time that has passed since then, and we are introduced to such diverse characters as Alan Bedell, the writer who co-wrote Tyler's story; and the cop who became obsessed with and tracked down the original group, Kinross. And Slide, the only member of the original group still as unreconstructed as of old. Then there is the Host, born of the shared mind created by the drugs and seemingly still out there somewhere, in the Dark, waiting.

DARK SEEKER is a strange book to be classed as horror. There is virtually no blood shed, few things creeping menacingly about. It is about tension -- the tension built up as the characters of Bedell and Tyler dance around each other, each daring the other to take the ultimate step into the dark; as Kinross stalks closer to the answer; as Slide exerts his power to try to draw Tyler back into the Dark, to the old days.

DARK SEEKER is not as gripping a book as SOUL EATER, the last Jeter I reviewed. It doesn't move as quickly, and some of the characters have no redeeming features, or indeed any memorable features at all. And the ending doesn't really come as any great surprise. Sad, really.

Frederik Pohl - - HOME GOING
(Gollancz, 1991, 279pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Having flogged the Heechee for all they were worth, Pohl now uses the concept to bring us a rather juvenile rite of passage. Lysander Washington has been brought up aboard an alien spaceship with Hakh'li playmates; the ship approaches Earth and he is sent down to suss out the place and keep the aliens informed of how things really are.

Raised on a diet of golden-era Hollywood movies and ancient television programmes, 'Sandy' finds Earth a constant series of shocks. In other words, Pohl invents a lot of misconceptions just so that he can unveil the facts and get some cheap laughs, a trick he often uses instead of genuine wit or humour.

It's all very straightforward and reads as though written for young-teens; certainly the average BSFA member will find it undemanding. Nobody can deny Pohl's facility with words, his firm grasp of plotting and his offbeat attitude toward Earth cultures and especially the strange customs of young Americans, but interstellar spying and trading should be made of sterner stuff, and this certainly lacks the bite of such classics as Eric Frank Russell's WASP. There's an awful lot of didactic explanation of Hakh'li culture and lifestyle and, as usual, Pohl overuses linguistic failings to identify characters.

Verdict: Okay for a light read, but nothing challenging and nothing new; might suit your children more than you, but it has its moments.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman - - ELVEN STAR (Bantam, 1992, 367pp)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Greatly to my surprise I've become a fan of this series, which more than anything else I've read in the field has actually moved beyond the tedious limits of the classic fantasy system. ELVEN STAR follows the *Death Gate* cycle into a world representing Fire (DRAGON WING took place in the realm of Sky). Here constant sunlight has created a jungle world with tree-dwelling elves and humans, and dwarves who naturally inhabit the lower levels. Once more, the mysterious Haplo (and the even more mysterious dog) passes through the Death Gate on the service of his master - to find constant wars and rampaging giants. Much focus is upon the elves, who are remarkably unTolkienian, and in fact one gets the impression that all this elf, human, dwarf stuff is there because no-one bloody well reads anything nowadays unless it's got an elf or a dragon or a wizard in it.

Ah. This also has a dragon and a wizard in it. Yes, but it all seems to work. Weis and Hickman have created a

setting which, as I suggested in PI 89, is really quite magnificent, with a hugely detailed cosmology and an insidious overall plot which has crept forward by the end of ELVEN STAR but clearly has a long way to go. For once, you want the next volume in a series to come out RIGHT NOW. For once, all these appendices make sense. When Weis and Hickman talk "magic" it doesn't half sound like hard science fiction - there's even a kind of "uncertainty principle". Could this be SF creeping into the back door of fantasy? I am beginning to think so, from hints that are dropped here.

But what sells this book to me is the appearance of Zifnab, the dottiest of dotty wizards, minded by a dragon who in a previous incarnation could have been Jeeves, who is about as *compos mentis* as a barrel full of monkeys on highly illegal substances and whose stream-of-consciousness blurts betray personal acquaintanceship with Gandalf, the dragons of Pern, ALICE IN WONDERLAND, and of course the world of the *Dragonlance* series. Run, don't walk, to your nearest bookshop and buy a copy of ELVEN STAR for these sequences alone; they're the best comic fantasy for a long time and refreshing proof that American fantasy can at last laugh at itself.

I bet you never thought I'd say something like that two years ago.

And by the way, volume 3, FIRE SEA, just out in hardback, is less of a comedy, but still pretty good - and the cover is magnificent.

James Blish - - STAR TREK: THE CLASSIC EPISODES (Vols 1 - 3) (Bantam Spectra, 1991, 646pp, 647pp, 627pp, £3.99 each)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

Sunday September 8th 1991 saw the kick-off to the start of the 25th anniversary celebrations of Gene Roddenberry's classic STAR TREK tv series, which was originally aired on the American NBC tv network way back in 1966, and has since been syndicated around the world. Incidentally, the 25th anniversary also sees the long-awaited and controversial film STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, which is due to be released in the USA in December this year but, unfortunately, UK fans (it seems) will have to wait until Spring 1992 to see it. It had been hoped by the majority of fans that ST VI would be released simultaneously in both countries, it being the all-important 25th year of STAR TREK fandom, but alas . . .

Predicatably, many people and organisations at ST conventions the world over have been cashing in on the quarter-century bonanza by producing and successfully selling many ST related goodies, and even the publishers are revamping previously-published work by the bucket-full. Bantam have reprinted, simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, this three-volume collection of STAR TREK short stories, adapted by the late James Blish (with help from his wife, Judith A. Lawrence), as THE CLASSIC EPISODES.

What I found most interesting about these three volumes (apart from the actual enjoyment gained from reading them, of course) was not so much the fact that they are simply run-of-the-mill reprints but the way each volume has been designed and presented for both old and new ST reader alike. Each volume starts off with introductions from various well-known authors such as D.C. Fontana (Vol. 1), David Gerrold (Vol. 2) and Norman Spinrad (Vol. 3), who themselves have all been to some degree instrumental to the development of ST in its early days. There is also a chronologically ordered selection of prefaces to the original editions, which were all exclusively written by James Blish, and also make interesting reading into the reasons why Blish took up the challenge of writing them in the first place.

Moving on from the introductions, the reader is presented with the title page of each individual short story in turn, with title, writer, director and guest-star credits, also including an 85x58 black-and-white print captured from a particularly memorable scene from each of the original tv episodes, which seems to add a touch more authenticity to each story.

All in all, a splendid gift-set to give that ever-hungry "Trekkie" for the 25th-anniversary Christmas. One thing that puzzles me, though, is why there are only a total of 76 adapted script-stories, spread between three volumes, when clearly there are 79 original tv scripts.

Stephen E. Whitfield & Gene Roddenberry - - THE MAKING OF STAR TREK (Titan, 1991, 363pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

From Titan Books comes the latest addition to their rapidly growing stable of "25th Anniversary" reprints: THE MAKING OF STAR TREK originally published in the USA in 1968 by ballantine Books. The large-format paperback gives the old, and new, STAR TREK fan a varied and chaotic collection of behind-the-scenes information, principally right from the very first desperate attempts by gene Roddenberry to sell his then radically-oriented and never-before-tries wagon train to the stars pilot 'The Cage' to the American tv networks, and onwards through to his second tv pilot 'Where No Man Has Gone before', which set the now recognised and familiar format for the series.

Although a reprint like most titles published in this special 25th year, the narrative by Mr Whitfield is written mainly from his own experiences as he saw them in 1968 and as such gives the reader the rare ability to actually "see" (as he did) just how the first and second seasons were made, with all the implied blood-sweat-and-tears excreted by both production cast and crew alike to stick to very tight weekly scheduled deadlines, which almost proved too much for some.

Whenever I re-read portions of this book for reference I am confronted with the bare bones fact that STAR TREK as we know it, for all its modern-day fame and popularity, came within a hair's breadth of being dumped in the "not suitable for family viewing" bin by the networks as too cerebral! Where does that leave the mentalities of viewers of LOST IN SPACE or THE LAND OF THE GIANTS. Almost as bad as the BBC when they presume to know what's good for Joe Public on tv . . .

Robert Asprin - - M.Y.T.H. INC. LINK

(Legend, 1991, 159pp, £3.99)

- MYTH-NOMERS AND IM-PERVECTIONS
(Legend, 1991, 200pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Legend continues its reissue of the superb Starblaze series, but without the more costly artistic and production appurtenances of the US versions, with Nos. 7 (1986) and 8 (1987) of this hilarious ongoing tale of the antics of Skeeve the Great, a mediocre-to-fair magician, and his motley crew.

Well, with Chumley (alias Big Crunch) the Troll, his sister Tananda, Vic the vampire, Maasha, Bunny the Moll from the Mob, Gleep the truly massive Dragon, and occasional Deveels, Pervects and Djins, there's little point in your coming into the story at this late date. The previous six books are still available, so take my advice: if you want light reading with a wealth of complexity in a totally believable plot, start with ANOTHER FINE MYTH and MYTH CONCEPTIONS, and just work your way along.

M.Y.T.H. INC. LINK, however, has something the others lack: a detailed ten-page introduction by Robert Asprin in which he explains the genesis and development of the series, its background, his other sfnal writing... I think any newcomer would do well to keep this to hand, but even if you've already read the first six books you'll find it invaluable. Interesting too: don't miss it.

One of the more-or-less endearing ongoing jokes of this series is the snappy 'quotations' that appear at the head of each chapter. Asprin claims that they often take longer to think up than the plot, and each one has a direct relevance to the action coming up next, so when you've finished the chapter it's a good idea to look back and find out why the quotation was more amusing than you thought. A few examples: "They don't make 'em like they used to" - H. Ford; "Nobody's seen it all" - Marco Polo; "I just need to pick up a few things" - I. Marcos; and "It's all a matter of taste" - B. Midler.

Discussing the plots of the Skeeve books is pretty silly: they do ramble on so, in and out of dimensions and problems. In No. 7 Skeeve is engaged by a Deveel to track down theft in his illegal business, and No. 8 has him setting off to Perv to find and cajole home his

former mentor Aahz who has disappeared, but both these merely set the scene for complications galore. Don't try too hard, go with the flow, and you should have a pleasant time. Pity about the Fangorn covers, though.

Richard Layman - - ONE RAINY NIGHT

(Headline, 1991, 410pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Steven Tew)

Horror is not a genre I have any particular interest in, so ONE RAINY NIGHT wouldn't normally be on my reading list. The story is rather uninspired: a small American town is transformed from cosy suburbia into an arena of bloodlust and killing. It's the rain, you see, hot, thick and black, turning all who go out in it into maniacs. The book's treatment of the hackings, amputations, rapes and murders, with a little old-fashioned fucking thrown in, is rather voyeuristic. Layman incorporates these elements in a background of blueberry pie family-oriented morality: none of this would have happened if the nasty Buddy and his pals hadn't killed the grandson of a hoodoo witch doctor for going out with Buddy's (white) girlfriend. Layman rails against racism, but aren't we left with the impression that inter-racial relationships are more trouble than they're worth and that the dark forces of nature, summoned by the black man for revenge on the almost all-white community, will inevitably be stirred by such goings-on? The romantic quest of (white) lawman Trev to find his (white) girlfriend Maureen serves to emphasise this impression. Maybe Layman didn't intend to give this message, but the rather bland style of the book, aimed at an audience existing on junk food and TV movies, perhaps, cuts the ground from under any more considered points he may wish to have made.

Entertaining? Perhaps. Worth re-reading? Certainly not.

Piers Anthony & Robert E. Margroff - - SERPENT'S SILVER
(Grafton, 1991, 313pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

Not having read any previous Anthony-Margroff collaborations, I was rather lost at first, but by the time I'd puzzled my way through about 50 pages I was well into this mildly unusual SF-fantasy hybrid.

"Worlds and universes lie side by side, interpenetrating, sometimes overlapping, touching slightly here and there," and our heroes are descended from people who arrived in a typical fantasy landscape (dragons, witches, horses, etc.) from another "frame" - Earth.

They are distinguishable from the native stock by their round (as opposed to pointed) ears, and are required by a combination of prophecy and sheer bad luck to spend most of their time dashing between the dimensions rescuing each other, dethroning tyrants, and all that jazz.

There are lots of good jokes here, some quite interesting ideas, and generally a nicely ironic tone: "She knew Jac was a good man, a fine thief, and a true patriot who wanted to overthrow their king. Such a man should be a logical catch for a girl". Unfortunately there are also enough exclamation marks to keep *The Sun* supplied for a decade; the frequent intrusion of a gratingly folksy style; and an unforgivable over-employment of that maddening little non-word "Eh", to denote hesitation or embarrassment.

S.P. Somtow - - MOON DANCE (Gollancz, 1991, 564pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Advertised as "doing for werewolves what Anne Rice did for vampires", MOON DANCE certainly lives up to expectations. S.P. Somtow (otherwise known as Somtow Sucharitkul, from his SF work) certainly follows a very similar line to INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE, as MOON DANCE starts in the near present (1963) and then takes the reader back to the 1880s as the werewolf tells his tale.

And what a story it is, starting with a governess meeting her charge, a schizophrenic boy being sent to a Viennese clinic. But, as the governess, Speranza, discovers, the boy is not merely mental - he is also a young werewolf, bastard son of the Count, who has collected together a tribe of lycanthropes who are setting out for America to stake a claim to the Mid-West wilderness.

Unfortunately, when they get to Deadwood in the Dakota Territory, they find the wilderness already occupied by the Shungmanitu, Indian werewolves of differing temperaments to their vicious cousins. The Indians view the wolf-boy as their Saviour, while the Europeans team up with the Indian-hating Cavalry commander Sanderson, to destroy the Shungmanitu. The resolution of the two tribes' destinies, involving both the multi-faceted wolf boy and Speranza, is grippingly told.

In 564 pages, Somtow crams in a huge amount of incident: Indian War history, bestiality and cruelty, Indian lore and spirit worlds. The main characters are all well drawn, and both societies of werewolves are well thought out. There is a certain amount of stomach-churning incident (not surprising, given the subject matter) but none of it is so overdone as to be either gratuitous or pornographic. It is to Somtow's credit that the most evil characters he portrays in the book are not werewolves, but the humans who try to use them for their own purposes. Reality, as ever, intrudes tellingly into fantasy.

Diane Duane - - HIGH WIZARDRY (Corgi, 1991, 235pp)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

HIGH WIZARDRY brings to a close the trilogy which began with SO YOU WANT TO BE A WIZARD and DEEP WIZARDRY. This series deserves to be recommended. Although the first volume doesn't show too much of the promise of its successors, it does have plenty in it to amuse young readers and in retrospect the picture of the bullied Nita becoming a powerful wizard is, of course the wish-fulfilment we all crave when we turn to SF or fantasy. DEEP WIZARDRY had a deep moral crux (counterpointed by its semi-comic reflection: just what do you tell mum and dad when you're about to sacrifice yourself for the world?) and HIGH WIZARDRY builds upon this, taking both moral questions and domestic crisis one step further. Now it's Nita's younger sister who becomes a trainee wizard and has to face the problems of death and free will.

Here, Duane switches scene and, arguably, genre: in contrast to her sister's book-form instruction manual, Dairene discovers her instructions in the wizardly art in the form of a computer, and ends up undergoing her Ordeal in deep space. Among the delightfully-imagined scenes leading up to the inevitable conflict with the Lone Power are those set in a Hypergate waiting room and on a sentient planet; vividly described with the right balance of humour and action which characterises the best children's SF.

If DEEP WIZARDRY reflected the central drama of THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE, its successor recalls that magnificent scene in THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW where Aslan awakens life out of a newly-created world - though in a science - fictional mode. This is not to say that Duane is just borrowing ideas: the imagery in which these ideas are expressed are all-important and it's spot-on. There's wit, just a touch of growing-up emotional changes, and expertly-handled big-screen science which is more than the jargon it's so easy to slip into. And above all, there's suspense and conflict. I've not read anything by Diane Duane I've enjoyed so much and this is probably the best children's SF I've read this year.

Elizabeth Hand - - WINTERLONG
(Bantam, 1991, 440pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by K. V. Bailey)

In a SCIENCE FICTION EYE critique, Elizabeth Hand writes of certain Delany novels that they "limn the sharp edges of madness and ecstasy without explaining them away". This might also be said of WINTERLONG. Its narrative alternates the first-person experiences of long-parted

17 year old bisexually-aspected twins: he, Raphael, a charismatic whore, but death-dealing; she, Wendy, an autistic empath, equally fatal. Their climactically converging lifelines play out the mythologies of sacred twins through the future City of Trees - a construct pitched between a hedonistic Hell and an apparent evocation of Washington (the museums of the Mall are there, their rôles analogous to that of the Palace of Green Porcelain in THE TIME MACHINE.) The twins' lives are vehicles for 'hyperstates' of 'the Hanged Boy' - the most insistent of several Tarot-related archetypes.

The festival of Winterlong culminates the City's year. It and other festivals of this a-historic, almost post-human, City are celebrated with parades, banquets and dramatic performances. Wendy Wanders, refugee from HEL (Human Experimental Laboratory), becomes an actress/actor, playing Shakespeare and having as co-star Miss Scarlet, an appealing talking chimpanzee. In describing these carnivals, such magnificent set-pieces as the 'Butterfly Ball' and the 'Masque of Owls', Elizabeth Hand's exotic, quite beautiful prose is at its best.

Perhaps the story suffers at times from mythopoetic overload, ambiguous identifications and symbolisms occupying an enormous gallery, from Baal and Orpheus to Peter Pan; from Aphrodite and the Magdalene to Wendy Darling. Moreover, in the apocalyptically heralded 'Final Ascension', mayhem and horror are actually made counter-effective by escalation and repetition. Admittedly, that excess does by contrast set-off the fine apotheosis of the novel's last pages, which conclude with the last lines of THE INFERNO marking Dante's and Virgil's exit from Hell: "And thus we came forth again to see the stars". Could these be the stars of a purgatorial Summer? Hand's work in progress is AESTIVAL TIDE.

Piers Anthony - - ROBOT ADEPT
(NEL, 1991, 286pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

This is the sequel to OUT OF PHAZE, which means that it is either the second or fifth in its series, and Piers Anthony has written eight series. I didn't realise that he had started on this one and don't feel that it has been a major discovery.

In parallel worlds two pairs of lovers experience the tribulations of Romeo and Juliet, though I doubt if they will end in the same way. I think they are going to save both worlds.

In one world the lovers are not of different families but different species - he is a man but she is unicorn. Fortunately, it is a world where magic works and she can change her shape for their frequent bouts of copulation, despite the fact that she maintains a unicorn's horselike seasonal oestrus. In the other world the lovers are not of different families but different materials - he is a robot and she is an amoeba, but I didn't come across any descriptions of mitosis, let alone meiosis, there.

All of this might be a wonderful opportunity for a discussion of Freud's idea of the polymorphous perverse, but it is an opportunity missed, and most of the book is a chase, with special attention to Agape the amoeba, who goes through an institutionalised game. She becomes a bit of a computerised gladiator, which means we get long descriptions of the input screens.

The book ends with another computer game contest between the two men. No doubt the next volume will deal with the results of that match. I can wait.

John Brosnan - - THE FALL OF THE SKY LORDS (Gollancz, 1991, 284pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

This is the final part of the trilogy which began with THE SKY LORDS, and continued with WAR OF THE SKY LORDS. Four centuries after the gene-wars which left Earth blighted and its humans impoverished, city-sized airships continue to fly around the place causing widespread unpleasantness.

Jan Dorvin, our heroine and would-be liberator of the planet, is languishing in Shangri-La, a protected haven

built by and for the Eloï - who were once human but, seeing the way things were going, decided it would be better to live on in a state of immortal euphoria. And why not?

Milo Haze, amoral arch-villain and trickster supreme (and one of the geneginners whose fault it all was in the first place) has teamed up with Ashley, the stone-bonkers computer personality in charge of the Sky Lords. Meanwhile another Milo Haze, a "cutting" of the original, is stuck on Belvedere, a hideously religious space colony. Needless to say, all these characters - and many more, equally extraordinary - must eventually meet to bring about an unexpected, and rather disturbing, conclusion.

WAR OF THE SKY LORDS provides a slightly disappointing ending to what is, taken overall, one of the most enjoyable trilogies I've ever read. There's still plenty of wit and action, and no problem in the dangling loose ends department. But the book lacks the sparkle of the earlier volumes, as if the author had begun to lose interest in the project. It's all (by Brosnan's high standards) a bit mechanical, with too much undisguised explanation and not enough wild invention. Perhaps this is due to the curse of the trinity: if there had just been two Sky Lords books, instead of the more marketable three, I might have concluded this notice with "unconditionally recommended" rather than just "recommended".

J. Michael Straczynski - - OTHERSYDE (Headline, 1991, 405pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

After a couple of introductory quotes from the book of Job (and where would horror writers be without the Bible?) we are eased into a Spielbergian LA suburb populated by teens looking for rectitude to trash. Enter one young Chris Martino who finds High School an unwelcoming place full of pot-smoking bullies. He quickly develops a friendship with Roger "Horseface" Obst and together they attempt to escape the attentions of their overbearing peers and parents. Meanwhile, local suicides are on the increase and the cops begin to get interested just as Chris and Roger discover a supernatural force which communicates to them via invisible ink (you remember - burnt lemon juice). Further investigation by Roger, to which Chris pays scant attention, reveals the eponymous unseen power is on the lookout for a disaffected earthly channel through which it can wreak havoc. Roger gleefully accepts the post and begins using the OTHERSYDE to dispatch the aforementioned school bullies.

Straczynski takes almost half the book to establish his narrative and build up the atmosphere and a rather good job he does too. It's a shame the second half deteriorates, suffering from rushed scare scenes and scatterbrained plot devices. The author appears to lose grip of his characters in the latter stages, switching to the kind of "shorthand" depiction used in the movies where logical consistency is sacrificed to allow the orchestration of a tense climax.

OTHERSYDE remains a readable experience and enough of Straczynski's strengths are revealed by this book to show that he can write a much better one. Maybe he will.

Elisabeth Marshall Thomas - - THE ANIMAL WIFE (Fontana, 1991, 380pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martyn Taylor)

This is a story about prehistoric hunter-gatherers, specifically about Kori, the adolescent son of a headman, and his passage to manhood. This involves him "stealing" a wife from another, interloping band because his own wife is about three and his lover is infrequent in her favours, largely because she is the new wife of his father and he, Kori, is the father of their child. This woman, Muskrat, is the alien, full of strange ways and a liking for the missionary position. In the end only ill comes of the relationship.

If anyone is interested in an accurate depiction of hunter-gatherers then I am sure this is a book for you. There is scholarship on every page. If anyone is

interested in yet another rite of passage adventure, then this is for you, and in very much better taste than many. If anyone is interested in an exciting narrative well told then this is for you, because Ms Marshall Thomas can write well.

Why, then, didn't I like this book? Because I did not believe it. Kori is not a bushman on the tundra. He is a modern man in skins. He and Andriki and Muskrat and the rest may behave exactly as their real-life contemporaries did, but the sophistication of the writing and conception of the story militate against the suspension of my disbelief. Which disappoints me greatly, because this is an ambitious book, approaching a difficult subject in an adult, unsensational fashion. It could have been one of the greats . . . Ah well, I am probably splitting hairs. If your hand strays in its direction go ahead and pick it up. I dare say you could very easily do a whole lot worse.

Bruce Sterling -- CRYSTAL EXPRESS (Legend, 1991, 317pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

CRYSTAL EXPRESS is Bruce Sterling's first short story collection. It contains twelve stories spanning the years 1982 to 1987. The stories are split into three sections, Shaper/Mechanist, Science Fiction and Fantasy.

The Shaper/Mechanist stories chart the struggle for supremacy of the Solar System by two human factions. The Shapers are so called because of their biological tampering with the human form, the Mechanists because they rebuild themselves mechanically. Sterling tells the stories from both viewpoints without any bias, giving a bleak overview of the coldness and impersonality of both cultures.

The three SF stories in the middle section step forward in time from the near-future anarchy of 'Green Days in Brunel' to the bored, shallow Utopia of 'The Beautiful and The Sublime'. All are handled with Sterling's customary ease and attention to detail.

The Fantasy stories are a mixed bunch, switching from metaphysics ('Telliamed') to magic to demonology to wry prophecy ('Dinner in Audoghast').

Bruce Sterling mainly writes a neat, concise prose that does justice to his SF, giving pace and clarity to difficult concepts.

"The Crowned Pawn was centered around a core of massive magnetic engines, fed by drones from a chunk of reaction mass. Outside these engines was a skeletal metal framework where Lobsters clung like cysts or skimmed along on induced magnetic fields." ('Cicada Queen')

But the Fantasy stories here show that he is equally at home with the more ornate forms that are needed for good Fantasy.

"The poet...picked up his two-stringed guitar. 'Dear God', he said, 'this is a splendid place. See, caravan-master, how the stars smile down on our beloved Southwest.' He drew a singing note from the leopard-gut strings. 'I feel at one with Eternity.'" 'Dinner in Audoghast'

All in all a good collection of stories.

Daniel Rhodes - - KISS OF DEATH (NEL, 1991, 261pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

I've never understood what appeal simple horror stories can have for SF fan. However, I will say that many horror writers - Daniel Rhodes included - have a smooth, relaxed style which ingratiates itself with the reader, who is thus carried into situations which, in a traditional SF format, s/he would immediately reject as unbelievable.

Certainly there are places on Earth where you can experience joy and a heightening of spiritual grace; equally, there are sites where a miasma of evil so permeates your being that you may be influenced to act evilly, or to imagine beings of evil. The reasonable person attributes this imbuing of places with good or evil to the activities of those who were closely connected with them in the past, especially at times of great stress.

Horror writers tend to invent, adapt or copy medieval legends and religious inventions to personify these feelings, and so we are given imps, vampires, succubi and incubi interacting with humans. Since the essence of fiction is conflict, they must then invoke similar powers for good to do battle with them, though I doubt if one in a hundred of my readers honestly believes that such beings exist.

Rhodes gives us such horrific and saintly inventions in the context of an American and his teenage daughter visiting south-west France - and then bringing back the horrors with them to the shores of sunny California. What south-west France did to deserve this is unclear; how California's own ancient powers of evil would welcome the advent of immigrants piggy-backing local folk is something else again. If this is the sort of thing that you like, you will like this: I thought it was codswallop, but then I'm biased.

Stephen Donaldson - - THE REAL STORY
(Fontana, 1991, 207pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

The many fans of Stephen Donaldson will welcome THE REAL STORY, first volume in a projected series of five. They will, however, be shocked if they expect a re-run of THE CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT. Donaldson is breaking new ground.

The book is SF, not fantasy and, instead of the detailed ramifications of a fantasy world, there are effectively only three main characters, the reader's interest focussed on the relationship between them.

Donaldson starts at the end of the story and presents us with a conventional picture of a maiden in distress saved from the clutches of a villain by a swashbuckling adventurer. He then takes us back to the origins of the situation, and shows us that the truth is very different; the villain, the adventurer, and even the maiden herself are not what they seem.

Because of the flashback technique, we don't read on to find out what happened; we already know that. We have to concentrate on the reasons for it, and the interpretation. The only problem is that Donaldson as writer is a bit too obviously there, pointing things out to us, guiding us directly when he should have left the story to do it for him.

The characters are powerful, particularly Angus, the villain, who is central to most of the action. But the story itself, even 'the real story', is undistinguished, and there is no real originality. This may be unfair comment at this stage of the series, with so much more ground to cover; at least I'm hooked enough to read the second volume.

The book ends with an afterword in which Donaldson explains the series' origins and the influence of Wagner's Ring cycle: fascinating stuff for anyone who wonders where writers get their ideas from.

Bridget Wood - - WOLFKING (Headline, 1991, 503pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

In a post-catastrophe future, the descendants of the survivors of the Apocalypse know very little about the lost civilisation of their decadent ancestors. As well as bringing about Devastation, the Apocalypse altered the fabric of time itself. The Glowing Lands on which it is forbidden to build or farm are actually gateways to the past, although this is a secret known only to a few and jealously guarded. Joanna Grady, fleeing from a forced marriage, is drawn through the Time Curtain, followed by her lover and would-be rescuer, Flynn O'Connor, and his companions. The past in which Joanna and Flynn find themselves is not an historic past, but the legendary heroic past of Ancient Ireland, where the sidh lure men to their doom, and the nightmare creatures of folk tale are real. In this beautiful yet cruel past, the exiled High King, Cormac of the Wolves, waits for the human who will break the enchantment that imprisons him, and enable him to regain his throne.

There are flashes of imaginative brilliance in this

book, such as Joanna's meeting with the dangerous yet infinitely desirable Cormac. Unfortunately there are also long passages that are painfully whimsical, and at times the plot creaks with strain. WOLFKING is an entertaining but flawed fantasy.

Ray Bradbury - - THE DAY IT RAINED FOREVER
(Roc, 1991, 233pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

This is a collection from the 1950's, containing some stories which are well-known, by title at least, 'Dark They Were and Golden-Eyed' among them. The stories here are both SF, including a couple of Martian stories, and non-SF. Some of the latter are realist, but others are what would now be called magical-realist. Bradbury was one of the first authors to bring modern SF to a wide public through the American slick magazines, but he did it perhaps at the expense of hard science, and the Roc cover is misleading in showing a man in a spacesuit sitting in front of a giant spacecraft.

Bradbury wrote mainly about Americans going into Space, and they were mainly Americans from small Mid-Western towns. Mars might transform them - it is colonists on Mars who become dark and golden-eyed - but they still want their stoops with them so they can spend the evenings sitting. And when you're in Space without a xmas tree, the stars make a good candle substitute.

Bradbury shows us another side to this, though, in stories I didn't really know, set among the Hispanics of the border states and Central America. Most of these are realistic, like 'The Little Mice' and 'The Wonderful Ice-Cream Suit', about the life of hispanic underdogs, but 'And The Rock Cried Out' is apocalyptic. 'Rock' describes a WASP couple trying to get back to civilisation after nuclear war has wiped out the First World. Now, the indians and latins can show the loathing for the exploitation they have experienced from long before the Monroe Doctrine, and the couple have nowhere to go.

So when you visit Bradbury's world you have confidence in Space and the distant planets, but here and now is empty and dubious, full of the same sort of spirit that he described in DEATH IS A LONELY BUSINESS. This collection includes all these things and I found the mixture quite appetising.

Ray Bradbury - - A GRAVEYARD FOR LUNATICS (Grafton, 1991, 285pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

It's worth saying at the outset that the only link between A GRAVEYARD FOR LUNATICS and science fiction or fantasy is that the author has written SF in the past; by any definition of the genre that one might wish to use (other than categorization by author) GRAVEYARD is not part of it - nor to be fair, do the publishers claim that it is, although the reviewers quoted prominently on the back of the book are used to point up the link.

So, if it's not SF what is it? Well, I suppose a rough description might be 'mystery'. It's set in Hollywood in 1954 and is the first-person narrative of a scriptwriter who is summoned to a cemetery opposite the film studio where he is employed, by a note promising him a startling revelation. The revelation proves to be a hoax - a papier-mache model of the dead previous owner of the studio. However, other revelations follow and a chance sighting by the narrator and his friend Roy of a man they call 'the Beast' on account of his extreme disfigurement sets off a crucial chain of events. Roy, the studio model-maker, uses the Beast as the basis for his next monster creation only to find himself fired - amongst other things - when the current head of the studio sees it. Further complications ensue.

It's appropriate that GRAVEYARD should be set around a film lot because it reads like a novelisation of a film; that's disappointing enough, but what is worse is that the film in question is at best made-for-TV. The plot twists and devices remind one of nothing so much as an episode of something like COLUMBO or even - and this is a

more accurate comparison - the cartoon series SCOOBY DOO, although sadly in this case there's no dog. Where else are you likely to find people making models of the dead in order to indulge in a little blackmail, disfigured monsters lurking at the top of a film-set Notre Dame, the use of masks as a successful means of impersonation, and most cornily, mysterious underground tunnels. All it lacks is someone to say 'And I would have got away with it if it hadn't been for those pesky kids'. SF might require a suspension of disbelief, but nothing I've read this year has required it on this scale.

In the end, A GRAVEYARD FOR LUNATICS is not a complete disaster: it is at least plotted with an awareness of pace and tension and is written with the author's usual sensitivity to language (although even this is over-done: why is Bradbury so enamoured of the word 'viscerated'?); it is however an extremely ordinary piece of work by any standard.

Ursula Le Guin - - A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA (Roc, 1991, 203pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Since this book, volume one of Le Guin's four Earthsea books, was first published in 1968, it has deservedly become a classic, a novel that every fantasy enthusiast must read. Originally it was aimed at children, but it is one of those books that appeals to every age group, and readers who discover it as adults will be equally delighted.

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA tells of the childhood and youth of the wizard Ged "who in his day became both dragonlord and Archmage...but this is a tale of the time before his fame, before the songs were made." Ged is the most talented of all the students at the school of wizards on the Isle of Roke, but he is over-proud of his abilities and unduly sensitive about his humble origins as a goatherd. One night, in an attempt to prove himself superior to another student wizard, he works an enchantment that rips open the fabric of the world and lets through an evil, a dark shadow, that only he can destroy.

Le Guin's storytelling combines with her evocation of the sights and sounds of the world of Earthsea to make this novel one of the best fantasies ever written. The various episodes in the story - Ged's confrontation with the ancient dragon of Pendor, his sojourn in the tower of a witch - and the terror of firstly his flight from, and then his hunting down of the shadow are so vividly realised that the reader is convinced that if magic existed it would work just as it does in this book, where a mage's power comes from his learning a person or object's true name.

Admittedly this is traditional fantasy in that it is set in a feudal-type world where male characters have most of the action, but the writing that describes this world and its inhabitants is fresh and original and brings the mages and other characters imaginatively to life.

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA is a complete story in itself, but I defy anyone to read it without wanting to read the other EARTHSEA novels. It is a book to read and re-read, with enjoyment every time.

than usual, in which the Adult Conspiracy is seen through and the effect of pink panties finally revealed. As Anthony says, critics (including myself, I suppose) revile these books, but they do make popular reading among young teenagers. I'm not surprised, for there is a knowingly conspiratorial cult-element to them. Allegory Lives. But I still find them insufferably arch, the fantasy equivalent of "Sweet Valley High" romances. (Andy Sawyer)

Orson Scott Card - - XENOCIDE (Legend, 1991, 463pp, £8.99)

Simultaneous trade paperback edition of the hardback: third in the series after ENDER'S GAME and SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD. Major issues are at stake as a warfleet sets out to destroy a planet. What is the nature of intelligence? Under what circumstances can a sentient species be destroyed? Thought-provoking, but didactic. Apart from an interesting sub-plot set on the Chinese world of Path, I felt it failed to grip and wasn't the author at his best; will the VECTOR reviewer and the reviewer of the mass-market paperback edition (when it appears) feel otherwise? (Andy Sawyer)

Jack L. Chalker - - EMPIRES OF FLUX AND ANCHOR (SOUL RIDER 2 (Roc, 1991, 320pp, £4.50)

The only thing that stops this book from being totally worthless is Chalker's wry sense of humour: it is instead almost totally worthless. This is the second of five and is a sad waste of talent. Someone should tell Chalker that he can write a lot or he can write well, but he can't do both: perhaps someone has. (Brendan Wignall)

Robert N. Chaurette - - FIND YOUR OWN TRUTH (Roc, 1991, 329pp, £4.50)

Sequel to CHOOSE YOUR ENEMIES CAREFULLY, with another in the Shadowrun fusion of cyberpunk and magic. The plot is as confusing as that sounds, with AIs and shamanistic totems battling it out. Essentially dumb. (Andy Sawyer)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA (Headline, 1991, £8.99)

Simultaneous trade paperback edition of the hardback following THE OTHER SINBAD: a fairly amusing Arabian Nights slapstick but with Gardner straining too hard at the jokes the word "slapdash" also comes to mind. Ali Baba starts off as the younger of two sons but by p. 61 is describing himself as the elder. (Andy Sawyer)

John Grant - - ALBION (Headline, 1991, 310pp, £8.99)

Simultaneous trade paperback edition of a fantasy which sounds very allegorical - an island called Albion inhabited by a ruling class and a population of peasants who have neither long-term memory nor the ability to conceive of a future and hence are easy to exploit. A brilliant underpinning concept and a horribly tragic beginning lead unfortunately from an unusual tale of perception to a standard story of revolt with a goddess and elemental rather unfairly weighting the scales. Still a superior fantasy, though I can't make up my mind about the oddly LIFE OF BRIAN-ish jokes about execution on pp. 279 - 81. (Andy Sawyer)

Richard Laymon - - DARKNESS, TELL US (headline, 1991, 312pp, £8.99)

Also available in hardback, DARKNESS, TELL US starts with a group of students around a ouija board and what happens after they are told about a treasure on a mountain side. Sex, violence and death are the outcomes, but there is also tender, romantic love. Laymon keeps up the pace and tension in each facet. The plot falters at times but he kick-starts it back into action so effectively you'd hardly notice. Don't play with ouija boards, kids - you never know what you'll find out about your friends. (Andy Sawyer)

Stephen Marley - - MORTAL MASK (Legend, 1991, 404pp, £8.99)

Trade paperback edition (also available in hardback) of a decidedly odd fantasy set in 1st-Century A.D. China, which builds from an incoherent, almost incomprehensible beginning to an atmospheric climax. Chia Black Dragon is a beautiful, powerful lesbian semi-immortal who is obviously someone's sex-fantasy locked in mortal combat



Piers Anthony - - ISLE OF VIEW (N.E.L., 1991, 344pp, £7.99)

Trade paperback (also available in hardcover) edition of the 13th in the Xanth series, deliberately less punny

with her dead brother. Touches of inventive Goth-flavoured imagery, helpings of authentic-sounding Chinese legendry, and inventive action-magic scenes still don't stop this from delivering less than it promises, due partly to some pretty crappy dialogue. Wait for the A-format and speed through it to VERY LOUD music. (Andy Sawyer)

Mick Mercer - - **GOTHIC ROCK: All you ever wanted to know** (Pegasus, 1991, 178pp, £9.99)

So far out on the fringes of our area of coverage you'll need a map and compass to get back, but you might care to note references to Poe, the pre-Raphaelites, and Storm Constantine among the entries for various obscure bands who did ten gigs and released one single before becoming Polytechnic rent officers. Totally fascinating. And in this context the Storm Constantine entry is actually one of the best things I've seen about her. And The Cure "always were and always will be a pop band" which comes as no surprise to me whatsoever. (Andy Sawyer)

David Morrell - - **THE COVENANT OF THE FLAME** (Headline, 1991, 564pp, £4.99)

Taut, lean thriller from the creator of Rambo fusing near-future ecological issues with the survival of the Albigenian Heresy. The sort of fusion book which could have been nearer to other genres if the author had wanted it, but as it is makes an exciting read for the widest possible audience. And why not? (Andy Sawyer)

R.A. Salvatore - - **SOJURN** (Penguin, 1991, 309pp, £4.50)

Conclusion of the *Dark Elf* trilogy in which Drizzt, unjustly accused of a massacre, is pursued by a bounty-hunter. Apparently, SOJURN "puts the finishing touches on the first stage of (Salvatore's) writing career", which is as tactful a way of saying "I'm done with this crap" as I've ever read. (Andy Sawyer)

Keith Taylor - - **BARD V: FELIMID'S HOMECOMING** (Headline, 1991, 280pp, £3.99)

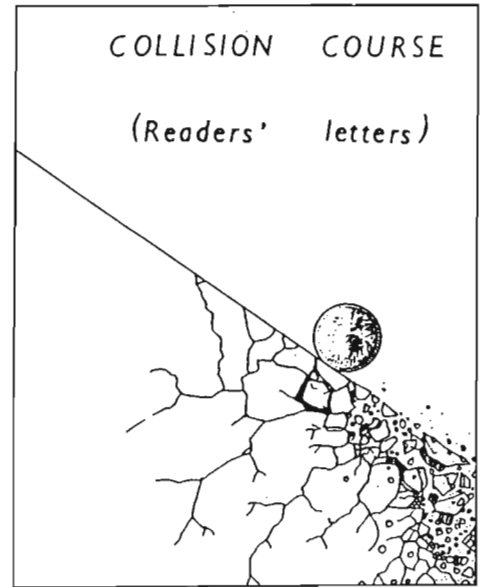
Apparent conclusion - but with hints of expansion - of the *Bard* series, with Felimid returning to Ireland for a showdown with a pretender to the title of Archdruid. To traditional sword-and-sorcery plotting is added some gritty 6th-Century historical flavouring. There's lots of action, some fairly duff poetry, and plenty of magic. I finished entertained enough to want to read the previous four and appreciative of Taylor's research: certainly better than most Celtic fantasy I've read in a long while. (Andy Sawyer)

Robert Thurston - - **BLOODNAME** (Roc, 1991, 287pp, £3.99)

Being the second book in the *Jade Phoenix* trilogy, BLOODNAME will be almost incomprehensible to anyone who has not read the first volume, or played the "Battletech" wargame. Huge, hulking warriors in huge, hulking BattleMechs stride through a huge, hulking heavy-handed plot driven only by hate, ambition and a really odd sense of honour. Events get dangerously close to being almost exciting in the last few chapters, or maybe I was just anxious to finish it, and read something worthwhile. (Martin Sutherland)

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman (Eds.) - - **DRAGONLANCE TALES COLLECTOR'S EDITION: THE MAGIC OF KRYNN: KENDER, GULLY DWARVES AND GNOMES and LOVE AND WAR** (Penguin, 1991, 698pp, £9.99)

Omnibus edition of three *Dragonlance* collections. Although my opinion of *Dragonlance* is largely unchanged since the saga first appeared, I have learned to my cost that it's by no means rock-bottom among fantasy-gaming epics. Fans will buy this because it's there. Non-fans will have no reason at all to look beyond the (stylish) cover. In *PI 73* I reviewed two of the books here, pointing out one good story (Richard A. Kneack's 'Definitions of Honour' from KENDER) and the amusing fannish commentary 'Into The Heart of the Story' by Michael Williams, and concluding that these books are "children's books of an essential but undemanding nature". I still think that's true, qualifying it only by pointing out the undoubted skill that goes into such world-building. I still don't like the stories or characters much, but that's another tale . . . (Andy Sawyer)



Andy Mills' throwing open of the *INTERZONE/MILLION* issue brought a flood of letter from STEVE GROVER, who wrote:

It prompted me to cancel my long-standing subscription to IZ.

It wasn't the Millzone issue itself that made me do it, but the increasing arrogance and smug complacency that have been displayed by IZ's editorial staff over the last few years . . . they got it wrong, they cheated their readers . . . If their problems were as bad as he has made out then what they should have done, but (for reasons of pride and newsagent distribution, no doubt) could not bear to do, was miss a month. As it is, without a change at the top, I will not miss IZ at all.

Given that we are now six months away from this topic, this issue is now declared dead and gone. Other topics for discussion are welcome: please note that this issue's lettercol is smaller than its heading.



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"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 54 - 55
(December 1991 - January 1992)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

With the end of the year come the customary annual polls, and *IZ* readers have been invited to vote for their favourite stories of 1991: a difficult choice this year with some strong contenders, such as Nicola Griffith, Lois

Index of books reviewed

Tilton, Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne. My top two, however, are 'Appropriate Love' (IZ 50 by Greg Egan followed by 'A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions' (49) by Kim Stanley Robinson. Egan, you may remember, won the poll last year and - with 'Blood Sisters' had another strong story this year.

Truth to tell there's nothing in these two issues to seriously worry 'Best of the Year' voters. Egan comes as near as anybody with 'The Hundred Light-year Diary' (55). In Robert Silverberg's THE STOCHASTIC MAN Martin Carvajal postulates the idea of parallel-but-time-reversed worlds as one possible explanation of his ability to "see" the future. Egan takes this concept (consciously, I think, given the story's opening location), provides a scientific explanation and then explores some of the consequences. The result is certainly interesting but the idea really requires a longer vehicle than the short story format can provide. 'Self-Sacrifice' by the pseudonymous Francis Amery (54) is a memorable if unsavoury story. An elderly man picks up a heroin-addicted prostitute in order to dress her like his dead daughter and then fuck her. But his confession to the drugged girl is even more unpleasant. More enjoyable in the same issue is David Langford's 'Encounter of Another Kind', a humorous attack on religious zeal (set near the former home of a famous sf writer, though I'm not certain that this is pertinent!) Also worth reading is 'The Queen of the Burn Plain' by Keith Brooke (55) in which a girl meets up with the semi-mythic human inhabitant of an alien volcano and listens to the woman's story. Nicely done, with a neat ending in which the girl's survival depends on the credence she gives to the story.

The other tales are below average. IZ 54 first. In David Brin's 'What Continues, What fails . . .' a scientist investigating the nature of black holes becomes pregnant. The birth of her daughter coincides with the success of her experiment and the parallel leads to her revelation as to the nature of the universe. Characters and plot exist simply to flesh out the theory and metaphysical speculation and while these notions are engaging enough

the story is not. Rather better is Molly Brown's 'Bad Timing' which exploits a time travel paradox in an amusing fashion, even if the premise is rather implausible. But "liquid caffeine" instead of "coffee"? Also of interest is 'Enola' by Alastair Reynolds, a post-holocaust story about a child who dreams she is a war machine - an Enola - which in a somewhat contrived fashion she and we learn is her middle name. With 'The Birth of Sons' Sharon Hall postulates a future where women no longer exist except as wombs to produce men. Unpleasant and unnecessary. To IZ now. In 'Tracks' Nicholas Royle once again looks at a commonplace aspect of life and turn it into something weird. Unfortunately this tale of insecurity doesn't realise its possibilities. Paul di Filippo's 'World Wars III' plunges us into an alternate world where nuclear development never occurred because a time-traveller single-mindedly prevented it. A nice read, though the story-within-a-story format knocks the initial pace on the head. 'Virtuous Reality' by Brian Stableford is a Poe pastiche set in the 'Virtual Reality' world of the twenty-third century and has an off-the-cuff feel to it. Stuart Palmer's 'The Discontinuum Kitchen' is crisply written in the future tense, though in truth this is all that distinguishes it from a host of other stories about experiments with time that go wrong. I gathered from Stephen Baxter's 'The Gödel Sunflowers' that Kapur is on an assimilation mission to the Snowflake, a tetrahedron measuring ten million miles along its edges. The rest, lost me!

Author interviews are with Robert Rankin (54) and Christopher Fowler (55). (The latter, apparently, was successful in advertising before turning - effortlessly, it seems - to writing books. Surely it can't be that easy? For those list-makers among us Richard Kadrey and Larry McCaffrey (in IZ 54) give us the influences which shaped cyberpunk (though it is not clear whether these influences are personal or widely gleaned) and in IZ 55 there are very useful bibliographies of C.J. Cherryh and Greg Egan. Also in 55 there's the hugely enjoyable 'Wisdom of the Ancients' by David Langford, who applies Lewis Carroll's words of advice on writing to modern fantasy, with results that had me laughing out loud.

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