

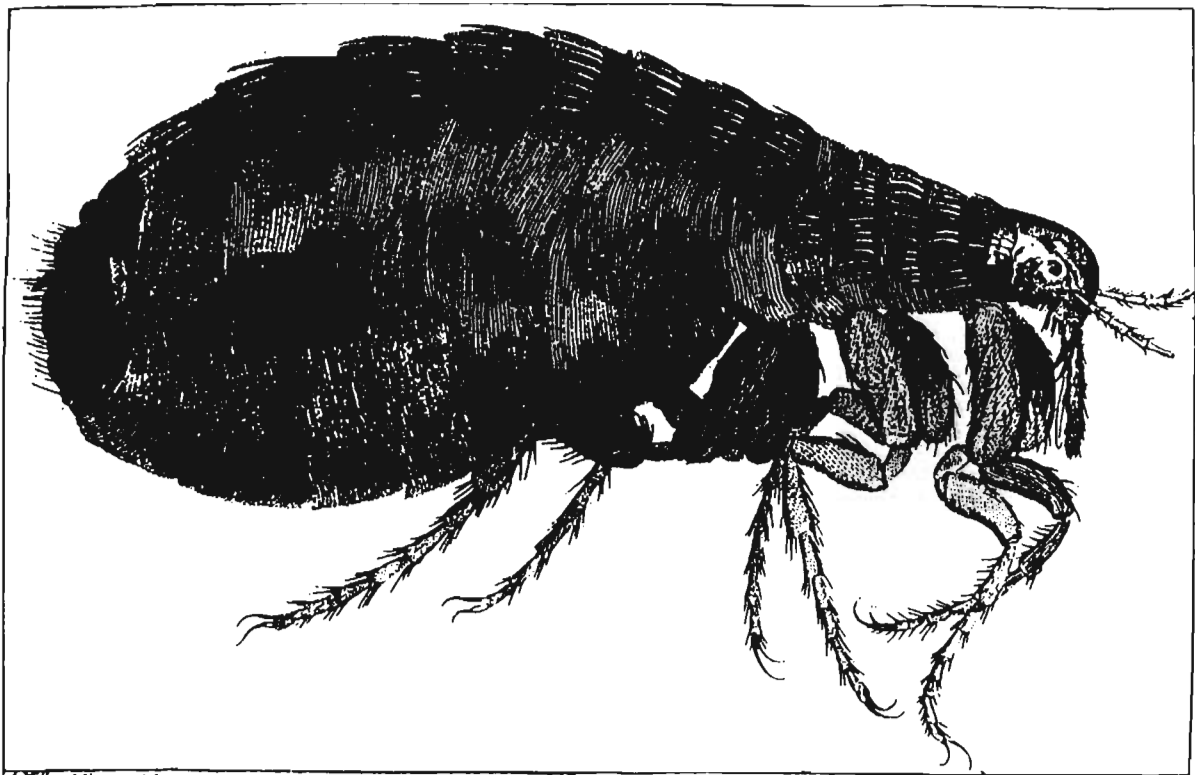


Paperback Inferno

95

The Review of paperback SF

April/May 1992



A. Walker, Life, et sculp.

A View of. a FLEA. drawn from the LIFE.

CONTENTS



Issue 95, April/May 1992

A publication of the British Science Fiction Association, edited by Andy Sawyer.
ISSN 0260 - 0595
Contents copyright © BSFA Ltd, 1992. Individual copyrights are the property of the authors and artists.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

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

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

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

Membership of the BSFA costs £12 per year and is available from JOANNE RAINE, 29 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW.

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

British Science Fiction Association Ltd.

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

EDITORIAL (<i>Paperback Purgatory</i>)	p.2
COMPETITION CORNER	p.3
FOUNDATION'S FUTURE: Science Fiction Foundation's survival in question	p.4
CLOSER ENCOUNTERS: Strangers, Cooters, and a lot of trollocs	p.5
REVIEWS	p.7
CAPSULES:	p.14
COLLISION COURSE:	p.15
UPON THE RACK IN PRINT: Magazine reviews from Andy Mills	p.16

REVIEWERS THIS ISSUE:-

Graham Andrews, K.V. Bailey, Cherith Baldrey, Norman Beswick, Lynne Bispham, Terry Broome, Geoff Cowie, Alan Fraser, Bill Johnson, Ken Lake, Dave Langford, Andy Mills, John Newsinger, John O. Owen, Andy Sawyer, Maureen Speller, Martin Sutherland, Sue Thomason, Jon Wallace, Brendan Wignall.

ARTWORK: The cover this issue comes from *MARTIN'S MAGAZINE*: a compendium of useful knowledge published in 1759, and is dedicated to Billy, for Reasons We Know.
Colin P. Davies: Logo.
Steve Bruce: p.5; p.14
Nick Waller: p.15

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to PI 96
is **Friday May 15**

HELP WANTED

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

BACK ISSUES

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

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

Paperback Purgatory

First, I'd like to thank everyone who wrote in with appreciative comments about my years at the *PI* editorial desk. Next time I apply for a job I'll certainly put you lot down as referees. Thank you.

I'm not gone yet, however, and although I hear that there is "half an application" in the pipeline, there's still chance for other interested people to inquire. I would like to make the August/September issue my final one, so hurry! hurry! hurry! join the queue. Because of long-standing other arrangements, I definitely won't be at the Eastercon for the whole weekend, but if I can make it to the BSFA AGM intending applicants can quiz me there. And I hope to see as many of the rest of you as I can.

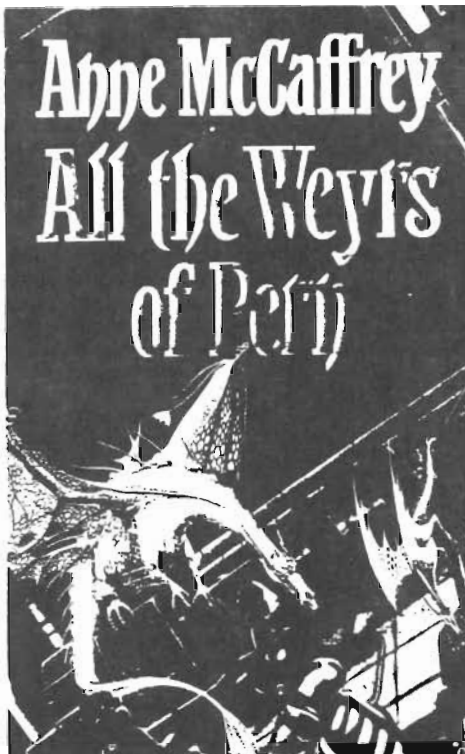
One thing which a couple of people did mention in phrases of remarkable tact and forbearance was *PI*'s (and the BSFA's) policy regarding magazine reviews. This does indeed need sorting out, but given that there will, I hope, be a new person handling my activities later this year, I've deliberately stopped from setting up systems which a new editor might want to change. Meanwhile, a couple of plugs rather than reviews of material which has come my way:

The new edition of *MILLION* (issue 8) contains an interview with the excellent Stephen Gallagher whose work was once rooted in SF (remember his work for *DR WHO?*) and is now moving towards crossover horror/suspense, and

a feature on Stan Lee of Marvel comics. That's all of science-fictional interest, but, well, I go on in horrid fascination about the Lance Horner 'Falconhurst' novels as well. What is this obsession with the unwholesome? It all started with reading Enid Blyton and 'Biggles', your honour . . . £13 for six issues or £2.50 for back issues from Popular Fictions, 217 Preston Drive, BRIGHTON BN1 6FL.

Regular *PI* contributor NIK MORTON has *AUGURIES 15* out, continuing the previous issue's "Green" theme with a mixture of stories from established and first-time small-press writers. It's a stronger collection than last time, I think, starting with some effective gruesomeness from Cleveland W Gibson's 'Genetic Lego'. I'm pleased to note that the two best stories are also from *PI* regulars. Both are examples of stories I generally loathe, oddly enough, so any prejudice in favour of the authors is cancelled out by my dislike of stories in which the wounded Earth is symbolised as a beautiful girl (Colin P. Davies's 'Gwinny') or which incorporates computer-speak (Steve Grover's 'The Last Tree'). However, the sardonic humour of Colin's first-person narrative from a macho buffoon makes the point far more effectively than any sentimentality, and Steve manages the even more tricky balancing act of enabling his story to emerge between the lines of a radio message and the computer-generated analysis of this message. Both are very good stories, and you can read them by contacting Nik Morton at 48 Anglesey Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants PO12 2EQ and sending £1.75

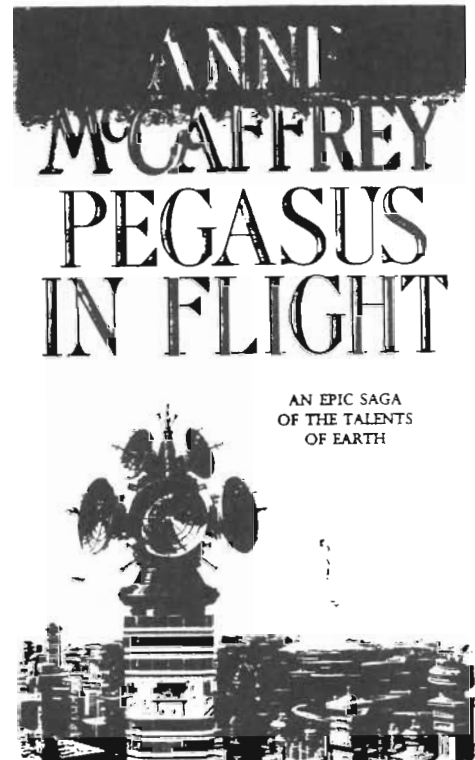
COMPETITION CORNER



We had a terrific response to last issue's competition, and the winners - who identified CARMEN DOG by Carol Emshwiller and WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD by Suzy McKee Charnas (in the omnibus volume with MOTHERLINES) - were Pete Lancaster, Nigel Parsons, and Susan Francis. Copies of THE START OF THE END OF IT ALL and THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY are on their way. Many thanks to Liz Gibbs of The Women's Press for arranging this competition.

Ann McCaffrey was recently in the country promoting her latest books and thanks to the kindness of TRANSWORLD we have five copies of two new paperbacks: the trade paperback of ALL THE WEYRS OF PERN and the mass-market edition of PEGASUS IN FLIGHT. So a copy of each of these books will be sent to the five people whose letters come out of my hat with the correct answers to the following questions:

- 1) What is the name of the gold dragon ridden by the Weyrwoman Lessa?
- 2) What is the trade of Master Robinton?
- 3) What is the usual name for the "space-travelling mycorrhizoid spores"?



AN EPIC SAGA
OF THE TALENTS
OF EARTH

Entries to be sent to the *PI* editorial address by the copy-date indicated on the contents-page.

(one issue) or £7.00 (four issues).

Auguries also comes with a reviews supplement and a New Science Fiction Alliance catalogue which offers a wealth of magazines and books from both sides of the Atlantic. Given that this one is dated Autumn 1991, a more up-to-date one might be available by the time you read this: send a s.a.e to Chris Reed c/o BBR Magazine, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY.

The Library Association lobbied Parliament on February 27th to mark "Save Our Libraries Day", to what effect, who can tell (particularly as we now have our chance to show what we think of a government which appointed an Arts Minister who was conspicuous by his absence)? Although this is a late entry into the battle, it will do no harm to point out the harm that has been done to the public library service over the years. Many of us, I'd wager, learned to become real readers through mooching around the shelves in our local libraries. Yet the choice of material available has declined. Recently, I looked in the catalogue of my own library service for a selection of well-reviewed books by some of the newer British SF writers. I found we had bought single copies - in some cases, no copies at all - of books which I would have hoped more than one library would have chosen.

In my own field - children's books - things are worse: on the one hand, authority-figures are complaining about alleged decline in reading standards and emphasising the need for more study materials, on the other, the amount of money available to meet demands is being cut. Admittedly, local government is not the only culprit: if you think that a lot of genre SF and Fantasy is crap then you really wouldn't want to know the range of material which comes out from children's publishers. There's still a supposition that what mum and dad liked is bound to go down well with their kids - witness the constant attempts

to revive Noddy who sells well to doting adults buying presents but is rarely asked for by the children themselves and that anyone with a famous name can write a children's book - witness also the Duchess of York and her appalling "Budgie The helicopter" books which I have never known a child to take the slightest interest in: (For that matter, if I really wanted to be cruel, I could cite two extremely well-respected British SF writers who have in recent years produced work for children which is so far inferior to their adult work as to be hardly recognisable . . .)

But there has always been substandard material and always will be; the problem is that so many good writers are having their creativity stunted because sales to libraries - which once could be relied upon to take a certain amount of a publisher's print-run - have slumped. If even a widely- and well-reviewed hardback novel can sell under 1000 copies, what hope is there for a new writer?

But this is special pleading, you argue. What right does any writer or publisher really have to have public money spent on their books? And you are not wrong, even though I wouldn't go so far as to say that you were *right*. The point is not that libraries should act as ways in which publishers can be subsidised, but that they should exist as ways in which readers can be guided to a wider range of reading. By borrowing a series of picture books for a young child, a parent may be creating a reader for life. If you borrow a novel by an obscure writer you would never spend even a fiver on just on the grounds that it *looked* interesting, you might actually buy their next. The more difficult this facility is made, the higher the barriers that are placed around our minds.

FOUNDATION'S FUTURE?

Polytechnic of East London pulls the plug on the Science Fiction Foundation!

Just as this magazine was going to press news came that the Polytechnic of East London, which has provided a home for the Science Fiction Foundation since its establishment in 1971, has decided to withdraw funding from the organisation.

Technically, to quote from the special issue of the Friends of Foundation *NEWSLETTER*, "The Polytechnic is not saying that the Foundation has to go, but from the end of the financial year 1992/3 (that is, April 1993) the Foundation would have to be self-financing. In other words, the Foundation would have to generate funds to pay for every aspect of Polytechnic involvement, including accommodation, salaries, services, incidental expenses and so on."

This would mean that the Foundation would have to come up with at least £34,000 a year.

When the Foundation was originally established, it was never envisaged that it would be self-financing, but that it would be a specialised resource which underpinned the educational programme and "generated academic lustre". It was to organise courses and conferences and supervise studies. Although earlier cuts removed the dual post of polytechnic lecturer/SFF Administrator (thus, ironically, removing one possible source of income from student fees) the journal *FOUNDATION*, now edited by Edward James, is one of the leaders in its field and the library attracts scholars and researchers from all over the world. Now, thanks to the present financial difficulties of the Polytechnic, all this is threatened.

THE CHOICES

A recent meeting of the SFF Council considered four options, which have been discussed in the FOF *NEWSLETTER*:

- 1) **SELL UP:** - A Japanese institution has apparently expressed an interest in buying the entire Foundation Library, leaving the Foundation with copied (microfilm, microfiche) records of its holding. The funds raised could then be used for the Foundation's educational purposes. This idea was rejected for various reasons, of which some of the most considerable were that the Foundation as such does not own much of its stock: the BSFA library, for example. There are other individual or corporate collections which are technically only on "permanent loan" to the Foundation Library. There would also be copyright and ethical problems involved in making copies of an entire library.
- 2) **CLOSE DOWN:** The Foundation could be wound up, and all property returned to its individual owners. This would remove a valuable resource.
- 3) **STAY AND PAY:** The Foundation could remain at the Polytechnic of East London, and find finance through other methods of fundraising, such as sponsorship.
- 4) **MOVE:** The Foundation could find a new home at another place of higher education where, perhaps, it might be possible to revive the educational aspect of its activities. There are several universities and polytechnics which now offers courses on SF and related bodies of literature - although, as with P.E.L., funding is tight and this would not necessarily remove the necessity of self-financing. Another option would be for the Foundation to establish itself as an independent body, by buying a house and re-establishing itself on its own site. This, however, would need careful costing: the sum of £100,000 has been suggested.

It has been pointed out that the journal *FOUNDATION* is not directly threatened by these proposals. Even taking into account its hidden subsidy from the P.E.L., it operates in the black and Edward James has indicated that he is willing to continue producing it, with Maxim Jakubowski of *MURDER ONE /NEW WORLDS* Bookshop providing

storage space and the Friends of Foundation handling subscription and sales. However, the magazine is only one part of the activities of the Foundation. Even at its present underfunded and underexploited level, the SF Foundation is one of the most important international resources for the world of science fiction.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

That, in a sense, is up to us. The Friends of Foundation are appealing for ideas, offers of help, money, suggestions of potential donors, anything which you can feel can be done to ensure the survival of the Foundation. They are organising a letter-writing campaign to the Polytechnic of East London, to persuade the authorities to think again about their decision. Letters should be addressed to

Professor F. Gould
Acting Rector
Polytechnic of East London
Romford Road
London
E15 4LZ

Individual subscription to Friends of Foundation (including *FOUNDATION* subscription costs £14 pa (UK & Eire)/£19 pa (Overseas) (Students subtract £1.00) Individuals who already subscribe to *FOUNDATION* pay £4.00: those who don't want to, pay £5.00). There are also rates for clubs, "large groups" and corporate bodies.

Further details can be obtained from:

Roger Robinson,
75 Rosslyn Avenue,
Harold Wood,
Essex, RM3 0RG,
to whom all constructive suggestions should be sent.

No doubt fuller accounts may reach you: indeed, there may well be national publicity. Why, then, am I telling you something you may have already found out from *MATRIX*? Because of the irony involved in receiving this news the day after I'd pasted-up my editorial about the cuts in library services throughout the country. Here is one cut which directly affects the SF field. As I have said above, if the Foundation is forced to wind up or dispose of its library, a unique resource is gone forever. As someone who has used the Foundation Library for research, I feel sad about this.

But there's another point to be stressed, which is suggested in the FOF *NEWSLETTER*. The "marriage" of the SF Foundation and the P.E.L. (then North-East London Polytechnic) came about largely through the pioneering efforts of George Hay and was, so far as I can gather, a deliberate attempt *not* to establish links with the world of "literary" studies, but to attempt to draw parallels between a literature which espoused scientific values and ideas and the "new" higher education of the late '60s which emphasised technical and technological studies. Hence the Foundation's home away from the "Arts" bias of the universities, in an era when "cross-curricular" studies were all the rage.

This brave and idealistic attempt to fuse the "two cultures" appears to have fizzled out.

While you can perhaps only go so far in using SF as a resource bank for scientific ideas, the old "pulp" idea - that you can share enthusiasm for a scientific knowledge of the world through an imaginative response to it - still has considerable mileage to it. The neglect of the Foundation as an educational resource - "educational" in its broadest terms - has meant neglect of the exploitation of the wealth represented by both the Foundation's physical stock (the library and the ideas contained within it) and the networks of its members and contacts. If the only true "humane" education includes a scientific one, the SF Foundation could still offer a unique map through this territory by emphasising not just the *literary* side of SF (though that will always be vital) but those areas where SF and "Science" have inspired each other (and sometimes conflicted).

Put briefly, there is still *need* for the Foundation. Please support it in whatever way you can.



Robert A. Heinlein - - STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND (N.E.L., 1992, 655pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by K.V. Bailey)

This very long novel was first published in 1961, Heinlein having agreed to cut his ms. by over a fifth. Now comes the original. Every writer thinks trimming means loss, but often comes to recognise benefits, certainly the 1961 version is a leaner, faster-moving read; but this restoration does gain from fuller description and characterisation, and from less hesitant accounts of nudity and sexual joys.

The campus revolts, the "grokking" cults and communes of the nineteen sixties which drew psychic energy from this hugely successful book - all are history. Thirty years on, certain waves generated have sunk to ripples; others have fed tides. Such ambiguous feminism as is to be found in STRANGER appears today feeble; while Heinlein's presaging the escalation of fundamentalism is now impressive. It is not, however, for its necessarily dated (though often still funny) iconoclastic satire that STRANGER retains so strong an imaginative hold. It is because its psychological and mythic dimensions make it of perennial rather than parochial moment.

The opening sentence sets the mythic frame: "Once upon a time when the world was young there was a Martian named Smith." He was "a race of one", a human orphan, a relic of the first fatal planetary expedition, reared solely by Martians. This uniqueness, abandonment and fostering immediately defines him as a (Joseph) Campbellian culture-hero, along with such characters as King Sargon, Chandragupta and Moses. After a later expedition has returned him, a grown man, to Earth, his childhood and rearing are continued because, although he has super-high human intelligence and the extra-terrestrial outlook and wild-talents of a Martian, in this "Strange Land" his mind is a *tabula rasa*. Before he can fulfil his role as "hero" there are initiations to be prepared for and undergone. As the wizard Merlin to Arthur, as the centaur Chiron to young Achilles, so the anarchical, hedonistic old cynic, Jubal Harshaw, is to Michael Valentine Smith.

Over the period of tutelage there develop both tensions and empathies between the Methusalem-type Jubal, rooted in earth, and the young transcendentially-conscious "prophet", leading to a part-reversal of roles as the ethos of Harshaw's "nest" becomes transformed by the "Thou art God" intimacy, a practice, a practice which denies ultimate fragmentation to an essentially holistic reality. After the stoning, dismemberment, and voluntary and happy "discorporation" of Smith at the hands of a blasphemy-intolerant mob, the story ends with variations on several birth-of-a-religion archetypes, providing analogues of the sacramental meal, the supernatural emanation, and a pending judgement of all the world - this apocalyptic prerogative resting with the discorporate Martian Old Ones, whose medium of terrestrial experience Smith proves to have been.

Harshaw, as revived in THE CAT WHO WALKS THROUGH WALLS, says "The World is myth. We create it ourselves and we change it ourselves." This brand of solipsistic pragmatism permeates STRANGER, makes it lastingly a stimulus to imaginative speculation, and reaches in its final sentence a neat symbolic summation. Archangel Mike, having seen a lot of changes he wants to make, "pushed back his halo and got to work."

Howard Waldrop - - NIGHT OF THE COOTERS: More Neat Stuff (Legend, 1991, 326pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by Dave Langford)

Here are eight stories, one essay, many chatty introductions and one short novel, none of them very much like anything else.

The 1960s come dancing nostalgically back to life. Bygone French notables move through a surreally written Dreyfus Case in wheels (*Fin de Cyclé*), culminating in Alfred Jerry's downhill bicycle race on the steps of the Eiffel Tower. A centaur left over from the age of myth is craftily smuggled through the tighter "modern" world of the Roman Empire under Julian. One hitherto unnoted Martian capsule from THE WAR OF THE WORLDS impacts far west of the others, causing alarms in cowboy-era Texas. Another altered world sees the 1939 "peace in our time" declaration relayed worldwide by, er, television? The Baker Street irregulars sleuth a mechanical rival of Jack the Ripper. High over Broadway, a comic-book hero fights the good fight....

That last story's follow-up article on sources and roots makes you boggle and wish all the rest were annotated likewise. Howard Waldrop's pop-culture and indeed real-culture erudition make for weird, manic and often very funny effects. He takes you out of your depth painlessly and with style: plenty of these have been shortlisted for popular awards and/or collected in Year's Best SF anthologies.

The short novel 'A Dozen Tough Jobs' is another of his fecund, cross-cultural transliterations: the Labours of Hercules, moved bodily to Mississippi in 1926-7 and told from the viewpoint of a young black slave. Some of this is just good rancid fun, as when Houlka/Herakles takes on the Augean Stables with a few sticks of dynamite - "That sonofabitch blew the seal on my minnow pond!" Some episodes are brand-new or powerfully changed: the descent into Hades becomes a far more alarming visit to a grand assembly of the Ku Klux Klan.

My sole niggle is that the relentless name-parallels can sometimes get a bit much: Mr. Augie with the manure problem, Mr. Ness who's always on his horse, Mr. Pluto Dees (Kleagle of the Klan), Mrs. Hippola of the local brothel (and her corset), etc. Though some are deliberately played for laughs, like T. Harris Tottle with his not-so-funny connection to Big Al, Al the Great, Al Capone....

It is impossible to do this weird collection justice in PI's miserable quota of 400 puny words. Just rush out and buy it, please. Trust me.

Robert Jordan - - THE EYE OF THE WORLD (Orbit, 1991, 814pp, £5.95)

THE GREAT HUNT (Orbit, 1991, 598pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

THE GREAT HUNT (also available in hardback) is the sequel to EYE, reviewed in PI90 by Geoff Cowie. It's interesting to think of these books in Tolkien's centenary year as they could never have been written without him. In fact, you

could list wholesale borrowings - a young hero (rand) questing with companions (Mat and Perrin - get the echoes?), orlike "trollocs", nazgul-like "Fades", imprisoned Dark Lord, a Warder (wandering warrior) who's really a king, a giant race of tree-tenders who see humans as particularly "hasty" . . . and so on. Jordan's nomenclature sounds as though he has jotted down words and changed the spelling - Shai'tan, the Ghob'hlin and Dhai'mon trolloc bands, the gypsy-like Tuatha'an.

Yet there are touches of subtlety as well. I like the way Rand and Perrin are each thinking of the other as the expert with girls, while on a macrocosmic level Jordan's world, while divided into Light and Dark, is as morally murky as our own. There's so much wrangling, squabbling and downright hatred between the various anti-Dark Lord factions, which range from enigmatic to Machievellian to downright fanatical.

Still, one misses the sense of *discovery* you get with Tolkien - the knowledge that this is something unlike anything written before. The point of the *WHEEL OF TIME* saga is precisely that it is quite like quite a lot of what you've already read and the reader will forgive a great deal of non-essential rambling for the reassurance of safe ground. Jordan's impressive attention to detail produces an epic sweep to his narrative and his sense of vast cycles of time is perhaps the most Tolkienian thing about his story. More *original* is the concept of a saviour who will also destroy. As the story progresses into THE GREAT HUNT Rand's position becomes clearer and his dilemma more acute. Though the mechanical scene-shifts, false climaxes, and delayed resolutions prevent the saga from being very good, it's still good enough if your tastes run to really large stories.

Dan Simmons - - *SUMMER OF NIGHT* (Headline, 1991, 634pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

In many ways *SUMMER OF NIGHT* is the antithesis of *HYPERION*. The fantastic complexity of the later giving way to a simple, almost naturalistic sprawl, with a slim plot that occasionally fades out altogether. It reads like a stock horror film treatment. You know that when the pre-teen adolescents of Elm Haven begin to investigate the disappearance of their peer, Tubby Cooke, they will eventually destroy the Borgia Bell, source of evil in Old Central, their school. You can even guess the method, completed with such relative ease that you expect to turn the page and read "continued in part two", except that the story ends here, loose threads and all.

Why do the TREMORS-like eel-things tunnel underground when they can easily pass through solid objects? What happened to the giant cockroach in Dale's wardrobe? Why are the kids the primary target? Why are they so blasé when several adults try to chop them into little bits? And why are the adults so unsuspecting?

The kids, gun-toting geniuses, come through it all as well-adjusted as when they began, all except the really smart one, who we all know is for the chop because the author wants us so much to identify with him. Despite the unstinting background detail, the kid's games, the cloying seasonal nostalgia, the children remain blank, distant, untouched. The only thing which phases them is the dark, but they can handle maggot-spewing monsters, the aforementioned eels (who think nothing of a dog for a snack and bite the legs off unwary conspirators) and the bell, which unaccountably turns into a mass of eyes in an ALIENS-inspired landscape at the end.

'Banished Dreams', a chapter omitted from the novel and published separately, apparently explains the kids' resourcefulness through their precognitive dreams. In the novel their actions beggar belief. In the May, 1991 *LOCUS*, Simmons explained that *SUMMER OF NIGHT* is semi-autobiographical, the non-fantastic elements coming from his childhood. Once a gifted child himself, and now a teacher of gifted children, Simmons may have badly misjudged the role of the children in the plotting of the novel, but the overly relaxed style and misplaced sense of nostalgia also serve to struggle with reader sympathy.

Simmons draws comparisons with his book to Stephen King's *IT*, which I sincerely hope is quicker to worm up and not so lacking in narrative drive.

Ellen Kushner - - *THOMAS THE RHYMER* (Gollancz, 1992, 248pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Taking a well-known folksong like "Thomas the Rhymer" and turning it into a fantasy novel doesn't sound like the most original idea: taking a plot (handsome minstrel meets Queen of Elfland, is spirited away to Elfland for seven years, returning with the gift of true speaking) known to most readers seems like a handicap to any author. However, Ellen Kushner has taken on that task and written the most moving fantasy I've read in a while. And she's done it without expanding on, or altering, the legend in any way.

What Kushner has done is write a very small-scale fantasy, concentrating on the characters at the tale's centre: here are no sages of good versus evil, no great quests. Instead, there is a very personal story, in four parts: three are first-person accounts by people close to the Rhymer, and only the second, Thomas in Elfland, is told from his own point of view. The others are by Gavin and Meg, who he finds refuge with and befriends before his sojourn in Faerie, and Elspeth, the girl he leaves behind, but marries on his return.

THOMAS THE RHYMER is a study in character, the central figure of the minstrel dominating, but bent each way between the three powerfully rendered humans and the beautiful, enigmatic Queen of Elfland. Thomas is the shuttle on the loom, weaving the overall picture from the threads of the other characters. Only in Elfland are Thomas' own thoughts heard, as the Queen's spell holds him in thrall and he feels his way through the Elvish court's intrigues. Into this section is woven the story of fair Eleanor, who donned men's clothing to become Sweet William on the murder of her husband and baby. Thomas is told the story piece by piece, and weaves it into the song "Famous Flower of Servingmen", using it to answer a riddle posed him by the Queen's adversary.

Lyrical written and very moving, *THOMAS THE RHYMER* shows it is possible to write fantasy on a human scale without losing sight of the magical or the splendid; it is a great achievement.

Ian Watson - - *THE FLIES OF MEMORY* (Gollancz, 1991, 220pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Martin Sutherland)

A pyramid full of insectoid aliens (the Flies) has come to visit Earth to "remember" it. They swarm around various cities like faithful tourists, and return to their spacecraft to "discharge" their memories. What is their real purpose? The CIA and KGB are all over the Flies like erm...flies, and the Vatican is madly trying to figure out whether they have souls or not. The trouble really starts when a Fly makes the statement that "Your God is sick." in front of St. Peter's in Rome. In the ensuing riot, the blaspheming Fly is killed while still in the process of "remembering" the cathedral, and mysteriously, the dome disappears.

It turns out that the Flies have a mystical link with "memory space", where they store all their art, data, and thoughts in the images of real-world buildings. When this link is broken, strange things happen.

The first chapter of *THE FLIES OF MEMORY* was originally published as a novella in *IASF*, and works perfectly on its own, but in the extension to a novel, an extra element has been introduced: Munich, which vanished when more Flies were killed, has been found on Mars. The main characters are flown there to rescue the three survivors, one of whom fancies himself as a neo-Hitler and is intent upon starting the Fourth Reich on the red planet.

Some of the emotions and goings-on in *THE FLIES OF MEMORY* are not pretty, and in parts even quite disturbing. The very personal viewpoints from which the story is told make the characters' feelings sharp and real, and rape and Nazism are not items to be taken lightly in the first place. Seeing just how malleable a human persona is can be an eye-opening experience, one that Mr. Watson hits home with his usual grace and subtle wit.

R E V I E W S

Robert Silverberg - - THE FACE OF THE WATERS
(Grafton, 1991, £8.99, 340pp)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Released in a B-format edition, Silverberg's latest novel is set on the water-world of Hydros, reminiscent of Jack Vance's THE BLUE WORLD. Like the Blue World humans, those on Hydros are exiles, many of them descendants of criminals transported there. Because there is no spaceport all trips to Hydros are one-way. Hydros is also home to a large number of intelligent aquatic and amphibian species, the dominant being the Gillies, who have built floating islands which they grudgingly allow the humans to share. These islands migrate between the planet's poles, but are restricted to a fairly narrow band of longitude, the rest of Hydros being unexplored.

The principal character, Valben Lawler, is the doctor on the floating island of Sorve. The native-born Lawler possesses a few Earth artefacts, and dreams of a better life than that possible on Hydros. His humdrum existence is suddenly interrupted when the human inhabitants of Sorve are driven off the island by the Gillies. A greedy trader called Delagard has killed several dolphin-like creatures by forcing them to stay underwater too long looking for ore on the seabed. The Gillies find out about this, and react by giving the humans an ultimatum to leave the island or die.

They set off in a fleet of Delagard's ships, but are unable to persuade any other human settlement to take them in. In desperation, the Sorvians embark on a trip to Hydros' other hemisphere in order to find the only land reputed to exist on the planet, a mythical island called by the Gillies 'The Face of the Waters', but which they themselves will never approach.

The voyage reminded me of the attempted circumnavigation in Silverberg's own MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES, as the flotilla is beset by a seemingly endless series of attacks, dangers and accidents. The survivors of the journey find something which they did not expect, and in the end we learn the true nature of Hydros and its native species, and the humans have the opportunity to redefine their relationship with the planet and its life.

THE FACE OF THE WATERS is ultimately about an unwilling settler facing the challenge of putting aside his unrealisable dreams. Silverberg always writes an engrossing tale with more to it than just a bizarre location and exciting events, and this is no exception, though the echoes of other water-world novels rob it of some originality.

Robert Silverberg LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE (Pan Books, 1992, 506pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

This is the first volume in Silverberg's Majipoor trilogy and shows a different facet of Silverberg's writing. Valentine, the central character, first appears on a hillside above the city of Pidruid, with no memory of who he is or how he got there. He then moves through a vast and varied world first in quest of his own identity and then in pursuit of the man who has usurped his body and his power.

The actual story-line is simple enough. What keeps the reader reading is the sheer packed solidity of Majipoor. Silverberg's invention is dazzling. There are enough ideas here to fill half a dozen science fiction novels. The numerous intelligent races on Majipoor, each with its own appearance, characteristics and customs. Unintelligent species, from sea dragons to flesh eating plants. A variety of backgrounds, forest, city and sea, and the great set-pieces in the Isle of Sleep, the Labyrinth, and Castle Mount itself. Valentine encounters all these, as well as a whole range of different social levels, from the juggling troupe who become his closest

friends, to those who hold the highest power in Majipoor.

In addition telepathy is a force on Majipoor. Dreams and sendings have a power of their own. Prophecies come true and magic works. Valentine and his companions face mental as well as physical challenges.

Too many fantasy quests degenerate into one battle after another, the only variety drawn from the number or shape of the nasties. In LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE, the encounters are much more subtle, often arising from Valentine's own nature, instead of being merely physical obstacles. Although there is never any serious doubt that he will win through, the route he has to take is interesting, and his character - unpretentious, loyal, reluctant to take the almost limitless power that is his right - is complex enough to be believable.

If you are into gritty realism, shock horror, or the wildly experimental, this is not for you. If you want fantasy, a finely imagined new world, and our old friend the 'sense of wonder', you have probably read this already. If not, I recommend it.

Richard Peyton (Ed.) - - THE GHOST NOW STANDING ON PLATFORM ONE (Futura, 1991, 362pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

There's something about railways which is conducive to ghost stories. Whether it is the murky Victorian atmosphere of the Age of Steam, or the traditionally mournful hoot of the train's whistle, or the deserted ramshackle slums which are all British Rail has left us of branch line stations, I don't know, but Richard Peyton has used this connection to bring together a collection of "Phantoms of the Railway in fact and Fiction".

Highlights are Charles Dickens' 'The Signai-man', Robert Bloch's 'That Hell-bound Train' and 'The Waiting Room' by Robert Aickman: all, perhaps widely available in other collections, but for the general reader stories like A.M. Burrage's poignant 'The Wrong Station' and F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'A Short Trip Home' will be lesser-known and equally welcome. Each story is preaced by a factual account of a railway haunting, sometimes with an attempt to link this with the next story. This, it has to be said is intensely irritating: a sort of "this next story is almost completely, but not entirely, unlike the anecdote I've just told, but it's the best link I could think of" approach. They are also typical factual ghost-story accounts, long on melodrama and wooden attempts at flesh-creeping, and short on references.

Further, although Rudyard Kipling's '007' and J.D. Beresford's 'Lost In The Fog' are terrific stories, they are hardly to be called *ghost* or even *supernatural* stories, being fantasies of an entirely different order. But that is something I'm prepared to forgive: despite its flaws, this is a good collection which contains a wide variety of approaches to its theme and many enjoyable stories.

Patricia Kennealy - - THE SILVER BRANCH
Book 1 of THE KELTIAD
(Grafton, 1991, \$4.99, 560pp)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

Although a land of comparatively short history, the USA still has its own store of legends and mythology. I am therefore amused at how some Irish Americans need to return to Celtic mythology as their source material for yet another "epic fantasy trilogy". One such is New Yorker Patricia Kennealy, who treats us to a melange of swords, sorcery and starships in this, the first book of a trilogy called The Keltiad, acknowledging THE MABINOGION, the Cuchulain cycle and THE VOYAGE OF MALDUIN as her principal sources of inspiration.

Kennealy herself is an interesting character: former rock journalist, magazine editor, and record company executive, in 1970 she went through "a private

religious ceremony" with Jim Morrison of The Doors (this book is copyrighted by 'Patricia Kennealy Morrison'). Mind you, I think Morrison was still legally married at the time!

What about her book? Keltia is a group of star systems 1000 light years from Earth, and the Kelts are the descendants of a starfaring race exiled there in prehistoric times. They built the civilisation of Atlantis, but then had to flee when it sank, settling in the Celtic lands of Northern Europe. In 453 AD the star-travellers left Earth for good, unwilling to reveal their technology to repel invaders and Christianity, settled on these Earthlike worlds and, for 3000 years have maintained a society completely feudal in structure except for starships and laser weapons. THE SILVER BRANCH, which is followed by THE COPPER CROWN and THE THRONE OF SCONE, deals with the early life of Aeron, sorceress, warrior, and future High Queen of Keltia. The later books deal with the conflict during Aeron's rule as the Terran Federacy discovers Keltia and an unwilling contact is re-established.

Kennealy kindly provides us with all the usual accoutrements: text laden with unfamiliar words and names which make the glossary absolutely essential, maps, essays on Keltish history and society, and a chronology of events leading up to the start of the book. The back cover compares Kennealy to Anne McCaffrey and Julian May, though I found more echoes of early Darkover. Her work doesn't reach that standard yet, but I quite enjoyed it, and won't mind tackling the later books in the series.

Pat Cadigan - - **SYNNERS**
(Grafton, 1991, 435pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Maureen Speller)

The trouble with back cover blurbs is that they are intended to make you want to buy the book. Hence they grab you by the throat and wave most saleable points of the novel under your nose. In the case of Pat Cadigan's **SYNNERS** think 'cyberpunk', 'computer virus' and 'virtual reality'. Read the book however, and you realise that this isn't the half of it. These days I like my sf with a bit of heart and humanity, a real feeling for the society within which the gizmos operate. I'm not saying that Cadigan has necessarily got the answer but she does seem to have blended technology and humanity with a greater degree than this particularly jaded reader is accustomed to seeing.

The action centres on a group of computer counter-culturists, but interestingly not all of the same generation, and their attempts to make their way within the system. It's easy to draw analogies with the music scene of the late sixties and early seventies, with the hippy/punk dichotomy, but equally you could see this novel as an attempt to square up the seat-of-the-pants programmers, out there testing the limits of the machinery, with the brash young desk-jockeys worrying about profitability curves rather than what the machinery will do. When the best among the socket-jockeys introduces the ultimate computer virus into the network the others have to assume responsibility for it and solve the problems. I don't want to give too much away but if you liked Gibson's wonderful sense of the romance of the computer but craved a stronger, deeper story, then this book is probably what you want. Certainly, I thought it was one of the best things I've read in a long while and I regretted reaching the end.

Pat Cadigan - - **PATTERNS**
(Grafton, 1991, 299pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

This is an impressive collection of fourteen stories that display the talents of someone who is likely to become a major sf writer. So far her novels have promised more than they've delivered, but in this volume there are a number of excellent stories - and the rest are not bad either.

My own favourites are 'The Day the Martels Got Cable', very much a Twilight Zone episode of a story; 'Heal', a fundamentalist horror story; 'My Brother's Keeper', a punk cum vampire story; 'Angel', a close encounter out on the mean streets; and 'Another One Hits the Road', about the sociability of a very long distance runner. The collection is more horror orientated than sf, with stories varying from the small town middle America to the grim world of the inner city.

'Angel', Cadigan tells us, was nominated for the Nebula, Hugo and World Fantasy Awards, and won the Locus reader's poll in 1988. The narrator is out on the streets with her alien companion, the Angel:

We were standing here awhile and I was looking around at nothing and everything, the cars cruising past, some of them stopping now and again for the hookers posing by the curb, and then I saw it, out of the corner of my eye. Stuff coming out of the Angel, shining like sparks but flowing like liquid. Silver fireworks. I turned and looked all the way at him and it was gone.

This is a good example of how her fiction works. A normal world... and then wonder, danger, horror!

Later in the same story:

The waitress came over with a tiny little pad to take our order... I looked up at her and froze. She had no face. Like, nothing, blank from hairline to chin...

Happens all the time.

A fine collection. Essential reading.

Charles L. Grant -- **STUNTS** (NEL, 1991, 438pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace.)

Evan Kendal, an American professor is living in a quiet little village on the edge of Salisbury Plain. His peace is shattered when the wife of his best friend tells him of her husband's disappearance. But Paul Burwin turns up again, in a terrible guise...

So opens this long and somewhat pointless horror story from a man described on the back as "the premier horror writer of his or any generation." Stephen King". (I can only imagine that King hasn't read **STUNTS**.)

But I'm being a bit hard on Grant. The book moves along snappily enough, driven by an interesting central premise. Events unfold and the action moves from Salisbury Plain, to London, to New York State with Addie Burwin and Evan Kendal being dragged in its wake fairly convincingly, to arrive in Port Richmond at Halloween just in time for the stunts of the title. But, and this a big but, in the end nothing is resolved. We, and the characters (the surviving ones anyway) know as little at the last page as we do at the first and this leaves us feeling unsatisfied.

I'll quote from the back again, "He sustains suspense so well that there's hardly a moment to disbelieve." This is almost true, suspense is maintained because we keep thinking that soon we're going to find out just what is going on. Wrongly. In life, things tend to leave loose ends behind, but in a novel, especially a horror novel, it is just frustrating.

M. John Harrison & Ian Miller - - **THE LUCK IN THE HEAD**
(Gollancz, 1991, 78pp, £8.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

This is one of the launch titles of the new graphic novels line from Gollancz (the other being Alan Moore & Oscar Zarate's **A SMALL KILLING**), and whatever else can be said about this new venture it is clear that if **THE LUCK IN THE HEAD** is anything to go by Gollancz don't intend making their new line easily accessible: this is a difficult book.

Based on Harrison's short story of the same name from **VIRICONIUM NIGHTS** this was a shifting, uncertain piece as a conventional short story, but as a graphic

novel these qualities are heightened to an almost intolerable degree. The text is dense and difficult to read, and Miller's graphics are at least as uncertain as the text and the nightmarish quality of the story is well-reflected by the unstable images (the central character, Ardwick Crone, appears variously as himself - one presumes - a bird-man, a tree-man and a doll-man, each change occurring apparently for no particular reason) and chaotic layout.

More positively, the images of the city are satisfyingly Gormenghastian, and the graphics settle down for the best part of the story, the dream of the luck in the head. The violent lines and colours of Miller's images are at best when matching the violence of the text, and the depiction of the Queen of the City, Memmy Vooley is appropriately creepy.

However, the overall effect is just too much, and the excessive uncertainties of Miller's graphics on top of the original ambivalence in the text crush the already tenuous line through the plot: *THE LUCK IN THE HEAD* is an extremely interesting failure.

Robert A. Heinlein - - *FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD*
(Orbit, 1991, 299pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD was first published in 1965, and the novel's style and preoccupations reflect its date. The style falls somewhere between Heinlein's straightforward juvenile adventure stories and his more complex and deeply realised adult novels, and the plot seems to be two completely separate story-ideas, cobbled together almost exactly halfway through the book.

Pages 1-145 are a standard libertarian survivalist fantasy, in which an American family, headed by a balding, sexually irresistible, omniscient Real Man, wait out a sneak Russian missile attack in their handy home-made bomb shelter, then play pioneers on the handy virgin alternate-Earth to which they have been blown. Pages 150-199 examine a number of (for the time) controversial topics by reversing situations seen as 'normal' in the America of the recent past (black supremacy and white slavery are taken for granted) and representing as 'normal' customs totally outrageous to contemporary American morality (sexual servicing of black men by white women, castration of 'uppity' slaves, cannibalism). In a classic couldn't-think-of-how-to-end-it ending, the lead characters are sent back in time to the beginning of the game, to have another go at surviving those dastardly Russki missiles, this time in a disused mine.

Characterisation is minimal. Men are either heroes, wimps (Mother's Boy gets castrated), or baddies (though this sometimes takes a while to reveal itself, as the veneer of American civilisation is slowly rubbed off the survivors). Women are distinguishable from men by a) having breasts, b) having babies, c) reacting to anything unpleasant by running outside and throwing up.

Heinlein has written some excellent science fiction novels. This isn't one of them.

Richard Paul Russo - - *SUBTERRANEAN GALLERY* (Grafton, 1991, 344pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Author of at least one other book, *INNER ECLIPSE*, the blurb compares Russo with Lucius Shepard and George R. R. Martin. Martin has written squarely in the horror and SF genres, while Shepard is best known for tales based around the Vietnam experience. Russo's novel, *SUBTERRANEAN GALLERY*, does harp back to that American obsession, but one suspects it would have worked better as general fiction.

The SF elements are tacked on and tacky, the devolution of the American dream overstated, the South American military arena a nebulous background detail given no explanation, and with no other purpose than that the Vietnam nightmare was in vogue in the late 1980's when the novel was written. Why and with whom the U. S. is at war is never elucidated - who knows if this is near future or alternate world.

The style isn't Shepard, but comes close to Dick's general fiction (indeed, the book won the P. K. Dick Memorial Award). The plot is almost non-existent, none of the characters do much: it is as if they float through events like the pieces left alone on a chess set as the game goes on around them; like the characters in Dick's work, they are underdogs, burn-outs, screwed-up artists bored with the status quo, not knowing how to change for the better.

Rheinhardt is an artist who goes through a mid-life crisis, temporarily burns out and rediscovers himself. Suffering from professional impotence for most of the book, he realises there is still lead in his pencil, and although the process of entropy has accelerated in the States, finds himself in a literal underground art movement. Strangely, the novel remains artistically stagnant, art the great redeemer, a literary device. Rheinhardt's salvation hollow because his raison d'etre does not adopt a pivotal role in the story.

The high point, other than the promising style, is Rheinhardt's expressed opinion of children: "I guess I look at young kids as people who aren't fucked up yet." (page 96), and the low point, on page 71, when we are asked to believe that the American government would in actuality go to the expense of using a military helicopter and a number of missiles on a bunch of clapped-out automobiles.

Judith & Garfield Reeves-Stevens - - *SHIFTER* (Roc, 1991, 284pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

I have to be honest and say that I came to this expecting and prepared not to like it: the cover is cliché-ridden, the cover blurb is facile (The epic adventures of a fascinating new hero born into a magical realm...stranded in our own' - gosh), it's taken two people to write it and it's published by Roc, an imprint of Penguin who for several years have been unchallenged holders of the 'crappiest publishers of sci' title; I don't even like most fantasy. Oh yes, and its full title is *THE CHRONICLES OF GALEN SWORD, BOOK 1: SHIFTER* - need I say more?

It came as a considerable surprise therefore to find this book engaging and, ultimately, engrossing. It deals with the experiences of playboy Galen Sword as he remembers an early part of his life which was not spent in our world, but in a place where he was son of a noble; he remembers being exiled for merely being human. This return of memory - prompted by a car accident and its aftermath - prompts him to search out the 'others', initially as a werewolf hunter. However, he catches something less than a werewolf which proves far more useful.

Presented so badly *SHIFTER* may sound as silly as the usual fantasy of this type, but the Reeves-Stevens have produced a genuinely interesting character and furnished him with an impressively realised supporting cast; the plot whizzes along and the tension is maintained throughout. In many ways it's reminiscent of Zelazny's *NINE PRINCES IN AMBER*, although it lacks that book's control over language. However, apart from the hero's name (which is pretty silly), and occasional enthusiasm for gratuitous techno-babble and the wholly unnecessary introduction to Morgane La Fey (perhaps Penguin insisted on this), this is a gripping and effective work and I look forward to its sequels.

Philip Mann - - *WULFSYARN*
(Gollancz, 1991, 287pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by John Newsinger)

The Wulf of the title is an autscribe, and his yarn is a biography of a tragic starship captain, Jon Wilberfoss. What Mann has cleverly contrived is an investigation of the human condition carried out by artificial intelligence. Wulf has much to say of Achilles, Christ and Dionysos, the three faces of humanity, and the result is a fine novel.

Wilberfoss is a flawed and tormented character who manages to find sanctuary with the Gentle Order of St Francis Dionysos, the bull-headed God. In the service of the Order he thrives and earns respect for both his

ability and reliability.

Wilberfoss is put to the test; selected to command the giant hospital starship, *Nightingale*, a semi-sentient craft that is helping to repair at least some of the damage caused by the War of Ignorance. He fails. The ship is lost, its crew and patients dead and only the crazed and suicidal Wilberfoss returns. With the assistance of the autonurse, Lily, Wulf tells the story of the fateful voyage and is gradually healed.

Mann is a very skillful and practiced writer. He creates a complete fictional universe with economy. We are told enough to follow the plot and appreciate the sheer scale of events that have left worlds destroyed and refugees scattered throughout space. He marvellously realises the planet Juniper, where Wilberfoss lives with his family before the fateful voyage and to which he returns afterward. Most impressive, however, is the account of the planet on which the *Nightingale* was wrecked, and of the Chi-da, the giant life-form that Wilberfoss encounters there.

This is well worth placing on the shelf alongside Mann's other novels, all of them good reading.

Melanie Tem - - **BLOOD MOON** (The Women's Press, 1992, 170pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Before reading **BLOOD MOON**, the only other fiction by Melanie Tem I'd come across was the short story 'Lightning Rod' (in Lisa Tuttle's anthology *SKIN OF THE SOUL*). In that story emotional pain and grief have physical manifestation. In **BLOOD MOON** the same happens with anger.

Tem's cast list is small, which gives the book an intimate, almost claustrophobic feel. There's Greg, an abused youngster who is a ward of (the US) social services and whose anger causes "bad" things to happen around him; Andy, Breanne's father, who like Greg has the ability to turn anger into a destructive force but who has suppressed his ability; and Melinda, Greg and Breanne's social worker.

The book describes the developing relationships between the Novaks, as Breanne struggles to cope with a difficult child who has been constantly rejected by previous foster parents, and Greg comes to terms with family life whilst learning to focus his power. Andy proves to be the wild card, whose attempts to influence the situation ultimately lead to disaster. And after a casual liaison, Breanne is pregnant. Can Greg cope with this or will his anger destroy the baby? We don't find out until the very last page.

In much standard horror fiction Greg would have been a manipulative, evil figure. For the most part, Tem eschews the clichés (curiously, the book's title is one exception; **BLOOD MOON** is at its weakest both during the "standard" scare-making moments and when maternal emotions are unproductively dwelt upon) and chooses ambiguity: Greg's controlled use of his anger is intermittent and even at his worst he is still a victim. If anything, the greatest horror is at the beginning of the novel when the abuse that Greg received is graphically described. The book's real success lies in its rich charting of the protagonists' relationships, of the difficulties in adopting a problem child and - when Andy has a stroke - of the meaning of expressive aphasia.

I believe this is Melanie Tem's first published novel. If so, it's a remarkable debut.

Sue Thomas - - **CORRESPONDENCE** (The Women's Press, 1992, 152pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

This is a curious novel, sometimes bewildering, sometimes drab, often insightful and always challenging. It is curious because it is experimental. It is curious because it is split into easily comprehensible chunks by the author yet the whole is elusive to grasp. It's an assured debut by Ms Thomas - perhaps too assured, for in the end it is easy to admire **CORRESPONDENCE** but less easy to enjoy it.

A synopsis of the book is well-nigh impossible without this reviewer tying himself in knots in the process, but here goes:

- the second person singular passage features a composer of fantasies, a woman who, after her family is wiped out in a road accident, allows herself to be turned into a cyborg. She/it produces software which interacts directly with the consciousness of her audience;
- two of her creations are Rosa and Shirley who have similar familial backgrounds to their creator. And, as with their creator, their intertwined lives are at a crux point. **CORRESPONDENCE** is the story of their fate;
- finally, there are "guides" to the text and "infodumps" which primarily give the reader information on the subject of Machine consciousness

Thomas's prose, though detached in style, is more than competent and her handling of material certainly skillful. My main problem, as a reader, lay in getting to grips with this material, in grasping what was going on and then switching attention from the protagonist to her creations and becoming involved in their story. Hence the novel's narrative structure, clever though it may be, tends to a certain degree to be counter-productive.

Nevertheless, this author has a fresh, feminist perspective which can only enrich the genre. For that alone, **CORRESPONDENCE** is recommended.

Esther Friesner - - **HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD** (Orbit, 1992, 217pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

HERE BE DEMONS and **DEMON BLUES** predate this and are essential reading: you'll never pick up the threads without the information, characterisation and sheer agonisingly-funny fantasy invention that Friesner manages to squeeze into them.

I have to admit that I found the third book less amusing. It could be that I expected too much, or that the plot had unwound itself so far that the sequel tries to spread too little substance and too few ideas over too many pages, but you need not fear to read the book straight-faced.

It is also more juvenile in both content and tone, which is not surprising since Hollywood - yes, of course Hollywood is just the diabolical aspect of Tinseltown - is a pretty low-grade place, intellectually, and the author is at least true to her subject here.

Hence the final shoot-out at the far-from-OK Corral, and hence too Solomon's closing words: "The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul." I waited a long time for this third part of Friesner's past-meets-present, hell-meets-sinful-mortals funtrip, and on balance it was worth the wait. But make sure you read the earlier books first!

Suzy McKee Charnas - - **THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY** (Women's Press, 1992, 285pp, £6.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Edward Weyland, a professor of anthropology, is tall, cultivated, distinguished - at one point even described as "all menacing and batlike" - and yes, he is a vampire. But the nature of his vampirism is not that of the horror-tale. There are aspects of the conventional vampire in his nature, but these are the traits of a being at the top of the food-chain, one which preys on man: potentially immortal, possibly the only one of his kind.

And what is the nature of such a being? We cannot really tell, because the first law of Weyland's survival is to adapt to his surroundings. If the physical resemblance of a vampire to a human is a kind of evolutionary camouflage, what about the mental and moral parallels? If even his sexual charisma is part of his nature, like the beauty of the tiger, what about the predatory instinct itself?

Throughout the five novellas of **THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY**, we get closer to Weyland. He is first seen through the eyes of an expatriate South African, widow of a university lecturer, and explores images of the "jungle"

of academic in-fighting, of unreformed South Africa, of concurrent campus rapes as well as the nature of both Weyland and Katje de Groot as one-way time-travellers in a changed world. The successful hunter here is the one experienced in facing other predators than Man. The second story views Weyland through Mark, living with his uncle as a refuge from his divorced parents' squabbling. Mark's isolation and the ruthlessness of Reese, a Satanist who wants to force the injured vampire to become a magnet for power and wealth, mirror Weyland's position as lonely predator. Subsequent stories bring him closer to the human situation by illuminating his own (or is it vice-versa?); in 'A Musical Interlude' he senses in the opera TOSCA a mirror of his own nature. By seeing reflections of himself in the creations of his "cattle", can he then feed off them in quite the same way?

THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY deserves the praise it has received. It's a cliché that the "vampire" image is a symbol of human nature, but Suzy Mckee Charnas makes that symbol the very point of her story. As the carefully-crafted stories weave into the "tapestry", the fate of the individuals causes the reader to feel the ambiguity of the predator-prey relationship and the questionable nature of the term "predator" itself. Much more than a vampire story, THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY works so brilliantly because in the end it's a good vampire story.

Stephen Laws - - THE FRIGHTENERS (NEL, 1991, 461pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martin Sutherland)

The most frightening thing about this book is not its story, but how it managed pick up blurb like "The essence of evil" and "...Laws' strength lies in building atmosphere, suspense and tension. THE FRIGHTENERS is unrelenting and a powerhouse of suppressed emotion." I suspect, however, that the latter quote has been taken hideously out of context, and that it means that Mr. Laws is rather good at describing the atmosphere, suspension and tension of buildings (is he an architect?), and that in THE FRIGHTENERS he has been unrelenting in suppressing to death any emotion the characters happen to feel.

Eddie Brinkburn is a rather bland carrier for the mysterious 'Power', which at first only enables him to control his nightmares. This could have been a terrifying plot line, but the 'Frighteners' take on a physical existence and boost the body count before any real dread is allowed to form. Rennie Montesor, Eddie's best friend, spends the first 400 pages trying to make up his mind whether he wants to be the hero or not, and consequently no time is spent on making him into anything more than an unsympathetic stooge who sticks his head in a bottle-bank full of alcoholic sand at the first sign of danger.

And then there is the usual government conspiracy and ultimate battle between good and evil (yawn). Some of the gore is actually quite good, but the only time it managed to uproot itself from the page and grab me by the throat was when one of the ex-government scientists (ironically) got his head turned inside-out.

"How much do you hate?" asked the madman in the beginning of the book. Enough, but not quite enough to make me say that I'll never read any of Stephen Laws' other books.

George H. Scithers and Darrell Schweitzer (eds.) -- ANOTHER ROUND AT THE SPACEPORT BAR. (NEL, 1992, 247pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace.)

This collection of 18 stories is a follow up to the earlier TALES FROM THE SPACEPORT BAR. Like its predecessor, it is an anthology of sf and fantasy stories set in bars of one sort or another. Pubs are a good place to hear stories, so it's no surprise to find that a lot of these stories are narrated, something which can get a bit wearing after a while, a bit like trying to read all of Asimov's Black Widower stories (there's one of those here) in one sitting. But persevere and dip in and you are rewarded by such classics as Heinlein's wonderful All You Zombies-- and Fritz Leiber's The Oldest Soldier.

But there are stories about bars, W.T. Quick's

Finnegan's' -- about the introduction of drinks dispensers to replace barmen -- and Morgan Llywelyn's 'Princess'. There are also Fantasy bars, like John Gregory Betancourt's Well Bottled at Slab's'; alien bars like Jonathon Milos' C.O.D.; and conspiracy bars like Michael Swanwick's Anyone Here from Utah?.

I suppose the main question to be asked is whether or not a thematic collection about bars and barties works. And the answer has to be not really. Some of these stories are classics, some are excellent tales, but taken as a whole, the inevitable sameness becomes oppressive. Definitely a dipping-into book.

Sheila Gilluly - - THE BOY FROM THE BURREN (Headline, 1991, 343pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

First, a warning: this book is subtitled 'The First Book of the Painter', so presumably there are more to come. Essentially, it's a Celtic Adventure Fantasy. The adventure takes place in a world where Storytelling is a highly respected profession, and Storytellers are accompanied not by bards but by Painters, whose ephemeral sand-paintings call into being the qualities told of in the story (I imagine something like Navajo sand-painting; a magical art capable of healing, invoking the Gods, and who knows what else).

The Boy from the Burren is Aengus, a poor, bright, rebellious lad. His drunken father sells him to Bruchan the Storyteller to redeem a gambling debt. Aengus is taken away to an island for training by the Brotherhood of the Wolf. He discovers he has a great talent, a hidden past, a vital task to perform - and enemies.

On the whole, a well-written, entertaining, gripping story. There are a few odd discrepancies - adders are obviously much more poisonous in this world than ours, for example - and a few continuity errors - whatever does happen to the wolf Jorem brings to Inshbuffin? But these are easily outweighed by the book's sheer readability. Enjoyable.

Joe Lansdale - - BY BIZARRE HANDS (N.E.L., 1992, 242pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Bill Johnson)

On the cover it says that this is "demented SF Horror", it should read 'diseased SF Horror'. Lansdale excels at splatter, the other stories have no great distinction.

The writing style is deliberately tough, complete with atrocious grammar and lots of really bad language. It suits the stories.

There is a town which captures travellers and makes them fight to the death in a pit bull ring, a self styled preacher who rapes and kills mentally retarded girls, a boy who is blooded for the duck hunt by shooting a man, an adulterer chained to a kill crazy Doberman, post-nuclear survivors ripped to shreds by mutated plants, a dead dog dragged behind a boy's van offends some snuff movie makers who avenge the dog. These stories are about as subtle as a smack in the teeth from the shovel of a JCB.

Most of Lansdale's characters are large, macho rednecks who make the Texas chainsaw family look positively effete. (Women appear only to be raped and/or killed.) The sexual preference of these heroes is for pubescent girls, who are killed after the sex act. They also like zombies. Of course, as one character points out, when bonking a zombie you have to be careful that bits of mouldering flesh don't come away attached to your Well, you did want to know what the stories are about, didn't you?

Having said all that, the Bram Stoker award winning story, 'On the far side of the Cadillac Desert with dead folks' does have a certain humour, or was it just that my brain was numb from reading the first 196 pages? This story is about nuns trying to convert George Romero's flesh eating zombies to Christianity, amongst other things. If you are curious about splatter you will have to buy this book because I don't think you will find it in many libraries.

Neil Gaiman, Mary Gentle & Roz Kaveney (Eds) -
 - THE VEERDE BOOK 1
 (Roc, 1992, 365pp, £4.99)
 (Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

THE VEERDE is an original anthology devised by Gaiman, Gentle and Kaveney of *Midnight Rose* for Penguin's ROC fantasy imprint. The Veerde are an ancient race of shape-changers who hide among Man, forming the basis for an occult legend. The framing prologue/epilogue story, set in the 'Library of the Conspiracy', was written by Gaiman and Kaveney, and the other eleven stories, by various contributors, differ considerably in style.

The most noteworthy are also the longest: Roz Kaveney's 'A Wolf to Man', a somewhat tongue-in-cheek tale of adventures in revolutionary Russia, is a little reminiscent of Moorcock's *BYZANTIUM ENDURES*; and Charles Stross' 'Ancient of Days', in which a power struggle breaks out between older and younger factions of the Veerde. Stross' story is a nod in the direction of the spy thriller.

Paul Cornell's 'Sunflower Pump', set on the streets of a near-future, ozone-warmed Manchester, brings together strange street-dwellers and some nasty youths. Chris Amies' 'Rain' evokes well the atmosphere of a parched Spanish town, where the exile of a Veerde is disturbed by a rainmaker and his followers. 'What God Abandoned' is as hermetic as one might expect from the author of *SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS*. Stableford's 'To The Bad' is a rather slight story of Veerde alienation. 'A Strange Sort of Friend' by Josephine Saxton is about an odd, ugly woman whom the narrator eventually decides is 'a bad, bad bitch'. 'Railway Mania' by Michael Fearn may best be appreciated by Settle-Carlisle railway buffs; it's also about the discovery of a disturbing diary. Liz Holliday's emotionally intense 'Blind Fate' involves Teiresias, the Sphinx, and Oedipus, and a knowledge of Greek mythology would help readers here. In Storm Constantine's 'A Change of Season' - as erotic as a Searles drawing - a traveller encounters a strange brother and sister. I wasn't quite sure what the point was of Colin Greenland's 'Going to the Black Bear', in which odd things happen in the American backwoods.

All in all, an entertaining, well-written and readable collection, and you could do a lot worse with the price of three pints.

Charles Sheffield - - DIVERGENCE (Gollencz, 1992, 281pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

The first page of this novel rivetted me: E. C. Tally, a computer-brain implanted in an otherwise human-like body, is undergoing a complete medical check before going out on his mission. I liked him at once and he does wonders for the plot. There's a nice bit where his brain is removed and controls the body from long distance along a thread of nerve-fibre; and if the body gets destroyed he can be switched off and used in a new one.

The story follows on from *SUMMERTIDE*, which I hadn't read and have now ordered. Land tides on the planet Quake in the Dobelle system appear to have activated artefacts left from the mysterious Boulder epoch. 'Something' got out, and investigators set forth; as well as humans, we have Lot'fian, a Hymenopt, and a Cecropian. The physical and cultural characteristics of each species are described for us in info-dump excerpts from the 'Universal Species Catalog', which puts us in the picture about Phages and (in due time) the frightful Zardalu.

It's a standard space-opera plot with some nice SF touches: like Speaker-Between, left behind by the Builders, and the amazing things on and beneath the surface of the planetoid Glistar. What's unsatisfying is that the plot's resolution depends (as so often in space-opera) on accidental successes not closely related to the main themes. The Cecropian just happens to have a couple of Starburst missiles with her; the Zardalu just happen to be...well, you'll see.

The other fault (apart from the info-dumps) is with the characters, many of them hard to tell apart or get

involved with. It seems a waste to have a character like the Hymenopt with umpteen legs and not really see them in use; all that happens is that one gets torn off and re-grows. The story lights up every E. C. Tally has something to contribute, and he amuses, as to a lesser extent does another fairly amusing character, Birdie Kelly. Maybe Charles Sheffield should aim to bring more comedy into his tales and leave out the cardboard straight men?

William Shatner - - TEKLORDS
 (Corgi, 1992, 255pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

TEKLORDS is a direct sequel to *TEKWAR*, in which... 'Jonathon 'Jake' Cardigan, an ex-cop unjustly convicted of dealing in Tek ("the ultimate computerised drug") has been sentenced to fifteen cold-sleep years on a satellite prison module. But, after only a four-year snooze..." (PI#91, p.10). And once again, Mr Shatner has paid dedicatory tribute to Ron Goulart ("wise, witty, ingenious").

Cardigan continues to work for the Cosmos Detective Agency, aided (more-or-less) by his partner, Sid Gomez, and Beth (daughter of rescuee Prof. Leon Kitteredge). *TEKLORDS* moves along at break-neck speed, with a well-knitted plot involving synthetic virus XP-203: "'How about London?' said Parafuso. 'A very smug city, and much too cold. If we use XP-203 there and produce, say, an additional 15,000 or so deaths - that ought to convince everyone'" (p.125).

The relationship between Jake and his almost-family (ex-wife Kathleen McRobb and fifteen-year-old son Dan) is edgily credible. Why, the Big Lug himself even comes out with the occasional wee think-pieces: eg the Freezer (p.83), and his traumatic formative years (pp.134-5). Jake's boss, Walt Bascomb, is suitably 'M'-like, while the baddies... but that would be telling.

As with most future-cop-thrillers (even *good* ones), *TEKLORDS* could easily have been set in the present - despite kamikaze androids, the "Dinelli underwater estate" (pp.67-70), cryogenic prisons, and Tek itself. Big f****g deal. Which reminds me: there's a naughty bit on page 42, and I can't go without mentioning these in-references: 'Torture Garden Motel... The Body Electric Bordello' (pp.71-2).

PS It may interest you to know that a character named Jack Cardigan once stalked the pages of *Dime Detective* magazine. Written by Frederick Nebel, some of these stories have been collected in *THE ADVENTURES OF CARDIGAN* (The Mysterious Press, 1988). ~~Jack~~ Jack Cardigan worked for the Cosmos Detective Agency.

PPS Further information can be found in *THE DIME DETECTIVES*, by Ron Goulart (TMP, 1988).

Phyllis Eisenstein *THE CRYSTAL PALACE* (Grafton, 1992, 416pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

A long awaited sequel to Eisenstein's 1979 fantasy *SORCERER'S SON*, *THE CRYSTAL PALACE* is an unusual, skilful and engrossing work, just as different from run-of-the-mill fantasy as was its predecessor.

The hero of *SORCERER'S SON*, Cray Ormoru, gets together with his friend, seer Feldar Sepwin, to create a magic mirror, wrought of silver and spider's web, to reveal the heart's desire of anyone, who gazes into it. To Cray's dismay, he appears to be the only one to see nothing in the mirror. For years he avoids the mirror, until one day, while visiting the seer, he looks into it, and it shows him a young girl. He watches the girl over the years as she grows up, wondering all the while who she is and where she comes from. He finally enlists the help of the demons of Fire, Air and Ice to discover her identity, and her lonely existence as an apprentice sorceress housed within a Crystal Palace deep inside the realm of Ice.

Ormoru pursues Aliza, his fair sorceress, only to discover she is as cold as the ice that she can manipulate so well. To win her love, he has to unlock the secret of the Crystal Palace and combat the strange, powerful sorcerer who is Aliza's grandfather.

The key to Eisenstein's success with this book is the excellent characterisation. All the characters are well-rounded, even the enigmatic and cold Aliza, and behave as they should no sudden changes in mood, or illogical behaviour. The only fault is the slight rabbit-out-of-the-hat ending to the climactic sorcerous battle between Gray and the evil grandfather, that and a slight tendency to spin things out just a little too long - at 416 pages, its about fifty pages too long. As with *SORCERER'S SON*, though, this is admirably original work.

Penelope Lucas - - *WILDERNESS MOON*
(Corgi, 1992, 480pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

There seems to be a new genre of books arising: I might call it Ice-Age Romance. Perhaps because we are disillusioned with the Myth of Progress as it relates to our own situation, we project it back into the past, and delight in the discoveries of a simpler age, as our heroes invent pottery, writing, the wheel, agriculture... Civilisation. How reassuring to know that their terrible problems can be solved! At the same time, Ice-Age Romances often try to work out Where We Went Wrong, by investigating the roots of religious feeling, creativity and spirituality in the shamanic response to the natural world, the changing seasons, and the diversity of plant and animal life.

The action of this story takes place in prehistoric Siberia, and shows the overthrow of matriarchy by patriarchy (Patriarchy Bad, and matriarchy not much better). By following the changing fortunes, shamanic initiation, and eventual partnership of Injya, daughter of the murdered matriarchal High Priestess, and Galdr, son of the patriarchal chief, the book gives models for male and female personal development, and for relationships between the sexes. The book also strongly implies that 'our' society is sick, and that this sickness is caused by an unbalanced or improper relationship between men and women, and between humans and the natural world.

The book contains a good deal of carefully researched information about shamanism, and about prehistoric nomadic life. But for a book about the shamanic worldview, it contains remarkably little reverence for - or detailed observation of - the natural world. The plot is jerky and too obviously driven by the implied ideology, the characterisation is sketchy, and the great natural powers of weather, landscape etc. are used as backdrop scenery rather than the numinous shapers of nomadic life.

Nancy A. Collins - - *III THE BLOOD*
(NEL, 1992, 301pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Geoff Cowie)

The story is told mainly through the eyes of small-time private investigator Palmer, who is initially hired to trace the vampire Sonja Blue and give her a message. Things start to get weird for Palmer even before he meets her but, after Sonja rescues him from an ogre, Palmer learns that he is a sensitive and that his original employer, Pangloss, is also a vampire. After she gets rid of his nightmares for him he agrees to team up with her, not that he really has much choice. Palmer now sees the world as it really is, a horrorshow inhabited by vampires, pyrotics, ogres and succubi. Sonja, aided by Palmer, sets out to track down Morgan, the vampire who created her.

The vampires feel erotic excitement when feeding, and emotions like hate and fear have a similar effect on them. At times, Sonja struggles to control an *Other* inside her that tries to take her over and create carnage out of everybody within reach.

This book, a sequel to *SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK*, is definitely more fun than the average horror novel and manages to bring wit, freshness and a little eroticism

to what is frequently a rather tiresome genre. Collins is at her most energetic when depicting the various nasties. Not everything works; the English working class accent of Sonja's dead boyfriend is, for instance, well over the top. The book suffers somewhat from sequelitis and has a rather inconclusive ending, indicating that there may be a third to come. There is less explicit gore and mayhem than in *SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK*, which is unfortunate, since Collins is generally at her best when at her most excessive.

Robert Rankin - - *THE ANTIPOPE* (Corgi, 1992, 283pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

There are, it is true to say, aspects of this book which are not laudable. Rankin describes few of his large *dramatis personae* so clear identification on the reader's part is not always easy. There are hardly any female characters and those that do exist are stereotyped or unsympathetically drawn or both. The menace in the story - the main plot has the eponymous, evil Pope Alexander VI reborn (in Brentford!) with supernatural powers and details our barfly heroes' attempt to stop him taking over the world - is built up effectively but fizzles out at the end. There is only one Irish character, O'mally, yet everyone sounds as if they have the blarney. The novel is possibly overlong.

But my oh my, there's so much that is *right* For a start, this is a very, very funny book with some wonderfully oddball characters, most of whom congregate in the Flying Swan, a public house which plays host to much of the proceedings. The dialogue is understated, the action incredible. It's impossible in the space of this review to do more than hint at the number of scenes (most of which are aside of the main plot) which strike a chord, or characters who stand out. I was partial to Captain Carson, who'd never seen the sea yet for thirty years had run a Seamen's Mission, spending all that time deterring anyone from sleeping under its roof. Or Soap Distant and his amazing tunnels under Brentford. Or Jack Lane, a publican "who had only noticed the Second World War because the noise had woken him up". And these are merely supporting players!

THE ANTIPOPE dates from 1981 and is the first book in Rankin's Brentford "trilogy" (of four). Don't worry, though - this is a novel in its own right, with a proper resolution. But when Corgi reissue the rest of the series, I'll be first in the queue.

Lawrence Watt-Evans - - *THE UNWILLING WARLORD* (Gratton, 1991, 349pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

Ostensibly this book is a fantasy novel, but its proper function may well be as a cure for insomnia. Sterren, our hero, is quietly earning his living from gambling, influencing the dice with his slight touch of "warlockry", when he is informed that he is the hereditary warlord of the kingdom of Semma and must defeat the kingdom's enemies in battle or be executed as a traitor. Having observed Semma's almost non-existent army, Sterren decides to enlist magical aid, and hires as assortment of incompetent witches and wizards, and a warlock who successfully routs Semma's enemies whilst inadvertently increasing his own power. In the last third of the book, Sterren has to deal with the ever-growing power of the warlock.

In order to understand this unevenly-plotted tale, the reader has to be informed about "warlockry" - so large chunks of information are dropped into the narrative, where they manage to slow up the action considerably. Sterren's musings about whether to stay in Semma or flee also contribute to the plodding pace of the novel, whilst the dialogue is prevented from becoming interesting by discussions about the problems of translation. Condensed into a short story about a warlock with apparently limitless power, this tale may have succeeded - as a novel it is simply tedious.

Marion Bradley, Julian May & Andre Norton -
- BLACK TRILLIUM

(Grafton, 1991, 491pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

The kingdom of Ruwenda has long been at peace, protected by the benevolent enchantments of Binah, but now the Archimage's powers are failing, whilst those of the sorcerer Orogastus, the power behind the throne of Labornok, grow stronger. When Labornok invades Ruwenda, the Ruwendan king and queen are killed, but the three princesses, Haramis, Kadiya and Anigel, manage to escape, aided by the magical buds of the Black Trillium plant bestowed upon them by Binah at their birth. The Archimage now sends each princess on a quest to find one of the three talismans which, united, will defeat Orogastus' evil. Not only must the princesses face the perils of fetid swamp, icy mountain, Orogastus' magic and the power he obtains from the machines of the 'Vanished Ones' whose cities are scattered throughout the swamp, but each must recognise their individual limitations if they are to work together to fulfil their destiny.

This novel is familiar fantasy territory, but is very readable, with colourful descriptions of exotic flora and fauna, including the dwarflike Oddlings and telepathic animals and birds who aid the princesses. Part of the novel's attraction was trying to decide which of the three authors was responsible for which parts of the novel, but although certain elements of BLACK TRILLIUM called to mind other of the authors' well known works, the book reads as though it were written by one author throughout.

The reader does not doubt that all will be well for the princesses by the end, but discovering exactly how the Archimage's prophecy is resolved makes for an enjoyable read.

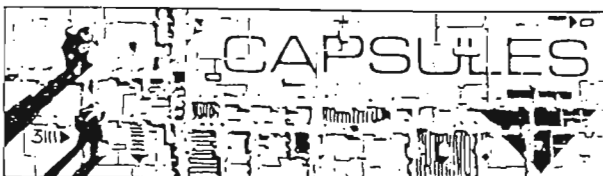
WANTED: A NEW EDITOR.

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 your-
self and how you would develop the magazine.



Jerry Ahern - - FIRESTORM (N.E.L., 1991, 192pp, £3.50)

This is the twentieth *Survivalist* novel. Obviously there is a market for this sort of juvenile militaristic crap but it's unlikely to be of interest to any BSFA members. The only consolation is that if there had been a nuclear war, the survivalists would all have died as well. (John Newsinger)

Piers Anthony & Robert E. Margroff - - CHIMERA'S COPPER
(Grafton, 1992, 311pp, £3.99)

Following on from DRAGON'S GOLD and SERPENT'S SILVER, the ear-shape motif gets almost subdued as heroes, kings,

evil queens and monsters nip in and out of adjacent "frames" in a plot ever more complex and piffling. Bright thirteen-year olds will enjoy its ingenuity, but not for long. (Norman Beswick)

Greg Bear - - ANVIL OF STARS (Legend, 1992, 442pp, £8.99)

Trade paperback edition (also available in hardback) of the sequel to THE FORGE OF GOD. A shipful of young survivors of the obliteration of Earth (looked after by robots called "moms") travel on a journey of revenge. Here, Bear's strengths and weaknesses are almost clinically revealed. The aliens and super-science are first-rate. The actual story offers not a lot that's really new, or even interesting. Bear's whimsical references to children's literature (his "children" call themselves Lost Boys and Wendys, their ship is the "Dawn Treader" and references to THE HOUSE AT POOH CORNER come sneaking in as well) are immensely irritating, particularly when his characters are fucking, sorry, "slicing" all the time and working out prodigious feats of ultra-mathematics. Updated gosh-wow SF down to the final shootout, but very little more. (Andy Sawyer)

Greg Bear - - THE VENGING (Legend, 1992, 269pp, £8.99)

Trade paperback edition (also available in hardback) containing eight stories including 'Mandala', later reworked as part of STRENGTH OF STONES (now available as a Gollancz paperback) and revisions of two early stories, 'The venging' and 'Perihersperon'. Bear's terrific science-fictional imagination can lead to an over-rich mix in the stories: 'Hardfought' is set in a brilliantly-conceived conflict between humans and an older race which is remarkably confused in its telling, while 'Scattershot' sets up a meeting of alternate earths through the use of an alien weapon which is rich in probabilities but doesn't go very far with it. Tellingly, the best story is the most conventional: 'The Wind From A Burning Woman'. (Andy Sawyer)

Jack L. Chalker - - MASTERS OF FLUX AND ANCHOR: SOUL RIDEK III (Foc, 1991, 424pp, £4.50)

It might be that having to read two SOUL RIDEK books in less than six months (thanks Andy, has eventually got to me, but whereas SOUL RIDEK II seemed to be saved from absolute failure by a certain amount of humour, and was as a consequence only almost totally worthless, SOUL RIDEK III is totally worthless; there is no humour of any value, and the dialogue . . . well, the dialogue beggars description in its sheer banality and crassness. Please - won't somebody make him stop. (Brendan Wignall)

Diane Guest - - FORBIDDEN GARDEN (Fontana, 1992, 320pp, £3.99)

A melodrama of madness exploring similar territory to that of Virginia Andrews without her obsessive high-temperature tensions, as a journalist becomes involved in the lives of a top conductor and his family. (Andy Sawyer)

Brian Lumley - - PSYCHOMECH (Grafton, 1992, 351pp, £3.99)

If Harold Robbins wrote horror it might be something like PSYCHOMECH. Astrology, the IRA, pre-cognitive dreams, a super-rich industrialist, ex-Nazi, a brain machine, a faithful assistant, ESP, soft porn, resurrection, a blind hero who becomes a god; all go to make up a mixture which, for any serious SF/horror fan, is not worth reading. (Bill Johnson)

David Mace - - SHADOW HUNTERS (N.E.L., 1992, 386pp, £4.99)

How does British author Mace turn out such scintillating hi-tech US-oriented fiction? I never read this stuff yet always enjoy his books, and this one - described flowerily by the publishers as "a page-turning psychodrama that seethes with tension, rivalry, betrayal and sexual politics" - replays the Cold War convincingly and chillingly. Give SF a rest and try this! (Ken Lake)

Kenneth Robeson - - PYTHON ISLE (Bantam "Falcon", 1992, 207pp, \$4.50)

PYTHON ISLE is the first all-new "Doc Savage" adventure since Philip Jose Farmer's ESCAPE FROM LOKI (Bantam "Falcon", August 1991). Its an I-didn't-think-they-wrote-them-that-way-any-more-type yarn, which takes us back to

those golden days of yesteryear. Will Murray is the latest scribblet to adopt the "Kenneth Robeson" byline, following the original-and-best Lester Dent, Norman Danberg, Alan Hathaway and William Bogart. There is also a snippet from WHITE EYES, the next all-new, etc. . . . available in March 1992. (Graham Andrews)

Whitley Streiber - - **THE WOLFEN** (Coronet, 1992, 275pp, £4.99)

Whitley Streiber is Unfashionable among right-thinking people, but this reissue of his 1979 horror-tale (predating abductions) is a simple but effective melodrama based upon the "werewolf" premise - or rather, that there exists among us a predator of canine origin adapted to prey upon humans. There's a nice touch where Streiber suggests that our reaction to the (mostly) harmless timber wolf is a projection of our fears of this near relative, and a neat explanation of the vampire myth to boot. Occasional episodes where characters are obviously speaking in time to crescendoes of spooky music and say things like "(this is) the strangest case I have worked on in my entire career", and the mini-shocks every few pages, remind us that this is low-budget movie-land, but at the end of the day you *do* want to keep turning the pages, the human characterisations are good and Streiber puts across the non-human motivations of his "wolfen" particularly well, allowing sympathy as well as terror. (Andy Sawyer)

TERRY PRATCHETT'S "TRUCKERS" (Picture Corgi, 1992, 32pp, £3.50)

And now the book of the TV series: TRUCKERS is here revamped for younger readers with full-colour stills from the recent ITV animation by Cosgrave Hall productions. I missed this, but my spies tell me the animation was terrific but it was a shame about the jokes which fell by the wayside - and that seems the case here. The visuals are good, the rather mechanical captions have little of the Pratchett magic; but if you watched the series or are a Pratchett completist you won't want to miss this. (Andy Sawyer)

Carlene Thompson - - **BLACK FOR REMEMBRANCE** (N.E.L., 1992, 248pp, £4.99)

well-written, suspense-horror debut novel which only suffers because it's yet another story which involves a murdered child who apparently returns from the dead 19 years later. Despite not adding a great deal to this strange sub-sub-genre, it's compelling if not outstanding and if Carlene Thompson can hit upon a more original idea for subsequent books she will fulfil the promise shown here. (Andy Sawyer)

Robert Thurston - - **FALCON GUARD** (Roc, 1992, 253pp, £3.99)

"The fate of the clan Jade Falcon rests in Star Colonel Aidan's hands..." or so it says on the front of this, THE LEGEND OF THE JADE PHOENIX, VOLUME 3. It's actually a reasonably gripping future battle novel which mixes strategy with action. People who like this sort of thing will be captivated by the glossary, map and schematics of the fighting suits at the back. (Jon Wallace)

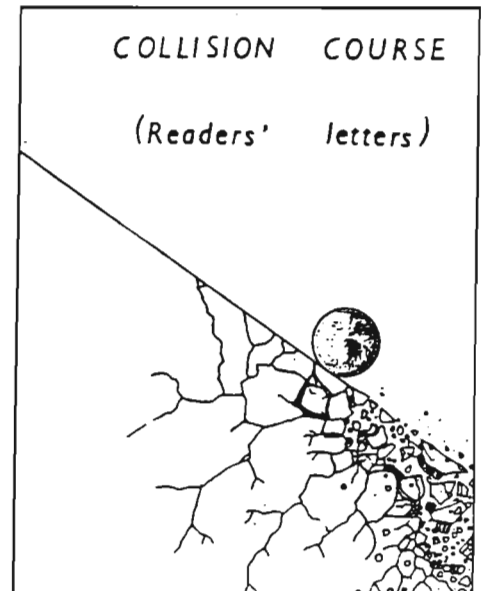
Jack Vance - - **ECCE & OLD EARTH** (N.E.L., 1992, 313pp, £8.99)

Trade paperback edition of the sequel to ARAMINTA STATION in which Vance's brilliantly detailed world-building and sardonic narration sometimes contrasts oddly with his melodramatic plotting; this is a variant of "we must find the deeds to the ranch before the Bad Guys" except that the deeds are to a whole planet. However, Vance as usual throws into the mix images which many lesser writers would turn into entire - and less effective - books. When completed, the *Cadwal Chronicles* may well be among Vance's best books - for how many of his generation of writers who are still active could we say something like that? (Andy Sawyer)

Paula Voisky - - **ILLUSION** (Gollancz, 1991, 700pp, £8.99)

Also available in hardback, this looks like science fiction (semi-sentient machines play a supporting role), reads like historical (the romantic plot is set against a background which is the French Revolution with the names changed) and is packaged as fantasy (there's magic involved). An attempt to hit several markets: It fails

between several sets of stools, in fact, but if you don't know the French Revolution well you may find it more vivid than most fantasy and if you do you may find the translation interesting. I must say I'd rather have read a straightforward historical novel on the same theme. (Andy Sawyer)



Once again Andy Mills' column provides the controversy for this issue: at least someone reads this bit! Just in time to create a real letter column this issue, SUE THOMAS writes:

Once again women of writers find themselves marginalised. How many times does this have to happen before we finally leave the men to their cosmic ray-guns and strike out on our own?

In his review of INTERZONE 54, (PI 94) Andy Mills dismisses 'The Birth Of Sons' by Sharon Hall as "unpleasant and unnecessary". I wonder why?

Surely not because he cannot contemplate an all-male family-centred society?

Does the idea of men loving each other make him nervous?

Is he disturbed by the representation of women as no more than a detached uterus without limbs or brain, useful only for growing foetuses?

He doesn't seem to flinch at outlining the unpleasant plot of Francis Amery's 'Self-Sacrifice' in the same issue - "an elderly man picks up a heroin-addicted prostitute in order to dress her up like his dead daughter and then fuck her". If that isn't unpleasant and unnecessary, I'd like to know what is. OK, Mills doesn't rate this wanking fantasy very much, but he gives it more review space than an honest attempt to express a feminist interpretation of male sexuality.

What is he scared of?

I found 'The Birth of Sons' utterly compelling. Here is a story about female mutilation written not by Eric Brown or David Wingrove, but by a woman. For a change, the subtext is not one of masturbatory sadism, but of culture and politics. I thought SF was about ideas, but maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's only about SOME ideas in SOME contexts. Maybe it's only OK to write about sexual politics if you're a full-blooded heterosexual male.

Sharon Hall's story raises a new agenda for SF. Written two years before IRON JOHN, when American men started running to the woods to rediscover themselves, it asks questions which shouldn't be dismissed.

I would like to know how gay men respond to the story.

I would like to know how women respond to the story.

I am disgusted that the issues it examines should be called "unnecessary".

[On page 10 you will find a review of CORRESPONDENCE by Sue Thomas. Readers who credit the editor with a warped sense of humour will be disappointed to hear that the decision on who was to be the reviewer was taken way, way, before this letter was received . . .]

"Upon the rack in print"

Index of books reviewed

INTERZONE 56 - 57
(February - March 1992)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

The lead stories in these two issues are by Ian Watson and Greg Egan respectively. Both are somewhat disappointing. 'The Coming of Vertumnus' by Watson is a curate's egg of a story which contains many of the author's trademarks: the conjunction of disparate themes (in this case, the paintings of Archimboldo, the Ecology movement, the space race, mind-controlling drugs and the Habsburg Empire), the layers of plot, a strong central female character, the bad puns and the unsatisfying ending. With 'Before' Greg Egan takes a trip into space. A journalist accompanies a rescue mission to an orbiting research station, where an experiment has resulted in the creation locally of a different space/time to ours. It's not without excitement, though the physics lost me and the characterisation was not up to Egan's usual standard.

Better in IZ 56 were: 'Not of This World' by Don Webb, in which an artist discovers his obsession with storms is due to his strange origins and - after initially avoiding his fate - he embraces the rain and meets a weird destiny; 'The Big Yellow Car' by Diane Mapes, a subtle horror story, the author making clever use of her memories of childhood cruelties to her sister; 'The Circle of Stones' by Chris Beckett which - after surmounting the obstacle of the clichéd love-making scene at its beginning - is a strong tale about youthful rebellion and the loss of heritage as experienced by the descendants of a stranded spaceship; 'Destroy All Brains!' by Paul Di Filippo, a story as delightful as its title (I once caught the band Destroy All Monsters, named after the film, and remember being disappointed that the music wasn't as good as the name) about a film reviewer desperately trying to track down a variously-reported film which has dramatic effects on the viewer; 'A Guide to Virtual Death' by J G Ballard, another short piece by this writer, which is both very funny and - unfortunately - not improbable. It's a TV schedule for 1999. For instance:

"4.00 Count-down. Game show in which contestants count backwards from one million.

"5.00 Newsflash. Either an airliner crash or a bank collapses. Viewers express preference."

And the highlights of IZ 57? Check out Terry Boren's 'Three Views of a Staked Plain' (which sounds as if it should have been written by Brian Aldiss), a story of a man who returns to New Mexico and his youth, and which conveys a fine sense of place. 'The Jade Pool' by Julian Flood, about a warrior travelling to China in search of eternal life, has more than one twist in its tail. Best of all is Cherry Wilder's 'Bird on a Time Branch' which combines quiet humour and sentiment with mystery. The title describes the content perfectly (Bird is the name of a man who gets caught in a time 'rift').

As to the rest, David Redd's 'The Blackness' (IZ 56), wherein a field-worker in the Arctic is stalked by a horror which may or may not be the physical manifestation of her despair, almost works. David Langford's workmanlike 'Blossoms That Coil and Decay' (IZ 57) uses an advanced form of VR (again!) to comment on decadence. 'Daydots, Inc.' by Kathleen Ann Goonan and 'The Speckless Cathedral' by Jonathan Lethem (both IZ 57) have fascinating premises, but the former (where memories can be trapped, synthesized and replayed) never really develops its potential whilst the latter (a drug which creates indifference is used to end a relationship) is let down by its contrived ending.

As to the non-fiction, the best by far is an interview with Tom Holt in IZ 56, charting his early forays into writing and telling how he came to find his niche in comic fantasy. Also in the same issue there's an interview with Philip K Dick biographer Lawrence Sutin, though since the subject under discussion is, in the main, Dick, a review of the biography (or an extended comparison of the approaches of Sutin and Rickmann) might have been more valuable. In IZ 57 Mike Ashley pens a homage to INTERZONE and Brian Stableford provides an incomplete survey of British sf magazines from an economic perspective.

AHERN, J.	FIRESTORM (N.E.L.)	p.14
ANTHONY, P./MARGROFF, R.E.	CHIMERA'S COPPER (Grafton)	p.14
BEAR, G.	ANVIL OF STARS (Legend)	p.14
BEAR, G.	THE VENGING (Legend)	p.14
BRADLEY, M./MAY, J./NORTON, A.	BLACK TRILLIUM (Grafton)	p.14
CADIGAN, P.	PATTERNS (Grafton)	p.8
CADIGAN, P.	SYNNERS (Grafton)	p.8
CHALKER, J.L.	MASTERS OF FLUX AND ANCHOR (Roc)	p.14
CHARNAS, S.M.	THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY (Women's Press)	p.10
	IN THE BLOOD (N.E.L.)	p.13
COLLINS, M.A.	THE CRYSTAL PALACE (Grafton)	p.12
EISENSTEIN, D.	HOORAY FOR HELLYWOOD (Orbit)	p.10
FRIESMER, E.		
GAIMAN, M./GENTLE, M./ KAVENEY, R.(Eds.)	THE VEERDE Book 1 (Roc)	p.12
GILLULY, S.	THE BOY FROM THE BURREN (Headline)	p.11
	STUNTS (N.E.L.)	p.8
GRANT, C.L.	FORBIDDEN GARDEN (Fontana)	p.14
GUEST, D.	THE LUCK IN THE HEAD (Gollancz)	p.8
HARRISON, M.J./MILLER, I.	FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD (Orbit)	p.9
HEINLEIN, R.A.	STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND (N.E.L.)	p.5
HEINLEIN, R.A.	THE EYE OF THE WORLD (Orbit)	p.5
JORDON, R.	THE GREAT HUNT (Orbit)	p.5
JORDON, R.	THE SILVER BRANCH (Grafton)	p.7
KENNEALY, P.	THOMAS THE RHYMER (Gollancz)	p.6
KUSHNER, E.	BY BIZARRE HANDS (N.E.L.)	p.11
LANSDALE, J.	THE FRIGHTENERS (N.E.L.)	p.11
LAWS, S.	WILDERNESS MOON (Corgi)	p.13
LUCAS, P.	PSYHOMECH (Grafton)	p.14
LUMLEY, B.	SHADOW HUNTERS (N.E.L.)	p.14
MACE, D.	WULFSYARN (Gollancz)	p.9
MANN, P.	THE GHOST NOW STANDING ON PLATFORM ONE (Futura)	p.7
PEYTON, R. (Ed.)	THE ANTIPOPE (Gorgi)	p.13
	SHIFTER (Roc)	p.9
RANKINE, R.	PYTHON ISLE (Bantam Falcon)	p.14
REEVES-STEVENS, J. & G.	SUBTERRANEAN GALLERY (Grafton)	p.9
ROBESON, K.	ANOTHER ROUND AT THE SPACEPORT BAR (N.E.L.)	p.11
RUSSO, R.P.	TEKLOROS (Corgi)	p.12
SCITHERS, G.H./SCHWEITZER, D.	DIVERGENCE (Gollancz)	p.12
	THE FACE OF THE WATERS (Grafton)	p.7
	LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE (Pan)	p.7
	SUMMER OF NIGHT (Headline)	p.6
	THE WOLFEN (Coronet)	p.15
	BLOOD MOON (Women's Press)	p.10
	(Picture Corgi)	p.15
	CORRESPONDENCE (Women's Press)	p.10
	BLACK FOR REMEMBRANCE (N.E.L.)	p.15
	FALCON GUARD (Roc)	p.15
	ECCE & OLD EARTH (N.E.L.)	p.15
	ILLUSION (Gollancz)	p.15
	NIGHT OF THE COOTERS (Legend)	p.5
	THE FLIES OF MEMORY (Gollancz)	p.6
	THE UNWILLING WARLORD (Grafton)	p.13

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.
