



# Paperback Inferno

96

The Review of paperback SF

June - July 1992

*Love, a Musician is profest,  
And, of all Musicke, is the best.*



ILLVSTR. XX.

Book. 2

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Graham Andrews, Chris C. Bailey, K.V. Bailey, Cherith Baldry, Lynne Bisphan, Terry Broome, Mat Coward, Alan Fraser, Chris Hart, L.J. Hurst, Bill Johnson, Ken Lake, Andy Mills, John D. Owen, Ian Sales, Andy Sawyer, Jim Steel, Martin Sutherland, Sue Thomason, Jon Wallace,

ARTWORK: The cover this issue is from A COLLECTION OF EMBLEMS, ANCIENT & MODERN by George Withers (1635): Withers being that poet whose life was pleaded for by Sir John Denham during the Civil War on the reasonable grounds that while he was left alive, no-one could say that Denham was the worst poet in England.  
Colin P. Davies: Logo.  
Steve Bruce: p.4; p.14

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**DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to PI 97**  
is **Friday 10th July**  
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#### 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.

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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.

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## Paperback Purgatory

Sue Thomas's letter in the last issue (attacking Andy Mills's comment about a story in *INTERZONE* 54) ended with a wish that women (and gay men) would come up with their responses to the story. The score so far: Gay Men 0 - Women 1. Cathie Gill wrote in to say that "I can't speak for 'women', only one of them, and this woman found 'The Birth of Sons' by Sharon Hall so disagreeable she didn't bother to finish reading it. I hadn't realised it was feminist literature, but now it has been pointed out to me, the story has only served to harden earlier opinions of feminist literature."

I'm not sure what that proves in the grand scheme of things, but thanks for taking the trouble to write, Cathie. I met Sue Thomas at Eastercon and we shared a laugh about her having unknowingly castigated the very reviewer who praised her own novel. Her own feminism seems, by the way, by no means the angry sort which the tone of her letter - written to defend a story she felt strongly about - suggests.

I was only at the convention for the Saturday, but I managed to meet quite a lot of people who until then were "only" correspondents. If I met you, it was nice to have seen you at last; if I didn't, perhaps another time. Thank you everyone.

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The news of Isaac Asimov's death arrived too late for mention in the last issue of *PI*, and by now you'll have seen it reported and read some of the obituaries. Perhaps the most interesting comments I heard were on The Late Show from Sarah Lefanu, John Clute and Brian Aldiss, who also produced an obituary for The Guardian.

My own lasting memory of Asimov is not so much one arising from his books (although I have enjoyed many of them immensely over the years) as a sensation which struck me eighteen months ago in Paris, while visiting an exhibition about robotics at the Cité des Sciences. There, attached to each display showing what robots could or could not do, or how scientists and thinkers have conceived of them, were constant references to Asimov and his stories. Would such a display in this country have made such play of using a science fiction writer as a touchstone? I would like to think yes, of course, but I have my doubts.

However, instead of going over the ground so many other people have gone over, can I just draw your attention to the two-volume collection THE ASIMOV CHRONICLES (Legend)

## COMPETITION CORNER

Many thanks to all who entered last issue's competition. The winners were Phil Thomas, Marise Morland-Chapman, Daniel Buck, C. Morris, and Theo Ross (again: it looks as though the incantation worked!) Prizes have been sent to all.

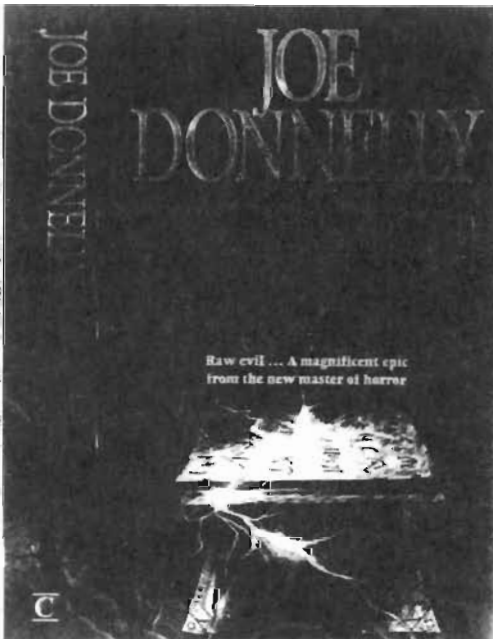
We have not one but *TWO* competitions this issue. Each competition is separate (i.e. you can choose to enter either or both and each will be individually judged).

On your *left* is a representation of Joe Donnelly's *THE SHEE* (STONE, his latest paperback, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue) published by Century, who have given us three sweatshirts to offer as competition prizes. If your reputation can stand up to wearing a sweatshirt with "Raw Evil" embellished on the front, simply answer the following question:

"What is the more usual spelling of the word for the supernatural being here spelled 'Shee'?"

And on your *right* is a representation of the latest paperback by C.J. Cherryh (which will be reviewed in a future issue, meanwhile, New English Library have given us three copies of *HEAVY TIME* to be given to three people who can tell us:

"Which previous Cherryh novel, set in the same future-history universe, won the Hugo in 1982?"



You don't *have* to enter both competitions . . . but why not?

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

and the commemorative volume edited by Martin H. Greenberg, *FOUNDATION'S FRIENDS* (Grafton), where other hands contribute stories about the universe created by Asimov. Both books were published in this country last year and although their original conceptions were as 50th-anniversary celebrations, they now serve as farewells to the man who did so much to define science fiction. Until "official" valedictory collections and editions appear, these (despite the sometimes shoddy proofreading of the Legend books) will do nicely.

As for general thoughts - well, I suppose I could do worse than repeat what I originally said with reference to *THE ASIMOV CHRONICLES*: ". . . Asimov is not a great writer. But he's possibly more than that: he's an essential writer. Asimov opens up the channels of greatness to people who would otherwise run a mile at things like the thought of discussing the scientific background to Shakespeare's poetry. . . His SF is the science fiction of scientific ideas rather than gadgetry or worldbuilding and is all the better for this." It's easy to point to what's *wrong* with Asimov's fiction, but this should never overshadow the fundamental fact that his gift of being able to create stories on the flimsiest of premises is one which many more technically gifted writers would kill for. And as a *science* writer, one who through fiction and non-fiction shared his love of investigation with as wide an audience as he could reach - surely he had no peers.

While writing this editorial, in fact, a new non-fiction Asimov arrived for review: *ATOM* (Mandarin, 1992, 319pp, £5.99). It covers some of the same ground as John Gribbin's *IN SEARCH OF SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT* (Black Swan, £5.99) which coincidentally I had just finished reading and it was interesting to think of them both together. Asimov explains the internal structure of the atom: Gribbin's exploration of quantum physics is more philosophically, even metaphysically, oriented. It has to be said that, by structuring his book as a combination of

quest mystery and speculative meditation, Gribbin produces the more evocative piece of writing, while Asimov's structure is the clumsier one of exploring what happens if you divide and divide and divide. He also tends to jump about in his exposition - "there will be more to say about this later" - without creating the air of suspense manifest throughout Gribbin's wonderful book (I have rarely read a science book in one sitting with as much sheer *enjoyment* as the best of novels). And while I probably still couldn't explain why Planck's Constant is so important I get the feeling that Asimov probably should have mentioned it.

Yet Asimov gripped me as well. He constantly explains what has puzzled me not only in Gribbin's book but in physics generally: little throwaway facts like *why* electricity diagrammatically flows from positive to negative but actually from negative to positive (just a wrong guess by Ben Franklin), and illustrations by analogy of just why four interactive forces which are really variants of each other might exist. As idiots' guides to wave-particle duality and black-body radiation, for example, Asimov's explanations seem superior to Gribbin's. (I am, of course, speaking as one of the idiots in question.) He may hold up the action with a couple of sentences about why "positron" is a faulty word-coining for the "anti-electron", but it's those kinds of drips of additional information and jolts to received wisdom which makes *ATOM* much more lively than the standard physics textbook. And with it *being* Asimov, you wonder about "positronic brains", but here, he's not telling!

Asimov's book is a tribute to "the glory of science" (his term) as a self-correcting mechanism based on logic, observed facts and theory, but above all it's the kind of book which you can give to an interested but ignorant non-scientist and at the end of the day have them still interested but a lot less ignorant. If you want to discover why the muon was originally called the meson

until it was realised that it was actually a *lepton* and almost *understand* it all, try ATOM.

What will Asimov be known as to posterity? Science fiction writer, or explainer of science *fact*? I'm not sure whether you really ought to make the distinction, but I wonder if those people who know him mainly through his fiction have tended to underestimate the beneficial effects of his science writing. All I know is that one reads it with pleasure, knowing that complicated ideas are being massively simplified, but grateful that someone has taken the trouble to do the simplifying. If there is a current renaissance in popular-science writing (and there seems to be, with Mandarin citing several other titles in the back of ATOM, with John Gribbin - perhaps the best all-rounder in the field at the moment - with at least a half-dozen of books which ought to be on everyone's bookshelf, and above all the extraordinary success of Stephen Hawking's A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME) then Asimov pioneered it.

Goodbye, Dr. A. We'll miss you.



Bob Shaw - - ORBITSVILLE JUDGEMENT  
(Orbit, 1992, 281pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

ORBITSVILLE JUDGEMENT is the third book in the series which began with ORBITSVILLE. The latter described the discovery and initial colonisation of a Dyson Sphere, the creation of a technology both advanced and mysterious. In the second book of the series, ORBITSVILLE DEPARTURE, the sphere was instantaneously transferred to another universe. ORBITSVILLE JUDGEMENT begins just after this relocation.

Jim Nicklin leads a mundane existence in Orangefield, a low-tech community modelled on the ideal of a small town in the American mid-West circa 1910. When Orangefield is visited by the religious mission led by Corey Montane, who believes that Orbitville is the work of the devil, a trap for mankind that has just been sprung, Nicklin is seduced by Danae, one of Montane's followers. Believing that Danae loves him, Nicklin, who has had little previous success with women, sells up and joins the mission to be with her. Once he has donated all his money to the mission, however, he discovers that she has no interest in him beyond recruitment. Nicklin determines to revenge himself on Danae and her leader, remains with the mission, and becomes involved with Montane's attempts to acquire a spaceship that will enable him and his followers to escape the trap he believes Orbitville has become.

The fact that Nicklin is introduced as dull, naive and unsociable, and then spends much of the book being deliberately objectionable, does not make him a particularly sympathetic character, despite the way he is treated. Montane and his followers are also unattractive, but the lack of admirable characters and a meandering plot do not detract from the author's ability to tell a story which constantly makes the reader want to find out what happens next. What does happen is unexpected - and not entirely compatible with what has gone before - but if you read and enjoyed the first two books, and have no objection to the occasional *deus ex machina* in your SF, then you will probably enjoy this one, even if it is less compulsive reading than its predecessors.

Ian Watson - - STALIN'S TEARDROPS  
(Gollancz, 1992, 270pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

This is Watson's latest collection, reprinting stories published in the last couple of years in magazines (eg *Interzone*, *The Gate & Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*), and anthologies (eg *Tales From the Forbidden Planet 2*, *Gaslight & Ghosts*). One story, however, first appeared in an earlier Watson collection.

By definition, short story collections are variable - but this one's a damn sight stronger than most. The title story may be plain unclassifiable, but it's one of the best stories I've read for a long time. And the one that follows it, 'Gaudi's Dragon', is even better. Any story that hangs its plot on Antonio Gaudi and the *Sagrada Familia* cathedral in Barcelona deserves every accolade it can get...

Unfortunately, the book is led off by the two strongest stories. 'In the Upper Cretaceous With the Summerfire Brigade' may be vintage Watson but is nowhere near as good. 'The Beggars In Our Backyard' must take the prize as "Most Thinly Disguised Allegory In Fiction", but is still a good piece of work.

'From the Annals of the Onomastic Society', 'Lambert, Lambert', 'Tales From Weston Willow' and 'In Her Shoes' are lightweight but enjoyable reading. 'The Human Chicken' is an extended joke and, when you reach the punchline, you're not really sure if you enjoyed it. 'The Case of the Glass Slipper' is a Sherlock Holmes pastiche, and quite why anyone would want to write a story like that I'll never know - but if anyone did it would probably be Ian Watson...

'The Pharoah and the Mademoiselle' may be reprinted from THE BOOK OF IAN WATSON (1985), and it may be somewhat disconcerting to read a story that's written half in prose and half in Shakespearian verse, but it works, and I enjoyed it. Silly ending, though.

And finally, 'The Eye of the Ayatollah', Watson's fatwah-inducing story from *Interzone*. This is a story whose purpose screams at you from every word. If you agree with that, you'll undoubtedly be impressed with it.

STALIN'S TEARDROPS is a perfect example of the sort of short story collection that *should* be filling up the bookshops' shelves. By definition, any Watson story is above the mundane, but this collection rises higher than that. Recommended.

Terry Pratchett - - REAPER MAN (Corgi, 1992, 287pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Not "another Discworld book" - MOVING PICTURES was not more of the same, REAPER MAN even less so, yet the skein of inspired insanity links both to the rest of the canon. That's why fans buy every Pratchett book - and then buy 'em again to give as gifts. Like Tom Sharpe, Pratchett hits a common nerve in mankind, and hits it with agility, with skill, and from a different angle each time. What's more, while Sharpe hasn't completed a book in eight years, Pratchett is still lining up success after success, and long may he do so.

On this occasion DEATH is dying. Cap that, then? Pratchett does: he caps it, bells it and makes it jump through hoops for our delectation. Consider a world where the dead come back to life again, and where the Life Force runs amuck: hold that idea fast and you have the basis of the plot here. Not that this matters: I hate reviewers who give away plots, but with Pratchett the plot is there simply to swing around in ever more eccentric ellipses, this time bringing us a female werewolf, a wereman (a wolf who becomes a man at the full moon), a ghoul, a vampire with problems, a shy banshee who sneaks up and leaves notes, and a bogeyman who comes out of the closet (where else?). We have an undead wizard from Unseen University, and the ineffable Mrs. Coke, "a medium, verging on small". How does he *do* it? I mean, the University dwarf gardener's name is Modo (not merely a quasi-Modo!)

However, Pratchett is never just a funny man. Consider this: "Discworld light is old, slow and heavy....The occasional valley slowed it for a moment and, here and there, a mountain range banked it up until it poured over the top and down the far slope." That's not humour: that's poetry in slow motion. What's not poetry is what happens when glass snowscene paperweights start hatching supermarket trolleys...but that's enough plot, though I must share with you the footnoted saga of vermine, ancestors of the lemming. Dead vermine don't breed, so those around today are descended from vermine who, faced with a cliff edge, squeaked the rodent equivalent (says Pratchett) of Blow that for a Game of Soldiers. They now abseil down cliffs, build small boats to cross lakes and, when their rush leads them to the seashore, sit around avoiding each other's gazes until they leave early to get home before the rush. Look, why don't you put this down, pick up a copy of REAPER MAN, and do the same? Because it's not all fun and games, you know - and if you don't know, why Pratchett will enlighten you in his final chapter.

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Ian McDonald - - KING OF MORNING, QUEEN OF DAY  
(Bantam, 1992, 400pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martin Sutherland)

---

"In the myth-ridden hills of Ireland..." Emily Desmond dreams of faery lovers and nights on the Wild Hunt of the Ever-Living Ones. Her father dreams of making contact with travellers from another world, who he believes have arrived in the solar system. Both make the greatest effort to fulfil these dreams: Edward Garret Desmond constructs a huge cross lit by thousands of light bulbs, which he hopes will be visible from space; Emily exerts her energies unconsciously, through her adolescent psyche. Dr Garret's failure brings him financial ruin; Emily's success brings her emotional disaster.

This is the very barest outline of the first part of KING OF MORNING, QUEEN OF DAY, and this first part is without doubt the best story I have read this year. The narrative flows effortlessly through the plot, irrigating the characters and polishing every rough edge to give the whole a marble smoothness. The tales of Emily and her father are bound up and interlaced with strands of silk. Not a word is misplaced. I cannot praise it enough.

Unfortunately, the novel has two other main parts, and although they are almost equally well-written, the stories of Emily's daughter and great-granddaughter ring somewhat hollow. This is perhaps due to the structure of the novel, which builds up to many things, but not to a full climax. The first part takes place in 1913, and Emily's visions of the Otherworld are filled with faeries and fauns, Wild Hunts and Sidhe. Enye (the great-granddaughter) lives in present-day Ireland where she has to do battle with horrific visions of madness. The descent from poetic order to mythic chaos is also mirrored in the timeline of the tales: Emily's story is told linearly with dates and diary entries, whereas Enye flashes and cuts back and forth through her tale like a master swordswoman.

As a whole, KING OF MORNING, QUEEN OF DAY is an ambitious, important and truly amazing work, but not quite a masterpiece. I urge you to read it, though, if only for part one, which *is* a masterpiece, and more.

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Brian Stableford - - THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON  
(Pan, 1992, 467pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

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One of the wonderful things about SF is that it's such a wide genre: public opinion may hold that if it hasn't got a spaceship on the cover then it isn't SF, but I think that most of us who actually read the stuff are willing for its remit to cover just about anything.

THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON is set during the 1870's and tells how a Victorian rationalist, Sir Edward Tallentyre, becomes involved with the eponymous and mythical werewolves. It all starts during a trip to a

little-known tomb in Egypt, where Tallentyre and his son-in-law-to-be David Lydyard become caught up in a conflict between two gods/demons/angels, whatever.

The story returns to London, where Lydyard is beginning to develop magical powers, and Tallentyre is suffering numerous crises of conscience as he tries to come to terms with a worldview which cannot explain the events he is witnessing.

It is Lydyard's powers that attract the werewolves, and also make him (more than just) a pawn in the struggle between the werewolves, the occultist Jacob Harkender, and a rogue werewolf who appears to represent the forces of Good. This struggle also involves a young boy, a ward of Harkender's, called Gabriel, who also appears to have magical powers.

THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON is a rich book. The period detail comes across well, and the hermetic worldview which forms the substrate of the novel proves a strong foundation for the plot to sit upon. There are a few moments when things drag, and you find yourself flipping pages to return to the story, but on the whole this is a strong piece of work. Recommended. I'm looking forward to reading the "sequel", The Angel of Pain...

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Glen Cook - - THE BLACK COMPANY (Roc, 1992, 319pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

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And when better than a fortnight before a General Election to confront one's ideological contradictions. Or in other words, how come, when I find hard-SF stories about mercenaries unspeakably vile, do I leap up and down and shout "yay!" when the same stuff comes in the guise of High Fantasy.

This came in the same package as the Midnight Rose collection VILLAINS! which as someone else is reviewing it I will leave except to say that I enjoyed its reversal of moral values - and about time too! But whereas the general tone of VILLAINS! is very much post-modern piss-taking, THE BLACK COMPANY mixes its comedy with just the right amount of moral angst in the traditional mould.

The Black Company itself - the title is now a bit of a misnomer as there is only one black man left in the group - is a band of mercenaries which has been hiring itself out for hundreds of years. As narrated by Croaker, the company medic and annalist, the story involves their involvement with The Lady - a sorceress who with her circle of dead wizards, the Taken, is laying waste to the north. So the Lady is - despite her glamour - one of the most shockingly evil characters ever attempt to dominate the world: the lads have taken on a contract, haven't they? But then not only does word gets round that the White Rose has been reborn but it looks like there are those among the Taken who want to play their own games. And the Black Company are right in the middle.

Imagine THE DIRTY DOZEN and all similar war films about amoral misfits fighting a filthy war translated into Fantasy terms, with all that means in terms of wisecracks, boozing, bitching, "war-is-hell" and the usual stereotypes: the tough Captain, the wise Sergeant, the squabbling buddies (in this case, two magicians), the romantically cynical narrator, idealism as stained as a squaddies underwear but still there, and the Outsider who becomes one of the group - they're all here. Cook's hard-bitten, world-weary prose is considerably more literate than his publisher's press release. I should have hated it. I loved it instead.

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Arthur C. Clarke - - IMPERIAL EARTH (Gollancz, 1992, 287pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

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During the latter stages of this novel, Duncan Makenzie flicks through a sketch book of visual protractations of mathematical equations, featuring omegas and vectors, until he is struck by a splendidly realised portrait of Calindy, his childhood sweetheart, that "...breathed life...drawn, with loving care." A reader surveying the constantly reprinted Clarke backlist may be stricken by

similar feelings when they reach IMPERIAL EARTH. Amongst contemplations of black holes, technology and mathematical speculations, Duncan Makenzie is a breath of life.

The splendour of the optical panoply of Saturn's rings is seen at a human level, through Makenzie's eyes, as he travels to Earth from his home of Titan. He is conducting a diplomatic mission representing the colony at a centennial gathering on Earth, the bureaucratic centre of the complex system of colonised moons, by virtue of his genes: Duncan is the third generation clone of a pioneering clan. The culture-shock experienced by Duncan is wonderfully evoked through his physical and meta-physical adaptations to the new environment. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of Clarke in this scenario; reflecting upon England from his satellite-island of Sri Lanka: Earth's inhabitants are aloof due to their superiority complex and on the verge of decadence à la Imperial Britain.

While reciting the travelogue Duncan stumbles upon an incidental conspiracy that unfolds through a series of events and chance happenings. The hard science begins to soften when 'what if' is replaced by 'if only'. In the end, the themes of coincidence eclipse the science.

Perhaps Duncan Makenzie is more of a sigh than a breath of life, and the plot uninspiring, but my disbelief was suspended so effectively that my poll tax bill seemed reasonable! This is not a great novel, but it is good science fiction.

---

Anne McCaffrey - - ALL THE WEYRS OF PERN (Bantam, 1992, 496pp trade paperback, £8.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

WEYRS... is the direct sequel to RENEGADES OF PERN, which was itself more-or-less a sequel to THE WHITE DRAGON. This means that it is not really worth reading this novel unless you have already read all or most of the previous books in the main chronological sequence of the dragon books starting with DRAGONFLIGHT.

The cover, showing a dragon and a fire lizard on the bridge of a starship, gives a good taste of the plot. At the end of RENEGADES the Pernese found that their moons, the Dawn Sisters, are really the three starships that brought them to Pern, still orbiting the planet after 2500 years. At the original colony they also discovered Aivas, the Artificial Intelligence Voice Address System computer left by the original settlers when their colony was devastated by Thread from the Red Star. In this book Aivas not only restores to them their Earth heritage, but also provides them with a plan to rid Pern of the Thread forever, one that involves the commitment and possible sacrifice of "all the Weyrs of Pern".

RENEGADES suffered from having too many plot-lines and principal characters, with the story of Thella's

wickedness being ultimately subordinate to the continuation of THE WHITE DRAGON story. This Pern story drives ahead in one main thrust, even though all our series favourites such as Lessa, Jaxom, Menolly, Master Robinton, and Piemur are involved. A long-time dragon fan, I found WEYRS to be an acceptable read, but McCaffrey should have written it more tensely. She could have allowed the opposition from the conservative Pernese who regard Aivas as an Abomination to threaten more effectively than it does, and also made the outcome of the anti-Thread plan more in doubt. Is this the end of the Pern saga? You'll have to read it to find out!

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Anne McCaffrey - - PEGASUS IN FLIGHT (Corgi, 1992, 320pp, £3.95)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

PEGASUS IN FLIGHT is a long-delayed sequel to 1973's TO RIDE PEGASUS in McCaffrey's series of The Talents of Earth, another of which was THE ROWAN. That book comes further up the series timeline, whereas this one is set back on Earth in a dystopian future. The fledgling space programme is our planet's only hope of easing the terrible overcrowding that forces the population to live in huge megalopolises, most in awful poverty. Because it is illegal to have more than one child, many children who inhabit the lower regions of the mighty linear complexes are illegal, living with the constant fear of capture by the authorities. They are therefore easy prey for the well-organised criminals who kidnap children, not only for child prostitution, but also to satisfy the demand of Earth's wealthy for organ transplants and life extension.

Rhysa Owen, granddaughter of the first book's hero, is the Director of the American East Coast Centre for Parapsychic Talents, responsible for finding and training the powerful psychics called Talents. A woman of strong psionic powers herself, Rhysa is battling the autocratic programme leaders who want to press-gang her Talents into space to meet a demanding deadline for the completion of the space platform. At the same time she must rescue from the city two children with powerful psionic skills, who are in deadly danger from a ruthless gang of kidnapers, whose influence stretches to the highest level of the Government.

McCaffrey may still have some mileage in her Pern saga, but she obviously wants to do other work, and resurrecting the Talent scenario fulfils that need at the moment. Although Ken Lake gave this book a dusty review in "Vector" and urged McCaffrey to return to her dragons, I found PEGASUS IN FLIGHT to be quite an exciting and satisfying read. It bodes well for other stories in this series.

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## R E V I E W S

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Martin H. Greenberg (Ed) - -  
ISAAC ASIMOV'S UNIVERSE VOLUME I: THE DIPLOMACY GUILD  
(Grafton, 1992, 260pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Graham Andrews)

"Why have I gone to the trouble of inventing a universe for other writers to exploit?" asks the Good Doctor in his Introduction to - wait for it! - ISAAC ASIMOV'S UNIVERSE (Avon, 1990), edited by the indefatigable Greenberg. The answer to this (necessarily) rhetorical question can be summed up as follows:

Asimov feels guilty about being an sf megastar who hogs limited bookstore capacity at the expense of fledgling writers. Ergo: ISAAC'S UNIVERSE (the less formal, preferred title) is meant to assuage this guilt by providing a guaranteed 'showcase'.

Several novels by neophytes were published under the Isaac Asimov Presents label, while 'psychohistory' and 'positronic robots' have been sharecropped in

FOUNDATION'S FRIENDS and the multi-episode 'Robot City'. Then MHG dreamed of having God Asimov design a brand-new Asiverse that could be sub-let to Young Turks and/or Old Farts.

The Asiverse teems with life-bearing planets... "However, there are only six *intelligent* species - widely different in nature" (Intro., p.xi). Asimov stresses the need for these diverse life-forms to maintain a *modus vivendi*, primarily through peaceful co-existence, information exchange and balance-of-power politicking. Also "...each intelligence may be split into several mutually hostile subcultures" (ibid., p.xii). Ho-hum. The more things don't change, the more they are the same.

The stories are minimum-level-of-competence stuff, lacking narrative energy, or - put simply - drama. David Brin's 'The Diplomacy Guild' is the best, with Robert Silverberg's 'They Hide, We Seek' running it a close second-rate. Robert Sheckley, Poul Anderson and Harry Turtledove complete the roll-call.

The Asiverse should simply have been featured in a bumper issue of IASFM.



Joe Donnelly - - STONE (Arrow, 1992, 514pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

STONE is totally unconnected with Donnelly's first novel, BANE, but it is worth comparing them.

Both are set in the present day Roseneath area and deal with a career man returning to his childhood home district to be faced with an ancient evil that has been contained by Celtic structures (but which breaks out regularly every couple of decades). There's the blossoming love interest between our hero and a medical type who's just moved into the area from the States, the kids with the ability to thwart the evil, farm animals being butchered as a warning of impending doom, the old biddy with second sight who snuffs it halfway through, and one or two other little similarities.

Differences? STONE is 73 pp. longer and is told from a third person viewpoint rather than a first. And that's pretty much it. Joe Donnelly has basically rewritten his first novel. True, he's improved it - but this is probably due to the fact that, as a reporter, he's possibly more comfortable working in the third person. But he still has a lot of work to do before he gets a polished draft. To begin with, he seems to have great difficulty in describing supernatural phenomenon without over-using similes. And he's getting lazy; there's little sense of place in STONE, and rarely does he bother to introduce us to characters before they are done over in pointless vignettes.

In general, STONE is better than BANE, but is a big disappointment. Donnelly has expressed an admiration for Stephen King and seems to want to do for Roseneath what King did for Maine, but he hasn't yet realised that it's the contrast between King's stories that is, in part, the key to his success. I finished my review of BANE by asking what more one could ask of a novel. Serves me right. A bit of imagination of the part of the author wouldn't go amiss for a start.

Frederik Pohl - - THE WORLD AT THE END OF TIME (Grafton, 1992, 407pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

Viktor Sorricaine is an American teenager when, with the rest of the colonists from the New Mayflower, he lands on Newmehome; the other main character in this book, Wan-To, is considerably older - just about as old as the Universe, which is quite old, even by Wan-To's reckoning.

Newmehome looks like a good choice for a new home for man, and the defrosted humans get on with turning it into one. This is the best and most enjoyable part of the novel; I don't remember ever reading a more interesting and believable account of colonisation.

Things go wrong - for the settlers and, to some extent, for the book - when the stars in Newmehome's sky start to move, and the planet's climate starts cooling. This is caused by Wan-To mucking about upstairs, as 'he' fights an undeclared war with some of his 'children'.

Wan-To isn't made of matter, a form of existence he finds repulsive; he lives inside stars, and is that old sf favourite, an 'entity', an 'intelligence'. Having created others like him for company, he has lately succumbed to paranoia and is convinced that he must zap his pals before they zap him. As a by-product of this celestial battling, Newmehome is being transported to the end of the Universe, and Viktor, as he grows up, is determined to find out why.

His quest is interrupted, more than once, when he falls asleep in a big fridge and wakes up to discover that thousands of years have passed during his snooze. Cryogenics is the device Pohl uses instead of time-travel to allow one character to follow the evolution of Newmehome, from its first settlement to "the end of time", as it reacts, unknowingly, to Wan-To's influence.

The narrative alternates between Viktor's adventures and Wan-To's. While the human sections of the story are exciting, satisfying and well-enough told, those dealing with the elderly entity tend to flag a bit; they are hopelessly didactic, inevitably (and not very convincingly) anthropomorphic and, for those of us lacking a degree in cosmology, rather hard-going.

Garfield Reeves-Stevens DARK MATTER (Pan, 1992, 393pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Author of STAR TREK: PRIME DIRECTIVE, and with partner, Judith, the sf series, THE CHRONICLES OF THE GALEN SWORD, Garfield Reeves-Stevens does surprisingly well in melding the sf/thriller/horror genres in DARK MATTER.

The novel revolves around gravity-mediating virtual particles and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, wherein matter can be described as a coincidence of observed probabilities. The plot is less high-brow. Anthony Cross, child genius and psychopath, is the Nobel Prize winning physicist in adulthood whose search for the mechanisms underpinning reality lead to fatal experiments on women who, without exception, find him irresistible.

Unlike most authors, Reeves-Stevens accomplishes the task of portraying a character brighter than himself well, and apart from the over-writing it wasn't until I had finished the novel that I could identify its other faults. The world of the story appears woolly and unfocused because explanations into the characters, situations and plot elements - while lucid and well-placed - are tardy. They seem to hang around until the author finds a use for them. The cross-genre technique occasionally seems practised and fragmentary for the same reason. The plot, with its Schlock Frankenstein overtones, its use of the clichés of conspiracies and a predictable betrayal detract from the suspension of disbelief required to accept the central conceit, that a person can become a living embodiment of Probability control by dissecting brain tissue. Despite all this, the author's enthusiasm for his ideas and the clarity with which they are imparted, make him a name to keep an eye on.

Kim Stanley Robinson - - A SHORT, SHARP SHOCK / Jack Vance - - THE DRAGON MASTERS (Tor Doubles, 1990, 216pp, £2.95)

(Reviewed by K. V. Bailey)

Vance's novella won the 1962 'Best SF Short Fiction' Hugo. It could have been shorter. Much of it is occupied by protracted and confusing battle pieces, though some of what remains is vintage Vance. Captured humans (the "Uttermen", now a scattered remnant race) are enslaved, bred and genetically altered by dragons (the "greph") and vice versa. A bleak planet, Aerlith, arena for greph invasions and dark-age baronial feuding, also shelters mysterious indigenes (the "sacerdotes"), vaguely reminiscent of Bernard Shaw's "Ancients". After the general inter-klan and inter-species decimation, it is they who seem to come off best - or at least are left patiently expectant of taking over the universe. Read for its descriptive verve and intriguing techno-magic.

A SHORT, SHARP SHOCK, contrasting with the dystopian/utopian realism of such other recent Kim Stanley Robinson science fiction as his Orange County novels, strikes a richly original vein of fantasy. Cast up on the sandy edge of a rocky planet-girding ridge, a pelagic world's only land-form, the protagonist Thel finds himself, as the story begins, naked and, apart from fleeting impressions of a former existence, amnesic. Beside him, equally naked and blank, is the woman known only as "the swimmer". Her touch on his body is the "shock" which initiates their journey together and prefigures other shocks - mystic, electrical, sensual and sexual - which mark Thel's progress among various symbolically distorted versions of humanity as he passes through or is detained in their settlements strung out along the ridge: the sadistic spine-kings, the symbiotic tree-folk, the fractally visaged facewomen, the crab-descended people, all recounting different, but inter-related cosmographies.

In the course of this surreal pilgrimage many metaphysical themes are explored: transience, through the cataclysm-desolated layers and ruins of disappearing cities; mutability in the changes of time, place and speciation occasioned by sudden reversals that occur each time the travellers pass through an elusive grail-mirror. Their final metamorphosis is into ancient monkeyish and otterish creature, in which evolutionarily regressed forms they reach the end of the incompletely circular ridge.

This is not, however, as is the self-consuming snake, Ouroboros, an irrevocable closed cycle of time. There is a stop, and a dive through the grail-mirror: a sunset plunge into the uncertainties of generation. This is a brilliant fantasy in which the very vividness and tangibility of Robinson's landscape and creaturely descriptions enhance rather than diminish their strangeness and multi-directioned symbolism.

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John Gribbin and Marcus Chown — **REUNION** (Gollancz, 1992, 285pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

Tugela is a teenage girl whose grandfather disappeared long ago through God's Window into the Forbidden Lands, where once had landed the comets that brought air to the world. This is the setting for this broad, sweeping novel from Gribbin and Chown. The story moves follows the fate of Tugela as she is caught up by the rebellion of the Periphery against the tyranny of the City. As events move along, the authors gradually fill in the details of this newly-technological world and by the turning point of the novel, when Tugela realises that things are not what they seemed and heads to the Forbidden Lands to search for the truth, we are well prepared for the switch to the hitech island of R'apehu, where lives Ondray, the second main character of this book.

In the second half, Tugela and Ondray are brought together, and together they find the answer to the riddles of two so-different societies.

The contrasting lives of Tugela and Ondray (and the societies which raised them) are well explored, and gradually we and the kids themselves realize that each has a skill to supply and that only by working together can the problems faced by both societies be resolved. Gribbin and Chown write convincingly, especially when dealing with the hard science bits, but occasionally they don't quite manage to achieve the sense of suspense that is potentially there. Of course, the denouement that should come halfway through is spoiled completely by the book's cover art and blurb. Who at the publishing house does this sort of thing? And are Gribbin and Chown happy about it?

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John Farris — **THE FURY**, (Grafton, 1992, 349pp, £3.99)  
(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

THE FURY is quite an old book, the copyright date is 1976, and this shows. The story starts with two rich teenagers in New York, then switches to a mysterious man looking for someone in Atlantic City. These two threads are the main line of the plot and the action switches from them to other shadowy figures, this time government ones. Yes, this is one of those books where They are hiding something for National Security. This time it is the existence of parapsychological powers that they plan to develop as a weapon, hopefully before the Ruskies get theirs...

The mysterious man is an ex-assassin whose son is a gifted telekinetic taken from him by Them, one of the girls also has Powers and when They get her too, the plot follows a trail of ex-sanguinated and butchered corpses, to a secret compound where They keep people like them, where the man schemes outside to spring the kids.

Nowadays, the ruthless Government agency boss who will stop at nothing to get his own way seems a bit overused, and Peter Sandza, the ex-assassin, is a little larger than life, but the plot gradually builds until it gets there in the end. While not quite the "...horrifying, terrifying chiller" promised on the cover, the taut writing and the fleshed-out main characters did hold me to the (vaguely unsatisfying) end.

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Deborah Grabien — **PLAINSONG** (Pan, 1992, 231pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

PLAINSONG is described as a 'fable of the millennium'. It is based on the idea that the spirit we call God renews itself every two thousand years; the power of Jesus

Christ is about to be superseded as the spirit becomes incarnate in another baby to begin the cycle afresh. Julia, pregnant with this baby, is one of the few survivors of a plague which has destroyed almost all the adults in the world while leaving the children untouched.

As the time for the birth draws near, a new set of Megi approaches, while the baby is threatened by a Christ reluctant to yield up his power, and Julia is protected by a group of strange beings, including Simon Peter the sheep, Gad the cat, and four ravens named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,

Viewed as fantasy, the book is delightful, vividly written with humour and charm, and building to a satisfying climax,

Viewed as serious philosophy, it is less successful. The reason for the plague, as preparation for the new incarnation, is unconvincing. The two thousand year cycle makes sense for Christianity, but does not account for the other major world religions or for anything before the time of Christ. There are some irritating inaccuracies, notably the crucial encounter between Christ and the Wandering Jew, which is given Biblical authority it does not have. For all the book's appealing qualities the intellectual framework is not rigorous enough to support its philosophy. Read it for fun.

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John Hart **JIZZ** (Black Swan, 1992, 285pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Hayden Sabanack is a young "freelance scholar" in the buzzing city-state of Brighton, AD 2012. Apart from the political map, more advanced robotics and a cosmopolitan food supply, there aren't that many obvious differences to life in 1992. Take discos, for instance:

"The men, drinks in hand, were eyeing the women hungrily: the women, in contrast, gave the impression of having graduated with honours in Indifference."

Hayden himself is met with indifference in his pursuit of Babette, an actress who 'didn't have a good side; she was aesthetically symmetrical'; at the same time he is oblivious to the interest of his research assistant, Sophie, but not to that of Sophie's friend, Francesca. If emotional entanglements aren't enough for our handsome genius, he's embroiled in deadly machinations when he is employed to produce a design to win the DeWit Bequest, which requires the manufacture of a device, available to all, which will further human understanding. Hayden thus develops a jizz-generator, a machine which will produce a life-enhancing self-image (or jizz) for the user. Will Hayden win the prize? Will Sophie win Hayden? Will the good guys triumph over the bad guys - indeed are all the good guys who they appear to be?

I was hampered, whilst reading JIZZ, in that my boss shares not only our hero's name but also his pedagogic tendencies; hence I fell to picturing the former in the lead role, which wasn't entirely helpful. I'm also not exactly enthusiastic about puns; a pity, as there are hundreds of the little devils in the book. Luckily for this reader, these handicaps were surmounted, for John Hart has also crammed his first novel full of idiosyncratic characters, marvellous notions and pun-less humour in general (including, as evinced above, some cracking one-liners).

JIZZ fully merits its publisher's description as being "a comic novel of ideas" and, as Hayden might say, is Hartily recommended.

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Charles De Lint — **GREENMANTLE**  
(Pan, 1992, 328pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

Ten years after the copyright date and five since its American debut, GREENMANTLE finally makes its British mass-market 'c' format paperback edition.

It shares with MOONHEART, its predecessor, a faery heart and a violent climax, as the forces of order and chaos, both mundane and magical, battle it out. It is also an odd concoction of refreshing Canadian innocence and originality, and stereotypical Hollywood guilt and angst. I suspect this has at its heart De Lint's desire to meld pagan mythology, folk concerns and pop. culture.



In Lanark County, near Toronto, is a village camouflaged by the Mysteries, the magic of the Green Man, who is kept alive by belief and reflects the souls of all those he encounters. Enter retired Mafia hitman, Valenti, who strikes up a friendship with Ali, daughter of recently estranged Frankie, all fleeing from a violent past and brought together by the magic of Pan. Unfortunately, Frankie's drug-pushing ex is out for her money, and when he recognises Valenti calls in the Mob to dispose of him. Meanwhile, a wild girl of the wood, Mally, a "little secret", helps catapult Ali into her own potentially life-threatening situation when the village folk begin to fear that the Green Man's magic is waning.

De Lint has an acute sense of place and an affinity with childhood and the stuff of magic (GREENMANTLE was inspired by a childhood reading Kenneth Grahame's WIND IN THE WILLOWS and later by Lord Dunsany's THE BLESSING OF PAN). The book has a very cinematic quality, at times to its cost when the switches of viewpoint narrative are too frenetic. The baddies are more two-dimensional than one would like, and in the Author's Note at the back of the book it becomes apparent in an apologia for his characters that he may be disinclined to delve too deeply into their dark sides. This is a fault which needs remedying if he is to give his work the dramatic edge it needs to effectively underscore the stakes. These weaknesses aside, it is a lovely book.

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**Kathleen Starbuck** - - **TIME IN MIND**  
(Grafton, 1992, 319pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

This novel is partly set 600 years in the future. The people of this era have rejected the beliefs and technology of the Time Before and have rediscovered the use of crystals in healing, chakras, mantras, telepathy and other psychic powers. They live in communes which include rooms set aside for meditation, and spirit guides help them attain a higher plane of existence. The ability to travel through time mentally, coupled with the 'alternative' culture of the characters, account for the book being described on its cover as Fantasy/New Age - a sub-genre new to this reviewer, and perhaps indicative of the difficulty of categorising.

In TIME IN MIND, the dawning of the age of Aquarius has not brought harmony and understanding to all; there are still individuals such as Drove Gardner who seek power over others. When Ian, known as Deaf-Mute as he lacks telepathy, incurs the enmity of Gardner, the only way his mother, whose mental powers are considerable, can save his life is to send him out of his body and into the past, the Time Before. She finds refuge for Ian in the body of Meg, who also possesses psychic powers, although in the Time Before (our present) 'hearing voices' is regarded as a symptom of schizophrenia rather than telepathy, and Ian's arrival in her head causes Meg to fear that she is finally going insane.

This book suffers from uneven plotting, particularly towards the end - it may be the author's first novel; the blurb doesn't say - but for 'train journey' reading it will do fine. Anyone fed up with all those swords and elves might consider giving it a try.

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**Emily Devenport** - - **SHADE** (The Women's Press, 1992, 246pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

The cover copy of this book gives very little indication that it's SF, it's presented as a thriller. And I ask myself what the SF elements are doing here. True, the action takes place on the planet Z'taruh, among an assortment of aliens; the heroine is a telepath. However, none of this is crucial.

Again, I'd expect a novel by a woman, published by The Women's Press, to have some feminist significance. The protagonist is a woman - spunky, streetwise Shade, who can certainly look after herself - but those who threaten her and those who help her, are principally men. At the end she is snatched away by an alien who becomes her father figure, and is further rewarded by reunion with her (male) lover.

I suspect the 'feminist' component is the demonstration that a woman can write about corruption, sex, child prostitution, drugs and so on, and pepper every page with four letter words. If so, I fail to see how it can possibly enhance the dignity or the freedom of women. There are patches of vivid writing - I was moved by the depiction of Shade's relationship with her mother - enough to make me hope for a better book from this writer, but she will have to abandon her stereotypes first.

SHADE is presented as a daring, a dangerous book. Not so. It is a safe book, safe because to take exception to it is to brand oneself uncool, Victorian, bourgeois, reactionary. A really daring book in today's climate would be inspirational; maybe in the gutter, but looking up at the stars.

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**Katherine Kerr** - - **POLAR CITY BLUES** (Grafton, 1992, 347pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Brendan Wignall)

In many ways this is a strange book, neither one thing nor any of the others claimed for it by the blurb. It's not 'cyberpunk' nor is it a 'noir thriller', although it would perhaps like to be both. This is not, however, to say that it is a particularly bad book, but it has a curious feeling of being unsure of itself.

The action takes place on Polar City, capital of Hagar, a world of the Republic, a small grouping squeezed by both the Interstellar Confederation and the Coreward Alliance. It begins with a murder with psychic overtones, which threatens to cause a major diplomatic incident. This murder is followed by others as potential witnesses are wiped out by a psychic assassin.

The plot pivots around the experiences of a police chief and a low-life psychic and the woman he loves, who both pursue the murderer. Along the way we meet a previously unknown alien virus and come into frequent contact with an artificial intelligence. The virus is one of the highlights of the novel, the AI one of its failures. The AI is like something out of a 'fifties sf film', a superpower computer with a personality which is irritating (to put it mildly) and is, of course, occasionally fallible.

The supposed noir element comes from the depiction of the underworld of Polar City, but it takes a bit more than showing the underbelly of a society to achieve noir-hood, and there is little *feel* of the darker side of life which is associated with this term.

The story has its longueurs, but stumbles on - although the AI character is a *major* problem - but it is all a little simplistic. If you can tolerate the AI character it's probably a tolerable experience, but if you like your n<sup>th</sup> generation computers to be plausibly drawn then this is not the book for you.

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**Margaret Weis** - - **KING'S SACRIFICE** (Bantam, 1992, 519pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The third volume of the STAR OF THE GUARDIANS trilogy brings Weis's "Galactic Fantasy" to a triumphant close, with an exciting climax and the callow hero Dion maturing into a conflict between love and duty. Will Dion remain the tool of Sagan and Maigrey? Will he accept the temptations of the evil Abdiel? Will Tusk ever pay XJ the 173 kilnors he owes? Just exactly what is going on anyway? Most of these questions are answered, to sufficient reader satisfaction, among some vivid action performed by a well-imagined and occasionally exotic cast (I particularly like Sparafucile, and Raoul and the Little One) which by no means accidentally feel like a cross between STAR WARS and grand opera.

Galactic Fantasy isn't to everyone's taste - it isn't really to mine - but try this: it's a particularly thoughtful romp in which the monochrome distinction between goodies and baddies hardly exists. After a maze of betrayal, counter-betrayal, crisis of conscience and self-sacrifice, everyone achieves their destiny - just, tragic, ironic. It's colourful, but the colours are often

sombre; romantic, but more akin to *Sturm und Drang* than Mills and Boon. It feeds, as I've said, from the same generic roots as *STAR WARS* to the point where you can even match characters, but its moral conflicts have far more complexity. It is good old-fashioned action-adventure like they used to have in those magazines your teachers used to sneer at - but it emphatically does not have the thinness of traditional pulp-adventure.

In short, it's escapist fantasy but a BIG escapist fantasy. It may have monarchist nonsense at its heart, but it has a heart. If you refer back to my review of the first volume in *PI 91*, you'll see a much more ambiguous reaction, but - own up - I was won over. *KING'S SACRIFICE* ends where such a saga, by the logic of its structure, has to end, but it gives you a good time getting there.

Antony Swithin -  
- **THE LORDS OF THE STONEY MOUNTAINS**  
(Fontana, 1992, 374pp, £3.50)

(Reviewed by Lynne Bispham)

*THE LORDS OF THE STONEY MOUNTAINS* is the second volume in a series entitled *THE PERILOUS QUEST FOR LYONESSE*. As might be expected in a quest fantasy, the plot is a linear narrative in which the hero journeys through an imaginary landscape and has various adventures along the way. In this novel, the hero, Simon Branthwaite, is searching for his father and brother who fled England in 1403 after fighting on the losing side at the battle of Shrewsbury, and who are believed to have found refuge in the lost realm of Lyonesse on the Isle of Rockall. Not having read the first volume in the series does not affect one's understanding of this book, for Simon summarises his earlier adventures in the first few pages. He and Prince Avran of the Rockallese kingdom of Sandastre then set off on their quest across a land that is as unfamiliar to Simon as it is to the reader.

Swithin has created a highly detailed background for his tale. The kingdoms and peoples of Rockall are numerous; not only are there native peoples, but also Englishmen and Gascons who have fled strife-torn Europe, and are attempting to set up their own realms and allegiances. On their travels, riding beasts with which they have telepathically bonded, Simon and Avran fall foul of despotic rulers, wild tribemen and bandits, and are aided by a man Simon describes as a wizard - but of course this fantasy is set in the fifteenth century!

Although the many descriptions do necessarily slow up the action, this book is a pleasant enough light read. I do suspect, however, that the search for Lyonesse will be a long one.

Robert Silverberg - - **MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES**  
(Pan, 1983, 317pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

Hissune, whom we first met as a streetwise urchin in *LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE*, is now a civil servant in the Labyrinth: "housebroken", as he describes himself. Bored to screaming pitch by the interminable documents he has to deal with, he enters, illicitly, the Register of Souls, where millions of the inhabitants of Majipoor, throughout the centuries, have deposited memories of their most valuable experiences.

Silverberg makes a double use of this framework. Considered as part of the story which is spanned by the complete Majipoor trilogy, this volume passes over years when not very much happened, and develops the character of Hissune, deepening it, for the part he will have to play in the final episode. For as Hissune vicariously experiences the deposited memories of the past, his motivations change; from uncomplicated thrill-seeking, he comes to realise that the Register offers him understanding of the history and philosophy of his world.

But the framework is not the most important part of the book. The experiences Hissune replays form a sequence of short stories, ranging from the early stages of the colonisation of Majipoor up to the present.

Though *MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES* can stand alone, readers of *LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE* will recognise names and events that were only mentioned in the earlier book, now presented in more detail and brought to life: the Metamorph wars, the establishment of the King of Dreams, the peculiar behaviour of the Pontifex Arioc.

*MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES* demonstrates Silverberg's apparently effortless invention, spanning as it does thousands of years of history, two vast continents, and a full range of social levels. He manages to convince the reader that he is selecting only the most illuminating memories from the millions on record and that, if he felt like it, he could go on for ever.

Read on its own, *MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES* is an intriguing and varied collection of short stories. As part of the trilogy, it increases the reader's knowledge of Majipoor, answers a lot of questions, and leads up to the events of the final volume, *VALENTINE PONTIFEX*.

Harry Harrison & David Bischoff - - **BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE PLANET OF TASTELESS PLEASURE**  
(Gollancz, 1992, 213pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

On the whole, I think sf comedy - as distinct from satire - should be left to British writers; if nothing else, at least they tend to be less profligate users of the exclamation mark.

This was the first 'Bill' I'd read, and my main reaction is: relax, Slippery Jim, your stainless steel crown is under no threat. It's basically a piss-take of Spaceship Trooper stories (the unloveable, unlucky Bill is indeed a Trooper), and the trouble with piss-takes is that unless your jokes are very very good then once you've taken the piss, all you're left with is a diuretic.

Terry Pratchett's books work so well because he realised from the beginning that mere pastiche wasn't going to give him a long career, and so he took his universe one step beyond - he made it believable on its own terms, and is as likely to parody himself as anyone else. And, of course, because his jokes are good.

Harrison and Bischoff's jokes go like this: Beautiful Princess says "May we simply commune soul to soul?", to which Desperately Randy Galactic Hero replies "Soul to soul? Isn't that a Galactic Motown record by Outta Sight and the Pimps?" Actually, there are one or two funny lines in *BTGHOTPOTP*, but unfortunately I didn't mark them as I was reading (I was in a hurry to be finished), and finding them again now would be like looking for a Space-Pin in a Mega-Stack.

The rest is puns, unoriginal malapropisms, and sf in-jokes (Bill reads 'Night of the Living Chingers by Stephen Thing'). As a great fan of Carry On films, Benny Hill, and *The Navy Lark* - and as an avowed enemy of avowedly serious literature - I never thought I'd hear myself complain that a book contained too much schoolboy humour, but I think I just took the cure.

Freda Varrington - - **DARKER THAN THE STORM**  
(NEL, 1992, 304pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Martin Sutherland)

At first glance, the cover art, design and blurb for *DARKER THAN THE STORM* all scream "Fantasy! Heroic doings! Sorcery! Really weird names!" in unmistakable tones of red, black and gold. But to my delighted surprise the book turned out to be anything but standard.

The story opens in the School of Sorcery on the world of Ikonus, where we find the High Master Gregardreos brooding over a vision of Prince Ashurek of Gorethria (okay, so there is sorcery, and the names are strange). While he is fiddling about with some magical powers, Ashurek inadvertently opens a Way to another world called Jhensit, which is under threat of destruction. He is forced to travel to Jhensit to observe it, but as he goes through the Way, Silvren (his wife) and Gregardreos are sucked through with him. Of course they don't end up in the same place, so Ashurek must set out to find Silvren.

So far, so fantasy; but if the set-up isn't hugely original, the characters certainly are. The (slightly unwilling) companions Ashurek finds, hopping from being bad to good to indifferent, are far more complex than one would expect of the supporting cast. Gregardreos' true nature is perhaps obvious, but this does not necessarily mean that he will act in accordance with it. Ashurek himself is repeatedly forced to act contrarily to his emotions, which at times alters his view of the world around him, and at times reinforces it. (Whenever I tried to guess what he would do next, I found him doing the exact opposite. And I never expected him to even kiss Shai Fea.) You've heard of chaos theory? Well here it's applied to a fantasy hero.

And as if the intricate characters weren't enough, a well-crafted plot and good solid writing (with perhaps a little too much emphasis on colours in the first few chapters) make DARKER THAN THE STORM an excellent read. Watch out for it.

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Freda Warrington - - A BLACKBIRD IN SILVER (NEL, 1992, 302pp, £4.99), A BLACKBIRD IN DARKNESS (NEL, 1992, 473pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

These two books tell of three companions brought together to quest to save the world from the Worm. The Worm wishes to subjugate the world to its total evil, and break through the space-time continuum to the two parallel planes which help provide some resistance. The three protagonists, each with their own problems or unattractive history or both, only sometimes have help from the other planes in their struggle. Of course, they are successful.

A quest involves a number of elements: the ultimate problem, short-term problems, exoticism, the weaknesses of the characters, the development of plot. And the background for all this has to be the potential for horror - what will happen if the heroes fail, and how they might fail.

Freda Warrington has taken a different position in some ways to Tolkien. Although the background to both LORD OF THE RINGS and these BLACKBIRD books is of impending immense evil, Tolkien avoided any involvement of gods, demons, the supernatural and any ethical discussion. The world of the three planes and the characters in it spend long periods discussing the ethics of their actions and the nature of the god-like figures (who are no gods) who control it. This makes the books more like the work of Stephen Donaldson than Tolkien, and the books share that dispiriting dullness the leper found.

An example of this fantasy is in the second book - Ashurek, one of the trio, has met a renegade general who has established his headquarters in a poor peasant village. The general has installed an Amphisbaena, an immense octopus-like creature belonging to the Worm, which has hypnotic powers, which enables the general to control the peasantry (and allows the beast to eat odd peasants without their minding). The peasants revel in the hypnotic reverie and worship the creature. Yet within fifteen pages of meeting the general and seeing the beast, both are dead and the peasants exposed to the misery of their lot again. No sooner has the threat appeared than the hero overcomes it, the scene does not contribute to the tension of the book. The exotic appears only at intervals and then disappears just as quickly as it was introduced. Moral discussion does not really make up for this weakness, if it is one.

Still, THOMAS COVENANT fans are likely to enjoy these. They're better than a lot on the shelves.

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John Davidson - - NATURAL CREATION OR NATURAL SELECTION (Element, 1992, 275pp, £9.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The genesis of this review is complicated. "This book is written by a Real Scientist (Cambridge degree in biological sciences: 17 years in the department of Applied Maths and Theoretical Physics): it obviously needs to be reviewed by one," I concluded. First find your Real

Scientist . . . "Sorry, you need a biologist," said one. One biologist reportedly turned white as the book fell open at the section describing human footprints among dinosaur-fossil rock strata and discovered a full timetable. After an entertaining game of pass-the-parcel at Eastercon, the book came back home to roost. "Who needs real scientists?" said your editor. "This book needs to be reviewed by an interested ignoramus with a headfull of pseudo-science and a sceptical approach to the lot of it."

So here I am.

Davidson's book is subtitled "A complete new theory of evolution" and appears to be an attempt to marry the conventional Darwinian theory of evolution with the mystical, consciousness-based doctrines used and abused by the Creationists. (It's unclear how far Davidson would class himself as a "Creationist", though he cites many of their objections to the "vulgar Darwinist" theories of gradual evolution by natural selection: the disruption of the fossil record, the logical difficulties involved in the survival of "living fossils", the gradual development of a complicated structure like the eye, or behavioural patterns like the egg-laying habits of the cuckoo. He does, however, go further than many creationists in implying an ongoing Formative Mind which shapes the cycles of evolution: this is clearly the result of his encounter with "the teachings of an Indian mystic").

In places, this is hard going; not simply through references to such fascinating anomalies in the standard theories as the Burgess Shale or Sheldrake's "morphic resonance" (themselves controversial enough!) but because of the citing of eastern philosophies. Nowhere is Davidson quite as incomprehensible as the manifesto of the Natural Law Party, but he is quite clearly writing from the same roots. His basic conclusion is that, while evolution is only a part of the picture of life in the universe, the larger picture involves a greater Life Force which acts, cyclically, through the physical universe in a pattern analogous to the Eastern doctrines of reincarnation and karmic law.

All life is linked, although only man has full consciousness. The outward form of "Life" may change through the eons, but what we might call the basic categories or "super-species" remains the same. Evolution is a process *within*, rather than *between* them: "Bacteria did not become seaweed, amoeba and other invertebrates, spiders did not become insects, fishes did not become amphibians, reptiles did not become birds and mammals, apes did not become man."

All very well, but as I said, I'm an ignoramus. And two things come to mind. First, the analogy with Eastern philosophy can work both ways: by which I mean that - leaving to one side the truth or otherwise of any purely religious approach to the apparent facts - surely it may be possible that the Eastern fascination with cycles, moral actions and reactions, and the working-out of a kind of immanent Will throughout the universe is the expression in another language of the physical sciences which concern the West? Do westerners who pick up on this actually understand what is being said?

And second, there are these wretched footprints. Davidson cites them among various "Fortean" instances to suggest that the existence of "Man" is far older than orthodox science suggests. But as two of the three source-volumes of these anomalies are published by the Reader's Digest, don't we rather believe that this is just recycling the same old stories? Or even, with Charles Fort, that anomalies exist and that's the end of it?

Being a non-scientist, I can afford the luxury of looking upon this book as quite interesting science fiction: which I hope is not as bitchy as it sounds. Were I a scientist, I hope I'd just quietly point out that you can accept most of the metaphysical points Davidson puts forward without bringing on board any of his more radical ideas regarding evolution and species differentiation at all. In the end, he proves nothing.

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Jean M. Auel - - THE PLAINS OF PASSAGE (Coronet, 1992, 975pp., £5.99)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

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This is the fourth book in the *Earth's Children*™ series. It is not intended to stand alone, and the preceding titles CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR, THE VALLEY OF HORSES, and

the MAMMOTH HUNTERS should be read first.

The book is set about 35,000 years ago, and describes the epic journey of Ayla and Jondalar across the ice-free area of Central and South-western Europe, to Jondalar's home in the west. The world-view is unashamedly romanticised - between them, Ayla and Jondalar have invented or discovered most of Neolithic culture and technology. They are both blonde, beautiful and amazingly intelligent and healthy - they keep being mistaken for the Goddess and Her Consort, and I can see why!

The narrative progresses by sections, in the following pattern: a) evocative landscape and travel description; b) digression to give the reader an information-dump on prehistoric geology, botany, climate, etc.; c) Ayla and Jondalar have a steamy sex session; d) Ayla and Jondalar encounter an unfamiliar group of people; e) Ayla learns their language (she's a linguistic genius) and after the usual misunderstandings, alarms and excursions, A. and J. solve the group's problems, are invited to stay and live with them, but continue their journey. The book ends abruptly with their arrival at Jondalar's tribal home.

In some ways, this book seems the antithesis of "classical" SF, locating the Golden Age firmly in the past, before human misuse of science and technology has spoiled the natural world (those are the book's assumptions, not mine). Ayla and Jondalar are typical idealized pioneers, seeing each new problem as a (not terribly taxing) challenge to their ingenuity and inventiveness, and solving it with ease.

In short, pure escapism - perhaps worth reading if it gives readers the energy, positive outlook and motivation to confront some real-world problem.

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Ben Bova - - ORION IN THE DYING TIME (Mandarin, 1992, 356pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Chris Hart)

"I'll be back." (Page 92)

I expect most people will give a little groan when they read those words coming from Orion, the hero of this novel; especially since he has been constructed to move through time cleaning up the continuum - oh yes, he's indestructable too.

Orion's overlords, The Creators, place him in a PreHistoric Paradise with his female, god-like companion Anya. The duo discover their Eden terrorised by mean looking dinosaurs hooked on genocide. The reptiles are controlled by Set, the god worshipped by the Egyptians, who is harnessing power from the Earth's core. An ingenious, and improbable, "core-tap" is at the centre of a plot to claim squatters rights on the planet, and, destroy the human race for no other reason than they "talk too much". Orion is the battle-ground upon which the cosmic confrontation between Set and The Creators is fought. He is manipulated by the respective joysticks of the two sides through various encounters and physical extremities.

Bova flounders around, attempting to give some credibility to the novel, with clumsy, nudge-nudge allusions to biblical, Buddhist myths and the unity of the cosmos. Despite his best efforts the novel is derivative nonsense when considered next to his inventive satire CYBERBOOKS.

The afterword from Bova is self congratulation on his myth-making. "This is the third in the series, and, "His story is not complete yet." (page 356) Orion will be back ... oh dear.

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Philip José Farmer - - DAYWORLD BREAKUP (Grafton, 1992, 366pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

This is the final novel in the trilogy begun with DAYWORLD and continued with DAYWORLD REBEL. It is set in a future where the inhabitants of Earth are 'stoned' for six days a week. Since the stoning process puts them in a form of stasis, they live seven objective years (obyears) to each subjective year (subyear). This

happens to the populations for each day, so that a person may live literally only on Mondays.

The Earth had been a peaceful world state for several millenia... until Jefferson Cervantes Caird came on the scene and rebelled against a State that had become corrupt and repressive. But that story is dealt with in the first two books. DAYWORLD BREAKUP chronicles the last days of Caird and his rebellion. An opening chapter attempts to explain the events of the preceding books, but does little more than confuse. Two expository chapters further into the novel also try to present background learnt in DAYWORLD and DAYWORLD REBEL, but intrude rather than inform.

There's no denying that Dayworld is a fascinating idea, and that Farmer has done his homework and considered all the implications of stoning each day's population. But. The whole novel is written in a detached manner - the plot and events are 'reported' rather than 'described'. It also seemed to take a lot of time to go very little distance. In fact, the major impression I gained from DAYWORLD BREAKUP was that it was written to a) end the trilogy neatly, and b) fulfil a contractual obligation.

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Greg Bear - - STRENGTH OF STONES (Gollancz, 1992, 221pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

This is a fix-up of three stories, which imply events even more interesting happened before the book begins. The millenium will not come in the year 2000 and the Moslems will create such wars that they will be globally reviled. Eventually the three theistic religions will form a pact and all take themselves off to another galaxy. On that planet, which they call God-Does-Battle, which seems to be the Sinai Desert made bigger, they inhabit enormous movable arcologies. Unfortunately, the arcologies have built in moral standards, and it finds the people not worthy and expels them into the desert where they degenerate for eons. The book begins here.

The cities are losing their power to replicate so long has passed; various tribal leaders are attacking the cities partly to support their drive for power. Reah is a good woman who is allowed into one of the remaining cities and explores it (shades here of one of Greg Bear's bigger exploration in EON). She bears a child who grows up inside convinced of his moral worth, who decides to end these last remnants of ancient civilisation. Then a deus ex machina appears - a replicant of the original architect - who struggles to bring back something of learning and culture. So far have the people declined that this includes all knowledge of the stars above them, so that the Moslems cannot orientate themselves towards Mecca. It is with this little piece of learning and its promise for the future that the book ends.

Like GORMENGHAST, RAMA, or EON the main interest of this book is in discovering the grandeur of the ruins. Greg Bear does this well, everything else by comparison is decoration. It is not everyone who builds a building with the intention of having it die of old age.

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J.M. Dillard - - STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY (Grafton, 1992, 301pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

Stardate 8679.25: Captain Kirk and his ageing crew, along with what seems like a veritable plague of Klingons, and other assorted aliens, are faced with yet another ultimately crucial mission to help save the Federation from all-out war and destruction. A somewhat surprising addition to the galactic melée this time round is experiencing Sulu as Captain of the Federation ship Excelsior. It seems that at long last Paramount and its cronies have given in to Trekkers' demands for a larger character role for Sulu (George Takei) to play. Arguably the best STAR TREK adventure penned to date, there is little actual difference between STVI:TUC the book and STVI:TUC the film, which I just happened to see at Reading's ABC cinema about a month before reading the book in question.

J.M. Dillard has done her very best to continue to give the reader a sensawunda atmosphere consistent with the STAR TREK universe of old, and although not quite so good as her previous attempt STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER, it does have its moments. Overpriced at £3.99, as are most of today's paperbacks unfortunately, THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY is nevertheless worth the trouble to read. And finally, for all those genuinely despairing Trekkers and unrelenting critics of ST everywhere, get this: due to the phenomenal box-office success of STVI: TUC, Paramount has agreed to commence filming this summer STAR TREK VII: THE DEADLY YEARS. Yes! another ST feature film to end all feature films, which will really be the last one, as it effectively ties-in the original ST with ST:ING. The plot sees Kirk and co. accidentally misplaced in time by about 75 years by a freak time-warp, to meet up with Captain Picard and his crew, where they mutually kick ass off a few deadly aliens. A real treat to look forward to . . .

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Robert Asprin - - M.Y.T.H. INC. IN ACTION (Legend, 1991, 245pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

This ponderously punning title is the ninth in a series dealing with the misadventures of the incompetent but always lucky wizard Skeeve; the first appeared in a glorious Starblaze edition in 1978, and this was first published in the same sequence in 1990.

This means I last read it two years ago, and while one is assured of a laugh-a-minute, pun-a-minute, romp through the several dimensions of Asprin's invented and memorable magical universe, I have to confess that I had forgotten every word of this book by the time the review copy - with its usual grossly inferior Fangorn cover - arrived in my mail-box.

This is no criticism; if I were to hold in my head the ins and outs of every fantasy plot I read, my contact with the real world would be tenuous at best. Take this as a ninth chance to enjoy a convoluted plot, some slapstick fun and new permutations on a small but variegated cast of characters. Like Pratchett's *Discworld* books, this is the sort of writing that encourages you to buy the complete nine volumes at least three times over to give to younger, non-fannish readers, simply to get them hooked on the lowest common denominator of fantasy writing and the best - no quests, no morals, no boring introspection, just a good time for all.

This time Queen Hemlock is conquering planets at an alarming rate; this cannot be good for Skeeve, yet he disappears to the planet of Perve (where the Perverts live, and be careful how you say that) in search of his mentor, Aahz. No point in telling you any more: if you are a lover of the MYTH series you will know what to expect - which is to say, the unexpected - and if you are not yet a convert then you might at least take note that Asprin has already sold over two million copies of the first eight books, so he must be doing something right. As he is also editor of the THIEVES' WORLD series, has had many another non-MYTH title published and has even written some "graphic novels", you should have good cause to try this book.

There's also an interesting Author's Note which will give the prurient an insight into the infighting that so bedevils the publishing world and makes the simple task of the author - to write and sell books - so frustrating. I've always been annoyed by Legend's subtitle to all these books - "a series to take very, very, seriously" - but certainly that applies to the author's opening explanation in this latest work.

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Neal Barrett Jr. - - DAWN'S UNCERTAIN LIGHT (Grafton, 1992, 252pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by L. J. Hurst)

This is the sequel to THROUGH DARKEST AMERICA, although the cover does not make it clear, and it appeared in the U.S.A. four years ago. Fortunately or unfortunately, I read the first book, and it left me feeling sick. I don't have it in the house now and feel better for that. I know other readers didn't respond so strongly, but I

thought it was designed to evoke the response I felt.

The world of the two books is of post-holocaust America, where nearly all wildlife has been exterminated in the long distant wars and the people now live in a half-civilised ruin wracked by civil war fought for no apparent reason. At the end of the first book Howie Ryder discovered that the stock which supplied meat was human stock. Everyone who longs for a sausage gets it from humans reared for the purpose.

The difference between people and stock is that stock have no intelligence. In DAWN'S UNCERTAIN LIGHT Howie learns that this lack of intelligence is due to lack of care in babyhood (i.e. due to the deprivation of being treated as animals they become moronic - a possibly accurate description), not lack of a soul which is what the church teaches. Over all of North America herds are reared for meat and the population believes that there is a difference. Due to problems with inbreeding which weakens the blood lines the existing authorities take children to improve the stock, while letting their parents believe they have been chosen to go and re-build civilisation. Howie's sister was one, and the plot of the two books is Howie's search to find her.

The effects of childhood deprivation might be accurately described but the much bigger concept of the economy is extremely weak. The stock are in better condition than the people, yet the people go on feeding the stock when they could be eating the feedstuff themselves and avoiding the middle animal. It's the economic argument for vegetarianism writ large.

Along with this people have lost nearly all feeling or humanity. Torture is common on all sides, and no one has a standard of ethics. Howie gets a girlfriend in this book, but she only seems to be in for the sex. Along with nearly everyone else she gets slaughtered at the end.

This book and its predecessor are close to gross out, and I can't really see that it could have any other purpose.

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Patricia Kennealy - - THE COPPER CROWN (Grafton, 1992, 560pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

THE COPPER CROWN is ostensibly Book 2 in this SF/fantasy series of Kelts in Space, but after finishing it, a slightly different picture emerges. This book, originally published in 1984, forms one continuous narrative together with its sequel, THE THRONE OF SCONE. The "first" book of the series, THE SILVER BRANCH, dating from 1988, is therefore a prequel, explaining the early life of the principal character, Aeron Queen of Keltia. This explains why all the maps and appendices occur here also, and why many of the names on the maps were not referenced in the first book. It also means you don't have to read Book 1 before picking up this one!

The story starts in 3512 AD with the Earth Federacy exploration ship "Sword" being discovered by a fleet of strange advanced ships one thousand light-years from Earth. These dragon-shaped craft, crewed by huge hairy warriors in kilts, are from the kingdom of Keltia, a completely feudal but starfaring culture descended from an advanced race that had settled on Earth, and who briefly became our Celts before heading off into space again. The Earth folk are welcomed by the Kelts, especially by their warrior/sorceress queen Aeron, and invited to join an alliance. This sparks off an interstellar war between the Kelts and the two other empires that inhabit that part of the galaxy. The book ends tantalisingly with the Kelts apparently defeated and Aeron in mid-Quest to save both them and Earth, which gives the reader an incentive to go out and buy Book 3.

In my earlier review I commented on Irish New Yorker Kennealy and her fascination with that culture. In true Green tradition (as opposed to Orange, not Red or Blue), the Terran who turns out to be a villain, Hugh Tindal, is quite obviously British. Prejudice aside, I found the book to be suitably swashbuckling space opera of the swords and starships variety. It's better than the first volume by virtue of having a continuous plot-line, which Kennealy sustains well. Derivative and undemanding, of course, but none the less enjoyable.



Jack L. Chalker - - **THE BIRTH OF FLUX AND ANCHOR: SOUL RIDER 4** (Roc, 1992, 374pp, £4.99)

This prequel to the "main" trilogy tells of the forming of the world in which *Soul Rider* takes place. Although some of the ideas are fascinating, particularly the early scene-setting involving the ambiguous history of intelligent computers, the book seems to have been written very quickly. The result is top-of-the-head pulp which, if taken slowly, would have made a decent novel; as it is, if you read it at all you'll read it quickly and forget it next day. (Andy Sawyer)

Jack L. Chalker **CHILDREN OF FLUX AND ANCHOR** (Roc, 1992, 350pp, £4.99)

This is Book Five, the final volume in the *Soul Rider* series. I suppose that anyone who has read Books One to Four will want it. It can stand alone but is marred by lengthy information dumps (to bring new readers up to speed), a tired, convoluted plot, uni-dimensional and bizarre, shape-changing characters and above all by Chalker's uninspired writing style. For those of you who are unacquainted with either the series or Jack L. Chalker, I would advise you not to start here. (Bill Johnson)

Charles De Lint - - **YARROW** (Pan, 1992, 244pp, £7.99 Trade Paperback)

De Lint seems to be staking a successful claim for a literate folk-ballad fantasy genre, and this is especially marked here in this story of a writer whose inspiration by a faery Otherworld is threatened by a kind of psychic vampire. There's an awful lot of not-necessarily-relevant "business" involving SF (Cat's supporting characters are a bookshop owner and a fan, which allows for considerable namedropping) and music (where it looks unfortunately like De Lint thinks Sid Vicious sang lead on the Pistols' "God Save The Queen"). However where the story is absolutely successful is in its exploration of the symbolic geographies of the old folk ballads and its beautifully sentimental picture of Ben's transition from fan-worship to real affection. (Andy Sawyer)

David Eddings - - **THE SAPPHIRE ROSE** (Grafton, 1992, 525pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

Concluding *THE ELENIUM*, *SAPPHIRE ROSE* has Sparhawk using the power of the jewel Bhellion to awaken the poisoned queen - and that's only the beginning of the story. Typically Eddings in its mixture of cuteness and readability, it amuses and occasionally irritates with its Boy's Own Paper approach to High fantasy, while the plotline, among other goodies, includes an ongoing manipulation of voting majorities among an ecclesiastical council even more complicated than that which might have occurred on Thursday April 9th (of tragic memory). (Andy Sawyer)

David Gemmell - - **LION OF MACEDON** (Legend, 1992, 420pp, £4.99)

Mass-market edition of the excellent historical-fantasy I reviewed in *PI* 90. Though I'm not normally a great fan of Gemmell, this story of the Spartan Parmenion and his relationship with Alexander the Great is first-rate in its depiction of a time when heroes really were heroes: brilliantly visualised and - so far as I can tell - accurately detailed. This edition also contains the first two chapters of the sequel, *DARK PRINCE* (see *PI* 93): a marketing ploy which seems to be getting more common and which I don't altogether favour. (Andy Sawyer)

David Gemmell - - **MORNINGSTAR** (Legend, 1992, 282pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

*MORNINGSTAR* may be the best book that David Gemmell has written to date, and shows his talent for muscular, heroic fantasy to be maturing, becoming deeper and more thoughtful without losing the essential elements demanded of such an epic. If you have any liking at all for such fantasy, then this is most definitely a book you should read. (John D. Owen)

Peter Morwood - - **FIREBIRD** (Legend, 1992, 308pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

A well-realised and exciting historical fantasy (sequel to *PRINCE IVAN*) based upon Slavic folklore and the 13th-century crusade of the Teutonic Knights against Russia. Its somewhat unusual setting provides an exotic flavour, but also a rare topicality: you can discern the aftermaths of these invasions and conflicts in news reports from Eastern Europe today. (Andy Sawyer)

Dwina Murphy-Gibb - - **CORMAC: THE SEERS** (Pan, 1992, 328pp, £7.99 trade paperback)

A Celtic-Historical-Romance-Fantasy from the wife of Bee Gee Robin. I take against writers who acknowledge "psychic guides" and indeed there's a touch of New Age mush in this novel, which is otherwise a passable beginning for an epic trilogy (by the end of this first part the eponymous High King of Ireland is still a baby). It's well-trodden ground, but vivid and psychic guide or not Ms Murphy-Gibb seems to know her stuff. (Andy Sawyer)

Melanie Rawn - - **STRONGHOLD DRAGON STAR Book One** (Pan, 1992, 587pp, Trade Paperback)

The opening of a new trilogy following the *DRAGON PRINCE* books, this concerns the threat of a barbarian invasion to High Prince Rohan's realm. Somewhere in this expansive but dull fantasy is a sub-plot about conflict between the magical and secular politics of Rawn's world, but despite the dramatic and colourful cover the McCaffrey-like dragons are barely even of sub-plot status. Rawn is puffed as the "Reigning Queen of Fantasy", but a finer example of genre conservatism I've not seen. Perhaps that's the point, but how I longed for something interesting to happen! (Andy Sawyer)

Fred Saberhagen - - **FARSLAYER'S STORY** (Orbit, 1992, 252pp, £4.50)

This is, of course, another in Saberhagen's "Swords" series. Mermaids, demons, a holy hermit, a blood-feud and a sword that kills on demand. The story bats along nicely, but don't look for depth of characterisation, or challenging ideas. (Cherith Baldry)

Betty Shine - - **MIND MAGIC** (Corgi, 1992, 318pp, £3.99)

The saddest thing about this book - sent for review presumably because we wacky sci-fi types go for New Age claims about "The key to the universe" (subtitle) - is that most of it is straightforward and commendable relaxation/meditation techniques, whatever mystical tosh it's dressed up in. The rest of this "self-help guide" does things like suggest that conditions like diabetes and leukemia can be cured by thinking positive thoughts and *imagining* you're taking medication. I'm sure many of the book's readers would gain great benefit from many of the techniques described here, but at heart it's at best irresponsible, at worst cruel and dangerous. It's also a best-seller. (Andy Sawyer)

Anthony Swithin - - **THE WINDS OF THE WASTELANDS** (Fontana, 1992, 289pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

Sequel to *THE LORDS OF THE STONEY MOUNTAINS* (reviewed elsewhere this issue by Lynne Bispham) and taking the search for Lyonesse one (small) step closer to its conclusion. More travelogue than quest, it explores further areas of the imaginary Rockall to entertaining effect. I must admit I took to the slightly stilted first-person narration which reminded me more of H. Rider Haggard than modern fantasy writers, and by the end I was sorry to leave the journey. (Andy Sawyer)



**FAR POINT 4**  
(May/June 1992)

## "Upon the rack in print"

**WORKS 8**

(£1.95 or £11 for 6 issues from J. C. H Rigby, Victoria Publications, PO Box 47, GRANTHAM, Lincs. NG31 8RJ)

(£1.60 or 4 issues for £5.50 from Dave W Hughes, 12 Blakestones Road, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5UQ)

(Reviewed by Stephen Baxter)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The *GUARDIAN* of 5th May 1992 informed us that between 1985 - 91 the average time we spent reading magazines fell by 7 per cent, and by more than 18 per cent among 16 - 19 year olds. Into this shrivelling marketplace *FAR POINT* - yet another courageous SF magazine venture - has been launched. The magazine has already done well, I suppose, to survive to its fourth issue; but what prospect of success does *FAR POINT* have in the future?

Any marketing manager will tell you that the way to judge a product is against the "4 p's" of the marketing mix - product, price, placement and promotion. So, turning to the product first, we find a magazine with a pleasant feel - plenty of pages, 9 pieces of fiction and a poem, glossy paper throughout and internal colour - although some of the illos and typefaces give the magazine an occasionally tacky feel.

the emphasis for the fiction is on short, snappy stories with plenty of action and pace - the submission guidelines ask for pieces of no more than 6,000 words - and this, by contrast with, say, *INTERZONE*, gives *FAR POINT* something of a juvenile feel. Perhaps it's fairer to describe it as Britain's answer to *ABORIGINAL*, clearly aiming at the wider readership away from the SF addict.

But it isn't all *ABORIGINAL*. My personal favourite here is Jack Wainer's "Miss Ain't Behaving", a jazz-soaked fantasy piece which wouldn't be out of place in *IN DREAMS*. Old pro John Brunner (the only major name in this issue) seems to get the tone right; 'A Break in the Ring' is a brisk, competent and entertaining juvenile piece, peppered with exclamation marks. But the tone - and the quality - of the rest is uneven, with a lot of new(ish) authors being given a chance. Mike O'Driscoll's 'Metal Picnic' is interesting and exotic, though ultimately confusing, and Sarah Ash with 'Minufar's Kiss' provides effective fantasy-horror with a terrific opening. 'The Hard Man' by Andy Sawyer is solid but rather slow until the vividly imagined close. 'Dualists' by new author David Wade has drive, vigour and promise, but is the most amateur piece here, with a cliched idea and too much telling rather than showing. Of the rest, Roger Pyle's 'The Price of a Head' is competent rather than slight, D.B. Normanton provides the second half of a serial without - irritatingly - a precis of the first installment, 'The Character Who Was real' by Peter Reveley is pointless parody and 'To You fromme' by Julia Lucie is a poem of some tweezeness.

Of the non-fiction, two strong elements are the book reviews - Clute they ain't, but they are valuably clear, informed and informative - and Ronald Brocklehurst's science column on 'Terrorming' which is lively, fact-filled and provocative: probably the best read in the magazine, actually. There's news on cons, expressed thankfully in the language of the average human, and a rather slight letter section featuring, sadly, no less than two cheap cracks at *INTERZONE*.

So the product is a curate's egg, with its core element - the fiction - maybe not consistently competent enough to attract the target audience. Of the other three marketing P's, the price at £1.95 doesn't seem as bad as once it might have, especially considering the weight of reading material, and placement is as much of a problem as ever: *FAR POINT* is being handled by Titan but not by W.H. Smith's, the editorial complains to us. I'm not sure about the value of such moans as regards the 4th P, promotion - how many people "out there" buy a magazine out of sympathy? - but other *FAR POINT* promotional ideas are imaginative, and other magazines could maybe follow its lead. For example there's a free-book subscription boost scheme and a bullet list of reasons why it's in the interest of its readers - of us, not just the magazine - to subscribe. But the ad content is depressingly light - no major names and a large number of plugs for other small mags.

*FAR POINT* is friendly and brave, and it's hard not to like it; and, as an author looking for markets, I have to wish it well: we need more than one stable short fiction SF market in this country. But the editors are launching a product of mixed quality into a difficult and shrinking market, and *FAR POINT* is going to need a lot of luck to survive.

Meeting my deadline by the skin of its teeth is the welcome return of *WORKS*, shorn of its letter-column and "Study" reviews extra but particularly strong this time on illustration (many by Kevin Cullen but also featuring a drawing each from Dallas Gollin and Alan Hunter) and the sensitive and atmospheric response of the artists to the stories.

The magazine contains the usual *WORKS* mixture of stories and poetry, often from the more experimental end of the spectrum, although Mark Polykett's *BLUE SKIES* OF *EARTH* would not be out of place in the old-fashioned pulps with its grasping for the final imagistic cliché. (Great Cullen illustrations, though.) Bathos aside, of particular note is a story by Garry Kilworth (whose novel *THE DROWNERS*, by the way, has been nominated for 1991's Carnegie Award for best children's novel). In 'Home' (economically illustrated by Jack McArdle) a couple unravel the real nature of their seclusion behind a computer-generated "outside" played upon their windows. Again, this is traditional, as is D.W. Sherridan's 'Moonbaby', a science-fiction fable about sexual predation. I will not make any puns about the rushed ending of the latter.

More oblique is Don Webb's 'Essence of Faery' about alien life in the subway: eerie, but its disassociated narrative is perhaps made more so by a larger than usual incidence of apparent typos, while content determines form in Conrad Williams's 'Ripples', a story of quantum reality changes - but some lines appear to be lost at the end of one column! I may be nit-picking, but these are both stories which demand (and repay) careful reading, and their editing should be just as careful.

Most notable of the rest of the longer pieces, David Memmott's 'Closing Ceremonies' wrestles effectively with the problem of how you shut down an android which thinks it's alive. Of the shorter pieces, Hilary Hayes's 'Ashes' is predictable but still moving, and I'm tempted to nominate K.V. Bailey's poem 'A Hoylish Fantasy' as the best single piece in the magazine. Most of the other poetry is strictly amateur; chopped lines and "profound" thoughts, but Bailey writes with a feel for rhythms and words and both traditional and non-traditional poetic forms. And his poem is about something (and a science-fictional something) rather than a vague mood. I know I've said something like this before, and that Bailey has a much deeper background in verse than most other contributors to *WORKS* presumably have. But it's true.

Much of the delight in reading *WORKS* and similar magazines lies in discovering such things. Really, at £1.60, *WORKS* is good value for money. I like the way Dave Hughes only "party line" is to provide a wide range of moods and themes even if I may disagree with individual selections. There's always something to enjoy and it's good to see it back.

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*INTERZONE* 58-9 (April - May 1992)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

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Publication of the April issue was doubtless marked by a jolly party down in Brighton as *Interzone* reached the ripe old age of 10 years, quite a feat for a British SF magazine (a breed with a noticeably high mortality rate). We readers can celebrate to because *IZ* 58 boasts a very high standard of fiction. Pick of the bunch is Storm Constantine's 'Priest of Hands'. Ays is a young priest of the flying city of Min, a city which wanders through the skies above the Earth. Ays has status and contentment through his work, this being to administer - in a fashion - the last rites to dying people. Into his life, via a curious displacement, comes a strange woman and Ays's life is turned upside down. Beautifully written, 'Priest of Hands' is accompanied by an interview with Storm Constantine (who, with a name like that, ought by rights to be a romantic novelist). I used to gripe that author interviews weren't paired with an example of the writer's

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craft; I've also had cause to complain about the non-relevant covers. Not so now - the last few months have seen a switch to illustration of stories, and these two issues under review boast two fine examples from SMS and Kevin Cullen respectively.

But back to fiction. Constantine beat by a very short head J G Ballard with his 'The Message From Mars'. This story is unusual for Ballard in that he steps out into space. In 2007 the US is galvanised into sending a manned rocket to Mars. Speed and media coverage apart, the voyage and return are unremarkable, but what happens when the travellers return to Earth is not, and we're back in familiar territory. An effective combination of irony and suspense, this is an apt story to include as a JGB 'freebie' came with the first issue of IZ, which letter also contained a story by M John Harrison. He too is represented in this anniversary issue (reviewers kill for such painless links as this!). In 'Anima' the anonymous narrator is captivated by one Chloe Ashton, who is searching for the anima mundi who seduced him. A refutation of Thatcherite ambitions, perhaps? Less enigmatic is Graham Joyce's 'The Careperson' in which careworker Andy goes into an abandoned mine to befriend and recover children living there. It's a good read despite being rushed and having an unnecessary sub-plot and it's especially welcome to see a current social problem (in this case, youth homelessness) being given the sfnal treatment in IZ. Robert Irwin's 'An Incident at the Monastery of Alcobaca' concerns the historical figure of William Beckford; other than its Islamic flavour, the story is straight out of the 'gentleman's club' tradition of days gone by. By its title you can also gather that Ian Macdonald's 'The Best and the Rest of James Joyce' also features real-life characters. Here we meet Joyce in a variety of guises and alternate situations - the writer with Jung in Zurich, encountering "Travellers" who move between universes, a tachyon physicist in a devastated Britannia. Well-written, yes, but I can't help feel that, whilst I like them, alternate world stories are becoming too commonplace in the magazine.

The May IZ is best summarised as 'enjoyable but undemanding' with no stories that can be said to be outstanding and, since I've spent so much space discussing the April edition, I'll skip through the contents (such a perfunctory approach may result in vitriolic attacks from aggrieved readers, but what the heck!) Best is 'Pacing the Nightmare' by Sean McMullen in which a woman pushes herself too far in her karate training and metamorphoses into an anorexic killing machine. Good sports background, kooky speculation. Onto gladiatorial football now as with 'SQPR' Kim Newman gives us a When Saturday Comes reader's nightmare combined with 2000 AD action. Notable for featuring Neil Kinnock's resignation. Diane Mapes squeezes an entertaining new trick out of the 'There's Something in the Attic' storyline in 'Nesting'. Also fun, despite cardboard, plot-driven characters, is 'Epsilon Dreams' by Eric Brown, featuring personality inserts and double dealing on Addenbrooke. 'Why Live? Dream!' instructs Barrington Bayley as an alternative to surviving on an eco-damaged Earth. Initially intriguing, ultimately slight. On the non-fiction side, there's a profile of Marvel-man Stan Lee and another of Stan Nicholls's fine interviews, this time with Dan Simmons.

Finally, there are the 1991 IZ poll results. Runner-up was Molly Brown's 'Bad Timing' whilst Greg Egan took the top spot with 'The Infinite Assassin'. Well, I'd tipped the right author but not the right story!

[INTERZONE is available from David Pringle, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6FL) for £14/6 issues, £26/12 issues).

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