



Paperback Inferno

97

The Review of paperback SF

August - September 1992

The Belman of London :
BRINGING TO LIGHT
THE MOST NOTORIOUS
VILLANIES THAT ARE NOW
Practised in the Kingdome.

Profitable for Gentlemen, Lawyers, Merchants, Citizens, Farmers, Masters of households, and all sorts of servants, to make, and delightfull for all men to reade.

Legē, Perlegē, Relegē.



Well, he SAID he could shed new light
on SF . . .



Issue 97, August/September 1992

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL (Paperback Purgatory) p.2
'A NEW MILLENNIUM' p.3
COMPETITION CORNER p.4
CLOSER ENCOUNTERS: p.4
REVIEWS p.6
CAPSULES: p.14
'UPON THE RACK IN PRINT': Magazine reviews from Andy Mills p.15

REVIEWERS THIS ISSUE: - Chris C. Bailey, K.V. Bailey, Cherith Baldry, Norman Beswick, Colin Bird, Lynne Bisphan, Terry Broome, Mat Coward, Alan Fraser, Steve Grover, L.J. Hurst, Bill Johnson, Paul Kincaid, Ken Lake, Jan Malique, Joseph Nicholas, John D. Owen, Ian Sales, Andy Sawyer, Jim Steel, Maureen Speller, Martin Sutherland, Sue Thomason, Jon Wallace, Jessica Yates.

ARTWORK: The cover this issue is (slightly adapted) from the title page of Thomas Dekker's THE BELMAN OF LONDON (1608). Colin P. Davies: Logo. Steve Bruce: p.4; p.14

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS to PI 98 is Friday 11th September

BACK ISSUES

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

Paperback Purgatory

FROM INFERNO TO PURGATORY TO . . . ?

Height: 178cm. Eyes: Brown. Shoe size: 44.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

The new editor of PAPERBACK INFERNO will be

STEPHEN PAYNE 24 Malvern Road Stoneygate LEICESTER LE2 2BH

to whom all correspondence, review copies, and publicity material should now be sent.

The magazine that you are holding in your hands will be the last ever issue of PAPERBACK INFERNO. Let's pause for a moment, put our feet up, and think on that, because what we're talking about here is 97 issues; 97 issues of PAPERBACK INFERNO. Now that's a lot of history. A lot of water under the bridge. A lot for me to aspire to . . .

Andy has already been a part of it. He has edited and produced PAPERBACK INFERNO for the last 7 years through 42 editions. Thanks Andy. And thanks also to the reviewers and the talents, largely unsung, of the production assistants who have helped him along the way. Thank you all. And if this sounds like the reading of the last rites; well, in a way it is. Big changes are afoot.

From next issue, PAPERBACK INFERNO will be no more. In its place, PAPERBACK PURGATORY will return as the paperback review section of VECTOR and I will be its editor. In addition, as part of VECTOR, the magazine's organisation will also change. Unlike Andy, I will not be responsible for production; Catie Cary will be handling that side of the magazine. What I will continue to be responsible for are the reviews and editorial space (such as is available). Hopefully, over the coming months, my

character will assert itself in that area, just as Andy's has in *PAPERBACK INFERNO*. More to the point, paperbacks are the books that people buy, I buy, and although I may take the opportunity to consider the paperback in a context wider than that of the review, *PAPERBACK INFERNO* - whatever its form - will continue to reflect and inform upon that simple fact.

For those of you who do not know me or are simply curious, I have been asked to include some details about myself. I have listed a few at the top of this column. Note that I also possess a *Panama* hat.

And finally, as we say down here, *Notify Ground Crew*.

SO LONG, AND THANKS FOR ALL THE PAPERBACKS!

There must have been quite a few current BSFA members who were more into *BLUE PETER* than cyberpunk when I took over from Joseph Nicholas as *PAPERBACK INFERNO* editor from issue 55 in August 1985. Which isn't necessarily a factor in my deciding to return to the BSFA equivalent of the back-benches, but if a week is a long time in politics seven years is an eternity in fandom and there comes a time when new blood is necessary. So I'm off to get some. Cheers.

I've been enormously encouraged over the years by friends and colleagues within the SF field. Here, I really ought to list everyone who helped, but the number of people really is too vast. So a personal thank you to BSFA Committee members past and present, reviewers, production assistants, publishing houses, press officers, SF editors, writers (without whom we would all look pretty silly) and anyone who's offered praise, criticism and aid. You know who you are. I break the rule at once to name Keith Freeman, (without whom, as Alison Cook suggested in the last *MATRIX*, the BSFA would have collapsed years ago). And my family Mary, Rosamund and Harriet, who've put up with my inexorable shackling to a bimonthly publication schedule for such a long time. I think I know who you are.

And as for the deluge of fantasy trilogies, role-playing game spin-offs, sharecroppings, second-string novels of twenty years ago repackaged as precursors of cyberpunk, second-string novels of today packaged as cyberpunk despite the fact that the term is so unhip only games-players and the Sunday glossies (and *BLUE PETER*, for all I know) use it - well, I enjoyed it. Most of it. And the stories I could tell . . .

Only now could some of them be revealed. Such as the time a full-page advert arrived precisely *not* in time to be inserted in the issue it was intended for. (Fortunately, I managed to contact the printers and arrange a swift surgical operation on the master copy pages). Or the time I'd prised a review copy of a book out of a publisher by dropping the name of the well-known author who'd suggested I ask for it. It was just the book to take on a Sunday picnic at a local resort, so a pleasant sunny afternoon was spent reading it. Back home:

"Where's that book I was reading?"

"Where did you put it?"

"In the carrier bag with the sandwiches."

"You mean the carrier bag with the sandwich wrappings in it. Which I carefully put the rest of the rubbish in. And which I ecologically and country-code-consciously put in the nearest bin. . ."

Fortunately, it was still there. Good book, too. *Smells* a bit, but worth a read . . .

But enough. This is reminiscences time. This is nostalgia time. We look to the future, and the new-look BSFA magazines, with Stephen Payne (now that name ought to confuse future bibliographers of this magazine!) taking over.

One final thank-you though: to Steve Glover for the title of this final editorial!



AN UNCOLLECTED PROOF FROM MILLENNIUM

A NEW MILLENNIUM?

No, this is not yet another coded reference to the changes involving *PAPERBACK INFERNO*, but refers to the new publishing house set up by Anthony Cheetham following his departure from Random Century. ("Century" . . . "Millennium" . . . geddit? Oh well.

Actually, to make it even more confusing, *ORION* is the name of the new publishing house. *MILLENNIUM* is the SF imprint, run by Deborah Beale (formerly operating Random Century's "Legend" SF imprint) assisted by Charon Young.

What *isn't* confusing is the likely quality of the list. Before me is a proof copy of the first title, to be published on 17th September: Vernor Vinge's *A FIRE UPON THE DEEP*. Not only is it stylishly presented, with the ants that seem to be Millennium's trademark scattered over a cover which puts most finished copies to shame, but it's perhaps the perfect book for me to exit with. I've always had a weakness for big far-future galactic epics with unusual alien races, and this is one: a gloriously gripping, *big* book which zooms into orbit and keeps you following its path until the bus has gone way past your stop, the family have stopped speaking to you, and the cat's decided it won't get fed today.

As well as *A FIRE UPON THE DEEP*, Millennium are launching into simultaneous hardback/trade paperback with Kristine Kathryn Rusch's fantasy *THE WHITE MISTS OF POWER* and the Arthurian-but-more epic *THE FOREVER KING* from Molly Cochran and Warren Murphy.

(And YOU can see them for yourselves: see this issue's Competition Corner!)

Later, in November, comes omnibus editions of Michael Moorcock epics featuring: *VON BEK: THE ETERNAL CHAMPION: HAWKMOON* and *CORUM*.

Mass-market paperbacks will appear this time next year. Meanwhile, new stars scheduled for future appearance in the Millennium imprint are Charles Stross (*SCRATCHMONKEY*), Alison Sinclair (*HOMECOMING*), and stockbroker-turned writer Mary Corvan (*IMPERIAL LIGHT*). Also forthcoming is the "literary horror" of Kathe Koja (*SKIN* and *BAD BRAINS*) and the humour of Phil James with a multi-volume series whose working title is *PIONEER*.

If ever there was a well-balanced list with the proverbial "something for everyone", this must be it.

But what about these ants which have suddenly started adorning Millennium's publicity material? Obviously a deeply sfnal comment about come the Millennium the metaphorical or actual insects will have taken over? Actually not - they just thought it was unusual and amusing. Actually, I prefer that!

 COMPETITION CORNER

Never let it be said that I didn't go out with a bang! Once more we have not one but *TWO* competitions: enter as many as you like, but please keep your entries on separate pieces of paper. (It confuses the hat otherwise).

Thanks to the generosity of ORION (see separate feature article) and LEGEND we have two sets of prizes to celebrate (?) my freedom. Three sets of the first ORION books (Vernor Vinge's *A FIRE UPON THE DEEP*, Kristine Kathryn Rusch's *THE WHITE MISTS OF POWER* and Molly Cochran/Warren Murphy's *THE FOREVER KING* are available for three people who can tell me:

* What trade or profession was followed by the mythological character "Orion"?

Furthermore, not only have LEGEND donated three copies of the new mass-market edition of Orson Scott Card's *XENOCIDE* but they have conveniently reprinted the first two volumes of the series, *ENDER'S GAME* and *SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD*, so three people can end up with matching sets. All they have to do is tell me:

Which alien race was the enemy in *ENDER'S GAME*?

Please send all entries to the OLD editorial address (i.e. I, The Flaxyard . . .) by *SATURDAY 11th SEPTEMBER*.

THE FIRST GREAT SPACE EPIC
FOR THE NINETIES

A FIRE UPON THE DEEP

VERNOR
VINGE

BY UNCORRECTED PROOF FROM WILKINSON



Winners of last issue's competitions? Well, in a last-ditch attempt to confuse the ubiquitous Theo Ross and his telepathic dog I got Harriet to pick the names out of her umbrella. Didn't work, though. So Theo wins a RAW EVIL sweatshirt (courtesy of Random Century) and is joined by Jenne White and William Powell. Copies of C.J. Cherryh's HEAVY TIME, donated by New English Library, go to Andy Mills, P. Hammond, and Nigel Parsons. Many thanks to all those who entered and to the publishers who donated prizes.

Closer Encounters



Iain M. Banks -- *USE OF WEAPONS* (Orbit, 1992, 387pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas)

Interstellar empires are staple to SF, but are considered implausible because no political system could possibly hold together across the distances involved; hence other writers' civil wars and collapses into barbarism. Iain Banks finesses the distance problem by arguing that any culture technologically advanced enough to spread through the galaxy would have solved its energy problems and no longer require a formal political system. The state would have withered away; people would take what they want and give what they could; and the result would be communist utopia -- which explains immediately why no US writer has followed Banks down the same path.

If the "Culture" novels were truly communist, of course, they would have no human protagonists: ~~humans~~ ^{humans} alone (with a capital H and a sense of directive purpose) would be the hero -- but the last person to write novels

solely of ideas was Olaf Stapledon, and no one reads him any more. But while Banks recognises that readers need characters with which to identify, he avoids SF's traditional exaggeration of the role of the individual by constructing plots whose outcomes will have little effect on wider events -- people may fight and die, but the Culture carries serenely on, gradually but unstoppably absorbing everyone else.

USE OF WEAPONS is hailed as the best Culture story yet, but reviewers perhaps responded more favourably to it than *CONSIDER PHLEBAS* and *THE PLAYER OF GAMES* because it is more of a novel of character and so better fits the bourgeois tradition such novels embody. I found the plot, in which a mercenary is sent to a non-Culture star cluster to bring a respected politician out of retirement to avert a civil war, much slighter than that of *THE PLAYER OF GAMES*, and -- since it ends without showing whether the war was averted -- even unresolved. It perhaps illustrates the dangers of plots in which individual actions count for little: lots may happen, but nothing is important. Nor do I find wholly credible the last chapter's rationale for the mercenary's behaviour: if he was and did who he was claimed to be and to have done, the revelation would have been public knowledge long before the story opened.

These quibbles won't matter to a fan of the Culture series, although to spot all the references they also need to be politically aware. There's an embedded joke about Marx's theory of alienation, for example; a nice touch in these rather Fukuyama-ist times. I look forward to a future Culture novel refuting his thesis, too.

Christopher Evans - - CHIMERAS
(Grafton, 1992, 173pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Paul Kincaid)

"They swallow up art whole as soon as it's produced, then spit out its bloodied bones. To them, all the sweat, all the agony of creation stands for nothing, is not even taken into account. They smother it and deaden it with their words, then move on to the next victim."

Christopher Evans has had his say about critics before they even get to see his new novel. This isn't a challenge or a debate, just an outright dismissal of anything we might say about the book. Of course, the words are put into the mouth of Vendavo, the arrogant artistic genius at the centre of the story, but with that hanging over us it doesn't leave a great deal of room for manoeuvre.

The problem with CHIMERAS is that it isn't a novel, except in the mosaic sense of Keith Roberts's work. It is a sequence of linked stories (you'll have seen some of them in OTHER EDENS and ZENITH) which follow Vendavo from before his birth to after his death. The book avoids dramatic incident: in 'Artefacts' we learn of the murder of Vendavo and the suicide of his assassin, but these are off-stage; in 'The Bridge' there is a full scale revolution, but it is dealt with so obliquely you could blink and miss it. Rather, we get incidents in the artistic development of the great artist; yet although Vendavo is the pivot around which all else turns, he is never the viewpoint, his creations are worked in secret. For a book about artistry it is strangely shorn of "all the sweat, all the agony of creation". What is more, these artistic creations are sculpted from unseen spirits, chimeras, and are able to move for a while with an odd semblance of life. Given the fairly obvious moral dilemmas which might therefore be raised, the book does seem to avoid doubt and debate.

What we do get, however, is beautiful writing, lush and occasionally over-rich, full of colours and sensations. The observation of character is precise and delicate, the meeting between a pregnant woman and a woman apparently dying in 'Birth Rites' is perhaps the best thing Christopher Evans has ever written. And there is a subtle reportage on the social and personal dimensions of art which underpins the book, though it is made explicit only in the final chapter. Ignore the first chapter, which is formulaic fantasy of the worst kind, and this is an excellent novel which hits targets other than those I suspect it was originally aimed at. Now, bring on the next victim.

Mary Gentle - - THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE (Corgi, 1992, 252pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Mary Gentle is highly intelligent, well-read and driven by a formidable talent. Her novels so far have been capable but cluttered, certainly unsuitable for intermittent reading. After finishing GOLDEN WITCHBRED and ANCIENT LIGHT (otherwise excellent) I wanted to sit her down with an editor's trimming and condensing pencil, and after two careful readings of the remarkable RATS AND GARGOYLES I still felt I needed an index of characters, species, factions and themes; in fact, as a post-modernist fabulation, the book might even profit from one. (After all, she gave us a daunting "short bibliography" to follow up at the end.)

All this may only mean that her work is densely structured and many-layered, and that it will stand up to repeated readings. THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE is on first impression slighter and more straightforward, the tally of major characters smaller and the narrative following fewer tracks. Valentine the White Crow and Lord-Architect Casaubon (from RATS AND GARGOYLES) return with their children to an alternative seventeenth-century England, a realm of wandering mercenaries, coups and conspiracies, Protector-General Olivia against penniless Queen Carola, and of course magic. Impaired heads of criminals whisper their crimes on London Bridge; physicians, architects, scholars and rulers think and act in a pre-renaissance world of signs and correspondences.

Four plotlines interweave. The servants at Roseveare House want to take it over and run it as a collective. A captain of gentleman-mercenaries rapes Desire-of-the-Lord Guillaume, for whom Valentine feels an immediate sexual attraction. Casaubon is directed by Olivia to resolve the problems of an unbuildable temple; Valentine by contrast is sent on a secret mission to Queen Carola. Gentle builds her story with gathering enthusiasm, bringing it to an exciting climax that (in contrast to RATS) carries an unexpectedly strong emotional charge.

There are incidental amusements, like oblique correspondences with our own seventeenth century, and the appearance of characters like Newton, Aubrey, Harvey. And there is all the physicality for which this author is noted; it was there in WITCHBRED and its sequel but here it is almost obsessive - not just the grossness of Casaubon but the grottness of everything else, a striking contrast to the over-sanitised space fiction of early decades.

For sheer originality and individuality of voice Gentle is much to be commended, writing as she does in a genre where formula so often rules. This won't be her greatest book, but it's one where strong emotion works itself out in the adventure playground of her mind.

Robert Holdstock - - THE BONE FOREST
(Grafton, 1992, 268pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by L J Hurst)

'The Bone Forest' is a novella prequel to MYTHAGO WOOD, and occupies the first third of this book. The next six short stories all have something of a shared mythological background, and finally, 'The Time Beyond Age' is science fiction. That sf is about attempts to observe artificial humans, though, which gives this book a theme, the study of character against testing environments, mostly beyond their protagonists' control.

'The Bone Forest' describes the original explorations of George Huxley and Edward Wynne-Jones into the nature of Ryhope Wood. Already the wood is threatening (the story begins with a 'snow woman' tearing all their chickens apart), but events are kept more under control. The real time that Huxley spends in the wood, for instance, is never more than a couple of days; in the novels the entries into the wood become near-unending bloody hunts.

The end of the story ties up with other of Holdstock's ideas when Huxley discovers that one of the wood's visitors to his house is his other-half, or fetch; his wife finding it difficult to tell them apart. But this seems to contradict the idea in the novels that it's the 'urcumug' which takes on the characteristics of the Freudian, castrating father-figure. The urcumug chases children because the father wants to kill its young.

Three of the other short stories come from the mid-seventies, and the rest from the last half of the eighties. I thought least of 'Scarrowfell' which just seems to retell the story of the film THE WICKER MAN.

'Time of the Tree' is the most explicitly environmental - describing the evolution of a patch of land from the retreat of the glaciers to the current despoliation of industry.

The wood can always strike back, or try to. In 'Thorn' the old priest of the living groves inspires a young stone mason working on a new Christian church to work on carving the god out of the stone, but the mason is confused by the fertility rites involving his wife and strikes back, wrecking everything, including the priest and himself. At least, that is what I think happens.

All these environments may be beyond their protagonists' control, but the characters might not know it. Equally, if the unthinking spirit of the trees needs placating by regular doses of human blood and bone meal, it is not going to get a lot of sympathy. The natural world that Holdstock sees is a cruel world. But is it?

Ursula Le Guin - - DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD
(Paladin, 1992, 306pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Maureen Speller)

"My goal," as Ursula le Guin observes, "has been to subvert as much as possible without hurting anybody's

feelings". It's a seemingly impossible task and yet, as this collection clearly shows, the velvet-gloved radical has always pursued an uncompromising path. With a mixture of talks, essays, reviews and occasional writings, drawn from her work during the last ten years, she explores the concerns which inform all her work, both as novelist and speech-maker conference participant and convention guest.

Her concerns are varied, as a glance at the contents page will show. Carefully coded, to help people avoid anything towards which they might feel unsympathetic, it's another indication of the soft approach she favours. Too soft in some ways, for how many people might pass by her sharp observations on the effect of menopause on the female status, and her eminently sensible suggestion that, should aliens appear and want a representative of our species, why shouldn't an elderly woman prove the most suitable, with all her wealth of experience, all because they are labelled "feminism"? But look closer and the label is as subversive as its originator would wish. A memoir of her remarkable mother, marked "literature", is as much the story of any woman's struggle to combine work and family, a sugar-coated pill indeed.

For me, the most interesting items are her meditations on her art as a writer, and as a writer of science-fiction. Bristling with insights into the very nature of fiction, these articles test the reader's understanding to a level which may not suit those who read exclusively for entertainment, but for those who want to pace the boundaries of the genre, Le Guin is an erudite but accessible guide. She stumbles only in her reviews, including one or two which seem to me to be too flippant to be of lasting value.

And just to prove that it is not all hard work, she includes some entertainments of her own; poems on place-names, a memoir of a journey through England and a sparkling description of working on the film of *THE LATHE OF HEAVEN*, revealing the tricks of the low-budget movie-maker.

This collection needs to be read slowly, chewed and digested shred by shred. Dense and rich, it is a stimulating insight into the work of one of our foremost writers.

Robert Silverberg - - *PLUTO IN THE MORNING LIGHT: THE COLLECTED STORIES OF ROBERT SILVERBERG, VOLUME 1* (Grafton, 1992, 396pp, £6.99)

(Reviewed by K V Bailey)

It contains fifteen stories written soon after Silverberg's 'return' to sf (1981-1985). For Silverberg, the short story is a challenge towards which an "internal compulsion" seasonally urges him ('Introduction'). Substantial forewords enlarge the autobiographic/bibliographic perspectives of his (1975) contribution to Aldiss's *HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS*, and provide insights into authorial problems and techniques.

He classifies some stories as "making use of my home turf" (ie of being Californian). Even that domestication, though, involves concepts as various as split personalities roaming the streets and clubs of San Francisco ('Multiples'), and a seeming re-run of Wells' Martian invasion which becomes a kind of 'forsaken merman' tragedy ('Against Babylon'). The most bizarre story of this class is 'Amanda and the Alien', in which a predatory alien is tricked by an even more predatory Bay Area bimbo into perpetrating a revenge.

Trickery and deception are cousins to illusion and hallucination; permutations of these are found in such stories as 'Tourist Trade' (a dealer cheating and being cheated in illegal art sales to aliens); 'Blindsight' (the search for a refugee criminal surgeon who must operate to substitute supersensory perception for sight in ffl travellers); and the novella 'Sailing to Byzantium'. In the last-named, the protagonist's uncertainty of identity is only resolved by his realisation that, hijacked into a bewildering future, he exists only as a software entity, a novelty to intrigue jet-setting immortals. One of Silverberg's most fantastic, most romantic/erotic, and most poignant variations on the theme of alienation, it is rivalled only by 'Homefaring', the story of a time-travel experiment in which the volunteer finds himself on an oceanic Earth sharing body, consciousness and eschatological expectations with a species of giant crustacean. The most extravagant reach of Silverberg in this mode is 'Dancers in the Time-Flux', a reprise of his *SON OF MAN* psycho-environment.

There are several hardish sf stories, including the title one; and one, 'Basileus', which seems proto-cyberpunk. There is also a rather atypical, but welcome, Thurberesque romp ('Hannibal's Elephants'), starting with mastodon-like aliens occupying Central Park and ending in *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS* parody. No space to notice other stories, but my advice is - miss none of them.

R E V I E W S

Robert Shekley - - *IMMORTALITY INC.* (Legend, 1992, 204pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Bill Johnson)

IMMORTALITY INC. was first published in 1959. It has been republished by Legend because it was used as the basis of the film *FREEJACK*, released in March.

The book is set in New York in the year 2110 and perhaps because of the century removed from our time there are very, very few erroneous prophecies at which we can laugh. In fact, thirty two years on, it still reads better than many novels coming out today.

The story assumes a dichotomy between mind and body and that the mind can not only exist independently of the body but, given the opportunity, take over a new body, a kind of reincarnation with awareness. A large corporation, invents a scientific process which will make reincarnation possible to those rich enough to afford it and who do not want to spend a lifetime studying yoga.

As a publicity stunt they reach into the past and drag back to their own time the mind of a man from 1958. This latter day Rip van Winkle is let loose amongst the crooks of the twenty second century and ends up as the quarry of a legal murder hunt. The story involves body hopping, voluntary suicides, zombies, man-hunts and

ghosts and when put as baldly as that I will admit that it sounds like a load of old rubbish. I can assure you that it is anything but. Shekley's literary craftsmanship effortlessly persuades us to suspend our disbelief while he spins a great adventure yarn around such unpromising material. There are no physics lectures, no pseudo-intellectual philosophizing and no unnecessary padding to bulk out the book into the 400+ pages that seem to be required nowadays for W.H. Smith. If you like a good, clean, fast moving story, superbly told, then you won't do a lot better than *IMMORTALITY INC.*

Brian Aldiss - - *DRACULA UNBOUND* (Grafton, 1992, 247pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Jan Malique)

DRACULA UNBOUND opens to a chilling scenario in Earth's distant future, when the dying planet is ruled by Dracula and his minions. The landscape is as bleak and hopeless as the torments suffered by the human slaves: darkness has finally triumphed. This is a future that Joe Bodenland, 21st century scientist, and Bram Stoker, 19th century author, have to prevent at all costs. Joe's invention, a machine which halts time decay, is at the

centre of the action and its appropriation by Dracula kick-starts an horrific chain of events.

A startling theory is put forward, that vampires have been present throughout time, rulers of the earth and sky until evolution gifted mankind with individual consciousness. Then they could no longer be seen as hapless prey, and presented a dangerous threat instead.

The Fleet Ones, as they are called, attempt to right this imbalance (as they see it) by the use of time travel to gather their fiendish army and finally subjugate the human race. Brian Aldiss throws in Chaos Theory and fractal mathematics to add a little spice.

I was rivetted by this book, for the very reason that Dracula gives in answer to one of his own kind:

"Bear in mind that the Fleet Ones must always remain the negative side of humanity, their dark obverse. Otherwise we hold no attraction for them."

Bodenland's Dracula is not the darkly sexual aristocrat of Stoker's imagination; this creature will have you running with disgust, not desire. The monster in these pages is from a more primitive past, in which "all blood was cool and thick and slow and lizard-flavoured." He is portrayed as an ancient evil lurking on the fringes of consciousness, fettered only by human imagination. Bloody frightening as a result!

I keep breaking out in hyperbole, but this is only because of the vivid imagery and fantastic narrative employed to spin this tale. Chaos Theory and fractals were a little beyond me, admittedly, but who cares when perched on the wardrobe with fright? Just don't read it at night and on your own...

Craig Shaw Gardner *A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA* (Headline, 1992, 372pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Bill Johnson)

Paragraph the first, in which the reviewer doth express his irritation with all manner of twee devices that the author did use in an attempt to raise a snigger. Fortunately, after a while, this same author did lapse from his Olde Englishe mannerisms and assume a more modern idiom.

As to the book itself, well, the real trouble with Gardner is that he uses other people's material, B-movies in the *Cineverse* cycle, here, in the *Arabian Nights* cycle stories from, guess where. *A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA* is precisely that, a straight retelling of the Ali Baba legend. To bulk it out, the Aladdin story is also used. Both of these are sufficiently familiar to a British audience, if only through pantomime, not to need summarizing here. Gardner produces nothing that is original except perhaps in the final denouement (very much diluted Terry Pratchett).

Whilst reading this opus I formed the opinion that Gardner meant it to be funny. Now some say that humour is like a fine wine; it does not always travel well; and this has had a long journey from the U.S.A. However, humour is a most individual taste. Millions laugh at Jeremy Beadle while others find his programmes repetitive and boring and yet others find them offensive. Now Craig Shaw Gardner sells many books and film scripts so clearly somebody thinks he is funny. If you have read his work before and liked it then I am sure you will also find this one hilarious.

As for the rest of us, perhaps when the final part of this 'Arabian Nights' trilogy, SCHEHEREZADE'S NIGHT OUT is printed, the publishers would be so good as to indicate, with italic stress or underlining, the parts where we are supposed to laugh.

Gill Alderman -- *THE LAND BEYOND* (Grafton, 1992, 306pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

Linguists may find this book amusing. The authoress borrows a few words from Inuit, a few more from George Borrow's Romany, and gives us the city of Dreamness and the islands of Probably and Probably Not, where the Fishfolk make computer-sagas for an addicted world whose scientists have created the future-city under the perennial ice of the North Pole.

The writer is obsessed with her own femininity, giving us a book with which few male readers will feel at ease. We are given slabs of introspection on childbirth, breeding, tampons, "penetrative sex" and - to my bewilderment - "ingratiation, its female equivalent". We get sex in various forms - and we get linguistics. "Most of their words sounded like the language of an infant, pretty groups of phonics on trial, words for tasks like mending and earning, words for essentials like eating, mother, sex..." and here we go again. Before we even start the Prologue, we learn that the authoress has two daughters, four grandsons, a second husband, that she comes from Dorset and lives in County Cork. Is this in any way relevant?

We are in the 46th. century: doubtless every SF aficionado has noticed how so many writers seek to avoid any logical connection with the real world by pitching their plots so far into the future that anything goes, but I take leave to express my sincere disbelief in a world where people eat fish from plates of bone and heavy silver, yet still consume "cream cakes" and coffee from disposable cups. There are just too many false notes for me to suspend disbelief, and this is not helped by the opening sentence, which is, "It was night. It was always bloody night -- " when I am aware that "bloody" is a fairly modern, debased swear-word not even used in contemporary American English, hardly likely to fall from the lips of a 46th. century female.

We are led into a confrontation with the Democratic Travelling Circus, we learn of spirit-talk and of the drive to procreate. And we see decadents enjoying the 2551st. instalment of the heroine's magnum opus, 'Greed.' I'm sorry but I just could not take any of this seriously. *The Sunday Times* in a rare SF review hailed her as "a new visionary", but I have to agree with the informed view of *Locus* that "I can guarantee you've never read anything like this". I hope you have greater joy of it than I did; if you are a woman I am sure you will.

Kim Newman -- *BAD DREAMS*, (Grafton, 1992, 317pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

The blurb on the front, under the title, "First you dream - then you die" might lead you to believe that this was going to be a sub-Freddy, NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET sort of thing, but you'd be wrong. The back cover blurb is pretty misleading too, harping on about decadence and cultural icons. These areas are covered, but they form the backdrop to a fairly straight, if streetwise horror story.

Anne Nielson is an American investigative journalist, carving out an independent career for herself in London. When she is contacted by the police to identify her sister's body, she investigates her way into the heart of something nightmarish and surreal.

Kim Newman portrays the different lifestyles of Anne and her sister well, giving a harsh look at a society where drugs and spectacularly kinky sex are the norm.

"Behind a glass-topped desk sat an elegant woman in her forties, with purple-streaked hair coiled in a psyche knot and Morticia Addams make-up. She was delicately shaping a Paramount mountain of white powder in front of her. It looked like flour, but a fistful would be worth what Anne earned in a year."

But this society is the home of something worse, a creature centuries old, a psychic vampire who has touched the lives of Anne and her family before and who is now the puppetmaster who revels in controlling, and eventually taking the lives of everyone that he touches.

"There were Monsters, Anne knew. It was a secret she shared with Judi. Their father had met a Monster, and lost, before they were born."

The backgrounds are painted convincingly, and while most of the characters are pathetic rather than sympathetic, Newman gives us enough grasp of Anne Nielson and her family to make us concerned about what happens to her. The whole thing is swept along at a pace which helps keep the pages turning nicely. The plot switches from the real world of Society drug-pushers to the surreal world of the Monsters dream smoothly enough to leave us grasping for a point of reference, then the two worlds join seamlessly together and pull the tension mercilessly to breaking point.

Kim Newman effortlessly flings enough elements into his work to link it to the real world, but when he reaches out to the other world of the Monsters Dream, he really pulls out the stops.

Glen Cook - - SHADOWS LINGER (Roc, 1992, 319pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

This sequel to THE BLACK COMPANY sees the hardbitten mercenaries marching across half the world to prevent the resurrection of the Dominator, whose evil is only matched by that of his spouse The Lady, in whose service the Company fights. Meanwhile, in Juniper, the snivelling coward Shed discovers that he can only save his inn from the moneylenders by smuggling corpses, and we the readers know that his partner Raven is the same ex-Black Companyman whose task is to serve the White Rose, who alone can save the world from The Lady.

The title is apt: shadows linger in a world where moral values depend on who has the power, yet where there are shadows there is light. Is Croaker's crush upon The Lady any sign that she might have any redeeming qualities? Is there any *mileage* for the Company in taking up the banner of the White Rose? The streets down which Croaker, the nihilistically romantic narrator, and his companions ramble are not so much mean as positively psychopathic. SHADOWS LINGER perhaps suffers a little from middle-book-in-trilogy-itis, but it's almost as good a read as its predecessor and a healthy antidote to the flowery saccharine goodness of most fantasy.

You can read it - especially the part dealing with Shed - as a parable of moral redemption if you like but I just liked the way Glen Cook steams out a good old-fashioned mixture of gangster/war stories in the fantasy mode. *Noir* fantasy? Why not.

Peter David - - THE RIFT: (Star Trek 52 (Titan, 1992, 274pp, \$3.50)

Michael-Jan Friedman - - FACES OF FIRE: Star Trek 53 (Titan, 1992, 307pp, £3.99)

Robert Greenberger, Michael-Jan Friedman, & Peter David - - THE DISINHERITED: Star Trek 54 (Titan, 1992, 261pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey)

THE RIFT is an intriguing and though-provoking new *Star Trek* novel from Peter David, which reasonably sets out to try to combine most loose ends inherent from both the original *Enterprise* Captain, Christopher Pike (THE CAGE) and the subsequent Captain, James T. Kirk (WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE, etc.) Although it is the first time that I have read this type of *Star Trek* story (have there been any others?) I'm not totally convinced that it is a good idea to attempt to conspire to hold the two differing *Enterprise's* together, although it remains to be said that the best such (visual) attempt was THE MENAGERIE.

FACES OF FIRE is the first *Star Trek* novel that I have read from the pen of Michael-Jan Friedman, a very fast-paced effort, skilfully contrived to keep the reader on tenterhooks from cover to cover. The way the author has put together the multiple-thematically oriented plot seems to work okay: from past experience of reading similar plots it doesn't always manage to come together as coherently as it has with this. The story itself is loosely oriented around the middle years of the *Enterprise's* original five-year mission, and subsequently concerns intimate conflict between Kirk and crew, irascible Klingons, and interaction with Kirk's old flame Dr Carol Marcus and a very young son, David. Worth a follow-up if only to bring together several major loose ends between Kirk and his son.

THE DISINHERITED, like most collaborations, can all too easily suffer from unintentional plot degradation as a result of conflicting viewpoints from a multi-author input, leaving the reader wondering just what the story was about in the first place (though in the final analysis I did manage to enjoy reading it). Certain likable aspects of THE DISINHERITED - particularly those dealing with the humanoid but hive-like Rithrim - immediately bring to mind the almost unbeatable *Moties* in Niven & Pournelle's THE MOT IN GOD'S EYE and also Frank Herbert's more Earthbound novel HELLSTROM'S HIVE where human beings are themselves genetically altered to resemble a caste-ridden, hive-like society.

T.L. Mancour - - SPARTACUS: Star Trek: TNG 20 (Titan, 1992, 276pp, £3.50)

Bill McCay & Eloise Flood - - CHAIN OF COMMAND: Star Trek: TNG 21 (Titan, 1992, 278pp, £3.99)

V.E. Mitchell - - IMBALANCE: Star Trek: TNG 22 (Titan, 1992, 280pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

My first reaction was uncharitably to trash all three of these books. Then I thought I'd better read them . . . and the reason I decided *that* was because they'd become a bit battered and well-thumbed after my daughter had borrowed them and passed them round her friends.

My daughter the Trekkie . . .

But taking note of this phenomenon I did start to take more of an interest in ST:TNG, actually watching a few episodes, and once you force your way past the incredibly silly names these people have ("Geordie" . . . ?"Beverley Crusher" . . . ? give me a break!) two out of these three books are adequate if uninspiring adventure novels with very little sciencefictional content apart from the setting. But that's maybe the point.

In SPARTACUS, the *Enterprise* meets a damaged alien vessel and helps the crew - then the crew's owners turn up. Picard has to arbitrate between the differing evils of slavery and terrorism, between different definitions of "life" and "race". ST:TNG is popular round here because Data is wonderfully cute. He's featured here, even to the point of romantic interest. So plus one for the swoon factor even though I can't say I went all wobbly, but then I suppose you'd worry if I did.

Continuity slips up with CHAIN OF COMMAND which is also about a slave revolt, this time a lost colony of humans rebelling against their avian owners. There's a scene where Deanna Troi suddenly becomes the sex-object for a planet of frustrated males and political correctness apart, her reaction almost makes me understand why All True Trekkies despise "Ms Empathy" as much as they lust after Data.

IMBALANCE has the *Enterprise* crew called to open diplomatic relations with a race of insectoids. There are more holes in this story than in my second-best socks, and I'm getting increasingly worried about the standard of federation technology. Why is it that landing parties always end up with their communicators breaking down? Still, it was amusing to discover that Ms Empathy is a chocoholic. However, while devoted fans will read anything with a ST logo, I'd advise curious starters to try either of the previous two books and avoid this. Non-fans will remain unconvinced, but at least the complex politics of the "real" world are reflected in these entertainments and let whoever does not read any shared-world productions at all cast the first stone.

Robert E. Vardeman & Geo. W. Proctor - - SWORDS OF RAEMMLYN (Book 1) (NEL, 1992, £7.99)

(Reviewed by John D. Owen)

Robert E. Vardeman seems to be an author who can toss off fantasy trilogies like dandruff, either solo or in collaboration. SWORDS OF RAEMMLYN (Book 1) was co-written with Geo. W. Proctor. Initially published in the USA in three volumes (TO DEMONS BOUND, A YOKE OF MAGIC and BLOOD FOUNTAIN), it now appears as the first 600 page book of a series.

Devin Anane (last surviving member of the House of Anane, adventurer, thief) and his companion Gorwan (magical spirit trapped in man's body) start a quest to rid a demon-possessed woman, Lijena, of her burden (placed on her through Anane's actions). The plot wends its way across the land of Raemmlyn, as the pair pursue Lijena, meeting strangely familiar people (in the sense of having met such characters a thousand times before in other fantasies, not all of them by Vardeman) and undergoing equally well-rehearsed adventures.

It's an amusing enough read, if your critical faculties remain in neutral, but suffers from being predictable and self-repetitive. The target readership is obviously those acned adolescent youths who aren't

getting their share of sex, since the story is dotted with little sexual escapades that could only seriously titillate the utterly innocent. Most of the time, these risqué little episodes are incidental to the plot, and are plainly there to spice up an otherwise rather dull story. The tactic doesn't work.

In many ways, this book typifies the 'writing-by-rote' mentality that I abhor in fantasy authors. It is lowest common denominator writing, as if the authors were afraid to lose one potential customer because of plots that might be too complex (or believable), or characters made of anything but cereal-box cardboard. The worse thing one can say about a book like this is that it is fantasy for SUN readers, but that just about sums it up.

Phil Allcock -- **THE WILL OF DARGAN** (Phoenix, 1989, 256pp, £3.99) **IN SEARCH OF THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE** (Phoenix, 1991, 287pp, £3.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beswick)

Some stories for children are so well imagined and crafted that adults read them with equal pleasure. Phil Allcock hasn't managed to do that, but in this quest fantasy (**STORIES OF THE REALM**) he learns as he goes along.

Kess and his twin sister, Linnil are Quiet Ones, living in the Valley. They go to Meltizoc the Wise about rumours of evil threatening the Realm. They soon join up with others, including Valor, a mountain Guard; Vallel and Vosphel, Water Crafters; Hesteron, and Air Crafter; Merric, a minstrel; Rrum, a Rrokki; Gattera, a Land Crafter; and Athennar, son of Tolledon, an Elf. Their enemy is Dargan, "an embittered and twisted being", dominating other evil individuals, Zorgs, mind-sucking Tarks and other nasties. Dargan has obtained by trickery the Golden Sceptre, created by Elsinoth the Mighty when He also created the Realm.

In **THE WILL OF DARGAN**, the band set out to retrieve the Sceptre, while Tolledon's army mounts an assault on Dargan's fortress. It succeeds, but Dargan escapes. Disasters are contrived with routine regularity; in every chapter someone gets laid low, to be revived (or not) anxious pages later by special skills or magic herbs.

In **SEARCH OF THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE** begins with Linnil snatched by Dargan for his evil designs, and the rescue mission toils through dangerous mists to the kingdom of the Ice People and into the Jewelled Forest. The imaginative quality improves but all too often the plot depends heavily on accidents and impulse. A cliffhanger conclusion prepares us for the final volume, **THE FADING REALM**.

A gently stated religious thread emphasises decency and faith in Elsinoth, in contrast to the evil of Dargan's hordes. But despite the delicious horridness of many episodes there is an underlying cosiness - welcome perhaps to nervous young readers of ten upwards.

Mark Jacobson -- **GOJIRO**
(Penguin, 1992, 356pp, £8.99)

(Reviewed by Ian Sales)

Reading this book, you're going to get comments like "have you finished colouring in the pictures yet?". Sure, it looks like a cheap trashy Jap SF B-movie manga. The cover shows a godzilloid reptile stamping on a city and holding a cute oriental kid in one claw. Buzzing around the lizard's head is the latest in 1950's US flying military hardware. But don't go by first impressions. This is *serious* fiction.

GOJIRO is about Gojiro (Godzilla in all but name) and Coma Boy Komodo, survivor of Hiroshima. It's about their Triple Ring Promise, a bond of friendship defined by a brand of three concentric circles on Komodo's chest. It's about Budd Hazard, backporch philosopher persona of Gojiro and his wacky creed. It's about Joseph Prometheus Brooks, loony tunes genius and inventor of the atomic bomb that turned an insignificant monitor lizard on a Pacific island into a 500' tall monster.

Gojiro is no meathead, trashing cities, climbing skyscrapers or battling an ever more ludicrous menagerie of evil creatures. He lives on Radioactive Island,

protector of the world's gene-blasted human fall-out, the Atoms. To entertain these Nuclear Age tragedies, Gojiro and Komodo make films - films in which he, um, trashes cities, climbs skyscrapers, and battles ever more...

These films have leaked to the outside world, and the Big G is a hero to tortured and neglected kids the world over. So when Sheila Brooks, daughter of Joseph Prometheus Brooks and hermit Hollywood producer with a string of hit movies to her name, writes to Gojiro for help, Komodo sees it as their chance to fulfil the Triple Ring Promise and unravel its secret.

So they do.

GOJIRO is 'modern literature' in some bizarre disguise that's fooled the marketing boys fer shure. It's that Twentieth Century stuff that owes more to the underbelly of US trash culture (including Japanese imports) than to the usual TLS Guide To Po-Faced Literary Farties. It's not - horrors - SF, but it'll find its way onto the SF shelves of better bookshops across the UK. After all, it's got a five hundred foot lizard on the cover, fercrissake... But yer average analog SF reader'll as likely be stumped as the marketing boys were. It's weird. It's in a class of its own. It should be read. So go out. Buy it. Now.

Stephen Gallagher -- **THE BOAT HOUSE** (NEL, 1991, 353pp, £4.99)

Reviewed by Jon Wallace.

Gallagher says that he is "writing straight novels with horrible things in them. Suspense with an edge of the weird." **THE BOAT HOUSE** fits nicely into this concept. On the surface it is the story of a mixed group of people in a small lakeside community, entwines with the fate of Alina, a young Russian refugee who comes to live there. But underneath this runs the riddle of the drownings in the lake, and the strangely similar episodes in Russia, before Alina left...

"They asked her what had happened, and she said that a rusalka from the lake had hurt Viktor. You know what the rusalki are?"

In some ways this is a soap-like novel, not in any derogatory sense, but in the sense that there are many characters, and that it is easy to become involved in them all. Gallagher's people are familiar to a British audience, they are all people that we have met before in all walks of life. This makes it simplicity itself for us to become interested in what happens to them. This keeps the pages turning.

But that's not all that there to this novel. There are the glimpses of Alina's flight from Russia and the people she used to cross the border. There are her mysterious nighttime excursions. There are the drowned people and animals that litter Alina's path, and mixed inextricably through it all, the ambivalence within Alina towards the thing that she is underneath.

Gallagher writes well about his characters and his portrayal of the small community of Three Oaks Bay is convincing and real. Alina has sympathy as well as a hesitant air of menace, and although she manipulates people to get her way, there is a feeling that she doesn't really want to do it, as if another side of her nature compels her. Stephen Gallagher's strength in this book is that he makes it plausible. If there is a weakness, it is in the understatedness of the horror side of things. A lot of things happen off-camera and while this may be seen as an antidote to the blood-and-gore school, it does seem to distance us, to make the horror a bit casual, not really horrible enough to send those shivers up the back. Which is what it's all about really.

S.P. Somtow -- **VAMPIRE JUNCTION** (Gollancz, 1992, 362pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

The biggest rock star in the world is Timmy Valentine. He seems to be 12, but he's a vampire nearly 2000 years old.

Somtow uses a film-like technique to follow the fate and fortune of Valentine and the people attracted by him, dissolving from scene to scene and mixing standard writing with unmarked dialogue to build a picture of

Valentine, what he is and what he wants.

And what he is, is an unconventional view of the vampire myth. He describes himself as an archetype. Like traditional vampires, he can create others like himself, but these others are governed by their own perceptions of what they have become. What he wants is harder to find out. He hires Carla Rubens, a Jungian analyst ostensibly to analyse him, to help him come to terms with what he is. But in reality he has a darker reason...

Valentine is a fine example of the new fashion in vampire. He has hungers, as per the traditional specification, but he regrets what he has to do to (un)live, he has compassion for his victims and he despises those of his kind who enjoy their feeding without compassion. As the story develops, Valentine's concerns become ours, the characters orbiting round him and their actions holding our attention until the climax.

Somtow's narrative technique works very well and the tension mounts nicely. His descriptions of the horrors from AD 79 through the Holocaust to the present day are convincingly realistic. Occasionally, though, some of the images don't convey what they should, the confusing sequences of events fill the mind and obscure the point.

Anne Rice - - *THE WITCHING HOUR* (Penguin, 1992, 1207pp, £5.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

THE WITCHING HOUR is very long. It lacks the hallucinatory decadence of *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* or even the A.N. Roquelaure "Sleeping Beauty" erotica, and the basic story is held up by the vast "Mayfair File", an infodump itself twice the size of many novels. Yet this immense saga of observation and passion is readable and it's one hell of a credit to the author that she makes it so.

For 300 years the Mayfair family - from their origins in the form of a peasant woman in Scotland to their final expression as an interrelated clan in New Orleans - has produced witches. Rowan Mayfair, a surgeon with ESP abilities, is the final incarnation. Michael, the man she rescues from drowning who has since discovered his own psychic powers, unravels her family history. Central to the weird and unsettling chronicle of the Mayfairs is a demon/spirit/disembodied intelligence called Lasher, and their relationship is charted by an organisation called the Talamasca, a group of investigative scholars whose representatives have been linked to the Mayfairs for generations.

Is "Lasher" evil or merely seductive? What is the nature of his illusions? Exactly what is Michael's mission? The problem is that after 1200 pages (and if ever I read a cliff-hanger ending for a sequel it's the last few pages!) we're not really sure. But that apart, *THE WITCHING HOUR* is a mighty melodrama, a giant supernatural-family saga-soap, a whopping great soft-erotic fantasy which occasionally possesses real chills even if its hints at something major in the field of dark fantasy fail to materialise.

Mercedes Lackey - - *MAGIC'S PAWN* (ROC, 1992, 349pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

At times I wish someone would take the theme of this book - the lad least likely to succeed, who turns out to be the heir to the throne/the most powerful sorcerer/the only one who can save the world - I wish someone would take it and lay it quietly to rest, because we've surely had enough of it.

That said, Mercedes Lackey makes good use of the old favourite. She gains our sympathy for Vanyel, her protagonist, by the portrayal of truly appalling parents, and by placing him in an isolation built up through a combination of misunderstandings and deliberate cruelty. Neither he nor anyone else has any suspicion of his magical abilities until after the tragedy that shatters his life, and the rest of the book details his slow recovery and the acceptance of the responsibility his powers lay upon him.

MAGIC'S PAWN is the first of a trilogy, with the second and third volumes to follow shortly. The reader gathers that they will cover Vanyel's use of his powers

in his maturity. The present volume succeeds mainly because Vanyel has such a deeply personal stake in events; it remains to be seen whether the author can sustain this throughout the whole work.

I enjoyed *MAGIC'S PAWN*, though sometimes the intense emotionalism tips into sentimentality. It reminded me of Diane Duane, and partly of Anne McCaffrey. Fans of these writers should give it a go. Meanwhile, I'm waiting for the book about the lad least likely to succeed who is just as hopeless as everyone thinks he is - and still has a story worth telling.

David Hartwell (ed.) - - *THE DARK DESCENT III: A FABULOUS, FORMLESS DARKNESS* (Grafton, 1992, 704pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Colin Bird)

All the comments made in previous PI's concerning the first two volumes of this trilogy of anthologies still apply, so I won't reiterate them. This third installment, as the title suggests, refers to David Hartwell's "fantastic" category of horror fiction. The insightful introductions do a commendable job of justifying each story as a member of this category, although some entrants are surprising: Philip K. Dick's 'A Little Something For Us Temponauts' is pure SF and has no place here. The reader may be tempted to alter the editor's category to "ghost stories" since they predominate, particularly early examples from such writers as Dickens, de la Mare, Wharton and Turgenev. More modern efforts come from big brand names like King, Wolfe, Leiber and Disch.

Once again the best story is by Robert Aickman. 'The Hospice' starts out like a discarded plot for Rod Serling's *TWILIGHT ZONE* and develops into a delightfully uneasy read. The shorter stories work more satisfyingly for me because the restrictions require an economy of style which allows full rein to the imagination. This is exemplified by Dickens' 'The Signal-Man', a famous story recently adapted for television. Some of the longer stories have patches of turgid prose and flabby narrative.

I'm surprised at the absence of anything by M.R. James or Ramsey Campbell. The story from Stephen King (the Lovecraft pastiche 'Crouch End') is not representative of his output. Other stories that deserve a mention are Fritz Leiber's 'Smoke Ghost' and Shirley Jackson's 'The Beautiful Stranger'. All in all, plenty of good horror fiction but if you want variety you may be disappointed.

Simon Ings - - *HOT HEAD* (Grafton, 1992, 300pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

If "post-cyberpunk, post-modern, totally unique (sic)" science fiction is what you're after, you'd best get hold of this one as it's sure to be on the reading list for *Post-Cyberpunk 101*. Frankly, I could not make head nor tail of it.

It reads like a very long Interzone story: artificial intelligence, virtual reality, data implants - all the usual suspects rounded up, in fact, to form a list which will, in a year or so's time, date it as precisely as a Beatle haircut dates a 60s school photo.

It has, as all cyberpunk must have, an unknowable young heroine, who gets raped quite a lot. She's called Malise, and she's back on Earth after fighting the Moonwolf, a space AI gone bonkers. She's got wasted muscles, and illegal military hardware in her brain, and her 'skeleton' has been confiscated. And now she's got to save the world from some more rogue AIs, which are indestructible and heading homewards.

That's one strand of the novel, told in the traditional cyberstyle: cold, brutal, staccato, unengaging. Another strand deals with Malise's early life, in a Europe rebuilding itself from collapse. This Tarot-driven element of the narrative is much more readable, and humane. The whole book is very well-thought-out and well-informed, and its hard-science core is fascinating - albeit, to the uninitiated like me, somewhat incomprehensible. But for an Earth-vs-the-Artificial-Intelligences-from-Hell story, I prefer the

much more human-centred, less earnest style of Robert Reed's *BLACK MILK*.

Having said which, Simon Ings is obviously a good writer, and not merely the rising star of a fading sub-genre, and I suspect that *HOT HEAD* is a superior example of its kind. If you've kept up with cyberism, and can read a sentence containing four portmanteau-words without choking, you'll probably like it a lot.

Catherine Brophy - - *DARK PARADISE*
(Wolfhound Press (Dublin), 1991, 222pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Norman Beeswick)

Wolfhound Press receives financial assistance from the Arts Council in Dublin. Catherine Brophy spent time in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig (County Monaghan), and expresses gratitude to the authors of four books on psychology and child-birth. I suspect that her novel intends depths and subtleties that will not be apparent to the ordinary reader, but if that's you, I advise you not to worry one little bit.

What we have here is a nicely written science fantasy set on the planet Zintilla, where some of the inhabitants feel the very varied weather requires expensive outlay on protection. Wol the Coweler devises a crystal covering to roof in the major areas, within which inhabitants live a disciplined and rational existence, feeding off food capsules and moving around on 'floaters' so that legs are no longer needed. Bewal of Xemplox, the first Krister to be named Supreme, does away with natural reproduction, and genetically engineered (legless) babies are conceived in the Pool of Life. "Chaotic" emotion and imagination are forbidden and troublesome individuals are "levigated".

The Outlands are still populated by unreconstructed bipeds, who value physical labour and live in rapport with nature; under a treaty, the bipeds do useful work for those dwelling under the Coweling. In due course, genius youngsters condemned to "levigation" escape to the Outlands and try to forge an alliance with the bipeds to bring down the regime.

The story is therefore one in which individuals and then a whole society break out of or are expelled from the protection that has restricted them, into the 'chaotic' universe of possibility outside, including "star-vaulting". Indeed, the novel opens with Fender, the Supreme Krister, "star-vaulting" after being partly responsible for the collapse of his regime: it is unclear to me whether the subsequent paragraphs depicting a child in the womb getting ready to emerge relate to his experiences while "vaulting" or to the new society developing around him.

But I found that didn't matter very much, and doubtless cleverer people will advise me if it turns out to be important. Meanwhile, this is a pleasantly told tale on a familiar theme by a sensitive author whose future may be worth watching with at least half an eye.

Elizabeth Massie - - *SINEATER*
(Pan, 1992, 332pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by L J Hurst)

I feel sure that I've come across the idea of a sin eater (I'll write it as two words) before, but I do not have a dictionary of mythology to check. I know that the idea that sin is unique and transmissible, like a relay runner's baton, is an old one because it goes back to the Biblical scapegoat. Elizabeth Massie's sin eating has redeveloped in a fundamentalist church in the backwoods of West Virginia, where the communicants believe that a final meal placed on the body of a corpse which is then eaten by one man who is otherwise an outcast can take away the sin and allow the sin-free soul entry to Heaven. An alternate church has grown up in the same town, with some strange beliefs about blood. The followers of the two churches hate each other - like sin. Each one they declare is one or more parts of Satan.

The sin eater's job is not hereditary, but the ostracism associated with it (no one looks at or speaks to the sin eater, and he believes that they should not) means that his family does not find much social favour.

Avery Barker, the sin eater or the title, is the first to be married and his son Joel does not get much joy from the matter. Joel's friend, Burke, is staying with his aunt, who is a mainstay of the rival church, so Joel cannot trust Burke's friendship.

Something is in the air. A little girl has disappeared and Joel has never seen his father. Someone is planting bombs. There is much talk of evil. Before the book ends, Joel has decided to take his father's job.

And now for something completely different. *SINEATER* is a study, in fictional form, of the economic and social background to religious belief among a socially deprived group of whites in West Virginia, USA. Centered on the life of Joel Barker, it particularly indicts the lack of expenditure on education and roads, particularly Route 536.

In the end, that's what the horror of *SINEATER* is. Education is the answer to supernaturalism.

Peter Straub -- *HOUSES WITHOUT DOORS*. (Grafton, 1992, 448pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

This short story collection from Peter Straub is linked by a common theme, that of terror, specifically the terror that is experienced when you find yourself in a situation that there is no way out of. There are six stories, loosely knitted together by interludes, wrapped by a two part vignette and finished off with an author's note.

The stories themselves are explorations of entrapment of one sort or another, and, in a sort of auctorial in-joke, the first two relate peripherally to Straub's novel, *KOKO*. The characters in 'Blue Rose' and 'The Juniper Tree' are trapped by their childness. Straub doesn't write about children as convincingly as Stephen King, but the first person narrative of 'The Juniper Tree' guides us through the ambivalent feelings of the narrator to the events which befall him; while Harry, in 'Blue Rose' has a coldness in him which makes the things that he does seem natural to him.

In 'The Buffalo Hunter' and 'Mrs God' the protagonists are caught by their very different obsessions. 'Something About a Death, Something About a Fire' describes a man, forever cycling through an enigmatic performance, until he himself disappears and only the performance and its audience are left. 'A Short Guide to the City', is an unusual piece. Its format is that of a tour guide to an unnamed city, but as the guide progresses, we are given sly glimpses of its dark side.

Peter Straub is one of the most persuasive and literate of the current crop of horror writers, and these stories, which rely more on style than his novels, can only confirm this position. The plots may be sketchy in places and obscure in others, but they are all beautifully crafted, the writing and sheer professional polish more than making up for any deficiencies that may be found.

"The clarity he had experienced on first waking vanished into headache and other physical miseries."

The Buffalo Hunter"

Douglas Clegg -- *NEVERLAND*, (NEL, 1991, 373pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jon Wallace)

Gull Island wasn't really an island, but the peninsula was as separate from reality as if it was. For Beau and his sisters, Missie and Nonie, it was the old family place where they spent every August. For their cousin Sumter, it was the place where he had sold his soul to the devil.

Douglas Clegg sets his book firmly in America's Deep South, his characters are the old-fashioned sort of families that you would expect to populate this territory. I wonder if this is a flaw? Are these characters just stereotypes? I can't comment on this, but they worked for me.

10 year old Beau is a mixture of hard-nosed boy, willing to be led into everything, and intelligent hero, increasingly uneasy at the turns that events are taking. His older sisters are just as easily led as Beau, but are more willing to see the things that they take part in as games. And Sumter, of course, is wholly evil.

Clegg's atmospheric style builds tension beautifully, and he mixes the children's fantasies and realities well.

enough that we feel their attraction and revulsion. My one quibble is that it feels like it is set in the sixties, but hints throughout seem to suggest that the setting is much more recent.

This apart, the location, the events and the people are nicely stirred together to create a cocktail of suspense and horror that sets the teeth on edge.

Robert Silverberg - - VALENTINE PONTIFEX
(Pan Books, 1985, 367pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Cherith Baldry)

It might seem churlish for a confirmed fan of Majipoor to admit a slight disappointment with VALENTINE PONTIFEX, the third volume of the trilogy. Perhaps this is because Silverberg has raised this reader's expectations too high.

The Pontifex is the senior ruler of Majipoor, who traditionally lives isolated in the Labyrinth. Readers of LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE will know that Valentine felt a dread of succeeding to this position, and was determined to put off the day. So the very title of the third volume has an ominous ring.

VALENTINE PONTIFEX takes up this theme, and makes good use of the conflict between Valentine and his advisers, first over the succession, and then over his reluctance to behave like a Pontifex and retire to the Labyrinth. It is Valentine's active presence which saves Majipoor; his final retirement comes almost as an afterthought. We are left wondering what effect it had on him.

Yet the novel has the same wide sweep as its predecessors. The Metamorphs, the original inhabitants of Majipoor, are making another attempt to rebel and, despite Valentine's attempts at reconciliation, threaten the life of the planet with a series of pestilences and the introduction of new and horrific creatures. The situation is further complicated by a revolution among the metamorphs themselves, and the emergence of the sea dragons as intelligent and effectively godlike beings. Valentine refuses to look for violent solutions; he succeeds, at last - in a stunningly effective finale - without the loss of his integrity.

Anyone who has read the first two volumes will not be able to resist this one. Nor should they, for it is a very impressive book. But I still have a sneaking feeling that it could have been even better.

Robert Phillips - - THE OMNIBUS OF 20th CENTURY GHOST STORIES (Robinson, 1992, 313pp, £7.99)

(Reviewed by Maureen Speiler)

This book is not quite what it proclaims itself to be. A title which implies that it will range across the gamut of 20th Century ghost story writing does not belong to a book which, as its editor avows, is intended to exclude the professional ghost-story writers in favour of demonstrating that *other* writers also wrote ghost stories, implying that we will find exotic rarities. Or rather, as this cynical mind amended it, to prove that most writers produce at least one ghost story during their careers. In fact, several of Phillips' chosen authors are generally well-known as writers of the supernatural, not least Elizabeth Bowen, Edith Wharton and Henry James, and whilst he chooses James' deservedly little-known, and very turgid, 'The Jolly Corner', the other authors are represented by stories which are as much war-horses as the works by the professional supernaturalists he so easily disparages. And do we really need yet another airing for the excellent but much-anthologised 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) and 'Seaton's Aunt' (Walter de la Mare)?

To be fair, Phillips has included some more unfamiliar material, including excellent stories by people such as Louis Auchincloss, John Updike, Muriel Spark and Graham Greene but even so, several other stories have a sense of being included because they contain supernatural elements rather than because they are well-written stories in their own right. It would seem that in his haste to demonstrate that writers still tackle the supernatural, Phillips has overlooked the necessity for

craftsmanship as well. In the end, the volume seems to demonstrate that, whilst ghost stories survive in 20th Century literature, without the professional ghost-story writers to nurture them, they are likely to dwindle away, because too many modern writers do not understand that it takes more than a breath of the inexplicable to make a good ghost story.

William R. Forstchen - - RALLY CRY
(ROC, 1992, 412pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Mat Coward)

I can't remember when I last enjoyed an adventure story as much as I enjoyed RALLY CRY, the first volume of a trilogy with the overall title THE LOST REGIMENT. It is easily the best-written, best-plotted sf/f adventure I've read for years.

In 1865, the 35th Maine Regiment of the Union Army is transported into an alternate universe. The land it ends up in is similar to medieval Russia, and populated by humans whose ancestors have also unwillingly made the trip between worlds.

Fresh (or rather, knackered) from the fight to save the Union and abolish slavery, the Americans are shocked at the tyrannical serfdom of Rus, and bring to the historic power-struggle between Church and nobles dangerously alien ideas of equality and democracy. Then they discover who's really running the joint: the planet's monstrous natives, to whom humans are, literally, cattle.

In a rich, exciting and even thoughtful book, Forstchen only misses one trick: as the Yankees raise their own livestock in preparation for the Tugar siege, the irony of their dual status - as cattle and cattle-keepers - goes unnoticed by them and, apparently, by the author. But that apart - and a final edit, which would have removed a few ugly sentences and clumsy repetitions - it's difficult to see how RALLY CRY could be improved.

Robert Mason - - WEAPON
(Corgi, 1990, 367pp, £3.99/£0.75)

(Reviewed by Steve Grover)

Robert Mason's first book, CHICKENHAWK, was an autobiographical account of his experiences as a combat helicopter pilot in Vietnam. It was excellent. WEAPON, his first novel, draws heavily on the same material but is based upon current AI research, and particularly the philosophy of intelligence. Though 'obviously' sf, Corgi has not marketed it as such, which is why this review is two years late.

The book is set in 'present day' Costa Rica and Nicaragua, where the US Army is field-testing Solo, an extremely advanced robot warrior. Solo is man-shaped, bullet-proof, can 'see' the whole electromagnetic spectrum, and is indoctrinated with the Army's world-view. It is also capable of completely independent action, as it proves by 'deserting' during an exercise. The book tells the story of the Army's and the CIA's attempts to retrieve Solo, and makes quite a good thriller on that level, but Mason also interweaves discussion on the nature of awareness, friendship, love and life itself - and adds a little on Central American politics for good measure. There is a little too much "aren't peasants wonderful", though.

Of course, much suspension of disbelief is required, particularly in relation to the hardware. Solo's daily need for a recharge is dealt with at length, but the technology of its advanced batteries is glossed over. There is one reference to NASA's hard-suit technology and a few to Kevlar tendons and Teflon seals, but generally Solo's body is ignored in favour of its developing intelligence, sentience and emotions. This is well-handled, and only slightly overdone at the end, but the book doesn't really say anything very new about robotics and AI. As a thriller it left me vaguely dissatisfied, because of complications ignored and hints of technical deus ex machina. Overall, though, it was a much better than average read, and I advise you to get a copy while remaindered stocks last.

Hugh Cook - - THE WORSHIPPERS AND THE WAY
- CHRONICLES OF AN AGE OF DARKNESS: VOLUME 9
(Corgi, 1992, 380pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

Frequently, a large novel must be split, or a fictional scenario is so strong that it is capable of supporting several different novels. Sometimes an author is so lacking in imagination that it would be morally unjustified for him to try and kid his readers that he is able to invent a fresh setting for each book.

Guess where this one falls.

This series hinges on The Nexus, a fuzzy plot device that links several universes together under one civilisation. The Nexus has collapsed, cutting off the universes. As they have differing physical laws, Cook is able to mix SF and Sword & Sorcery in a soggy mess.

Asodo Hatch is a sort of purple Stallone figure currently training at the Nexus Combat College. He gets involved in an internal power struggle which develops into a general revolution, but I won't ruin your enjoyment by revealing who becomes the new emperor.

Instead, I'll warn you of the illusion tanks that take up half the novel, thanks to training sessions and competitions. They are VR shoot-em-downs that provide all the narrative tension of a phone book.

And the plotting! Although Hatch is a typical member of an average clan, Cook also has his brother and sister playing key roles in the destiny of the empire, soap style, although his sister's role is a passive one (she is only a girlie, after all).

Actually, it's very difficult to get a sense of scale here. Although Cook uses an excess of descriptive padding, he's merely repeating the same information over and over again, apparently working under the delusion that this is a complex novel and the reader will have trouble following it.

No, I'm afraid Lionel Fanthorpe used that technique to much greater effect. Hugh Cook isn't even funny.

Alan Dean Foster - - CYBER WAY (Orbit, 1992, 306pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Florida, the not-too-distant future. A powerful and wealthy art collector is found dead by unidentifiable means, with his latest acquisition - a Navaho sandpainting - destroyed. Detective Vernon Moody is sent to Arizona to work with a Navaho member of the local police force on tracking down anything significant about the sandpainting. When they run it through a sophisticated computer analysis, they inadvertently reactivate a link to a powerful alien intelligence. Unfortunately, they're not the only people to have discovered how to do this.

CYBER WAY is a kind of sanitised cyberpunk story including the essential elements of a computer "dimension", an unfamiliar "native" religious tradition, alien intelligences and futuristic cityscapes, but excluding the gritty squalor and violence of the source tradition. A professionally-crafted tale, as all of Foster's work is, it should provide a pleasant and harmless diversion for reasonably intelligent, reasonably uncritical readers.

Alan Dean Foster - - CAT-A-LYST (Orbit, 1992, 325pp, £4.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

If you want to read this book, rip the cover off first. (Not before buying it, you fool!) Both the back-cover blurb and the front-cover artwork give away the basic plot twist -- which you probably wouldn't otherwise guess until at least page 23.

Plot: assorted likeable-but-wacky and unlikeable-but-wacky characters use various cover stories to travel to Peru, seeking for Paititi, the legendary lost treasure city of the Incas. Which they duly find, but the treasure proves trivial beside an ancient alien instantaneous-

travel device, which apparently only operates when jumped on by a cat (both the hero and the villain take their cats with them into the jungle). The end of the line, in instantaneous-travel terms, turns out to be a parallel world inhabited by a breakaway group of Incas who left our timeline about 500 years ago. They are delighted to find the device on their world is still useable, and start planning to take over our world and exterminate the Spanish. Various humorous complications ensue, but (surprise me!) all ends well.

To me nearly all of Foster's SF novels read like novelisations of "family viewing" films in which the children are meant to take the action-adventure story seriously, and the adults are meant to be amused by the knowing asides, charmed by the fantastic elements, and generally made to feel superior for being able to see through what's going on. I don't enjoy this kind of close-to-parody humour, so I don't generally enjoy Foster's work (including this book), despite admiring its professional smoothness of style and structure. But don't let me put you off, if you like this kind of thing

Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean - - SIGNAL TO NOISE (Gollancz, 1992, £9.99)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

SIGNAL TO NOISE is a beautifully produced graphic novel, a mix of photorealism and abstraction reflected in the text, where a fairly straightforward narrative about a film director dying of cancer and the final film he is rehearsing in his head suddenly breaks down into half-coherent computer-generated speaking in tongues.

At first reading, I thought it thought-provoking but glossy and arty, the kind of thing that *would* be serialised in THE FACE, wouldn't it? On second reading, I began to discern the depth Jonathan Carroll claims in his introduction. It's a moving story about vision and approaching darkness. Is it the script which the Director has left behind which is his epitaph or his creation of it? "We are always living in the final days" reflects the Director's obsession with Apocalypse: approaching personal extinction his film is about the Millennium of 299AD; the universal transcendence which didn't, in the end, happen. What, in this representation is "signal" or "noise"; the act of meaningful communication? The moment on the hillside when the continuity of life is affirmed? The Director's decision to put down on paper what until then existed only in his head? The final reading of the script?

Apart from the awkwardly episodic structure of its early movements - straight multi-framed graphic-narrative breaking apart to larger chaotic visions - presumably imposed by its serialisation, the storytelling is superb: filmic both in linear and non-linear terms. For a cinematic non-literate like me, you can see how each frame relates to the whole yet how much expression McKean has put into the simplest sequences: hear Gaiman's use of dialogue and voice-over. It's good to see interior action translated so well into a medium which generally has been at its most noticable for exterior conflict.

Mark Morris - - STITCH (Corgi, 1992, 526pp, £4.99)

(Reviewed by Jim Steel)

This is the second novel from a young writer who is already making waves in British horror.

Most of the action takes place in the first week of a new term at Maybury University, mainly involving a fresh intake of first year students. Mature student Ian Raven arrives and is installed in the Halls of Residence, only to find himself drawn into an escalating web of evil centred around fourth year student Dan Lacher. Lacher has been possessed by a creature called Peregrine Stitch who uses him to recruit and brainwash students - and write hypnotic fiction which serves a similar purpose - in order to bring about an end which is never made entirely clear.

Stitch - through Lacher - makes use of several methods to achieve whatever it is he's ultimately after (Possession of souls? World domination?), though several seem to be intended for a purpose that Morris fails to develop. The kids recruited for Lacher's student

organisation and the readers of the short story do seem to have a function (though why does Stitch need to use both methods?), but there is no logical reason for the existence of Larry the Serial Killer - despite a genuine surprise when his true identity comes to light. Nor is there any purpose apparent behind the death of Francis Duffy, and the spread of the sexual plague makes for a great AIDS metaphor but is similarly redundant plotwise. Seems like Mark Morris got carried away when developing subplots and didn't leave himself enough room to tie them all together.

Although Morris's character interaction comes across as stilted, he has a superb ability to throw the reader into a person's thoughts and emotions, which results in some of the best writing in the novel. If the rest of STITCH was up to the calibre of Howard Duffy's grief at his mother's hospital bed or lecturer Jane Trent's reflections on her life, then STITCH would rank as one of the best novels of the year. And it's the diversions created for these two characters (amongst others) that go a long way to sabotaging the plot. Near misses such as STITCH are a damn sight more frustrating than the schlock that lesser writer turn out, but at least Morris has the excuse that he's new to the game and, given time, he should develop into a top rank writer.

Isaac Asimov, Charles C. Waugh, & Martin Greenberg (Eds.)
 - - THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION
 (Robinson, 1992, 535pp, £5.95)

(Reviewed by Terry Broome)

The cover misleadingly states that this volume is presented by Isaac Asimov, but there are no words of the late Doctor's here, his role as presenter being purely an editorial/marketing one.

The ten novellas and novelettes from the 1970s which comprise the book include several award-winners and some highly regarded classics. Roger Zelazny's 'Born With The Dead' being the most disappointing of them. A Nebula winner, it is a hollow tale of estrangement and betrayal, the science-fictional element marginal and intrusive. The other Nebula winner (Poul Anderson's 'The Queen of Air and Darkness') also took the Hugo award. Here, the natives of a planet attempt to conquer the human settlers by conuring up mythic archetypes. As with Bradbury's Martians, they sadly learn of emotional cross-transference when the humans get the better of them. The story can also, interestingly, be interpreted more pessimistically as Humanity's rejection of a Gaean delusion for a self-destructive egocentric one. A deserving award winner which still bears well.

Two other stories centre around myth or fairy tale. Donald Kingsbury's 'The Moon Goddess and the Son' is a refreshingly realistic portrayal of an abused working-class child's rise to divinity, while Joan Vinge's much-praised and unabashed romance 'Tin Soldier' has a novel twist in the area of sexual role models. Another role-reversal is cutely observed in Gordon Dickson's 'The Munster and the Maiden', about a Loch Ness beastie aiding a diver-in-distress. The ending, uncritically upbeat in the 1970s, now reads like an ironic epitaph to extinct species in the Green-marketed '90s.

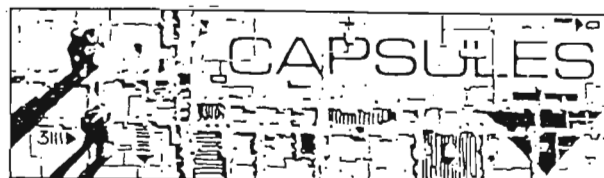
Realism is revisited in Frederick Pohl's effective humanity play, 'In the Problem Pit', although it never quite hits its peak. The remarkable thing is that it portrays men caring about men. John Varley's 'The Persistence of Vision', about a community of the deaf and blind who lead an almost utopian existence in a disintegrating and increasingly hostile world, suffers from a jarring, badly engineered ending.

The final three stories all rely on a gimmick to fuel them, to varying degrees of success. Norman Spinrad's 'Riding The Torch', whilst giving away the surprise too soon, is an effective exploration of the intersection between the arts, loneliness and decadence. Edward Weilen's 'Mouthpiece' and Larry Niven's Gil Hamilton tale, 'Arm' also let their respective cats out of their bags a little early. Weilen's story prefigures the Cyberpunk movement with its tale of an egomaniacal ghost-in-the-machine, while Niven's is a murder mystery in the Columbo or Sherlock Holmes vein, with an intriguing scientific jumping point and some social concern.

This is an excellent anthology of - admittedly - very familiar stories, but it is reasonably priced and a bargain for someone new to them.

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Piers Anthony - - QUESTION QUEST (N.E.L., 1992, 359pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

The 14th *XANTH* book, most of which is taken up by a resume of the previous 13. Fewer puns, but more panties. (Andy Sawyer)

Piers Anthony - - UNICORN POINT (N.E.L., 1992, 303pp, £4.99)

Sequel to *ROBOT ADEPT* and sixth in the *APPRENTICE ADEPT* series. Flach and Nepe, grandchildren to Stile and Blue Adept become embroiled in their power struggles to finally decide who will have ultimate control of the Frames. All ends well, 'nuff said. . . (Jan Malique)

Adam Ford - - THE CUCKOO PLANT (Mandarin Teens, 1991, 238pp, £3.50)

I am unaware of any previous SF or teenage novels by Adam Ford, so if this is a debut on both counts it's an accomplished one, producing a Wyndhamesque fable of alien incursion (though with benign intentions) told in the past-paced vernacular suited to teenage readers. A fireball is seen streaking around the world, and comes down in the Atlantic. When the fireball is salvaged no cargo - or passenger - is found. COULD this be connected with the strange slime found in a pond in Filkins Wood, the sudden abundance of wild flowers and the appearance of a doppelganger of the book's teenage hero? Recommended for youth libraries. (Jessica Yates)

Craig Shaw Gardner - - SCHEHERAZADE'S NIGHT OUT (Headline, 1992, 250pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

The conclusion of the *Arabian Nights* trilogy in which a mixture of stories-within-stories jumbles up what plot exists. If this "humorous fantasy" had any jokes or wit in it at any level above the plodding, it would be funny. (Andy Sawyer)

Simon Green - - BLUE MOON RISING (Gollancz, 1992, 448pp, £4.99)

Mass-market edition of the fantasy reviewed in PI 93. Green knows what the genre-fan wants and gives it and knows what the jaded hack aching for some subversion wants and gives it too. He's clearly read *GORMENGHAST* which makes him a Good Person and his jokes are all the better and funnier because he doesn't try to be an imitation of Pratchett. This guy will go far. Buy the book. (Andy Sawyer)

Katharine Kerr - - A TIME OF OMENS (HarperCollins, 1992, 355pp, £8.99 trade paperback)

This second in a new *Deverry* cycle doesn't follow from *A TIME OF EXILE* in quite the expected way and new readers

would find its time-shifts (not to mention incarnation-shifts) confusing. Nevertheless this is a worthwhile and vividly-crafted Celtic fantasy in the tradition of Katherine Kurtz's *Deryni* books. (Is that the right way round? No matter, the web's worth getting lost in for a while). (Andy Sawyer)

Robert Leeson - - **LANDING IN CLOUD VALLEY** (Mammoth, 1991, 144pp, £2.50); **FIRE ON THE CLOUD** (Mammoth, 1991, 159pp, £2.50)

An alien robot lands in Cloud Valley, and sets about observing humankind. It selects four young teenagers from different backgrounds and brings them together to study their interactions: upper-class Kate; slightly disabled Rachel, working-class Craig and Asian immigrant's son Ashok. They become unlikely friends, hides the robot and help it observe human nature. Simply and punchily told, to suit reluctant readers, it may help provoke them into wondering about class, race and gender in an SF context. There are two more episodes in the pipeline. (Jessica Yates)

Brian Lumley - - **BLOOD BROTHERS: Vampire World I** (Roc, 1992, 741pp, £5.99)

Lumley returns to the world of his *Necroscope* series: a notable line in grotesqueries but longwinded and pulpish, desperately lacking in any form of character and interest. (Andy Sawyer)

Diana Paxson - - **THE WIND CRYSTAL** (N.E.L., 1992, 308pp, £4.99)

Book 5 of the *Chronicles of Westria*, but readable without knowing the previous four. Julian, born a prince but brought up a stone-cutter, finds and masters the third of four elemental Jewels of Power in his continuing endeavour to reclaim the throne and defeat the wicked Blood Lord Caolin. A well-written and enjoyable read, if you don't mind a little mixed mythology and a villain whose name reminds me irrevocably of bone china. (Sue Thomason)

Christopher Pike - - **WITCH** (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 208pp, £3.99)

Christopher Pike is an increasingly popular writer of horror-thrillers for teenage girls. **WITCH** covers the story of Julia, a 17-year old with healing powers who foresees the death of her best friend's new boyfriend, in a weirdly unusual mixture of Sweet Valley High meets splatterpunk. With violent shootouts at liquor stores and bawdy repartee it's exactly the sort of stuff to cite next time someone goes on about those terrible Guy N. Smith and Shaun Hutson books these girls' *brothers* read. Lord forgive me, I enjoyed it despite the scam of having the first two chapters of the next novel bulk out the pagecount. (Andy Sawyer)

Stephen Thraves - - **CAVES OF FURY** (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, £5.99)

A *Battle Quest* fighting fantasy gamebook which comes in a plastic wallet with dice, strength cards and various items of equipment. No more tatty pieces of paper with cryptic notes to guide your playing - and yes, I did find it enjoyable to play even though I've so far never ended up anything more than dead! (Andy Sawyer)

Bill Wallerson - - **ATTACK OF THE DERANGED MUTANT KILLER MONSTER SNOW GOONS** (Warner Books, 1992, 127pp, £4.99)

Presumably sent for review because of Calvin's spaceman fantasies or the title, this is another of the "Calvin and Hobbs" collections: right up there with Garfield and Snoopy as snapshots of everyday philosophy, not to mention realistic pictures of kids. **THE HOUSE AT POOH CORNER** was never as anarchic! (Andy Sawyer)

F. Paul Wilson - - **THE KEEP** (N.E.L., 1992, 379pp, £4.99)

A horror-thriller which nods to the Lovecraft circle, though its tone is far from Lovecraftian. A German detachment in a remote Romanian stronghold awakens an age-old terror. The Commander struggles against the SS man, and a Jewish scholar has the knowledge which may save them: an interesting situation which enlivens a standard plot. (Andy Sawyer)

F. Paul Wilson - - **REPRISAL** (N.E.L., 1992, 323pp, £4.99)

In this sequel to **REBORN** the evil force we met in **THE KEEP** appears again corrupting the lives of a Jesuit priest and a university lecturer. Wilson cleverly manipulates the strands of this story with the two sides kept only unconsciously linked until the final confrontation. (Andy Sawyer)

Tim Wynne-Jones - - **VOICES** (N.E.L., 1992, 312pp, £4.99)

VOICES starts with a hole talking to a drunk - and then gets weird. . . By no means a conventional ghost- or horror-story, it skirts the fuzzy boundaries between haunting and breakdown as Alexis brings from the ruined castle of Fastyngange a clue to her confusion. A puzzler of a book - and not just because (fans of children's fantasy please note) it's by a Wynne Jones, there's a character called Howl, and it involves a castle! (Andy Sawyer)

"Upon the rack in print"

INTERZONE 50 - 61
(June/July 1992)

(Reviewed by Andy Mills)

Most fantasy writing leaves me somewhat cold, so when I saw the cover of *IZ 50*, and discovered that this was to be an issue devoted to fantasy, my expectations were not high. I'm delighted to say my reservations proved false. There is some excellent material in here.

Garry Kilworth more than makes up for his last story for the magazine (the disappointing 'Hamelin, Nebraska') with 'The Sculptor'. Nicholas Pisani, the thirteenth-century sculptor is - I think! - the hero of Kilworth's deceptively complex, anachronistic pot-pourri which also features an evil da Vinci and a Tower of Babel/Pisa. Kilworth's multi-layered story of revenge and purpose provides the reader with an interesting time in trying to spot the references. Juicy!

having said that this is a fantasy issue, Geoffrey A Landis's 'In the Land of Purple Flowers' is really a snail interpretation of faerie, ostensibly set in a fantasy world where a girl on a unicorn discovers an enchanted city. But all is not as it seems. This is a very entertaining reconsideration of some standard fantasy situations and characters. With 'The Unluckiest Thief' Brian Stablerford provides us with a short but intriguing cautionary tale - a robber steals a jewel from the eye of an evil god's statue but then receives his come-uppance. In 'The Dumpster' by Ken Wisman a strange midget bids for a condo's refuse collection contract. Quirky and undemanding, this is reminiscent of one of John Wyndham's lighter shorts. Finally on the fiction, Stephen Baxter's 'The Orchards of the Moon' is a creaking romp about an elf employed to investigate the weakening of magic by a human.

Stan Nicholls has three short author interviews in this month's issue. Unfortunately these are more superficial than we've come to expect. I may be wrong, but I suspect that this is less to do with their length and more because of Nicholls's unfamiliarity with the writers' work. For the record the authors in question are Robert Asprin (who believes one has to have practised humour in front of a live audience to be a good comic writer, a statement I consider questionable), Terry Brooks (who is candid about his motivation for writing - money) and Stephen Donaldson, certainly the most sympathetic of the three writers (contrast his "I don't write them for the money" with Brooks's sentiments).

The July *INTERZONE* leads off with BSFA award-winner Molly Brown's 'The Vengeance of Grandmother Wu'. This would have been well-suited to the June issue as it is an utterly delightful fantasy set, of all places, in Soho. Shades of Barry Hughart here as a grandmother's demon lover has to fight for her skeptical grandson. Another story with an oriental feel is 'Spring Rain' by John Meany, a moving and sensitive tale of loss, pride and compassion. A fine debut indeed. With 'Unstable Orbits in the Space of Lies' Greg Egan turns in a Watson-esque piece about a couple who are caught in the interstices of "belier" attractors following an event in 2018 termed "Meltdown" - not a reference to nuclear war but to when

Index of books reviewed

people became influenced telepathically by the beliefs of others. The couple are tramps who steer clear of the belief nodes in order to retain freedom of thought. Egan demonstrates that such freedom is illusory in this downbeat and restrained tale. Ian Lee's 'No Sense of Humour' is typically oddball and features a semi-autonomous robot arm transmitting the last thoughts of the cyborg it is attached to. Even odder is Stephen Blanchard's 'The Fat People', a story which centres on a thin bicycle courier and his fat neighbour, a parable perhaps of the symbiotic relationship as well as the gulf between rich and poor. Also odd is Mary A Turzillo's 'The Sheel', which eponymous creature lives in the sink and is terrorising Claudia. A good start, but eventually I was lost by the central character's motivation. Lawrence Watt-Evans 'Fragments' too does not quite come off, this being about the role of nostalgia in the lives of a post-civilisation America.

On the non-fiction there's another useful annotated bibliography, this time on Barry Malzberg (though at least a listing of his non-sf would not have gone amiss), an overview of Isaac Asimov's work which stresses his eclectic and prolific output, and an illuminating interview with the author of SOLDIERS OF PARADISE, Paul Park (who, interestingly, did not consider his first novel to be sf until an editor pointed it out).

And there we have it - two top-notch issues, just the job for taking into the garden for a Sunday afternoon read. Enjoy!

COLLISION COURSE

(Readers' letters)

(JOHN GRIEBIN writes regarding a review in PI 96II):

Jon Wallace asks whether Marcus Chown and I are happy about our publishers revealing the key twist in our novel REUNION on the cover. Do pigs fly? We are about as happy with this as Margaret Thatcher was with the result of the last Tory party leadership election. If anyone is thinking of reading REUNION on the strength of Jon's review, please read it before you look at the cover!

and finally . . .

(SHARON M. HALL replies to the comment made last issue upon her story 'The Birth of Sons', neatly bringing the ongoing discussion stemming from an INTERZONE review to a close. Together with this issue, Sharon's final paragraph so effectively sums up the kind of talking-point that I would have liked to leave you with on my "retirement" that all I can do is keep it with her. Thank you!!)

Well that's it then. Now that Cathie Gill has a name - "feminist" SF - for her pain, I guess she can relax. I would like to point out, however, that although 'The Birth of Sons' can perhaps be labelled "feminist" SF (in that it deals with what might be labelled a "feminist" theme) this does not mean that it is in any way typical or representative of "feminist" writing. I don't know what Cathie has read, but before she writes off feminist writing, can I suggest that she has a look at, for example, the 'Jane Saint' books by Josephine Saxton which are funny and fantastical as well as being "feminist". Or Marge Piercy's WOMAN AT THE EDGE OF TIME, or something by Joanna Ross, or Sue Thomas . . . or any of dozens of different women writers, writing different kinds of SF, who may find themselves lumped together under the label "feminist". All of these and many more can write the socks off Sharon Hall - and if Cathie dismisses them out of hand because of one disagreeable story then it will be her loss.

Like Cathie, I can only speak for myself, but this woman thought what SF was "about" was pushing the edge. About difference. About possibilities. Perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps it is about being agreeable. Perhaps what readers really want are fictions set in a Disney future of safe special effects. But I hope not.

ALDERMAN, G.	THE LAND BEYOND (Grafton)	p.7
ALDISS, B.	DRACULA UNBOUND (Grafton)	p.6
ALLCOCK, P.	IN SEARCH OF THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE (Phoenix)	p.9
ALLCOCK, P.	THE WILL OF DARGAN (Phoenix)	p.9
ANTHONY, P.	QUESTION QUEST (N.E.L.)	p.14
ANTHONY, P.	UNICORN POINT (N.E.L.)	p.14
ASIMOV, I./WAUGH, C./GREENBERG, M. (Eds.)	MAMMOTH BOOK OF FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION (Robinson)	p.14
BANKS, I.M.	USE OF WEAPONS (Orbit)	p.4
BROPHY, C.	DARK PARADISE (Wolthound Press)	p.11
CLEGG, D.	NEVERLAND (N.E.L.)	p.11
COOK, G.	SHADDOUS LINGER (Roc)	p.8
COOK, H.	THE WORSHIPPERS AND THE WAY (Corgi)	p.13
DAVID, P.	THE RIFT (Titan)	p.8
EVANS, C.	CHIMERA (Grafton)	p.5
FORD, A.	THE CUCKOO PLANT (Mandarin)	p.14
FORSTCHEN, W.R.	RALLY CRY (Roc)	p.12
FOSTER, A.D.	CAT-A-LYST (Orbit)	p.13
FOSTER, A.D.	CYBER WAY (Orbit)	p.13
FRIEDMAN, M.J.	FACES OF FEAR (Titan)	p.8
GAIMAN, N./MCKEAN, D.	SIGNAL TO NOISE (Gollancz)	p.13
GALLAGHER, S.	THE BOAT HOUSE (N.E.L.)	p.9
GARDNER, C.S.	A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA (Headline)	p.7
GARDNER, C.S.	SCHERERAZADE'S NIGHT OUT (Headline)	p.14
GENTLE, M.I.	THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE (Corgi)	p.5
GREEN, S.	BLUE MOON RISING (Gollancz)	p.14
GREENBERGER, R./FRIEDMAN, M.J./DAVID, P.	THE DISINHERITED (Titan)	p.8
HARTWELL, O. (Ed.)	DARK DESCENT III: A FABULOUS FORMLESS DARKNESS (Grafton)	p.10
HOLDSTOCK, R.	THE BONE FOREST (Grafton)	p.5
INGS, S.	HOTHEAD (Grafton)	p.10
JACOBSON, M.	GOLIRO (Penguin)	p.9
KERR, K.	A TIME OF WOMEN (HarperCollins)	p.14
LACKEY, M.	MAGIC'S PAWN (Roc)	p.10
LEESON, R.	FIRE ON THE CLOUD (Mammoth)	p.15
LEESON, R.	LANDING IN CLOUD VALLEY (Mammoth)	p.15
LE GUIN, U.	DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD (Paladin)	p.5
LUMLEY, B.	BLOOD BROTHERS (Roc)	p.15
MCCAY, B./FLOOD, E.	CHAIN OF COMMAND (Titan)	p.3
MANCOUR, T.L.	SPARTACUS (Titan)	p.3
MASON, R.	WEAPON (Corgi)	p.12
MASSIE, E.	SINEATER (Pan)	p.11
MITCHELL, V.E.	IMBALANCE (Titan)	p.8
MORRIS, M.	STITCH (Corgi)	p.13
NEWMAN, K.	BAD DREAMS (Grafton)	p.7
PAXON, D.	THE WIND CRYSTAL (N.E.L.)	p.15
PHILLIPS, R. (Ed.)	OMNIBUS OF 20th CENTURY GHOST STORIES (Robinson)	p.12
PIKE, C.	WITCH (Hodder & Stoughton)	p.15
RICE, A.	THE WITCHING HOUR (Penguin)	p.10
SHECKLEY, R.	IMMORTALITY INC. (Legend)	p.6
SILVERBERG, R.	PLUTO IN THE MORNING LIGHT (Grafton)	p.6
SILVERBERG, R.	VALENTINE PONTIFEX (Pan)	p.12
SOMTOW, S.P.	VAMPIRE JUNCTION (Gollancz)	p.9
STRAUB, P.	HOUSES WITHOUT DOORS (Grafton)	p.11
THRAVES, S.	CAVES OF FURY (Hodder & Stoughton)	p.15
VARGEMAN, R.E./PROCTOR, G.V.	SWORDS OF RAEMLLYN Book I (N.E.L.)	p.3
WALLERSON, B.	ATTACK OF THE DERANGED MUTANT MONSTER SNOW GOONS (Warner)	p.15
WILSON, F.P.	THE KEEP (N.E.L.)	p.15
WILSON, F.P.	REPRISAL (N.E.L.)	p.15
WYNNE-JONES, T.	VOICES (N.E.L.)	p.15



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