

INFERNO by LARRY NIVEN & JERRY POURNELLE: STAR: 1976: 192pp: 75p

After the remarkable success of "The Note in God's Eye", it was a lot to hope for that Niven & Pournelle could do as well a second time. They haven't - they've done far better. The story seems straightforward - famous SF writer Allen Carpenter falls out of a window at an SF convention and wakes up in Hell. Literally. His surroundings seem to tally in all accounts with the Inferno described by Dante Alighieri, and Carpenter wonders why anyone should go to such much trouble to create a facsimile of it. Gradually as he, and his guide Benito progress further into Hell (toward the only exit, Benito insists) it becomes obvious that the surroundings are no mere facsimile. Niven and Pournelle have faithfully taken the 'world' of Dante's "Inferno", changing it only to modernise it (there are so many new sins), and the journey of Carpenter and Benito re-enacts that of Dante and Virgil, with the exception that the latter were guests, and the former are prisoners. But "Inferno" is no mere copy of the earlier book - rather the authors have attempted to capture the same essence for a 20th century reader, and have succeeded admirably. Dante undoubtedly wrote greater literature, but today Niven and Pournelle have greater impact. This, for me, was the best book of 1976.

THE GRAIN KINGS by KEITH ROBERTS: PANTHER: 1966-75: 208pp: 65p

All of the stories in this collection are good and most of them have the disturbing and haunting power which distinguished "Pavane". Indeed one, "The White Boat", seems set on the same alternate world as "Pavane", whilst another, "Weihnachtsabend", evokes a similar atmosphere in a world where England and Germany came to terms and all Europe is now part of the Two Empires. The landscapes - square miles of cornfield, acres of snow, an alien canal system - seem to dominate the situations and the people. But one can never be sure that we are not being caught up by whirls of events or emotions into projecting them onto the surrounding. These stories are poignant, strange, sometimes wistful, powerful and well-written. Keith Roberts is a master of the short story. (Pa)

BROTHERS OF THE HEAD by BRIAN W ALDISS & IAN POLLOCK: PIERROT PUBLISHING: 1977:
119pp: £3-95

Brian Aldiss can always be relied upon to produce something new and different. More than any other science fiction author he has been concerned about exploring the form in every shape or size possible, producing such masterpieces of 'originality' as "Barefoot in the Head", "Report on Probability A" and "Malacia Tapestry". Now he has branched out in yet another direction with this first in a series (later volumes are promised from Ballard & Harrison) of large format, fully illustrated science fiction paperbacks. The idea of illustrations with a book is, of course, not new, but in "Brothers of the Head", Ian Pollock's illustrations serve a different function. Taking up about half the book, they are designed to complement rather than to supplement Brian Aldiss' story, and form an integral part of the book. The story itself is a remarkable one, of two brothers joined inseparably at the waist (and of the third 'dead' head attached to one) who become a sensation in the pop world, but are ultimately destroyed by their own savagery. Although the story is only about half the length of a standard novel, Aldiss has managed to build up the characters and setting so well that the bizarreness of the situation never intrudes damagingly. As for the illustrations, they certainly add an extra dimension to the book, and I think adequately prove the idea a workable one, but are at times in style rather more in opposition to the story than descriptive of it. Aldiss' brothers are 'both handsome young men' while Pollock's paintings are uniformly drab, the characters contorted and ugly. Despite that it is a fascinating book, and I look forward to the next in the series.

FLASH GORDON 4: THE TIME TRAP OF MING XIII by ALEX RAYMOND & CON STEFFANSON: STAR:
1977?: 160pp: 60p

This farrago of impossible escapes, ludicrously inefficient baddies and totally implausible monsters, not to mention a hero and heroine verging on the moronic, is so absurdly and unabashedly bad that it aroused a certain nostalgic, trancelike enjoyment - but a comic really ought to have more pictures. (RM)

TRITON by SAMUEL R DELANY: CORGI: 1976: 369pp: 85p

For years Delany was said to be working on a 'large novel' and when, finally, "Dhalgren" appeared it caused a worldwide reaction in fandom as the violent pro- and anti-camps formed and fought. That vast and complex work seemed an adequate explanation for so many years' work. Then, before the reverberations died away, another book from Delany appeared almost unannounced - "Triton", a book which has been almost ignored in the wake of "Dhalgren", but which is arguably much better. On the surface, the book is straightforward SF. Several of the planets and moons in the Solar System have been colonised and are now splitting into two factions - the Inner Worlds and the Outer Satellites - which are on the brink of war. One of the colonists on Triton, Bron Hellstrom, becomes idly involved in the conflict, both as a tourist on Earth, and later back on Triton after war breaks out. As with many of Delany's books however, the plot is not paramount. "Triton" is centred on Bron Hellstrom, and the whole sequence of events is seen as it affects him, rather than from an objective viewpoint. Delany builds Bron into an almost too believable non-hero until the reader cannot doubt his vacillating existence. Around him are dotted sparkling Delany people with revolutionary Delany notions in a sharp, bizarre landscape. This is probably Delany's best novel - it is certainly his most fascinating.

OX by PIERS ANTHONY: CORGI: 1976: 256pp: 85p

After a somewhat disappointing second volume in "Orn", Piers Anthony has managed in "OX" to regain, if not excel, the dizzy heights of originality and entertainment that so characterised "Omnivore", the first in the series. Following their capture on Paleo, Veg, Cal, Aquilon and the two surviving mantas are being returned to Earth when the aperture generator dislocates and they find themselves on a strange world populated by fierce machines and curious animate patterns of dots. Soon separated by these forces, they, and Tamme the Earth-agent who follows them, weave an almost stately dance through the alternate worlds via a set of linked 'gateways', finding more and more bizarre worlds, as well as duplicate Vegs, Cals, Aquilons and Tammes. Meanwhile, watching it all is OX, the pattern entity who reproduces by the laws of the mathematical game "Life". Mr Anthony has produced here a stunning feat which reestablishes him as one of the most remarkable SF writers around.

THE DEEP by JOHN CROWLEY: NEL: 1975: 180pp: 85p

Most authors tend to need two or three novels published to find their feet, and then start producing the good stuff with their fourth or fifth. Occasionally, though, there appears a novelist who can circumvent that apprenticeship, starting off with a brilliant first novel - John Crowley is one of these. For "The Deep" he has created a very unusual (unnamed) world ruled by The Protectorate, a feudal kingdom comprised of two families, the Red and the Black, continually at war. On the sidelines are the Greys, the learned, the lawmakers, and skulking behind every shadow are the Just, armed with Guns and a sacred mission of occasional assassination. Into this melee comes a Visitor, one who is almost but not quite human - one who claims kinship with Leviathan, the monster that lives in the Deep that surrounds the Pillar on which the world stands. Crowley very skillfully developed the parallel themes of the warring Protectorate and the mysterious stranger, to a very startling conclusion, making this one of the more original and compelling SF novels of recent years.

DR. BLOODMONEY by PHILIP K DICK: ARROW: 1965: 290pp: 80p

In a post-holocaust world, the scattered remnants of humanity are held together by the lone astronaut Dangerfield, forever orbiting Earth and keeping the isolated groups in touch via his radio. In the San Francisco area, however, a small group of individuals are vying for supremacy amongst themselves and with Dangerfield. There is the eponymous Bluthgeld, who believes he started the war, the phocomelus (a child born without limbs) Hoppy, with a talent for precognition and mechanical gadgetry, and Bill Keller, who was born and has lived all his life in his sister's abdomen. Bizarre as always with Dick, but very enjoyable.

NO DIRECTION HOME by NORMAN SPINRAD: FONTANA: 1969-74: 190pp: 75p

Sadly Norman Spinrad is one of the least prolific of the top modern SF authors. With only a handful of novels published and a marvellous collection of short stories long unavailable, the Spinrad addict is very liable to die of starvation. But here is good news at last for those as hooked as I - a second collection of eleven stories from the last eight years. The best of the collection must be the Nebula Award Nominee "A Thing of Beauty", about a sadly declined America where Japanese tourists come to buy souvenirs, like the Yankee Stadium. In the same fallen US is "The Lost Continent", a rather bitter look back at today from a time when the advantages don't seem so great. Then there is the classically tragic "Heroes Die But Once" about a pair of non-heroes who don't, the sardonic "The National Pastime" about an extrapolation of American football, and seven other gems to amuse, instruct, or inspire. Roll on the third collection!

APPROACHING OBLIVION by HARLAN ELLISON: PAN: 1962-74: 164pp: 60p

The second-best collection of Ellison stories (nothing has beaten "Deathbird Stories" yet) at last available over here. As always with Ellison, the stories range from the hilarious to the horrific. The best for humour must be "I'm Looking for Kadak", about a blue, eleven-armed, alien Jew called Evisse trying desperately to find a tenth Jew so they can recite the kaddish for their shortly-to-be-destroyed planet (the tale even has a built-in Yiddish glossary!). At the other end of the spectrum is "Knox", one of the bleakest stories inspired, if only indirectly, by the Vietnam experience. This collection contains all of Ellison's short fiction from 1970-74 and is an excellent testimony to a remarkable author.

A MARTIAN ODYSSEY by STANLEY G WEINBAUM: SPHERE: 1934-37: 316pp: 95p

Every genre has its quota of brilliant exponents who died young but left a permanent imprint behind. In SF the most tragic case must have been Stanley Weinbaum, who was born in 1900, published his first SF story in 1934 and died at the end of 1935, having ensured himself immortality with only 12 stories (another dozen and a couple of novels followed posthumously). This book (originally called "The Best of Stanley G Weinbaum") shows clearly the effect he must have had. The title story (his first) introduced the most amusing aliens the genre had seen - particularly Tweel, the nose-diving 'freak ostrich' - followed by one of the most lovable absent-minded professors in "The Worlds of If" and an unusual Venus ecology in "Parasite Planet". Despite their age, and the many more recent stories that have borrowed from them, the contents of this collection still make marvellous reading.

THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE by J.G. BALLARD: PENGUIN: 1956-62: 211pp: 55p

Eight of Ballard's early stories again in print. (This collection is slightly different from the previous Penguin book of the same title - "Prima Belladonna" and "Studio 5, the Stars" having been replaced by "Thirteen to Centaurus" and "The Overloaded Man"). The best, and best known, is undoubtedly the short "Garden of Time", the sad tale of an enclave of peace held apart in time by the power of its flowers, now almost all dead. Rather more sinister is the bizarre "The Watch-Towers" of a future where large grey watch-towers hang suspended from the sky every few hundred yards, passively watching the scurrying humans beneath their gaze. This remains one of the better of Ballard's early collections and perhaps will spur other publishers to reissue the others.

MAXWELL'S DEMON by MARTIN SHERWOOD: NEL: 1976: 160pp: 75p

When John Maxwell simply would not wake up, he was taken to a special centre for research into states of unconsciousness. Maxwell's arrival acts as a trigger on the other patients, and by the time Tim Wagner, a young doctor at the centre, and Andrew Graham, his boss, work out what is happening, a nightmare situation has already developed. Martin Sherwood's second novel shows that the skills of characterisation and good plotting still need to be developed, but the ideas propounded are interesting and unusual, and the conclusion satisfyingly logical. (Pa)

INHERIT THE STARS by JAMES P HOGAN: BALLANTINE/FUTURA: 1977: 216pp: 70p

As a first novel, "Inherit the Stars" is surprisingly good. A spacesuited body is found on the Moon. Unfortunately for the scientific establishment, exhaustive tests prove it to be of human origin - and 50,000 years old! In showing how the puzzle of 'Charlie' is tackled, James Hogan is very convincing, and if the careful storytelling is very reminiscent of "Rendezvous with Rama", it is none the worse for that. Despite one half-developed plot element and a solution which Hogan's scientists see 50 pages after the reader does, this novel is strongly recommended to aficionados of 'hard' SF. (Pa)

GARGANTUA by ANTHONY COBURN: FUTURA: 1977: 394pp: £1-25

When Europe first establishes footholds in space it soon discovers the truth about the nuclear disarmament promises the Americans and Russians made, and, using its position of moral superiority, begins to exert unwelcome pressure on the two super-powers. So, when a gigantic meteor (over 100 miles across) is detected heading for Earth, and seems likely to impact on Europe, not all factions are keen to avert the disaster. It is up to Otis Buckley and his rather outdated spacecraft to win through the intrigue and missiles of the other powers to try to destroy this Gargantua before he 'feasts' on the world. At times the characterisation is a little weak, but apart for that the book is one of the best space thrillers around, with the tension kept nail-bitingly taut to the very last page. Unfortunately the author died earlier this year - there should have been sequels.

JOSHUA SON OF NONE by NANCY FREEDMAN: PANTHER: 1973: 235pp: 75p

"JFK is dead: Long Live JFK!" On that fateful day in November 1963 in Dallas, the attending doctor, Bitterbaum, preserved some blood cells and determined to try to clone his idol, the late President. Carefully selecting the man to act as father, Bitterbaum watches through the slow growth of the foetus from the cells, the birth and then the careful education of Joshua Francis Kellogg towards his 'destiny'. The book has been immaculately plotted and Ms. Freedman lays out with care the steps taken to duplicate the late President's upbringing and environment, so painstakingly that it almost becomes plausible. Only the ending, where I feel she made the wrong choice, is disappointing in this very clever book.

STAR WARS by GEORGE LUCAS: SPHERE: 1976: 220pp: 95p

It seems likely that this book will be a good souvenir of the film - not least because of sixteen pages of colour stills. However, with the Rebellion having won a battle, but not the war; with Luke and the princess only just becoming acquainted and lots of mysteries left to solve, the reader (like the viewer?) is left tantalised, waiting for more stories "From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker". (Pa)

THE LOST TRAVELLER by STEVE WILSON: PAN: 1976: 245pp: 70p

Subtitled "A Motorcycle Grail Quest Epic and Science Fiction Western", this book is rather more the latter description than the former. In a post-holocaust world a group of motorcyclists are sent across the 'Badlands' to kidnap a professor of technology. There's the traditional snippet of gratuitous sex, rather more gratuitous violence, and a lot of boring motorcycle chat and trite philosophy. It tries to be a cross between "Damnation Alley" and "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance", and fails miserably.

LIEUT GULLIVER JONES: HIS VACATION by EDWIN LESTER ARNOLD: NEL: 1905: 206pp: 90p

"Lieut Gulliver Jones" has long been a well-known, but unavailable, classic of Mars adventures, particularly as a probable source work for much of Burrough's background in the 'John Carter' series. For that reason, if no other, it is good to see the book brought back into print. It does have some intrinsic interest as well - Arnold's view of the decadent Mars is a very entertaining one - but the characterisation is poor and the plot trivial. In the end, the reader is only to glad to relieve his boredom by finishing the book.

THE BEST OF BRITISH SF 1 ed MIKE ASHLEY: ORBIT: 1895-1970: 411pp: 95p
THE BEST OF BRITISH SF 2 ed MIKE ASHLEY: ORBIT: 1958-1974: 378pp: 95p

With the original SF short story market at such a low ebb in this country, it is reassuring to be reminded that this hasn't always been the case, and that for years the British SF story ranked at least with, if not above, its American contemporaries. In these 800 pages Mike Ashley has collected a remarkable homage to the British SF short, with 32 stories from 29 authors ranging from H.G. Wells to Keith Roberts. In most cases the stories have been selected, and commented on, by the authors concerned, which has produced a number of little-known gems such as Brian Aldiss' "Manuscript Found in a Police State" - about the amazing prison mountain of Kherbar - or John Brunner's "The Totally Rich" - an unsettling story about the hidden elite for whom money really is no object. Others are more standard, e.g. H.G. Wells' "The Star" or James White's "The Tableau", though still classics of their period. Obviously a lot of work and thought has gone into these collections to a very commendable result. If there were an award for Best Anthologist I would certainly give it to Mike Ashley.

DEEP SPACE ed ROBERT SILVERBERG: CORGI: 1944-68: 172pp: 70p

Robert Silverberg is one of those rare men - one who is as good at selecting stories by other writers as he is at writing his own. His anthologies always promise an above-average collection of classics and less familiar masterpieces, and this is no exception. In the former category we find "Far Centaurus" by A.E. Van Vogt, a rip-roaring adventure of the first trip to Centaurus (and back), and, completely different, Terry Carr's poignant "The Dance of the Changer and the Three", a study of a very alien race. Lesser known, but just as good, are Chad Oliver's "Blood's a Rover", with a new slant on UFOlogy, or Silverberg's own "The Sixth Palace", a delightful gamepiece. The remaining stories by Vance, Ellison, Knight and Dickson all maintain this high standard to fill out a very enjoyable book.

THREADS OF TIME ed ROBERT SILVERBERG: FONTANA: 1974: 207pp: 75p

One of the better collections of three original novellas that became such a popular form a few years back. The weakest of the three is the title story by Gregory Benford, linking the Bigfoot of North America with a crashed alien spacecraft on the moon. Simak provides a very Simakian tale called "The Marathon Photograph" about a curious set of recluses in the Michigan hills and the photograph one has that seems to have been taken at the Battle of Marathon. Best of all, though, is certainly Norman Spinrad's "Riding the Torch", a panoramic vista of an emigrating armada from a dying Earth searching the Universe desperately for a new home, while rapidly ceasing to need one.

ALIENS ed BEN BOVA: ORBIT: 1945-61: 156pp: 70p

EXILES ed BEN BOVA: ORBIT: 1949-59: 159pp: 70p

Apparently these are the first two in a new series of anthologies edited by Bova and published by Orbit, each of which will contain three novellas. The first contains Murray Leinster's "First Contact", Simak's "The Big Front Yard" and Clarke's "Meeting with Medusa", each too well known to need introduction - or reprinting. The second has a poor short story by Poul Anderson ("Gypsy"), Russell's classic "And Then There Were None" and Asimov's "Profession" - about a sane man in an insane world, or possibly vice versa. Each volume has a brief phatic introduction by Bova, and while bemoaning the lack of reprint market for novellas seem to have been made as short as possible for the price, and to have deliberately ignored the novellas that really need reprinting (like Harness' "Ornament to His Profession").

THE 6TH MAYFLOWER BOOK OF BLACK MAGIC STORIES ed MICHEL PARRY: MAYFLOWER: 174pp: 1932-76: 60p

The usual mixture of good and bad. A couple of superb and humorous classics - "Compliment of the Author" by Lewis Padgett and "Thus I Refute Beelzy" by John Collier - two clever, original tales - "Someone is Watching" by Steven Utley and "The Seductress" by Ramsey Campbell - and six other rather run-of-the-mill offerings. It could be worse.

DERYNI RISING by KATHERINE KURTZ: BALLANTINE/FUTURA: 1970: 271pp: 85p
DERYNI CHECKMATE by KATHERINE KURTZ: BALLANTINE/FUTURA: 1972: 302pp: 85p
HIGH DERYNI by KATHERINE KURTZ: BALLANTINE/FUTURA: 1973: 369pp: 85p

These books have enjoyed strong support as well as substantial attack for several years. The appeal is to imaginations starved for wonder. The Land of the Elven Kingdoms has its history, its geography, its peoples and its problems all far enough removed to be different, all near enough to evoke simple emotional responses. For some readers the substantial presence of Deryni 'magic' (sometimes standard paranormal powers; sometimes 'genuine' magic) is recommendation enough. It seems fair to say that anyone who does not like the first book, where the plotting and characterisation are both fairly convincing, will dislike the other two. All of them, but especially the third, are open to charges of superficiality, unnecessary tear-jerking and banality. Indeed the plotting of "High Deryni" suggests that Katherine Kurtz was desperate for an ending - any ending. But the books do have considerable emotional appeal, and, having fallen in love with Duke Alaric, I would like to have much more about him. (Pa)

THE ANOME by JACK VANCE: CORONET: 1971: 206pp: 75p
THE BRAVE FREE MEN by JACK VANCE: CORONET: 1972: 224pp: 75p
THE ASUTRA by JACK VANCE: CORONET: 1973: 187pp: 75p

The land of Durdane consists of obstinately independent cantons, under a central dictatorship more successfully ruthless, absolute and arbitrary than any in the boring annals of Earth. The cantons exhibit a riotous diversity of culture and custom (severally bordering on and collectively exemplifying the insane), whilst the dictatorship is exercised by one anonymous citizen, the Anome, plus a staff of two. This eccentric system is rendered tolerable by peculiar and all-pervasive cultural pre-occupations. At the beginning of the series this piquant regime has been working admirably for centuries. But now the curious lethargy of the current Anome over the Rugushkoi incursions inspires Ifness, a licensed meddler from Earth, to manoeuvre Etwane, a naturally rebellious musician, into virtually destroying the system. Book 1 ends with Etwane, overcome by poetic justice, the new Anome and the next two books have slight story interest. The plot is little more than a vehicle for the setting, as in some especially fine descriptions of the country's capital, built largely of coloured glass (colour is very important) and with much more exuberance than taste. "The Anome", at least, is highly entertaining, if lightweight, reading. (RM)

INTERFACE by MARK ADLARD: ORBIT: 1971: 191pp: 75p
VOLTEFACE by MARK ADLARD: ORBIT: 1972: 210pp: 75p
MULTIFACE by MARK ADLARD: ORBIT: 1975: 184pp: 75p

What would life be like if it were all leisure? Adlard's vision of Tcity where citizens drift from amusement to amusement and back to their 'cells' in the 'beeblocks', never seeing or caring about the outside world is his answer. He also shows that most SF written is based on all sorts of assumptions originating in the South and that those of the North East provide an interesting alternative. Tcity is 'ruled' by the Executives, a very small, very intelligent, very privileged elite and all three books feature one of them, Jan Caspol, to a greater or lesser degree adding an exotic element. The story, such as it is, is more or less continuous, especially in the second and third books; but the plot is slight, trite and has more ends loose than tied off. Unfortunately these ends include several major sub-plots begun and never continued, e.g. the return of artistic originality seems the most exciting potential at the end of "Interface" and is then never even mentioned again. The characters are given a similarly cavalier treatment. Adlard's feeling for his background is admirable, but it needs more than this excuse for a story. (Pa)

PERRY RHODAN 28: THE PLAGUE OF OBLIVION by CLARK DARLTON: ORBIT: 1954?: 126pp: 65p

These further adventures of Pucky the Intrepid Hamster (also known as "The Vagabond Leaper") and his Chinese cronies provide further evidence that the series should really be called Perry Rodent.

THE STORM LORD by TANITH LEE: ORBIT: 1976:35Opp: 95p

Despite its length and complexity this heroic fantasy is sparing in its use of the traditional devices of the genre, relying on determination rather than swashbuckling, intrigue rather than sorcery. Raldnor, last conceived son and therefore true heir of the overlord of the Vis continent, is born in obscurity, totally ignorant of his birthright. The external action takes us from his gradual and beautifully inevitable discovery of the situation to the ultimate overthrow of his usurper half-brother, but equally important is his internal struggle to realise his maternal inheritance, the gift of telepathy. Between and behind these main strands lies a meticulously organised system of sub-plots which give the novel an impressive weight and momentum. The characters are well rounded and convincing, especially the splendidly Machiavellian villainess Val Mala, and Tanith Lee's writing is as ever strong and vivid. Her touch is equally sure whether describing the dour resistance of a subjugated race or conjuring up the lush splendour and intrinsic cruelty of sophisticated barbarism. It is a pity that the ending is rather an anticlimax so that one is left wondering whether all this expenditure of talent was really worthwhile. (RM)

DEMON SEED by DEAN R KOONTZ: CORGI: 1973: 182pp: 70p

Dean R Koontz is one of those authors who has written very little - but that little, though not well-known, is very good. "Demon Seed" is one of his better novels. A new style computer, "Proteus", is given a supply of 'amorphous alloys' with which he can expand himself. Unknown to those who watch him, however, Proteus uses them to take over the house computer belonging to Susan Abramson, a young woman living as a virtual recluse nearby. Once in control, Proteus tells a horrified Susan that he wants to propagate himself in flesh, and that she will be the mother. The plot is farfetched, and some points (like Proteus' desire to see Susan naked) seem ridiculous at first, but the whole is written together into a very enjoyable book.

THE SPACE VAMPIRES by COLIN WILSON: PANTHER: 1976: 214pp: 75p

This book is not, as its title might indicate, a blending of the traditions of Stableford and Stoker. Indeed the almost naive plethora of SF elements - from alien spaceships to telepathy and psychic force field counters - seems little more than incidental to the story, and even the vampirism is not primarily of the Transylvanian variety. Instead, under a fast moving thriller plotline, we find Colin Wilson pursuing two of his long-term interests - criminality and the odder manifestations of human sexuality. Thus whilst the story is quite gripping in itself, interest centres on Wilson's theories and the intriguing and well-researched background material which fleashes them out (notably the sinister Count Magnus, festering in seventeenth century Sweden). The style is that of the competent journalist, out to make something nasty seem very plausible, and succeeding. (RM)

BROWTOMEK! by MICHAEL CONEY: PAN: 223pp: 1976: 60p

A sequel to end all sequels. Coney has borrowed his heroine Susanna Lincoln from "Charisma", his villain Hetherington and the amorphs from "Mirror Image", the world from "Syzygy", Ralph Strong from "Beneath Still Waters", the Brontomechs from "Esmeralda" and probably a few more I haven't spotted, and combined them all into a very competent, if a little confusing, book. Basically, Hetherington has bought the planet Arcadia for his own nefarious purposes and employs Ralph Strong for a publicity stunt. Involved with both is the hero Kevin Moncrieff who tries to tread the narrow path between acceptance of the Organisation and the colonists' over-fanatical rejection. One of Coney's better books.

SKYFALL by HARRY HARRISON: CORGI: 1976: 270pp: 85p

Solar power is at last within man's reach. The first of a series of orbiting relay stations, the 'Prometheus', is launched as a joint Soviet-American project. Disaster strikes when one stage fails to separate properly and falls in the wrong orbit - right on to a busy new town in Britain. Even worse, the main module, at 2000 tonnes the largest ever launched, is also put into a decaying orbit. Frantically both countries try to avert a major disaster - taking care not to jeopardise their own security, of course. A very competent novel certainly - but by its blatant scaremongering it has probably driven another nail into the coffin of spaceflight.

A WORLD OUT OF TIME by LARRY NIVEN: ORBIT: 1976: 246pp: 85p

A rather disappointing novel from Larry Niven. It starts off with the short story "Rammer" about Jerome Branch Corbell (sic) who is woken from suspended animation in the 22nd century and told to go exploring in a spacecraft. Instead he steals the ship, nips around the galactic core and ends up on Earth millions of years in the future. There among the amazingly humanlike natives he finds another relatively close contemporary of his who also happened to nip around the galactic core and back. All great fun, but rather as in "Ringworld" Niven has opened up dazzling possibilities and then ignored them.

THE MERCENARY by JERRY POURNELLE: ORBIT: 1977: 223pp: 85p

A novelisation of three Analog stories ("Peace With Honour", "The Mercenary", and "Sword and Sceptre") about John Falkenberg, the brilliant CoDominium Navy officer who is cashiered and becomes a mercenary. The first story sets the background of political machinations behind the Navy and Falkenberg. The second demonstrates Falkenberg in action on behalf of the CoDominium, and the third is his hour of glory as he wins land for his men to settle on. It is a very competent, but very bloody and militaristic novel - if you liked "Starship Troopers" you'll probably enjoy it. It is also amusingly billed by Pournelle as telling the events that preceded "The Mote in God's Eye" which, considering the millenium between them is like regarding a history of the Norman Conquest as the events that preceded the First World War.

TC OPEN THE SKY by ROBERT SILVERBERG: SPHERE: 1967: 203pp: 85p

Another good novel from Silverberg's best period. This is a relatively lightweight story built of five linked novelettes tracing the development of two religious movements - the Vorsters, worshippers of the atom, and the heretical sect split from them, the Harmonists - both founded by the dreamer Vorst, and both dedicated to developing viable interstellar travel for mankind. Silverberg neatly draws the interplay and reaction of the two opposing factions on Earth and Venus, to a very satisfying, if not unexpected, ending. This is by no means one of his best novels, but it's a very enjoyable one.

SEED OF LIGHT by EDMUND COOPER: CORONET: 1959: 158pp: 75p

"Seed of Light" was Edmund Cooper's second novel and has, surprisingly, been unavailable since the Panther edition seventeen years ago. In a ravaged post-nuclear world humanity is struggling to survive inside airtight domes. In Europe a small group is building a starship to launch a colony to preserve mankind's heritage off the Earth in case they fail on it. Much of the book is dated, but the resolution is still brilliantly turned, and the moral as relevant as ever. One of Mr Cooper's better books,

ALL FOOLS DAY by EDMUND COOPER: CORONET: 1966: 192pp: 75p

WHO NEEDS MEN? by EDMUND COOPER: CORONET: 1972: 192pp: 75p

Another reissue of two of Cooper's novels. "All Fools Day" is a very clever and dismal story of the near future (now technically the near past) when an increase in Solar Radiation destroys most of the Normal people in the world. "Who Needs Men?" on the other hand is Cooper's response to Women's Lib, a story of a future where women reproduce parthenogenetically and men are becoming obsolete - the story is more enjoyable than the moral.

Q: THROUGH THE EYE OF TIME by TREVOR HOYLE: PANTHER: 1977: 173pp: 60p

The sententious nonsense of the prologue is succeeded by an anxious parade of cosmological terms and theories inadequately understood and incompetently presented. Despite the slight relief afforded by the cheap crude humour of interspersed passages from the fictional diary of Hitler's quack physician, the book remains a total disaster. (RM)

KAMPUS by JAMES E GUNN: BANTAM/CORGI: 1977: 308pp: 75p

A polemical novel to show the American youth of today where Student Power could lead. Sadly in this book Gunn has abandoned his usual entertaining style and strives too hard to prove his point.

TYRANOPOLIS by A.E. VAN VOGT: SPHERE: 1973: 172pp: 85p

This novel (originally "Future Glitter") is one of Van Vogt's more unusual recent offerings. Several years ago he wrote a long mainstream novel about brain-washing in Red China, in which the hero spends most of the book arguing ideologies with the Communists. In this new novel he seems to have decided to reach a wider audience and, as he explains in his introduction, has based the dictator on Stalin, much of the background on Mao's China and borrowed several of the scientists from Solzhenitsyn's "First Circle". Around this basic core of intellectual argument Van Vogt has woven a very bizarre story about a Professor Higenroth and a new form of communication that acts regardless of media, distance, time or anything. Distinctly odd, but with a peculiar quality that makes it quite interesting.

EARTH'S LAST FORTRESS by A.E. VAN VOGT: SPHERE: 1959: 173pp: 85p

Two fairly early Van Vogt short novels available in British paperback for the first time. "Earth's Last Fortress" (= "Masters of Time") is about a strange recruiting station on Earth which is recruiting men for a battle in the far future over the fate of the Earth. But when Professor Garson and girl-friend set out to defy the 'mysterious universe manipulators', things don't go quite as expected. In "Three Eyes of Evil" (= "Siege of the Unseen") Michael Slade suddenly finds after a car accident that he has a third eye in his forehead. Shortly after he finds himself in a bizarre alien city where his new powers are vitally needed. Both stories are fairly slight, but in the best Van Vogtian tradition.

THE WINGED MAN by A.E. VAN VOGT & E. MAYNE HULL: SPHERE: 1944: 159pp: 85p

An early novel by Van Vogt and his late wife back in print again. 20th century submariner Konlon is yanked 25,000 years into the future to help in a war between a group of flying humans who live in a city in the sky and an aquatic bunch whose city floats on the sea. In true Van Vogt style he soon has complete control of the situation. Amusing, but unexceptional.

MONSTERS by A.E. VAN VOGT: CORGI: 1939-50: 190pp: 80p

Another reprint of this classic Van Vogt collection with its delightful crew of monsters and aliens like the reborn mummy in "Resurrection", the bizarre protean creature of "Vault of the Beast", the superhuman androids in "Concealment" or the ludicrously inhuman Forrest Ackerman of "Introduction". Shame the book's got such a bad cover.

THE HUMANOIDS by JACK WILLIAMSON: SPHERE: 1948: 189pp: 85p

After the unfortunate Legions of Space & Time, at last a book to remind us that Jack Williamson did occasionally rise above the banal. Indeed "The Humanoids", arguably Williamson's best SF novel, created quite a sensation when it first appeared thirty years ago, with its startling twist on an old concept. A race of androids, created on one of Earth's colonies, come to the home planet to protect the people from harm. Unfortunately they have a rather broad definition of harm, and man soon finds himself enslaved by his mechanical protectors. The handling of the overefficient robots and their ultimate downfall make this a very entertaining book.

OFF CENTRE by DAMON KNIGHT: MAGNUM: 1952-64: 192pp: 70p

Damon Knight is so much better known as an anthologist, that it is easy to forget that he is an accomplished science fiction writer in his own right. These eight stories provide a good picture of his achievements in the field. The best of the stories must be "Masks" (originally published in Playboy), a very complex yet short piece of a man who has had his body rebuilt by the government, but not quite how he wants it. Rather more amusing is "To Be Continued" of an ardent fan who keeps travelling back in time, through alternate worlds, to persuade the same author to write the next volume in a series that 'he' (the author) has written in other parallel worlds. Then there is "Be My Guest" about someone who finds he's a walking haunted house, "What Rough Beast" about a young man who can 'twist' the past to alter the present, and four other enjoyable stories.

THE EMBEDDING by IAN WATSON: ORBIT: 1973: 185pp: 65p

Another reprint of Ian Watson's award-winning first novel. In a very complex plot, Watson manages to tie together aliens from a thousand light-years away, primitive South American Indians, and scientific experiments in 'psycholinguistics', to form a fascinating look at the way mankind is blinkered by its languages and philosophical precepts. A book to be studied as much as read, but well worth the effort.

CAMP CONCENTRATION by THOMAS M DISCH: PANTHER: 1969: 158pp: 65p

One of Disch's better books back in print again. Imprisoned as a conscientious objector Louis Sacchetti suddenly finds himself transferred without warning from the authoritarian prison he was sent to, to the enigmatic and easygoing Camp Archimedes. Soon it is not only the reason for his transfer that worries him, but also his fellow inmates who seem to have a growing tendency towards genius and early death. Gradually he becomes involved in the bizarre events behind the whole set-up. A fascinating and thought-provoking book.

PRICE OF THE PHOENIX by BONDRA MARSHAK & MYRNA CULBREATH: CORGI: 1977: 182pp: 75p

A curious Star Trek novel, where the Enterprise and most of the crew make only cursory appearances. Mostly the novel examines some questions of character and philosophy, but in a decidedly hackneyed plot. The five principals include, inevitably, Kirk and Spock, whose characters have been developed in an unlikely fashion. The authors have not succeeded in creating a new depth or a wider interest for these two, mainly because of strong deficiencies in the plotting. But it is a very interesting try. (Pa)

PLANET OF JUDGEMENT by JOE HALDEMAN: CORGI: 1977: 151pp: 70p

Joe Haldeman has written a standard Star Trek novel to the standard Star Trek formula. The style is flat and the plot poorly padded out by flashback. It is, however, an improvement on some recent offerings. (Pa)

DOC SAVAGE 89: THE MAGIC ISLAND by KENNETH ROBESON: BANTAM/CORGI: 1937: 137pp: 50p
DOC SAVAGE 90: THE FLYING GOBLIN by KENNETH ROBESON: BANTAM/CORGI: 1940: 120pp: 60p

I remember collecting the first 37 Doc Savage titles avidly when Corgi first distributed them eight years ago. Since then the price has more than trebled (from 3/6d) but remarkably little else has changed. Doc is still accompanied by his intrepid band of followers - Monk, Ham, Renny, Johnny and Long Tom, not to mention the pig Habeas Corpus and the ape Chemistry - and has the same knack for finding bizarre crooks and weird situations to overcome (a magnetic city in 89, and an ultra-modern missile in 90) and the same ability to come out unscathed. I enjoyed them immensely, but one thing bothers me - where will I get volumes 38-88 from?

THE MYSTERY OF FU MANCHU by SAX ROHMER: STAR: 237pp: 1930: 75p

THE MASK OF FU MANCHU by SAX ROHMER: STAR: 1932: 205pp: 75p

The first two (though really first and third chronologically) in a new reprint of this classic series of fringe SF interest. I remember enjoying Fu Manchu a great deal as a child, but found myself rather bored this time through. Nevertheless it is always nice to see such classic old favourites returning to print.

GETAWAY WORLD by STEPHEN GOLDIN (& E.E. SMITH): PANTHER: 1977: 176pp: 65p

The fourth in Goldin's series about Doc Smith's SOTE agents Jules and Yvette D'Alembert (better known as Agents Wombat and Periwinkle). In this gripping installment Yvette falls in love with a murderer and her boyfriend helps the two agents conquer a world of convicts and desperadoes to reach the daughter of the head of SOTE who's put her foot in it again. Ideal for insomniacs.

BERSERKER 2: THE BULL CHIEF by CHRIS CARLSEN: SPHERE: 1977: 175p: 85p

The Berserker is reborn as a boy in 5th century Ireland. After some entertaining antics as a child, he is exiled and goes in search of those who can help him. First, as the author indulges his in-jokes, he visits the lost Druid sect of the Pai Iairians, and then he teams up with a band of fiana and searches for the giant Carnbillanak, who, when found, imprisons him. Finally, released, he travels to England to fight beside Arthur before confronting his destiny at Stonehenge. A light, amusing but well-researched book.

THE FOOD OF THE GODS by H.G. WELLS: SPHERE: 1904: 223pp: 75p

MEN LIKE GODS by H.G. WELLS: SPHERE: 1923: 232pp: 65p

Another reissue of these lesser-known Wells novels. "The Food of the Gods" deals with a strange scientific discovery of a plantfood that makes crops grow fantastically fast and tall. Matters get a little out of hand when some wasps and rats eat the food and start threatening the countryside, but the real crux of the book comes when some children are fed the food and a new race of Giants is unleashed on the world. "Men Like Gods" is a far slighter book - about one Mr. Barnstaple who, together with some of Wells' contemporary politicians, is catapulted into a parallel world - a world without war or hate, until the unclean Earthmen arrive. Both books show their age very badly, and are rather tedious, thinly disguised political tracts, but the touches of innovation are hidden there underneath.

FLIGHT TO OPAR by PHILIP JOSE FARMER: MAGNUM: 223pp: 1976: 75p

For more than half its length the second in Farmer's 'Opar' series makes dreary reading. Amid the stock fights and flights only the way the plot of volume one is worked in shows any sign of talent. Thereafter the plot warms up a little and in the palace intrigues and underground mazes of Opar finally achieves mediocrity. (RM)

SPACED OUT ed MICHEL PARRY: PANTHER: 1929-73: 192pp: 75p

Michel Parry's third anthology of 'SF' drug stories. The main story is Moorcock's classic "The Deep Fix" about the paranoid trip of John Seward under MA-19 and his encounters with The Man with No Navel and The Vampire. There is the amusing "Melodramine" by Henry Slesar, about a drug with strange hallucinatory effects and its even weirder antidote, and the odd but captivating "Sky" by R.A. Lafferty. The other five stories, by Leiber, Jacobi, Pratt, Davis and Gerrold are unexceptional, but the inclusion of some Jim Pitts illustrations make it a fairly rewarding collection.

MASTERS OF TERROR 1: WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON ed PETER TREMAYNE: CORGI: 1905-24: 156pp: 80p

William Hope Hodgson will always be remembered for his classic horror novel "The House on the Borderland" and for the brilliant fantasy "The Night Land". His real metier, however, was the 'sea horror' story as typified by his novels "The Ghost Pirates" and "The Boats of the Glen Carrig". It is mainly from this category that Mr Tremayne has selected seven notable stories, to which he has added a short, but enlightening, introduction. The stories show their age considerably, but are no less powerful for it.

BLOOD SUMMER by LOUISE COOPER: NEL: 1976: 127pp: 40p

There is a hint in this novel that somewhere behind the facile vampire story there lurks quite a good "curse down the ages" tale. Unfortunately it is mentioned, rather than told. For those who are addicted to vampire stories, this thin and not incompetent book may have some interest. (Pa)

WHEN EVIL WAKES ed AUGUST DERLETH: SPHERE: 1924-60: 255pp: 85p

Another Derleth collection of sixteen fairly predictable tales from the usual stable of horror authors.

FANTASY ART

GOD JOKES: THE ART OF ABDUL MATI KLARWEIN: BIG O PUBLISHING: 1976: 56pp: £2-95

Klarwein is one of the best psychedelic pop artists around. Abandoning the purely representational he strives to combine the surrealist vision of artists like Magritte with the distorting viewpoint of a Dali, to produce remarkably clear and stunningly colourful montages of the beautiful, the ordinary and the ridiculous. This marvellous book contains twenty of his less well-known paintings, plus four views of the incredible Aleph Sanctuary in the Ernst Fuchs Museum in Vienna - an entire room decorated with Klarwein art from floor to ceiling. Each plate has an amusing, though rarely relevant, epigram from Klarwein, who also provides a short introduction. A slight complaint is that the titles are listed at the front and do not accompany the plates - a minor irritation in an otherwise superb book.

ESCHATUS by BRUCE PENNINGTON: DRAGON'S WORLD/PHINN PUBLISHING: 1977: 92pp: £4-25

Artist Bruce Pennington, well known for his SF book covers, has undertaken here a remarkable project. He has selected thirty-two quatrains from the section of Nostradamus' prophecies believed to refer to future events and provided pictorial interpretations of them. Thus the forty paintings trace the 'history' of the future from the declining world peace at the start of the twenty-second century, through wars, plagues and alien invasion to the coming of the 'great lawgiver' in the twenty-fourth century. The pictures are each accompanied by the corresponding quatrain, both in the original 'French' and in a new translation by the editors. Whether you believe in Nostradamus or not, he was certainly a remarkable man, and this too is a remarkable representation of what just might happen.

VISIONS I: Intro by WALTER HOPPS: POMEGRANATE/BIG O PUBLISHING: 1977: 92pp: £3-95

This book is an anthology of work by seven of the best San Francisco surrealist artists who have become so well-known through their entrancing posters in recent years. Of them all, probably the most familiar is Bill Martin, with his faintly impossible evocation of a peaceful Edenlike world - particularly the famous "Storm" and "Rock". Then there is Thomas Akawie, marvellously recapitulating the distant past with his representations from Egyptian mythology. Gage Turner produces a set of enticing views of a not-quite Earth, populated by innocent humans and curious green aliens. On the other hand, Nick Hyde's visions are far from Earth, combining the fire and fury of John Martin with the grotesqueries of Hieronymus Bosch. Sheila Rose, Cliff McReynolds and Joseph Parker fill out the rest of the book, and Walter Hopps, curator of 20th century American art at the Smithsonian, provides a fascinating, if at times over-abstruse, introduction.

WIZARDRY & WILD ROMANCE CALENDAR 1978 by RODNEY MATTHEWS: BIG O: 1977: £3-95

Not really a paperback(!) but a candidate which couldn't really be ignored for a fantasy art section. Rodney Matthews is already well-known for his jacket covers on the latest three Moorcock 'End of Time' books (only "The End of All Songs" so far available in UK paperback). Now he has done full-size posters of twelve scenes from a number of Moorcock fantasy novels (chiefly Elric, Kane & Corum) and they have been bound together in a 1978 calendar. Although they suffer a little from the reduction in size, the reproduction is immaculate, and each is accompanied by the relevant piece of text and a hand-drawn month chart. The whole is rounded off by a bibliography of Moorcock titles in print. This must be the fantasy calendar of the year.

VIEWS by ROGER DEAN: DRAGON'S DREAM/BIG O PUBLISHING: 1975: 156pp: £4-75

Another reprint of this famous collection of Dean's art. It contains most of his famous pieces, such as the Osibisa and Greenslade album covers, as well as many more minor and less familiar paintings, and samples of his detailed designs for furniture, new style houses, etc. Through it all runs a very comprehensive narrative, putting each piece in its correct perspective and adding background detail. A singularly fine compilation of an outstanding artist.

OCCUPIED SPACES by BRAD JOHANNSSEN: BIG O PUBLISHING: 1977: 48pp: £2-95

A very poor mishmash of montaged 'art' and inapt captions.

NON-FICTION

WHO'S WHO IN SCIENCE FICTION by BRIAN ASH: SPHERE: 1976: 218pp: 95p

Potted biographies of some 400 'notable contributors to the SF genre'. The choice is highly idiosyncratic, with minor characters like Frigyes Karinthy, R.F. Starzl and Brian Ash included while more important ones like Michael Coney, Gene Wolfe or Samuel Butler (the latter, of "Erewhon" fame, not even mentioned in the list of omissions). There are also a number of uncorrected typographical and factual errors (e.g. Haldeman's "Mindbreak") and a sad confusion of pseudonym cross-references ('John Rankine' appears only under his real name, Douglas Mason, and John Beynon Harris only under his pseudonym 'John Wyndham'). This is certainly a very useful book, and Mr Ash knows his subject pretty well (as he amply demonstrated in "Faces of the Future"), but there is a lot of room for improvement.

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE by HARRY HARRISON: PIERROT PUBLISHING: 1977: 118pp: £3-95

A dazzling collection of SF illustrations from all periods and countries on the theme of 'sex in SF'. From the coy suggestion of the Campbell era to the blatant let-it-all-hang-out policy of the brilliant 'Metal Hurlant', the book shows graphically the extremes the artists have gone to in both directions through the years. Harrison's accompanying text is amusing and often enlightening, tracing both the different attitudes in the artwork and the parallel development of the stories, but it never lives up to the subtitle of "A History of Sex in Science Fiction Illustration". An entertaining book, well put together and professionally produced.

SCIENCE FICTION by ROBERT SCHOLES & ERIC RABKIN: OUP: 1977: 258pp: £1-50

Written by American academics primarily for American students. Parts of the book already need updating and their "literary history of Science Fiction" is remarkable for its partiality. The style is rather dull and overall the book lacks cohesion. Some of the information and analyses are useful, but most of this (especially the 'science' section) has been done better elsewhere. (Pa)

THE DRACULA SCRAPBOOK ed PETER HAINING: NEL: 1976: 180pp: £4-50

THE FRANKENSTEIN FILE ed PETER HAINING: NEL: 1977: 128pp: £3-50

Two books similar in format, but very different in approach, on the world's two favourite monsters. "The Dracula Scrapbook" is, as its name implies, a vast assorted collection of articles, essays, anecdotes and memorabilia about Dracula, Stoker, Lugosi, Lee, vampires in general and half-a-dozen other related topics. Inclusions range from a bibliography of Stoker (so noticeably missing from the Ludlam biography) to advertisements for frothing blood capsules. Conversely "The Frankenstein File" is a very coherent collection of just 18 pieces on Frankenstein in book or film - the monster, the actors and the authoress. Both volumes are crammed with illustrations, all well credited, and both are very competently held together by Peter Haining - who can now add another two outstanding books to his growing list.

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF PROPHECY by WALTER R & LITZKA R GIBSON: MAYFLOWER: 1974: 336pp: £1-25

This misleadingly titled book is really a handbook of fortune telling and is on the whole a fairly reliable summary. The directions for the various forms of divination are clear and comprehensive, if somewhat impersonal and lacking in depth. Astrology, Colorology, Graphology and Phrenology are not covered here (they can be found in "The Book of the Psychic Sciences" by the same authors) but otherwise this book will provide a good starting point for the curious. (Pa)

ASIMOV'S LECHEROUS LIMERICKS by ISAAC ASIMOV: CORGI: 1975: 207pp: 75p

From biochemist to superstar - Asimov has gone a long way in his life, and is now in the enviable position where anything with his name on it will sell. Fortunately this hasn't stopped him writing some very good books, but it has also led to bizarre offerings like this collection of 100 of his dirty limericks. They're not bad, and the accompanying chat and illustrations are often amusing, but there are no masterpieces here, and the book is of little value except to Asimov completists.