

Dear Jan,
 Trade for The Shang Blah?
 Regards Phil

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A bimonthly review of British paperback SF; published by Philip Stephensen-Payne.

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With the beginning of a new year, it is perhaps time for a restatement of the policy of "Paperback Parlour". Our aim is to review, briefly, every science fiction or fantasy book that has appeared in British paperback for the first time in the preceding two months. The period covered is not rigidly defined, because of the varying policies of publishers sending out review copies, so that this issue, although technically covering December and January, had a cut-off date for books of January 24th, and does include a few published in February that were received sufficiently in advance. This issue, like most others, also contains a number of books that fall outside the definite scope of PP - in particular reprints, horror and related non-fiction. The main distinction is that we aim at a complete coverage of new SF, while the others are generally only included when they seem of interest or value.

This issue has unfortunately suffered somewhat from post-Christmas recession. After a bumper spread of books from the publishers at the end of last year, this year's crop so far has - with a few notable exceptions - been somewhat disappointing. For this reason I have included a couple of Art Books that did not arrive in time for last issue's Special Section. On the subject of art, I have also started a new policy of mentioning the cover artist where he is credited or I could recognise the signature. (They are referenced by initials with a key at the end.) Sadly the non-informative stance of many of the publishers has meant I could not put a name to several of the artists, and any information on the ones I have omitted (or on the real identities of 'Melvyn' and 'PE') would be very welcome. I have also, at Robin Marcus' suggestion, added an Index to Books Reviewed in this issue, and would welcome comments on the value of this.

It is well-known how rarely the 'blurb' on a book bears much relation to the content thereof - no matter what the book is about, publishers seem always to want to sell it as something else - but there is one thing worse than the blurbs - the advance publicity information sent out. It would take too long to repeat even a selection of the more amusing ones, but I confess that even I was staggered at Sphere's announcement of "Blake's 7" as written by a "top British science fiction author". Was this Arthur Clarke? Or Brian Aldiss? No - Trevor Hoyle, the man whose three books so far make Perry Rhodan look like literature! What are we coming to? It's like all those books which are "Soon to be a Major film" - there don't seem to be any minor films any more.

Anyway, enough of my waffling - there is just room left to say Thank You to all those who wrote in with comments and suggestions, to my co-reviewers Robin Marcus (RM) and Philippa Grove-Stephensen (Pa) without whom I could never manage this monster, and to the indefatigable Keith Freeman tirelessly cranking the duplicator.

THE MALACIA TAPESTRY by BRIAN ALDISS: PANTHER: 1978: 293pp: 95p

For all the noise and bustle of the streets of Malacia, the city is a place where the passing of the years has little meaning. The rulers of the city are dedicated to preserving it as it stands, and they seem to have succeeded since the city and its way of life are as they have been for hundreds - or maybe even thousands - of years. "Malacia Tapestry" is more a portrait of this city, its peoples and places, than anything else. The story is told by Perian de Chirola whose trade - he is an actor - leads him from the gutters of Malacia to the ceremonials of its aristocracy. Through his eyes we see courtesan and priest, artist and beggar, town and country. If Malacia, illustrated here so well by some Tiepolo drawings, is reminiscent of Venice just after her great days were over, then Perian is surely another Cellini - swashbuckling, hypocritical, ambitious, something of a rogue and yet showing us his world with a clarity born of a reluctant artistic honesty. The whole is indeed a tapestry where the pageant of events is the centre of the stage, but more importantly the excuse for displaying all the variety of colour and texture that the artist has conceived. There are too many remarkable scenes, all of which merit attention, to mention - I remember especially though the Ancestor Hunt, when the privileged (including Perian at the apex of his career) ritually hunt the great reptiles from whom man is descended, and a short, very touching, scene when Perian visits Falember, the resident artist, on his father's estate and sees the artistic embodiment of Malacia's fate in the magnificent work Falember will never finish because it can never fulfill his vision; because he can never reproduce the glory of God's light. We can all be glad that Brian Aldiss has not followed his lead, since his evocation of the light and the shadow, the glory and the gutter, is masterly. His handling of plot, character and atmosphere leave a satisfying feeling of rightness. "The Malacia Tapestry" is a work of art. (Pa)

FLOATING WORLDS by CECILIA HOLLAND: SPHERE: 1975: 542pp: £1-50: M

A huge, complex, serious and important book to which no short review can do justice - its scope and ambition are so colossal. In a little over 500 pages, set in various parts of the Solar System, Cecilia Holland gives us episodes of political dickering, interplanetary war, pure space opera, courtroom drama, explicit sex, love, hate, revenge and personal tragedy. There are almost lyric descriptions of beauty and horror, flat descriptions of terror and heroism, stark descriptions of the sordid and the sensual. Five planetoid cultures are involved, four major political ideologies, three distinct stages of human evolution. The unifying factor is Paula Mendoza - Earth born anarchist turned political envoy, turned wife of one of the huge black mutants of the outer planets; mother, lesbian, diplomat, pragmatic idealist. The book rests on her credibility and if no human can really sustain that under such an enormous pressure of plot, yet Ms Holland comes very close to success, a considerable achievement. Parts of the book are dull and others distasteful, while the whole may strike some as downright pretentious - nevertheless it is a major and welcome contribution to the genre. (RM)

THE WIND'S TWELVE QUARTERS VOL 1 by URSULA LeGUIN: PANTHER: 1962-70: 157pp: 75p: DB

Every now and again over the last 16 years Ursula LeGuin has published a gem of a story that has, on the whole, been overlooked in the wake of her novels. At last she has collected most of them together in one book with a short introduction to each. Unfortunately Panther have so far only published the first half (9 out of 17 stories) of the collection, but presumably the rest will follow shortly. Of the nine here, four are related to her novels - "Semley's Necklace" is an interesting prologue to "Rocannon's World", "Winter's King" a separate story in the world of "The Left Hand of Darkness", and "The Rules of Names" and "The Word of Unbinding" are two short delightful Earthsea tales. Of the others, there is the famous "Nine Lives" about the effect on a clone when his clonemates die violently, and the marvellous "April in Paris" about time-travelling lovers. "The Masters", "Darkness Box" and "The Good Trip" round off this brilliant collection, whose only drawback is its distasteful cover.

PERRY RHODAN 30: TO ARKON by KURT MAHR: ORBIT: 115pp: 65p: PE

Rhodan falls in love, and is then defeated twice by the Arkons - there must be a message there somewhere,

ANYWHEN by JAMES BLISH: ARROW: 1961-68: 184pp: 65p

James Blish wrote comparatively few short stories, but those that he did are worth treasuring. The eight stories in this collection were all specially commissioned by magazine editors, and show the great versatility of Blish's talent. The first story, "A Style in Treason" (a rewritten version of the earlier "A Hero's Life") is in many ways typical of Blish himself - Earth's traitor-in-chief has a difficult mission on the outland planet Boadicea, and in the end it is not what he does that saves the day, but the style with which he does it. The more recent "How Beautiful with Banners" tells the delightful story of an alien lifeform on Titan that falls in love with the 'space-bubble' protecting the human sent to investigate it. "Sksign" takes an amused look at the SF fan captured by an alien spaceship, while "A Dusk of Idols" is a rather grimmer view of Mephistopheles' "Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it". In all an outstanding collection, long overdue in paperback.

PROMISED LAND by BRIAN STABLEFORD: PAN: 1975: 160pp: 60p

THE PARADISE GAME by BRIAN STABLEFORD: PAN: 1976: 158pp: 60p

Numbers 3 & 4 in the "Hooded Swan" ("Star-Pilot Grainger") series. They feature Grainger, who dislikes humanity but can get along with aliens, the Hooded Swan, which is the fastest ship in the Galaxy (by several magnitudes) and assorted companions. For how they all got together and why Grainger apparently talks to himself, and much other necessary background, you should first read "Halycon Drift" (Number 1 in the series). All the books are good light reading on the classic adventure lines, providing a good enough excuse for everyone to be entangled in the oddest schemes; a character you can like in spite of himself; a plot and style which coast comfortably along and a good dollop of honest SF speculation to boot. (Pa)

NO MAN FRIDAY by REX GORDON: NEL: 1956: 207pp: 90p: JP

It is books like this that make the 'SF Masters' series worthwhile. Gordon Holder becomes part of the first (British) expedition to Mars and, when it crashes, is the only survivor. With typically British ingenuity he manages to produce the oxygen and water vital for his immediate survival, but cannot provide enough to keep himself alive indefinitely. In search of a 'Man Friday' who can help him he meets an intelligent race of Martians - but their role in his life becomes very different from the one he had imagined. Much of the book seems unexceptional - the survival aspects are ingenious, but still borrowed from the original - and the existence of huge sentient beings on Mars is hard to accept. Compensating for this is Holder's time with the Martians and the discussions they have on Mankind's nature and purpose, and on the importance of 'progress'. This is a very thought-provoking book, and one that certainly deserves its revival as classic.

A KNIGHT OF GHOSTS AND SHADOWS by POUL ANDERSON: SPHERE: 1975: 220pp: 85p: M

Our civilisation is fascinated by the decline of others. Equally there is a very direct emotional appeal in tales of the wise and brave who fight heroically to stave off the final collapse of a once great culture. Thus in his Flandry books, set in the Terran Empire's decadence, Anderson starts out with all the charms of Autumn going for him; it remains only to add credible characters, tolerably interesting incidents and a suitably bittersweet tone. This he does here quite adequately, even adding flashes of humour and a note of personal tragedy. If the book seems a trifle lightweight, it is because Dominic Flandry would not have it seem otherwise. (RM)

THE HOSPITAL SHIP by MARTIN BAX: PICADOR: 1976: 204pp: 95p: BC

A large ship, equipped as a hospital, is slowly cruising around picking up survivors from what appears to be a collapse of civilisation. On board time is divided between Sir Maximov Flint's new 'love therapy' and discussions on obstetrics. Parts of the book are brilliantly conceived - the bizarre crucifixions on land, V the girl from Saigon - but much of it reads more like a medical textbook than a novel. Mr. Bax has obviously been heavily influenced by J.G. Ballard, but has little of his mentor's ability.

LAMBDA 1 AND OTHER STORIES ed JOHN CARNELL: PENGUIN: 1961-64: 206pp: 55p: JF

An unusual collection that Carnell produced when he relinquished the editorship of 'New Worlds' to Michael Moorcock, and containing some of the most popular stories published therein while he was editor. The title story, by Colin Kapp, is a very complex one about a ship travelling through 'Tau' space, that slips out of phase, and the two men who try to rescue it. George Whitley's "All Laced Up" takes an amusing look at a time-travelling con man, while Lee Harding in "Quest" seeks a meaning for humanity. H.A. Hargreaves, Donald Malcolm, Philip High, Michael Moorcock and John Rackham also provide interesting stories to make this an enjoyable, if slightly dated, collection.

THE PEOPLE OF THE WIND by POUL ANDERSON: SPHERE: 1973: 191pp: 85p: M

Heavy doses of space opera as the Terran Empire attempts to 'normalise' its frontiers with the Domain of the flying Ythri leave insufficient time to develop the more interesting problems of the planet Avalon, where humans and Ythrians (and their cultures) intermingle. Too often Anderson stops to describe his characters' emotion rather than letting the plot illustrate them. The result is decidedly pedestrian and well below the author's best. (RM)

LAND UNDER ENGLAND by JOSEPH O'NEILL: NEL: 1935: 287pp: £1-25: JP

"Land Under England" could in some ways be called a political thriller. Written at a time when Hitler's power was growing, it depicts a strange world under the Earth's surface, founded by the Romans, in which individualism is unheard of and the State is all. Into this strange world stumbles Anthony Julian, in search of his father who vanished years before. Disgusted at the world he finds, Julian tries first to impose his individuality on it, and, that failing, to escape intact. The book is very well written and, for its time, has some outstanding flights of imaginative description. However, like so many of its contemporaries, it cannot really stand the test of time - it has all been done much better elsewhere since. An interesting curiosity - ridiculously overpriced.

CITY ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER (by HARLAN ELLISON): BANTAM: 1977: 156pp: 85p

For those among you who find Blish's adaptation too much of an intellectual strain; 300 colour stills from the original show, with the script drastically cut to fit the pictures and the important words in heavier type so that you can reduce effort to a minimum. This is even crueller to the dialogue than the stills are to the acting. But good value, if you want lots of mediocre colour pictures. (Pa)

THE HOLLOW LANDS by MICHAEL MOORCOCK: MAYFLOWER: 1975: 180pp: 60p

A reprint of the second volume in Moorcock's "The Dancers at the End of Time" trilogy. In this volume Amelia returns to her native 19th century, closely pursued by Jherek. Moorcock proves himself far more at home in the 19th century than the far future, turning this into possibly the best volume of the trilogy.

POLICE YOUR PLANET by LESTER DEL REY & ERIK VAN LHM: NEL: 1956: 190pp: 90p: BP

Seemingly Del Rey wanted to avoid some of the blame for this book, by invoking his pseudonym of Erik Van Lhm - which is not surprising. Bruce Gordon is kicked off Earth to the frontier world of Mars. There he soon joins the police and starts a career of beating, torturing, terrorising and killing - as do the rest of the police. Then, finding himself on the other side, he starts beating and killing the police. Finally, a survivor in a pacified world, he is sent to the frontier world of Mercury to repeat the performance. The characters are cardboard and the plot ridiculous, serving merely as a vehicle for the violence. Another once-fine author who's sold his soul to the sicker side of twentieth-century commercialism.

THE MIND RIDERS by BRIAN STABLEFORD: FONTANA: 1976: 157pp: 65p: TR

Ex-boxer Ryan Hart is hired by the man who had him barred to return to the ring and defeat the World Champion. Ryan agrees - but on his own terms. The SF angle? - the boxing is done by holographs and simulation. OK if you like boxing novels.

THE ALTERATION by KINGSLEY AMIS: PANTHER: 1976: 205pp: 85p: BB

The 'alteration' of the title is twofold. Firstly it refers to Amis' treatment of history - Luther became Pope; the Reformation never happened and Protestantism survives only in America. Amis's portrait of the resultant England in 1976 is both interesting and convincing. The immediate focus is Hubert Anvil, star treble of the choir school of England's foremost cathedral (St. George at Coverley - pronounced "Cowley" by the old-fashioned), who is threatened with the other 'alteration' in order to preserve that magnificent voice. The careful unfolding of the book not only tells Hubert's story, but also is an ever-widening picture of the background. Amis has not matched the imaginative feat of Keith Roberts, (though the influence of "Pavane" is acknowledged by its mention - as "Galliard"), but the consistency and attention to the myriad of detail are remarkable, and his handling of the plot (especially the end) avoids the obvious. Mr Amis's quirky humour and very urbane style are at their most polished. A welcome addition to the SF bookshelf. (Pa)

THE PROMETHEUS CRISIS by THOMAS N SCORTIA & FRANK M ROBINSON: PAN: 1975: 318pp: 80P

The authors say they intended both to write a good thriller and to make the reader consider the issues - and they succeed admirably. 'Prometheus' is a very large nuclear fission power station newly built in America. Through a combination of political pressure and shoddy workmanship, it is started up before fully checked out, and runs into problems immediately. There is no fancy, melodramatic nuclear explosion (this is a 'safe' reactor); instead the plant loses its coolant and the fuel begins to melt under its own decay heat, rapidly turning the power station into a blazing holocaust spewing radioactive ash into the air. Enough subplots run through the story to keep up a high tension, and the whole episode becomes very plausible. It makes you think.

MASKE: THAERY by JACK VANCE: FONTANA: 1976: 215pp: 75p: PT

Ye gods, what a ghastly cover! But inside is one of the author's most accomplished and typical creations. The land of Thaery on the backwoods planet Maske, full of individuality and odd customs (lovingly delineated) is ruled by a quirkish bureaucracy steeped in tradition to the point of ritual. Jubal the hero is a decent, highminded, resourceful, determined misfit. The consequent action is as it should be, full of twists and diversions, layered with intrigue and spiced with witty, ambiguous dialogue, whilst the style is Vance at his best - mellow irony exploding into sardonic hilarity. But at the end much of Maske remains a mystery - a sequel please? (RM)

COSMIC KALEIDOSCOPE by BOB SHAW: PAN: 1959-76: 174pp: 70p

Another nine entertaining stories from Bob Shaw. As usual, some of the stories have a marvellous streak of humour through them - "The Gioconda Caper" with the incredible story of how Leonardo da Vinci invented the blue movie, or "Unreasonable Facsimile" which involves a group of aliens building a glass-fibre replica of Mount Everest. There is the black comedy "Waltz of the Bodysnatchers" where suicide becomes a paying proposition, and the strange "Uncomic Book Horror Story" about the monster from the river and the only boy who saw it. Bob Shaw also has his more serious side, as in "Skirmish on a Summer Morning", a real SF-Western which nevertheless tells a moving story, or "A Little Night Flying" presenting an unusual situation for a dedicated cop. "A Full Member of the Club", "The Silent Partners" and "The Brink" round off this very enjoyable collection.

THE MAN WHO AWOKE by LAURENCE MANNING: SPHERE: 1933: 186pp: 85p

Norman Winters decides to see the future and so puts himself into a frozen sleep, timed to wake him up in 5000 AD, then 10000 AD and so until he finally settles in 25000. The book suffers greatly from the narrowness of vision common in the 1930s so that 5000 year gaps wreak less change in mankind than one would expect 500 to. Might be of interest to the SF historian, but otherwise rather tedious.

THE SORCERER by ERIC ERICSON: NEL: 1978: 220pp: 85p: DM

A surprisingly good novel about witchcraft. Mason gets involved with a coven of witches and agrees to join them in their search for the Jewel (a sort of philosophers' stone). He soon realises that he is more involved than he wants, and that the only way he can be free is by defeating Frazer, the coven's leader. Mr Ericson has very skilfully avoided all the traditional and overworked trappings of witchcraft - there are no invocations of the Devil, no chanting congregations at a Black Mass, not even a broomstick. At the same time he manages to invoke a belief in the powers involved and to maintain a high tension throughout - right to the brilliantly conceived ending. Certainly the best author in the field since the late Dennis Wheatley - let us hope he will write much more.

TO CONTROL THE STARS by ROBERT HOSKINS: BALLANTINE: 1977: 188pp: 65p

On the day he graduates Shan Eliot is asked to join the Institute of Hominidic Studies - twice, each time by a man apparently unaware of the other's existence. He joins, and in a planet-hopping adventure manages to help defeat the villains and to contact a race who have remained in complete isolation for thousands of years. Some 'side' aspects of the plot should have been expanded or deleted, but on the whole the book, though slight, sustains a fast enough pace for melodrama and has enough interest to hold you to the end. (Pa)

CRITICAL MASS by FREDERIK POHL & C.M.KORNBLUTH: BANTAM: 1955-74: 179pp: 75p: EJ

Ten of the stories written jointly by Pohl and Kornbluth (all but four of which appeared in the previous collection "The Wonder Effect"). Sadly, a collaboration that worked so well on novels was far less successful on short stories, and these are in general poorer than either of the authors achieved on his own. A couple of the stories stand out. "The Gift of Garigolli" is an amusing, though dated, story of some tiny aliens trying, unobtrusively, to reward their unsuspecting human host. "Mute Inglorious Tam" is a touching little piece about a man born out of time - in the fourteenth century. Most of the others, though, achieve little more than mediocrity, making the book more a curiosity than anything else.

IN DEEP by DAMON KNIGHT: MAGNUM: 1951-57: 172pp: 75p: CM

Another entertaining collection of seven Knight stories from the 50s. The best is probably "Stranger Station", a curious and moving story about contact between humans and the huge aliens from Titan who exude an immortality serum - a contact at once essential and devastating. On a lighter note, "An Eye for a What" is a hilarious romp with a metamorphic alien whose social structure is based purely on a question of size. There is also the classic "Country of the Kind", about the one violent man in a pacified world, and "Ticket to Anywhere", about a one-way gateway to the Universe, as well as three other above-average tales. All great fun.

BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO by HARRY HARRISON: PENGUIN: 1965: 174pp: 60p: ML

Harry Harrison's sardonic reply to Heinlein's "Starship Troopers". Enlisted against his will, Harrison's battered hero Bill gets shuttled from one end of the Universe to the other, Upholding the Glory of the Empire, Protecting his Motherland, and whatever else the military admen can think of for him - while really only trying to get out. Grim and ghastly, it is nonetheless hilarious.

THE WANDERING WORLDS by TERRY GREENHOUGH: NEL: 1976: 172pp: 85p

The crew of a lone ship in deep space are attacked on the mental plane, and only the alien menial is immune. Even a plot like this could be redeemed by good writing. Alas Terry Greenhough's style is excruciatingly bad. (RM)

PERRY RHODAN 29: A WORLD GONE MAD by CLARK DARLTON: ORBIT: 1935: 124pp: 65p

Topthor and the fierce and unstoppable Mounders are scared away from their objective by a few gesticulating natives. Meanwhile the Earthmen go off and talk to a moon. Ho hum, certainly someone is mad - possibly the author.

THE EXILE WAITING by VONDA N McINTYRE: PAN: 1976: 236pp: 75p

"The Exile Waiting" is set in the underground city of Center - originally a major fall-out shelter - on an almost deserted Earth. The lives of three people intertwine here as each of them seeks to escape domination by someone close to them. The main protagonist is Mischa, whose search for freedom leads her from the gutters of Center to the palace and finally to the vast underground caverns where the banished mutants live among the waste products of the society above them. Some of the background to the plot is inadequate and the characterisation is not very profound, but the action and setting of the book carry conviction and are woven together in a rich, mainly satisfying tale - a remarkably competent first novel. (Pa)

LORD OF LIGHT by ROGER ZELAZNY: PANTHER: 1967: 251pp: 75p: PGf

Somewhere, not on his native planet, man has achieved the externals of Hinduism as technological reality. The ruling oligarchy have taken up positions in the pantheon and are fast growing into their roles; Reincarnation via the transfer machines now involves mind-scan by the Lords of Karma. For Sam, confederate of the oldest gods in the days of colonisation, and possessor of some rather special powers himself, things have gone too far. His rebellion and the ensuing theomachy form the substance of one of Zelazny's most exuberantly inventive works - unashamed power-fantasy, racy, amusing and above all colourful. A brilliant if perhaps superficial book, which wears its first ten years immaculately. (RM)

THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION by SAMUEL R DELANY: SPHERE: 1967: 159pp: 75p: PE

In "The Einstein Intersection" Delany once again turns to myth and legend (as in, for instance, "Nova"). Christ is re-crucified, Billy the Kid betrayed again and, struggling with life and death, Lo Lobey, a latter-day Orpheus, travels across the desert to rescue his Eurydice from Kid Death. The old powers of the human race still dominate their inheritors who took over the bodies, souls and racial myths which the humans left behind. But the substance of this tale lies in the searching - for meaning, for life - at the end of which each reader must judge individually where the search led and what the searcher found there. (Pa)

DIMENSION OF MIRACLES by ROBERT SHECKLEY: PANTHER: 1968: 139pp: 60p: PG

Life in a Sheckley novel is never easy. In this one the protagonist, Carmody, has to put up with a computer arguing that it has an ethical duty occasionally to make a mistake, the being who was contracted by God to build the Earth, a talking city and many other strange and unsettling beings and devices, not least the predator created specifically for hunting Carmody's. He spends the whole book looking for his home planet Earth, accompanied by his talking metamorphic Galactic Prize - for which he left home in the first place. A treat for lovers of zany humour.

THE STAR DIARIES by STANISLAW LEM: ORBIT: 1954-71: 275pp: 95p: PT

Lem is one of the more unpredictable authors around. His books range from the brilliantly original "Solaris" or the hilariously chaotic "The Cyberiad" to the turgid space-opera of "The Invincible" and boring plainness of "The Futurological Congress". Sadly this book lies at the lower end. Despite a marvellous translation by Michael Kandel (who did "The Cyberiad") this book rarely rises above the banal, rehashing every cliched idea SF has ever had.

THE PRIMITIVE by E.C. TUBB: ORBIT: 1977: 142pp: 65p: PJ

Leon Vardis has only one motive for anything and everything - revenge. Since everyone else serves only as recipients for said revenge, the only character in this book is very boring. The 'adventures' of Leon Vardis are very boring too. The whole is slight, trite and forgettable. (Pa)

THE GODS LOOK DOWN by TREVOR HOYLE: PANTHER: 1978: 185pp: 75p: PG

Trevor Hoyle has taken half his plot from the Bible, and the other half from the 30s pulps, pausing only to lower the standard of the writing on the way.

THE FEMALE MAN by JOANNA RUSS: STAR: 1975: 214pp: 85p: PJ

"The Female Man" is - a collage of ideas, notes, problems, and personalities; a boring feminist tract; a serious exploration of possibilities; an unintelligible mess; a cleverly told story - depending on your point of view. Its subject matter is women - the way they look at themselves, each other, and men. Its characters all come from different 'probabilities' - Joanna from our world, Jeanine from one where the Second World War never happened, Janet from Whileaway, where there have been no men for nine centuries, and Jael from a point where the battle of the sexes is a grim reality. The plot concerns them and their interaction. For those neither bored nor nauseated the book is witty, wise, tender and bitter; it is also well written and very clever. Ms Russ does however demand acceptance for her ideas - those who refuse it should avoid this book. (Pa)

PICNIC ON PARADISE by JOANNA RUSS: STAR: 1968: 157pp: 60p

The tourist planet Paradise unexpectedly has a war on its hands, and Trans-Temp arranges for Alyx, a gutter thief from the great days of Tyre, to escort ten tourists to a nearby 'safe base'. Alyx judges it a 'picnic' - but she is reckoning without the personalities of the people involved, including, as she finds out, her own. Joanna Russ' first novel was fairly lightweight and cannot always command conviction, but it is by turns funny, realistic, compassionate and sardonic, and is always readable. (Pa)

A CHOICE OF GODS by CLIFFORD D SIMAK: MAGNUM: 1973: 158pp: 70p: CH

Suddenly, one day, 99% of the Earth's population are no longer there - they have 'gone away' somehow or another. Of the few hundred left, some try to maintain their previous style of life, while others settle down to a more pastoral existence, but one thing soon becomes evident to all - the aging process have been drastically slowed down. Time passes rapidly on Earth, with no sign of the ex-inhabitants or the reason for their departure until, three thousand years later, a rocket returns with the news that the People have been found - transplanted to three other worlds light-years away - and that there is a gigantic Principle out in space, who is responsible for it all. Still they do not know the reason, until the robots' secret Project comes to fruition, and starts talking to the Principle. A very unusual book for Simak, and one of his best of recent years.

NEW WRITINGS IN SF 29 ed KEN BULMER: CORGI: 1976: 187pp: 75p

As usual in the series, this volume combines a couple of good stories with a large number of nondescript ones. Brian Aldiss provides a story - not three enigmas this time - of a man searching the Universe for its meaning, and is, as usual, entertaining. Ernest Hill produces an amusing, though straightforward, tale of a duel between man and machine, and Ted Tubb takes another look at the entrance examination for qualification to a Galactic society. The other five stories range between those that have been done better before and those that would have been better left undone.

DESTINATION: VOID by FRANK HERBERT: PENGUIN: 1965: 219pp: 60p: JP

One of Frank Herbert's less successful novels. An expedition to Tau Ceti is disabled when the Organic Mental Core that 'runs' the spacecraft goes insane and has to be destroyed. The crew are then faced with the problem of creating a replacement from the materials to hand. Herbert introduces some interesting speculations on the nature and purpose of consciousness, but is rather too didactic for enjoyment.

DARKNESS WEAVES by KARL EDWARD WAGNER: CORONET: 1970: 192pp: 95p

Another Sword & Sorcery skirmish featuring the repellent Kane, this book has few merits. It consists largely of a rehashing of very tired motifs and is distinguishable from the rest of its sub-sub-genre only by its excessive relishing of the unwholesome. (RM)

NON-FICTION

SCIENCE FICTION ART compiled by BRIAN ALDISS: NEL: 1975: 128pp: £2-95

With this book Aldiss has done as much for SF (magazine) illustration, as his "Billion Year Spree" did for SF literature. The book starts off with an introduction which briefly discusses the history of SF illustration from Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" to the present day, and is then divided into three separate sections. The first is a gallery of work by thirty of the more notable artists, with a short introductory piece on each, covering both the well-known (like Paul & Bok) and the less familiar (like Jack Binder or William Timmins). This is followed by a medley of artists portraying nine "Themes in Science Fiction", such as Delightful Domsdays (catastrophes) and Spires and Sewers (future cities). Finally there is a short but fascinating collection of covers from over 60 different SF magazines (many of them illustrating the first, or only, issue). A short but useful index concludes this marvellous book, which must rank as the best compendium of SF magazine art yet published. I only hope that Brian Aldiss, or someone else, will repeat the job for book cover art - a field strangely neglected.

MYTHOPOEIKON by PATRICK WOODROFFE: DRAGON'S WORLD: 1976: 156pp: £3-95?: PW

Patrick Woodroffe is, to my mind, the best current cover illustrator of paperback SF. Like most cover artists he is usually uncredited on the books, and it is a continual pleasant surprise on looking through this book to find so many favourite uncredited covers. His versatility is incredible, ranging from the ultra-hardware spacecraft of "The Forever War" (Futura) to the soft and slimy monsters on the Abraham Merritt novels (Futura), from the representational portraits on the "Sos the Rope" trilogy (Corgi), to the abstract collages on Moorcock's Corum & Cornelius novels (Quartet). As well as these, the book contains many other lesser-known book cover designs, some record-sleeves and a selection of his non-commercial art, all accompanied by a fascinating commentary by the artist himself.

MERVYN PEAKE by JOHN WATNEY: ABAJUS: 1976: 191pp: £1-95: MG

It is said that every genius must be a little mad, and Mervyn Peake would seem to be a prime example. While an outstanding creator on paper, or canvas, he seems to have been hardly able to look after himself, treating many of the 20th century 'staples' as irrelevant or incomprehensible. John Watney has put a great deal of painstaking work into his book, and the result is eminently readable, tracing Peake's slow and painful path from childhood in Peking to his death from Parkinson's disease, staying always the wrong side of fame and fortune. Throughout the history is illustrated with letters and comments from people who knew Peake at the time, and Mr. Watney has also included a very competent bibliography, which make the whole a very praiseworthy achievement.

MAN FROM ATLANTIS:SEA KILL by RICHARD WOODLEY: MAYFLOWER: 1977: 156pp: 65p

MAN FROM ATLANTIS:DEATH SCOUTS by RICHARD WOODLEY: MAYFLOWER: 1977: 157pp: 65p

Two novels from the recently deceased TV series. After introducing Mark Harris - a water-breathing human with amnesia - the first book moves on to a madman who is capturing atomic submarines and plans to make the land-masses annihilate each other by starting a Third World War (a plot curiously similar to that of the latest James Bond film). The second book produces a couple of aliens - who take over a couple of bodies and impersonate water-breathing humans - with one of whom Mark falls in love. The books are pure hack, but probably no worse than the TV programmes.

THE CATS by NICK SHARMAN: NEL: 1977: 160pp: 75p

Tedious rubbish. Mr. Sharman neither convinces nor frightens - the only horrifying thing is that people pay money for the junk.

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KEY TO ARTISTS

BB = Beverley le Barrow
BC = Bob Carlos-Clarke
BP = Bruce Pennington
CM = Chris Moore
DB = David Bergen
DM = David McAllister

EJ = Eddie Jones
JP = Joe Petagno
M = 'Melvyn'
MG = Maeve Gilmore
ML = Mike Little
PE = 'PE'

PG = Peter Gudynas
PGf = Peter Goodfellow
PJ = Peter Jones
PT = Peter Tybus
PW = Patrick Woodroffe
TR = Tony Roberts