

PPPP	AAA	PPPP	EEEEEE	RRRR	BBBB	AAA	CCCC	K	K
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A bimonthly review of British paperback SF; published by Philip Stephensen-Payne.

Donated free to the BSFA. Otherwise 10p an issue or selected trade.
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Before starting on this issue, I feel further apologies are due for the quality of production of last issue. Through an unfortunate accident (accepting help from an incompetent) the collation and stapling was very poor on top of everything else. Hopefully all is back to normal now, with the return of my typewriter & slightly more sleep.

While on the subject of last issue, a few more uncredited artists:- "A Song for Lya" - Joe Petagno; "Millenium" - Tony Roberts; "Slaves of Heaven" - Jim Burns; "Slave Girl of Gor" & "Raven No 1" - Chris Achilleos; "Perry Rhodan 31" - probably Angus McKie; "Journey of Joenes" - probably Peter Elson. My thanks to Rog Peyton and Tim Pickard for this information, and to Tim for some help on artists for this issue.

Another new SF paperback publisher this time - Hamlyn. While not outstanding, their books so far have been interesting, and they do credit their cover artists. (If anyone feels like writing a letter in a cause worth supporting, write to the remaining firms who don't credit the artists - principally PAN, Sphere, Orbit and Coronet). Astute readers may also have noticed a few Ace books on the market in the last couple of months. These have been imported by a firm called LSP Books. The first batch was somewhat haphazard, went only to a few bookshops, and accidentally infringed some copyrights, so I have not tried to cover them. However LSP are currently sorting out the legal situation, and aim to set up a regular schedule soon, at which point I will include them here.

One other paperback which I would like to mention, although it is not SF in the slightest, is the revised version of "The Nagus" by John Fowles which has just been published by Panther (656pp: £1-50). To attempt to summarise the story in a couple of lines would be foolish, but in essence it concerns an English school-master in Greece, for whom life suddenly takes on the aspect of a surrealist play. Every time he thinks he has worked out what is going on around him and why, something happens to change the picture, until he comes to doubt even the most fundamental 'facts' of his existence. The dreamlike unreality that pervades the book becomes so hauntingly believable that even the reader begins to get paranoiac by the end. A remarkable achievement and well worth reading.

Which leaves me just enough room for the usual credits and plaudits;- to my fellow reviewers Robin Marcus (RM) and Philippa Grove-Stephensen (Pa) who have to put up with some tedious rubbish to read; and to Keith Freeman who masterminds the job of transferring these words to hordes of pieces of paper. My thanks to all.

LUCIFER'S HAMMER by LARRY NIVEN & JERRY POURNELLE: FUTURA: 1977: 639pp: £1-50

What If? What if something happens to your world, so cataclysmic, so unthinkable that your past experience is useless? Would you be one of those who curled up and died in the aftershock? Would you just follow the nearest person who seemed to know what to do? Or would you ride the crisis, adapt to the change and continue to fight for your ideals? This is the situation that Niven & Pournelle portray in their latest novel. For when parts of the Hammer-Brown comet hit the Earth, they destroy in one stroke the entire social and political order of the United States, most of the major cities and lines of communication, and many people's morale. In the aftermath various groups and people survive and strive with, or against, each other to form a new type of civilisation. The essence of the book is believability. The authors create and present their major actors in 'normal' life and then trace them through the weeks leading to the catastrophe and the events thereafter, each coming alive in his or her individual role. The action centres on a small area of California and the interaction there, but nevertheless the feeling of a global disaster pervades the book. This should win the Hugo (and so probably won't) and is conclusive proof that Niven & Pournelle are the best pair of co-authors the SF world has ever engendered.

THE MARTIAN INCA by IAN WATSON: PANTHER: 1977: 203pp: 75p: PG

"The Martian Inca", Ian Watson's third novel, will doubtless add to his already considerable reputation. But it is in some ways disappointing, despite its considerable achievements. A Russian spacecraft crash-lands on a village on the high Bolivian Plateau and the soil samples it contains send the villagers into a coma from which only two emerge alive. Both of these have gained access to the 'metaprogramming' of their minds; they can see and understand racial memories, and can disentangle their own motivations. Julio, driven by a need to see his heritage restored (plus a fatal desire for power) proclaims himself the Inca and sets out to re-establish the old Inca Empire. The other survivor, Angelina, goes with him, attempting to make him see how reform of themselves by the understanding they have gained, comes first. Meanwhile the American mission to Mars nears its destination and fears about the possible effects of the Martian soil grow, as does the tension between the three team members, whose approaches to life are so very different. Despite the plot connections and parallels, the two parts of this book do not seem to mesh, and the implications of what is conceived as a new evolutionary step are described but not brought vividly alive for the reader. Ian Watson's material deserved a fuller exploration. That said, it must be acknowledged that the book is rich in imaginative detail and one can sense a genuine intellectual force behind it. Though Ian Watson's craftsmanship is still deficient, there can be no doubt of his very substantial talent. (Pa)

MAN PLUS by FREDERIK POHL: PANTHER: 1976: 228pp: 95p: PG

It was inevitable, following the 'bionic' successes on TV, that some author would take a serious look at the problems involved in creating a bionic man, and their possible solution. In "Man Plus" the purpose of the engineering is to create a man who can live unprotected on the surface of Mars, so that a self-contained colony can survive there. Pohl argues the story through with great skill and insight, treating especially the effect of the changes on the cyborg (as Pohl calls him) himself and on his close friends, but he never really manages to establish the credibility of his basic thesis. In particular he ignores completely the problems of the colony propagating itself without the incredibly complex technology required to make a cyborg. An interesting book, but certainly not deserving the Nebula Award it won last year.

THE MAKESHIFT ROCKET by POUL ANDERSON: HAMLIN: 1958: 114pp: 70p: PJ

An asteroid out of Merrie England is invaded by Irish Nationalists. Knud Axel Syrup, a bicycling Dane who is Chief Engineer of a tintack spaceship gets caught up in the trouble, along with Sarmishkidu, the Martian owner of a beer cellar and Emily, a vicar's daughter who's an ardent follower of Isadora Suncan. And the plot gets sillier from there on. Like the eponymous rocket, the book is slight and utterly ridiculous - but who wants more from a funny story? (Pa)

DEATHBIRD STORIES by HARLAN ELLISON: PAN: 1965-75: 346pp: 80p

At the front of this collection, Ellison recommends that the stories be read in several sittings for "the emotional content of these stories, taken without break, may be extremely upsetting" and, for once, he is not exaggerating. The stories are a cycle - a study of gods and men. First is the award-winning "Whimper of Whipped Dogs" of the cruel, bloodthirsty god of New York, demanding you watch his human sacrifice or are one. Then "Along the Scenic Route", where worship of the automobile has been raised to new heights as drivers duel each other on the highways with lasers, Spandaus and so on. On and on, step by step through the 19 stories, Ellison presents god after god, emotion following emotion, each building on and complementing the others. Mars, God of War, shows his terrifying visage in "Basilisk" when a Vietnam soldier gets the power to kill by his glance; Dis, the "Rock God", awakening after years of slumber under a Manhattan skyscraper to call in his dues. And the lighter gods, the God of Love moving quietly like a unicorn "On the Downhill Side", or "Paingod" bringing mankind joy through pain. And, at the end, the summary of all, the incredible "Deathbird" itself. This is probably the best single-author SF collection ever compiled, and certainly Ellison's best, so far.

THE WIND'S TWELVE QUARTERS VOLUME 2 by URSULA LeGUIN: PANTHER: 1970-74: 138pp: 75p: PG

Here is the second half of Ursula Le Guin's brilliant collection of short stories. Best known is probably "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas". Short, but compelling, it allegorises a comment of the philosopher William James, that man could not accept a state of perfect happiness, if that state was conditional on the suffering of even one being. Less familiar, but almost as striking, is "Direction of the Road" which takes a very strange perspective on an everyday occurrence, giving a glimpse of a really alien way of looking at things. In "The Field of Vision" man finds his God at last, not in a distant heaven but in a gloomy room on Mars, while in "The Stars Below" the brilliant stars appear, at the bottom of a mine. Each of the eight stories in this collection is a gem to be treasured - if only there were more of them.

TELEPATHIST by JOHN BRUNNER: FONTANA: 1964: 190pp: 80p: PGf

"Telepathist" pre-dates Brunner's most famous novels, but like others from this period shows Brunner's considerable power of writing a thoroughly enjoyable story. Gerald Howson is the world's most powerful telepathist, at the cost of being a helpless cripple. The book is in three parts; the first tells of Howson's early, painful history and his discovery; the second traces how he comes to terms with his terrifying gift; and, finally, in the third part, he comes to terms with himself. Brunner's account of telepathy and its potential uses is very convincing, but it is his portrait of Howson for whom the insight into the minds of others only seems to emphasize his physical and emotional isolation, which has won this book many affectionate admirers; this re-issue will doubtless gain many more. (Pa)

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS by KURT VONNEGUT JR.: PANTHER: 1973: 270pp: 95p

Kilgore Trout, doomed to have his novels published only as bread for pornographic sandwiches, journeys to meet Dwayne Hoover and precipitate him into violent insanity. One moves; the other waits; neither gets anywhere. Pulp-magazine plot synopses are introduced at random between equally irrelevant gobbets of action or reverie. It would be easy to write off this book as simply self-indulgent - the product of a youthful iconoclasm turned cynical in middle age - and to berate the author for inflicting on the public the result of his taking a mental enema. Certainly the book is pervaded by many of the drearier trappings of the Existentialist school - a deliberate banality of style, a near-identification of the mad and the sane, an underlying sense of sordid futility. Yet the absurdity of the characters, and the book's calculated structural discursiveness camouflage an eloquent statement of a positive faith reborn. Despite appearances this book is worth reading to the end. (RM)

THE SHINING by STEPHEN KING: NEL: 1977: 416pp: £1-25: RJ

Jack Torrance, fired from his teaching post for assaulting a pupil, accepts a job as winter caretaker at the Overlook Hotel up in the mountains - a quiet spot where he can finish his book in peace, and where his wife and five year old son Danny can have a rest. But Danny is no ordinary boy, and the Overlook no ordinary hotel. For Danny has the 'shine', a telepathic/precognitive ability of surprising power; and the Overlook wants that power, for it has its own perverse life formed from those who have died there, and it wants Danny to join the group. Very cleverly Stephen King builds up the tension as the Torrances slowly become aware that all is not well as the snow descends and seals them into the hotel. A masterpiece of suspense, the book carries even the most sceptical reader along.

'SALEM'S LOT by STEPHEN KING: NEL: 1975: 439pp: £1-35: RJ

Ben Mears returns to his childhood town of Jerusalem's Lot to write a book about the mysterious, 'haunted' Marsten House. To his surprise, he finds somebody has just bought the house; two men setting up an antique business - one of whom is never seen out in daylight. Then people begin to disappear, and others are found dead, seemingly of acute anaemia. Slowly Ben begins to suspect the horrifying truth, but can he do anything in time? "'Salem's Lot" is one of the best novels of vampirism around, despite the fact that for dramatic effect Mr. King assumes that every vampire must kill one person per night, each of whom becomes a vampire and does the same - at which rate the entire world would be taken over in just over a month!

CARRIE by STEPHEN KING: NEL: 1974: 189pp: 75p: DM

Every puny weakling, set on by the school bullies, wishes "If only I had some Power, so that I could strike back". For Carrie White the wish comes true when she discovers her telekinetic abilities. But when the 'bullies' seem to her to be the whole town of Chamberlain, the effects of that striking back can be fearsome. Made famous by De Palma's film of the same name, the book is of far more interest, creating more believable characters and looking more closely at the whole situation. An early and brief indication of Stephen King's later abilities.

THE FOG by JAMES HERBERT: NEL: 1975: 267pp: 80p

Herbert's second published novel, which starts off very well. A mysterious earthquake shakes a village on Salisbury Plain, and from one of the fissures emerges a strange green 'fog'. Soon, all those exposed to the fog, animal or human, begin to exhibit strange tendencies, generally suicidal or homicidal. Herbert builds up the tension and horror very masterfully, but sadly cannot bring it to a satisfactory climax, and the plot collapses instead into straight melodrama.

THE RATS by JAMES HERBERT: NEL: 1974: 175pp: 75p

One of the first of the 'mutated creatures attack mankind' books, and possibly the 'best' of a very uninspired subgenre. Herbert's characterisation is good, and his plotting skillful, but even he cannot inject life into such a dull theme.

KILLER CRABS by GUY N SMITH: NEL: 1978: 158pp: 75p: BM

Inept attempt at the sex plus horror formula. Very boring indeed. (RM)

THE RESURRECTION MACHINE by PHIL SMITH: NEL: 1978: 205pp: 80p

A new laser transmitter awakes primitive forces from beyond the grave. The book's as ridiculous as it sounds.

THE POWER OF BLACKNESS by JACK WILLIAMSON: SPHERE: 1974-76: 220pp: 95p: PE

It is over 40 years since Williamson wrote the 'Legion of Space' stories, and from the evidence of this recent novel, he seems to have learnt nothing in that time. The adventures of Blacklantern the Nggonggan and the Benefactors portray the same naive characterisation, space opera mechanisms and cardboard plots as before.

THE WORLD-SHUFFLER by KEITH LAUMER: CORONET: 1973: 159pp: 75p: FW?

Lafayette O'Leary is transported from our world into one of his dreams where he overthrows an usurping king, kills a dragon, survives a duel with a jealous lover and marries his sweetheart. And all this in flashback in the first four pages. Then, just as he's getting bored with court life, someone or something shifts him to yet another reality. Here Lafayette has to start from scratch as nothing and nobody are quite what they seem. It's impossible to convey the side-splittingly funny quality of the book without going into incredibly tortuous detail; lovers of humorous fantasy will enjoy it greatly. It richly deserves its lovely (though uncredited) cover illustration. (Pa)

THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN by JOHN BRUNNER: NEL: 1973: 207pp: 75p: JP

Another gloomy Brunner view of the near future, but this time with a built-in solution. Europe trembles on the brink of World War III, and in England unemployment is rising dramatically, and there has been a return to Victorian prudery, enforced - often violently - by the Campaign Against Moral Pollution. Maurice Post, however, has discovered a viral drug that will give everybody total recall of all they have ever said/heard/done as well as heighten their senses and faculties. Brunner's case - that this drug will solve all the problems - is not altogether convincing, but the book is nevertheless very enjoyable, taking some amusing swipes at contemporary England.

THE CASTLE KEEPS by ANDREW J OFFUTT: MAGNUM: 1972: 203pp: 85p: LE

Set only a generation in the future "The Castle Keeps" portrays a world dominated by over-population, pollution and violent crime. Frankly propagandist its rather sketchy plot is laced with liberal doses of ecological moralising. However if the result is rather bitty and the author displays more sincerity than ability, nevertheless there are some exciting passages and telling descriptions which make the book and its message more or less acceptable. (RM)

MELTDOWN by RAY KYTLE: PANTHER: 1976: 188pp: 80p: CF

Another novel about a new nuclear power station going on line, and the way in which, despite the safety precautions, it could cause a national disaster. The book focuses on two people, the scientist who thinks it is dangerous and the saboteur who wants revenge on the company, and goes into detail both on the physics involved in the plant and on how to make and conceal a home-made bomb. It would be quite a good book, were it not so overshadowed by "The Prometheus Crisis" (see PP II.1). "Meltdown" has none of the emotional impact of the other book, and its plot and characterisation are weak by comparison.

SPLINTER OF THE MIND'S EYE by ALAN DEAN FOSTER: SPHERE: 1978: 222pp: 85p

Another extract "from the Adventures of Luke Skywalker", though not the immediate sequel to "Star Wars". Luke, Leia and the two robots are stranded on an alien planet. They go through a disaster and a rescue per chapter in true comic tradition before ultimately encountering Darth Vader just about to get his hands on the jewel that will enhance yet further his mastery of the Force. Naturally the plot leaves everyone just as they were and ready for the next adventure, but it is sad to watch the characters become mere cliches. (Pa)

SHAKESPEARE'S PLANET by CLIFFORD D SIMAK: MAGNUM: 1976: 188pp: 75p: CM

A very disappointing novel. Carter Horton, only survivor of a 'frozen-sleep' space exploration team, lands on a remote planet seemingly suitable for human life. Accompanied by the usual amusing Simakian robot, Nicodemus, he encounters the semi-human Carnivore who tells Horton of his dead friend Shakespeare (no relation) who used to live on the planet. The plot rambles on through some interesting but very skimmed twists to a ridiculous 3-page climax. One expects better from Simak.

THE WORLD OF PTAUVVS by LARRY NIVEN: ORBIT: 1966: 188pp: 80p: PJ

A GIFT FROM EARTH by LARRY NIVEN: ORBIT: 1968: 254pp: 90p: PJ

NEUTRON STAR by LARRY NIVEN: ORBIT: 1966-67: 285pp: 90p: PJ

Three of Niven's early books back in print. "The World of Ptavvs" was his first published novel and deals with an alien who is shipwrecked on Earth in a stasis field. When he is released centuries later by Earth scientists, he immediately takes over the nearest human and tries to find his crashed spacecraft, while the other Earthmen, only vaguely aware of what is happening, try to stop him. "A Gift from Earth" is set on Mount Lookitthat, a solitary mountain rising miles above its planet surface, and forming the only habitable ground on a hostile planet, and on which a civil war is about to ~~be~~ waged over the ethics of organ transplants. Probably the best of the three, though, is "Neutron Star", a collection of eight stories including the classic title story in which Beowulf Shaeffer investigates the immediate environs of a neutron star, "At the Core" where he visits the galactic core, to find a nasty surprise there, and six other brilliant stories. Niven is probably the best current exponent of 'hard' SF, and these three books show his abilities well.

THE BRASS DRAGON by MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY: NETHUEN: 1969: 191pp: 65p: BF

Seventeen year old Barry wakes up with amnesia in a Texas hospital, with a sort of brass dragon the only clue to his past. Then that past begins to catch up with him and he starts trying to find out why he is receiving anonymous phone calls; having his clothing torn apart or his home ransacked. The second half of the book tells of what happened - he was kidnapped by visiting alien scientists (but from the highest of motives), and then marooned on Mars by visiting alien monsters. The characters lack individuality; the evil aliens are unconvincing and the plot has several gaping holes, but the story jogs along. Fans of the Heinlein ~~&~~ juveniles might well enjoy it. (Pa)

HELLO SUMMER, GOODBYE by MICHAEL CONEY: PAN: 1975: 192pp: 70p: IM?

At the beginning of this book Coney calls it "a love story, a war story and a science-fiction story, and more besides", and in many ways the book's major failure is that he tries to do too much with it. The SF element is minimal - the village of Pallahaxi is effectively Coney's familiar 'Cornish' fishing port - and only really used to set up a political environment in which the story can happen. The war is mere background and plays no noticeable part in the story. Only the love element survives, and that is often threatened with submersion beneath the other parts of the book, in particular Coney's recurrent theme of the corruption inherent in power and politics. Despite all that, it is an enjoyable story, but certainly not up to Coney's best.

INSTAR by RYDER BRADY: NEL: 1976: 233pp: 95p: TM

Though published under 'Horror & Supernatural', "Instar" displays few of the standard characteristics of these genres. Its flat, retrospective style plays down the horrific element and its assumption of a subconscious telepathic link between man and dog is mainly a mechanistic device on which to base the plot proper - a somewhat morbid psychological study of inbreeding and obsession. The background of stifling New England wealthy society is nicely portrayed and the atmosphere of growing subjective unreality does succeed in building up the quietly chilling effect intended. A neat book. (RM)

A FUNERAL FOR THE EYES OF FIRE by MICHAEL BISHOP: SPHERE: 1975: 294pp: 95p: M

Like so many first published novels, this one contains too many interesting ideas welded together imperfectly into a severely flawed book. The plot theoretically concerns the transportation of a dissident group of human-descended aliens from one planet to another, although Bishop is more concerned with the conflict of ideologies created by the proposed emigration. Bishop is capable of some very evocative writing, and his imagination is certainly fertile, but in trying to do too much in too little space, he loses a lot of the effect of them, and the book becomes rather dry and tedious.

THE DEATH OF THE DRAGON by SAKYO KOMATSU: NEL: 1973: 192pp: 95p: DM

Although science fiction is very popular in Japan, very little Japanese SF gets translated into English, and so it is difficult to tell how representative this book is. Originally titled "Japan Sinks", it is a straightforward disaster novel in which the continental plate movements near Japan begin to change, causing the whole Archipelago to sink into the sea over a period of two years. The precise 'mechanics' of the disaster appear to have been worked out carefully but most are lost on the reader, as is much of the effect, by the publisher's ridiculous omission of a proper map, without which most of the place names are meaningless. The plot follows the usual 'disaster' lines, and is insufficiently original or interesting to save the book from mediocrity.

THE SEED OF EARTH by ROBERT SILVERBERG: HAMLYN: 1952: 167pp: 80p: TR

In his historical introduction Silverberg says "...it's not the profound mixture of adventure and human insight I thought it was in 1958, but I still think it's an okay book. And it's interesting to see how many of my later literary themes and obsessions turn up in it." Which is more or less accurate, although the scheme of compulsory pioneering of alien planets seems very improbable and the plot structure, which takes more than half the book to set up the 'testing' situations, betrays its short-story origins. It's a long way from mature Silverberg, but readable. (Pa)

A WREATH OF STARS by BOB SHAW: PAN: 1976: 191pp: 70p

When bizarrely shaped ghosts begin to appear in the mines of Barandi, the public are inclined to dismiss them as hallucinations. But it seems that these apparitions are only visible through the new magnifying glasses, light-gathering devices that apparently react also to anti-neutrinos. The real truth is not apparent though, until Gilbert Snook, a man with limited telepathic abilities, manages to contact the beings and finds they are in fact inhabitants of an anti-neutrino planet, dubbed Avernus, which exists 'within' the Earth but has been perturbed recently by the passage through the Solar System of another anti-neutrino planet. Despite the bizarreness of the idea and a scattering of logical flaws, this is a remarkably good book, and one of Shaw's best.

THE GARMENTS OF CAEAN by BARRINGTON J BAYLEY: FONTANA: 1976: 222pp: 90p: TR

Peder Forbarth was a sartorial, a designer of clothes and fashions in the Ziode empire. But his skill cannot match that of the legendary Caeanic master, Frachonard. Thus Peder is overwhelmed when he comes into possession of a genuine Frachonard suit, one of only five in existence, until he begins to realise the influence his elegant apparel is having over him. Bayley, as always, is sparkingly innovative, and some passages of the book - like the world of infra-sound - are brilliantly conceived, but ultimately his plot is too slow and ill-conceived to carry the book, and it becomes boring. A shame.

NAKED TO THE STARS by GORDON R DICKSON: SPHERE: 1961: 157pp: 75p: PE

To my mind, Gordon Dickson is the best writer of SF 'war' stories around. He shares neither the jingoistic military attitude of Heinlein, nor the nihilistic get-what-you-can-out-of-it approach of Haldeman. Instead, he seems to say 'War is going to happen, but perhaps it doesn't have to be so terrible'. This book exemplifies that belief as Cal Truant, refused re-enlistment to the Combat Corps is persuaded to join the Contact Corps, whose aim is peaceful settlements rather than bloody massacres. A thoughtful book, well worth a couple of hours reading.

THE CRYSTAL WORLD by J.G. BALLARD: PANTHER: 1966: 175pp: 75p: PGf

One of Ballard's early novels, again in print. Part of the African jungle begins to 'crystallise', turning plants and animals into coruscating jewels. Into this kaleidoscopic maelstrom plunges Dr. Sanders in search of Suzanne, his ex-mistress. The conditions and people he meets there, and their effect on him and his search make this a beautifully haunting and thoughtful book, and one not to be missed.

THE GOLDEN SWORD by JANET E MORRIS: BANTAM: 1977: 368pp: 85p: BF

This, the second book of a fantasy trilogy, is, like its predecessor, set largely on the planet Silistra, a world more or less independent of the galactic federation and much courted as the source of a longevity serum. By the end of the first book, "High Couch of Silistra", Estri, chief official call-girl of Well Astria, has discovered her mysterious off-planet father, some of whose god-like powers she has inherited. She has also contrived to fornicate, gently but thoroughly, with nearly all the leading male characters. "The Golden Sword" finds her returned somewhat unceremoniously to Silistra - in a desert portion ruled by a rather barbarous tribe who proceed to enslave her. In the highly complex plot which ensues, most of the characters from "High Couch" are deployed and developed, but more stress is laid on the 'Day Keepers' - a technological elite who indirectly run the planet - and on the further ramifications of her father's kin. Nonetheless the sexual titillation continues unabated, spiced where appropriate with a little bondage and the like. The climax is carefully led up to, yet still seems a bit contrived as the way for book three is opened up. Whilst over-ambitious and in places slightly boring, "The Golden Sword" is decidedly above average for the genre, and more solidly structured than "High Couch of Silistra". The final volume could be very good. (RM)

SPACE VIKING by H. BEAM PIPER: SPHERE: 1963: 222pp: 85p: M

When Lucas Trask sees his wife killed minutes after the wedding, he willingly forfeits his home and title to go into space to find her murderer. Starting as an ordinary 'Space Viking' with just one ship and crew, he soon builds a strong base and acquires a strong fleet which enable him to conquer the planet his enemy has just captured. The plot is thin and unconvincing, and, despite some interesting political discussions, the book, as a whole, drags. Not Piper at his best.

STAR TREK: THE NEW VOYAGES 2 ed MYRNA CULBREATH & SONDRÁ MARSHAK: CORGI: 1977: 252pp: 85p

Another collection of amateur stories, poems, etc. which show much more affection than talent. Occasionally one wonders how Kirk, Spock and so on became the sloppy demi-Gods that they seem here. (Pa)

PERRY RHODAN 33: THE GIANT'S PARTNER by CLARK DARLTON: 1973: 128pp: 70p: PJ

Rhodan makes friends with the Brian, the Arkonide supercomputer, and defeats the Zarlt of Zalit as a gesture of goodwill. Meanwhile his affair with Thora is hotting up - getting him into her bedroom (though not yet her bed) at last.

THE LAND OF FROUD ed DAVID LARKIN: PAN: 1977: 92pp: £3-95: BTr

Brian Froud's paintings have not appeared on many book covers (though devotees will remember some of the James Branch Cabell books from Ballantine, or Lloyd Alexander's Prydain chronicles from Armada). Despite that his work has already acquired quite a following in the United States. A painter of Faery, his pictures abound in trolls, witches, dwarves and fairies themselves, alternately ugly and grotesque or light and beautiful. A painter, one feels, who could have done justice to "The Lord of the Rings". His style will not appeal to everybody, but for lovers of Faery it is not to be missed.

FROM THE BLOB TO STAR WARS by BART ANDREWS: SPHERE: 1977: 154pp: 85p

One hundred, 20-question quizzes entirely on science-fiction films, with the first 25 devoted exclusively to "Star Wars" for topicality. The questions range from the very easy ("What short story was (2001: A Space Odyssey) based on, and who wrote it?") to the abstruse ("Who played the monster in 'Zaat'?"). Sadly the emphasis is very much on the latter, making this really a book for the expert.

THE MARVEL COMICS ILLUSTRATED VERSION OF STAR WARS: SPHERE: 1977: 124pp: 75p: RH/DC

The unavoidable comic strip adaptation of "Star Wars". The plot is not quite the same in some places, and the characters (except Chewbacca) look nothing like the actors they portray, but no doubt it will satisfy comic fans.

THE OCCULT by COLIN WILSON: MAYFLOWER: 1971: 795pp: £2-25

Colin Wilson has been interested in the 'hidden' sides of man's nature for a long time, and this volume is his major exploration of this problem. It is a massive tome, which pursues several different themes. During the course of it, Colin Wilson traces the rise and nature of religion; the decline of man's 'natural' magical powers; the nature of the 'occult'; he tells of the nature of a vast number of 'occult' phenomena, and of many people involved with it. All this is by way of expanding and illustrating his major thesis which concerns his postulated "Faculty X". Quite what this Faculty X is, seems more easily illustrated than defined, but it involves man's 'inward vision' and 'awareness' and clearly encompasses occult powers. Colin Wilson believes that we have necessarily lost these 'instinctive' abilities in order to develop a technological civilisation; but now we must expand this faculty - "man's future lies in the cultivation of Faculty X". It seems, through these 800 pages, that Wilson not infrequently loses sight of his thesis in detail and his case is far from proven, but it is certainly presented in extensive detail. The major value of this book may lie in the wealth of material used. The mountain of sheer factual evidence - anecdotes, explanations, histories, quotations - is almost overwhelming, but Colin Wilson's narrative ability rarely falters. His elucidation of, for example, the Kabbalah, is admirably clear and much of what he says is very interesting. Certain major reservations must be made, however. Firstly Colin Wilson is a man with a message and rather too often he uses an argumentative process which is not logically valid - "obviously" such and such follows, even when it doesn't - which is the book's major flaw. His scepticism about many 'occult' faculties may offend some. On some subjects, for example the Tarot, his account is indubitably very partial, and may even be inaccurate. All in all this book is very slanted, and its encyclopaedic coverage is eccentric in presentation and opinion, but it is intelligent, the facts are well-documented and the organisation admirably tabulated. Whether or not Colin Wilson's thesis is ultimately convincing, his masterly appraisal of the occult is the best single work covering the entire field on the market and deserves a place of prominence on the bookshelf. (Pa)

VELIKOVSKY RECONSIDERED ed The Editors of PENSEE: ABACUS: 1966-76: 274pp: £1-50

This series of articles from the magazine Pensee discusses a number of aspects of Velikovsky's theories of solar system catastrophes in historical times and the controversy surrounding their original publication. Part one covers this latter aspect and presents very convincingly a damning case against a significant portion of the scientific establishment of the 1940s and '50s. Later sections consider particular facets of the theories in more detail - ancient astronomical observations, celestial mechanics and plasma physics, the chemistry of Venus' atmosphere and the possible residual evidence of planetary catastrophe in the Solar System as we now know it. Though several of the articles are of a highly technical nature the book as a whole makes fascinating and at times blood-boiling reading. (RM)

SOCORRO SAUCER by RAY STANFORD: FONTANA: 1976: 191pp: 85p: CY

In 1965 an unidentified flying object landed in Socorro, New Mexico. The policeman who witnessed it also saw two humanoids standing by it. The object showed flight patterns which we cannot reproduce; there was physical evidence left behind. Mr Stanford seems to establish these facts beyond reasonable doubt. He then goes on to tell of a military 'cover-up' of evidence, and of more than just this sighting. It is probably impossible for anyone, short of the Congressional Hearing which Mr Stanford demands, to check the accuracy of his facts. Some of his evidence is third-hand, and some of his arguments logically flawed, but there remains a good deal which, unless Mr Stanford is lying, is factual. And it is hard to see how the facts he presents can lead to conclusions radically different to his own - including the existence of a massive 'hush' operation. A careful, plausible account worth consideration by anyone interested in the UFO question. (Pa)

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BFr= Brian Froud	IM = Ian Miller	PJ = Peter Jones
BH = Bob Martin	JP = Joe Petagno	PW = Patrick Woodroffe
BP = Bob Parkin	LE = Les Edwards	RH = Rick Hoberg
CF = Chris Foss	M = 'Melvyn'	RJ = Roger Judd
CM = Chris Moore	PE = Peter Elson	TM = Tony Masero
CY = Chris Yates	PG = Peter Gudynas	TR = Tony Roberts
DC = Dave Cockrum		