THE VECTOR REVIEWS SUPPLEMENT
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MERLIN'S MIRROR by Andre Norton; Sidwick & Jackson; London; 1976; 205 pp.; £3.95; ISBN 0 223 98328 0
Reviewed by Brian Stabileford

The world of Arthurian legend has been one of the most prolific sources of inspiration for fantasy writers since the days of Malory. The mythology has worn extremely well, supplying a stream of excellent works. It is not surprising to find that Arthur's world is a constant feature of British fantasy - it is, after all, home-grown - but it is perhaps surprising to find that it holds a similar attraction for American fantasy writers. There is a kind of comfort-able homelessness in stumbling across Merlin in The Chronicles of Charun, by Eduardo V. Pauwels, or The Weathermonger, but Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee, who visited Arthur's court in 1869, was surely too utterly out of place that his unfortunate accident did not bear repeating. And yet, we have seen in recent years Arthurian fantasies by H. Warner Munn (Merlin's Ring), Karen Anne Laubenthal (Enchanted) and Robert Nathan (The Elixir).

Now Andre Norton has joined in, and one is bound to ask: is there really anything new to be added?

The answer seems to be no. There are grave risks involved in re-working a myth so well-known, and the gimmick by which Andre Norton tries to invent it with new life is tediously feeble. (There are these two alien races, you see, and their agents - Merlin, Nimue, et al. are begotten by misconceptions... and their magic powers are - you'll never guess - really their alien superpowers...) Andre Norton is a pedestrian writer at the best of times, and can so easily fall into hopeless dullness. Here, alas, she has fallen - her prose is quite bland and the action sadly routine. Against competition as strong as The Once And Future King. The Elixir and The Crystal Cave Miss Norton could hardly expect to shine in performance, but the extent of her failure is really quite tragic.

Sir Lancelot does not appear. I hope she isn't saving him for a sequel.

SEYFALL by Harry Harrison; Faber & Faber; London; 1976; 270 pp.; £3.50; ISBN 0 571 10862 4
Reviewed by Brian Stabileford

Enclosed in the review copy of this book is a note which reads: "Harry Harrison asks us to point out that unlike his previous books Seyfall is emphatically not a work of science fiction". It is signed: "Publicity Dept". I pass on this message without comment, as I feel that any debate arising from it would be unnecessarily wasteful of space.

Seyfall is a suspense thriller about a joint Soviet-American spaceshuttle which takes off in trouble and gets deeper and deeper as problems stack up neatly like a pile of pennies.

Melodramatic moments follow one another in perfect military order and the tone of the book covers unsasily (but effortlessly) between matters-of-fact toughness and soap-opera schmaltziness. It features boy-meets-girl, conscience-meets-politics and back-to-the-wall heroes. The final casualty figures are 31,000 plus.

This is a book written very much according to a recipe. (Movie pudding, I believe, is what they call the dish when it comes right.) Gourmets might find it unsatisfactory, because it has the unmistakable smack of metaphorical monosodium glutamate, but those out for a good, solid meal might do worse - lots of lovely, suiting fare. Harry Harrison is nothing if not competent, especially in the entertainment business, and the target audience for this particular book (see above note) will undoubtedly get their money's worth.

SCIENCE FICTION DISCOVERIES edited by Carol and Frederik Pohl; Bantam; New York; 1976; 69p; 272 pp; ISBN 0 553 08585 9
Reviewed by Brian Stabileford

Here is yet another anthology of original stories, which, if successful, will probably turn into an annual series. As an experiment in publishing policy the original anthology has probably not yet been fully tested despite the vast number which have been issued in the last six or seven years. The mortality rate has been high, but New Dimensions and Universe both seem established now as consider-able aspect within the field. BP Discoveries is a fat collection, consisting of seven short stories and a short novel that might easily have made a paperback in its own right, but there is neither freshness nor high quality - it is very much a cut-glass imitation - and that is a failing that an anthology, unlike a single issue of a magazine, cannot really afford. The standard that has to be reached in this medium is very high. The one poor story among the shorts is a trivial effort by Roger Zelazny, but three of the others fit patterns which are becoming disturbingly standardised. George K. H. Martin's "Starlady" and Scott Edelman's "Age of Libra" are fashionable but unconvincing, while Robert Shockey's "Never-Ending Western Movie" is so typical of Shockey's work that every word seems familiar as it slides past the eye. Fred Sieberhagen, by contrast, contributes an atypical piece which is eminently readable and Doria Pisirchka contributes a stomach-churning black comedy which draws out yet another lump of her sick sense of humour - I wish she would set aside her morbid preoccupations a little more frequently, for she is a fine writer. My favourite among the shorts is actually a fairly unassuming piece, a variant on the old-man-who by Arthur Jean Cox called "An Incident at the Owl Creek Rest Home", which is very neatly handled.

I confess that I don't know what to make of the long story - Sabette Rosenmore's "Error" (qv at p 8).
I find that what offend me most about this book is its determined attempt to pervert the English language. Any habitual reader of sf criticism should be used to this by now, but for some reason I find Ash's semi-literacy even more grating than most. In Who's Who in SF we meet J. G. Ballard, an expert in slow choreographies of physical and mental disintegration; Ray Bradbury, a highly gifted writer and a constant bone of contention in the science fictional arena; Larry Niven, a noted arrival of the last decade and a sophisticated updater of space opera; and Theodore Sturgeon, a gifted and provocative writer, almost in a school of his own. There are at least three American critics/historians who can now sit back with contented smiles upon their faces, secure in the knowledge that they are no longer leading contenders for the title of World Champion Metaphor-angler.

There has always been a great deal of worthless and ephemeral writing about sf, but once it was confined within the fanzines. It is very depressing to discover that the proportion of good and useful material appearing from commercial publishers is no greater than that appearing in second-rate amateur journals. A lot of people are getting money for old rope, and the publishers will soon have collected enough old rope to strangle the market completely.

THE EDWARD DE BONO SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTION

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

I am quite a fan of Edward de Bono, the champion of lateral thinking. His book on The Mechanism of Mind is a neat and elegant example of analogical analysis applied to the problem of how minds work, and is to my mind an admirable place of work. His demand that minds should occasionally be jolted out of the ruts that help them run smoothly, so that they may be forced to confront new concepts and create new perspectives, is a very healthy one. And I think, too, that science fiction may help this process - that by its very nature it helps create new perspectives. It seems to me, therefore, that an Edward de Bono collection of science fiction might be a good idea.

I am not so sure, though, about a George Hay anthology which calls itself an Edward de Bono collection.
We have here a good, but very brief, comment on sf in general by de Bono, plus twelve stories selected by George Hay. There is no comment of any kind on the individual stories, and no attempt at all to bind the fiction to the context which de Bono's name and ideas are supposed to provide for them. This lack of integration is, I feel, a total cop-out. It's not even sure whether there has been any attempt on George Hay's part to choose stories which might specifically illustrate or embody anything in de Bono's thesis, or whether those stories just happen to be ones he likes. There is the classic "Aisle Love", in which a group of scientists is confronted with the notionally impossible (wronged by fraud) and then forced, via lateral thinking, to create a new theory in which the impossible not only becomes possible but practicable. This would have been an appropriate story to lead off the collection. Unfortunately, it is placed second to Katherine MacLian's excellent pyramid-selling story "The Snowball Effect", which seems to me to have little to do with the presiding genius of the collection.

There are good stories here - it is nice to see Norman Kagan's "The Mathematician" and Sprague de Camp's "The Harrier Race" rescued from obscurity - but nothing has been done with the idea behind the project. It has not been followed through and it has not been used to make a book any different from all of the other reprint collections which will crop into print this year.

VAMPETERS FORA & CRANFALLONS by Kurt Vonnegut Jr; Panther; St Albans; 1974; 75p; 255pp; ISBN 586 04256 3

Reviewed by James Corlay

Possibly this collection of speeches, essays and magazine articles was meant to expand Vonnegut's reputation from youth cult novelist to universal guru.

Venturing inside the dark recesses of the guru's head one finds a region wild, indisciplined and exceedingly strange: in places an impenetrable jungle and in places a morass, everywhere uncompromising and written on the large scale, rather like the upper Amazon in fact.

There is a powerful talent on display here but something has happened to its sense of discrimination, from Madame Blavatsky on the donkey of American New Journalism.

In common with many humanitarians he is astonishingly naive and simplistic about human nature; like many deeply committed men he is prepared, consciously or unconsciously, to use polemic and propaganda with no regard for truth. He is inconsistent and self-contradictory yet his mind is more closed than open.

He admits to irrationality but here as well I believe him wrong. He is only that hopeless figure a rationalist at odds with an irrational world and the bottle has turned him into a madman of Langian craziness.

The book will be of more interest to students of Vonnegut as a literary figure than as an sf writer which he again, rightly, claims not to be. What he has to say about sf here is patently illogical, his views on almost everything else are witty, facile and profoundly irritating. As a commentator he is revolutionary, as a commentator he is Citizenas The Vengeance knitting as the utilotome falls.

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THE EARLY LONG by Frank Belknap Long; Hale; London; 1977; £3.50; 211 pp; ISBN 0 7091 5854 8

Reviewed by Brian Griffen

This covers Frank Long's virtuoso word-spinning career from 'Death Masters' (Weird Tales, 1924) to 'The Peepers' (2.I. 1944). Seven of the stories come from T.T.; the rest are divided between Astounding, Marvel Tales and Campbell's Unknown Worlds, and consist of fantasy, plus a few experiments with more recognizably SF-type ideas.

To describe Frank Long, I choose the adjectives 'virtuoso' and 'word-spinner' with care. He is a virtuoso, with formidable powers of association and invention (he sometimes confesses, in the short prefaces to the stories, that he would sometimes sit down and make up a story on the spot); and there can be no doubt that he's given countless readers lots of good unhealthy fun down the years. On the other hand, a lot of this early material is word-spinning, produced at so many cents a word. The resulting product is always easy to read, entertaining, and usually lies as light as a feather on the mind, ready to be blown away by the next breeze. This, in a way, a pity, for he is plainly capable of striking ideas. In 'The Hands of Lindaloo', one of the best stories here, and Long's most frequently anthologised piece, as up to date in spirit as Fritjof Capra's 'The Tao of Physics' --- he was able, for once, to treat
date in spirit as Fritjof Capra's The Tao of Physics -- he was able, for once, to treat his idea with something like due care, and the result is uniquely memorable: anyone who hasn't read it should somehow get hold of it. Likewise, in 'The Space Eaters' -- one of the earliest Cthulhu Mythos tales -- he makes a deep impression, drawing on the basic Lovecraftian obsession: Suppose Imagination Is Reality? (Nigel Kneale must have had stories like this at the back of his mind when he wrote Quatermass and the Pit).

As for the rest of the stories here -- well in the better of these -- 'The Elements' (loosely resembling Wells's 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles'), 'Dark Vision' (in which the protagonist experiences a kind of photographic negative of life) and 'The Flame wicket' -- the basic idea is striking, haunting even, but has to fight against the crudities of word-spinning. 'The Flame Wicket' posits the invasion of our world by a boling of microscopic size from a tiny star, possessing terrific mass and energy. So far, so good. But Long the word-spinner has a deadline to meet; so the story ends with an incredibly comic climax, in which the microscopic spaceship, having landed in the right kidney of a mad scientist, finally blasts off and takes the scientist with it! Marvelous! Trouble is, I don't think it's supposed to be funny. Or if it is, it still doesn't fit in with the rest of the tale. This kind of incongruity can be found, in varying degrees, throughout this collection. In 'A Visitor from Egypt', an eminent Egyptologist is transfigured into the form of a giris -- in a museum loo! It's as if Rob Shax were to start asking Shawian jokes in the middle of The Palace of Eternity: Long just isn't in control, artistically-speaking.

But you have to admire the sheer invention: in 'Fisherman's Luck', the rod of Aras becomes a fishing rod with which the protagonist literally hooks a girl from the nineteenth century, plus the troublesome severed head of a Chinese suicide. The result is half-whimsical and half-impressive, as if Long hadn't made up his mind what he wanted. Some of the other stories are merely zany -- 'The Census Taker' and 'Step Into My Garden' -- or predictably sinister, like 'The Ocean Leach'. These are perhaps the least satisfactory.

Basically, Frank Long is a crazy, bumbling magician who likes jiggling ideas round at random, and occasionally hits the right proportions.

There's quite a bit to please the lazily-indulgent reader here; but I suspect that Frank Long has had more fun, over the years, than any of his readers.

The author provides a 21-page autobiographical introduction, which is pleasant, occasionally interesting, and excusably longwinded -- after all, it was no doubt commissioned, together with the epistolary preambles to the stories. I suppose Asimov started all this, and I don't like it. As persons, authors are no more interesting than anyone else, and these personal interpolations tend to destroy whatever fictional magic might be happening.

WILL O'THE WISP by Thomas Burnett Swann; Coriol; London; 1976; 60p; 160 pp; ISBN 0552 10358 6

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

In one of his essays, Chesterton says that Puritanism, far from being a specially English phenomenon, can be regarded as a sort of alien invasion, or mass psychosis. In Will O'the Wisp this suggestion is taken literally: the first Puritans, the real instigators, were non-human beings called Gubbings (a corruption of 'Sky-Kings'). Originally, they had been airborne, bird-like creatures, feathered and hatched from eggs, and worshipped by the ancient Celts. Then they were cursed with 'the feather-blight' and lost the use of their wings. Around this time the first Christian missionaries arrived in England. They persuaded both the Sky-Kings and their worshippers that these bird-like beings were fallen angels, doomed to mortify their flesh and torture their souls for all eternity. The Sky Kings came to believe this: they mining in Devon, and became the sinister Gubbings of Devonshire folklore. And once the Tudors were dead and the glory Stuarts were on the throne, the Gubbings' hour came. Witch-hunting was in the air, the Elizabethan wholeness of vision was fractured, and the Gubbings twisted it all to their own use. On the one hand, by hiding out on Dartmoor and spreading rumours of their own bostral atrocity (they crucified at the least sign of 'the flesh') they made sure no-one visited their stronghold. On the other hand, they infiltrated towns and villages (being careful to hide their feathers and vestigial wings) and became witch-hunters in their own right -- for the first to cry 'witch' is never suspected.
Sustained by the zeitgeist, the Gubbings spread: the captain of the Mayflower is a Gubbings—-

Swann pines against the Gubbings the figure of Robert Herrick—'post, viger, and pagan'—who makes a last stand for Elizabethan England as against their age-old psychoses. Here wider issues are raised: have we all been suffering from a dark delusion? Is the Christian God some terrible perversion of the real thing?

This is an ingenious idea, with plenty of possibilities; and I wish I could say that Swann had exploited it to the full. Actually, I found the book slight in impact. Swann's style is very much that of an old-fashioned historical novelist, and his characters never really came alive for me. He is naive, and sometimes downright soppy. He combines a certain care over local colour and the poetic not just with a surprising slowness in basic storytelling technique.

Still, the implications of his tale are worth taking seriously, as long as you're not prepared for anything really revelatory. If you want revelation, I suggest you read John Buchan's Witch Wood.

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MORWYN: THE VENGEANCE OF GOD by John Cowper Powys; Sphere; London; 1977; 95p; 271 pp; ISBN 0 7221 6980 8

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

This is a wild, lengthy, rhapsodical-philosophical fantasy, and I liked it a lot. The chief domestic personae are a horny enemy captain, his black spaniel, a vivisecting scientist and his young daughter—- the Morwyn of the title, and the object of the captain's scarcely-sublimated passion. This quartet may suggest the main characters in Olaf Stapledon's Sirius (which came out seven years later, in 1944), and not without reason; but whereas Stapledon makes no comment on the methods whereby his scientist produces super-sheepdogs, and indeed seems to give his tacit approval, Powys thunders his apocalyptic anger at the whole urge to 'murder and dissect' throughout the length of this book, which is considerable.

Anyway, these four main characters are caught on the hills in the wilds of Wales (again, very like Sirius), when some apocalyptic physical-psychical event, involving a giant meteor and heightened consciousness, opens the earth beneath them, and they plummet down into a very literal Hades, a vast underground kingdom of the dead and damned. The essence of damnation, it appears, lies to the cruelty of the damned; so that common-or-garden perverts like the Marquis de Sade, Nero, and Blackboard, mix familiarly with types like John Calvin and Torquemada the Inquisitor, not to mention their latter-day equivalents, the new priesthood of Science, the behaviourists and vivisectors, who are forever watching ongoing events in vivisection laboratories throughout the world, via I.V. This book is, in fact, a massive attack on the twin gods of Science-with-a-capital-S and Religion-with-a-capital-R, Eugenics and Jehovah, all the abstract claims of 'Knowledge' and 'Salvation' that have militated against the still, small voice of individual human conscience.

But though there are lengthy passages of philosophising, this is no tract. Powys's imaginative invention is tremendous; and besides that, everything that happens depends not on some abstract 'message', but on the intense erotic relationship between the horny captain (who is the narrator) and the virgin Morwyn, as they pass through ever-more-surrealistic underground adventures, involving Taliesin the ancient bard, Merlin, Saturn, Rhadamantus (Judge of the Golden Age), and the shades of Socrates and Habalalas (who are not damned, but seem, like Taliesin, to have a free pass to Hades). It all reads, at times, like a wildly-surrealistic Journey to Centre of the Earth --- in fact they do, ultimately, reach the dead centre.

Throughout the book, something indescribable is happening --- the Creation: of Man, the return of the Golden Age, the judgment of the damned (i.e., all those who have not assisted in, or have actively militated against, the Creation) --- oh, anything and everything is happening, and I enjoyed every bit of it. Powys keeps repeating himself, he mixed extraordinary insights with platitudes, he is long-winded and threatens to become incoherent (Part Three is a continuous narrative of nearly a hundred pages, and you just have to keep on reading); but I don't care, it's all worth it. There are precious moments when Powys seems to place the whole rise of Science-with-a-capital-S within the all-comprehending myth of Creation, and these moments are well worth waiting for.
In his introduction to The Story of Art, E.H. Gombrich says: "To talk cleverly about art is not very difficult —. But to look at a picture with fresh eyes and to venture on a voyage of discovery into it is a much more rewarding task. There is no telling what you might bring home from such a journey."

For me, this applies especially to a writer like Bradbury; and it certainly applies to the sixteen animated pictures on the epidermis of his Illustrated Man. Yes — sixteen: in this edition, at any rate. In the original edition (1951), and in my last Corgi edition (1963) there are eighteen. Panther have excised 'The Fire Balloons' (for crying out loud — what do they think they're doing to these classic collections?), 'The Exiles' 'The Rocket Man' and 'The Concrete Mixer' — so that's four of the best stories gone to start with. I suppose they'll pop up in some Panther edition of The Golden Apples, which would be better than nothing. But why?

Anyway, to fill in the aching void they've created, Panther have inserted two pretty good Bradbury Tales from elsewhere — 'Usher Two', which is a free fantasia on Bradburyian themes, rather like 'The Lost City of Mars', or a sequel to 'Exiles' (But where is 'The Exiles'?) and 'The Playground', which is Bradbury in his psychological, October-Country mood (aging widower becomes obsessed with games of evil children in sinister playground). When I read this one recently I found it wondrously uncomfortable in its implications.

I can't say that Panther are actually cheating anyone with this revised edition: after all, the other stories are great. I only hope they know what they've done with those other four, great stories. After all, there may be a few people around who haven't read them yet.
Hurled. If you take a couple of chapters from the first book of Thomas Carlyle's wife, and mix them up with a parable of naivete somewhere in between Jerry Kornfield's Being There and Christopher Isherwood's Goodbye to All That, you get the loony toon feeling of The Great Years by Frederik Pohl and Carol Pohl. London: 1977; 267 pp; 75p; ISBN 0 7221 6294 8

The Great Years contains seven stories which first appeared between 1934 and 1953. All are entertaining and only a couple are old-fashioned. "...And Then There Were None" by Eric Frank Russell (later part of his novel The Great Explosion) shows how a long-forgotten colony planet without laws, government or any kind of authority can "defeat" a large and well-armed spaceship from Earth which has come to make contact after 300 years. Pohl's "The Little Black Bag", Fred Brown's "Placet is a Crazy Place" and William Tenn's "The Liberation of Earth" are surely as well written as anything of mine is. Superfluous "Wings of the Lightning World" by James MacCreight (a pseudonym of Frederik Pohl) is an unusual fantasy within a hard-bound, which succeeds due to its sense of wonder and a carefully calculated revelation, and despite an aimless plot. The two stories from the 1930s - "Old Faithful" by Raymond F. Gallun (a Martian in communication with Earth) and "A Matter Of Form" by F. L. Gold (a reporter investigates illegal brain surgery) - are the poorest in the collection, though neither is really bad and the former seems to have achieved the status of a classic. If you haven't already read too many of these seven sales, this is an anthology worth buying.

When one novella occupies almost half of an original anthology, the anthology is going to stand or fall on the quality of that novella. "Error Hurled" by Babette Rosmond (who?) is original, erudite and amusing (about Earth being no more than the imperfect construction of a couple of superchildren) could have been made in half the space, and Science Fiction Discoveries is, by its inclusion, reduced from good to mediocore. The best here is "Starlady" by George R. R. Martin, a brilliant, rather Delaplantage tale set in a complex, decadent future. As the first line says this story has no hero in it. In contrast, the whole cast of characters is so nasty (sadiats, murderers, plams, prostitutes, and never a heart of gold anywhere) as to leave a bitter taste in the mouth. Robert Shea's "The Never-Ending Western Movie" is derivative of the film Westworld, but here there aren't any robots and everything is for real, including the bullets. There's an astonishingly black comedy from Doris Priebe (people die, but the tiny atomic motors inserted surgically keep their bodies functioning so that they can still walk around), and an unusually good story from Fred Sabahage (about literally tangible time). Contributions by Scott Edelstein and Arthur Jean Cox are entertaining without being outstanding, and there's a Roger Zelazny piece which is, unfortunately, very slight and unoriginal. At 65 pence the anthology is still quite good value.

TETRASOMY TWO by Oscar Romsster; Corrug; London; 1976; 174 pp; 80p; ISBN 0 582 10386 6

Reviewed by Brian Stablesford

Here we have - not for the first time - a schizoid superman-fantasy which finds its resolution in a transcendental metamorphosis. In its basics, it bears a strong resemblance to The Infinite Cage by Keith Laumer, which I reviewed here some time ago. The superstructure however, is different. Tetrasyom Two is ghastly, with a touch of irony. Its schizoid element is self-conscious, the action taking place in a mental hospital. Its author, like its hero, is a doctor, and can't quite take delusions with obsessive seriousness. The result is a flippantly which undermines the resolution. If you are going to juggle mind-shattering concepts then you have got to take them seriously. If you look at The Great Years as if you are just messing about, the whole exercise becomes ridiculous. Tetrasyom Two is a jolly little book, as apocalyptic novels go - most of the way it's competently written mystery stuff with an uneasy air of sex - but jolly books should have jolly endings, and you can't effectively latch a salvation myth on to a trivial thriller. Look out for Rosster, though - I would not be surprised if he will well produce some eminently readable books in time to come.

DRAGONSONG by Anne McCaffrey; Sidwick & Jackson; London; 1976; 13.95; 202 pp; ISBN 0 283 05229 9

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

So there we were at the end of Dragonquest, waiting anxiously to hear whether the new-fangled methods of Less Weyr and_C. W. had really be accepted by the old dragon-riders and more conservative holders, whether the gubs could possibly multiply to cover Pern's northern continent in time to use it from erratic TaltocbThread...which plans Flar had for the dragon-riders if Thread could be wiped out, and what would happen to the unique chibi dragon-rom (the juvenile Lord Holder of Ruatha)?

But Dragonsong (the third novell in the series doesn't tell us what the maesters don't advance the grand saga of Pern one bit. Instead, it concentrates on the microcosm, telling the Cinderella tale of Menolly, a tall, geeky fifteen-year-old girl who lives in the Half Circle Sea Hold, a grim fishing village which has little contact with the rest of Pern. Menolly is a natural musician
but is persecuted for this by her family because "girls can't be harpies" and because it's a waste of good fish-gutting time.

There's a lot of nob stuff when she accidently slices her hand. Will she won't she ever be able to play the pipes again? Unable to bear the harshness of the hold any longer, she runs away. And then the fairy godmother takes care of the mess. (Which means they'll follow her anywhere.) From then on (despite misunderstanding) it's success all the way.

This is essentially a juvenile novel, a fairy tale. It occurs concurrently with Dragonquest, and we are shown again the hatching at Bendron Feyr when Brykke (having lost her queen dragon) fails to re-impregnate, and when Janus impregnates the white dragon. It is successful enough as a juvenile, but disappointingly so compared to Dragonflight and Dragonquest. The central character is a range of strong emotions and a vast, swashbuckling grandeur; Dragonquest is shallow, simple and small-scale. The sea hold is well described, chapter after chapter (Mendoly) is convincing, and the fire lizards are delightfully twee, but this isn't enough.

THE WORLD SET FREE by H. G. Wells; Corgi; London; 1976; 192 pp; 60p; ISBN 0 552 10258 X
Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is the novel, first published in 1914, in which Wells deals with the invention and use of the atomic bomb. It belongs to the curious sub-genre of speculative fiction which flourished in Britain between 1870 and the eve of the First World War - the eminent war novel.

This brand of scree story fed gratuitously on an undercurrent of anxiety which haunted Britain in this period. The roots of the anxiety are easy enough to trace in the social disruption which followed the Industrial Revolution - a loss of confidence in tomorrow, a mind of proto-Future Shock.

Oddly enough, only two of the writers who contributed to the genre seem to have had any real appreciation of the fact that technology would go remake the art of war that there was genuine reason for great concern about the scale of the destruction which might soon be possible: One was Wells, the other George Griffith (who wrote, in 1911, The Lord of Labour, another novel featuring the use of atomic weapons). Perhaps more even odd was the fact that neither Wells nor Griffith found in this possibility of doom any cause for despair - rather the reverse, in fact. Griffith always took a delight in recounting tales of tremendous destruction, and Wells felt that the destruction of man's present world was necessary in order that a socialist Utopia might emerge from the ashes. The World Set Free takes its title and its plot from this belief.

The way in which the New Order arises from the chaos of an atomic war in the novel seems, today, so shallow and unconvincing as to be ludicrous. An elite corps of ex-kings and ex-prime ministers band together to establish a beneficent oligarchy. This is characteristic of Wells the Flahain, who could only believe that socialism would have to be forced upon the masses by a cultural elite. In common people and revolutions he had no faith at all.

This is an interesting book, in that it offers valuable insights into Wells thinking and to the speculative literature characteristic of its time. But it is not of a piece. Corgi, in reprinting it as a standard genre paperback, are guilty of a misrepresentation which seems, alas, to be characteristic of their present policies.

NEW WRITINGS IN SF 25 edited by Kenneth Bulmer; Corgi; London; 1975; 50p; 180 pp; ISBN 0 552 10083 6
NEW WRITINGS IN SF 28 edited by Kenneth Bulmer; Sidgwick & Jackson; London; 1976; £3.95; 180 pp; ISBN 0 283 98317 5
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

The longest-running origins anthology series in SF is alive and well and living in deepest Kent. Under John Cornell's editorship (vols 1-21) the most outstanding feature of the series was its conservatism. The stories were mostly by British writers (though Canadians and Australians were occasionally allowed in) and were traditional science fiction: aliens, space ships, time machines and dystopian futures with all manner of fantasy or experimentation and certainly never a Dangerous Vision. And has the position changed under Kenneth Bulmer? I think it has. True, traditional sf is still to be found in NWSF (but this is what the bulk of sf readers seem to demand, isn't it?) yet mixed in with it are originality of both theme and presentation and even references to love-making. Two examples are pertinent here. First Brian Aldiss's trice of enigmas have become a regular feature of most recent volumes. Second, the proportion of new authors - mainly young - is rising, and these newcomers are clearly not content to rip off the tired old ideas of 1950s sf, but instead try to achieve a synthesis of old style and new wave.

A good starting point for detailed consideration of these two volumes is with new author Michael Stoll, who has produced marginally the best story in each. His very first published story, originally in NWSF 23, was the most original of that collection. "Rice Brandy" in NWSF 25 displays that same originality combined with excellent descriptions and a careful, double-plotted presentation. It is an alternate world story against Cambodian background which is either well known to the author or painstakingly researched. "Wanganon" in NWSF 26 is no different in theme and style that it might have been written by a different Michael Stoll, but the quality is still present. In a way it, too, is an alternate worlds story. Travellers and ciphers seek gates which lead to other worlds. Their motives vary from escape to a desire for the immortality which gate travel confers. Their eagerness to seize a gate gives an air of heroic fantasy, but Wanganon, the whole system of gates, is revealed as very much a mental exercise, and the story becomes heavily philosophical towards the end. Yes, Michael Stoll is a talented writer, still improving.

Another powerful tale in NWSF 25 in "The Green Fuses" by Martin Ricketts. The unravelling of alien reproductivecycles has become such a standard theme of late that the success of a tale hinges upon the author's scientific ingenuity in setting up the cycle and his descriptive powers in making both humans and aliens believable. Despite a technically unconvincing...
underwater sequence, Martin Ricketts pulls it off, and this success is due largely to the intense emotional climax in which thirteen babies are slaughtered. (If this sort of Dangerous Vision persists in NWSF I'm sure it won't be long before there are four-letter words in the foreword!)

Fans of the Unorthodox Engineers will be glad to see them back. Colin Kapp has edged into Larry River territory to produce a funny though rather obvious Black Hole story. The other goodies in NWSF 25 are an off-beat spoof by Keith Wallis, a charmingly quaint Ballard-like contribution from Charles Partington and a slight but pleasing time travel mood piece by Wolfgang Jorchke. The remaining three stories in no 25 are all competently written by established authors (Sydway J. Bounds, Donald MacLolm and John Eackham) but their themes and styles are so much of the 1950s and early 60s that I could barely bear them. I find interesting that the blurb writer chose those three on which to concentrate.

NWSF 28 also has its share of hackneyed themes, but the authors concerned have generally taken the trouble to disguise them by originality of presentation. For example, the most exciting story in the book ( "On the Inside" by Robert P. Holdstock) is revealed, is the harsh light of denouement, as having some very heavy old plot-elements. But the writing pulls the reader along from page to page at a great pace. There is no time to stop and wonder as Andrew Quinn gets up, kisses his mummified wife, goes off to work, makes a lunch-time visit to the park and "Shock" becomes a different person. Similarly, Bryn Portey sets up his fair obvious ending in the first ten lines of "Wordsmith" but the story is a success because of its pacy approach to the theme.

"The Banks Of The Nile" by Ritchle Smith and Thomas Peeman shows us Europe after the end of (presumably) nuclear war. It is a rebuilt Europe, perhaps to similar to the original at the time of the Renaissance to be totally credible, but beautifully described andockeyed with literary and historical allusions. It is also a Europe torn by new wars, and viewed mainly from an airship. This has an air of quality about it and runs Michael Stil's "Mangenon" close.

On the lighter side there are three more of Brian Aldiss's assign, this time in playlet form, and stories by Lesy Kettle and George Leman. "The Call Of The Wild" by Dutch author Maual van Loggean would have been amusing in its descriptions of pedestrian-baiting by Pearson's courtsmen if the Death Race 2000 had not come first. (The idea is not new though, its earliest use which I can trace is in Fritz Leiber's "X Marks The Pedwalk" from Galaxy in 1953)

I'm glad to see the gradual improvement in New Writing's standards and also the increasing number of fans appearing in it. Long may the series continue.

NEW WRITINGS IN SF 26 edited by Kenneth Bulmer; Corgi; London; 1976; 60p; 191 pp; ISBN 0 552 10232 8

Reviewed by David Wignro\ve

The New Writing series aims delicately between the excellent and the abysmal. Within each volume you are almost guaranteed to find an assortment of gobs and dust flavoured by the perennial performance of an "old hand". This collection is little different from that standard barring the fact that the "old hand" in this case Mr Eldiss) performs more than adequately. I find this blend rather disconcerting at times - at others refreshing. It is nice to be reminded that it is all things to all people.

John Keith opens the batting with a tale in the manner of Cordwainer Smith, "A Planet Called Carnratic", "OnHmm dined the Thirty Thousand" he repeats tirelessly (and tiresomely) and impresses us with Ezel training, the Interguam, Keridis battle squadron and the Bengal Marines. Frankly, by the end of all the jargon I didn't care a damn. Cordwainer Smith presented his fare with a hint of enigma, a rough mummy and an undercurrent of factual scepticism. Mr Keith presents it undiluted and bores us silly.

Chris Priest's "Men Of Good Value" is an impressively honest tract despite Mr Bulmer's editorial disclaimer. Characters too often betray a natural "assumed" courage that real life would have been circumstances prevailed. Cort Priest presents his alter-ego here for our inspection and it escapes unscathed if perforated. As a warning to morality of the media it is perhaps a half-hearted blow; as if only to remind us of which we already know.

"Three Coins In Etruscan Fountain" - another three assign from Mr Eldiss. This is one of two excellently written stories in this collection (the other is incidental) and stands out as such. The language drags like molten bouncy as we romp through shards of the delightfully diseased mind of EWA. "Carefully observed woman" reels through vistas of feminine dominance and trite truisms to where "the daffodil returns the smile" and Icelah travels up from the Rind to do battle with the Kmarean. And somehow it is peaceful to find out the has in "The year of the quiet computer" where transience will be banished and the daffodil returns the smile.

Need I say more?

"The Photos Transcripts" by Cherry Wilder is singularly unimpressive. A-la-Mailot the author provides us with the report of the incident on Photos. Was an alien intelligence involved? Well, you see and the man-who-wore-at-the-bottom-of-the-garden know, at least...

"The Man Who" by David S. Garnett - a familiar nightmare to those with regular, routine jobs. Garnett handles the theme with respect and produces a finely crafted if unspectacular result.

"You Get Lots Of Yesterday, Lots Of Today" by Lawrence James avoids once again a question that has always nagged at me with these "crowded world" stories. So people live in tiny boxes, fed through tubes three times a day. Fine. But who looks after them? How do they produce food? How do they reproduce? Are the workers in the system also the cause of the population explosion? If so, (a) when do they have the time? and (b) wouldn't they have the science to leave off if it caused them so much work? That aside, Mr James writes a
fine story about that "special" day everyone is allocated once in their lives.

But once again: why should they bother?

"Murders" by Ramsey Campbell - holographic solids and a powerful telepath become a threat to society's fragile structure. But the power of mass reaction can be a two-edged weapon. The city is saved enough to maintain interest throughout, but not as powerful as Barrington Bayley's "An Overload" (NWQ 6) which explores the same theme of mass manipulation by media personalities. A predictable outcome.

"To The Pump Room With Jane" by Ian Watson - Mr Watson confuses our senses. A fine essay on delusion and madness. The future proves a delirium of the past; but I spoil the tale....

"The Seafarer" by Ritchie Smith and Thomas Purnam - I lost count of the literary/musical references that about in this moving tale. It certainly relativises man's place back as it does with nostalgia for this "simple" age of ours. Gently written; this pair lead us gently into the history of our world and the lost love of Bararetti, the seafarer. The romantic poets and our contemporary balladour provide staunch support to the intellectual entanglements of a budding relationship. A care for language, construction and emotive subtlety is much in evidence. I shall watch these two with considerable interest.

Something for everyone? Certainly there was enough to keep my interest, and - in three cases - stimulate my thoughts. New Writings could be so much better with so little extra effort. I don't know Mr. Palmer's problems, economic or otherwise, and so would refrain from further comment, but bow of these stories were pure padding. Oh well, I keep reading the buggers so they can't be that bad!

**THE BOOK OF PHILIP JOSE FARMER; The Elmfield Press; Leeds; 1976; £1.95; 229 pp; ISBN 0 7057 0087 4**

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Phil Farmer has made a name for himself not by writing well but by the obsessional pursuit in his works of three controversial themes: fantasy sex, resurrection and the factual bases of fictional heroes. Potentially a very good writer (I regard the excellent novelette "Sketches Among the Ruins Of My Mind" as his finest achievement; at least two of his novels, The Lovers and Inside-Outside are good by any standards), Farmer has too often sacrificed quality for sensationalism. Also, much of his output over the last ten or twelve years has been marred by lack of re-writing. Some of his novels are appallingly bad.

This latest volume (a nice hardcover reprint of the 1972 DAW books edition) is the author's personal selection and contains examples of many of the disparate strands of his work. Farmer has written a foreword and a brief introduction to each of the contents. Nowhere does he attempt to disguise or make light of his obsessions; nor does he discuss any of his backwork. The result is a justice to the strengths and weaknesses of Philip Jose Farmer while simultaneously being varied and entertaining.

Undoubtedly, Farmer's best work is of novellette length. Two of his best, "My Sister's Brother" and "The Alley Man", are reprinted here, together with a short extract from his notorious Hugo winner, "Siders of the Purple Waga". "My Sister's Brother" (like The Lovecraft are an early story of alien races. In this instance there is no sexual contact between the human male, Cardigan Lane, and the attractive female humanoid he discovers on Mars, though there are detailed anatomical descriptions. But the point of the story concerns conditioned attitudes towards sex rather than actions; it is much allegory as straight sf.

Curiously, this book and, even more so, "The Alley Man" contain a small man in her throat as part of her sexual apparatus, recur only slightly altered in Farmer's two porn fantasies, The Image Of The Beast and Elope. I wonder if Linda Lovelace ever read Phil Farmer during her formative years.

Old Man Paley, "The Alley Man", is a scrap merchant and possibly the last surviving Nanderthal. He is, for me, one of Farmer's most unforgettable characters, starring in a story full of pride and madness which should have won a Hugo.

Obviously the Riverworld novels are Farmer's best-known exposition of the resurrection theme, though Inside-Outside (reprinted last year in the Avon SF Rediscovery series) is a far superior treatment. The theme is represented here by "The Beloved City", a relatively poor novelette which is nevertheless very typical of Farmer's non-heroic fiction, in having one weak male and two strong female characters, plus a bit of divine intervention by the narrator (in case you don't know, Farmer's angels are usually alien superbeings in more-or-less human shapes.)

Then there are six of what Phil Farmer has christened polytopical parapsycho.

These are Martian tales but, as the author says in his foreword, "the term refers to Crouch, Chico and Harpo, not Karl!" They are very short; any fantasies with occasional bursts of satire, the best being "The Sumerian Oath", in which it is not tongue in cheek and scalpel in throat) that all doctors besides swearing the Hippocratic Oath swear the Sumerian oath never to reveal that disease is manufactured by doctors just to keep themselves in business.

The last section of The Book Of Philip Jose Farmer contains a "factual" meeting between Farmer and Tarzan, a biographical sketch of Kilgore Trout and an article about Farmer by US book critic Leslie A. Feldler. The Tarzan interview is a stuff upper-lip encounter, concentrating mainly on small discrepancies between Burroughan books and real life, while missing out on most of the opportunities for juicy humour. But there is some humour there (page 213):

"Farmer: Suffice it to say that I have shown you the only prototypes that are closely related to the man were living prototypes of Doc Savage, Nero Wolfe, Bulldog Drummond, Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Leopold Bloom, and Richard Wentworth, known as O-H, The Spider and The Shadow), and a number of other notable characters in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction.

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Farmer: I have also found the explanation for the remarkable, almost superhuman powers exhibited by yourself and your family. As you know, a monument marks the spot today where a meteorite hit Holm Newton, Yorkshire, in 1795. It just so happens that three coaches were passing by when the meteorite struck, and in them were the third Duke of Greyfostoke and his wife, the rich gentleman Fitzwilliam Darcy of Pemberley House and his wife Elizabeth Bennet — the heroine of Pride and Prejudice — Sherlock Holmes' great-grandparents, and a number of others. All the ladies were pregnant. Everybody was exposed to the radiation from the meteorite. Ionization accompanies the fall of these, you know. And the radiation must have caused favorable mutations in the party.

To those unfamiliar with the Kilgore Trout controversy let me just mention that he is a character (a fictional author) in three of Kurt Vonnegut's books whose various stories have (with or without Vonnegut's permission) made use of. For his written a Kilgore Trout novel, Vug and the Half-sheil. His Biographical article on Trout is a weird combination of fact and fiction. The article by Pielke about Farmer in an honest appraisal not without brickbats.

This was meant to be a representative collection of Farmer's best work in different areas, omitting the most frequently anthologised material.

such it succeeds well, though it is inevitable that few readers will enjoy the whole spectrum of writings included. Bibliographical purists will be upset that several of the pieces' first appearances were not credited, and I expect most people will join me in wishing that Farmer's introductory remarks had been longer, but this is a good volume — and interesting testament to obsession.

Josh Kirby has done a very nice wrap-around jacket illustration of an early scene from "My Sister's Brother".

THE BEST OF MURRAY LEINSTER edited by Brian Davis; Corgi; London; 1978; 171 pp; £6.00; ISBN 0 552 10393 0

Reviewed by Brian Sibley

Advertising in the UK is subject to various legal constraints regarding honesty, but one of the difficulties that the art director faces is the fact that through long and corrupt misuse certain words have become so devalued as to have lost all meaning. One of these words is "best". There has been a recent spate of "Best of..." anthologies which have made the term ridiculous. The present offering is even more pretentious in that it makes no attempt to be "a memorial anthology". This means that Murray Leinster died while the collection was being compiled and some bright spark in the publishing house thought this death might offer opportunities for even more cynical exploitation of the casual reader.

Murray Leinster's career is of spanned nearly half a century - he began writing before Amazing Stories was born and was still around to help reissue it in the mid-sixties. He wrote a large number of dull potboilers but he did have ability and imagination, which he occasionally used to good effect. He wrote for a wide range of markets inside and outside the SF establishment. How is it to become in this "memorial anthology"? We have ten short stories all of which initially appeared between 1920 and 1938. The book does not contain "The Mad Planet", "El Dorado in Time", "First Contact" or "The Exploration Team" - yet these are the four stories with which his name is primarily associated. It does not contain any of the "Red Ship" stories. It does not contain any representative of his early work in or out of the genre magazines, not any representative of his work during the last decade that he was active. It does not contain "A Logic Named Joe" or "The Strange Case of John Kingman" or "The Lady in the World" or "The Amateur Alchemist" - it has, in fact, just two stories which number among Leinster's best ever popular: "The Ethical Equations" and "Se Pro Fundan". The book relies on an introduction, but it is only one page long and makes but a few facile comments. There is nothing here to put Leinster's work into any kind of perspective.

In my opinion the packaging of this collection is dishonest. To pretend that this book is a testament to Murray Leinster seems perilously close to an insult.

WOMAN ON THE EARTH OF TIME by Marge Piercy; Random House; New York; 366 pp; $10.00

WOMEN OF WONDER edited by Pamela Sargent; Random House/Vintage Books; New York; 235 pp + 1lvil pp; $1.95

MORE WOMEN OF WONDER edited by Pamela Sargent; Random House/Vintage Books; New York; 310 + 111 pp; $1.95

GREAT TALES by Ursula Le Guin; Harper and Row; New York; 1976; 160 pp; $7.95

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

What is perhaps most interesting about of today is the fact that the boundaries are being blurred from every direction, as the single-author book under review will reveal. But first, I want to discuss two fine new anthologies.

Pamela Sargent has rapidly gained a reputation as a formidable editor of and commentator on SF. Women of Wonder and Men Women of Wonder are not only superior collections of science fiction, but associated. It contains some of the most exciting and provocative stories from the forties and fifties with those from the sixties and seventies are provocative and satirical. Though it is still a male-dominated field, some real new stories have been made; today writers are beginning to envision futures where advances in every field of technology will have their effect upon the social, psychological and sexual lives of women and
Ofttaring moving known The Utopia, sense both Changes never saying life anything: love playful, the world over a fancy it life-enhancing of life, of people swings of the edge, of the edge.

Ursula Le Guin’s new collection, Orsinian Tales, represents her first work outside sf. Set in periods from 1150 to the near-present and in the imaginary-real countries of more realistic fiction, these stories reveal new facets of Ms Le Guin’s protein and humane talent, her fine craft and her calm, accepting love of life.

Ms Le Guin has a remarkable talent for creating characters in whose emotional life the reader shares. Many of these stories, although set in various periods of this century of change, have a touching quality that is never forgotten by those who read them. The men and women who lead their ordinary lives suffer forms of oppression — but Le Guin’s readers will never have known. This only means that the people of her bleak Utopian planet in The Dispossessed, they live there lives a bit clearer to the skin; there’s less fancy clothing hiding the “poor bare, forked animal” that is every person. Deliberately lacking in adventure or romance, and often ending in material defeat for the protagonists, these stories are wonderfully, profoundly moving celebrations of human courage and love of life. Orsinian Tales is a year-saying book.

As, in its different way, is Margaret Pehrson’s Woman of the Edge of Time. Ms Pehrson is known, not as an sf author, but as a feminist poet and a woman’s rights activist. Changes, was praised by Adrienne Rich and Madeleine L’Engle. Yet an earlier novel, Dance The Eagle To Sleep, was a projection into a future from the youthful sense of possibility in the sixties, and Woman On The Edge Of Time is sf if it’s anything: a tale of the future for our own time, and a story of extraordinary power and range.

Beginning in the contemporary slums of New York, it swings widely between various mental hospitals in the area and at least two possible futures, one a beautifully humane Utopia, the other a mechanistic Dystopia, both obviating the social products of our present culture. Conseulo (Connie) Ramos, the woman on the edge of time, is trapped in a mental hospital so specifically rendered it scared the hell out of me. She somehow makes mental contact with Lucinda of the playful, androgynous society of Wattapoi seed, over a century in the future. Treated as a sick animal by the people of her own time, Connie keeps going to Wattapoi seed, where the inhabitants teach her their way of life, a life William Morris would have loved for its potential to free themselves of familial repressions; a world in which communities are large family groups, in which sexist distinctions have been eradicated (one of Pehrson’s best touches in the all-encompassing regimen). I was using by the time I’d finished the novel in which creativity for and of all is a reality, and in which death is accepted as a natural part of life. Against this dream – a nightmare: a world of scientists, people mostly cyborg and controlled by technology, the worst imaginings of C. S. Lewis — The Abolition of Man. And, as Luciente tells Connie, “Yours is a crus-time. Alternative universes co-exist. Probabilities clash and possibilities wink out forever.”

Indeed. Chosen to be a guinea-pig for a new method of “therapy”, a neuro-electric experiment, in which computer-run electrodes implanted in the patient’s brain will keep his or her “peaceful”, Connie is only too aware that the war between the two futures is already being fought. It is this terrible story of the present which keeps Woman On The Edge Of Time from becoming a boring Ralph Bellamy tour of a perfect future world, Connie is a human being, now, whose life is free human beings is a peril; she fully engages the reader’s sympathies. In the doctor’s eyes, she is mentally ill and anti-social, and society appears to agree with the doctors. If her family is in any measure of its opinion. Yet she finally realizes that she is at “war” with a form of thought and life which will prevent Wattapoi seed from coming, and this realization brings her to a violent moral choice.

It is impossible to do justice to the complexity of this novel, the stark realism of the hospital scenes juxtaposed to the glorious creation of the world of Wattapoi seed, the rich characterisations not only of Connie, but of others in her ward and her family, and her treatment in the future. Woman On The Edge Of Time is a book full of pain and love, human courage and suffering, and, finally, hope. It is a book to be read and cherished for its imaginative speculations, but also for its refusal to despair about the future of mankind.

EARTHS ABIDES by George R. Stewart; Gollancz; London; 1877; £3.85; 334 pp; ISBN 0 575 02273 S; Reviewed by Cy Chauvin.

In Billion Year Spree, Brian Aldiss said that the best novel in the disaster novel subgenre — which British writers of sf seemed to dominate — is, surprisingly, written by an American. He was referring to George R. Stewart’s Earth Abides (1949). Not only did the novel win the International Fantasy Award for that year, but it comes with a recommendation from Carl Sandburg.

The novel chronicles the life of Isherwood Williams, who is bracketed between two epochs while alone in the wilderness just prior to the outbreak of the plague. Through some accidental inoculation process, lhe does not die. But he (and other survivors) still have the serious psychological problem of adjusting to a radically different world. Some do not survive: they drink themselves to oblivion, withdraw, or pretend as best they can that life is as it was, before.
Ish is a "loner" before the plague, and when it first strikes he thinks of himself as an observer rather than a participant, in the world to come. Methodically, he makes a list of his qualifications for survival:

1) Have will to survive. Want to see what will happen in a world without man, and how. Geographer.
2) Always was solitary.
3) Have appendix out.
4) Moderately practical, though not mechanical. Camper.
5) Did not suffer devastating experience of living through it all, seeing family, other people, die. Thus escaped the worst of the book. (Ish was in the wilderness during this period.)

In the classical explorer tradition, Ish decides to take a cross-country trip, to see how the plague has affected different areas. While preparing for the trip, a beagle (in the classic situation) adopts Ish as his master. Without being overly cute or sentimental, Stewart uses the dog as a device to reveal Ish's character. It is in the dog that makes his first emotional attachment since the disaster. He has not realized how lonely he has been, and lives in fear (not all of it rational) of what is to come. When the dog runs off to chase some rabbits in the desert, he becomes very depressed (he is afraid the dog will get lost and not return). When the dog returns after all, makes an important realization: "What am I afraid of?" he thought. 'Nothing more than my own death can happen. That has come to most people already. Why should I be afraid of that?... He felt infinite relief.'

Ish's journey is an odyssey across a changed world, a world where man's influence is gradually waning, as certain bits of crucially placed omniscient narration help emphasize. Dogs die penned in kennels; pavement cracks and trees fall and cover roads; the wheat and the weeds grow together. This sort of contrasts the conventional narrative focused on Em - they give a picture of the earth's evolution from nature's viewpoint, rather than man's.

Ish finds survivors along the way, but none he would wish to stay with. The people were often emotionally dead; the culture shock was too great. When Ish returns to the west coast, he meets Em, and he realizes how much he has missed "real" human companions. They decide to live together, and gradually a small group of survivors grows up around them. They refer to themselves as "The Tribe", and a close-knit family/society evolves, with Ish as the leader. Ish says of himself: "I always struggle. I can never be really happy."

He sees the fall of his civilization and culture - not only the exteriors (buildings, technology) but in the children's lack of musical and reading ability, Ish puts all his hopes in one small boy, Joey, and when a virus spreads among the Tribe and kills the boy, Ish is crushed. "Perhaps the brilliant are not suited to survive," says one character to Ish, but he goes on to describe to members of the Tribe as "solid" but with "no imagination" (which is why they did not go crazy with shock). Ish comes to realize too that one boy and man cannot change the world - "How much did man strike outward to affect his surrounding, and how much did surroundings press in upon him?"

It is like a Robot-made in much of its appeal - a small band of people fighting against nature, trying to salvage the scraps of civilization. But there is no outside world they can escape to; and technological civilization cannot survive. A part of Ish (the last American!) dies when he realizes this.

There is some religious background to the novel. A hammer Ish discovers when he is first bitten by the rattlesnake becomes a symbol of his authority, and a link with the past. Some of the children come to believe it has magical powers, and Ish carries it everywhere with him. (Towards the end of his life, Ish is tending to be regarded as a god, or a prophet, and young men come to him for advice on important matters.)

There is also a more conventional religious/fate orientation to the novel. Immediately after the infection spreads through the Tribe, and Joey dies, Ish thinks that the group may have consulted some unknown sin, and confesses his weakness to Em. She replies:

"If there is a God who made it and we did wrong before his eyes... at least we did wrong only because we were made to, and I do not think he should set traps. Let us not bring all that back into the world again - the angry God, the mean God - the one who does not tell us the rules of the game, and then strikes back when we break them."

Towards the very end of the novel, Ish begins to wonder how the plague has affected his life, and he thinks that at this point in his life it hardly matters: he would be an old man now, even if civilization had continued. "What did it matter? What had he accomplished? How certainly it made no difference." At many points in the novel, Ish puts off doing things (or does not do them at all) because he feels his actions alone will have no effect - nature will undo all he tries to accomplish. Yet, Earth Abides is not a study of the futility of man's actions; it is more a story about human courage, how the characters learn reasons for surviving despite the disasters. Of Em, a friend says: "We need Em, for she has us courage, and without courage there is only a living, not life. On my second reading of the novel, I found this last section too depressing, and strangely relevant to my own personal feelings. I suppose I felt the pair of empathy and tragedy.

"Man come and man go, but earth abides." (Ecclesiastes 1:1). The same might be said of most science fiction novels, but not of George R. Stewart's Earth Abides.

A Survey of Essays

THE IMPERIAL STARS by E. E. Doc Smith and Stephen Goldie: Panther; St Albans; 1975; 155 pp; 50p; ISBN 04334 8

FLANDRY OF TERRA by Paul Anderson: Coronet: London; 1978; 251 pp; 70p; 1898 0 340 20753 1

THE CLAIM TEASE STAND BY Paul Dobson: London; 1976; 125 pp; £3.35; 4398 0 234 7948 2

Reviewed by Brian Stableford
Hack writers, unlike old soldiers, die but sometimes show a remarkable reluctance to fade away. Doc Smith has been that select group of wordmiths whose salves will be kept turning despite the demise of their intellectual machinery. His brand of space opera can now be standardised and supplied by mass-production. For want of a better comment: Oh dear.

The Imperial Stars has been elaborated by Stephen Goldin from a fragment which appeared as a novelette in If some ten years ago. Goldin's addition are like those when one sees the join but there's no getting over the fact that the intrinsic plot is very thin on top. It is a spy story and a Kuritian romance.

The fact that its Kuritian is another world and its Rasendil a pair of mean-mouthed trapeze artists is hardly enough to warrant any claim of originality.

In the symposium The Science Fiction Novel published by Advent many years ago, Cyril Kornbluth pointed out that Smith's work consists structurally similar to those employed by small children engaged in exciting games of make-believe, and that their universe is a metaphorical translation of the child.

The Imperial Stars is no exception, save that its poverty of ideas marks it off as the product of a jaded and ineffectual imagination compared to the /reader's own which has all the verve and vigour of a genuine child's imagination. The empire and the emperor here are paternal not in the political sense but in a straightforward metaphorical sense. To say that this is a childish novel is not to insult it but to describe it literally.

Poul Anderson's Flandry stories, three of which ("The Game of Glory", "A Message in Secret" and "A Plague of Masters") crop up in Flandry of Terra and one of which similarly stands thinly alone in We Claim These Stars, also feature the adventures of an imperial adventurer much the same to point out some of the shortcomings of The Imperial Stars but - by an interesting irony - also reveal their own shortcomings by virtue of the comparison.

Poul Anderson does not turn out standardised crud by the yard. Each of these four stories contains or less carefully assigned hypothetical problem and a unique background. These factors allow the stories to become entities in their own right, not mere sections cut from an endless roll of patterned cloth. They are not very good stories - the problem is "A Message in Secret" is very silly and the background in "The Game Of Glory" fails to convince - but they are individual stories. Their central character, in addition, has some semblance of personality - he does not simply go through the motions but plan has attitudes to what he is doing, motives and (occasionally) feelings. All this makes Flandry more interesting, and his adventures more readable, than the family d'Alembert, who exhibit a literally - child-like acceptance of the parameters surrounding their actions and existence.

Curiously, however, it becomes easy once we have recognised The Imperial Stars as a childish fantasy - to see the Flandry stories for what they really are, and to identify the factors involved in the characterization of their hero. The Flandry series is unmistakably an adolescent fantasy. Here the Empire is still Daddy, but instead of the snug childhood acceptance of paternal rule we have a flamboyant and contemptuous adolescent resentment of it - it is seen as decadent and seedy, while the youthful protagonist represents himself sarcastically as a cavalier and independent spirit.

The Imperial Stars is recommended to those with an infantile age of 9, the Flandry series to those existentially becalmed at 15. Paracinous readers may care to note that if Conrett continues with the series We Claim These Stars (the best of the bunch should appear in a subsequent collection under Anderson's preferred title "Gunners of the Sky Cave"), along with a couple of other novelettes. This will be better value by far than a thin paperback photocopied from half of an old Ace Double.