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Volume 4 Number 5 -- a BSFA publication edited by Joseph Nicholas at his usual abode of Room 9, 94 St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY, United Kingdom; and featuring in this instance reviews by Roz Kaveney, John Hobson, Roy Macinski, Ian Williams, Mary Gentle, Chris Bailey, Tony Dixon, Kevin Rattan and me.

Jack Vance -- THE DYING EARTH (Granada, 159pp, £1·25)
M. John Harrison -- A STORM OF WINGS (Sphere, 185pp, £1·35)
Reviewed by Mary Gentle

Outdated, thin, boring, existing on a misplaced reputation -- these are remarks that can be made about many "classics" of science fiction, those books which "everyone has read". So how has The Dying Earth worn, over the years? Bearing in mind that the last British edition came out some years ago, and that the SF audience has a rapid turnover, suppose we ignore the copyright date and look at it as if it were a new book?

Here, then, we have a science fantasy (a publishing category which is neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring), a collection of loosely interconnected stories set on an aged Earth waiting only for the extinction of the sun. "How many times had this air been breathed before?" asks Turjan of Miir as he watches the dying red sun set. The images are vivid, though the conception is not new, appearing before in H. G. Wells's The Time Machine and William Hope Hodgson's The House On The Borderland. As well as Earth, there are other, unlocated worlds: Embelyon, Ariventa, and Jeldred. Magic rules, and the rules are strict. The form, short stories rather than one strong narrative, adds to the dislocated, rather aimless pace of life on this ancient world.

The characters move against a background of devolution and decay; theft, murder and duplicity are the natural way of life. Turjan, Mazirian, Liane the Wayfarer -- they haven't a moral or ethical principle between them. The most glaring omission, to the reader of modern fantasy, is that of any strong female character. Vance's females are damsels in distress, and distressing you may well find them. Many of them are literally created by genetic engineering. T'sais, created with the flaw of seeing only evil in the world, and finding deus ex machina love, can be seen as illustrating the corrosive effect of pessimism (but then how optimistic could one be, waiting for the sun to go out?) -- but, alternatively, because she disagrees with the laws of her creator's world, seeing them as inimical to her, she has a very proto-feminist outlook. Her sister T'sain, constructed without her flaw, can find nothing better to do with her life than give it up to save Turjan of Miir -- a laudable and charitable act, given the circumstances, if only one didn't feel that she died because she was too stupid to think of a smarter way out of her difficulties.

The Dying Earth pictures a violent, amoral world, people with the curious results of genetic engineering, and cities built by civilisations that have since abandoned Earth for the stars. An inconclusive ending in the Museum of Man leaves two people in possession of the history of the planet -- but what can they do with all that knowledge and no resources at the end of the world?

The Dying Earth, copyright 1950, looks pretty good in 1981. Vance borrows from no particular mythology (although Prince Kandive's court has a somewhat Hindu atmosphere to it), and his fantasies are all his own. Grotesque, baroque, sometimes evil and always stylish, the book deserves a place in any SF collection. Vance was the first to recognise the potential of the setting, and if he has been outstripped by later and more complex works, then that only goes to prove how potent the image of a dying Earth is.

"Later and more complex works" being, for example, Gene Wolfe's "The Book Of The New Sun" sequence -- of which only the first, The Shadow Of The Torturer, has yet appeared; but it augurs well for the other three -- and M. John Harrison's rather neglected "Viriconium" sequence.

The first book, The Pastel City, appeared back in the early seventies, and seemed to sink without trace (although Sphere have recently reprinted it); those of us who read it found it to have a rather haunting, distanced quality. Now, several years later, there's a second book, A Storm Of Wings: like the first, it's a memorable novel, having the dense, lyrical texture of poetry. Definitely not for those seeking a fast-paced undemanding adventure story, it requires concentration and repays slow reading.

A Storm Of Wings begins some eighty years after The War of The Two Queens detailed in The Pastel City. Methvet Nian (Queen Jane) still occupies the throne of Viriconium, last great city of the Evening. In the city itself, the Sign of the Locust gains adherants; outside, the mad Reborn woman Fay Glass comes bearing a strange warning from the north: an insect's severed head that is eighteen inches from eye to eye. With the assassin-bravo Lord Galen Hornwrack, she and some of the characters from the earlier book -- Cellur the Bird Lord; Alstath Fulthor, the Reborn man of the Afternoon cultures; Tomb the Iron Dwarf -- set off into the north to discover what may ultimately be not so much an invasion of aliens as an invasion of other realities. The journey and the outcome form the core of the novel.

For all its circumlocution, comparison and gratuitous atmosphere, A Storm Of Wings has a very simple plot. Benedict Paucemanly has reached the Moon (but in an airship; the physical laws of the universe no longer hold true) and opened the Earth to the Locust invasion -- but this invasion is as far from the 1950s insect invasion films as it's possible to get, because the Locust is also a religion and a philosophy. Whereas The Pastel City was fantasy, A Storm Of Wings has taken a step further, into metaphysics.

Its central concern is the imposition of one reality upon another, in the large sense the aliens' imposition on Earth, but echoed by many others. Fulthor and Glass, reborn into the Evening of Earth, are either mad or going mad, driven into insanity by the weight of the myths they carry from the Afternoon cultures. Methvet Nian lives in the past, dreaming of her dead cousin, Lord Tegeus-Cromis, and pressing Galen Hornwrack to take on the myth-identity of the same man, "who imagined he was a better poet than swordsman". Tomb's identity as the Iron Dwarf, superimposed on his old age, kills him; Cellur the Bird Lord is old enough to have become myth in his own right.

The style is similar to Mervyn Peake's, although less architectural; Harrison's characters are grotesque in the same way as Peake's and, like the castle Gormenghast, the city of Viriconium is a character in its own right. The geography of the city, although never made plain, is nevertheless made recognisable. Harrison's fantasy is full of urban imagery; even the moors and heaths seem the wasteland of some great industrial catastrophe. Not to mention the odder resonances: the Time of the Locust could pass for the seventies and early eighties, Viriconium in certain lights looks very like London, Duirinish and the north seems like the industrial north of England.

The actual language itself is open to parody. Personally, I found the auctorial voice an intrusion, and the plentiful use of italics irritating. Fortunately, the novel takes itself seriously but not solemnly; under the nihilism is a healthy streak of cynicism. If the ending is neither defeat nor quite victory

for either side, if one is not sure whether the Locusts were invading or were trapped, if sympathy is ambiguous, then that's perhaps inevitable in a world as ambiguous as the one in which we live. The Pastel City had a raw-edged bloody pessimism; A Storm Of Wings has transmuted this into lyrical sadness. Twilight, eroded lives, burnt-out emotions -- we come to an arid territory not far removed from Eliot's The Waste Land.

Or do we? For if The Pastel City had a sense of purpose eroded by futility, then A Storm Of Wings has nihilism undermined by an odd streak of hope. The two Reborn find a kind of love in their mutual insanity; friendship, though manifested in violence, is possible between Tomb and Hornwrack; Methvet Nian's ancient love moves her to offer help to Hornwrack, who himself dies to preserve Viriconium, and perhaps also out of compassion for Benedict Paucemanly; Cellur leaves his sanctuary with the knowledge that he faces impossible odds; Paucemanly labours against insanity and agony to warn Viriconium of danger. In these respects, a contradictory strain of hope, self-sacrifice and survival underlies the hopelessness. It may be that A Storm Of Wings is basically a cheerful book, its nihilism as fraudulent as Galen Hornwrack's despair; and Viriconium, for all its decay and dissolution, stands eternal in the Evening of Earth.

John Varley -- WIZARD (Orbit, 354pp, £1·75)
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

This is the first UK publication for the sequel to Titan, a book which leaned so heavily on Ringworld that it was painful, although long stretches of it proved to be adequate space opera. But it was also pregnant with suggestions that mighty truths would be revealed at the end, whereupon the facade of Varley's pretensions collapsed in the form of one of the worst anticlimaxes tacked onto an SF novel. The vaunted godhead proved to be a frumpy housewife, not through some devious stroke of the author's genius but because that was all he could manage.

At least no such pretensions are evident in Wizard, the tone being set in the first few pages where we meet an alien speaking in tough-guy B-movie talk ("He got a taste of human ass"). No mysteries of the boundless cosmos here; the aliens are merely novelty people with which to spice up the cast, and we soon realise that the humans are novelties too, Varley apparently believing that the provision of some eccentricity or deformity is a valid substitute for the proper creation of character.

And so Chris ("a collection of maniacal strangers") and Robin (an epileptic witch) are sent by Gaea the world-goddess out into the wide-open spaces in order to perform some feat of heroism that will flatter her into curing them; and off we traipse around the Ringworld again. This is a pretty flimsy substitute for a plot, and nothing more substantial is developed within the next three hundred pages. Little genuine inspiration salts the narrative; rather, the reader is treated to a succession of half-baked gimmicks, such as the "buzz bombs", organic V1 doodlebugs. There comes a point, it seems, where that precious SF commodity, imagination, runs out and is replaced by pure dottiness.

In short, the book is a wholly typical quick-buck sequel job. For example, a character from Titan, called Gene, reappears with absolutely no explanation given as to why he should bear a grudge against one of the heroines -- what is the new reader to make of this? Also, Wizard's ending proves the whole edifice to have been nothing more than a stepping-stone to the third volume, and I will eat the whole wretched trilogy if that isn't called Demon.

But there's plenty of sex. There was a lot of lesbianism in Titan, not, it would appear, through any sincere interest of the author's in woman-to-woman relationships or to illuminate character, but rather to provide him with some sort of doubtful titillation. Wizard actually features women wrestling in mud at one point, but most of Varley's proclivities are directed at the Titanides, a race of centaur-like creatures native to Gaea, who sport a bewildering array of sexual organs, some of Brobdingnagian proportions. There's even a chart provided at the back of the book so that you can look up who can do what and to whom.

And a jolly good time is had by all -- except the reader.

Harry Harrison -- WHEELWORLD (Granada, 188pp, £1·25; and Bantam, 181pp, $2·25)

Not having read the previous volume, Homeworld, I'm in no position to say how this "To The Stars" trilogy is shaping up, but Wheelworld appears to share all

the usual faults of the middle volumes of trilogies, in which the main object is to fill the gap between the first and third books and nothing much happens. Most of the plot concerns a long and rather tedious Damnation Alley-like journey between the north and south poles of a ferociously hot planet, with those bits of it that are relevant to the trilogy's overall theme tacked on at the beginning and end. In the beginning, Jan Kulozik, the main protagonist, addresses the colonists in repetitive pulp lecture manner with the words: "I am going to tell you some facts, facts you cannot argue with. First -- the ships are late. Four weeks late. In all the years the ships have been coming they have never been this late. Only once in all that time have they been more than four days late. The ships are late...." etc., causing the reader confronted with such inanity and dimwittedness to immediately wonder if this lateness might not be due to a rebellion somewhere; and at the end, the reader who's stuck with it discovers that his suspicions were unsurprisingly correct after all, as the ships finally land, rescue Kulozik from execution by the colonists and allow him to promote himself to the position of planetary leader. In fairness, this last act would seem to run counter to the overall theme of the trilogy (as I derive it from Steve Higgins's review of Homeworld in Vol 4 No 2), so there's a possibility that the eventual third volume, Starworld, might present us with something less predictable. In the meantime, those of you with some care for the quality of SF cover art are directed to acquire, if they can, the Bantam editions, with their sparse, appealing sombreness, in preference to the garishness of the Granada ones.)

Scott Asnin -- A COLD WIND FROM ORION (Futura/Del Rey, 280pp, 95p)
Reviewed by Roy Macinski

Orion is a space platform put into orbit ostensibly to carry a nuclear payload and which due to orbital decay is coming down decades too early. As the plot develops, however, we learn that the cargo is not nuclear but biological, and that if it is allowed to enter the atmosphere it will spell the end for mankind. Thus is launched the inevitable all-out race stop Orion before it's too late.

The backdrop to the story is both scientific and political. Asnin has drawn on his professional involvement in the space programme to give the events depicted a very convincing scientific feel; but at no point in the book does its political element ever become as real. It seems that ever since Watergate, American writers have felt an uncontrollable urge to put the kind of political wheelings and dealings featured here into their work irrespective of whether or not it really works. Indeed, due to its political ramifications and the style in which it's written, A Cold Wind From Orion has more of the feel and texture of a mainstream thriller; and a particularly unexciting one at that.

Given the fact that, stripped down to its bare bones, it's nothing more nor less than a cross between Harry Harrison's Skyfall and Michael Crichton's The Andromeda Strain (indeed, the central idea on which the climax of the story is built is all but stolen from the latter), it might still have worked if Asnin had managed to bring new life and energy to these tired and unoriginal ideas. As it is, he fails, and because of this A Cold Wind From Orion is little more than a waste of the reader's time and energy.

Ben Bova -- AS ON A DARKLING PLAIN (Magnum, 189pp, £1·25)
Reviewed by John Hobson

How does one review this drivel, its pretentious title and cutely meaningless cover encasing a hack job that has its only merits in being easily read and quickly forgotten? Ben Bova may be a competent editor in a field noted for its poverty (of style, of ideas, of characterisation,...of just about anything you care to name), but as a writer he is strictly division three.

Take the plot. Having published two entirely unconnected short stories, "The Sirius Mission" and "Jupiter Mission", Bova wanted to turn them into a cohesive novel, and hence supplement his meagre Analog wages, by the simple expedient of adding an eternal triangle to interlink the tales; unfortunately, he only glossed over his two originals, with the result that As On A Darkling Plain is but a patchwork quilt, and reades like it.

The hero is one Dr Sid Green, who discovers mysterious machines quietly working away on Titan. Sid naturally believes them to be malevolent and that

they must be destroyed, that God was an astronaut, and that there was an earlier "Golden Age" on Earth which, of course, the dumb archaeologists have missed. When he is not saving the world, Sid loves Marlene, who once loved Bob; Sid and Marlene are sent off to Sirius to explore the machines' origins -- for some reason the Earth has decided not to nuke them in situ, but if it did we wouldn't have this novel -- while poor Bob has to make do with a trip to Jupiter, where he meets Jovian whales and sharks swimming about in the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, after being defrosted near Sirius, Sid discovers a planet inhabited by Neanderthals. As these cavemen are described in terms not dissimilar to those one would use to describe a modern inhabitant of Nigeria, and as the crew of the spaceship all appear to be white, Sid has to black up in order to live with his discovery. It transpires that there was once a war between old Earth and its colonies and the "Others", which the latter won, so Sid's theories are proved correct; he returns to Earth as Cassandra to warn of the menace on Titan (about which everyone already knew anyway). Of course, no one listens to him, and he has to do battle with the forces of red tape before the secret of the machines' deadly mission is uncovered.

And what about Bob? He is now 150 years old, staying alive solely to get revenge on the pair of lovers who, thanks to Einstein, are merely 30 years old. He is a big shot on Earth and, for helping Sid, forces Marlene into selling herself for him; unfortunately, Sid decides to risk all for Marlene, rescuing her from a fate worse than a sequel (which, from the last few pages, Bova evidently intended).

The characters are typical SF cliches, manic depressants continually gritting their teeth and capable of expressing only violence towards each other in their speech and actions. Why anyone would linger on for 150 years to obtain revenge is never adequately explained. The writing style is crude, of the Van-Vogt-meets-a-dictionary variety.

It's hard to be enthusiastic about books of this ilk. One could view the silent machines as symbolic of the dangers of detente with the "Others", but can a writer of such limited horizons really intend something that serious? Perhaps more importantly, it could be charged that with his descriptions of the cavemen, Bova is revealing racist traits; the whites on Earth recovered from the war but dem darkies near Sirius just went downhill. Then again, why bother? This book will sell to people who want simple, unexacting escapism, and in that it excels.

Gordon Eklund -- THE GARDEN OF WINTER (Berkley, 199pp, $1·95)
Reviewed by Ian Williams

This is a truly remarkable book, because nothing on the cover and in the blurb has anything at all to do with the novel inside. It's labelled as a fantasy, but it isn't; the blurb burbles something about lovers saving the world, but the only thing it gets right is one name; the cover illustration depicts a scene from inside the artist's head. If all this served the purpose of enticing people to buy the book it would be forgiveable, but as it is the cover is terrible and the blurb incomprehensible. The only people likely to pick it up are long-standing Eklund fans like myself.

Its setting is a post-holocaust agrarian society, its tone low-key and gentle. There are no mutants, no religious nutters smashing up technology, and although there is conflict it's on an emotional rather than a physical basis. Most of the conflict stems from a would-be industrialist's determination to get hidden information from a church; in the end he gets more than he bargained for.

The writing and characterisation is of a high standard, and there is much more to the book than meets the eye.

E. C. Tubb -- PRISON OF NIGHT and INCIDENT ON ATH (Arrow, 160pp and 188pp, resp., £1·10 and £1·15, resp.)

Prison Of Night is the 17th in the "Dumarest" series and (as far as I can remember) the first not to provide a further small clue to the whereabouts of Earth. It's also the first to be set on the same planet as the preceding volume, which might be an attempt on Tubb's part to flesh out at least one portion of his rather simplistic universe; but if so it doesn't work, in the main because he's more accustomed to handling action and adventure than character and mood. And action

is of course what we get as the Cyclan again attempt to recapture Dumarest and the secret he stole from them earlier in the series, and again fail (as we knew they would, which consistency must cast strong doubts on their ever-touted efficiency and omnipotence). It's predictable, in other words, right down to Dumarest's taking passage out to somewhere else at the end: the eponymous Ath of the 18th book, of course, in search of yet another clue but getting himself embroiled in yet another revolt instead. The plot is cast in the form of a mystery but one so badly constructed and presented that the reader will have guessed what's going on by well over halfway through, and Dumarest's failure to do the same is simply inexcusable -- he has, after all, been presented to us throughout the series as a highly intelligent and competent individual, yet is here required to act as though thicker than the proverbial two short planks in order that Tubb can make the novel last as long as it does; as a result, Dumarest promptly loses all reader-sympathy and irritates us beyond endurance.

Richard A. Lupoff -- WHAT IF? VOLUMES 1 & 2 (Pocket Books, 266pp and 239pp, resp. $2·50 each)

What If? is an odd or at least offbeat idea for a reprint anthology series, presenting Richard Lupoff's choice of the short fiction of the past that he thinks should have won the Hugo Award but didn't; an idea that seems to me to be founded on a number of false assumptions. In the first place, it's to assume that stories which don't win the Award automatically pass into oblivion (and an inevitable fact about these anthologies is that they do tend to present their contents as though they were second-string works, rescued from such a fate); in the second, that winning a Hugo is the most important thing that can happen to an SF writer (whereas, as I seem to be forever pointing out, the Awards are but a subjective popularity contest and not an objective indicator of artistic quality, and hence no guide to the author's worth or importance); and in the third, that if these stories had won the Award then the subsequent history of SF would have been very different (which would assume that authors simply followed audience-determined trends rather than their own particular visions and desires....which is of course true for altogether too damn many of them, but the real trend-setters -- like, say, those who contributed the ghetto-breaking phenomenon that was Moorcock's New Worlds -- do nothing of the kind).

The stories themselves vary widely in quality, from the schmaltzy and embarrassing triteness of Theodore Sturgeon's "The Golden Helix" and the pulpy unreadability of Poul Anderson's "The Man Who Came Early" (both in Volume 1) to the mordant cleverness of Damon Knight's "Four In One" and the sharply-pointed satire of Avram Davidson's "The Sources Of The Nile" (Volumes 1 and 2, respectively). The real point about them, however, is that -- bar those by William Tenn, Shirley Jackson and Pauline Ashwell (three out of fourteen) -- none of them are at all "unknown" or "forgotten", which rather defeats the ostensible purpose of such a series. Of perhaps more interest than any of them are the introductions to each, intended to place them in their historical context -- but no: instead of analysis of cause and effect ("the reason why", which is the true nature of history, regardless of what your cramming for your O Level might have led you to believe), Lupoff gives us turgid lists of names and dates and titles, repeating so much basic information so many times that it's all rendered even more boring than it would otherwise have been.

Philip Jose Farmer -- RIVERWORLD AND OTHER STORIES (Granada, 303pp, £1·50) and THE GATES OF CREATION (Ace, 188pp, $2·25)

Despite the claim on the cover of Riverworld And Other Stories, it doesn't contain the original "Riverworld" novella but, as Farmer points out in his introduction to it, one of the novellas written for Galaxy in the mid-sixties which was not later reworked as part of To Your Scattered Bodies Go. It's nevertheless (leaving aside the rude things I said about The Magic Labyrinth last time) a competent and diverting action-adventure tale, although the unacknowledged "mystery" as to the true identity of one of its main characters is no mystery at all, and Farmer's refusal to allow the other main character to guess it is immensely irritating (another example, clearly, of a character required to act dumb for the purpose of furthering the plot); and also the best story in the collection, because the rest.... Well, the rest fall into one of two categories: those pre-

sented as though written by "fictional authors" (Holmes's chronicler Watson, for example), which are supposed to be affectionate pastiches but read like outright plagiarisms; and those which, via their barrage of jokes about sodomy, buggery, oral intercourse, excreta and what-all else, seem to be making a plea for greater sexual freedom but in fact have the faintly embarrassed air of adolescent schoolboys sniggering over airbrushed Playboy centrefolds or talking dirty in the toilets, and are really rather juvenile.

The Gates Of Creation, the second in the "World Of Tiers" series -- manufactured in response to reader-demand in the wake of a book conceived and executed as an independent entity -- is a straightforward action-adventure story with a layer of pseudo-philosophising to give it an illusion of depth: not unlike the "Riverworld" series itself, in fact, and wholly typical Farmer, although this is a less-than-competent example of it, its plot being pretty ramshackle and its style rather leaden. It's evident, however, that Farmer, like most of his contemporaries, is more at home with the crackbrained wish-fulfillment and blatant power-fantasy of things like this than with real human characters with real human problems, and that when he does try to deal with the latter (as he does in short stretches of The Gates Of Creation and certain stories in Riverworld And Other Stories) he simply falls flat on his face because he has absolutely no understanding of or insight into the workings of the human psyche. And it should go without saying that until more SF authors evince such understanding insight then, for all the alleged seriousness of its themes, SF's claim to be regarded as an important literary form will have to remain in abeyance.

(The cover of The Gates Of Creation, incidentally, is by Boris Vallejo, featuring his usual narcissistic portrait of himself as a ripplingly-muscled he-man, doubtless lifted from one of the many photographs he takes in lieu of using his imagination.)

Orson Scott Card -- CAPITOL and HOT SLEEP (Orbit; 278pp and 407pp, resp., £1·25 and £1·75, resp.)
Reviewed by Kevin Rattan

In the first story in Capitol, "A Sleep And A Forgetting", Card introduces a drug called "somec", which both places the user in a kind of suspended animation and makes them forget everything they have experienced. Through the development of a brain taping device, it is possible to record people's memories, put them to sleep, and then play the tape back to them when they are awoken; hence those with wealth and influence can gain a kind of immortality by sleeping for a number of years between periods of wakefulness.

Card builds his future history on this, describing Capitol as "the biography of a way of life that is born in "A Sleep And A Forgetting" and dies in "The Stars That Blind"." These two books, Capitol and Hot Sleep, are subtitled "The Worthing Chronicle" and are closely connected; unless they are read together, a great deal could be missed, not least because the stories in Capitol seem to have been written mainly to form the background for Hot Sleep.

On the whole, the stories in the former are neither particularly good nor bad, although I did like "Skipping Stones". The title refers to somec-users spending perhaps ten years asleep to one awake, and thus, according to one character, skipping over life like stones on the water while the ordinary people have to swim. Another story that I thought well above average was "When No One Remembers His Name, Does God Retire", althogh the title is actually better than the story!

Hot Sleep begins on the planet Capitol -- which, like Asimov's Trantor, is also a city -- and uses many of the terms and concepts that surface in the earlier book, Card assuming that the reader is as familiar with them as he. It concerns a group of adults sent out as unwilling colonists to a new planet, whose brain tapes are unintentionally destroyed on the journey and have to make a fresh start under the leadership of Jason Worthing, whose tape has not been wiped and who was partially responsible for the launching of the colony transport in the first place.

The characterisation is weak, leaving one with no clear impression of the personalities of almost all the people involved, although this might be excused on the grounds that they were all wiped halfway through. Because of Worthing's using of somec, there is also a great deal of jumping forward in time, thus forc-

ing rapid character change.

The two books, then, must be read together, and in the correct order; neither of them stand up very well by themselves. But as a whole, the "biography of a way of life" is a well thought-out follow-on from the initial idea of somec.

Orson Scott Card -- A PLANET CALLED TREASON (Pan, 299pp, £1·50)
Reviewed by Roz Kaveney

Well, at least this gaudy sado-masochistic comic-book is fast moving. Prince Lanik is sitting pretty as part of the ruling family of a petty but rich kingdom when ZAP! he is revealed as one of the radical regenerative mutants and can look forward to a future of growing extra bits to trade as transplant material to Earth. So KAPOW! he goes off as a secret agent to the mysterious tree-dwelling blacks of Nkumai where WHAM! he finds out their secret, falls out of a tree, grows a new self, hits it on the head and is captured by slavers who take him to where BASH! he meets mental wizards who give him new powers -- and we're only halfway through the book, with fratricide, massacre, the mystic power to cloud men's minds, earthquake and love still to go.

And there is the style, which is simple-minded and monosyllabic, viz this fragment of philosophising at the end: "My only hope was this -- to see what could be and to believe that it should be and then to do all that I could to bring it to pass whatever the cost". The hero is shown as having the bland sentimentality appropriate to one who has horses named Hitler and Himmler and who is awfully upset when he has to kill several thousand villains with a twitch of his cerebral cortex. The style is also fairly well adapted to depicting the various agonies and indignities to which Card submits Lanik: "My larynx had been cut out and I could feel the veins and arteries that were covered in scar tissue as they tried to heal, sending blood to my brain whatever the cost". While this sort of thing is irritating, it would have been far worse had the author tried to describe it in writing more elaborate.

It seems clear from this and the other Card works I have read -- "The Princess And The Bear", with its endlessly misunderstood and martyred werebear hero, and "Unaccompanied Sonata", with its dissident artist hero who keeps having bits chopped off him to stop him being a musician -- that Card is in some way unhappy with life despite winning the John W. Campbell Award for Best(!) New Writer. Authority is identified in his books with the destruction of happiness and the mutilation of beauty and health -- yet there is rarely any sense that such authority is illegitimate or that it might be possible to overthrow it. Here, for example, Lanik limits his vengeance to the local villains without trying to do anything in the short term about the Earth's leeching of the ingenuity of the colonists, repaid only by small amount of iron (which count for wealth on a planet with little in the way of metal). Card is not, I think, a writer wholly in control of his own imagination -- there are times when all this looks like a rebuke to an angry God who permits evil but expects high standards of personal behaviour, which is interesting coming as it does from a member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints.

But when one has pointed to the more than usually interesting psychopathology of this, is there anything more to add? No really; it is really rather bad, though bad in a wistful musclebound way rather than with the manic brashness of Chalker or the arrogant stare of Pournelle. Independent enquiry has revealed that at least two readers of A Planet Called Treason felt while trying to get through it and write a review that their brains were melting and gushing out through their ears -- but if that's an experience you particularly wish to undergo then by all means read the book.

One last word, although this not the fault of Card or of his witless little book: St Martin's Press brought this out at the same time as Tom Disch's On Wings Of Song and made it the lead item in their promotional material. In spite of the fact that they didn't push it at all hard, On Wings Of Song almost won two of the major awards and did win the third; A Planet Called Treason, on the other hand, has not come close to winning awards, has not won golden opinions and has not sold particularly wonderfully. I would not mind philistine moneygrubbers making the decisions about the literature we all love, but when they don't get it right even in their own terms....

(And after two such wholly contradictory reviews, readers might be wondering where I stand on the matter of Orson Scott Card....but from what you know of me, where do you think I'd stand? Just read on, folks.)

Fred Saberhagen (ed.) -- A SPADEFUL OF SPACETIME (Ace, 249pp, $2.50)

This anthology, an original rather than a reprint collection, is founded on the premise that Wells's time machine has made things too easy for subsequent SF writers; as Saberhagen states in his introduction, "We are shot into the past, or the future, and at once begin to interact with what has become only a different kind of present. The pleasures of the journey have been denied us" -- which seems a pretty fair criticism but immediately raises the looming possibility that what we're about to read is a book of stories about journeys differing only in detail and being ultimately rather tedious. But no: faced with the stricture against the use of time machines or similar arbitrary mechanical devices, the writers simply drag in a variety of other arbitrary means of travel, thus shooting us into the past or the future without a care for the journey and in the process defeating the anthology's ostensible editorial aim.

The only story which comes anywhere near to fulfilling it is R. A. Lafferty's "Bank And Shoal Of Time", concerned with a group of five "time researchers" -- all of whom have authored magnificently bizarrely-titled papers on the subject (would you believe "Time Is A Pile Of Transparencies" and "Did You Ever See A Naked Ghost?"?) and attended equally bizarrely named conferences ("Backward, Turn Backward Oh Time In Thy Flight", for example) -- who are called to an obscure chateau in France to learn from its owner, a time researcher par excellence, how to break free of the present's hold on them, cross the "time bank" that lies in their pasts, and be thus enabled to roam wherever they like. Which precis seems simple and straightforward enough, but since the story is a Lafferty it's nothing of the kind: larded with outré metaphysical concepts and written in his usual whimsically convoluted mad grasshopper-like style, it just about defies sober analysis; you really have to read it for yourselves.

It's far and away the best story in the book, then -- but unfortunately not worth the price of the book in itself, because the remaining pieces range in quality from the merely competent down to the plain awful. Edward Bryant's "Strata" is an exercise in made-over Simakian pastoral nostalgia about the ghosts of dinosaurs haunting the American mid-West, with college kids standing in for world-weary farmers and its location shifted from Simak's Wisconsin to Bryant's Wyoming; Orson Scott Card's "St Amy's Tale" is a chunk of blatantly silly wish-fulfillment about a group of self-appointed messiahs who invent a gimmick to destroy everything technological or artificial, and elitistly set about putting this master plan into action, supposedly so that man can start again, thus rediscovering God and learning to live in peace and purity and innocence and harmony and like that, and the only good thing that can be said about it is that the violence, hatred, mutilation, pain and bloodlust that fills all his other stories to overflowing is conspicuously lacking, which you might think is cause for celebration, but since the story only ends up telling us that it isn't technology that's evil, it's the uses to which man puts it, the answer is no, because we knew that already anyway; after which I stopped reading for a bit. When I restarted, I read Connie Willis's "The Child Who Cries For The Moon", which is but one long self-pitying whimper or, rather, shriek, full of hysterical breast-beating angst and gushing sentiment laid on with a trowel or, rather, a cement-mixer, and is thoroughly offensive; Charles Sheffield's "Forefather Figure" is centred around some pseudoscientific hokum about the transcribing of the memories of a perfectly preserved Cro-Magnon specimen into the brain of a modern man, which in its first few pages seems fairly promising but ends with an unsignalled plot twist designed to kill almost everyone involved, presumably because Sheffield was too lazy to think of a more imaginative way out of the corner into which he'd written himself; Chad Oliver's "To Whom It May Concern" struggles to say something Deep and Meaningful about the past still being with us in the shape of the nomad hunter-gatherers of Africa, but cops-out by having the natives tell us The Secret Of The Universe instead, thus giving us two stories in one, and neither of them properly developed....

It hardly seems worth pointing out that the stated editorial premise remains as undeveloped as it was before.

Gregory Benford & Gordon Eklund -- FIND THE CHANGELING (Dell, 249pp, $2·50)
Reviewed by Ian Williams

In the early days of Benford's career, it seemed obvious why he would want to collaborate with Eklund, since Eklund's understanding of character and subtle, poetic touches would complement Benford's hard SF approach; but since then Benford has become one of the best SF writers around, strong in ideas, logic, style and content, which would seem to render such a collaboration redundant. But on the other hand, of course, a reason for collaborating is to produce a novel totally distinct from those which the writers working on their own would publish.

That's certainly the case with Find The Changeling, but unfortunately it also happens to be inferior to their solo efforts, being nothing more than a routine SF adventure in which two ill-matched protagonists and a genetically improved dog land on a rural planet in search of a human shapechanger dedicated to creating chaos. Their job is made harder for them by the fact that the planet's inhabitants hate Earthmen, but so what? Although the authors make an attempt to give some philosophical depth to the Changeling and there is some good writing, this is the sort of book that's been done many times before: just another piece of formula escapsim.

Jayge Carr -- LEVIATHAN'S DEEP (Orbit, 255pp, £1·50)
Reviewed by Tony Dixon

In this first novel, Jayge Carr presents us with Delyafam, a world ruled by women, the Delyene, and threatened by a technologically rampant, space-colonising Earth. The Delyafam civilisation is reminiscent of a feudal society, although its main crops are fish and water-based produce rather than wheat and barley, and its warriors and thinkers are all female; the males, short-lived and mentally immature, are only good for net-repairing, entertaining and sexual pleasure. And if such sounds like a scenario for some very obvious feminism and reversed sexism, then I'm afraid it is, Carr taking literary vengeance on the male: pushing them around, ill-treating them, patronising them, calling them sluts and whores.

And quite effective it is too, especially when the heroine of the story, Kimassu, a lady of high rank and chief interrogator of the captured Terrans, starts throwing around one of the male Terrans in her charge; I felt as though I wanted to hit back at the overbearing bitch, which may be the effect that Carr is looking for.

The story itself concerns Kimassu's gradual drift towards terrorism and the adoption of Terran cunning as she strives to organise an effective defence against them. Its style, archaic-honorific, is one that takes some getting used to, although it has one defect (and one not confined to Carr's novel, either): it's written in the first-person, the first person in question being the one who's been given the job of dealing with the aliens because of her birth and training -- but one moment she seems to know the most incredibly complex things about the Terrans while the next she seems to have forgotten everything. This probably arises from the fact that the author is imposing her own insights onto those of the ostensible narrator, but if that's so then why stick to the myth of a first-person narrative and an absent author? It may be a good way of getting information across to the reader, since the half-informed heroine can simply ask all the questions that we the readers would like to have answered, but when by the next page the author's got back inside the first-person heroine and so knows everything about the aliens that the author does (which in fiction is the sum total of the knowledge available), it confuses and distracts.

The book has a good, and at times even gripping storyline, with characters one can feel for and ideas one can think about. But I get the impression that Carr wanted to say something a little more original and profound about the relationships between men and women, technology and nature, than she has actually managed to. And, comparing the women of today with the stupid, immature males of Delyafam, she by implication does less than justice to the achievements and abilities of such women.

Michael Moorcock -- THE GREAT ROCK 'N' ROLL SWINDLE (Virgin, 128pp, £1·50)

Inspired by the film of the same name and first published in tabloid newspaper

form, this story supposedly chronicles the rise and fall of an archetypal punk rock group (with The Sex Pistols standing in as the archetype) and, via the introduction of (the unidentified but nevertheless obvious) Jerry Cornelius as "the last of the Musician-Assassins", also purports to say something about the carefully-managed blandness of rock music before the advent of the punk rock movement in the mid-seventies and the revitalising effect it had. All of which is perfectly true, as we well know -- but its real thrust is given away by its chapter-headings: "Lesson One: How To Manufacture Your Group"; "Lesson Two: Establish The Name"; "Lesson Three: Sell The Swindle"; and so on, which simply point up the fact that a large part of the punk rock movement was motivated less by artistic integrity than by the cynical commercial desire to capitalise on a nascent trend by hyping it beyond its endurance and then laughing all the way to the bank. No wonder punk rock foundered so fast and rock music has become rather static again ....and with a bit of luck this book will also soon fade from view.

Ursula K. LeGuin -- THE BEGINNING PLACE (Bantam, 183pp, $2.25)
Reviewed by Mary Gentle

The Beginning Place is by Ursula LeGuin, one of the best fantasy writers working today, and it's one of those books that stick in the mind for a long time. So why can't I just come right out and say that it's a good book? Because I have to say that it's a good book, but....and that "but" may take a little defining.

For one thing, it's predictable. Maybe that "but" should be "but it's too easy" -- not just for the people in the book, for the author as well: the characters follow the steps of an elegant dance, but it's a dance we've seen before.

The beginning place itself lies somewhere between childhood and Avalon, a twilight land, the first country of the mind. Hugh Rogers finds his way into it on the run from the constricted life he leads, trapped in a dead-end job and emotionally blackmailed by his tyrannical, dependent mother. Irene Pannis, herself a citizen of Tembreabrezi the Mountain Town, suffers exile from it and problems in her own world -- compromise between her stepfather's unwelcome attentions and his breaking-up of her mother's second marriage, and being left homeless after the break-up of an apartment-sharing trio. At first antagonistic towards each other, they're forced into an uneasy alliance by the realisation that Hugh can always open the way into the beginning place, and Irene always find the path out of it.

It's a complex book, and the more you look into it the more there is to see. There are constant resonances between the beginning place and the outside world, between Tembreabrezi and the states of mind of Irene and Hugh. The people -- Lord Horn, his daughter Allia, the Master of the town, Sark -- mean one thing to her and another to him. Hugh, despite his protests, is recognised as the chosen champion who will fight the dragon on the mountain and defeat the fear that keeps Tembreabrezi's people confined to their village. Irene must interpret for him, and guide him; they are, as they have been since they entered the beginning place, interdependent. Yet Hugh loves Allia, Irene has loved Sark. There is a brother-sister relationship here that recalls the anima-animus of the psychologists. It's all but spelled out: Hugh must fight the mother-monster to gain his own freedom of movement, Irene must learn to accept not being able to help those she loves. Both, one way or the other, fight dependency.

It's a good book, but you shouldn't use fantasy solely as a psychoanalyst's couch.

LeGuin has much to say in her essays -- recently collected in the excellent The Language Of Night -- about certain people's fear and dislike of fantasy, because reading it is seen as unproductive and escapist. In The Beginning Place, both Hugh and Irene are escaping from their lives, and it seems as though LeGuin is trying to justify fantasy by saying "this teaches you something, it helps you work through problems, therefore it's good for you". But fantasy doesn't need to be justified.

Tembreabrezi itself, and Anirotembre, the land behind the mountain, seem very like Malafrena in twilight. LeGuin has called fantasy the natural language with which to describe spiritual journey, and the journey up the mountain is both psychological and real. Strangely enough, the most effective part of the book comes after the female monster is killed; with Hugh's and Irene's journey back to the outside world, their mutual interdependency becomes love. It's a rite of

passage: when they first meet, antagonistic and jealous, they are children; by the end of the book they are adults. The secondary theme (if not the primary one) is marriage, not a ceremony but a state of mind.

It's a good book, but, being rooted in a very exact urban world, it's easier to see it as allegory than as archetype. On the surface, too, it holds true to the male-active/female-passive stereotype, and it takes careful reading to see that this isn't so.

The character-viewpoint age is around 20, making it difficult to fit into a publisher's category. By the cover on this edition, Bantam think it's kiddie-fiction. Too complex for a child, too simplistic for an adult (who would want to know what Hugh and Irene do with their lives afterwards), perhaps The Beginning Place only adds further fuel to the argument that science fiction and fantasy are but branches of adolescent literature.

But it is a good book.

(And now -- this issue's sole entry in the "Gernsback Delusion" stakes, run under William Bains handicap rules over half a stencil or so....)

Martin Ince -- SPACE (Sphere, 215pp, £1·50)
Reviewed by Roy Macinski

Space is subtitled "An overview: from the first Sputnik to the brave new world of the future", but is in fact far more detailed and far less boyishly optimistic than that statement implies. Martin Ince has drawn on his experience as technology editor of Engineering Today to pack the book full of dates, facts and figures -- indeed, at times you feel as though you're indanger of being drowned by a tidal wave of information. For the main part, however, the balance between information and description is well judged.

Whilst there are good sections dealing with past achievements in space, the book is at its best when Ince turns to what may happen in the next fifty years or so, because in writing about a subject which seems to polarise people's views into diametrically opposed camps he has avoided becoming either over-optimistic or fashionably nihilistic. Instead, he considers the pros and cons of such ideas as the Space Shuttle, O'Neill colonies and Solar Power Satellites in a realistic and balanced manner.

If you're in the market for a clear and informative account of what man has achieved so far in space and what we can reasonably expect to see in the next fifty years or so, then this book is for you.

(Grump. I think I was being got at a bit in there. Look, Macinski, any more of this subtle underhand stuff and I'll....but despite it being the last page and all, I'm running out of room and don't have space for all the jokes I've been saving after all. Pooty-poot.)

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL REVIEWERS Due to the fact that I'll be winging off to Australia at the end of May, the next issue of this august organ will have to be typed up some two or three weeks earlier than usual, and I'd therefore be grateful if all reviewers who still have material outstanding, or receive books from me over the next fortnight or so, could endeavour to get their words of wisdom to me no later than the end of the first week in May. Vector reviewers should aim for the end of April; if they can't manage to deliver by then, they should send their material direct to Kev Smith. It all sounds terribly dictatorial, I know, but you'll end up with a ridiculously thin issue of Inferno otherwise....

And I'm not emigrating to Australia, either, all those of you with smiles on your faces; I won GUFF, and will be back by the end of June. You didn't think you'd get rid of me that easily, did you?

ALSO RECEIVED More books than I have room to list, in fact. I have on hand reviews of Nancy Springer's The Sable Moon (Pocket Books, 263pp, $2·50) and Eric Van Lustbader's "Sunset Warrior" trilogy (Star, £1·75 each), which will appear next time, together with reviews of Vonda McIntyre's Fireflood (Pocket Books, $2·75), Gordon R. Dickson's Love Not Human (Ace, $2·50), Jerry Pournelle's Birth Of Fire (Pocket Books, $2·25), Paul Preuss's Re-Entry (Bantam, $2·25), Robert Heinlein's The Number Of The Beast (New English Library, £2·25), Walter Wangerin's The Book Of The Dun Cow (Penguin, £1·25), several Aldiss titles from Avon, plus whatever else I can fit in. That's it; goodbye!