

THE MENTOR 77



THE MENTOR

Australian Science Fiction

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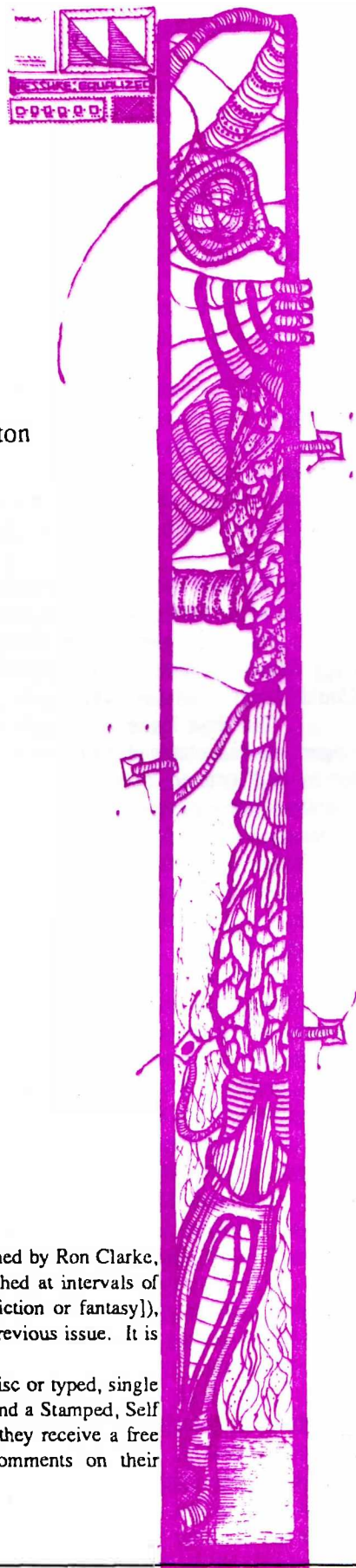
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OBUNAGA'S FINGER

by Mustafa Zahirovic

The first breath of life is the best breath. Take it from a guy who's been dead a couple of times before.

Despite the maternal embrace of genesis I was beginning not to feel too well. Many things had happened in too short a time. My forebrain was beginning to ache as the primary centres for logic started gearing down to second, maybe first.

So I lost the finger. Or it was stolen, which ever way you want to angle it.

I pulled myself out of the gutter and sat on its edge, facing the road. I massaged the bridge of my nose. Could I laugh at all this? Hmm, nix.

Ten days invested trying to trace the path of the finger. It had changed more hands than peace keeping forces had entered Portugal. Ten days littered with countless international phonecalls, bad leads and useless bribes. I understand there's an embassy official in Sapporo who bought his wife a holiday in Turkey with my bribe money. In return I get an authentic Hokkaido Government letterhead with a curt but apologetic message rejecting my visa application.

Two days ago I received a singing telegram commissioned by my Japanese contacts. A tall blonde wearing rubber boots cut off at thigh level and nothing else tells me I'm now the proud owner of the finger, yes the finger, yesirree! The boys in Japan still haven't lost their sense of humour. Or their gift for a clever business deal. They traded the finger from a scurvy stricken warehouse overseer for three kilos of imported oranges.

Less than an hour ago it was placed in my hand. Only a few parties knew I had it. There had to be some weak link in the chain.

The finger was on my person. In its humble wooden case it sat snugly in the inside pocket of my jacket. It was sliced out of its nest while I was out to lunch, rather deftly I may add.

That high voltage anti-personel blast someone used to stun my higher brain functions must have stopped my heart for a time. When I came around my fingers were still blue. My eternal thanks to the Australian Armed Forces and Nihon Biotechnologies for implanting that cardiac jump starter for my active duty in Colombia.

Ya, the first breath of life is the best.

My wallet was undisturbed but the .47 calibre was gone from its shoulder holster. Too bad it was a birthday present.

I scraped myself fully out of the gutter, people were beginning to stare. My gut felt heavy, my knees sore and my hands were beginning to tremble. If I looked as bad as I felt they had good reason to stare.

Walking back to my car I searched my pockets for some Vision. Two capsules left, I popped both. "Two minutes, mon. Two minutes. Faster Vision no can buy." That was the sales pitch the Rastafarian used to sell me half a dozen capsules. According to him in only two minutes I'd be riding The Wave. The wave of an endorphin and adrenalin rush strong enough to be sustained for a couple of hours but with enough bio-bypass chemistry to avoid frying receptor sensitivity.

I had to collect myself. There was no thread of continuity. Pieces of unconnected data sat heavily, awkwardly. Ya. I had all the classic signs of Pre-Wave Exhaustion. Elevated desire for control of self and surrounds, feelings of urgency, wry sense of humour. It was a well documented syndrome. Psychosomatic, apparently.

Deeper, search deeper.

Munen Muso. No design, no conception. Musashi's strong words were coming back to me. Words of reason, holding an intuitive correctness. Without the chemistry I had to fall back on the internal strength of my forefathers; philosophy, *Munen Muso*. When thought and action are instantaneously the same. No design, no conception.

The finger in question was in fact the distal phalanx of the little finger, and before its removal it was attached to the left hand of Obunaga Martez. The two parted company some seventy years ago.

Obu was a famous badman of northern Japan in a mongrel Yakuza clan, now extinct. The mongrel clans, like the finger were real relics. Only the finger more so.

Severing part of the digit was an act of penitence peculiar to the Yakuza. The digit was an offering, it signified to the Oyaban that his retainer had acknowledged

his error and wished to continue loyal service. It was simple, and extreme. That's how the Yakuza lived.

I made it back to my car. My heavy feet falling one after another as if by automation. I sat on the bonnet, I didn't know where to go first. My focus was displaced, I had no idea where to start. Where the hell was that Wave? A little more than two minutes, what say you, mon?

Munen Muso.

Wallet intact, gun taken. Finger cut out of my jacket, not simply taken out. Flamboyant. No blood, a perfect horizontal slice. Nice piece of knife-work, very nice.

'Hello, Slam Head.'

Knife-work. High voltage blast. Not very compatible.

'Hey! I'm talking to you, Coffee Boy.'

Long distance electrical assault. Short range knifing, very clean. Two parties, must be. But the gun was taken. Llancafilo, you prick.

'Hey, Moron.'

Finally realizing the barrage of abuse was directed at me was like being woken from sleep by a sharp slap to the gonads.

There were five of them, none older than sixteen. They carried chains and knives, one had a hockey stick. They stood in a half circle around me, grinning. Eyes full of the innocence of youth and the sparkle of ten plus milligrams of Chorus.

I slid off the bonnet, behind me was busy roadway. I was in a highly compromised position.

'Gentlemen', I said, instinctively crossing my arms across my chest. The absence of metallic weight in my shoulder holster was not comforting.

The one with the hockey stick approached.

'Sarah Connor?' he asked.

Great, just great. Me and these young hoods were the last people left in New-Melbourne who watch those ancient, television-style movies. These guys apparently memorised the lines.

'Your clothes, give them to me now.'

Clothes was the clue, by *me* the tip of my boot had connected with the side of his knee. I heard his ligaments scream as his knee opened under the impact.

He went down to the concrete quite promptly, I was pleased by this. I followed his downward path, taking the hockey stick from his hands just as a length of chain whizzed over my head.

I swung the stick in a wild arc to my right, it met some momentary resistance and continued. I caught a muffled scream.

A sudden glove smashed into my left temple as I rose from my crouch above the vocal hood. Icy razors of pain cut deeply into my face, gored my eyes and cheeks, separated flesh from bone.

My stick continued its arc and I let it swing my body like a hammer thrower's. It cut its own path without my control. Pain dissected my emotions, began to fell my will.

The stock landed heavily across the neck of my punching assailant. His knees resigned the burden of his body weight.

The Vision finally kicked in. Pain became a dry, warm throb.

Now in focus, I managed another swing at his face before he made it to the ground. The impact of the blow sent his head backward dramatically with a long spray of blood and teeth.

The running footsteps of the other two were a welcomed sound. The strained breathing and wet murmurs of the first three held their own felicity.

I got into the car. Home. Right now that was as good a destination as any

Llancafilo, you have much to answer for. Ya?

I drove home carefully. From the glances I caught in the rearview, I could see my left eye was quickly swelling and turning purple black. Great punch. Kid's got a good future.

I reviewed what I had. Llancafilo stole Obunaga's finger, nobody else I knew could handle a knife the way he does. Or would have specific interest in my gun. No-one but Llancafilo knew the gun was a gift from Myu.

The catch was that Llancafilo had no idea I had the cardiac jump starter implanted before my tour in Colombia. In other words that high voltage blast was set to flat-line me not just stun higher brain centres.

I gripped the steering wheel tightly. Much to answer for Llancafilo.

Trying to find the central thread, even Vision assisted, proved to be a tortuous exercise.

It was ten days ago that Brin Lois, the chief of New-Melbourne's most powerful mongrel gang, approached me in person. I was touched, a person of his ill-repute seen in public, associating with me. He had achieved legendary status, leaders of other crime cartels prayed facing toward his condominium. The story of how his type evolved, with all their far-reaching influence, read like the author was drawing inspiration from the peyote cactus.

The hallucination began about three years back. That which had previously drawn meagre sustenance leeching profit from the ankles of black business, now sought to curl its tongue around the pulse of its quarry. This ravenous new face of organised crime fed with a frenzy unequalled in fervour since the gangland wars over two decades ago that nearly razed New-Melbourne. (Would they have rebuilt again? New-NewMelbourne?)

The beast manifested in the form of the mongrel gangs. Rabid hybrids of nearly every race and colour. They were like a rusty hypodermic diving through soft flesh, destroying all tissue in its path to the artery.

Yet the early gangs had no foresight, no intuition. And subsequently exponentially calculated half lives. Little more than accelerated street hoods.

The mongrel gangs that arose in their places were more efficient and calculating. Hallmarks of a university education. Our Lois was a qualified actuary, care of Monash University.

These newer gangs were bonded by a common power lust and were just as brutal, however softer than their immediate predecessors. They had no need for blood on their manicured hands. They delegated this

responsibility; accumulated knowledge of generations of executive management flowed through their bodies.

Soon they basked in their power like giant lizards beneath a tropical sun. And in their resplendence they acquired a taste for the more obscure and macabre proclamations of their power. Their fetishes ran into an almost romantic interpretation of ancestor worship as they sought out a history of their own kind. In their search they soon caught the trail of the mongrel Yakuza clans that were all but extinct at the turn of the century.

It was this part of Japanese history Lois wanted to discuss. He spoke passionately, like an academic lecturing fellow historians on his favourite period.

I was in Cafe Detar when Lois accosted me. He was escorted by two heavily muscled body guards, they openly carried sub-machine guns. I smiled as we left, perhaps more nervously once they paid for my coffee. We talked as we walked. Lois used my first name, Alz, like we were old friends.

The short of it was that Lois wanted Obunaga's finger to complete the shrine in his personal quarters. He was willing to pay five hundred thousand credits if I could perform. I could tell by his tone and his carefully selected words that there was more in this for me than just an immediate pay-off. Ya, I could perform.

Now the big question. Who else knew I'd have the finger today? My contacts in Japan, Mario De Marni and Savannah.

The boys in Japan wouldn't sell me out. There couldn't be enough in it for Takeda and the other guys. Brothers. Male bonding. We served in Colombia together. They introduced me to Pankration. A modernization of the ancient Greek Olympic combat event; it had no rules. It had made a strong emergence in Japan. Although I explored the marketability of this martial art and they had pursued the sporting element, I didn't hold it against them. No, the ties with Japan were strong. Someone else had fed Llancafilo my plans.

Savannah, no, couldn't be. I just couldn't picture it. Hmm.

I parked my car a block down from my house and walked. Magnetic locks opened the front door silently.

I listened, no sound. She's still in bed.

I went upstairs to the bedroom, somewhere under a mess of sheets and pillows she lay sleeping. Still. Nearly midday.

'Savannah, wake up.'

Under the mess her body stiffened and suddenly her head sprang out from between the sheets. Her long face set in a tangle of dark locks.

Her eyes were feral for a fleeting instant and then she calmed, slightly. Her eyes showed she was still surprised to see me. Very surprised.

'I didn't expect you home so soon,' she said.

'I didn't tell you my plans.'

She smiled at this. A half-arsed, plastic smile. Her eyes still darted, looking me over. Yes, my lovely, I though, I'm still alive.

'I know,' I said, after a silent moment.

'What's that?' she asked, still smiling.

'I know.'

'Hell, Alz. I don't know what you're talking about.'

I went to the cupboard and fetched a revolver from a shoe-box with a few other smaller hand guns.

She watched me carefully.

I loaded the revolver, walked to the dresser and sat down. I put the gun down beside me.

Her eyes were curious.

'I know.'

She didn't even blink.

There was a length of silence, I examined her dryly. Soon she came to see in my expression that I really did know. Her shoulders dropped, her gaze dropped. There was no sharpness left in her eyes. She looked wasted and older, much older than she did the night before. She sighed a little.

'How much was Llancafilo paying you?'

She looked up at me, raising an eyebrow in a genuinely puzzled expression.

'You did this for sex?' I snapped, losing my feet for a second.

A smile hit the corner of her mouth.

Now I sighed.

Llancafilo means "snake among the rocks" in Castilian. How appropriate. Savannah and Llancafilo, some couple.

I picked up the revolver and aimed it at her face. She reeled back in the bed until she had nowhere further to go, the muzzle of the revolver followed her steadily.

Savannah, the original survivor. How many business execs have you seen sink? How many have you pushed under? You must be able to smell the power, you hunt it down. You're a lodestone pointing North. Changed your name to that of your favourite perfume. Unique? Hmm, just another social climber. Macheavilli would have been proud.

I pulled the trigger.

The shot rang back and forth in the room and down the hallway. There was a neat bullet hole in the wall a few centimetres from her frozen head.

She began to gasp for breath, it sounded like an asthma attack. She groped at her chest, the action wasn't feigned or exaggerated, it was pathetic.

'Leave,' I said.

I asked her to go, as much for her own sake as mine. She knew I'd seen her at her lowest, base instinct level. It did not sit well on her. This was obvious.

Perhaps under different circumstances I'd have let her stay. She was the cunning manipulator, but she executed her dance with cat-like precision and economy of movement. With no uncertainty, I found that easy to respect. Fate may yet smile down. Her lodestone might point back to me.

I went downstairs, courses of action were quickly making themselves available to me. Answers were coming like inspirations. Must be why they call it Vision.

I phoned Marco Blas. The phone rang twice. He answered using the vid-screen in his sauna. As he slid into view I saw a lean, glistening body slip out of view. Her legs seemed too heavily tanned to be local.

'What?' Marco barked. He looked into the view-screen and seeing me, he changed his tone slightly. Still, not that much. 'Still alive?' he asked.

'You now, huh?'

'Everyone here knows.'

'Who's got the finger, Marco?'

'Me and the boys.'

Now that's a twist, I thought. 'Why isn't Llancafilo taking it to Lois?'

'Llancafilo's presenting it to him tonight sort of like captured treasure.'

Now Marco was strong, but not too clever. Had to appeal to his sense of greed.

'Five hundred thousand credits, Marco. Simple trade, money for the finger.'

He looked at me sourly.

'Name the price.'

'Two mill.'

I nodded a little. Hungry. That's good. A man who can't look after his own interests can't look after mine.

'Be here in half an hour,' I said. I cut the link.

Marco would be here in exactly thirty minutes, he was simple to figure out. What I couldn't figure was why Llancafilo needed to ritualise taking the finger to Lois. And why Llancafilo trusted Marco with the finger at all. Llancafilo. The Snake.

In the lounge downstairs I poured myself a drink. Non-alcoholic. Ethanol wasn't my vice. I mixed in a few grams of Plylataset with my juice. It enhanced the Vision. I stared at myself in the mirror. Healthy smile, face full of colour, a sense of vigour in my stance and carriage. A Vision junkie, through and through.

Savannah left about ten minutes later, she didn't pack.

'What, no good-bye kiss?' I called out behind her as she passed out the door. It was a cheap shot, despite her having facilitated my real-death experience, I regretted it immediately.

She left behind sweet wisps of her perfume.

I kicked back and waited for Marco. My perspective had become *glas klar* as I rode the Wave. The clear view was, all of this sat precariously between confusion and misinterpretation.

Obunaga's finger, Brin Lois, Llancafilo, Marco Blas; this was no simple equation. Elementary winning method? Nix, I didn't like that. When I was younger, I didn't mind having to push things uphill. I turned twenty-something this year, maybe old age was sucking my best performance out of me. Sure as hell explained why I needed so much Vision. Hmm, nix elementary winning method.

I have known simpler times. At fifteen, nothing was more satisfying than playing Battleball. Wiping out an opposition player on the way to scoring a perfect nuke was better than sex. At twenty, inactive service in Egypt was straightforward. Daily shave, polish boots, gamble on the camel races in the twilight cool. Even at twenty-three active duty was without intricacy. You got in the line of fire, you died. If you didn't get cooked - jump start - alive again. Simple.

Despite its simplicity, I was asked to leave the Australian Armed Forces. Dishonourable discharge. They didn't smile upon my cocaine addiction. Nor the ten thousand other recorded cases arising from what was commonly called the Cocaine War of Colombia. It's hard to imagine people once fought over oil or even land.

The Forces were kind enough to send me into a three month detox clinic and education programme. I learned a fine lesson. Only synthetic imbibables for me. With polycombant molecular chains, the only down side to the synthetics was coming down to reality. In comparison, nearly half a decade after detox my nose still runs whenever the weather turns cold.

However, the Forces were not kind enough to continue my salary. I had to work for a living. Up and down the East coast mainly. Repairing nets on a fishing boat operating from Townsville. Caddy on a golf course in Brisbane. Bartender in a brother in Sydney's Kings Cross. No, I wasn't playing Nietzsche's dice with Death. I played the odds for longevity. As per usual.

I had a job with a stone mason company in New-Melbourne when Fate threw me a rope.

The first week I started work the foreman had both his legs broken by a Pankrationist. An illegal bookmaker had hired the fighter in an attempt to cover the foreman's outstanding betting debts. The bookie figured that the foreman would less likely visit the racetrack, and continue losing money he didn't have, if in a wheelchair. Yet could still fashion stone with his two healthy hands. As it eventuated the bookie was right.

I asked around. About the Pankrationist specifically, about his school.

Llancafilo had done the leg breaking. He was one of the most senior students in Fudo Myu's stable. Myu was held in great esteem by the lay and other Pankration establishments in New-Melbourne. I joined the school.

Training under Myu brought back memories of sparring with Takeda. I was beaten badly in Colombia. Once I spent two days in the infirmary nursing a few fractured ribs and a broken nose. In Myu's school, I was badly thrashed.

I began to improve, for my own health I had to. I could never quit, I was drawn more deeply every day. As I improved I gained more respect and stature in the school. The thrashings became less frequent and farther between. They remained severe.

I realized that Pankration for sport was a penniless endeavour. Unless you were top ranked fighter and received sponsorships and product endorsement payments you could hardly afford medical expenses. I looked more deeply into making money by exploiting Pankration, or Bujutsu as the Japanese called it. The art of war.

Myu was happy with my progress, he stopped charging me for classes and had me attend training sessions with advanced pupils. I began to be beaten occasionally, never severely.

Six years passed in training. Llancafilo and I became Myu's two highest ranking fighters.

Fudo Myu was his taken name, even after his death I still didn't know his real name. There was a life

sized statue of his namesake Japanese god at the head of our training hall. The face had the likeness of Myu, our instructor. He had the stone carving commissioned when he took the name for himself.

In his will, Myu left the teaching of Pankration and all the franchise schools he managed to Llancafilo and myself.

Llancafilo, the Snake.

The day the old man died, Llancafilo hired a gaggle of lawyers to contest the will. Two months later I was bumped out on some bullshit technicality. No school, no franchise, no profit. All Llancafilo's.

I started my own school from scratch. When I trained I often thought of Llancafilo. I dispensed many heavy beatings. I had plans for myself, and the Snake.

Fifty minutes after my phone call Marco walked in through the open front door, alone. Very bad. A person who was going to make two million credits without raising a sweat doesn't turn up twenty minutes late. A person who was going to sell out the trust of someone like Llancafilo would never come alone. Would always bring back-up, always. My imagination? No, Vision wasn't known for its paranoid side-effects.

Marco's grossly enlarged fingers placed the wooden box containing Obunaga's finger on the shelf by the front door. His massive bulk blocked out the doorway, easily.

Too simple, I thought, too dangerous. He didn't even want to see the money change accounts first. Marco was never that openly trusting. He put his hands on his hips with deliberated precision. As if he had rehearsed the movement. He obviously knew something I didn't. Something vital, something dangerous. We both knew he'd never divulge. It's unfortunate that he felt in control of the situation.

I put a bullet squarely into his forehead, his mountainous bulk staggered and fell. His fall echoes louder than the gunshot, easily. Having to shoot Marco made me nix happy.

Marco's years of intravenous injections of synthetic growth hormone had made his frame expand, proportionally, in all directions. The synthetic hormone avoided the unusual side effects of acromegaly common to its organic counterpart. Marco was a giant by anyone's definition, he was also a good fighter. One of Llancafilo's best students.

I had spent weeks sowing the sugared word in Marco's ear, trying to poach him, persuade him to join my school. Students of Marco's proportions would give the school a better reputation, more credibility. More marketability. Poaching was the free market way.

None of my students had enough time to abuse the synthetic growth hormone to get to Marco's size. No-one was prepared to go through my old fashioned principles of weight training and muscle grafting. I had to accept my school was comparatively lean in a heavy weight division. Good reason to be caught off guard when Brin Lois commissioned me to bring him Obunaga's finger.

It was well known that nearly a month ago Lois had narrowly survived an assassination attempt from a

Perth based mongrel gang. It was less well known, but still a fact, that he was in search of a new source of muscle for personal security and the blood-on-hands end of the business.

Obu's finger was important to Lois, but obtaining it also represented a trial period before buying. The product, my students. My school, the source of muscle. Supply and demand. It's the free market way.

Lois was going to judge the quality of my students by me. It I couldn't even locate and deliver the withered finger of some long dead neo-samurai, my school had nix chance of signing contracts with Lois' mongrel gang. Ya?

Marco's massive frame lay half in the doorway and half out. I dragged his two hundred kilo carcass the rest of the way in.

His wrists were pockmarked from literally thousands of growth hormone injections. He used to joke about it frequently. He said his wrists looked like Thailand after India had stopped bombing it.

I tried to clamp my hands, as a rough measure, around Marco's forearm. Short by about five centimetres. If Nietzsche was around today to see the technique, the chemistry, Marco; he would have had to rethink his Superman theory.

Marco you dumb shit, what a waste.

I went upstairs and took a shower, changed into a suit. A pair of sun-glasses to cover my left eye; black and swollen, it had nearly fully closed over. I didn't bring the revolver, no point.

I drove down to the harbour, Lois' condo rack had beach frontage.

Vision's impact had mostly faded. Having lost the first Wave, things were beginning to get unfocussed again. Facts weighed much more without the chemistry, became much harder to carry. What was it that they did again, before the age of bio-joy?

No design, no conception. Munen Muso.

I had the finger this morning, lost it, now I had it again. Of all the people Llancafilo could have trusted to hold the finger, he gave it to Marco. Knowing of my efforts to poach him. I massaged the bridge of my nose. Things still didn't fit, ya?

I drove into the ground floor parking of Lois' condo. A heavily balding man opened the door for me, took the keys. I recognised the face. He looked less certain of himself without his uniform, he was a cop. Now that was power, off duty police providing a valet service.

I was escorted by three of Lois' men to the lifts. I recognised one from Cafe Detar. He didn't return my smile.

They ran me through a metal detector, then frisked me quickly, inefficiently.

They put me in the lift and sent me to the fifth floor. The doors opened into Lois' office. I'd heard about it but never seen it before.

Mahogany floor and fixtures. Teak chairs, no upholstery, solid wood. Chinese white-oak desk. Petrified wooden side table. I knew Lois had substantial money and power. Yet this much wood was the badge of real wealth.

Lois sat behind his desk, paring an apple with a small ivory handled tanto. He smiled as he raised the

blade with a slice of apple to his mouth. His tongue darted out and the apple was gone. The gesture was reptilian, and deliberate.

To the left of the desk sat Llancafilo, fingers of both hands raised in a steeple in front of his mouth and nose. It barely concealed his smile. He was happy. Therefore I was not.

Savannah stood behind him, hands loosely draped over his shoulders. She leaned forward from her hips. Her eyes were doe-like, enchanted by her surrounds.

The two of them looked like they were posing for the cover of Modern Couple Magazine.

'Please sit down.' Lois spoke with an even tone.

The chair was warm, someone had just got up before I came. Nice to be expected.

I took the small wooden box from my jacket and placed in on the desk. Llancafilo clapped his hands together gently, mockingly.

Lois regarded it, his eyes remained calm. Yet there was something in his manner that was shouting, he could barely contain himself. He took the box from the desk, his hand travelled quickly. He opened it and released an almost inaudible sigh. His first glance of Obunaga's finger. The sexual overtones were not without their vulgarity.

Collecting himself visibly, he spoke, 'Despite everything, Alz.' Smiling. 'You did surprisingly well. Unfortunately....'

Llancafilo finished for him, 'Unfortunately you got screwed.' He laughed, too loudly.

Savannah writhed a little, delighted. She looked like she was going to orgasm.

Lois frowned slightly, it appeared he didn't care for Llancafilo's theatrics.

Llancafilo brought himself to tell his story between short bursts of forced laughter.

'I knew you could find the finger, Alz.' He always used first names when he got cocky. 'I knew I couldn't. Brin wanted the finger desperately and I knew your old army boyfriends could locate the fucken thing.'

Lois raised an unimpressed eyebrow. I couldn't tell what exactly had irked Lois; the informal use of his first name, being called desperate or Obunaga's finger being referred to as some "fucken thing". Perhaps it was all three.

Llancafilo continued, he was on a roll.

'Who was to know you had some military heart starter implanted? I mean, you just can't plan for something like that.'

Keep going Llancafilo. Sun-glasses hid my smiling eyes.

'Then of course I had to set up Marco. I knew you'd probably have to kill him but a contract's a contract, right. I had to show everyone I could crush you. And since you lived, I had to show you too.'

Lois leaned back in his chair, folding his hands behind his head. Did I hear him grunt softly?

Savannah looked a little distressed, she knew something was wrong but she couldn't tell what. She stood very still, eyes impassive.

Llancafilo sat on the edge of his chair, leaning forward. His face painted with rapture.

I could feel the second Wave coming, stronger than before. Much.

'Mr Lois,' I said, careful to address him formally. Perhaps too respectfully, but appropriate to the situation. 'You have need of Obunaga Martez' finger. You have it. You also have need of intelligent, efficient security. You did not have this.'

With that I stood up in front of the desk and took its cool, solid edge firmly in both hands. My arms were pressed against my rib cage. I opened my mouth into a wide "Oh" and drew in slow, harsh breaths.

I held inspiration for a moment, then forced the air out by contracting my abdominals. The back of my throat quickly dried, became itchy. I held my jaw very still. Saliva began to pool under my tongue, and a heavy drop escaped over my lip as I tilted my head down. It stretched out to the wood below, then broke.

I glanced up at them quickly over the rim of my glasses. For that instant I could see that all three carried the same expression. It was like they were watching holo-vid; it looks 3-D but I know it's not real expression. Beautiful.

Drawing my breaths faster, I felt my head grow light, then breathed a little faster still.

I was focused on the grain of the table but peripherally could see Lois push into the back of his chair bringing Obunaga's finger close to his chest.

I forced my tongue to the back of my throat, struggled to inhale past its softness. Globes of saliva continue to drip to the desk, tiny rings of condensation formed around their wetness.

Llancafilo sat rigidly, his hips were frozen at right angles. I'm sure by now Llancafilo had realized what I was doing.

Deep, laboured breaths. Tongue pushed back sickeningly. Irritation growing. Tight, dry, nearly... nearly.

I squeezed. Muscles strained in my neck. I forced my mouth wider till my jaw ached sharply. An artery began to thump in my temple as I reached the threshold for an uncontrolled spasm. A single convulsion shook me from the feet up, left my knees trembling. My tongue slid forward ballistically, forced pressure escaped in a short, wet hiss.

The small, glass ampoule fell to the table with a splash of sticky, pulpy vomitus. The oak grain beneath maintained its majesty.

I looked up at Lois. Tears trickled under my sun-glasses from the effort.

Lois focused on the ampoule. Its smooth and perfect form, even though small, stood out quite obviously. Immediate understanding and sudden fear registered on Lois' face. But he was safe, it hadn't broken as it fell to the table.

Llancafilo was on his feet. Backing away deliberately, slowly. He's lost his roll, now he was silent in voice and gesture.

Savannah hadn't grasped an understanding of the ampoule. She stood with both hands over the back of the

chair. Her long arms relaxed, but her fingers twitched in slight confusion.

My fist hammered down onto the glass. The contents sprayed in all directions. Powder splashed onto Lois' shirt and in seconds had vaporized. I could see he was holding his breath. Impotently he tried to brush the powder-vapour from his shirt with his free hand while he held the finger high with the other.

I took in long deep breaths through my nose. My stance and actions were grandiose and intentionally dramatic. I flared my nostrils as I caught the scent. Freshly cut grass. Perhaps an overscent of eucalyptus.

I heard Llancafilo approach the desk, his footsteps more determined than in his retreat.

Lois' eyebrows angled down making a crease in his brow. He continued to hold his breath. I looked away very deliberately then.

Lois sniffed the air crudely. Had I looked back would he have been tasting the air with his tongue?

Now Lois breathed more deeply and regularly. I continued to look away.

Llancafilo had put his hands in his pockets. He projected the image of a school-boy.

Savannah had angled her face toward me, eyelids closed a fraction. Mouth pouted slightly. She was suspicious. She was beginning to understand.

When I could no longer hear Lois' breathing I turned back to him. I would not allow him to think I had juiced him for emotion and watched him as he had given it.

The glass ampoule had sinister possibilities but was no more than a commercially available air freshener. No real threat, this time.

Now that my audience was captive, I continued. 'You have no need for calculating and deceptive security. Only security that takes orders well.' I darted a look at Llancafilo. The gesture was not lost on Lois. 'Why is it possible for potentially lethal hardware to slip into your presence? In your own office no less. Why is it that I'm not dead even though I could have been fried?'

I let the question hang. Took a handkerchief from my breast pocket, wiped some saliva from my chin. I couldn't resist the dramatic pause, it was the Thespian in me.

'Negligence. In any capacity negligence is an extreme thing. Extreme to the point of mortal issues. Let's not forget your visitors from Perth.' Did I see Lois' eyes glaze over, even slightly? Had I lost his undivided attention, was I lecturing at him? Better take a new line. I understood Lois had a decent methamphetamine habit, must be a paranoid streak somewhere in the man.

'Your apples are Rowville Reds, ya? You have them engineered specially for their texture and taste at Brisbane University. You have them flown down with Airtech Freight. You receive a dozen every Thursday, ya?'

Lois leaned forward putting both elbows on the desk, hunching slightly with his shoulders. It made him look like he was ready to spring. He raised Obunaga's finger at me in a gesture to continue. He wasn't angry, he was curious.

'I'm sure this latest batch are fine.' I pointed toward the half eaten apple resting on the table just clear of my gastric outpour. 'Ever had those apples scanned for toxic polymers?'

'No.' Lois spoke at a slightly higher pitch. Not in fear, more like he was internalizing a concept for the first time.

'Ya.' I nodded a little. Lois found himself nodding with me. Keeping my eye contact with him I sat down slowly, Lois' gaze did not leave mine. I felt like a snake charmer.

I was cutting strongly and deeply at many levels.

Lois leaned back into his chair. I could see tension leave his body. He wiped away a little moisture from under his hairline using the tanto's handle. He held the blade delicately, the cutting edge facing away from his palm. The knife made a nimble half turn in his hand. I could see now that the handle had been shaped specifically for his hand, to sit well, hug his fingers. He took to paring and eating the rest of his apple. He felt fully in control of his environment again. Good. Behind his eyes he was processing this new data quickly.

Llancafilo looked confused, almost gormless. He stared at me, then Lois, and back.

Savannah became increasingly agitated. She found it hard to stand on the one spot.

I smiled. Therefore Llancafilo was not happy.

Lois put the last piece of apple into his mouth and chewed carefully. He had a spark in his eyes, it may have looked like a few milligrams of Chorus in action, but I knew what it was.

'I'll call,' he said.

I nodded but not with quite as much respect as I had shown earlier. Not anymore. I served them all a fruitful smile as I left.

Llancafilo's expression had turned to one of open aggression.

Savannah's eyes, gently pleading.

I stood in the lift waiting for the doors to close.

Lois, with his feet up on the table, was fixated on the finger. Eyes wide. Llancafilo leaned over the desk, both hands in a wide futile gesture of reconciliation.

Doors were closing.

Lois stared at his prize.

'But Lois, my plans....'

Door shut.

The air in the lift was smooth and still. It held a familiar sweetness. A wisp of perfume had followed me in.



IN DEPTH #3

Fantasy Downunder

by Bill Congreve

This column is the first of a two part series on the current state of Australian fantasy. It is going to be more of a review column than a deep and meaningful critical exercise because I don't read an awful lot of fantasy these days. To me, the greatest use a magic talisman can be put is to make a drinkable cup of instant coffee at 5 am when I get up to write. A relevant question may be: why don't I read a lot of fantasy now? Unless my purpose in reading a book is pure mindless escapism, I like a little invention, purpose and emotion in my reading. The only modern fantasy writer whose work I actively seek out is Barbara Hambly, and even she spends too much time repeating themes, characters and plots. My favourite fantasies of all are the gentle historical myths of the late Thomas Burnett Swann. You might still be able to find a few of his in your local second hand shop if you're lucky.

For my taste, too much modern fantasy relies on, either directly or through the agencies of more modern writers such as David Eddings and Raymond Feist, the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, Poul Anderson, William Morris, E. R. Eddison, (all of whom I admire greatly) and James Branch Cabell whom I find barely readable. I know I'm leaving out the darker tradition represented by writers such as Lovecraft, Smith and Hodgson, but with a few exceptions their chief influence on today's fiction lies in another direction.

For the purpose of these columns I have searched out as representative a selection as possible of current Australian fantasy. There are some restrictions. I'm not, for instance, going to review every book Keith Tayler has written in the last ten years, but I will be looking at a couple of them.

Many of these volumes form part of a series. The Middleton books are a trilogy which forms the first part of an even longer series; the Shillitoe is "Book One of

Andrakis", we have no idea how long the series will become; OBERNEWTYN and THE FARSEEKERS by Isobelle Carmody are the first two of a series; and the Taylor books I'll be looking at form part of the "Bard" and "Danaans" series.

Why write trilogies, or a series, in the first place? I guess Tolkien started the phenomenon in the modern sense, but his decision was made for artistic purposes. Nowadays the decision is made more for marketing reasons. A publisher puts out the first volume of a brand new fantasy series by an author. A reader is interested in buying it. The publisher puts a little effort into packaging and promotion, and the first printing sells out. The reader was undecided and didn't buy the book. He is now kicking himself. The second volume appears, but the reader isn't interested because she hadn't read volume 1. What happens? The publisher reprints volume 1. The reader, along with any other donkeys in the same position, will now go and buy volume 1, and there is a good chance they'll buy volume 2 at the same time. Similar things happen when volume 3 appears. The third book supports the sales of the first two to buyers who have previously been undecided.

Even if the series is such a stinker that nobody will ever read the second and third books, they will always be published because the simple act of getting them into bookshops will support sales of the earlier books. Remember, not everybody reads reviews, or is part of a fan network where word of mouth is important. The ultimate indicator of a book's saleability is money in a cash register. If a series is poor, then the sales of each book will diminish until it is no longer cost effective to publish another one. If the thing is great, then sales of each new volume, and hence reprints of earlier volumes, will rise. If something goes wrong with this theory, the publisher can

rest on his laurels knowing that the accountants in his firm have calculated that a profit will be made anyway, and if the book is a stinker, everybody will blame the author and not the publisher. If the series or trilogy takes off, then everybody pats everybody else on the back and they all go and do lunch over a bottle of imported champagne.

So why do people buy trilogies, etc? My feeling is that if a reader likes a book, then they have entered the writer's world, or creation, and found the experience satisfying and exciting. Their purpose in investing in a book in the first place has been rewarded. Not every book will raise this feeling in a reader, and a reader must fork out good money on the gamble. If the book is part of a series then a reader is much more likely to take a gamble on the first book knowing that if it pays off, then there are a number of safe investments in the new books that will follow.

* * *

The Chronicles of the Custodians

CIRCLE OF LIGHT: Martin Middleton; novel; 1990; 379 p; Pan Australia; \$10.95.

A new player has entered Fantasy and SF publishing in Australia. Pan Macmillan are actively seeking to publish new Australian talent in the speculative genres. They have published Martin Middleton's entire Chronicles of the Custodians trilogy and the first Book of Andrakis, **GUARDIANS** by Tony Shillitoe. They report in Steve Paulsen's *AUSTRALIAN SF WRITERS NEWS* that they haven't seen any SF they like, which seems strange given all the current talent available, and they are actively looking for a horror thriller. All horror writers please take note of this.

The first book published as part of this program is **CIRCLES OF LIGHT**, the first volume of the Chronicles of the Custodians, by Martin Middleton.

Everything is very familiar. But that's the idea, isn't it? Teal is a sixteen year old boy who has been adopted by an innkeeper in an isolated village. A group of strange warriors visit and stay the night. They seem to know the Innkeeper, Harnett. Their visit gains in significance until the village is attacked in the middle of the night by a bunch of soldiers disguised as raiders from the wastelands.

Despite the death of his adopted family, Teal escapes with the strangers and learns they are Vahian warriors investigating the strange death of the King of Neuvah. Shortly after the death of the king, the heir is found murdered. One of the old King's brothers, Raimend, is acting as Régent for the heir apparent. Princess Loriet, who is only thirteen. Raimend intends to marry Loriet before she comes of age, and then rule the Kingdom for himself. The Vahians tell Teal of a merchant in a southern nation who may have news of the King's second son, who was supposedly killed in an earlier border skirmish. Prince Nels has been sold into slavery somewhere in the south....

This all seems very derivative. The companions have few adventures on their way south and Teal grows both in stature and ability. He changes from an honest but

lazy youth to an experienced warrior with great weapons skill. The party discover indications that all this nefarious plotting in their homeland is merely part of a deeper conspiracy to invade all of the north. There are adventures at sea against mysterious sea monsters that appear at whim, there is an underground city, there is a long trek through dangerous swamps and forests, there are wars, battles, and several heroic quests. The plotting gets somewhat frantic at times.

The novel has its problems. The dialogue is rather stilted as the characters all stand around and tell each other what has happened, what is happening now, and what they are going to do next, and as there is little characterization in the prose we are left with a feeling of a group of interchangeable adventurers who move through the plot without experiencing it in any way. The only reason Teal stands out (which he barely does) is because the novel is told in the first person. Teal's development towards experienced warrior and fledgling wizard isn't as convincing as it could be - perhaps because of the poor realisation of the passage of time. The battle sequences are poorly realised. Tactically Middleton's work seems okay, but his grasp of strategy seems poor. He divides his forces in the fact of superior numbers, and he has large forces acting in hostile environments with little in the way of lines of communication and supply. His fight sequences remind me of the old B grade westerns where all the bad guys stand around, shout, jiggle their arms up and down while stepping from one foot to the other, and wait their turn for the good guy to walk up and punch them in the face. There is a lot of sword-play in this book, but we are expected to believe superhuman feats from Middleton's characters with little or no description of the feat on which to hang our suspension of disbelief.

In reality, two aging but committed cricketers armed with cricket stumps could defeat a single champion fencer. In **CIRCLE OF LIGHT** a single swordsman can jump into the middle of a dozen armed and armoured foe and triumph in two sentences.

Middleton does a lot right. There are enough ideas in this novel to support a trilogy, but none of them is fully realised. For instance his circle of seven wizards is a marvellous idea, and I found myself wanting to read more of them and how they would operate. But after creating this circle of wizards, we never see how it functions, even though it is supposed to be more effective when operating that way. Middleton splits the circle up as part of his strategy of defeating several superior forces at once by splitting his band of heroes and then glossing over the action.

The book itself is beautifully packaged. Great cover, a uniform design used throughout the series, interesting blurb, a number of illos used as chapter headings. There's a glossary which defines all those old terms for weapons and armour that some of us have read without ever really being able to picture. Drop a bunch of these on bookshelves around the country, and they will sell. History has proved that. But for content, we are left with a labyrinthine plot with little in the way of convincing action, few characters to identify with, and a

bunch of interesting, and sometimes ever original ideas which are largely left undeveloped. There is enough in the book to make it interesting to some, but you've gotta be a real fan of this kind of stuff to enjoy it. The most interesting part of the book for me was the glossary.

* * *

TRIAD OF DARKNESS: Martin Middleton; novel; 1991; 337 + xiv pp; Pan Australia; \$11.95.

A bit of a landmark, this book. The first volume was reprinted to keep it on the shelves while volume 2 made its run.

TRIAD OF DARKNESS gets this issue's (warm) margarine dildo award for competency and professionalism in publishing. Don't blame this one on the author. When I first read it I thought it a rather expensive method for Pan Macmillan to advertise for new acquisitions editors. Ten years after the fanzines realized nobody was interested in dramatised versions of other people's D&D games and started publishing real fiction again, here comes a major publisher with a bunch of badly disguised games masquerading as a novel.

Everything Middleton does wrong in the first novel, he does in spades here. The prose is stilted and inefficient. Middleton often jumps between present and past tense in one paragraph and ends up with some quite ugly looking sentences trying to make sense of it all. His idea of strategy is still to divide an inferior force to take on several superior forces at once and rely on an invisible role of the dice to pull it off. The novel finishes half way through after a promising beginning. Then comes another segment - not self contained and seemingly intrusive - before Teal is spirited away on his own to do battle on another continent in a different story altogether. The action scenes are best avoided totally. For example, in one place Teal finds himself totally surrounded by enemy warriors in such close quarters that weapons are useless and they try to drag him down by hand. What happens? *With a shrug, I cleared a small area around me, and began to lay about me with my swords, until I was at last at the small doors.* Arnold Schwarzenegger would be embarrassed just reading that in a film script.

Like volume 1, the book ends with a resounding victory for the good guys. In order to maintain the tension and convince the reader to go out and spend more money, both volumes 1 and 2 end with the writer (or publisher) shamelessly begging the reader to go out and buy the next book. If you don't believe me, go into a bookshop and read the last line of either of these books.

Don't blame this thing on Middleton. Pan Macmillan should have had more sense. If they can't afford the time and effort to develop a property, they shouldn't buy it in the first place.

* * *

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE: Martin Middleton; novel; 1992; 330 + xvi pp; Pan Australia; \$11.95.

I'm going to take a little bit of a long-shot guess here and ask if Van Ikin's listing on the dedication page is relevant to **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**'s vast improvement over **TRIAD OF DARKNESS**.

In the last volume Teal did battle with the evil gods who had been loosed on Earth. This being a trilogy, we automatically know who won that battle. Teal, now monarch over the newly established kingdom of Troth, wakes up one morning to find that shit has happened. He and his wife, Loriet (whom we briefly met in the first two books), are comfortable and happy at the head of a thriving young nation when Loriet's brother, King Nels of nearby Neuvah, is assassinated. Teal suspects his old enemies, the Mammon grey robes, are on the war-path again trying to stir up another invasion force in the south.

All this is a bit of a red herring. Before Teal joins battle with the foe, he detects on the edge of his dreams a mysterious call for help from a totally unknown source. He sets up a supposedly fail-safe method for the unknown wizards to reach his consciousness in his dreams, and lies back and waits to fall asleep. The mysterious call is real, and the strangers are quite powerful. Teal is off on his adventures again as the callers manage to draw him and a couple of his trusty companions to an unknown land to do battle against an all too familiar foe.

I particularly liked the great trees of Bundara and the folk who lived in them. I also liked the thorn jungle and the tribes who lived amongst them. Middleton has developed two quite interesting societies, both of whom are in mortal peril, who must learn to communicate and act together in order to combat the ecological warfare being conducted against them. For me, the fate of these places and peoples is the most emotionally involving part of the novel. However, their destiny is left hanging on a thread as Middleton takes his characters on to further adventures in their quest for the Seers who brought them to this land.

I also quite liked Nyu', the God of Neutrality, Teal's patron through part of this adventure, the original God, He who was there before evil came to the world and took sides in the petty struggles of life - although His actions seem to make Him more the God of MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction). I guess that is neutrality of a kind.

The companions quest through a number of foreign lands, make a few friends, kill a few enemies, and walk away from it all as their quest continues like an Australian tourist will walk away from a pregnant Philippino whore in Manila. Teal returns home through the agency of the trickster god Nyu' with both a new companion and a surer knowledge of the threat they all face. He gives his missus a kiss and a pat on the backside, gathers the remainder of his forces, and heads off for the final battle against Darkness. (Loriet, despite supposedly being a feisty, intellectual, capable, tomboy sort of type, does very little that's real in any of these books except allow the men to do everything meaningful for her. The poor girl barely even gets a chance to stand in a corner and scream a bit. In Teal's absence, it is his *twelve* year old son who carries the fort.)

One thing that does strike me, and it isn't necessarily a fault, is that Teal and his companions slowly become morally bankrupt as they fight their foe. They never reach the depths of the Mammon grey robes, but a lot of their actions are suspect. As our scenario is one where a "good" god is removed from the world every time an "evil" one is despatched, and there are no good gods

left, only the ultimate evil and Nyu', the God of Neutrality, this seems ironically fitting. How deliberate it is, I don't know.

In many ways this novel is superior to the novels that came before. There is more conviction in the characters. The backgrounds are better realised, and have a greater impact on the people who live in them and travel through them. The action sequences are a little more convincing. There are a couple of major loose ends, causality breaks down in a few places (for instance where Teal and his companions wake up in Bundarra and decide they would much rather travel by climbing through the branches of the trees rather than along the broad and leafy avenues of the forest floor *before* they discover the nasties who live under the leaves). The world building is quite complex and generally convincing. In the words of Mark Twain - "There's no weather in this book!" - unless it has been generated by "elemental" ring bearers.

* * *

If you are intent on buying and reading "The Chronicles of the Custodians", congratulations! You are supporting the Australian publishing industry, though by the time you have finished you may be wondering why. Volume 2 may be comfortably ignored. Volume 1 and 3 both have their moments.

Middleton is going to keep writing, there is no reason for him to stop. After three published novels he has enviable experience in the publishing process. His involvement in the packaging of these books shows a deal of talent and common sense. His writing shows considerable invention, but not enough research and forethought. His chief problem here is that his invention has run away with itself. His characters lack conviction and depth, and his backgrounds are cluttered with ideas but are only superficially experienced by the characters and the reader. Perhaps he should consider abandoning the first person narrative and use instead third person. In the *Chronicles of the Custodians* it is quite obvious Middleton identifies strongly with his hero, Teal, although little of that passion appears on the page. Perhaps if the story wasn't told from what appears to be the viewpoint of the author, Middleton may be able to invest his characters with more conviction, and his backgrounds with more depth. Perhaps, using the third person, Middleton may be able to more convincingly put his thoughts and concepts down on paper.

His next book is sure to show an improvement over these.

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THE FORTRESS OF ETERNITY; Andrew Whitmore; novel; 1990; 251 + iv pp; Avon pb; US\$3.50.

I'd never heard of Andrew Whitmore until I read a review of this novel in *ANALOG*. Tom Easton was kind to the book, and when the idea for this column came up I searched out a copy. It may be rather hard to find. If *Galaxy* or *Minotaur* don't have it, try some of the mail order people such as Justin Ackroyd, Merv Binns (either of

whom may be able to order it in for you), or Graham Stone (2nd hand only).

THE FORTRESS OF ETERNITY opens with Isaf, an educated Jenemun barbarian with Marxist tendencies, winning the girl. Cayla is an experienced but still young whore who plies her trade in a cheap hotel brothel in the port town of Julkrease. Given all their other preoccupations, Isaf with proving his intellect to himself and to the world, and Cayla with her appearance, her station in life and her need for attention, they spend much of the rest of the novel wondering just what to do with each other.

Trevayne is an ex-mercenary commander preoccupied with a cowardly and traitorous past. Now he is a rich dandy with more money than common sense trying to justify his position in the world to himself. He has taken on a mysterious contract to kill a god. He needs Isaf, or more correctly he needs Isaf's sword and its previous owner. As the previous owner is now dead, and the giant barbarian looks quite able to use the weapon, then Isaf will do just fine.

Isaf and Cayla collect the next member of their party from a distant mountain holding. Herin is a sad composite figure; the mind and soul of Herin, the father, has possessed and made prematurely old the nineteen year old body of his son, Hawk. Trevayne picks up the last member of their entourage from within the well of souls. Lord Annukin, a godling, is the deposed son of the Flamelord and another tragic figure who has sworn vengeance on all members of the pantheon. The group is now complete.

In the background we find the party behind the quest is an ambitious and disenchanted king being advised by a disembodied face in a mirror.

Much of the characterization is by the means of extended flashbacks built into the plot. Isaf relives a bit of his life to Cayla. Herin's past is retold in the story of how he came to experience his present predicament. Trevayne's past is relived as, outside the well of souls, he battles the Medusa which turns men to stone by forcing them to confront the guilt and hypocrisy of their lives, the making of the godling, Annukin, is retold as he is reborn from the well of souls. These extended flashbacks are a little intrusive to the plot at hand, but they work well in describing the characters, and each works on its own as a story fragment. Although they occasionally serve to break the flow of the novel, I enjoyed the depth and flavour they added.

Many of the characters deal with guilt; Isaf by being aggressive and justifying himself, Herin by becoming morose and slightly insane in his son's body, Trevayne by allowing it to distort him, and Annukin by closing his mind totally to others until his own self-centred desires are all that remain.

There is a lot of invention, humour, despair and action in **THE FORTRESS OF ETERNITY**. It has all the trappings one would expect; quests, betrayals, mighty warriors, gods, magic swords, unfair maidens, etc. It contains just enough nuggets of truth to make reading it all the more enjoyable. What it lacks in direction in the

first half, it makes up with originality. The ending is reminiscent of William Hope Hodgson as the final scenes are played out against a nightmarish landscape within which the Flamelord manipulates his foes. Whitmore's theme seems to be "shit happens - learn to deal with it!"

The novel stands on its own. This isn't part of a series or a trilogy, thank god! (At least, not yet...) In a couple of places, chiefly the scenes around the well of souls which have been overwritten for effect, the style isn't as convincing as it could be, but Whitmore is an old Ditmar winner and his work is generally quite readable. The torture scene where one of the leading characters is murdered seems gratuitous until the reader recognises the event as the driving force behind the motives of another of the chief characters. Be warned if you are squeamish.

I enjoyed the novel. Hopefully some local or English publisher with an Australian distributor will reprint it and make it more available to an Australian audience.

* * *

GUARDIANS: Terry Shillitoe; novel; 1992; 417 + xii pp; Pan Australia; \$12.95.

In most cases the books I review are paid for out of my own pocket. After reading the first two Middleton novels I no longer trusted Pan Australia to publish fantasy that was worth reading. To me as a buyer and reader their credibility was so low I only bought this book because of this review column, and even then it was a near thing. I would never have bothered with it otherwise.

I enjoyed the novel greatly.

This is one of those books which swings across such a broad canvas that it needs maps. One or two maps is okay, this one has four and even then with the multiplicity of similar looking names I often found them useless. It also has glossaries of the two invented languages used in the text. Given the effects this usually has on readability, and some readers enjoy flicking pages around between two or three places every couple of paragraphs, the novel remains quite accessible. The glossaries I paid no attention to at all. This didn't affect my enjoyment of the novel.

Plot and counter plot. Terin is a young Aelendyell magician who is victimised by others of his age group because he is half human. His mother was raped by a human warrior she helped who was lost in the Aelendyell forest. Terin has a vast curiosity and a voracious appetite for learning. He also bears a grudge for the indignities he is forced to bear and he rebels against the village authorities until he turns renegade and runs away. He is captured by warriors from Ranu Ka Shelaala and is incarcerated in a stone tower under the tutelage of another renegade Aelendyell to learn the secrets of Shelaalan wizardry. Given Terin's twin thirsts for learning and power, he revels in the solitude. He is renamed A Ahmud Ki, Seeker of Power.

Andra is a young Guardian from the Vale who is sent with a couple of other volunteers from his village to do battle in the Great King of Thana's armies. His people don't believe in killing; they would much rather avoid a fight, and when they do battle would much rather use a

staff than a sword. The Way is to win without fighting - in yuppie negotiating parlance - a win-win scenario. Of course not every enemy is so easily manipulated. Hence Guardians are more than capable warriors when pressed. But when Andra leaves the Vale, his father presents him with a family heirloom, a sword wrought years before by an ancestor in a far land.

A Ahmud Ki continues onward and upward in his search for power. He moves (escapes isn't quite the word) from Ranu Ka Shelaala to the Federation of Targa where he learns yet more magic. Andra is inducted into the armies of the Great King of Thana, and achieves the respect of his peers. Both find romance of a sort, the reader suspects there is more to their destiny than meets the eye.

In the historical background of the land is a vast war against an enemy known as the Dragon Lords. Not a great deal is known of them. But there are, of course, a number of myths, legends and prophecies. A Ahmud Ki comes closer and closer to the magical secrets of an ancient enemy.

GUARDIANS is not as cluttered with plot and unused and unfelt detail as the Middleton books. While the book can be enjoyed for its own sake, it doesn't stand on its own as a novel. Neither does it pretend to. Andra and his friends are left in a murderous and cliff-hanging situation. GUARDIANS is a little routine in places, there is nothing much original about it, but I find myself caring very much about what happens next. Perhaps it is because the lead-in to the next book is built into the plot, not just tacked on as a last line. The novel is "Book One of..."; we have no idea how long the series will become. The extras such as the maps, invented languages and glossaries do add to the book's worth for more involved readers. South Australian school teacher Tony Shillitoe has written an enjoyable first novel in the vein of David Eddings. I look forward to reading more of the series.

* * *

SCATTERINGS: Isobelle Carmody; novel; 1991; 239 + vi pp; Puffin; \$8.95.

I'm not too certain of the price. I bought this at a discount and it doesn't have the price printed on it. Beware the rip-off merchants.

SCATTERINGS is the third novel from Victorian PR person and journalist, Isobelle Carmody. Like her other novels, it fits into the "Children's Literature" genre, an entirely different phenomena from other kinds of fiction published.

It is packaged as fantasy. The words "enthraling and exotic fantasy" are splashed on the front cover, but 95% of readers will spot it as SF within two pages. Why sell it as fantasy? I guess in the young adult marketing business fantasy sells better than SF, either that or these people operate according to a different set of definitions than the rest of us. I found the cover rather uninspiring and colourless, however it does illustrate a scene from the novel, which is unusual for general fiction but maybe not so for Young Adult stuff.

With post nuclear/eco-death apocalypse, post diaspora background, domed cities populate by withered

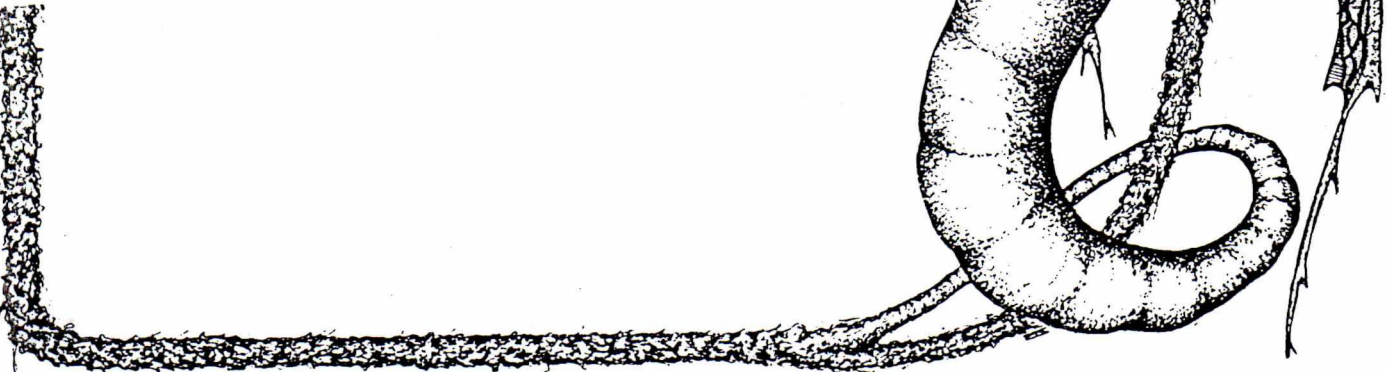
obsolete technocrats, computers, starships, a telepathic native population; this fits my definition of SF. There is nothing particularly original about any of it, the psychic powers are vintage Andre Norton, and the other ideas we have all seen before in more spectacular treatments.

Children's literature is more literature of characters and parables than symbology and scientific and technocratic concepts. The core of this novel is a very human story of a young girl with amnesia who must find her way in a very alien world. Merlin awakes shaken but otherwise not badly hurt after some kind of crash in a forest. She drags herself out of what she thinks is an ambulance and collapses back against a tree. She sees the remains of the vehicle, the trees, but can't see a road. She has a dented collar fastened around her neck to which is fastened a chain. She hears voices in her mind one of which quotes definitions to her as if from a dictionary while the other seeks to reassure her. The vehicle explodes and burns before she can get back to it and rescue another occupant. She crawls further into the bush and instinctively hides from people wearing shining white bodysuits with helmets who are sent to rescue her.

SCATTERINGS is an absorbing treatment of a teenager who must make her way in a totally alien world. It has a simplistic and rather one-sided view of technology, and most of the characters other than Merlin are a bit underdone or stereotyped. It has the standard plotting problem with psychic abilities - the characters only use their ability to solve their problems when the plot demands it, the rest of the time their ability may as well not exist. It takes an exceptionally vigorous application of logic to avoid this, and not many works succeed. However some things we must accept for the sake of the story. I enjoyed the novel. For lovers of Andre Norton, James Schmitz's Telzey Amberdon (my personal favourite of this kind of thing) and Anne McCaffrey's "Dragonsong" and its sequels.

* * *

In the next column we'll have a look at Carmody's OBERNEWTYN and THE FARSEEKERS, Keith Taylor's BARD and THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY, and a novel from the man who may just be the best of them all, THE RED KING, by Victor Kelleher. We will also try and discover if it all means anything deeper than that a few of us just like reading good books.



GODDESS OF STONE

by Sean Williams

The world's last natural rainforest was beautiful -- he was forced to admit it -- but utterly deadly. In the very heart of its forty thousand hectares, he was surrounded by scurrying insects, stealthy animals, poisonous plants and treacherous terrain, any one of which would kill him if given half an opportunity. The only option open to him was to walk, to make an attempt to reach the nearest edge of the forest on foot. If the recon squads found him too late, he thought, then it would have been better that he had died trying, rather than waiting.

The wreckage of the flyer was one day's solid walk behind him when he first caught sight of the girl.

He was heading as nearly eastwards as he could, using the sun as a crude guide when it was visible through the tangled shadows of the forest canopy. His uniform was torn and stained, his thin shoes little more than scraps irritating his ankles and heels. The wound on the back of his skull was weeping, as though sweating blood in the tropical thickness of the air; he supposed it might have been festering, but there was little he could do about it except worry.

Occasionally he paused to rest strained muscles, to sip handfuls of water from a stream, or to venture a meal of the infrequent plants he could identify and suspected were not poisonous. A rash had developed across his neck and shoulders -- no doubt a reaction to some previously unknown allergen -- and he was feeling so faint by nightfall that, when he collapsed aching into a moss-infested nook between the roots of some giant tree, he first assumed the girl to be a hallucination, a product of fever and despair.

She was standing not ten metres from him, a small woman dressed in primitive fabrics woven from the produce of the forest. He had not noticed her before then because she was so still, so motionless; from the corner of his eye she looked like a skinny tree, stripped of its branches. Almost child-like, she was entirely innocent of his presence, staring raptly at the sunset, daydreaming as dusk fell. Her hair was matted and thick, falling in one solid mass almost as far as her waist. He was unable to

tell whether or not she was beautiful beneath the dirt and grime.

Unable to tear his eyes from her -- the first living person he had seen since the crash -- he nevertheless waited until the sun had set before speaking. He didn't want to startle her from her reverie, lest she fled at the sight of him. He imagined that he would not make a pleasant sight: six foot tall with cropped black hair darkened further by blood, covered with dirt and scratched in a thousand places.

Night fell, and at last the girl's eyes drifted from the invisible horizon. She became restless, as though about to leave. Clambering stiffly from his place of concealment, he coughed softly to announce his presence.

The girl made a strange noise at the back of her throat, one hand flying like a startled bird to her mouth. Her eyes flashed wide towards him, and he knew instantly that she was going to run.

"Wait!" he cried, even as she turned on her heel and darted away from him between the trees. "I need help!"

Too late. He had one last glimpse of a pale ankle vanishing behind a thick trunk, and then she disappeared, as though the forest had swallowed her.

Try as he might, he could not summon her back to him. His frantic pleas only frightened the multitude of technicolour birds from their perches.

Sighing with frustration, he twisted a thin branch from a tree to use as a staff and limped into the deepening night. Sometimes he imagined that he could hear the sound of stealthy pursuit, but this he supposed to be nothing more than wishful thinking.

He forced himself onward until he knew he had lost his sense of direction. To proceed further would have been foolish, so he made a make-shift bed in the undergrowth and tried to sleep.

The forest rustled as restlessly at night as during the day, and he, although utterly tired, was unable to find comfort.

* * *

He awoke from grey slumber at dawn to find the girl crouched not far from him, studying him with a frown upon her face. Her eyes were bright and intense. She appeared less child-like than she had the previous night -- twenty years old, perhaps, but no more -- and he realised that, despite her filthiness, she was indeed beautiful. He blinked away fatigue and wriggled upright, reaching for his staff.

The girl appeared to be alone, but he would not have been surprised to learn that there were others of her kind hidden behind the trees that surrounded him, waiting for him to behave threateningly.

"Who are you?" he asked. His throat was thick, and he had to clear it twice before the words emerged intelligibly.

"You are Pieter Jedrik," she said, the tone of her voice indicating that it might have been a question.

"Yes." He wanted to ask her how she knew, but the question was too enormous, too full of discomforting ramifications. His uniform had a nametag sewn upon it, but she should have been unable to read it.

"Yes," he repeated. "I'm a pilot. My flyer crashed."

She shook her head. "I don't understand."

He tried a different tack. "I don't have any food and I don't know where I am. Will you help me?"

She nodded slowly. "I think so."

"Do you have to ask permission?"

"No." She sniffed. "I do what I want."

"Well, I really need your help ..."

She stood suddenly, as though reaching some internal decision. "I'll get you something to eat." She turned away from him.

"Wait," he called after her, "at least tell me your name."

She swivelled to face him. The frown was gone, as was her shyness. She seemed suddenly older, more self-assured, as she replied:

"My name is Gay."

Then she was off, skipping barefoot into the forest. He lay back onto his bed of leaves and undergrowth, wondering at the sudden turn in his fortune. Although his head throbbed dully and his body was wracked with muscle pains and deeper aches, he felt a faint resurgence of hope.

When she returned, she was carrying a leaf basket laden with berries and fruit which she handed to him one by one. He chewed them slowly, wary of a stomach that was alternately uncertain and eager.

"Thank you," he said between mouthfuls. "I'll not forget this."

She smiled but said nothing, just gave him another morsel.

"I need to find my way to the edge of the Zone," he went on. "Recon will be looking for me, but it's just too damn easy to lose someone amongst all this." He waved disparagingly at the vista of trees and vines. "Can you show me the way out of here?"

She shrugged. "Tell me where you want to go, and I'll take you there."

"To the nearest edge of the forest. There are stations every kilometre or so along the Wall and I can call help from one. Do you know the way?"

"You want to go home?"

"Yes -- but not to yours, you understand? My home; with my people."

"I understand. I can take you there."

"Good." He sighed, feeling much stronger now that his stomach was full. He waved away the next mouthful she offered, indicating that she should eat what remained.

She shook her head and buried the leftovers of his breakfast in a shallow grave at the base of a tree. Then she helped him to his feet and, handing him the staff, led him away from his impromptu bed.

* * *

They headed south, not east. At first he was concerned that she was leading him in the wrong direction, but later decided that it was more likely he who was mistaken. The information he had relied upon was an image of the distant edge of the rainforest, seen through the shattered canopy of the flyer as it tumbled like a winged eagle towards the green earth. It had seemed eastwards then, but it had only been a glimpse. He was forced to assume that she knew where she was going. If she was correct, then she had surely saved him a pointless march nowhere.

He tried to learn more of her origins as they walked, but she was reticent and didn't seem to understand many of his questions. He eventually discovered that she lived by herself and had no family or tribe. This suggested to him that she was one of the brain-wiped who had wandered or been exiled from her village -- although he was at a loss to explain why the recon patrols had not picked her up as soon as the signals from her homing beacon had strayed from their proper location.

She, with some amusement, allowed him to search her scalp for the bump that was all that could be felt of the surgically implanted signalling device, but he could find no trace of it.

He had once thought that there were only three types of person to be found within the Rehab Zone -- four if you counted the rumours of rebels as fact. Gay, however, seemed to fit into no category at all; not brain-wiped savage or ISN officer or witch, she seemed simply to be, as she put it:

"Just Gay." Unexplained and mysterious. "I help people," she once added, but that was as near as she came to giving a reason for her existence.

Eventually he gave up. He allowed her to question him in turn.

"Why are you here?" was all she asked.

He described as best he could the disaster that had wrenched the flyer from the sky. He had tried to steer the craft towards a safe landing, but had failed. When he had regained consciousness, six hours after the crash, he had stumbled empty-handed and wounded from the cold wreckage that contained the bodies of his fellows and started walking.

She looked at him blankly and repeated the question.

"Why are you here?"

He hesitated. She had clearly understood little of his talk of flyers and engines and explosions.

"Do you want to know what I was doing, before the crash?"

She shrugged. "Is that what you would like to tell me?"

He looked away, unable to meet the piercing probity of her eyes.

"I guess. There's not much else to say, really." He watched the ground as he talked, studying the minutiae of the forest floor. "I'm a pilot for the clean-up squads. I take them where they need to go, then back to base afterwards. I'm not really part of the ISN, just a courier.

"I was ferrying a squad out to one of the north-eastern sectors to survey a potential target. We didn't make it."

He thought for a moment, wondering if there was anything else she might conceivably want to hear. "That's about it really."

They walked in silence for a while. Whether she had understood a word he said, he didn't know. An annoying doubt -- surprisingly like guilt -- nagged at him.

"Would you like to fly?" he asked her, more to distract himself from his own uncertainties than out of any real interest.

Her reaction startled him. It was definitely not the curiosity he had expected.

"Like a bird?" she asked, eyes wide.

"Yes, in the sky -- "

She shook her head definitely.

"No, never. Never."

He was slightly taken aback. "I'm sorry -- "

She chopped a hand through the air, indicating that he should keep quiet. At first he thought that she was angry but, as the silence dragged on, he came to realise that she was afraid.

Of heights? he wondered, but didn't have the courage to ask.

He kept his mouth shut until, well after nightfall, he had to ask her to stop for rest. His aching legs could support him no further; he was on the brink of total exhaustion. He had barely settled gratefully onto the forest floor before falling into a bottomless sleep, timeless and utterly devoid of dreams.

His last thought before succumbing was to wonder for the hundredth time where, and by whom, he was being led.

* * *

Around noon the next day they reached the river.

It stretched across their path like the fat belly of a wriggling snake, slow and full, and thick with sediment. He knew it from the aerial maps of the Zone, but was surprised to have come across it in their travels. He supposed that he must have lost his bearings entirely since the crash, for the river lay well away from the path he had mentally plotted as his best route to the outside world.

"What now, Gay? Do we cross?"

She nodded slowly, not taking her eyes off the water.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Can't you swim?"

She shook her head, not answering his question but expressing a general negative.

"You go first," she said, "and I'll meet you on the other side."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. Go. Don't look back."

Shrugging, he clambered his way through the thick roots that tangled the river's edge, watching carefully for snakes. The water was cool and refreshing as he stepped stepped down into it; he could feel the grime sloughing from his skin under the gentle current. Three uncertain steps saw him up to his waist; another three left him paddling.

He looked over his shoulder to ensure she was following, but could not see her.

"Gay?"

There was no reply apart from the tittering of birds.

Anxious to reach the other side before drifting too far downstream, he ignored her apparent disappearance and started to swim.

He managed the short distance without difficulty. As soon as he had a foot on the slimy riverbottom, he paused to wash his face and hair. Then, grasping a projecting root, he hauled himself into the web of foliage.

He slapped his arms and legs of water, marvelling at how unexpectedly revitalised he felt. When he glanced back across the river he could still see no sign of her. Taking a seat on a fallen branch, he settled himself to wait.

He wondered what he would do after his rescue. Would he hand the girl over to the authorities so more could be learned of her origins? It was important to discover how she had slipped through the tight net of security that enclosed the Zone, but he knew he would feel as though he had betrayed her if he did so. If, however, he let her go, then he would be breaking the law -- and the law, in the Zone as it was elsewhere, was everything.

She returned silently, stepping from the forest behind him with a smear of sap pasted on a bright green leaf.

"Where did you get to?" he asked, startled from his reverie. She didn't appear to be wet, and he wondered if there was another means across the river that he was for some reason barred from using.

She ignored the question. "Here. Turn around."

He did so. She pulled his shoulder downwards until she could study the back of his head. The sap stung briefly where she applied it, but the sensation quickly faded into one of vagueness and warmth.

"It will heal you," she said when she had finished.

"Thanks again."

"It's my pleasure," she replied, smiling.

He looked upwards. The sun had begun its leisurely fall to the horizon.

"Let's get moving," he said. "We've got a long way to go."

"No -- not far." She nodded cryptically. "Not far."

He allowed himself to be led away from the river by the enigma that had befriended him. Their pace increased, as though they were nearing their destination. He received the distinct impression that she was keeping something from him.

He followed her slender back in silence, aware that his options were painfully limited. He could either tag along with her or take his chances on his own. Even if they were heading in the wrong direction, she was still keeping him alive; regardless of where she took him, every minute he lingered increased his chances of being rescued.

Then, as evening fell, he became aware of an alien sound ascending from the chaos of the forest.

There were people ahead. Singing or chanting or just talking, their presence echoed throughout the shallow valley like the cries of peculiar animals, hovering on the brink of intelligence but muffled by the distance. As the sounds of industry became more recognisable, he realised that they were approaching a village. Not a large one by the sound of it; maybe no more than a hundred people.

As soon as he was certain, he brought her instantly to a halt.

"Wait," he said. "Where are we going?"

She pointed ahead, meaning the village.

He tried to make her understand her error. "I thought we were headed to the edge of the forest. To my home."

"You are."

"This is a village -- "

"Yes -- "

" -- it's not my home."

She reached out a slender hand and put it across his mouth to silence his protests. He pushed it away as gently as he could.

"Gay, listen -- "

"We must keep going."

"We can't -- it's dangerous."

"The forest is more dangerous."

"But these people -- "

"Are your people."

"They're criminals, Gay." He tried to take her shoulders, to force the words into her. "Don't you understand? Do you even know what a criminal is?"

She shook her head, her eyes cold and angry. "You are all killers."

"No -- not all of us. Just some. Sure, the ones in the village have been brain-wiped, but still -- "

He stopped in mid-phrase, struck by a thought that should have occurred to him before then:

There would be a witch in the village. This presented a solution to his dilemma that he should have considered earlier. Heading for a village -- the one before him or any other -- suddenly became the most obvious solution.

She, unaware that he was no longer arguing, continued to stare at him angrily. There was hurt in her eyes too, and he felt ashamed for his ingratitude.

"I know better than you," she said. "I don't understand you, but I know you better."

"Yes. I'm sorry. I don't understand you either."

He cupped her cheek in his hand; at first she flinched away from his touch, but then clasped his hand in hers.

"Truce?"

She nodded gratefully, her anger evaporating instantly.

"So let's go, mystery girl."

"Home?"

"Yes, Gay." She kept his hand in hers as they moved towards the still-distant voices. "To the village."

* * *

Dusk was thickening as they stepped into the wide clearing that contained the small collection of ragtag huts and animal pens. A group of tanned men and women were milking goats to one edge of the village and immediately caught sight of them as they emerged from the cover of the trees.

One of them, a woman, let forth a whooping cry that sent birds streaking towards the sky. The others, when they realised the cause of the outburst, pushed the goats aside and ran forward, waving their arms. Heads appeared out of low doorways, curious at first and then smiling joyfully. Children joined the approaching throng.

He was surrounded within moments by a jostling crowd of beaming savages, all dressed in grass skirts and string neckbands. They were speaking what sounded to him like heavily-accented Chinese, and he was buffeted in confusion by their cries of celebration.

He watched in impotent amazement as Gay was gently separated from him by a circle of extremely large men, dancing around her with arms linked. He called to her, and she shouted back at him:

"Don't be afraid, Pieter. They know me here."

A motherly woman firmly grasped his forearm and led him with the swarming crowd towards the centre of the village. There he was pressed forwards to meet a small man of about fifty, hastily painted with native dyes to resemble a lizard.

The crowd fell silent as the man spoke to the two of them, and he assumed that this was some kind of chief. Gay responded in the same language, and he heard his name, "Pieter," mentioned in passing. The chief sized up his muscles and garments; he felt palms patting him softly on the back.

"He says, 'Hello'," translated Gay, smiling. "His name is Azuma, and you are welcome here."

Pieter just blinked. After three days in the forest, alone apart from the girl, he had already become unaccustomed to people. He nodded mutely in reply, and the old man's eyes twinkled sympathetically into his.

A small feast was thrown together, mostly of vegetables but with a small amount of meat roasted over an open fire. Gay and Pieter were seated at the head of the ring of villagers, next to the chief and his wife, a fragrantly-daubed woman almost twice as large as her diminutive husband.

By the time he was handed a wooden plate of steaming food, he had regained his senses. Amongst the smiling faces, he could see none that recognised his uniform.

"I need to ask Azuma some questions," he whispered to Gay when he had the opportunity.

"Later," she said.

"It's very important."

"When the feast is finished."

Pieter accepted the denial of his request with as much grace as he could muster. He concentrated on his food, feeling left out and forgotten, despite the stares of the villagers. Most of them were gazing in some kind of rapture at Gay, but always their eyes eventually wandered to him; as her companion, he seemed to have earned some special honour.

"Who are you, Gay?"

She shrugged cheerfully. "Just Gay."

"But these people are treating you like some sort of queen. Why?"

"They know me, Pieter." Her smile was patient, as though he were missing some crucial point.

"But who are you?"

Her smile grew even wider, mocking his ignorance, and he turned angrily away.

A young child of no more than eight took his plate from him when he had finished. He found it hard to believe that these people had once been political criminals and their families. Stripped of their memories -- even of their crimes -- and retaining only the imprints of personality, language and a basic education, they had been relocated as a group to demonstrate that their transgressions were not the result of genetic corruption. It was difficult to imagine any one of them, perhaps as recently as months ago, behind the triggers of weapons, undermining the New World Order.

The character of the village was timeless, as though it had existed, and would continue to exist, for a thousand years. He had to remind himself that, if the taint of their crimes emerged in the form of specific symptoms, the villagers might be gone within weeks.

The chief, Azuma, told a story that Gay refused to translate after the collection of plates and disposal of scraps. The voice was mellow and hypnotic; this, and his weariness, conspired to send Pieter's eyes drifting closed. He tried to stay awake, however, wondering why the witch was taking so long to make his or her identity known to him.

When he was shaken back to consciousness, the night was quiet. The children were asleep; the fire was out. The woman who had awakened him gestured that his presence was required elsewhere. He clambered stiffly to his feet and was led to the largest of the huts.

Inside, cross-legged on mats of woven grass, were Gay and Azuma. The chief looked up when he entered and gestured towards a third mat. He took his seat awkwardly, waiting to be spoken to before speaking.

"Azuma will talk to you now," said Gay.

"I need to see the village witch," he said. "Ask him if he'll let me."

Gay translated, but the chief shook his head, uttering a short sentence in reply.

"He says you can't."

"But I have to." Pieter leaned close to impress his urgency upon her. "The witch will have a communicator. With it I can call for help."

Gay relayed only the first part of his plea, and again Azuma shook his head.

"Ask him why not."

"He says you can't because the village has no witch."

"What? They must have."

Azuma spoke for a few minutes, gesturing occasionally, and Pieter waited impatiently for Gay to pass on the explanation.

"He says he is sorry. He would be happy to allow your wish, if he could, but the witch has gone."

"Gone? When will she back?"

Gay shook her head. "She will not be back."

"Why? Was she sick? Is there a replacement?"

"Azuma says only that she was summoned by the gods."

Pieter felt cold envelope him, like goose-bumps. "When?"

"Yesterday."

"Jesus Christ." The hope that he had allowed himself to entertain suddenly evaporated and was replaced by a terrible fear. There was only one reason why a witch would desert her village, if not because of ill-health.

"We can't stay here," he hissed urgently.

She was startled. "Why not?"

He looked around nervously. "The witches are rehab agents planted to guide the villagers back to society. The only reason why one would leave without offering a replacement would be if she'd failed." The blankness was in her eyes again; she didn't understand what he was saying. He cursed her naive innocence. "It's dangerous, Gay; trust me. You could be hurt."

She shook her head. "We must stay."

"We can't, Gay --"

"We must."

There was a strength of purpose in the lock of her jaw and eyes that told him it was no use resisting. She wouldn't leave. But still he felt compelled to argue with her while Azuma looked on, mystified.

"Why?" he asked, half-expecting her to ignore him as she always did when he questioned her motivations.

"Because." She gripped his right arm in a surprisingly strong grip. "Just one night."

He looked at her hand; the knuckles were white as her fingers dug painfully into his flesh. He understood that she would do everything in her power to keep him in the village with her. He also knew that, if he angered her sufficiently, she could muster the whole village to ensure that he stayed.

So he shrugged, feigning acquiescence. "Alright. You win. One night only, though, and then we move on."

She released his arm, studying him carefully. "Good."

"I am very tired," he said, and this was not entirely a lie. "Can Azuma arrange somewhere for me to sleep?"

She nodded, clapping her hands. A tall man stepped through the hut's doorway. "He will guide you," said Gay, and Pieter stood.

As he was lead away from the chief's hut, he could hear the melodic patterns of their incomprehensible conversation trickling like a stream behind him; the sound was peaceful, unselfconscious, entirely ignorant of what was inevitably going to happen. He half-expected the nasal buzz of ISN flyers to descend upon the village at any moment, now that he knew they would be coming.

He was shown to a small hut near the heart of the village. Inside was a single straw mattress. He thanked his guide, who wandered innocently away, and settled onto the bed with no intention of sleeping.

* * *

He waited as long as he could before making his escape. After what felt like two hours, he got up off the bed and crept cautiously from the hut.

There was no moon. Apart from a faint smattering of starlight, the darkness in the village was almost total. There seemed to be no-one about, but he did not allow his lack of certainty to bother him; if he couldn't see them then he doubted they would see him either.

He needed supplies if he was going to survive the next few days alone in the forest. Flitting from hut to hut, he hunted for a cache of food or primitive medicine. All he found were sleeping villagers, until he tried a large hut on the edge of the clearing.

The hut had no windows and its single door was closed. The interior would be relatively cool during the day -- an ideal place to store leftovers, he supposed. As quietly as he could, he forced his way inside.

The interior was utterly dark except for a strange patch of light on the far side of the chamber. His questing hands revealed nothing at all within the hut apart from the mats the villagers preferred over chairs. Treading carefully through the blackness but finding no obstacles to impede his progress, he crossed the room to study the pale glow.

It came from a statue, a metre-high stone carving covered with glowing moss -- the source of an unearthly bioluminescence. The statue was of a woman with crudely fashioned limbs and protruding belly; only the face was carved in any detail.

It seemed ancient, possibly thousands of years old, and he wondered how the villagers had come to have such a thing in their possession. Perhaps, he thought, they had found it in the forest and taken it as their own. He suddenly realised that he might have invaded some kind of shrine; the villagers may well have worshipped the statue, or the woman it represented.

And the face of the statue was shockingly familiar.

It was Gay.

There was a noise from outside the hut. He instinctively dropped into a crouch, approaching the pale

rectangle of the door on the balls of his feet. But when he looked outside, he could see no-one.

Abandoning his search for food, he made a dash for the shadowy concealment of the forest. If someone had discovered him, he was confident that he could lose them amongst the trees and escape unhindered.

Barely had he made the edge of the clearing when small but strong hands dragged him back by the rags of his uniform. He turned to fight off his pursuer, but the tiny figure darted out of reach, vanishing in the darkness like a ghost.

Again the hands came from behind, this time pushing him back towards the village. He swung about wildly, trying to catch his opponent with an outstretched arm but failing to do so.

The cat-and-mouse game continued for some minutes, with him whirling in circles and his attacker always just beyond his grasp. His frustration grew rapidly, as did his desperation; he was being toyed with, taunted. The strange, silent confrontation continued relentlessly until a particularly strong blow sent him sprawling face-forwards into the dirt.

He cursed silently, rolling onto his back. His assailant fell on top of him, pinning him heavily to the ground. He thrashed wildly, his clutching hands tearing fragile fabric and matted hair. His opponent was female, yet undeniably strong; for all his efforts, he could no more shift her than he could a mountain.

He opened his mouth to call for help but his lips were silenced by hers, kissing him open-mouthed and with suffocating passion. Startled out of his wits, he tried to turn his head but the girl's hands held him still. Her tongue invaded him, awaking passion from his surprised flesh. He could only respond, growing more eager with every moment. His mouth never once left hers as the peculiar violation progressed to its conclusion.

Strong thighs gripped him, drawing him inside her through the ripped material that had once been his uniform. The girl's flesh was as hot as a furnace, insistent and savagely demanding. Her hips moved violently, thrusting him deeper within her until it seemed that he had penetrated her very heart.

With a sharp cry, she shuddered over him, her thighs tightening until he felt pain. Still she moved, not slowing until he too had had release. He gasped, echoing the panting of her breath. A fire was burning in his groin -- a fire that was not extinguished after satiation, or the brief twitch of orgasm.

He lay breathless, empty, on the broken soil beneath his back, too shocked to move or speak.

She whispered into his ear, barely audible above the roaring of blood in his ears:

"I am Gay. You will never forget me."

And then, entirely without warning, the night exploded and she was gone.

* * *

Light burst over the village, as though daylight had suddenly returned. The sound of a thousand chainsaws deafened him. He covered his eyes with his

hands, trying to regain his footing in the gale of the downdraught.

There were at least a dozen ISN flyers circling in tight combat formation over the thatched roofs of the village. The light of their searchlights was so fierce that he was blinded. The edge of the forest was invisible, obscured behind vivid afterimages splashed by his shocked retinæ. He staggered forwards desperately, one arm outstretched, but was knocked to his knees by the first of the explosions.

The sound of screams and staccato gunfire joined the chaos. He squinted through slitted eyelids upwards into the maelstrom; the cleanup squad was descending on slender pillars of invisible force, strafing the clearing with fire. Terrified villagers, awakened from their dreams of peace and tranquillity, fled in all directions and were picked off one by one, blasted in mid-step.

His eyes were clearing. He was further from the forest than he had realised. Crawling desperately, he scrambled towards cover. Another series of explosions flattened him, knocking the wind from his lungs. He rolled, clutching at the pain within his ears. Black-clad figures drifted from hut to hut, leaving fire in their wake.

The squad itself was on the ground, searching for stunned survivors amongst those already dead.

One officer caught sight of him and he instinctively tried to flee. The energy rifle came up. He flung himself to one side. Lines of fire pock-marked the soil to his left, and he screamed, waving the tatters of his uniform at the armoured man.

"Don't fire! I'm Pieter Jedrik!"

The rifle targetted again, its barrel red hot.

"I'm Pieter Jedrik!"

Fury spat at him, faster than his lunge for safety.

An instant of pain flowered in his right shoulder and he lost his balance. The ground came at him like a hammer, but he was unconscious before it struck him.

* * *

He seemed to fall forever -- ever-downwards into a brown sea that tasted of blood and dirt -- until, at last, darkness fell. The grave claimed his soul for an instant, then reluctantly released it.

When he awoke briefly in the emergency flyer, the stump of his right shoulder was enveloped in the plastic shroud of machinery, and all he could feel was the pain of separation.

* * *

The pilot knew him, and came back to offer reassurance during the short flight.

"It's okay," said the woman, her face startlingly clean and harsh in the bright artificial light. "You'll live."

He struggled to find his voice but was unable to. His mind was fogged by painkillers, his body distant, beyond reach. All that kept him conscious was a dull, nagging ache -- as though a need had been awakened within him that he would never be able to fill.

Realising that he was trying to speak, she hurried to explain before he over-exerted himself:

"We found the wreck yesterday morning and assumed you were out here somewhere. You're not the sort to give up -- we all knew that, even though the search parties couldn't find you. It was a good idea to head for one of the villages, just bad luck I guess that you picked the wrong one."

He managed to force out a word:

"Why ... ?"

The pilot shrugged. "Rehabilitation Agent Svenson reported that the villagers were worshipping some sort of primal deity. When the idolatry became too entrenched to be cured, she left the village and called us in to finish it off." She took his one remaining hand and squeezed it. "Good riddance, I say. There's no room for superstition; not these days."

He closed his eyes, whispering a name under his breath.

"How did you know?" asked the pilot, and he half-opened his eyes in surprise.

"Gaia, the earth-goddess," she said. "A load of primitive crap."

He stared at her, sensing through his pain a cultural gap between them that had not existed before his journey through the forest.

"No," he said, quite clearly.

She smiled tolerantly, understanding that he was delirious.

Darkness returned quickly as the drugs in his bloodstream claimed him once again -- but, before he succumbed, he thought he heard her say in wry amusement:

"Next you'll be saying that you actually met her..."



WARRIORS OF ANCIENT WORLDS

by Andrew Darlington

The roots of sword and sorcery? Through the 1950s and 1960s British picture-strip stories like OLAC THE GLADIATOR, HEROS THE SPARTAN, KARL THE VIKING and WULF THE BRITON defined a genre that today is recognised as the best work of legendary artists FRANK BELLAMY, DON LAWRENCE and RON EMBLETON. This is the full story.

I owe my interest in, and enthusiasm for, the Roman military campaigns of Agricolae in Northern Britain, not from school history lessons, but from the colour pages of the EXPRESS comic, and the adventures of WULF THE BRITON. Just as my knowledge of the deposed last king of Rome, *Tarquin the Proud*, and his attempted coup to regain power with the assistance of other Latinium tribes, comes not from my excellent history teacher Mr Nelson, but from TIGER, and the graphic exploits of OLAC THE GLADIATOR. Throughout the late 50s and 1960s, along with Science Fiction strips and novels, adventure fiction set in antiquity in prose and picture format supplied me with an evocative and important genre of ideas. Its popularity then, and continuing cult interest today, indicated I was far from alone in that fascination.

The exquisite and historically detailed novels of Geoffrey Trease and Rosemary Sutcliffe delineate the general territory the strips work within; from the days of Classical Greek civilisation, through the rise and decline of Rome, into the Dark Ages of the epic Viking voyages. On such a time-scale the earliest strip is John Burn's WRATH OF THE GODS with a script that captures something of Trease's myth-weaving. "From the ancient, crumbling ruins of the once mighty Greek Empire there still lives a strange, time-worn legend. It deals with a proud mortal who dared to challenge Fate and defy the most powerful Greek God of all, Zeus. The mortal's name was Arion, and his story began 3,000 years ago..."

Later, the exploits of HEROS THE SPARTAN commenced in full gravure colour across the centre-spread of EAGLE on 27th October 1962, the same issue that saw the launch of Dan Dare's WEB OF FEAR serial. OLAC THE GLADIATOR, the British slave with ambitions in

the combat arena, began in TIGER in 1957. WULF THE BRITON, in the meantime, ran in EXPRESS from 1956 to '61, first as the central character of FREEDOM IS THE PRIZE and later - from '57, eponymously on the front page. Moving further through historical times KARL THE VIKING was a popular feature of LION from 1960 (to '64). In a further incarnation as ERIC THE VIKING he took the genre from 1969 into the next decade for IPC's short-lived SMASH. No relation at all to the Monty Python movie of the same name, "Eric" closed in 1971.

Taken together these stories form a powerful and unjustly neglected part of British comics history. The art remains often stunning, and is seldom less than impressive, incorporating work from the portfolios of acknowledged graphics wizards like Frank Bellamy, Don Lawrence, or Ron Embleton. Accurate enough, at their best, to make academic text-work, care was taken with the details of armour, architecture, and vessels. To ensure a high degree of authenticity. Yet there are fantastic and supernatural elements that add extra dimensions to Heros and Karl ensuring that their exploits are never dull.

Unfortunately the same can't be said for certain "fringe" strips. These were the days when local movie-houses screened a slew of Hollywood forays into Brylcreamed antiquity - THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, SPARTACUS, THE ROBE, or hugely enjoyable all-action costume romps like the Tony Curtis Kirk Douglas epic THE VIKINGS. The downside of such celluloid extravagance was a tendency for descent into the pious. And EAGLE was founded by the Reverend Marcus Morris whose crusading do-goodery ensured a sequence of back-page serials built around Biblical themes. Chad Varah, editorial consultant and genuine war hero - he'd escaped Nazi arrest in 1934, scripted MARK: THE YOUNGEST DISCIPLE through 1955. The illustrations, by Bellavitis, feature Roman costumes and period settings as accurate as any contemporary strip, both well-crafted and stylish, but not even his skill is capable of salvaging a high interest factor from such dull subject matter. Things don't improve with the even greater excess of THE ROAD TO COURAGE in 1961, where a Marcus Morris script

HEROS

the SPARTAN

ROARS OF EXCITEMENT RANG AROUND A SUN DRENCHED ARENA, SOMEWHERE IN ANCIENT BRITAIN. IT WAS THE FEAST OF SATURN, AND THE CLIMAX OF A GAMES HELD BY THE ROMAN CONQUERORS IN HONOUR OF THE FATHER OF JUPITER....!

OVER TWO HOURS HAVE PASSED, AND STILL THEY FIGHT!

NOW, ULTHUR - USE YOUR NET!

AND NOW, OF ALL THE CONTESTANTS, THE ONLY SURVIVORS WERE A BRITISH CHIEFTAIN...

...AND HEROS THE SPARTAN!

BUT HEROS STRUCK WITH THE FLAT OF HIS SWORD...

THE ROMAN SIDE - STEPS! HE HAS AVOIDED THE NET!

THE SPECTATORS ROSE TO THAT ACT OF MERCY...

A VICTORY TO ROME - HAIL TO HEROS!

OUR FINEST WARRIOR LIES AT HIS FEET! IS THERE NO ONE AMONG US WHO CAN DEFEAT HIM?

AAAH! ULTHUR IS DISARMED! HE IS DOOMED!

SUDDENLY A FIGURE LEAPT INTO THE ARENA.

BY MABON! ANOTHER OPPONENT FOR HEROS!

HIS FACE IS MASKED BY HIS HELMET. WHO CAN HE BE?

THE STRANGER LAUNCHED HIMSELF AT HEROS...

...AND THE CLASH OF STEEL RANG ACROSS THE ARENA.

THE STRANGER MEANS BUSINESS! THAT BLOW WAS AIMED AT HEROS'S THROAT!

HE HAS THE SPEED OF A DEER AND THE SAVAGERY OF A WOLF!

HEROS FOUND HIMSELF FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE!

WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS? THERE IS DEATH IN HIS EYES, AND HE GRUNTS AND GROWLS LIKE AN ANIMAL!

and art by Dan Dare's creator Frank Hampson are brought to bear on the story of Jesus. So we'll pass them by...

There is also a rash of strips set in prehistory which, despite straying dangerously into Conan territory, are occasionally worth chasing up. MORG OF THE MAMMOTHS, in ancient Britain 9000 years ago, was serialised in LION through the final months of 1963, an Androcles variant, Morg is exiled from his tribe - the Hill People, after striking up a close relationship with Karga, the single-tusked Mammoth. In 1964 they sequelled into JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF THE WORLD to face even greater perils from predatory dinosaurs. Closer to the genre - and over at D C Thompson, as far back as July 1940 HOTSPUR had run text stories featuring PEP-TALK POLONIUS: MAKER OF GLADIATORS (issues #s 361 to 389), and a crudely unsophisticated picture-strip from March 1952 (issue #s 803 to 814) which traces the history of TORGOTH THE AXEMAN and his comrade Prince Olaf, heir to the throne of Norway. Also from the Dundee stable I recall BEANO serialising a Viking strip taking its protagonists through Africa defying the various obstacles placed in their path by Saracens.

But the first of the genuine classics - WRATH OF THE GODS, begins in what Denis Gifford calls "blazing hand-painted colour... across the cinematic centre spread of BOYS WORLD No.1 (in ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COMIC CHARACTERS. Longman 1987). The date is 26th January 1963, the story drawing heavily on mythology as Arion searches for the Nameless God to whom he must return the Chalice of Apollo, meeting the devious Sphinx en route, or questing for the stolen Bow of Delos which will re-animate Patreious, a mistakenly slain friend.

BOYS WORLD survived a mere 89 issues, merging with EAGLE from the 10th October '64 issue, where Arion's adventures briefly continue, with John Burns art replacing that of Ron Embleton.

HEROS THE SPARTAN was written by Tom Tully (who went on to script DAN DARE in the 1980's EAGLE re-launch), and - for a year, was illustrated by Frank Bellamy, Dare's most controversial artist. The iconoclastic Bellamy had already embellished the tales of MARCO POLO and DAVID, THE SHEPHERD KING for EAGLE, and he'd go on to work on GARTH in the DAILY MIRROR and for Gerry Anderson's THUNDERBIRDS strip spin-offs. But with Heros he was instrumental in freeing British picture strips from the rigid limitations of the 3-frames wide by 4-frames deep straight-jacket, by exploding his graphics in disruptive fully interlocking shapes that come together into a single double-spread conception. Promoted to the status of real art, yet never sterile, the Heros stories also aspire to the best that Swords & Sorcery has in its image-banks. The macabre quality is almost tactile as "on the Island of Darkness, Heros the Spartan and the survivors of his cohort were forced by priests of the pagan god Diom, to fight duels with the animal-men called the Magus". Weird scenes follow bizarre threats from slavery in the gold mines of the priests of Diom, to the search for his lost centurion friend Septimus imprisoned under the thrall of the Man of Vyah,

an evil Eastern despot. In a FANTASY ADVERTISER interview (12 May 1973) with Dez Skinn, Bellamy reveals how the "EAGLE people 'phoned me to offer me the set, telling me that HEROS would be about the swashbuckling adventures of someone who would be a cross between a Roman soldier and an ancient Greek soldier. I had the first script - by Tom Tully, a few days later.... I definitely found Heros to be something entirely different from anything I'd ever drawn. I was able to create giant warrior tribes, sea monsters and eerie creatures".

Heros is given command of the Fifth Legion "the worst unit in the armies of Rome" by a tyrannical and vindictive Caesar and - with a courier called Crassus, marches them north into Gaul to stamp out an evil Druid cult. Episode five of the story (dated 6th April 1963) includes a famous battle scene featuring over 200 figures; a spread destined to be exhibited at the New York "American academy of Comic Book Arts". Then, following his ordeal at the hands of the "false" Vyah, sentenced to die "the death of a thousand cuts" - as well as a lesser artist in 1964, Bellamy returns to illustrate action set in the desert stronghold of El Rascild whose Moorish army plans to conquer Rome. With the EAGLE/BOYS WORLD merger Heros is reduced to a single page from October '65 and into the next year with L. Bermajo as the draughtsman responsible for a tale in which - wrongly accused of an assassination attempt Heros and the gladiator Candilis are outlawed by Caesar. He becomes a galley-slave, fights the pirate Barbosa, and winds up in the combat arena of Governor Epicus. By his demise HEROS THE SPARTAN shares EAGLE pages with that kindred story from the days following the Trojan wars - WRATH OF THE GODS! Heros tales continues into the 1965 EAGLE ANNUAL, a 4-page saga located in Gaul called MARK OF THE WARRIOR done with some flair by Bermajo. And although the strip was discontinued on a weekly basis that same year, Bellamy recaptures the full horror of the subhuman denizens of the Isle of Darkness in a one-off 8-page adventure for the '66 annual, pitting the Spartan against Druid Cormag, shaman of the lycantropic Wolk Clan.

WULF THE BRITON replaced the MARK FURY single-page colour strip in EXPRESS WEEKLY dated 13th October 1956 in an introductory story set in AD 62. Written by Jenny M. Butterworth (wife of Mike, who scripted the high-rated THE TRIGAN EMPIRE series - since published in large-format book editions) it traces the struggles of Wulf - a slave owned by the Roman Lucellus, as he endures a series of seven trials to gain his liberty. The story swiftly expands to double-paged status announcing itself as "out of the desperate days of Ancient Rome leaps Wulf the Briton" - by January '57 leaping to the front cover under his own name, the "Freedom is the Prize" sub-title gradually fading out. From its finest episodes inked by Ron Embleton - who inherited art duties with the switch to the front-page and carries them over into a lavish centre-spread, Wulf's forays range across the Empire from Egypt and back to Britain, there to resist the Roman centurion I used to mispronounce phonetically "Agri-Cola" (a la Pepsi-Cola!). But "our quarrel is with

WULF THE BRITON

Wulf is captain of a galley with a crew of escaped gladiators. His travels take him into the Black Sea, where danger and adventure lie in wait for him....



SUDDENLY A SHRILL CRY BREAKS THE SILENCE...

SMOKE! SMOKE TO LEEWARD... THERE'S A SHIP ON FIRE!



A ROMAN MERCHANTMAN... AND SHE'S IN TROUBLE! THE OTHER SHIP'S CLOSING IN FOR THE KILL...



THE MERCHANTMAN IS LISTING BADLY. SMOKE POURING FROM HER. THE PIRATE GALLEY BEARS DOWN ON ITS VICTIM...



SOUND THE CALL TO ARMS! BRING THE SHIP ROUND! WE'RE GOING TO SAVE THAT MERCHANTMAN

WHY SHOULD WE RISK OUR SKINS TO SAVE ROMANS? WHAT DID THEY EVER DO FOR US? IT'S MADNESS!



OUR QUARREL IS WITH INJUSTICE - NOT WITH ROME ALONE! WE GO TO HELP THE WEAKER. IF YOU'VE NO MIND TO FIGHT, GO BELOW!

I'M NOT AFRAID TO FIGHT IF THE CAUSE IS JUST

injustice, not with Rome alone. We go to help the weaker" Wulf cries heroically in the 1958 EXPRESS ANNUAL story. Here, alongside a JET MORGAN escapade, Wulf is "Captain of a galley with a crew of escaped gladiators" fighting Timur Khan of the Tartar War-horde on the Black Sea. Righting such misdeeds he remained an integral EXPRESS attraction until the final issue, long after he'd lost both cover position and his best artist. With the magazine's radical format reshuffle of 16th April '60 into TV EXPRESS Wulf was terminated.

Heros and Wulf, with their luxurious use of rich gravure colour, were promoted as "prestige" strips with a whiff of educationalism to validate the claim. Yet unlike the EAGLE back-pagers, they also succeed superbly as adventure yarns. But of all the genre it was ORLAC THE GLADIATOR in humble monochrome who survived longest; continuing as a star of TIGER for eleven years - from 1957 to '68...

Unlike the lushly flowing coiffure of a Don Lawrence hero, OLAC THE GLADIATOR's hair is short and neatly disciplined. But the world he inhabits is just as savage. Olac's Rome (as for Heros the Spartan) is a violent place, as rife with scurrilous plots and intrigue as anything from Robert Graves CLAUDIUS trilogy. The Emperor is either corrupt, insane, or the object of cunning coup, putative putsch or assassination by jealous conspirators. Beyond the city the oceans are plagued by pirates, and the empire's rim is under constant threat from barbarians of every hue. But unlike HEROS THE SPARTAN or KARL THE VIKING there are no supernatural threats. Olac stories are solid blood-and-thunder heroics. The only unnatural aspect is Olac's remarkable longevity. The general "Roman" setting is used as an excuse to justify his involvement in incidents that are historically separated by hundreds of years - from the origins of the Republic, with Tarquin, to the destruction of the Empire in the hands of Atilla the Hun. In real time, Tarquin was expelled from Rome in 509 BC, while Atilla's pagan hordes advance into Italy in 453 AD. Both events involve Olac's participation - yet are 960 years apart!

Before Olac, but inhabiting roughly similar terrain, LION's uncomplicated serial REBELS OF ANCIENT ROME ran through the final months of 1952 and the first issues of 1953. Written by E. George Cowan - creator of ROBOT ARCHIE, it chronicles the escapades of three British brothers, Cardoc, Edric and Granus. Sold as slaves to Mercius, "one of Nero's finest officers" < their attempt to earn their freedom involved escaping from galley slavery with the rousing cry "come Britons, break the bondage of Rome. You were born free - then strike now for freedom!" The climax is a Ben Hur-style chariot race in the Circus Maximus. With an identical moral and plot-simplicity Cowan followed the story, in February 1955, with BERON, CHIEF OF THE BRITONS - more arena conflict but this time there's also a character called Olac! The exact connection is unclear, but regardless of such genealogical intricacies, by 1957 TIGER was launching the OLAC THE GLADIATOR strip in its own right.

Like Cardoc, Beron, and Wulf the Briton, Olac begins as a British champion gladiator. With the assistance of a fellow gladiator called Claudius, Olac repays his patron by uncovering and thwarting a plot against him by Pendor of the sinister Brotherhood of the Sword. His trials continue at the gladiatorial contests held annually in Pompeii where again in the service of Durbio he comes up against the evil machinations of General Branda. But it's from 24th October 1959 - as TIGER consumes COMET, and the strips develop greater artistic sweep with large dramatic opening "title" frames, that the series hits its stride. OLAC PLUNGES INTO ANOTHER TREMENDOUS STORY OF PERIL AND ADVENTURE shouts the banner across the page-head announcing a tale later re-printed as ROME IN PERIL' "out of the north-east flooded a mysterious barbaric horde, merciless and all-conquering... and at their head rode their leader, the infamous scourge of god, Attila the Hun". The Gladiator, with Vorg the Vandal and Marcus Lepidus, captain of the Emperor's guard, face the invaders where "sinister birds of prey follow Attila's thousands, feeding on the foul refuse and the bodies of the dead victims they left behind", macabre prose that shifts comparisons from Geoffrey Trease to Michael Moorcock's emerging "Elric" fantasies. But before defeating the Hun in personal combat Olac finds time to muse "does this herald the fall of mighty Rome and the death of all who revere her?".

Naturally he's wrong, from 26th December (reprinted in 1966 as GLADIATOR ARMY) he's back leading 50 gladiators on a mission to pay a 10,000 gold pieces ransom for the Emperor's nephew, Octavius, in the Parthian far reaches of the empire. Then (from 16th April 1960/14th May '66) he's in Londinium to find more treachery in his own home, the tyrant Sergius usurping the city and Olac's brother Sumnor enslaved. The story included some of Olac's finest art; the galley in which he sails north to Britain, his entrance into Londinium itself.

Hadrian's Wall and the wilds of Caledonia are all particularly well envisaged. Despite the impossible time-scale he spans, Olac's adventures are historically realist, enacted around an authentic cast and real incidents. The illustrations, matching the story-tone, are solid and reliable. While they never reach the quintessential excellence of a Frank Bellamy or a Don Lawrence, and while there are a number of artist changes following on from Brian Leigh, the visual appeal is never less than competent, and can frequently be very powerful.

Next - oddly, came the Tarquin challenge (from 19th August '60/reprinted 17th Sept. '66) with a new and less sophisticated draughtsman, and the 30 rival cities of Latium uniting to attack Rome, while portents of the gods Castor & Pollux assist Olac and Claudius. Into 1961 he sails around North Britain with the Sword of Niall given him by a dying Irish chief, and on beyond Ultima Thule to Canada fighting Norsemen and Scotti for the Stone of Destiny (the future "Stone of Scone"). The 20th May '61 issue saw Olac back in Italy for yet another artist and the ethical dilemma presented by Comus - the one-time executioner of Corinth. Despite the profession proclaimed by his title as gladiator, Olac never kills gratuitously in the

OLAC

THE GLADIATOR

OLAC RETURNS TO CUMBRIA IN BRITAIN AND LEARNS THAT THE BRIGANTES, NOTORIOUS OUTLAWS, ARE RAVAGING THE LAND UNDER A CHIEFTAIN NAMED TORLAG. THE FAMOUS 5TH LEGION IS STATIONED IN A CHAIN OF FORTS ACROSS CUMBRIA. CRAFTILY, AGENTS IN TORLAG'S PAY DRUG THE WELL WHICH PROVIDES THE LEGION HEADQUARTERS WITH WATER. THAT NIGHT, DURING A CEREMONIAL DISPLAY, LEGIONARIES BEGIN TO COLLAPSE UNDER THE EFFECTS OF THE DRUG. THE WATLIN TORLAG PREPARES TO ATTACK THE STRONGHOLD.

THE BARBARIANS SURGED FORWARD. HATE AND FEROCITY TWISTED THE FACE OF TORLAG INTO A FIENDISH MASK.

OH, BRIGANTE WARRIORS! OH! DEATH TO THE ROMANS AND THEIR ALLIES! DEATH TO ALL WITHIN THE STOCKADE! LET NONE BE SPARED!

IN THE FOREFRONT, A GREAT BATTERING-RAM BOUNCED AND SWAYED BETWEEN TWO OF THE BRIGANTE CHARIOTS.

FASTER, CAIMRAN! FASTER!

MEANWHILE, ON THE FIGHTING-TOP OF THE FORT'S STOCKADE, A SENTRY GAVE A RINGING SHOUT.

THE BRIGANTES! TO ARMS, COMRADES! TO ARMS!

FOUR SCORE OF THE LEGIONARIES LIE LIKE PUPPETS SWEEPED DOWN BY AN UNSEEN HAND, MARCUS SEVERUS! AND THE ANSWER TO THE MYSTERY IS IN THE CRY THAT CAME FROM THE FIGHTING-TOP... "THE BRIGANTES!"

OUTSIDE THE FORT'S DOUBLE GATES THE GROUND WAS SHUDDERING TO THE BARBARIAN ONRUSH.

DRAW REIN, COMRADE! NOW!

IT WAS A CRY THAT HALF THE GARRISON COULD NOT ANSWER. THEY HAD BEEN DRUGGED BY THE DOPED WATER FROM THE WELL!

THE EAGLE MUST BE PRESERVED. AT ALL COSTS... THE EAGLE... MUST BE... PRESERVED... BUT WHERE IS THE STRENGTH IN MY LIMBS? WHY IS MY BRAIN SO NUMB?

FAITH, OLAC, I'LL WARRANT YOU ARE RIGHT! BUT, BY MITHRAS, THERE ARE STILL ENOUGH OF US ON OUR FEET TO OFFER STOUT RESISTANCE!

WHEELS SLIDDERED IN THE DIRT. THE BATTERING-RAM SMASHED INTO THE GATES-ORCE A THUNDERBOLT.

AND IN A MATTER OF SECONDS, THE SPEARHEAD OF THE ASSAULT STORMED THROUGH THE BREACH.

TO WORK, SONS OF THE BRIGANTE TRIBE! WE'LL MAKE A SLAUGHTER YARD OF THIS PARADE GROUND BEFORE WE'RE DONE!

THEY FLY ASUNDER TO THE SHOCK! THE WAY IS OPEN TO TORLAG AND HIS WARRIORS!

TORLAG'S JAVELIN FLASHED THROUGH THE AIR.

FIRST BLOOD TO THE BRIGANTES!

AND THOSE SCYTHE-BLADES AT HIS CHARIOT WHEELS WILL TAKE FAR HEAVIER TOLL... UNLESS HE CAN BE CHECKED!

arena - except in self-defense. This editorially imposed code of chivalry is cleverly tested to its limits by Comus, who'd become Christian and refuses to fight in the arena, even to save his own life. Such considerations don't cramp the action though, the story climaxing with a revolt in the mines of Sarbos, the slave island. Then there's more corruption in the arena with the dubious Governor Pobius...

Over the following years Olac's adventures alternate from intrigue in Rome to menaces across the empire, until - from the 15th May 1965 issue, TIGER swallowed fellow-IPC rival HURRICANE and expanded to a 40-page vehicle largely for reprints; in which form Olac went on into 1968. Across the years Olac was framed for the murder of Scarbius, the Emperor's nephew, for more skulduggery in the catacombs beneath Rome. From 12th May '62 he rode into North Africa with the head-strong Carphorus of the 14 Legion, and by June to Carthage to resist the ambitions of Decius the Great, a tale ending in a huge naval battle. Briefly, from 15th Feb '64 Olac assumed colour cover position for exploits set in Cumbria with the Brigante outlaw Torleg. THE SCOURGE OF THE SCORPION (from 4th April '64), TREACHERY AT THE OLYMPICS, and THE ARMoured GIANTS (from 16th Jan '65) follow before returning to interior spreads with QUEST FOR THE GOLDEN ARMOUR (13 Feb) taking Olac to the forbidden city of Nefari to find the stolen armour of King Zavian of Drovina, a story using huge two-frame opening pages. Throughout his eleven years Olac's blade is seldom allowed to rest in its sheath, or the thrill-factor to vary far below optimum. But in one moment of rare reflection he observes, with remarkable prescience "there's never been another city like Rome... and there never will be... unless my native city of Londinium ever grows to take its place".

No genre strip lasted as long as OLAC THE GLADIATOR, although there were many short-lived rivals. BLACK AXE, THE SAXON WARRIOR ran in BUSTER during 1960, while a gladiator romp called THE IRON MASTER was featured in 1968 issues of VALIANT.

And then there is KARL THE VIKING in LION. Like WULF THE BRITON, Karl grew out of the success of a single serial - THE SWORD OF EINGAR, run from late 1960. The sacred sword of the title has been stolen by the Saxon Earl Gyrth of Eastumbria, with a Viking expedition precariously led by two Norsemen both pledged to recover it, Karl - son of Eingar the Manslayer, and his rival Skurl. With some passing plot-wise similarities to the Tony Curtis Kirk Douglas movie THE VIKINGS, the story's popularity demanded Karl's return to a sequel. And like HEROS THE SPARTAN before him, magical and fantastical derring-do was in store for the blonde Nordic hero. The epic voyage to isles of wonder is one of story-telling's most reliable devices, as old as the Odyssey, and probably older. By substituting "planet" for "isles" the theme is also one of the major lures of Science Fiction. Certainly Karl's worlds are as weirdly imaginative as anything from the contemporary DAN DARE or CAPTAIN CONDOR stories published in LION.

And from the historical realism of the "Eingar" story Karl rapidly voyages into strangeness. First he returns an outcast boy-king called Tihuana to his distant throne in Maya-esque Oxaca, stopping over en route at the jungle island domain of man-giant Ulka the Hunter, and at the volcanic caverns of golden Atlantis! Next - from the issue dated 29th July '61, he's involved with the equally bizarre Selgor the Wolf, and by March 1962 his homeland is threatened by mutant growths of "Helvuds" fungus which wreaks hideous changes on those who eat its flesh, including Karl's deputy Veldi. Later voyages take him to Saracen North Africa in pursuit of Selgor look-alike El Sarid the Merciless (commencing 4th August '62) who's enslaved Karl's long-time companion Ajarn.

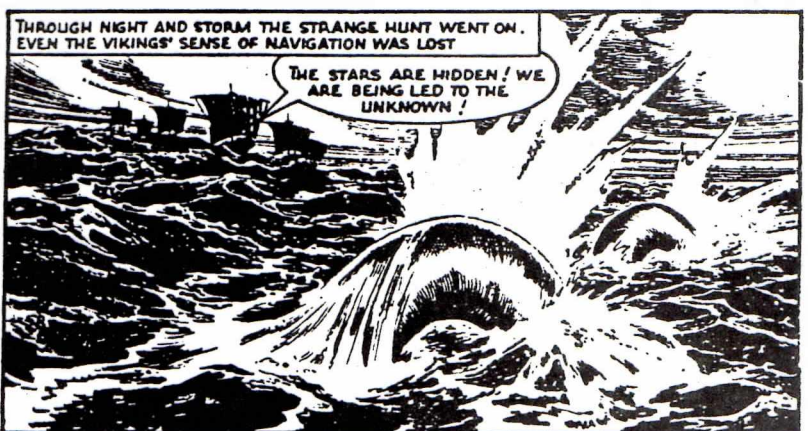
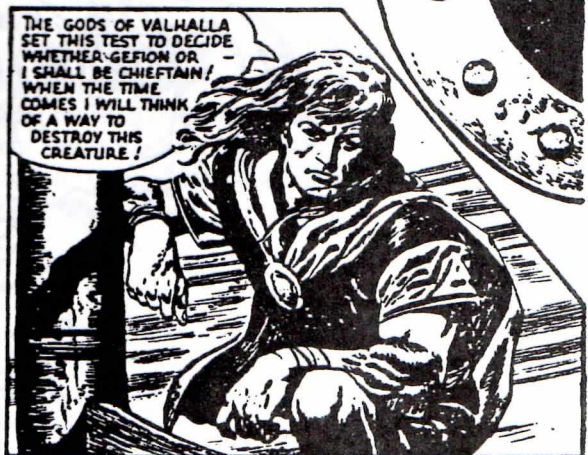
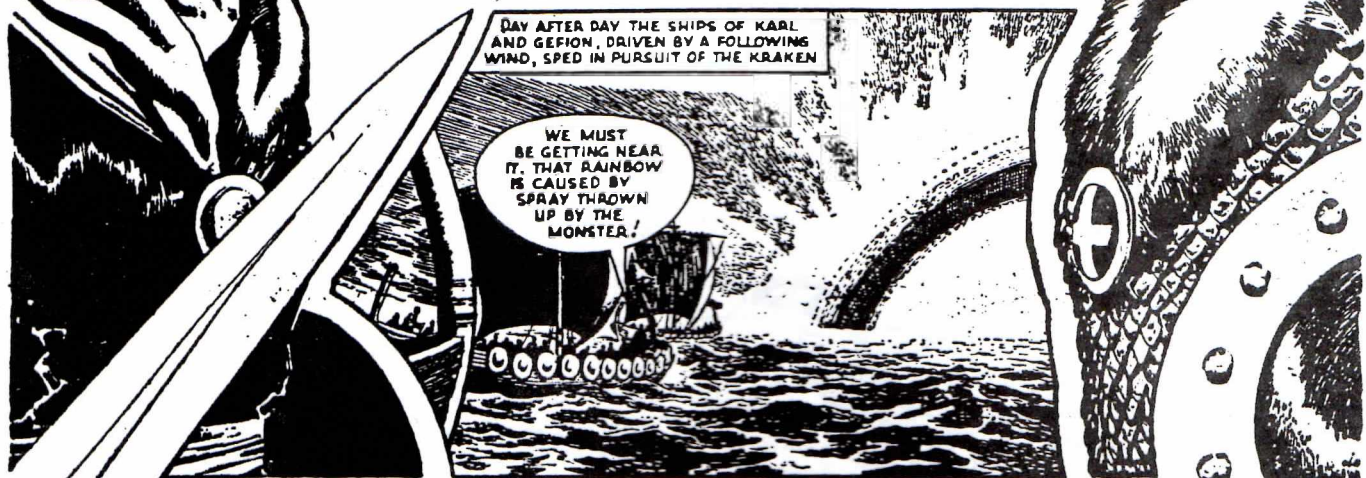
Like "The Trican Empire", the artwork comes courtesy of Don Lawrence which, despite the reduction to monochrome, is cleanly and beautifully executed. Detail of "lateen-rigged Arab dhows" in this story are as line-perfect as the giant frogs of the following quest for the Kraken, or his next rival Gefion One-Eye. The 1964 LION ANNUAL saw Karl dramatically taking the cover, while the then-current weekly serial is set in Ireland with the Celts under attack from Erisk the Black and his Phantom Horsemen. At the close of the year a temporary illustrator takes Karl deep into Mongol-Tartar Himalayan territory to discover a cache of diamonds beneath a fallen meteorite, Lawrence resuming by the 29th February '65 issue in time for the perilous journey home to Scandinavia across Russia. The final frame finds the hero in an introspective mood - "what does a fortune in diamonds mean to me? By the Hammerer, tomorrow we start building new ships. Soon Karl and his Vikings will seek adventures again". Sure enough, he returns in stories titled VOYAGE OF THE SEA RAIDERS and THE QUEST OF THE LONG SHIPS.

A sequel of Karl stories were re-run in IPC's SMASH from 1969 to the magazine's demise 3rd April 1971 - for some reason re-titled and re-edited to ERIK THE VIKING. The stories begin with the one featuring Selgor the Wolf; a "the-story-so-far" box revealing that "the Vikings believed that the gods had prepared a quest for two men - Erik, the young Viking chieftain, and Selgor the Wolf, leader of the dreaded Berserks. The greater would find "the Riches of Woden", but the weaker would die like a coward". The rivalry takes the action through the Jaws of Sullar to Egra in Sicily. But whether as Karl... or Erik, the strips are just as stunning. And oddly, such name-changing was not unusual at the time. For example, in a totally absurd re-print series, World War II frogmen SPIKE AND DUSTY were re-named MIKE AND RUSTY! It seems like an acknowledgement from IPC that a period of British comics history was over, and to disguise the fact that all they had on offer for the 1970's was reprints.

So although weekly serialisation came to an end with the 60s, interest continued, and reputations grew into mythic status. The roots of Pat Mills excellent 2000 AD creation SLAINE - from 1983, certainly lie within these strips; beginning while some OLAC THE

Karl the Viking

Karl and Gefion One-Eye were chieftains of two rival Viking clans. Both of them had ships and men destroyed by a sea monster known as the Kraken. The survivors then sailed in pursuit of the creature, for whoever of Karl and Gefion slew it would be made chief of both clans.



GLADIATOR exploits were being recycled in pocket-book form through the EAGLE COMIC LIBRARY.

Dez Skinn - in his FANTASY ADVERTISER Frank Bellamy interview was perhaps the first journalist to identify and promulgate the "Warriors of Ancient Worlds" genre. In 1975 he produced a fine semi-pro magazine called WARRIOR, HEROIC TALES OF SWORDS AND SORCERY specifically to rescue such stories, and through its brief run of issues he featured ERIK THE VIKING versus Selgor, a large section of HEROS THE SPARTAN on the Isle of Darkness, OLAC THE GLADIATOR confronting Parthian marauders, and WRATH OF THE GODS.

WULF THE BRITON, in the meantime, was being reprinted in Marvel's FORCES IN COMBAT magazine through 1980.

Today, the works of Don Lawrence, Ron Embleton and Frank Bellamy rightly receive the recognition of collectors and academic "panelogists" alike. But above and beyond such consideration, they still make hellishly good reading!

- Andrew Darlington.



THE SALE OF YOUTH

by George Ivanoff

*"But at my back I always hear
Times winged Chariot hurrying near"*

TO HIS COY MISTRESS
Andrew Marvell

The birds pecked eagerly at the bread-crumbs scattered across the grass. One of the pigeons, having eaten all the crumbs in its immediate vicinity, looked up at the source of the food - an old man with wrinkled features, little hair and tired eyes. Seemingly oblivious to the old man's sorrowful gaze it darted forward, pecked up the two crumbs beside his foot and took flight.

Martin watched as the rest of the birds finished their meal and then flew off one by one as they realised he had no more food to give them. He wondered why he even bothered feeding the feathered parasites. 'I guess', he thought, 'it's what old farts like me are supposed to do.'

A light wind caught a fluffy white feather left behind by its owner and whisked it into the air. Martin's eyes followed its erratic flight until movement in the corner of his vision distracted him. He turned his attention to the group of five school children who came running into the park, disturbing the serenity. Throwing their bags onto the grass with little regard for the contents, they produced a football and began to play running around, kicking the ball, shouting and having fun. Martin sat quietly on the park bench, watching and remembering. It had been such a long time since he had played, but he still remembered it vividly. He remembered the excitement of chasing the ball, the thrill of the catch, his heart pounding faster as he kicked it. But most of all he remembered the happiness of being with his friends. All these things were gone now, but at least his memory had survived the aging process.

Several times one or more of the children would stop to glance in his direction, probably wondering why he kept staring at them. "No need to worry kids," he whispered to no one. "I'm not a dirty old man... just a lonely one."

His gaze wandered away from the children to a young couple seated on a bench not too far from his own.

With their arms around each other they looked blissfully happy. Martin's thoughts immediately turned to Eloise. In the words of an old cliché, he had loved her with all his heart and soul. For thirty-nine years she had been the woman that made his life worth living. Without her, his existence had lost its vividness, like the washed-out colours of a photograph left out in the sun for too long.

"Hey!" A harsh voice broke into the memories. It belonged to the male half of the couple. "What d'ya think yer staring at. Rack off!" In closing he gave Martin the one-fingered salute and returned to the embrace of his girlfriend.

Martin turned away. Young people just seemed to be getting ruder and ruder as the years past. Or maybe it was simply his perception that was altering. Taking his cane from beside the bench he leaned heavily on it as he got to his feet. Cursing the arthritis that afflicted his old body he shuffled along the path and out of the park.

* * * * *

Closing and locking the door behind him, Martin entered his spacious apartment and headed for the lounge-room. He went to the record-laden shelves next to the stereo and chose one that he had lately been listening to more and more. Charles Aznavour's voice filled the room and Martin went to fix himself a drink.

*"Yesterday when I was young,
The taste of life was sweet as rain upon my
tongue.*

*I treated life as if it were a foolish game,
The way the evening breeze may tease a candle
flame."*

Bourbon splashed down onto the ice. When the glass was full Martin took a swig, refilled it and went to sit on the sofa.

*"I ran so fast that time and youth at last ran out.
I never stopped to think what life was all about."*

Martin ran a trembling hand over his eyes and looked up at the photographs that stood in their silver frames on the mantel. A much younger version of himself with his two best army mates - he wondered where they were now, or even if they were still alive. In the other photo he was older and he had his arm around Eloise - Eloise, his wife, who had died three days after that photo was taken.

"The friends I made all seemed somehow to drift away,

And only I am left on stage to end the play."

A tear ran down his cheek.

"There are so many songs in me that won't be sung.

I feel the bitter taste of tears upon my tongue.

*The time has come for me to pay for yesterday,
When I was...young."*

Martin finished his drink and went to get another one. The song finished playing and a pigeon that had been seated on the window-sill took flight.

In the alley below Martin's third story apartment, Steve sat against the building's cold brick wall. In the dim light of apartment windows that were a world away, positioned between two rubbish bins, Steve injected the last of his heroin. He had no idea how he would get his next hit, for he had no money, no work, and no one to turn to for help. But as his mind lifted higher, he really didn't care.

Steve nervously walked the streets, glancing over his shoulder every now and then. One thing, and one thing only, revolved in his mind: how was he going to get his next hit? He had to figure it out soon - he needed it badly.

He ducked down the same alley in which he had taken his previous night's hit. Leaning against the wall he closed his eyes and tried to think.

Another hit - he needed another hit.

Money - he needed money to get another hit. Where was he going to get money? He could always steal it?

"I have a better option for you."

Steve's eyes snapped open. In front of him stood the owner of the voice. A tall, thin man wearing all black, with a pair of reflective sunglasses over his eyes.

"No need to be worried, Steven. Quite the opposite in fact. You see, I have a proposition for you." The man in black smiled.

Martin plonked himself down on the park bench, ready to feed the birds. Only, there didn't seem to be any around today. He stared up at the hot noonday sun.

"Mr Cornell!"

Startled, he looked in the direction the voice had come from. Blinded at first from having looked up at the sun, a black form solidified before him. The first thing Martin noticed was that he seemed a bit over-dressed for such a warm day - black skivvy with jeans of the same colour and a matching jacket. Mind you, he was wearing sunglasses. His longish black hair, slicked back, shone in the sun.

"Do I know you?" Martin was quite sure that he had never met the man, but he thought he'd ask just in case.

"No Mr Cornell, you don't know me. But I know you." He smiled.

Martin's wrinkled forehead scrunched up in a frown. "You seem to have me at a disadvantage."

"I assure you, Mr Cornell, that that is not my intention. If it makes you feel more at ease to know my name then you shall." He paused. "My name is Preston Curl."

"Well, Mr Curl. Just what is your intention?"

"My intention is to make you a proposition. One that I'm sure will be to your liking." As Curl grinned, Martin caught a glimpse of his white teeth. So white, in fact, that they appeared to sparkle.

"Go on!"

"Mr Cornell, how would you like to be fifteen again?"

Martin burst out laughing. As he wiped the tears from his eyes he looked at Curl's face and saw that the man wasn't joking. The look on his face was sombre, and strangely self-satisfied. Martin's laughter stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

"I'm pleased that you find my question so amusing Mr Cornell. But I am quite serious. I am in the position to be able to offer you one of the most highly sought after commodities in existence."

"Are you saying that you can make me young again?"

"In a nutshell, yes."

Martin looked away from the strange man with the unbelievable offer, and up at the sky. A few wispy white clouds moved slowly across the expanse of blue. This Preston Curl was most likely a madman - Martin knew this. Yet there was something about him that inclined belief. Perhaps it was the look on his face, or the way he spoke with such conviction; or perhaps it was merely the fact that a tired old man was clutching at a few straws while longing to be young again. Whatever the explanation, Martin decided that he wanted to know more. He looked back at Curl. "Tell me more."

"With pleasure," Curl smiled. "You wish to be young again. I have the ability to make your wish a reality."

This was a very odd fairy-godmother, Martin thought, and did his best to conceal a smile.

"Of course, to make your wish come true there is a price to be paid."

It seemed that this black-clad nineties version of a fairy-godmother didn't do good deeds for free. "Well, what do you want? My soul? My first-born child? What?"

"I don't like children Mr Cornell, and frankly your soul would be worth very little to me. I'm after something more tangible. All your worldly possessions, to be exact."

Martin's eyes widened. "You're nuts."

"That may well be. But think about it. At present you have very few years left to live, and all the possessions in the world won't enable you to run, play football, or engage in romantic pursuits. And they won't stop you from dying either."

Curl took a folded piece of paper from the inside pocket of his jacket. "Think about it. What's more important to you, material possessions or youth?" He waved the piece of paper in front of him. "This is the contract. Take it home, read it and think about it. If you choose to accept, come back to this same spot tomorrow at the same time." He tossed the paper onto the bench. Martin picked it up, unfolded it and glanced at the writing. When he looked up Preston Curl was gone.

Having visually surveyed the park and seen no one, Martin moved to sit down, but stopped upon hearing a voice from behind.

"I take it by your presence here that you have chosen to accept my offer."

Martin turned to face Curl. After a moments hesitation he nodded.

Curl held out his hand. "The Contract?"

Martin fished the paper from his pocket and handed it over. Curl examined the signature and then put it in his own pocket.

"Well, now what do we do?"

Curl smiled and his teeth sparkled. "We wait for the second party to arrive."

"What second party?"

"That one." Curl stretched a long bony finger in the direction of a scruffy looking boy walking down the path towards them. "You see, it is his youth that you are buying. I am merely the middle-man."

"This isn't mentioned in the contract."

"Of course not; it is irrelevant to our agreement. I have a separate arrangement with the young gentleman. You are going to get what you paid for - where the commodity comes from is my business, not yours."

Martin remained silent as Steve approached Curl. "Well have you got the stuff?" He was obviously agitated, probably desperate, and definitely unwell, Martin noticed.

Curl nodded and took a small case from his pocket. Steve grabbed it from his hands and fumbled with the clasp. Finally opening it he checked the contents. "Hey, where's the rest of it?"

"You'll receive the second half after the procedure is complete." Curl turned to Martin. "Well Mr Cornell, I do believe we're ready." He closed his eyes, turned his face to the sun and smiled.

"What the hell's he doing that for", thought Martin, and then everything went out of focus. "Shit!" As things began to swim around in a mass of incoherence, he

felt a tingling sensation spread through his body. As the tingling reached his legs he collapsed.

Opening his eyes, Martin managed to bring his vision into focus. Curl stood before him.

Cautiously Martin moved to get up, and was astounded to discover an absence of pain in his back. As he got to his feet he also realised that for the first time in over fifteen years there was no arthritic pain in his joints. He looked at Curl, who seemed just a little taller, and asked, "Did it work?"

Curl took a compact mirror from his pocket and handed it to Martin. "See for yourself."

Martin snatched the mirror and gazed at his reflection in astonishment. "It's a trick," was the first thought that entered his mind.

"I assure you, this is all quite real," smiled Curl, attempting to ease Martin's unspoken concern. "If you doubt the reflection then simply take a look at your benefactor." He stepped aside, and Martin saw a frail old man in the scruffy clothes of the boy, lying on the grass.

Martin ran over to the still form, surprising himself that he was actually able to run. He knelt down and placed his youthful hands over the wrinkled face, hoping that this physical evidence would consolidate these unbelievable occurrences in his mind. The old man that had been the boy remained motionless. Noticing the coldness of his skin, Martin felt for a pulse. Nothing.

He jump back in horror, and turned to face Curl. "He's dead!"

"I know." Curl strolled over to the body, and casually picked up the case he had earlier handed over, and had been subsequently dropped by the aging boy. "I'm afraid that the young man had a weak heart. Had he aged normally he would have died at the age of fifty-three, assuming, of course, he hadn't died earlier on from his little drug habit." He pocketed the case. "As it happens, he's now been dead for thirty-one years." He smiled. "You, on the other hand, have many years ahead of you. After all you're only fifteen."

Martin stared at the dead body. A wave of guilt washed over his conscience as he realised that he was in a way responsible for that poor soul's death. The guilt, however, quickly receded, forced back by the tremendous joy that overcame him. Joy that he was young again. Joy that he had his whole life ahead of him. Joy that he could again run, and jump, and play football.

His revelry was interrupted by Curl. "In accordance with the contract I now own all that used to belong to you in what is now your former life." He chuckled. "However, since I am a generous man I think I shall let you keep the clothes you are wearing."

For the first time Martin realised that his old clothes were slightly big on him. He looked over at the dead body, but couldn't bring himself to swap clothes with it. He was about to query Curl on how he expected to actually obtain all of his belongings when he realised that the man in black was no longer there.

Martin bounded up the steps that led to his apartment, receiving curious glances from the other residents of the building which was predominantly occupied by elderly people. Being young again was going to take a little getting used to. But he didn't mind.

Reaching the door of his apartment he fished in his pockets for the key. They were empty - not only was the key missing, but so was his wallet containing his credit card and his driver's license. 'That bastard must have stolen them,' he thought, and banged his fist against the door in frustration.

What was he going to do? The landlord could let him in, but he'd never believe that this fifteen year old was actually Martin Cornell. He had just decided on trying to break in, when then door opened slightly. An elderly lady with blue-rinse hair and horn-rimmed glasses peered through the opening between the door and the frame. "Yes?" she asked, looking nervously at the boy.

"Who the hell are you and what do you think you're doing in there?"

"I'm Mrs Crenshaw and I live here," she said, checking the chain that kept the door from opening too wide.

Hearing that, was, for Martin, the mental equivalent to getting punched in the face. He never for a moment believed that he would loose his apartment, or any of his belongings - until now. "You can't live here. *I* live here." He tapped his chest. "I've lived here for over ten years. I *still* live here."

By this stage Mrs Crenshaw was convinced that the boy was mad. It seemed, to her, that the youth of today were becoming more and more unbalanced. This strange boy at her door was further proof of her theory. Not knowing what else to do she slammed the door in his face.

Martin hit his fist against the door. "Damn it, this is my apartment."

A muffled voice came from behind the door, quavering with fear. "Go away or I'll call the police."

Martin leaned his head against the door as a tear escaped his eye. All his memories were inside that apartment - his photographs, his medals, his late wife's collection of china dolls, the letters they had written each other while courting...his whole life was behind a locked door, and there was nothing he could do.

* * * * *

Martin peaked through a hole in the fence as a woman hung washing on the clothes line. Having completed this section of her boring housewifely routine, Roberta picked up the plastic orange clothes basket and went indoors.

The moment she was out of sight Martin climbed the fence and jumped into the yard. He sprinted to the hanging clothes and grabbed a pair of jeans that looked about the right size, and a t-shirt with the name of some pop group that he had never heard of. They were soaking wet, but they would have to do.

Having placed the clothes basket back in the laundry, Roberta approached the pile of dirty dishes beside the sink - her next chore for the day. Before starting she

glanced up at the window over the sink, which looked out into the back yard. She was astonished to see a boy running towards the fence with some of her son's clothes.

Roberta hurried to the back door, ready to scream out at the intruder, but by the time she got outside he was already over the fence and away. She went to the telephone to call the police. As she picked up the receiver she realised that for the first time in fourteen years her daily routine had been disrupted. She gazed silently around the immaculately clean lounge room in which the telephone sat, and the stolen clothes seemed to lose their importance.

* * * * *

Martin walked into the bank, feeling a little uncomfortable in the still damp clothes. He filled out a withdrawal slip and went to stand in the queue. As he waited he hoped that his money was still there. 'It had to be,' he thought. 'Curl can't use my card without the pin number. And there's no way he could know that.'

"Next," called the teller.

Martin approached the woman with the exceedingly bored expression. He handed her the withdrawal slip. She took it without saying a word, and punched the account number into the computer. After a brief moment of hesitation she turned back to Martin. "Mr Cornell, I think you've written down the wrong account number."

"No, I'm quite sure I didn't."

She turned back to the computer and tried again. "I'm sorry, but this account is listed as belonging to a Mr Preston Curl."

Martin's face fell in an expression of defeat. "Oh," was all he managed to say.

"I can call the manager and ask him to double check," she suggested. "It is possible that the account numbers may have accidentally been switched."

"No, that's okay. I probably did put down the wrong number." He turned away. "I'll go home and check."

* * * * *

Martin sat on his familiar park bench and watched the birds as he wondered what he was going to do next. Curl had somehow managed to take everything that was his, and Martin Cornell no longer existed - not officially anyway. No one would believe that he was the eighty-four year old retired army officer who used to live in an apartment now occupied by a lady with blue-rinse hair and horn-rimmed glasses. His old life no longer existed. He no longer had an education or a career - but at least he had his youth.

He realised for the first time that he would have to start his life all over again. He would have to get a job, find a new place to live, build a whole new identity. This was going to be a lot more difficult than he had anticipated. But he had already lived one life, and with the experience he had gained, he was sure that he would be able to handle it.

He stood up, filled with new resolve, and headed off to begin his new life.

* * * * *

A boy, no older than sixteen, lay on the cold concrete ground, the darkness of the alley-way surrounding him. He shivered uncontrollably as he stared at the empty syringe before him.

A man, all dressed in black, stepped out from the shadows and smiled. "Mr Cornell," he said. "I have a proposition for you."

*"Youth's like diamonds in the Sun
And diamonds are forever"*

FOREVER YOUNG
Alphaville (1984)

GRAND TOUR

*Mars was too cruel,
Cracking skulls in a dry season.
Venus was active,
Nowhere to light a cigarette.
Mercury? Too cold
or too hot; extreme statistics.
Earth was typical:
Nice sunsets but nowhere to park.
Don't like asteroids,
A slow motion arc case, then bang.
Jupiter was big
But they lie about the Red Spot.
Saturn was a gas,
No time to get out and walk around.
This is Uranus,
We all snigger under pressure.
Beautiful Neptune,
Think of gravity, see fishes.
Pluto tags along,
Soft touch System, picking up strays.
Bound for Planet X
And the big sleep among the stars*

- J. C. Hartley.

A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION & FANDOM IN ARGENTINA

by Claudio Omar Noguero

Part Two

CONSOLIDATION (1955 - 1965)

Before the beginning of the decline of MAS ALLA, there were already emerging those who would inherit its audience. The coming period would be under the hegemony of Minotauro Editions, with an unquestionable presence that lasts up to the present.

Minotauro was founded in 1955 by the Spaniard Francisco Porrua. In spite of the presence of MAS ALLA, what he himself proposed was still an adventure. There existed a definite audience who read MAS ALLA: a worthy conglomeration of amateur radio buffs, students, engineers and electricians; but it was very difficult to achieve the 'cult' image for the public pay attention to.

Minotauro tried, and achieved it. The first books of its collection were novels some of which had appeared in MAS ALLA, such as THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES ('Cronicas Marcianas') by Bradbury, and MORE THAN HUMAN ('Mas Que Humano') by Sturgeon. Translations were careful and the covers were sober, being of abstract sketches instead of the habitual spacecraft. Both these novels came with the endorsement of prologues written, respectively, by Jorge Luis Borges and Marcos Victoria, whose presence removed any doubt from the traditional reader. Distribution was also taken carefully, trying not to lose the 'masallista' audience (a pamphlet was sent to all of the MAS ALLA subscribers, announcing the first six titles of the collection).

Throughout this decade, it was Minotauro who exercised an unquestionable teaching among the Argentine audience, giving them all the genre classics:

Bradbury, Pohl/Kornbluth, Sturgeon, Bester, Sloane, Simak, Stapledon, Clarke, Lovecraft, Matheson, Fowler Wright... and more recently Le Guin, Aldiss, Priest, Carter, Henderson, Ballard, Moorcock...

Beside the careful work of Minotauro, whose editions were in certain ways superior to the French ones of that time, there were others who pale with Minotauro's intent to fill the empty place left by MAS ALA, and these had a poor reception.

Certainly, in 1956 began another series by the publisher Fabril. Under the sub-title of 'Fantaciencia', appeared fourteen titles, some already published by MAS ALLA, such as DRAGON'S ISLAND ('La Isla del Dragon') by Jack Williamson. There were works by Hoyle, Asimov, Hal Clement, Jerry Sohl and Frederik Pohl.

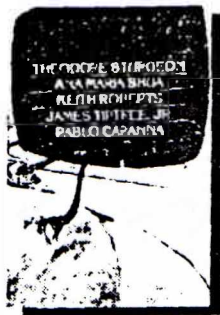
Aimed at another audience, the Acme Agency published books for young readers (THE SPACE ROBIN HOOD COLLECTION, 1957). They were adventure books written by Clarke, Evan Hunter or Heinlein. But Acme also tried to compete with a magazine: SPACE TRAILS ('Pistas del espacio'), edited by Alfredo J. Grassi, parting from the traditional TRAILS ('Pistas'), a serial of cheap police stories. It published fourteen issues, some with old stories, some without signatures and a comic with a text as coarse as its art.

There also appeared in 1957, in the comic ZERO HOUR ('Hora Ceao'), that which we have already defined as the first sf novel written and set in Argentina, though it remained in print elsewhere: THE ETERNAUT by Hector German Oesterheld, recognised today as one of the best writers in the world. It was illustrated by Solano Lopez,

LA IMAGINACION

La ficción especulativa.
Las conjeturas de la ciencia y de la fantasía.
El pensamiento alternativo.
Cuentos, artículos, libros, cine, noticias.
Publicación trimestral de

 Ediciones Minotauro



and there were several editions (most recently, as a serial in the magazine SCORPIO). Maybe the most important feat with this comic was its staging in an familiar urban landscape (Liberter's Avenue, May Avenue, Congress, Retiro, Plaza Italia...), an apocalypse, similar to those that appeared in old novels and films referring to 'invasions'; the impression left in its thousands of readers over several generations has as its base the concrete reality the author created, without superheroes or superscience but with fallible characters, in a Buenos Aires suburb.

In 1960 was registered the official birth of what we would call Argentina fandom. The one responsible was Hector Raul Pessina, who would become international spokesman for Argentine fans by way of a fanzine written in English: THE ARGENTINE SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, which had several foreign correspondents.

Through it, Pessina informed readers of the latest happenings in the USA. Later he would create a private fanzine titled EL ALIEN-IGENA SOLITARIO: The Lonely Alien (1969), this time it was bilingual (as in the title), and another which alluded to the fantastic cinema: OMICRON (1969). As result from his efforts was the creation of The Science Fiction Club of Argentine (1969), the first such in fandom, which also produced a bulletin.

However, a little before, in 1964, and encouraged by the success of his book editions, Francisco Possua resolved to create the magazine MINOTAURO, characterised by the same sobriety and care that had defined his editorial line. The editorship was given to Ricardo Gosseyn (an alias for Porrúa, taken from A.E. van Vogt), who would admit that it was the local edition of THE MAGAZINE OF F&SF.

Aside from the covers, there were no other illustrations. But it had given something that no other magazine before had given: biographical data and prologues that preceded each story; the audience had left off being a mere consumer, and wanted to know something about the authors. Passages from International critics were given to lead off the editorials. All these made MINOTAURO an impeccable product, though for its appearance it looked more an anthology than a magazine.

Much at the same time, Porrúa started an Argentina reprint of the French magazine PLANETS, alternating its publication with MINOTAURO. PLANET ('Planets') was also edited by Gosseyn and brought science articles and some sf stories. In its first period it published twenty-six issues, and further on another seven under the name NEW PLANETS ('Nuevo Planets').

Let us now return to Minotauro: its ten issues, appearing between 1964 and 1968, presented a new wave of writers: Cordwainer Smith, James G. Ballard, John Brunner, Roger Zelazny and Brian Aldiss. Issue number nine included an 'editorial' manifesto: 'The English Scene' by Judith Merrill. The English, with Ballard at the head, promised a revolution in the genre: Minotauro orientated its editorials with this in mind.

There was also a critic for the fantastic cinema: Agustin Mahieu. In the last issue there was an Uruguayan (Jose Pedro Diaz) whose 'Anthropologic Exercises' ('Ejercicios Antropologicos') would continue in other magazines (including EL PENDULO). It was planned also to create a section for book reviews, which was given over to Pablo Capanna, but that didn't get to appear before the magazine folded.

A product as refined as Minotauro, however, didn't fit to the ideas of the traditional sf addict, the MAS ALLA reader. It is maybe because of that that Oesterheld tried out another magazine... which folded very quickly. It was GEMINIS, whose two issues appeared in June and August 1965, trying to find the MAS ALLA recipe. Its material came from GALAXY, with brief notes at the foot of the pages, articles on astronautics, local artists (covers by Breccia), but with a more careless presentation than MAS ALLA. It did publish a story by R.A. Lafferty ('El planets Pani') and the script for Orson Wells' WAR OF THE WORLDS, and included two very interesting stories of Oesterheld.

EXTENSION (1966 - 1970)

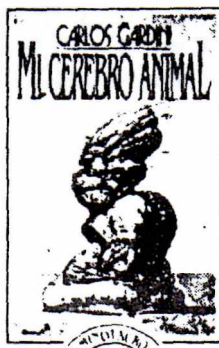
The following years were very invigorating for science fiction.

The cause may have been the boom of Latinamerican literature, which motivated many publishers to go in search of Argentine writers in all the fields, including those as doubtful as sf. In that time the first sf books by Argentine writers were published, two conventions were run and the creation of a syndicate was tried, with the few stable sf writers that existed.

To begin, a group of psychoanalysts that had discovered that they had a common interest in sf, met each other at the lecture given by Sturgeon, and sheltered and helped each other, later persuading Horne Publishing (which specialised in Freudian texts) to compile their stories into an anthology. With a prologue by Dalmire Saenz, FANTASTIC EQUATION ('Ecuacion Fantastica') was released in 1966. There were professionals like Emilio Rodreque, Marie Langer, Grinberg, Usandivaras,

LA IMAGINACION

Los nueve primeros títulos de una colección que abarcará los mejores textos de ficción especulativa escritos en castellano.

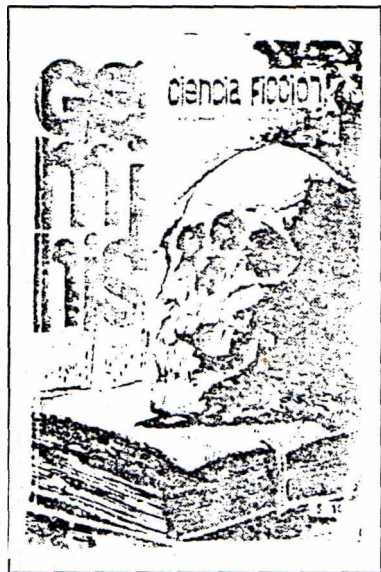


Ediciones Minotauro

Raskovski and Abadi. Of them all only Rodrigue returned to sf with PLENIPOTENCE ('Plenipotencia' - Minotauro 1967), a collection of tales of which the very brief EIGHT TO THE INFINITE stands out. Marie Langer was then co-authoress, with Eduardo Goligorsky, of a critic essay on the genre: SF AND PSYCHOANALYSIS (Paidos, 1969).

In the middle of 1966, Minotauro published its first book devoted to Argentine authors: MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE ('Memorias del Futuro'), by Alberto Vanasco and Eduardo Goligorsky. Vanasco was already a very respected writer in the literary field, and Goligorsky came from working, under separate pseudonyms, in the police genre. The stories combined a certain mix of porteno (porteno = relative to Buenos Aires) humour and assail classical sf,

with a notable influence of Philip J. Farmer in Goligorsky, and of Pohl/Kornbluth in Vanasco, who wrote the most detestable tale of the volume: *THE POET'S DEATH* ('La Muerte del Poeta'). The edition, as carefully wrought as those of foreign authors, varied in size and format in that it had fewer pages, but larger, pages.



Also in 1966 there was published *THE SENSE OF SF* ('El Sentido de la Ciencia Ficción') by Pablo Capanna (Published by Columba), recognised as one of the best essays on the genre at world level... this book should have had better luck: it is now impossible to find, and it was never re-published.

In the following year we see Vanasco and Goligorsky together again with another collection for Minotauro: *GOODBYE TO TOMORROW* ('Adios al Manana'), and also a different authoress who, with the passing of time, would become the most innovative figure of science fiction in the Spanish speaking world and Argentina and who also stands out at the International level: Angelica Gorodischer.

Her work *OPUS TWO* ('Opus Dos' - Minotauro) is a 'novella in nine articulated parts'. Though this story doesn't forecast the wide range of her future works, this story shows the tone of her prose, the professionalism in the construction and a general literary tone, which shows she is an omnivorous reader, as she is



indeed (Angelica, my 'mother', says: "I mistrust the person who writes more than she reads"). What limits her in this story is that, though solid enough, the originality of the ideas seems to make her writing feel insecure, but she

creates an atmosphere and includes some of the things other authors would be censured for: general descriptions, historical moments, fantastic landscapes, the action... all of which she would correct in her future works.

In this year, anthologies multiplied, created in general, by the same method: a couple of prestigious classics, a writer invited to write sf, some professional stories, and those of many friends who pursued the editor relentlessly with their unpublishable writings. Thus appeared *ARGENTINE SF TALES* ('Cuentos Argentinos de Cf' - Merlin, 1967) which included stories by Marco Denevi, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Goligorsky, Alfredo J. Grassi, Dalmiro Saenz, Alejandro Vignatti, and Carlos Peralta. Selection was done under the direction of Juan Jacobo Bajarlia. Flower Publishers ('Ediciones de la Flor') compiled a historical anthology: *BEFORE THE SCIENCE WAS FICTION* ('Antes Que la Ciencia Fuera Ficción') chosen by Alejo Ueautier and J. Davies, who rescued Holmberg, Cervantes, Leopoldo alás 'Clarín' and Enrique Mendez Calzada.

Grassi and Vignatti later composed another anthology: *SF: NEW ARGENTINE TALES* ('Ciencia Ficción: Nuevos Cuentos Argentinos' - Calatayud-Dea, 1968), including Marco Denevi, Carlos M. Caron, Eduardo Azcuay, Osvaldo Elieff, and Juan J. Bajarlia, who later on would come back with his *MONSTERS STORIES* ('Historias de Monstruos' - Del la Flor 1969, and *FORMULA OF THE ANTIWORLD* ('Formula al antimundo' - Galema 1970). Goligorsky, present in all these anthologies, compiled his own: *THE ARGENTINES IN THE MOON* ('Los Argentinos en la Luna' - De la Flor, 1968), which maybe the most balanced.



With the passing of time this group became diluted. Vanasco wrote outside of sf doing general narratives and essays; Goligorsky went to Spain, where he published *UNDER THE SHADES OF THE BARBARIANS* ('A la

Sombra de los Barbaros' - Nueva Dimension); Vignatti went to Venezuela, where he soon died; Denevi and Saenz never came back to write sf, and Bajarlia devoted himself to criticism, only returning very recently to write again.

There was another try with a magazine - 2001, A TIME OF ANTICIPATION ('2001, Periodismo de Anticipacion') published by Enrique Loiacono. Specially devoted to UFOs, it published some sf tales, to incline it towards the 'counterculture', with more opportunism than conviction. It passed on without pain or glory. Other approximations were seen in THE NOTEBOOKS OF MR. CRUSOE ('Cuadernos de Mr Crusoe (only one issue), which included the comic JULA in the style of BARBARELLA, with text by Carlos del Peral and art by Guillermo Thiemer; SKETCHED LITERATURE ('Literature dibujada) published by Oscar Massota went the same way. It appeared in November 1968: it reproduced episodes of Flash Gordon and Mort Cinder (of Oesterheld - Breccia) previously published in the magazine MISTERIX (1962), as well as the comic NEUTRON by the Italian G. Crepax.

The magazine that could not be published in Argentina, was born in Spain: NUEVA DIMENSION ('New Dimension') began to appear in 1968, and took the leadership of the genre for the Spanish-speaking audience during the following years, always publishing Argentine authors, some of whom debuted in the science fiction: Graciela Parini, Sergio Gaut vel Hartman, Norma Vitti... and it even devoted a special issue to MAS ALLA.

We also had conventions - two conventions!!

In December 15 and 16, 1967, the First Argentine SF Convention took place in Bs. Aires - Bairescon. Books and workshops with Vanasco, Goligorsky, and Porrua were exposed to the public's gaze. It was presided over by Pessina and also present was Fernando Pujadas (President of the 'Antelae' Club of Mar Del Plata).

In the following year, the marplatenses (=inhabitants of Mar Del Plata) organised what would be the major Argentine sf convention, Mardelcon. They were assisted by Pessina's people and by La Plata's Fantasy and SF Club (presided over by Osvaldo Elliff). It took place between 26 and 28 July 1968. Writers, editors, distributors attended and the UFO investigation centres and air-space magazines had displays. The Mar del Plata municipality and local TV showed interest in its development. There were expositions, allocations, debates and the performance of plays; Dr Armando Cocca spoke about Space Law; science fiction genre limits were discussed. There were also a story contest: awards were given to Magdalene Moujan Otano, Osvaldo Jorgensen, Ana Ibanez de Lopez Leclube and Cayetano Ferrari. The winner, Magdalena Moujan Otano would give further cause to talk about her in Spanish-speaking countries when her stories appeared in NUEVA DIMENSION (Spain), especially for the celebrated GU TA GUTARRAK (in Basque - we and ours - the story told of the origin of the Basque people as the result of a paradoxical travelling in time by a group with a present day Basque scientist - among whom was the authoress, of course, resolving by chance the mystery that at present still veils this people

and their language), which provoked the ire of dictator Francisco Franco, who made seized the issue of the magazine containing the tale.. (well, he had prohibited talking and writing other languages than Spanish in Spain; nobody could express in Catala, Basque, Galician, Asturian: once again ethnic minorities were crushed under totalitarianism).

Coming back to the convention: there was present a young man recently arrived from Uruguay - Marcial Souto, who was soon to depart for the USA and was made by acclamation 'Argentine Fandom's Plenipotentiary Ambassador' to the World Convention. He departed and was lost for some years. When he came back he gave much talks... We are now finished with Mardelcon, but we'll mention that the organising club made use of the occasion to present their magazine ANTELAS.

Meanwhile, in Rosario, the magazine EL LAGRIMAL TRIFURCA appeared, devoted to general literature and poetry; it published stories, notes and articles on sf and fantasy. It published 13 issues up to 1976 and was published by Francisco and Elvio Gandolfo.

In 1969 we saw the nationally produced film INVASION, directed by Hugo Santiago by arrangement of Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Principal characters were played by Lautaro Murua and Olga Zubarry. It in black and white and runs 124 minutes.

The golden '60s were ending and there wasn't publishing news nor sf magazines till 1973.

FOLDING: 1970 - 1975

Minotauro ceased looking for Argentine authors, and from 1970 on began a thematic turn which started with the publication of an important part of J. G. Ballard's work and included the suppression of the label 'Science Fiction'.

It may be the folding in local sf publication was due to causes outside the genre: we must not forget that this was the final period of the military government of Lanusse after it began a political era which would carry us to the new government of Juan D. Peron. All this was outlined against a background of growing terrorism. Publishers reacted to these circumstances: business was in a period of revision, and they were publishing multiple books on history, politics, the economy, and anything was covered in the ideologic spectrum.

With this climate there was not much room for science fiction, save fo the doubtful action of trying to 'discover' what was 'national' (this search, everything from craft to songs, from clothes to literature). A facile collection, THE UNIVERSAL CHAPTER ('Capitulo Universal) of the Centro Editor de America Latina, devoted to literature analysis, devoted a chapter to 'Scientific fiction', which was written by Luis Gregorich's (1970). There was also a LATINAMERICAN SF FIRST ANTHOLOGY by Rodolfo Alonso Editor, which used reprints.

1970 also brought the only issue of Hector Pessina's fanzine OMICRON, devoted to fantastic films, and the

beginning of the comic strip GILGAMESH, by the hand of Lucho Olivera. The year ended with Bairescon II, performed in El Tigre. It was a miniconvention in order to prepare for an 'Argencon' that never came to be.

In 1972 appeared the first volume of the 'Fonton' collection, of the publisher Grupo Editor de Buenos Aires. They were 13 titles of modest presentation; versions were cut, when not abbreviated. It included an anthology of Argentine authors (FANTASTIC AND DESQUIETENING), THE LATHE OF HEAVEN and CITY OF ILLUSIONS by Ursula Le Guin, (At the same time Minotauro published, with remarkable success, THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS), ATLANTIC ABOMINATION by John Brunner, Astorn Del Martia's ALONE AGAINST TIME, John Phillipent's ARGENTINA PLANET, Leith Laumer's THE BIG SHOW and the Strugatski brothers' THE SECOND MARTIAN INVASION.

Meanwhile, Ediciones de la Flor published UNDER THE JUBEAS IN FLOWER ('Bajo las Jubeas en Flor') by Angelica Gorodischer, without doubt the best book of sf tales in our history till the present, and maybe one of the best works in the world: a true classic from the moment of its publication. The kind of branched associations that were anticipated in SOLDIER'S TALES ('Cuentos Con Soldados') and THE WIGS ('Las Pelucas') - two of her former works, 1965 and 1968, respectively - is achieved perfectly, above all for the expansion of the stories, which extent themselves and turn into novels. Though some elements creak, it is saved by the powerful ideas in the book, which is woven around nuclei, in particular a story in which the universe could be contained: THE ORDAINING OF WHAT IS AND CANON OF THE APPEARANCES ('Ordenamiento Del Lo Que Es Y Canon De Las Apariencias'), an immeasurable book the plot of which twists until the point comes when we don't know what we are reading, be it the Canon or Under the Jubeas... The story with the same name than the book, ONOMATOPOEIA OF THE SILENT EYE, ('Onomatopeya del Ojo Silencioso') and VIOLET EMBRIONS ('Los Embriones del Violeta') clearly is sf. The latter describes with indulgence the effects aggravated by some probable 'pieces of God' with the aid of which anyone can obtain what he wants, and then, carried be to perdition in a type of freedom that is equivalent to slavery.

At the end of 1973 the infatigable Hector Pessina founded the movie club 'Metropolis 3000' which specialised in sf.

In 1974, two leaders in the publishing market, Emece and Subamericanos, brought out their own anthologies. Emece included in its Best Sellers factory a sf anthology which published over 20 titles (and that continued publishing in Spain under the label of ULTRAMAR), and was characterised by an erratic selection, which ranged from Priest to Thomas Page and worse, with covers which were frankly ugly and of little imagination (worse than the present covers of ACERVO). Sudamericana wanted to publish something similar to the Spanish collection NEBULAE; so surged forth GALAXIA, an anthology that Marcial Souto was placed in charge, and which was frustrated early, publishing only 4

titles: THE GENOCIDES (Thomas Disch), FOUR FOR TOMORROW (Roger Zelazny), TALES OF TEN WORLDS (Arthur C. Clarke) and WHAT MAD UNIVERSE (Frederik Brown). Other titles that were already translated to Spanish and typeset, passed to NEBULAE in Spain, and they were distributed back here in 1977 - 79, with a local reimpression of lower quality than the original. This time 25 titles appeared (though the Spanish anthology went - and still goes - on being published until the present day, with more than 60 volumes), including authors like Haldeman, Asimov, Clarke, Aldiss, Dick, Sheekley, Simak, C. Smith and Matheson.

On the other hand, Ediciones Record began the publication of its comics magazines (SKORPIO, TIT-BITS) which include an excellent series of sf comics: HOR/HELGA, a new edition of THE ETERNAUT, BARBARA...

And from Spain came the publisher Dronte, busy with NUEVA DIMENSION, producing 13 titles badly connected and with many mistakes. Several issues of the magazine NUEVA DIMENSION were reprinted though the books would continue being published in only Spain.

More interesting was the tentative publishing plans that Intersea had in 1975: to print the Azimuth collection, edited by E.A. Machalsky. They were some 10 titles about despair, that went from GESTARESCALA (P.K. Dick) and CAMP CONCENTRATION (T. Disch) - which would be reprinted later on by Adiax in Spain with the paraphrased title of CONCENTRATION CAMP), to THE VALLEY WHERE TIME STOOD STILL (Lin Carter). Economical fluctuations of that era put an end to that proposal.. and with many others apart from sf.

Alberto Breaccia published a new version, in comic form, of THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (H.P. Lovecraft), and Carlos Jeruslainsky made a super-8 film of the story SURPRISE CARGO (Ray Bradbury), winning the Unciper Concourse award of 1976 with it.

A NEW EXPANSION: 1976 - 1980

The installation of a new military regime (they come and they go...) and the 'dirty war' with which it began, produced among other things, be it by censure, self-censure or laziness, the disappearance of a great deal of Argentine publications. Publishers opted for the easy way out: they filled us with that shit called 'best-sellers', with tragedies on the jet-set, catastrophes, invasions, espionage and satanic possession.

But all that intellectual complicated movement, added to the pre-concept of 'Sf is evasion' contributed to preserve its diffusion, so as readers who were sick of the garbage described above and who wanted something that put their neurons to work, discovered sf. And they discovered it through Spanish editions, to the lament of our country... it's true that the government didn't take notice of many people in those times: and the 'Chicago boy' that was occupying the economic ministry noticed it less (Jose A. Martinez De Hoz, puaj!), who through his famous 'overture' achieved the sinking of the national

economy. In the face of this, many publishers departed for Spain.



MARIO LEVRERO

And yet another generation of readers was born, less technical and more humanistic. Newspapers such as the CLARIN and LA UPINION dedicated several articles and fulfillment to the genre. It was there that we came to see some known names and some new, such as that of Anibal Venelli, a critic of the cinema, who wrote a GUIDE FOR THE SF READER (Convergencia, 1977), another ingredient that showed the increasing interest in science fiction.

In January 1976, the publisher Fantgaciencia began a series of publications which reached 10 titles. The first one was THE ONE WHO SPIES IN THE LINTEL by H. P. Lovecraft and A. Derleth. Following volumes were a little bit careless, but finally its presentation improved. Selections, as we can see, were wide ranging and translations were regular. Some important titles were EXTRAPOLATION by Ted Sturgeon and Aldiss's STARSWARM.

In February there appeared the only issue of the fanzine TRAFALMADORE (courtesy of Kurt Vonnegut Jr.), bringing stories and critical notes. Contributors were Claudio Bolini, Eduardo Abel Gimenez, Hermes Gosso, Norma Vitti, Fernando Morales, Marcelo and Daniel Schapces. It tried to be the spokesman for a Buenos Aires SF Club, which was only an idea then. In the same month LA OPINION published in its cultural section an interview with Pablo Capann: THE ROUTINE OF THE FANTASTIC.

In June, the publisher Tiempo Cero tried to publish an sf serial, but only part one appeared: TIME OF

CHANGES ('Tiempo de Cambios') by Robert Silverberg. Marcial Souto was in charge; some months later he would be the alma mater of another magazine: LA REVISTA DE CIENCIA FICCION Y FANTASIA ('The Magazine of SF and Fantasy'), from the publisher Orion. Three issues appeared, with characteristics very similar to the previous Minotauro magazine: more an anthology than a 'zine. The most notable difference was that the magazine didn't rely on a single source: it had translations of some very good work by Cordwainer Smith, a scientific section by Isaac Asimov, and there were book reviews and several rioplanenses (rioplanense = slang for 'Rio De La Plata', referring to the inhabitants of Uruguay and Buenos Aires) authors were Mario Levrero, Diaz and Norma Vitti. Notwithstanding, the old problem was still there: in February 1977, the magazine ceased publication for economic reasons.



Also in 1976 there rose a specialized publication, ANDROMEDA, edited by Jorge Sanchez with Hector Pessina as consultant. Its ambitious start included three anthologies: THE GOLEM (fantasy), MAS ALLA (further on) and THE ALEPH (sf), though a certain kind of improvisation and a very bad distribution made it soon fail. At any rate, works were profusely presented and selected: included were works by J. Brunner, P.J. Farmer, Hodgson, B. Aldiss, A.C. Clarke and I. Asimov. Covers where by the hand of Oscar Diaz, and of the contributors we can name Elvio E. Gandolfo, Hermes Gosso, Juan Carlos Prieto Cane and Annelisse von der Lippen. But it may be also the most important event was in having published the first properly titled Anthology of Argentine SF: THE GLIMPSED UNIVERSES ('Los universos

vislumbrados'), collected by Sanchez, Pessina and Gandolfo. Another particularly interesting volume was CASTA LUNA ELECTRONICA ('The Electronic Virgin Moon'), which included new stories by Angelica Gorodischer and an extensive interview with the authoress by Elvio E. Gandolfo. Another detail we must mention is that all books had careful critical and autobiographic notes.

Later on, Sanchez moved to work for the publisher El Cid, where he made possible another important achievement for local sf: the publication of Angelica Gorodischer's TRAFALGAR. This book is made up of several tales with a common character: Trafalgar Medrano, space traveller who tells, in an unavoidable rosarian (rosarian - patriotic for Rosario-language - Angelica lives in Rosario), his adventures on distant planets. Each story begins with a dialog which is the modest local version of the introductory dialogues in the English narrations, though here the exclusive club or the reunion around the fireplace with a glass of cognac or scotch are replaced by a cenric-bar or a truce table (truce: an Argentine rural game with cards), and the gentlemen with slippers and monocle by the authoress herself or her aunts in apron or gown. The interaction between the present Rosario and the very strange planets that Trafalgar visits, achieves an equal mixture of contradictory factors which feed the facet of the cruelest absurdity we can imagine. Language is no longer any the baroque one to which Angelica introduced us: now comes a continuous use of humour, a direct communication, with less solemnity in the treatment of the theme. With all the sf hardware - rockets, strange societies, space travel, etc - she builds a series in the same style as that of P. J. Farmer's Father Carmody, composing an amazing whole, thanks to which we now know of a planet dominated by an aristomatriarche with making-love-machines (UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE ELECTRONIC VIGRIN MOON), a story also included in the volume published by Andromeda), or about a second Earth in an infinite and symetric universe, to which Trafalgar arrives on the eve of America's discovery (ON SAILORS), or another world in which reality changes totally every day because time is 'concrete, constant, simultaneous and non-uniform' (THE BEST DAY OF THE YEAR), and at last, the strange planet 'Gonzaleedworkamenyaleidos, Gonzalex for short', where everybody is related and the dead live in peace (THE FIGHT OF THE GONZALEZ FAMILY FOR A BETTER WORLD).

Orion's magazine disappeared, and Souto came back again, founding this time EDIUCIONES ENTROPI, another valuable effort which sank in the waters of our turbulent economy. He published one issue of the magazine ENTROPIA, both with the same formula as Minotauro, and two books: an anthology with stories by Damon Knight, Roger Zelazny and Frederik Pohl, called DECEMBER KEYS, and Mario Levrero's novel LA CIUDAD ('The City').

In April 1977 NIGHT WINGS by Silverberg appeared, the first volume of the NEBULAE ARGENTINA collection, by the publisher Sudamericana, about whom we have already commented.

Meanwhile Andromeda published Vanasco's NUEVAS MEM-ORIAS DEL FUTURO ('New Future Memories'), and Ediciones La Tabla De Esmeralda published Juan Jacobo Bajarlia's STRANGE STORIES ('Cuentos Extranos').

In November the magazine UMBRAL TIEMPO FUTURO ('Lintel Future Time') was distributed, with notes, illustrations and tales of Argentine origin, in general very free, mixing sf with other literature about occultism or UFOs.

In 1978, the Distar published the QUARK collection, which only reached two issues, and included very good material with careful presentation. Andromeda, on the other hand, published THE GLIMPSED UNIVERSE, as we said, an excellent anthology of native authors such as Macedonio Fernandez, Bajarlia, Jorge, Gorodischer, Magdalena Moujan Otano, Bioy Casares, Gandolfo, Santiago Dabove, Mario Grassi, Vanasco, Ernesto Sabato, Guillermo Boido and Alicia Suarez.

In the following year, the publisher Libium released an sf series under the editorship of Hector Pessina. There were nearly 20 volumes with a predominance of heroic fantasy, all by foreign writers.

Adiax Ediciones then began the publication of FENIX ANTHOLOGIES under the editorship of Jorge Sanchez, now operating out of Spain. Two volumes were published and included Argentine stories and notes.

Emerce, using the format of the best-seller, published the collection of stories EL MENTIR DE LAS ESTRELLAS ('The Lie Of The Stars'), by Enrique Anderson Imbert, another important Argentine writer, sometimes forgotten because he lived outside our country (in the USA). There had been other works previously published by him and which included stories related to the genre: EL GRIMORIO (1961), EL GATO DE CHESIRE' ('Chesire's Cat' - 1965) and LA SANDIA Y OTROS CUENTOS ('The Watermelon And Other Stories' - 1965). The stories pertaining to EL MENTIR... preferred the surroundings of the supernatural and of magic, playing with space and time to create a new universe from chaos. "When the tale's theme" - says Anderson - "is real, sorcery can still show its hand in the way of disguising things, or on the other hand, the unveiling of a surprise ending."

Continued from page 46

PROHIBITED MATTER: Rod Marsden, PO Box 19, Spit Junction, NSW 2088. \$6 each, write for sub info.

SIRIUS: Gaslight Pubs, PO Box 1022, Fyshwick, ACT 2609. Quarterly. \$30 year in Aust, Economy Air (O/S), \$40, Sea Mail \$40.

INTIMATE ARMAGEDDONS: Five Islands Press Assoc, PO Box 1946, Wollongong, NSW 2500. \$10.95.

THE CARTOON GALLERY: Shop 38, Level 2, Queen Victoria Bldg, Sydney 2000.

SUE OWEN, PO Box 92, Islington, NSW 2296.

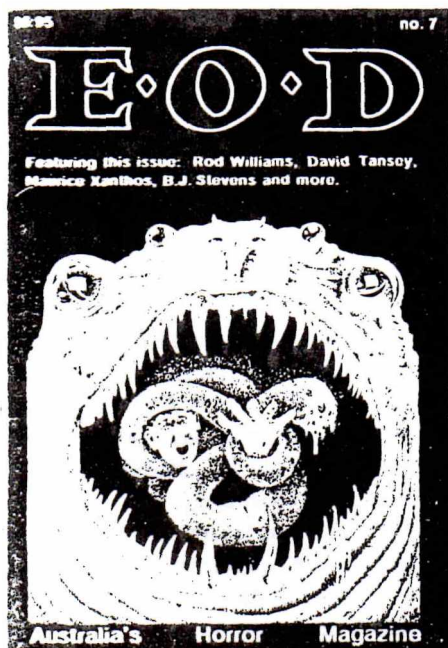
EIDOLON: Eidolon Publications, PO Box 225, North Perth, WA 6006. \$24 for 4 issues in Oz, o'seas \$44 air, \$34 seamail.

AUREALIS; Chimaera Pubs, PO Box 538, Waverley, Vic 3149. \$24 in Oz, o'seas \$39 air, \$31 seamail.

OUT OF OZ

SNIPPETS OF FANNISH HAPPENINGS

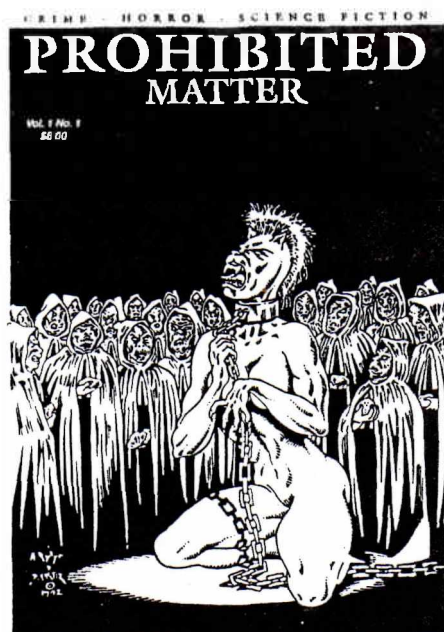
by Ron Clarke



There are quite a few Oz fans of sf who are also "into" horror. This can be seen by all the activity in horror fandom recently. There has been an upsurge in quality horror small press publications - the latest issue of EOD is an example. This magazine has gone from an average horror fanzine to be one of the best in its field. It is a digest sized (half A4) publication, with a glossy black-and-white cover. Its 94 pages are filled with fiction: *TIME WILL TELL* by Rod Williams, *DESPERATION POINT* by B.J. Stevens, *BLOOD SPILL* by David Tansey, *TOTALLY GRATUITOUS HORROR STORY* by Waldopecker II, *THE REALM OF THE UNDERDWELLERS* by D.J. Brook, *THE RUBY BROOCH* by Jo-Ann Burke, *VALLEY FOLD* by Jaice

Ragan, *LIFE WASN'T MEANT TO BE EASY* by Clive King, *OLD MAN'S GAME* by Maurice Xanthos, *STRAY CAT* by Steven Paulsen, and *IN MADAM'S WOOD* by Duncan Evans.

There is also as much poetry. There are no articles this time around, though there is a selection of Reader's Letters. Some few of the stories depend on sexual violence for their punch - the first story is an exception. Though there is sex throughout - women screwing themselves on "false" penises growing from the bodies of alien slugs, I found the story itself good enough to keep me reading to see who the author would wind up the piece.

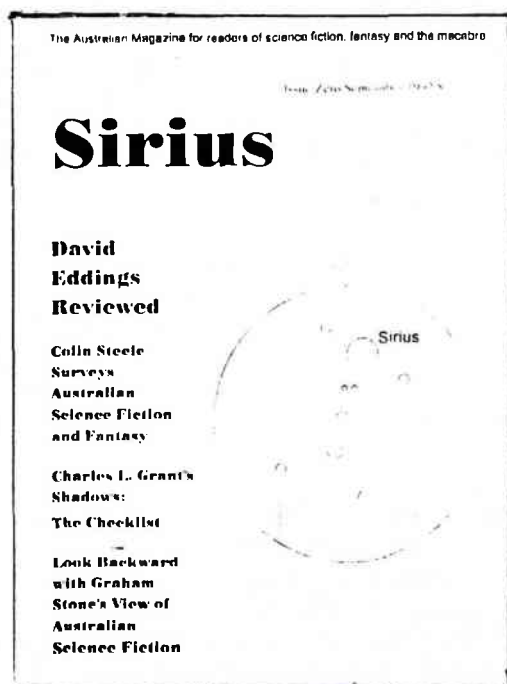
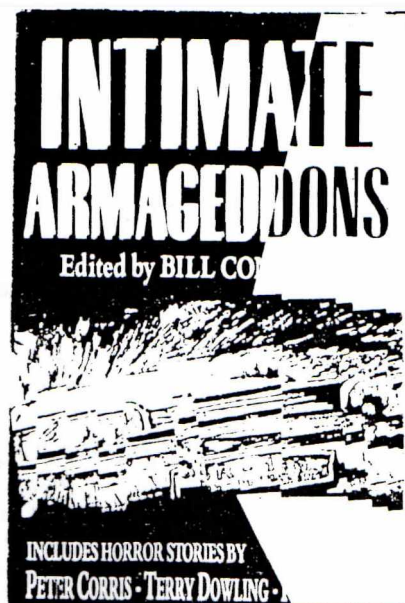


A new magazine is *PROHIBITED MATTER*, edited and published by Rod Marsden. It also has a wrap-around cover, although the magazine itself is A4. Rod himself has various stories throughout - it is the first issue,

and I do not doubt that he will receive enough contributors to fill future issues. PROHIBITED MATTER has Crime, Horror and Science Fiction. Under Crime, the fiction is JOHNNY PSYCHO by S. Carcinogen, GONE FISHIN by Rod Marsden and PERSIAN GULF MURDER SPREE by Don Boyd. The Horror section has VAMPYRE NIGHTS by Rod Marsden, HAUPTMON CURSE by S. Carcinogen, LIBRARY GUARD by Don Boyd, MISADVENTURES OF A TRAIN TRAVELLER by Rod Marsden and MURDERERS MOON by Don Boyd. There is also a feature article: BANNED FOR 19 YEARS - THE STATE OF AUSTRALIAN CENSORSHIP. Lastly, the Science fiction section has ALIEN ENCOUNTERS by Rod Marsden, WITHIN THE YELLOW MAZE by S. Carcinogen, STRANGE HOMECOMING by Don Body and HORROR IN THE ARTONT by S. Carcinogen.

There is quite a bag of different stories, though, again, sex rears its nodding head.

page ads. The cover is very plain - it really needs a good illustration, though the interior is clean and sharp. It is impossible to tell how this zine will look when it gets going, from this "sample" issue. There isn't enough of it to tell.



A third magazine, whose issue "zero" just arrived, is SIRIUS. This is an sf magazine. and has 26 A4 pages. It also has a wrap-around cover, and judging by the typesetting, it was done on a Macintosh (macs can't do shading boxes with text very well). In this issue there isn't any fiction, thought there are articles by Catherine Rayner (David Eddings - Master of Magic and Adventure), Graham Stone (Fillyloo... Looking Backward) and Charles L. Grant's SHADOWS (Bibliofile). There are some future departments (Reviews, LetterColumn, Small Ads and News and Trivia) plus an editorial.

This *really is* issue zero - there are about six blank pages (including the back cover) left for advertisement, as well as various blank spaces for quarter

Something different is a new original story Horror anthology edited by Bill Congreve. (Horror is really hitting its pace lately). The cover is a striking black, red and white and is on glossy card. The volume is 144 pages long and is nice and compact.

A three page Introduction by Bill Congreve leads off, then the stories follow: DEM BONES by Robert Hood, A SPRIG OF ACONITE by Sue Isle, THEY FOUND *THE ANGRY MOON* by Terry Dowling, HOLINESS by Rosaleen Love, MEAT PUPPETS by Geoffrey Maloney, THE PORPHYRIC PLAGUE by Sean McMullen, SIRENSONG by A.G. Clarke, MAGGIE'S PLACE by Steven Proposch, DREAM by Bill Congreve, BIT PARTS by Peter Corris and GOING NOWHERE by Sean Williams.

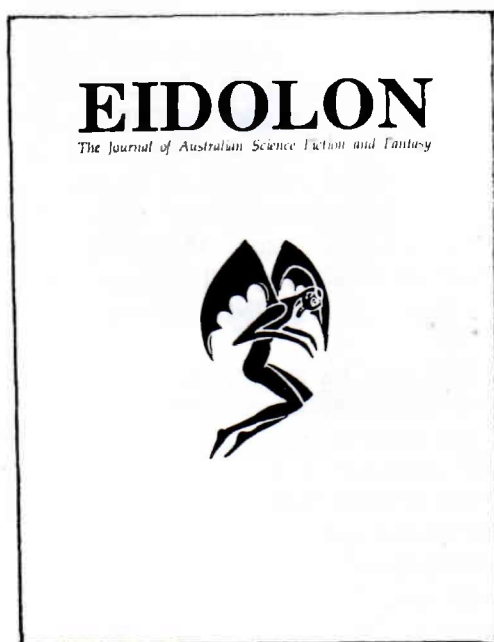
Each story has an individual introduction to the author and some background. DEM BONES is a good lead off story about an old bone man of several parts, A SPRIG OF ACONITE is a werewolf story that is a bit light, THEY FOUND *THE ANGRY MOON* is about a strange tavern and is one of the best stories in the book, HOLINESS by Rosaleen Love is a time travel story which left me cold, MEAT PUPPETS is an excellent story that, although the reader can guess part of the ending, the actual climax is well done, THE PORPHYRIC PLAGUE is a little too short for tying all its plot together, SIRENSONG is a lot of action packed into a short story; there was a little bit that threw me for some time, but overall a good gut-punch, MAGGIE'S PLACE I didn't like much at all, though that could have been my tastes, DREAM has those ingredients of sexual violence, and works well for a work of horror, BIT PARTS is a *nice* piece of horror - very well done in that length, and

GOING NOWHERE is a Stephen Kingish piece that leaves a couple of threads loose....

This is not to say that the book isn't well worth getting - if you are a horror reader, or like the best of Oz genre fiction, then I'd definitely buy this. If you are an overseas reader, then this is a good intro to some up-and-coming Oz authors.

I received several interesting pieces of material in the mail that readers may like to know about: *The Cartoon Gallery* in the Queen Victoria Building in Sydney city is publishing a bed-sheet sized sheet in full colour called TOON ART TIMES. It has a cover price of \$5. Michael Heins, a director of the Galley, writes a short editorial headed AN INVESTMENT IN LAUGHTER. The Gallery had purchased from the USA many cels and has them for sale. The Times shows them (in B&W and Colour) and lists the prices. The prices range from a \$280 Wizards cel, to \$3,000 for an original animation drawing of the 1959 SLEEPING BEAUTY.

I also received a book and comics list from Susan Owen, a bookseller. The books are mixed Pelicans, Harper Bros, Thames and Hudson, etc and cover many titles (eg THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF BRITAIN by Webster and Dudley, THE SECOND BOOK OF IRISH MYTHS AND LEGENDS by Neeson, FEUDAL SOCIETY by Bloch). The comics are also interesting: there are AVENGERS #301 from Mar89 and CAPTAIN ATOM #33 from Sep89. Obviously someone's sold their collection.



he Winter 1992 issue of EIDOLON was an "all-fiction issue". Said stories were: SNOWMAN by Ken Wisman; THE SEAS OF CASTLE HILL ROAD by Rick Kennett; THE LONELY DEATH OF THE WIZARD OF HOAT by Martin Bridgstock; MATTERS OF CONSEQUENCE by Shane Dix; A NEW SONG FOR ODYSSEUS by Simon Brown; RELICS by Leigh Edmonds; IN THE EYE OF THE OCTOPUS by Sean Williams; ON FINGAL HEAD by Jeremy Gadd and

CLOSER by Greg Egan. The artists were first class and really added to the success of the issue with their contributions.

Among the best stories this issue were SNOWMAN and THE LONELY DEATH OF THE WIZARD OF HOAT. RELICS is a tribute to A. Bertram Chandler. IN THE EYE OF THE OCTOPUS is another gem by Sean Williams, though I don't know about counting orgasms. CLOSER was a good story to finish the issue with. Overall, well worth the money.



AUREALIS has just come out with issue #9, with a green, blue and black cover. There are the usual Depts. - the Editorial, Letters, an article by Sean McMullen on Aust. SF Anthologies 1968-1990, the SF Hall of Fame (which has outlived its humour, I would think), and the Contributors (a short resume on each).

The fiction is why readers buy the magazine; this issue the stories are POCKET HOSTAGE by John Wallace; SAINT SEBASTIAN AND THE MONA LISA by A. F. Kidd; IN HIS OWN IMAGE by Graeme Menzies; THE FINAL VOYAGE OF CAPTAIN GELISE by Terry Dowling; SHIFTER by Martin Livings; LITTLE LAMB by John Ezzy and MOVING WITH THE HERD by Geoffrey Maloney. AUREALIS is now publishing horror - I don't think that the sf writers have a big enough market - the horror outlets are growing and I think that these two sf magazines should stick to SF and fantasy. The best stories in the issue are both SF: LITTLE LAMB and MOVING WITH THE HERD, though SAINT SEBASTIAN AND THE MONA LISA has some in-depth background details in the story which bring it in third, though the ending is a bit of a letdown.

THE ABOVE AVAIL FROM:

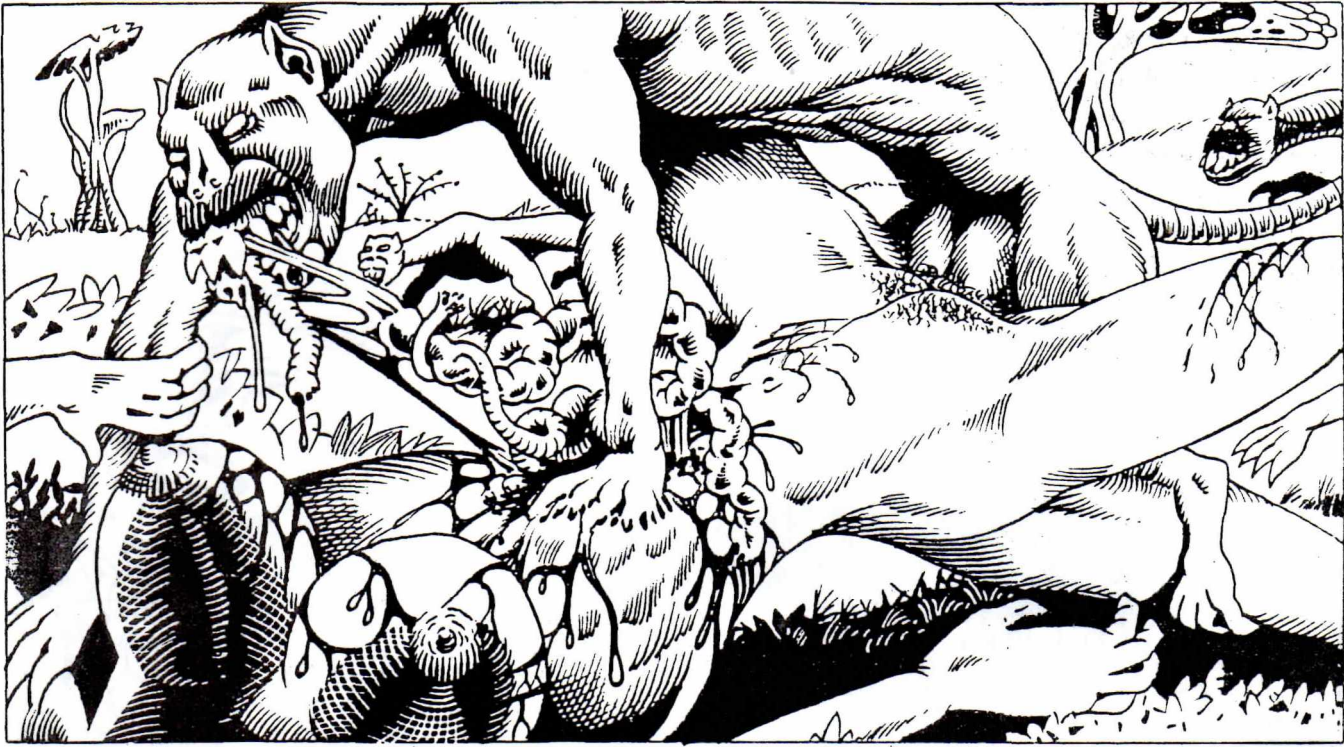
EOD: Chris Masters, PO Box 7545 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, Vic 3004. \$6.95 each, write for sub info.

Continued p. 43

PROLOG

CUT OFF FROM THE HERD A LONE
FEMOSAUR FLEES FOR HER LIFE.
AT HER HEELS BAYS A VICIOUS PACK
OF RODEPHONS. THE CHASE, AS ALWAYS,
HAS AROUSED THEM TO A FEVER
PITCH. THEY ARE OBLIVIOUS TO ALL
ELSE BUT THEIR TERRIFIED PREY.

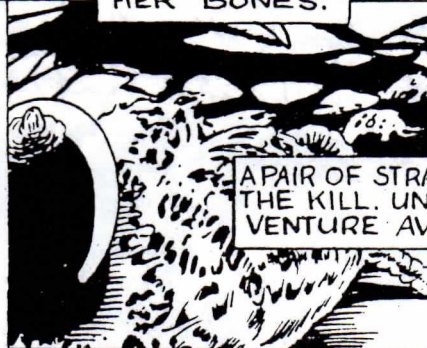
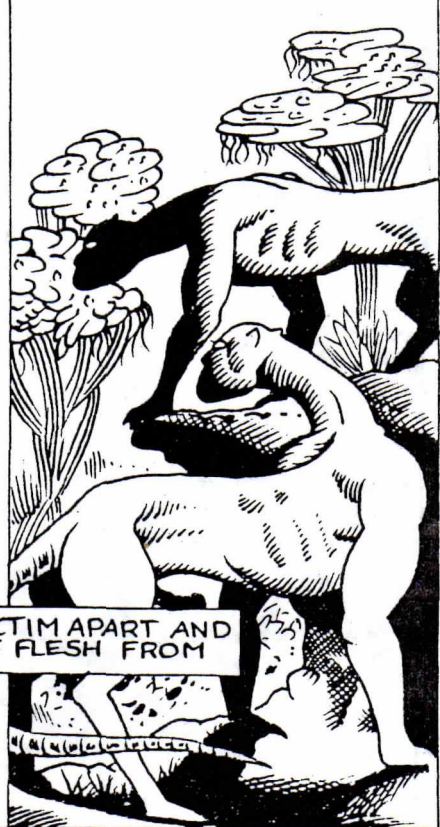




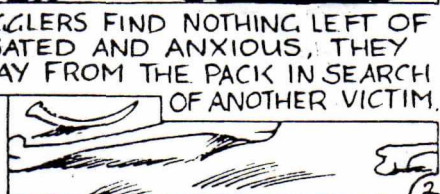
THOUGH THE PRIME PURPOSE OF THE FEROCIOUS PACK'S ATTACK IS TO FILL THEIR EAGER BELLIES WITH BLOODY FLESH THEY SATISFY URGES OTHER THAN BASIC HUNGER AS THEY DISEMBOWEL THEIR WRITHING VICTIM.



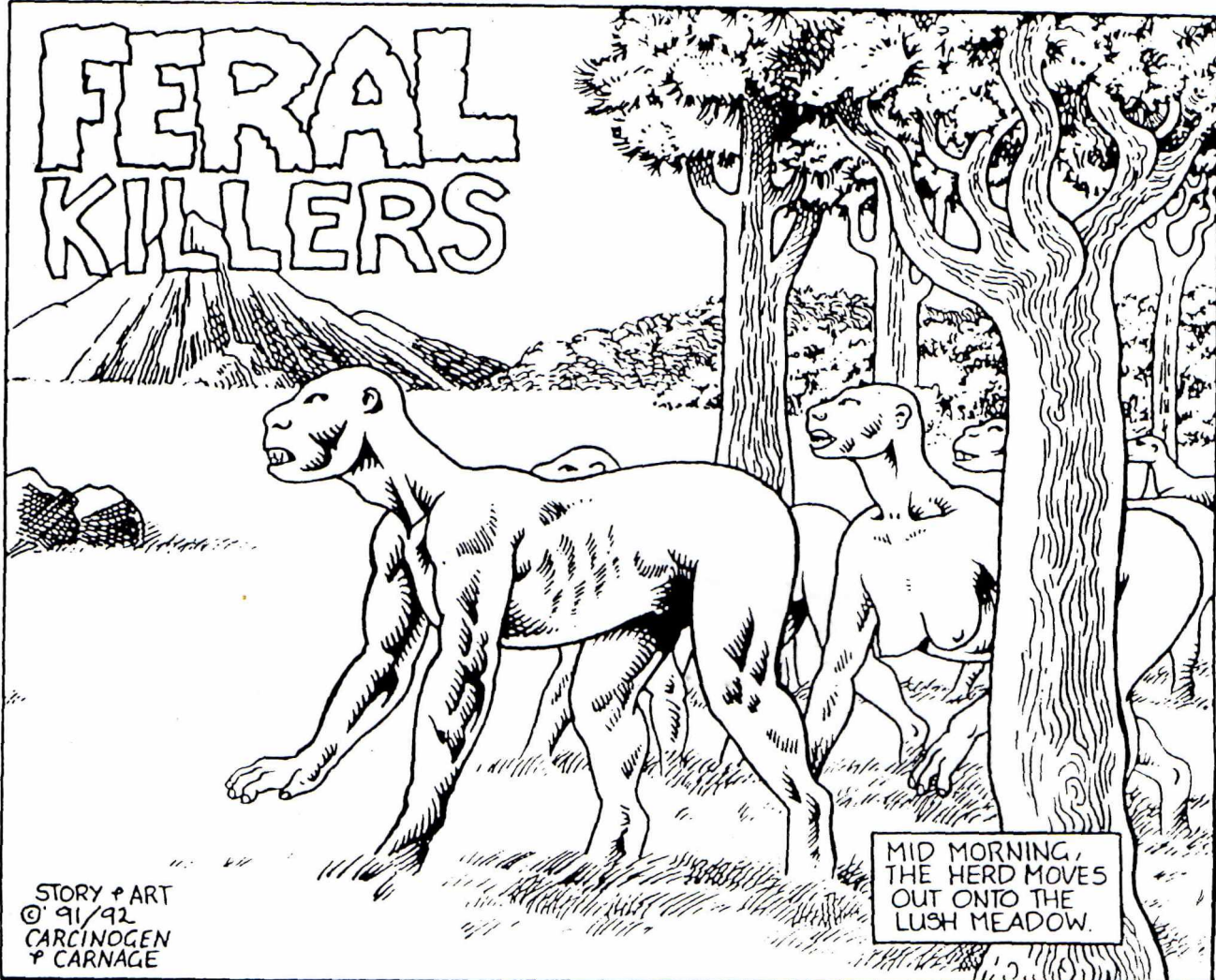
IN A MANIC FRENZY THEY TEAR THEIR VICTIM APART AND RAPACIOUSLY SCRAPE EVERY MORSEL OF FLESH FROM HER BONES.



A PAIR OF STRAGGLERS FIND NOTHING LEFT OF THE KILL. UNSATED AND ANXIOUS, THEY VENTURE AWAY FROM THE PACK IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER VICTIM.

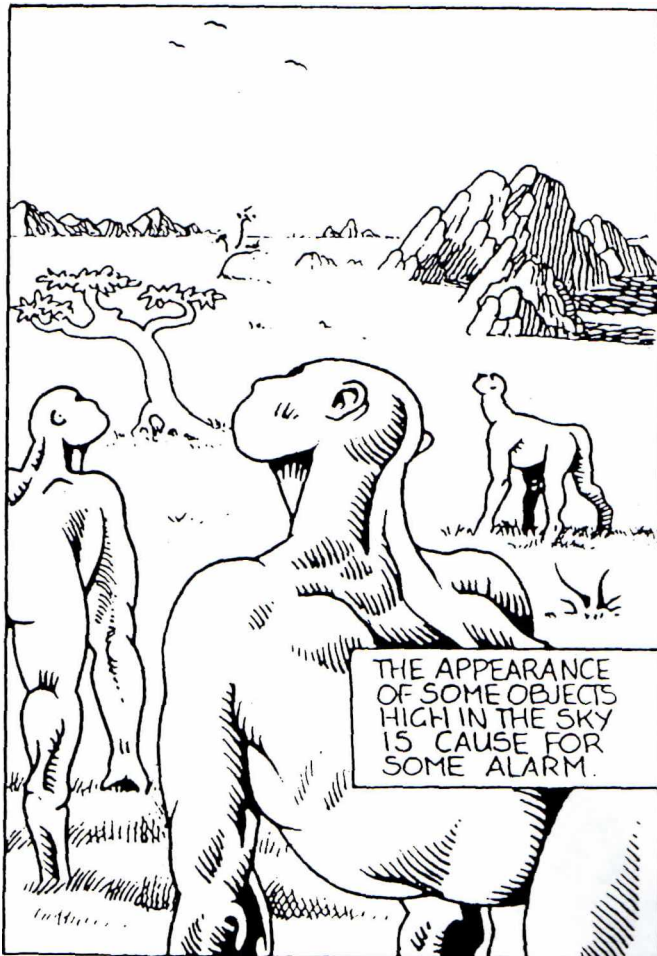
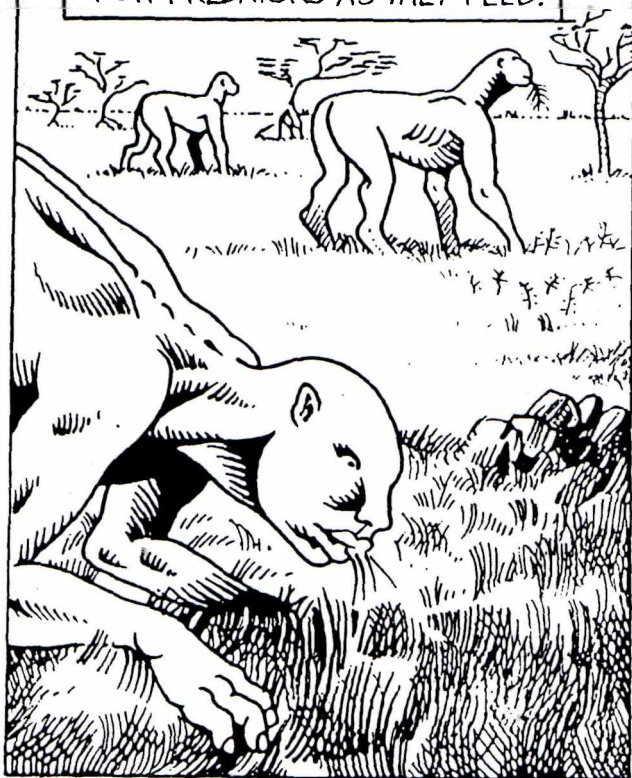


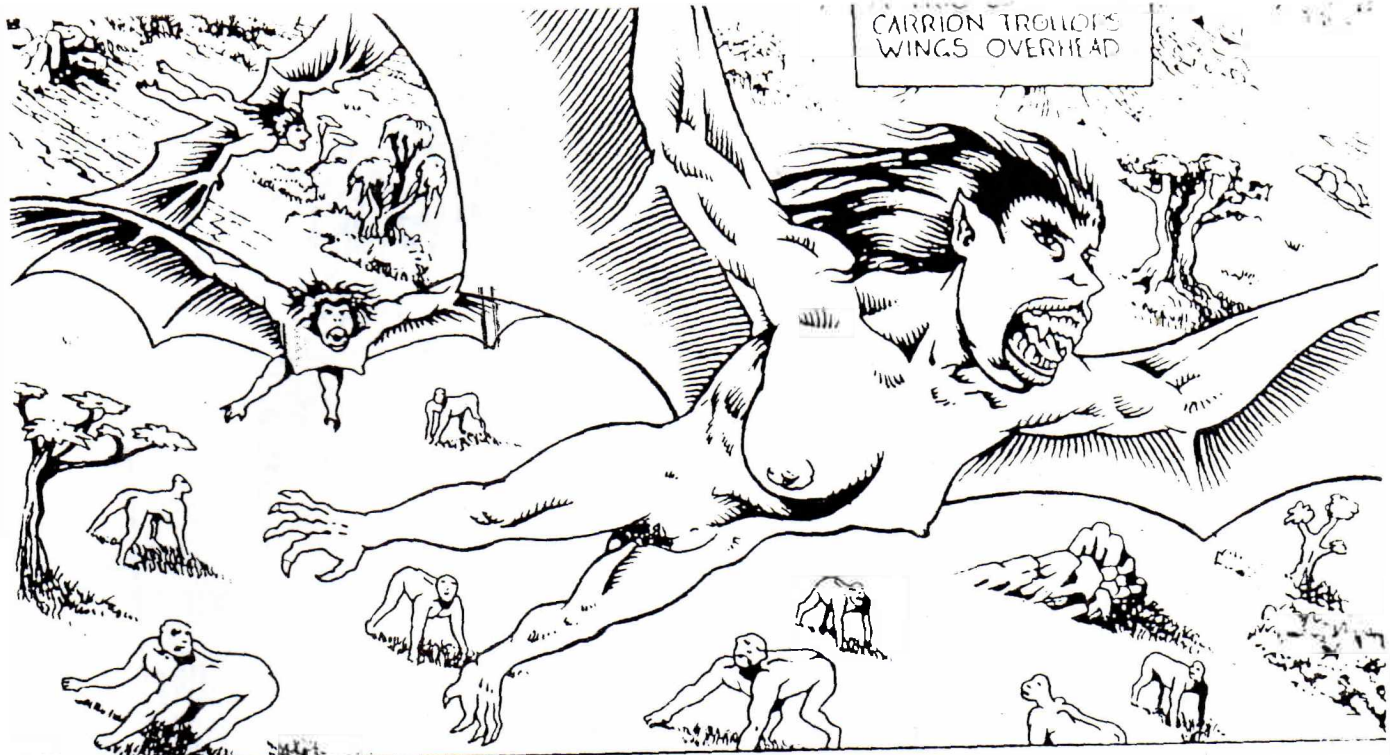
FERAL KILLERS



STORY & ART
© '91/'92
CARCINOGEN
& CARNAGE

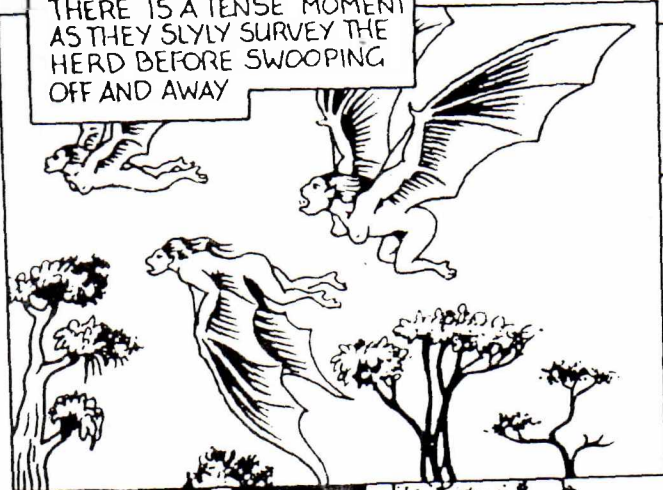
THEY EAGERLY SETTLE DOWN TO GRAZING OUT IN THE OPEN UNDER THE WARM SUN. THE BULLS AND YOUNG BUCKS STAND ON THE OUTSIDE, CAUTIOUSLY WATCHING OUT FOR PREDATORS AS THEY FEED.



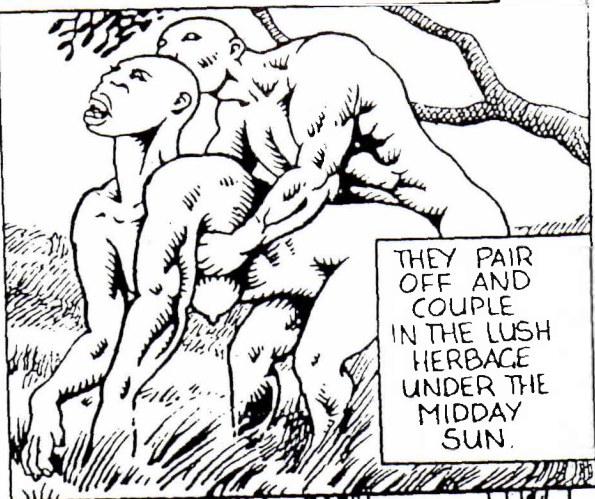


CARRION TROLLS' WINGS OVERHEAD

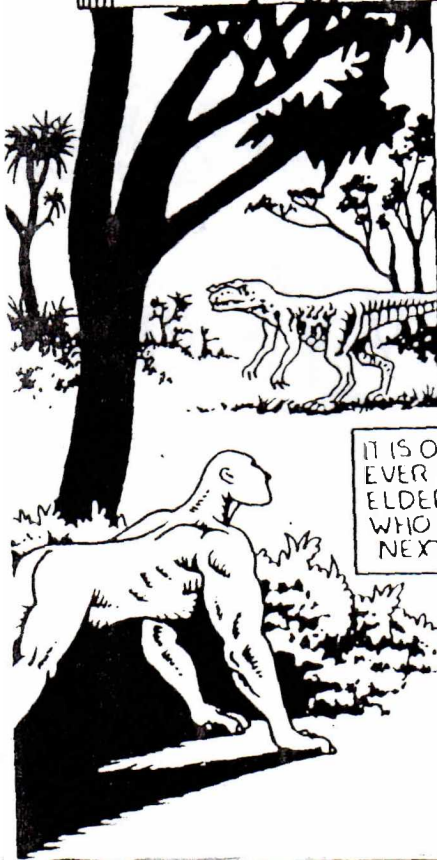
THERE IS A TENSE MOMENT AS THEY SLYLY SURVEY THE HERD BEFORE SWOOPING OFF AND AWAY



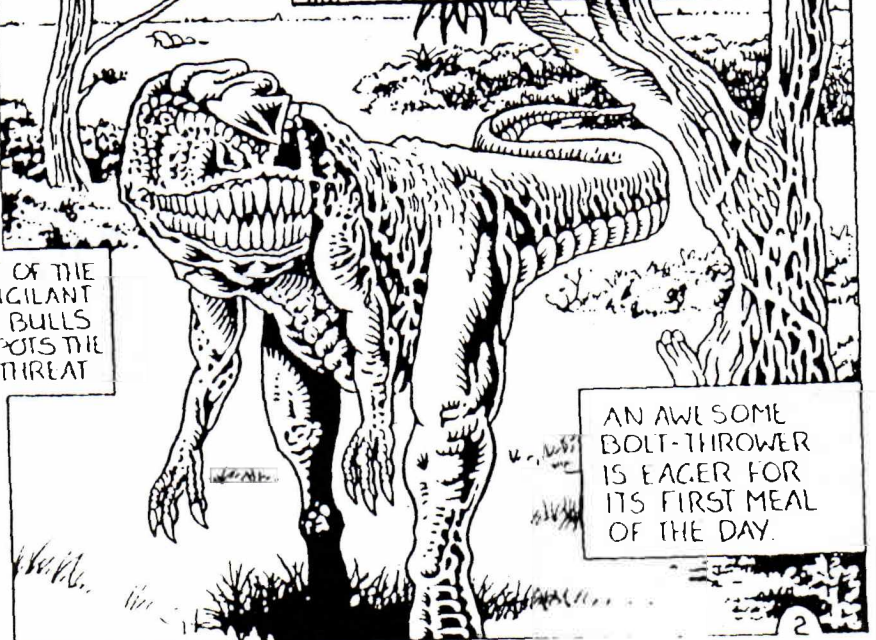
ANXIETY AMONG THE HERD IS SOON DISPELLED AND ONCE SATIED BY THE MORNING'S GRAZING SOME OF THE YOUNG BULLS AND COWS BECOME PLAYFUL



THEY PAIR OFF AND COUPLE IN THE LUSH HERBAGE UNDER THE MIDDAY SUN



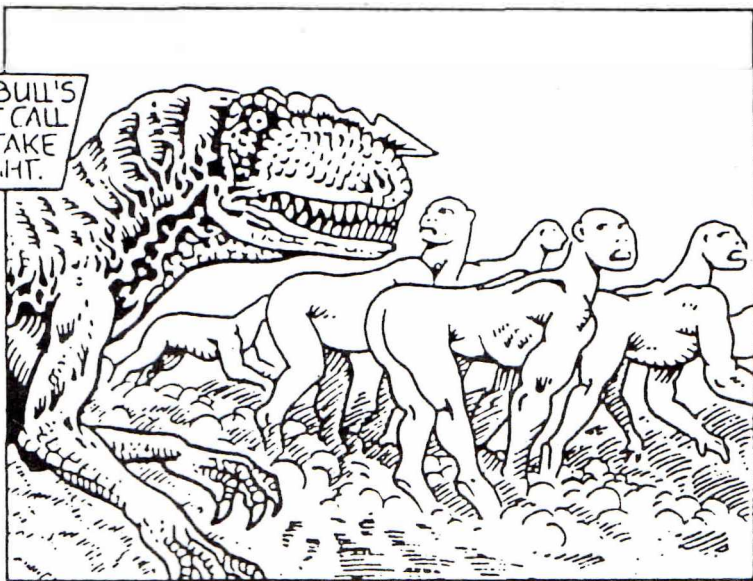
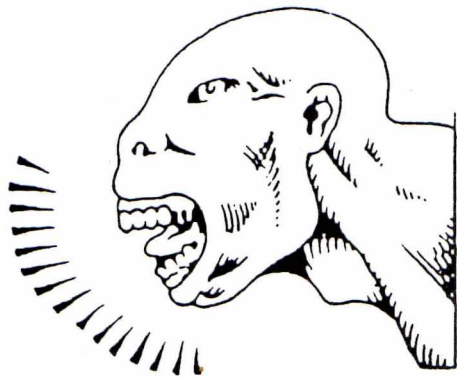
IT IS ONE OF THE EVER VIGILANT ELDER BULLS WHO SPOTS THE NEXT THREAT



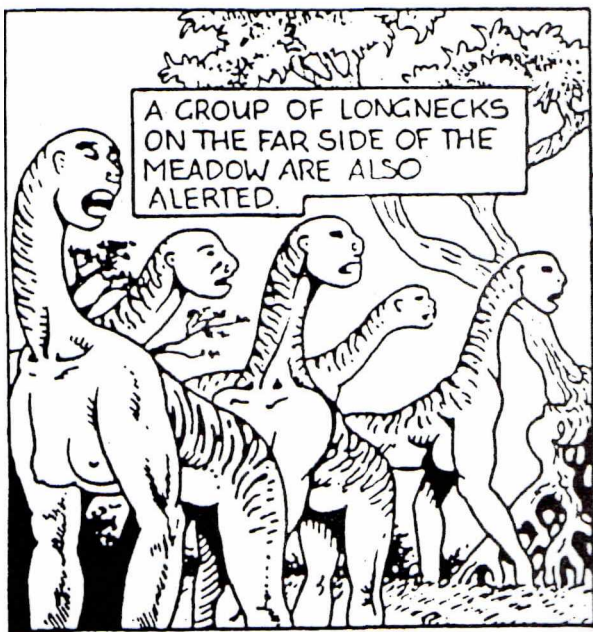
AN AWESOME BOLT-THROWER IS EAGER FOR ITS FIRST MEAL OF THE DAY

THIS IS THE MOST LETHAL THREAT
YET, AND THE HERD MUST BE SWIFT
IF THEY WANT TO AVOID A CASUALTY.

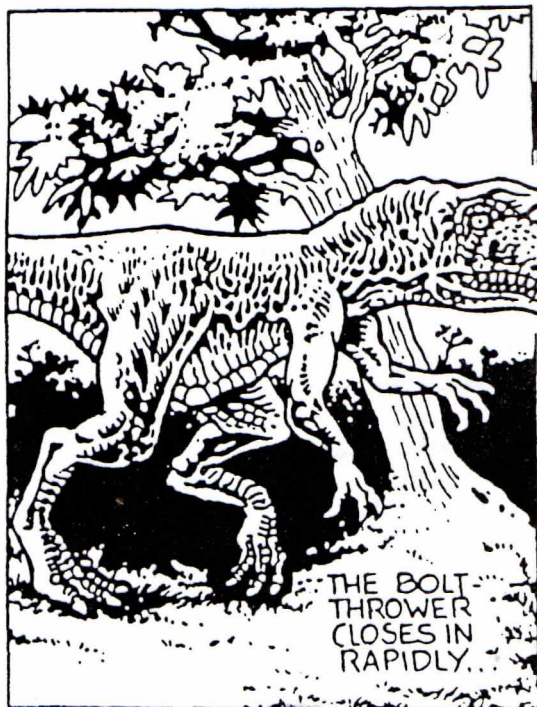
AT THE BULL'S
URGENT CALL
THEY TAKE
FLIGHT.



A GROUP OF LONGNECKS
ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE
MEADOW ARE ALSO
ALERTED.



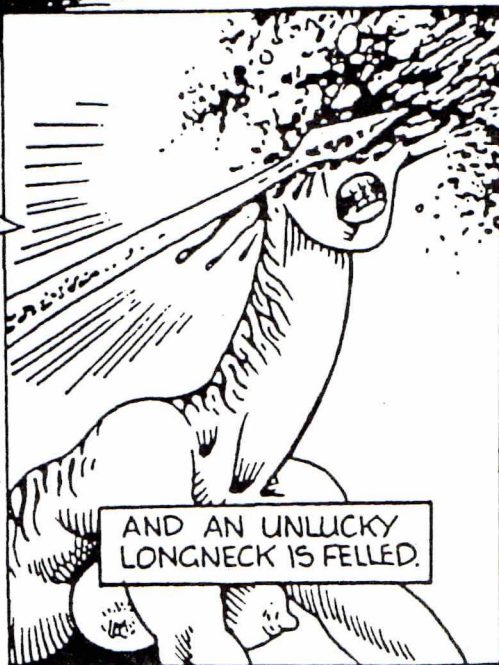
THEY MINGLE WITH
THE HERD AS THEY
STAMPEDE FOR
SAFETY.



THE BOLT-
THROWER
CLOSES IN
RAPIDLY.

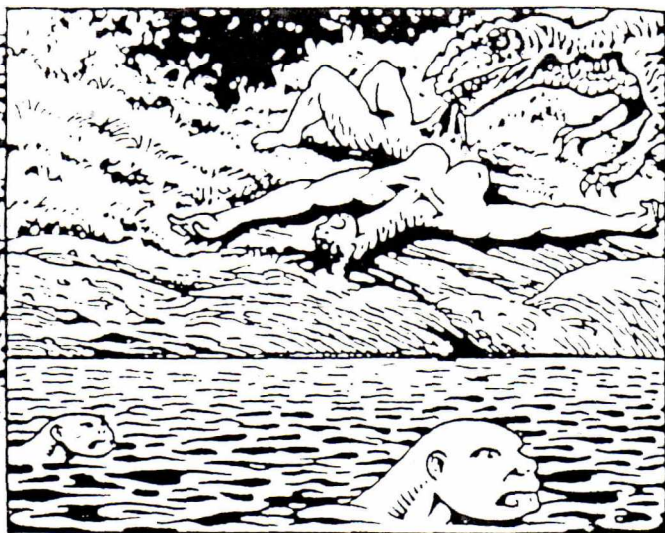
WITH
PRACTISED
SKILL IT
SIGHTS A
TARGET.

POWERFUL
SINews
FLEX,

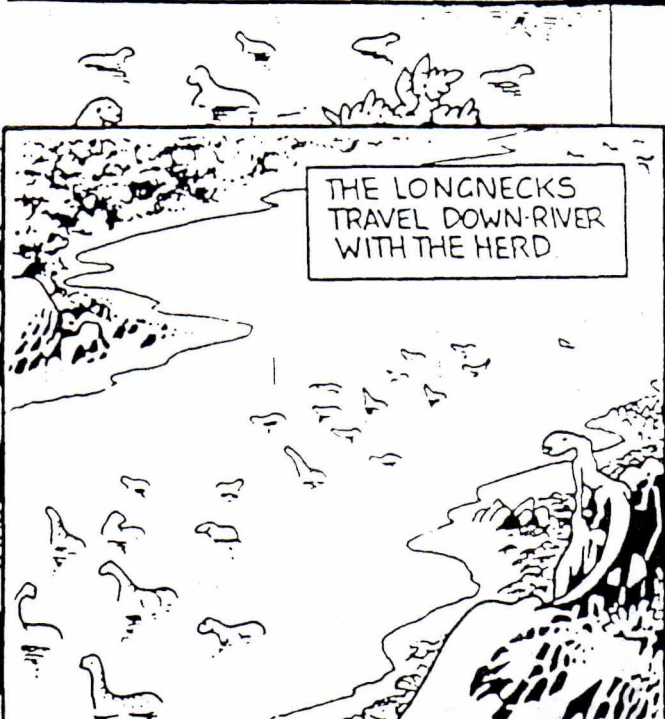


AND AN UNLUCKY
LONGNECK IS FELLED.

THE REST OF THE BOLTING CREATURES REACH THE COOL RIVER. THEY DRIFT AWAY FROM THE SCENE OF VIOLENT DEATH IN THE GENTLE CURRENT.



THE LONGNECKS TRAVEL DOWN-RIVER WITH THE HERD.

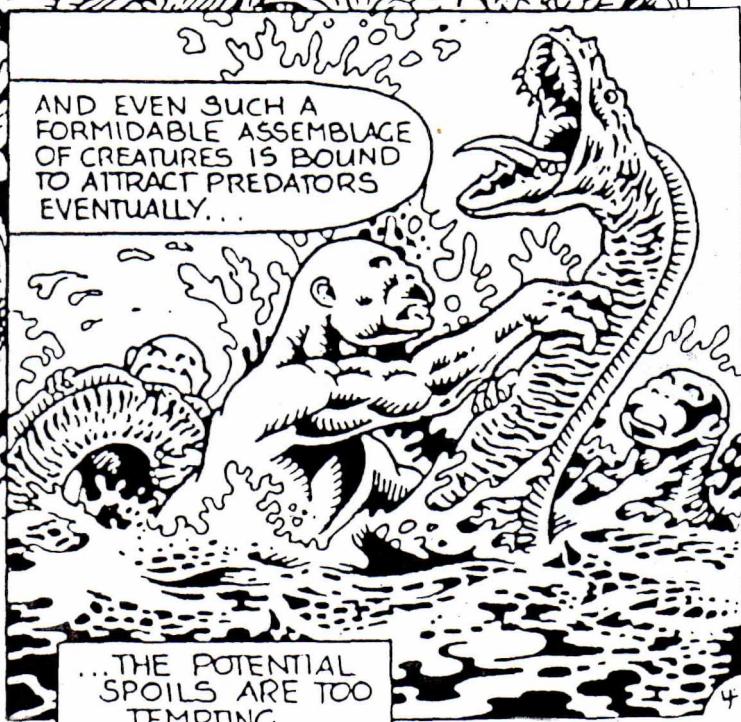


THERE IS NO ANIMOSITY FROM EITHER GROUP; INSTEAD, THEY FEEL A MUTUAL SENSE OF SAFETY IN THEIR COMBINED NUMBERS.



THE RIVER, OF COURSE, IS NOT WITHOUT ITS DANGERS...

AND EVEN SUCH A FORMIDABLE ASSEMBLAGE OF CREATURES IS BOUND TO ATTRACT PREDATORS EVENTUALLY...



...THE POTENTIAL SPOILS ARE TOO TEMPTING...

LATE AFTERNOON TURNS TO TWILIGHT.

THE RIVER DELTA
THE BEACH... SEA

THE LONGNECKS HAVE
LONG SINCE DEPARTED.

PRIME CONCERNS NOW ARE
FOOD AND FINDING SHELTER
FOR THE ONCOMING NIGHT.

FOOD IS EASY
IF YOU ARE FAST.

THE SHELTER MUST BE
READILY DEFENDABLE.

AND WHILE SOME REST, OTHERS
BECOME SENTINELS, FOR
THERE ARE ALWAYS HUNTERS.

WITH MOONS
SO FULL AND
BRIGHT THE
NIGHT IS
NEVER DARK
JUST AS THE
SEA IS NEVER
STILL...

...HUNTERS WHOSE
PREDACIOUS HEARTS
BEAT AS RESTLESSLY
AS THE WAVES
AGAINST THE SHORE.

... SEA SCAVENGERS.

EMERGING INTO THE COOL EVENING

... SHAMBLING UP THE BEACH...



TWO FEARSOME GUARDS
BAR THEIR WAY...



THE BULLS SAVAGELY
DEFEND THEIR POST.



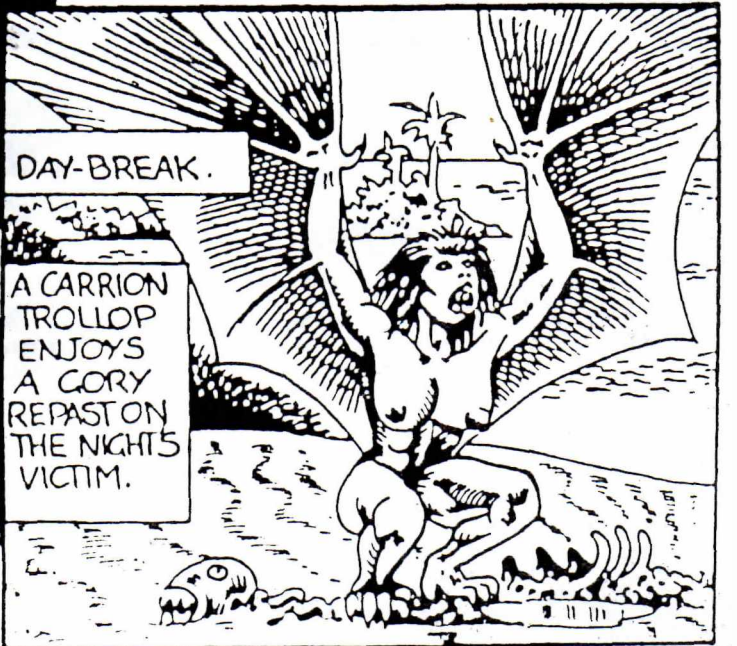
... MANAGE
TO CRIPPLE
THE LARGEST
OF THEIR
GROPING
ASSAILANTS.



THE FALL OF THEIR
RING-LEADER IS
ENOUGH TO SEND
THEM LUMBERING
BACK TO THE SEA.

DAY-BREAK.

A CARRION
TROLLOP
ENJOYS
A GORY
REPAST ON
THE NIGHT'S
VICTIM.



END



THIRST

*It pours down upon our children,
an outpouring of defiance and rage.
Smearing, beating young bodies
until insanity brings the end.*

*The desert revolves lopsided,
throwing death without ceremony.
No memories above, no one mourns
except us, locked in our cages.*

*Red drops still fall, shimmering
jewels from our sons and daughters.
The dry earth covers the bodies,
as it drinks goblets of blood.*

*I feel the moisture enter my tomb,
and soak through my bandaged eyes.
The sun burns hotter, far above me,
another life disappears into the sand.*

- Monique DeMontigny.



HARRY WARNER, Jr., 423 Summit Ave, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, USA.

I believe two or three issues of *THE MENTOR* await comments from me. It has been a bad year for the Hagerstown loc machine in many ways and I'm sorry I haven't been as regular as usual in doing my duty to you. For the time being, I'll confine myself to the most recent issue, and if I don't drop dead first, I'll try to get around to the other unlocced issues a little later on.

For, then, to your 74th. Fortunately I'm not among the fans who react badly to fiction in fanzines, so I read all the stories in this issue with interest and in several cases with real pleasure. However, I didn't care particularly for *FUGITIVE*, mainly because it seemed so much like the synopsis of an hour-long episode of a television series, with a few changes like space ships for helicopters, an asteroid mine for a lost mine in the mountains, and a threatened death by asphyxiation instead of the threat of freezing to death during an escape effort while improperly clad.

THE JEWELLED MIRROR held my interest much more firmly. I don't guarantee that I understand fully everything that happens or is implied in the story, but it's intense and different and I just let the paragraphs flow through my mind, something like the way one listens to the music of Delius. One very minor flaw is in the first line, where the past tense is confusing, since it's followed by a long section in the present tense.

THE TREE is also a trifle mystifying for a worn-out, old reader like me. Since it's so short and meant to be so atmospheric, I wonder if it wouldn't be better if turned into a poem, a sort of ballad in a half-dozen or so stanzas.

Buck Coulson's column is particularly notable this time for the insights it gives into the mechanics of being a huckster at a worldcon. Everyone knows the hucksters are there and sometimes a huckster reports on his experiences at a con but we don't often have a chance to read about the various problems that a worldcon

huckster faces or the financial problems that he may encounter. Additionally, large cons will establish a policy that a panel or talk will be cancelled if there aren't at least a dozen or so persons attending. It seems silly to tie up a half-dozen panelists for an hour when only four or five persons are in the audience and, by the law of averages, one or two of them will be too sleepy or too drunk to benefit from what he hears.

I was fascinated by all the things Andrew Darlington told us about boys' science fiction in another land around the middle of the century. Of course, I've never read any of these books and probably haven't read anything else most of their authors have written. But this sort of article has genuine value for filling out the history of science fiction. If it hadn't been written today, it would be in a serious danger of never being written; twenty years from now, hardly anyone will be left who can remember those publishing ventures and trying to research such a piece without personal memories would be impossibly difficult. I felt the same envy while reading it that I experience whenever I encounter an article about science fiction written with a teenager market in mind. There was virtually nothing of the sort in existence in the United States when I was growing up in the 1930s, except for Tom Swift whose adventures weren't very far removed from existing technology.

Alas, I could make no sense at all out of the contents of the poetry pages, except for *STARLIGHT*, and that is changed so little from a ditty children sing in the United States when the first star becomes visible at twilight it hardly seemed like a new poem.

The reprint of Terry Jeeves' article in the letter section has significance he didn't point out. A half-century ago, magazine advertisements could interest readers with offers of information on how to make money because the general public was actually interested in earning a living in those days. Today I can't imagine such advertisements appearing in any great numbers because

people who need money are content to let it come from welfare or unemployment checks or other sources that require no exertion on the part of the recipients. We do see an occasional small ad which offers to give people a chance to make money by addressing envelopes at home, but even these aren't as numerous as they were before word started to get around that such offers aren't the splendid opportunities they seemed to be.

Terry's other loc mentions problems with copying illustrations in old magazines with a camera. It's possible to buy a special kind of film which is extremely high contrast and records only blacks and whites, no gray middle tones. But this is used mainly in quantities by printing shops and it isn't normally available at small camera stores. Lacking that, it's best to use the slowest available black and white film, since this will tend to give the best contrast. If the processing firm isn't so automated that it can't render special services, the contrast can be further improved by underexposing and asking for overdevelopment of the negatives. If the paper of the old magazines has gone yellowish all over, not just at the edges, photographing through a yellow filter will be helpful. All this assumes the use of black and white film; with color film, improving the contrast is difficult, although for outdoor work Terry could experiment with a polarizing filter at various settings and at various angles to the sun, in an effort to reduce reflections from the old ink. As you note, putting the old publications into an office copier directly is the easiest system, but sometimes it's dangerous to do this in the case of old pulps that might suffer damage from the effort to hold the illustration flat against the glass.

I think I'm going to have a thousand copies made of one remark in Walt Willis' letter and enclose one in each loc I write in the future. "I regard all art with incredulous suspicion as at best some sort of supernatural manifestation, or at worst a particularly sneaky kind of conjuring trick." That is the perfect explanation of why I never manage to include specific comments on fanzine illustrations. (18.8.92)

BRIAN EARL BROWN, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, Michigan 48224, USA.

My apologies for taking so long to respond to the latest issues of THE MENTOR. It seems like it's been one thing after another this year: heavy work for the Pulp Era Amateur Press Society, a months long lingering illness (sinusitis/bronchitis with a cough that wouldn't go away), and the need to clear out a room and repaint it for the baby. We're still working on that but just getting the room cleaned out have been a lot. All in all it just seems like I can never get caught up with fanzines.

Peggy Ranson's cover on THE MENTOR 73 was nice but not particularly spectacular. There are aspects of it that are better than average - the face and hands seem well delineated - but others, like the clothes, lack conviction. They look like so much air-brushed art, full of fuzzy edges with no sense of real detail. But that said, Ranson's painting is a lot better than a lot of fan art I've seen.

Andrew Darlington's article on ROBOT ARCHIE was the gem of the 73rd issue. It was both well and carefully researched and the supplied strips clearly illustrate just what sort of stories these were. In some ways I'm surprised strips like Robot Archie survived well into the sixties as I would have thought by then that the whole idea of robot men had become passe'. But I suppose that I've projected a jaded disdain for C3PO and the like cute sci-fi movie cut-ups which date only from the mid-seventies on, into a past they never belonged. Looking at the selection of ROBOT ARCHIE pages I find myself wishing for a collection or two of these stories, particularly the Robot Builders series with the Ron Turner art. The art is fantastic and the story lines look to be more complicated (or at least more developed) than what usually passes for children's story-telling. (There was a recently launched series of Tom Swift adventures which have been sadly disappointing because of their short length, leading to slight stories about often trite inventions. This series is aimed at the 8-13 year old market I think, but can't help thinking that anyone over the age of 9 would feel short changed by these books. The older Tom Swift Junior series (1954 to about 1970) remains a better written series, less condescending to its audience, and better science fiction.)

On to THE MENTOR 74.

Buck Coulson has often mentioned his dislike for trip and con reports, which is why I'm surprised he wrote one for THE MENTOR. But I guess I shouldn't be surprised that, halfway through it, I decided to skip the rest as Buck's lack of enthusiasm for what he's writing shows through.

Again, Andrew Darlington's article, here on juvenile SF series, is the centre-piece of the issue. There was a lot of science fiction books published for juveniles in the 50s and probably few of them worth looking up today. Andrew makes The Kings of Space series by Captain W.E. Johns sound like it might be one worth finding. Though finding copies of either the original publications or the few 80s paperback reissues over here in the states won't be easy.

Andrew makes an unusual defense, arguing that Capt. Johns' books are in keeping with the state of scientific knowledge and literary license for the times, and thus do not represent bad science fiction. Is it a good defense? Well, "yes" and "no". Arguing in the 50s that Venus could be a habitable world and might have oceans and dinosaurs (and bears.. Oh my!) was in the realm of the credible, even though astronomers never detected appropriate levels of oxygen in Venus's atmosphere. The lack of detectable levels of oxygen should have suggested to honest scientists and science fiction writers that Venus might have many things, but life wasn't one of them. Like-wise the best estimates on a Martian atmosphere and of the Martian surface temperature, even during the 50s, were too gloomy. Heinlein's RED PLANET improved astronomical data to the max but still regarded Mars as too cold and with too thin an atmosphere for unaided human life. While life on the Moon was a flat out impossibility. Its lack of atmosphere and extremes of temperature were well and widely known. Any author who "discovered" life

there had better be talking about like adapted for hard vacuum. So Asimov's cavears don't hold water. He should have known better, although Capt. Johns could be excused since he was neither a scientist or a Campbell-trained SF writer.

The US had its own juvenile series. Not just Heinlein or Andre Norton, but a whole series of unrelated SF novels by various authors appears from Winston Publishers. A number of them, written by Lester del Rey, were reprinted in the 80s by del Rey (Judy del Rey, not Lester, editing). A few others, by writers who later gained fair popularity, like Alan Nourse, were also reprinted, but quite a few remain out of print. One book VANDALS OF THE VOID by Jack Vance stood out in my memory from that series and recently I had an opportunity to pick up a mint copy of the first edition, only I decided that nostalgia just couldn't justify the \$95 price tag. Sigh.

I haven't read Julian Jayne's book which argues that consciousness as we know it didn't exist a couple thousand years ago, though I'd like to. It is an intriguing concept. But if its chief argument comes from an analysis of the development of the Greek written language over time then I fear this theory is on pretty weak ground. Language grows as it is used. New situations arise and words are invented to describe it. The English we speak today is far more complex and involved than the English of 400 years ago. But that hardly compares to ancient Greece where writing was just being developed. The spelling or meaning of few words would have been agreed upon thus the written language would reflect little of the richness of the spoken language. For that matter, since Greek society then would still be predominantly oral, writing would slavishly ape speech, thus thought would be expressed as speech because people understand speech even from unknown sources, while they might not understand the idea of thinking to one's self.

But maybe Jayne's already responded to these points in his book. (11.8.92)

HARRY ANDRUSCHAK, PO Box 5309, Torrance, CA 90510-5309, USA.

Thank you very much for sending THE MENTOR 74... First off, though, I want to say that I like the idea of the AUSTRALIA IN 1999 Worldcon Bid, and I'd be glad to support it any way that I could. As long as it did not involve too much money. Since I don't go to cons much, I am not sure I could help out with bid parties. I will be attending the LOSCON 19 this November, so maybe I could hand out flyers at that con?

I have read THE MENTOR twice, and it is, as usual, a good read. But I am not sure how much energy I can generate in writing a LOC. I do not have air-conditioning, and right now Los Angeles is in the middle of a brutal heat wave combined with high humidity and smog.

As far as Andrew Darlington's article goes, I seem to have missed most of those juvenile SF books. The main reason is that I did not have enough money to buy the books, and the local library only had the juvenile books of Heinlein and "Paul French". And as I remember it, most of my reading was magazines. ASTOUNDING,

GALAXY, F&SF, AMAZING, FANTASTIC, IF, and maybe a few other survivors of the big 1950s shake-out.

But, oh yes, the solar system was still mostly unknown in the 1950s. In a way, I am sort of sad that my many many years at JPL ruined so many stories. The one I miss the most is the series that Darlington ignores completely.. the twilight zone of Mercury. Here was the territory of Leigh Brackett, among others. I was always fascinated by the idea of life in such a fragile zone, a zone that might suddenly get too hot, or too cold, and in which a fierce struggle for existence resulted.

Of course, we now have sulphur volcanos on IO, rings around Uranus and Neptune, a double planet system in Pluto/Charon, and a hell-hole in the new, improved Venus.

Strangely enough, Mars is still generating interest. Even though the two Viking Lander spacecraft find no evidence whatever for life, past or present. Given that the atmosphere of Mars does not stop the ultraviolet rays from hitting the surface and breaking up any organic molecules that might happen to form, this was no real surprise.

But it seems that many are still hoping to find out that Mars did, way back in the past, have liquid water, a milder climate, perhaps an atmosphere that could do something about the ultraviolet rays, and even life. NASA has proposed many very expensive missions to go back for another look. To date, nothing has actually gone as far as money, and I have my doubts it ever will.

Still, the Mars Observer, intended to be launched in 1988, might get off the ground in a few months. This small spacecraft from JPL is going to do a more thorough survey from orbit than the two Viking Orbiter spacecraft were able to do. Instrumentation technology has made huge leaps in performance since the 1970s.

Buck Coulson's article is yet another one that seems to be all too common nowadays, about the problems of enjoying yourself at multi-thousand cons. COPPERCON may be 300-400, and CORFLU 9 was about 75 at the most.

Still, a Worldcon in Australia is not likely to have all that many people, considering what the air fares will be like. (20.8.92)

PETER BRODIE, 15/16 Waratah Street, Cronulla, NSW 2230.

Lots of artwork in this ish. Jozef, as usual, up to his excellent standards. The "dino" chick on the cover reminds me of an old girlfriend; which might explain a lot. Go away, memories, go away!!

Look, Chrissie-poo, when masochists like you take my crap so seriously, I just can't avoid leading them on a bit more... then a bit more. If I call you a drooling fuckwit with delusions of adequacy I can only assume I've just made yer day. Maybe you'll learn one day. I doubt it. Anyway, write that list, it will give you summat better to do than respond to people like me who love baiting idiots. It is, after all, a no-win situation, eh?

Well Joe Buchanan, the poem was Fantasy not SF. There's a bit of a difference, or can't you tell? Anyway, it was my own pathetic attempt at humour and

humour is always available for any genre. It's the dead-serious attempts at SF poetry that are doomed by the nature of the attitude not to mention the inaccessibility of the medium (she's generally out to all callers between 10 and 5, seven days a week, but leave a spirit on her machine and she'll ether contact you in this life or the next.)

I liked the mouse, too. He's an old friend of the family.

Bill, I can do video reviews any time. Used to do them for DATA. Matter of fact, I initiated DATA's vid review column about two centuries ago. It's just a matter of Ron wanting such. I can also do vid game reviews, but only for the Megadrive and the Snes at the mo. Tons of brill games out now with either an SF slant or a direct tie-in. Also many games now play like a movie, complete with sub-plots, character interaction and so on. (2.9.92)

JOHN TIPPER, PO Box 487, Strathfield, NSW 2135.

Thanks for TM 76. Pleased to see you've used Steve Carter's work on the cover. I assume you saw the article on his comic strip endeavours in the local paper? I've sent copies of that article off to other zine eds who might be interested in helping him to get published.

Seems I should have edited out all the technical stuff from that article on Biggles which you printed in full. But I thought it would probably be outside your TM content so didn't really expect you to run it. Doubt if many American readers will be familiar with Biggles - the stories were originally considered too "English" to appeal there, and the recent movie would have given them rather mixed-up expectations of the "genuine article".

One comment from past readers on your fiction has been "it's been done before". But I would be surprised if anyone can say that about Sean Williams' *LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK*. I can generally get right into Sean's stories, in like manner to those early King/Bachman stories, but this one took a bit of grasping. Maybe there were too many alien ideas thrown up in the first couple of pages. Once a few explanations were given, I relaxed and enjoyed it.

Not as much as *USED BOOKS*, though. I want to use this in *GOLDEN YEARS*, Shane. How about it? A beaut little story, quite the best you've run. I'll be interested to read what others write about it.

Pressure of work will prevent me from reading the remaining fiction for some time, so a quick jump forward to R&R...

In answer to Bill Congreve's query in his *THE DEVILS OF LANGENHAGEN* review, seen in TM 75, and brought to my attention by another writer's chainsaw-like outburst in #76, it seems that Sean McMullen was correct in his use of Spitfires as bomber escorts over Germany in 1945. The Mk.22 version which saw service just before the end of the war had a maximum range (with drop tanks) of over 1500 km. I can't answer the question about the use of Lancasters on daylight raids, but in the context of the story (which I haven't seen) one can assume that in the alternate history, the Poms learnt their lesson in '43 and equipped the Lancasters with more powerful engines and B-17 armament! (3.9.92)

MAE STRELKOV, 4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina.

THE MENTOR 74 just came and many thanks. Very interesting Don Boyd's comments re consciousness as we know it not having existed a few thousand years ago. In my studies I have had to recognise that visions created by hallucinations are at the back of religions at the start. Awareness of mysteries evoked by the brain when thus stimulated must have played a vital role in changing apes into human beings. They had to start trying to figure things out.

A favorite author of mine, Logan Pearsall Smith in *THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE* (first published in 1912 and many times reprinted) pointed out:

The "sense of personality, of the existence of men as separate individuals, is one of the later developments of human thought. Man in early societies is not thought of as an individual and the notion of "I" or the concept of "myself" is but slowly differentiated from the collective "we" of the group in which he lives."

He speaks of all the new "self" terms of the 17th Century and "a swarm of what we may call "introspective" words."

All so new! We're only now beginning to become real!

Elsewhere, he writes that earlier "man was thought of not so much as a person as of a soul to be saved or lost." (Trouble was, medieval views of a static heaven versus hell, were so unreal!)

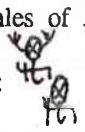
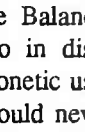
True, what Buck Coulson writes:

"If all our DNA goes back to one woman... then obviously language has to go back to one tongue... probably a series of grunts and odd noises."

Which "grunts & odd noises" hide in all our languages still, as I suggest!

When saying "Quechuan and Chinese seem to share the same roots", I'd have better underlined that they shared *the same mind-pictures*. "Feasting cozily on dog flesh" created some very happy terms, for instance.

"A scorpion hidden under a stone", on the other hand, in China as an old LIAD, suggested fearful things; while the Indo-European echo was LADH - "hidden/latent". (There are Quechuan echoes for the aspects of LIAD suggested).

A whole book about all the old roles played by that scorpion, I've just finished writing. Anybody know interesting details? I'd love to learn more. In Babylonia's Zodiac Scorpio's claws controlled the Scales of Justice. Here's China's old "Scorpion of a Myriad": , and it turns into a monkey upon losing its claws:  (or an ape).

In Egypt "the Ape sat before the Balance" (to make sure the scales were just). Scorpio in disguise? Scorpio's lost claws could, in a Chinese phonetic usage as an old GIWAN, represent the gibbon. I could never fall asleep over such findings, I find them exciting. Still, I'm glad Chris Masters could hope to sleep better now he knows of Quechuan/Old Chinese similarities. Was he worrying? I suppose we all do worry at problems needing answers. That "first mother" and her DNA that we all inherit really fascinates me. I want to know more!

(12.8.92)

DAVID TANSEY, GPO Box 2061, Canberra, ACT 2601.

Shame, shame, shame on your editorial of #76 commenting on how democracy has triumphed over communism in the last couple of years. Democracy is a political term, while communism is an economic one, so they cannot be opposites or even compared. In my humble opinion I would say that democracy and capitalism had triumphed over totalitarianism and communism respectively. We do have actual countries with totalitarian governments and capitalist economies, eg South Korea and Kuwait, but to date there have been no democratic communist states.

In theory it is possible to have a democratic communist state, where there is a free electoral system and the wealth is equally distributed. No such state has existed in history so far, maybe because internal communist revolutions which have removed intolerable dictators or foreign colonisers have required tight centralised control on the part of the revolutionaries once the coup has created a vacuum at the top. It is interesting to speculate on what Vietnam would have been like today if the Americans hadn't waged economic war on the country since 1975. Maybe, the revolution having served its purpose, Vietnam would have evolved into another Taiwan. I can't help but feel that America's econowar only served to harden resistance to reform in Vietnam.

At the end of your editorial you suggest Australia is not a democracy and I agree for two reasons. Firstly, our Head of State achieved power through ancestral lineage (She's not *my* Queen - I didn't vote for her!). That Head of State is also the Head of the Church of England, and only people of that faith can marry into the Royal family. This form of religious discrimination is unconstitutional in Australia. Secondly, because the two major political parties usually have approximately the same percentage of voter support, they have to pander to every minority group that comes along because the votes of that minority may swing the election, even if they are worth only as much as one percent. Each of the major parties can't afford to injure the feelings of the left-handed lesbians or the Macedonian animal liberationists. The result is a mish-mash of policy that has no meaning for the majority of Australians (and usually results in some of their tax dollars being wasted on some obscure cause).

The only answer to bring about true democracy is CIR (Citizen Initiated Referendum). We have the technology now for the population to make decisions on a daily basis. For example, polls have shown that some 80% of Australians want a reduction in our immigration from Asia, and some 60% prefer a republic to our current structure. We would have true democracy if these opinions were acted upon. No politician would dare to have anything to do with CIR, as it would take away their power. The prime function of any politician is to keep their party in power. Secondary to this is the running of the country.

Now to the stories in #76:

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK by Sean Williams is a clear example of how professional quality stories end up in fanzines because of the lack of publishing outlets (no offence intended to fanzines). A

few quibbles: why would the computer assume the suited astronaut was a male if it couldn't distinguish genders? It is actually Gauntly who first assumes the figure is male: "See if you can make contact with him." Why would they make such sexist assumptions hundreds of years in the future, when we don't now? Also, that far in the future would people from different centuries who meet be able to instantly converse, even if they both spoke the same language? Also, would they use the expressions "Gung-ho", "funhouse" etc in the far future?

USED BOOKS by Shane Dix was a nice little piece. Shane's stories have a "soundness" about them. Nothing too experimental. Shame about the typo "past pages" instead of "last pages". NOTHING NICE by Duncan Evans was an unusual SF/fantasy combination that worked. THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER by Evan Rainer I couldn't finish. It is typical fan crap. COMPACT by James Verran: I'm surprised we don't see more stories from this WOTF winner. This was average stuff - surely James can do better? TREES ALONG A DELTA by Brent Lillie: Great, some horror at last. It worked okay. Maybe Brent can produce something a bit meatier in this vein (or is it a mixed metaphor?). THE FARM by Grai Hughes was out of place in THE MENTOR. The SF element (vague futuristic references) don't qualify it as SF. It should have been published in some country bumpkin magazine. I didn't feel sorry for the characters - Australian farmers have never been particularly efficient. What is happening to farmers is also happening to manufacturing and everything else in this country.

In conclusion I would like to complain about all the fucking swearing that has been published lately in your letter column. Don't you realise that most of your readers are SF fans and therefore virgins? (10.9.92)

BLAIR HUNT, PO Box Finch Hatton, Qld 4756.

Just received TM 76. One of the best I've seen for fiction. Evan Rainer's THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER was my favourite. It was beautifully done. A sort of Phillip Marlow meets James Bond on Mars. More please, Evan.

Duncan Evans' NOTHING NICE was next on my list because of the controlled writing style, as well as the humour.

Shane Dix's USED BOOKS was well written and he built the tension well, though I thought it could have been tighter just towards the end.

Sean Williams' LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK was a pleasant and clever variation on the old "going back in time to meet yourself" theme.

Bill Congreve's review of the Terry Dowling Books has moved me to send off to APHELION for all three of them. (5.9.92)

SEAN WILLIAMS, PO Box 605, Cowandilla, SA 5033.

Perfect timing. I was just about to go crazy when #76 arrived. Having spent the last five weeks working on a novel, with only a quick break last weekend to read Greg Egan's new novel, I was sorely in need of distraction.

Distraction of a particularly fine sort, too. I won't go through it line-by-line, as per usual; as well as being short on time, I think I've already taken up too much space. Just a few quick lines:

The best fiction of the issue was **THE FARM STORY** (Grai Hughes). It wasn't really sf, I guess, but what the hell. Having spent a fair proportion of my life on a farm near Cowell, SA, I can sympathise with the protagonists. Grai has a prodigious talent for description and narrative, whoever he is.

Regarding Bill Congreve's **IN DEPTH**: at a recent meeting of the Kensington Norwood Writers Group Science Fiction Chapter, the subject of Dowling vs Egan arose. As far as I can tell, the best way to compare them is by employing sexual metaphor. If the stories of Greg Egan can be likened to a spectacular bonking experience (maybe an extramarital affair, a one-night stand, the enactment of a fantasy - short, sharp, a little rough in places, but extremely powerful and memorable, regardless), then Terry Dowling can seem, at times, like four hours of foreplay. Technically stimulating, engaging, yet somehow lacking punch. Both have their place. That's all I have to say on the subject.

Thanks to everybody who commented on **HOTEL**, no matter what they said. Criticism - good, bad or indifferent - is always valuable. If only one could please everybody all the time, though... (I'm already dreading the response to **LOOKING FORWARD**.)

As for Shane Dix: he has only one person to blame. If *he* hadn't given me the idea for the story, then turned down my offer to co-write it, and actually encouraged me to enter the competition - well, what can I say?

Lastly, as a huge fan of Robert Rankin's novels, I feel obliged to point out that **THE SUBURBAN BOOK OF THE DEAD, ARMAGEDDON II: THE REMAKE** has just been released in the UK (glowingly reviewed in **INTERZONE**, issue 63). I differ with you, Ron, in that I though **ARMAGEDDON II** was better than the original, but there you go; no accounting for tastes. I am also pleased to announce that I live on Rankine Rd (in response to something somebody asked in a previous issue).

(7.9.92)

DON BOYD, PO Box 19, Split Junction, NSW 2088.

Having a look at the last few TMs I can't help but be struck by the feeling that there is some mysterious chemistry going on in the Australian SF scene to produce a flowering of darn good stuff.. There has been an explosion of detective fiction in other areas with a lot of women academics getting their rocks off writing the stuff, so maybe we have reached an ignition point where the population is large enough and the outlets good enough (like TM, **EIDOLON**, **AUREALIS**) to cause a boom.

Steve Fox's orange cover was really finely wrought and reminded me of van Dongen's work in **ASTOUNDING**. The blobby life-forms oozing upwards under twin suns smacked of Hal Clements' hi-grav planets with oceans of liquid methane. Under a pressure of 2000 atmospheres, perhaps we have two immiscible liquids at the ocean interface and the white dots on the right horizon

are spores floating off to the top of the ocean a hundred miles up?

Sean Williams' time-travel yarn in TM 76 was pretty well flawless with a couple of characters who created conflict, plus a bit of romance. The mental work to work out his concept of time is pretty impressive, plus he's invented a few slang/jargon words like a Bore, for time breakout, and the Arm to give the whole imaginary world a feeling of actuality.

I have noticed some rumblings from readers who say they don't bother to read the fiction. And there is the perpetual gripe against poetry. I say keep on truckin', Ron. Some of the writers who are pretty good now might have been rather iffy a good many TMs back and got to be good through your outlet and criticism from the public. Bad poetry can be revolting but seeing other people's attempts is a good incentive. I've liked some of the poems a lot, mainly to do with giant sharks eating tin ejector seats, or red-eyed monsters pawing at our holed-up spaceman's cave, so keep the poetry going.

You gave Pavel Viazulkov of Moscow a pretty blunt knockback when you said you only print Aussie SF. I assume you were more explanatory to him in other communications. It is pretty tough being a small-population English-speaking country when the giants of America, Britain and Canada totally swamp our culture with their cheap movies and magazines. We know you would be swamped with a billion tons of mail from American amateurs otherwise, and they have their own outlets in a 300 million people market.

[Yes, but you notice I did print his story... - Ron.]

Ukrainian emigre Eugene Naoumov's comment about Australia having socialism without communism reminds me of Keynes's remark that we are all socialists now, meaning the normal, decent provisions by government for those who are not well off or, let's face it, dills is an accepted part of Western politics. Except possibly in the USA, which is a rather bizarre world of its own. Across its border in Canada is an Aussie-style civilization with free (almost) medical care and humane employment welfare. USA dog-eat-dog capitalism produces crime and other excesses, but it seems to also toss up innovations that we grudgingly build into our society a decade later, like freedom of information legislation, sexual equality and whistle-blower protections. Also drive-in movies and the throw-away razor, not to mention 6 litre V8s and smooth peanut butter.

All my mates who are or have been on unemployment did so or are still doing so because they couldn't be bothered working. Three or four of them on over \$100 a week each could rent a house at the beach for several years of idyllic surf-board waxing etc.

I hope Eugene hits the libraries and soaks up the Russian section. H. Montgomery Hyde's biography of Stalin is good; Isaac Deutscher's trilogy on Trotsky is a must for somebody subjected to 70 years of nonspeak against the man; and Thaddeus Wittlin's work on KGB boss Beria would fascinate any Ukrainian or Georgian.

The definitions of democracy as being supreme power vested in the people suits my thinking. The idea of

majorityism is probably too limiting and only of meaning to people like us Australians because of our strong two-party system. Some countries like Japan and Germany, and Australia in the '50s, operated as essentially one-party governments for decades because the ruling party fixed the system so that it required far more than 50% of the vote to gain power. As long as the people can kick 'em out of power they have to tread carefully and try to represent what they think the people want. I don't think Australians want all Vietnamese sent back home, or women police treated as secretaries. But ethnic power groups do manipulate the system and public backlash awaits those who go too far, ie a change of government.

I notice there seems to be another huge wave of (former) Soviets emigrating to Australia. There was a half-page article in the SYDNEY MORNING HERALD (5/9/92) about Russian (meaning CIS) scientists coming here. One 28 yr old Dr Alexander Isaev was a theoretical mathematician at Moscow University, earning a pittance and living in a 3-room apartment with seven others. Now he's at ANU on \$33,000 a year and lives in a 6-room house in Canberra suburbia. Other Australian scientists are ganging up to get their Russian friends out here. Migration always brings something to this country and I hope these sorts of people have an effect on Australian science fiction.

In this vein, I thought Claudio Omar Noguero's article on Argentinian SF was absolutely outstanding. It is really mind-boggling to see how differently the Argentinian mind views science fiction in comparison to us. To me the advance of science and its application to me and my life-style is a perfectly natural thing; I expect to see factory complexes with half a million people in orbit, and I expect to see some sort of virtual reality with the world computer network plugged directly into my consciousness. I also suspect experiments with the current bedside machines that produce lucid dreaming will open up a window directly into the mind, and perhaps the psychic element, very soon.

But the Argentines are much more interested in SF as a philosophical tool, and as a metaphor for the depressing regimes they have lived under. Their attitude to SF bears resemblances to SF under communist regimes, where double meanings abound and what can't be said about the bosses is hinted at in other ways.

I'll bet Ned Brooks of Virginia would fall out of his tree if he looked out the window at the rising moon and saw that someone had turned it upside down to the way it should be at four in the morning.

Congreve's repetitive "Sorry, I don't believe a word of it" was a pretty good bit of reviewer's individualism and I took it to be a humorous way of saying "THIS STINKS". Maybe it got on David Tansey's nerves but it raised a smile from me. Asking whether Spitfires had enough range for whatever the author tasked them is reasonable as it keeps the author on his nettle. I often stretch the physics a bit in my writing and it is good to have a reader saying, "Hey, wait a minute..." Mike Hailstone did this to me once when I used outdated surface pressures for a Mars story. I think I countered by saying

maybe they were at the bottom of a big canyon, I think, but it didn't work.

Andrew Darlington's articles are top notch (quietest topus drawus chappo). I liked the CS Lewis article. On the strength of his article I think I might drag em out at the local library and re-read them.

I liked Rod William's mechanical cockroach illo.

Let book publishers' PR flaks note: on the strength of your reviews I'm gonna get THEY CAME AND ATE US (to read about Jesus' twin sister, Christineen - was there a movie about an evil car?), and also BILL THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE PLANET OF ZOMBIE VAMPIRES, mainly on account of I want to see what happens when Bill comes up against Alien.

(5.9.92)

JOHN FRANCIS HAINES, 5 Cross Farm, Station Rd, Padgate, Warrington WA2 0QG, UK.

Ta for TM 75. SANCTUARY I found disappointing - and dare I poke my head over the parapet after getting it shot off over my comments on blues? A stalagmite doesn't hang, it stands upright, therefore it cannot drip; also, my dictionary says that permafrost is "Subsoil remaining below freezing-point throughout the year in polar regions." - CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY - no doubt the experts will tell me how it is possible to slip on new permafrost (which by definition is frozen subsoil) and whether it can form that quickly.

Andrew Darlington again has pulled another cracker from the past - I remember being awestruck by Blish's "cosmic" vision in BRIDGE - I seem to remember conflicting theories abounding of the nature of Jovian "weather" - was it a raging inferno or an ice-hell? Seems the frozen form is winning at the moment, but not as envisaged then.

HEARTBREAK HOTEL towered above every other piece of fiction in the mag. It was well written and believable; my only quibble would be that the reasons for it all were kept too much from us, I would have liked an explanation as to why the time travelling was undertaken, why Stephen was so important, and what would have happened if Old Nick had succeeded in defusing the bomb.

Buck Coulson's articles are always interesting, and no, Buck, I don't want to move - I like living here, I don't want to be saddled with another mortgage, and with the currently depressed housing market I doubt if anyone would buy this place anyway!

ASHTA THE FOOL had wit and charm, GREY CLOUDS was depressing (is this an eco-doom special issue?), ROCK A BYE BABY was even more depressing, WAY BACK WHEN I'm afraid I found tedious, LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS was pretty good, but far too short and with a telegraphed ending.

Bill Congreve's reviews were very well done, I would enjoy your own more if you gave them more depth - brief round-up type reviews tend to be just a check-list that doesn't give the reader anything to get his or her teeth into.

I'm sorry Peter Brodie and Joy Buchanan don't like SF poetry, but I wish they'd say why? Do they dislike all poetry, or only SF poetry? As to the poems in this issue, I'm afraid I found them very disappointing. It is not

mandatory to use jingly rhythms just because you are using rhyme - and if, having set up a lolloping triple rhythm, as in *THE MAN IN BLUE A TRAVELLER TOO* it doesn't improve matters if you then totally destroy that rhythm in one line: "I have been a creator, destroyer, a thing of lust."

Do you print locs as submitted? I ask because of two hilarious typos(?) - rolls, for *roles* and beried for *buried* stood out quite dramatically. (12.9.92)

[*I blame the spell checker in Word For Windows, as well as the well known fact that you can never pick up all the errors you type yourself - Ron.*]

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS, 27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, UK.

Many thanks for TM 75; another enjoyable issue. I liked the cover and Peggy Ranson's illustration on page 24.

I don't think having most of the fiction reflecting doom and gloom in one issue was a good idea. Not only depressing, but old-fashioned. (I remember when sf was mostly nuclear disaster stuff just after World War II.) Fiction is supposed to entertain; when the sermon is too obvious, it fails. H G Wells is remembered for his early romances; his later stuff, when he began preaching, is now unread. Authors be warned. *ASHTA THE FOOL* was amusing and so the most satisfactory.

Nice to see Jim Blish getting a pat on the back. My favourite is *THE NIGHT SHAPES*. When I met Blish many years ago he was interested to hear this; apparently this novel was not highly rated in the USA.

I enjoyed Bill Congreve's *IN DEPTH* column. Always interesting to hear what's going on down there, and especially in the small press. I hope this column continues.

Poems: *ADRIFT* worked well apart from the second line in the third stanza, which does not scan. I hope the poet will rework this line. *MANY HEADS AND SUMMER* is a good one too.

Undoubtedly the star turn this issue is Michael's *WAY BACK WHEN*. (Though I can't agree with your editorial comment that doors are opening up again - not in the Middle East and Central Europe.)

Interesting to read Blair Hunt's report on a New Zealand convention; more NZ news would be welcome.

Jim Verran's rejection form was amusing.

And I have read very few of the books reviewed; Pratchett's *REAPERMAN* was funny in places, but not the riot of fun he usually is; I hope he's not going serious on us.

The most interesting read I've had lately is Harlan Ellison's film script of Asimov's *I ROBOT* (in the November, December and Mid-December 1987 issues of *ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE*.) (14.9.92)

TERRY DOWLING, 11 Everard St, Hunters Hill, NSW 2110.

Thank you for the recent copies of *THE MENTOR*. I've admired it for years and only the austere disciplines of working at being a writer have kept me from saying so.

I was honoured by Bill's look at my work in Issue 76, October 92, and wish to express my thanks for running such a coverage. I don't believe that authors write with their egos; it is a solitary and uniquely vulnerable process. Having that sort of acknowledgement is nurturing and helpful.

Incidentally, I am usually very careful about my science, and before any liberties are taken with causality, I discuss things with my long-suffering adviser and friend, Sean McMullen, author of the fine collection, *CALL TO THE EDGE*. Or have helpful reader-experts write me, such as a specialist like Tom Reeve, who gave me information on laser-strikes from orbit. I take that knowledge, allow for the "magic bird" factor, whereby future technological advancements will invariably appear to us as magic, and proceed accordingly.

The geo-tethered satellites used by the Ab'O tribes of Tom Rynosseros's future are exactly that: ancillary units tethered by microfilaments to parent facilities geosynched *over the Equator* exactly as Bill noted it has to be done; in other words they would be trailing slave installations. This makes for a busy and dangerous sky, but lets me have the orbital surveillance needed for Tom's Australia.

And, yes, I agree totally that satellites could not "hear" from orbit, but in the limited information flow of Tom's day there is a *fear that they can*. In *PRIVATEERS' MOON* (*Blue Tyson* p.174) Tom reflects "Gain-monitors could never reach down so far, but scan could", showing my in-text agreement with Bill's point and also showing Tom's generally better-informed position in his own world.

However, *mea culpa*, this does not excuse me for having a crescent moon rising to midnight in *DREAMING THE KNIFE*. Sean is in no way responsible for that oversight since I - smugly, wrongly, aaagghhhh! - did not think to let him view such an obviously so-science-problems-here story. Never again!

I console myself by saying that Niven had the Earth rotating the wrong way in the original edition of *RINGWORLD*, and that Bob Silverberg had a full moon visible at midday, so I'm told. Any other such faux pas - please send details to the Dowling Smokescreen Contest care of this address. (20.9.92)

MICHAEL HAILSTONE, PO Box 15, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Vic 3005.

Thanks for printing my trip report, *WAY BACK WHEN*, (could have done with a better title, but I can't think of one). I agree with Lorraine Cormack, that the piece is not well written, and indeed I was going to write you a letter of comment criticizing my own work. I have an excuse though, which I gave when I sent you the thing in the first place. After being let down by the likes of Shears and Bondar, I was afraid you'd end up doing the same, so I just sent you a rough first draft. Had I more faith that it really would see print in your fanzine, I would have taken more trouble with it. If I ever republish it anywhere, it will certainly undergo some revision. (It's rather like the kind of luck I had ten to fifteen years ago: Every time I had a story or article accepted by a (more) professional magazine, sed magazine would fold just before the issue including my work.)

However I fail to see how Lorraine gets the idea that I "constantly (comment) on (my) great interest in the 'wether'". I make just one such passing comment, not constant at all. As for the spelling that so incredibly irritates her, I gather from her comment that she has never heard of Spelling Reform One (SR1), which simply follows the rule of writing the letter "e" for the short clear vowel in "bet", wherever it occurs, regardless of present usage. The idea of this is (to use a modern vogue term) low impact on the reader, as it usually crops up in only about one in fifty words or so. However I can see that it tends to have a more blatant impact if the writer is like me interested in the weather (here I'll drop the use of SR1 to avoid irritating and confusing her) or has occasion to make a few mentions thereof. A similar problem arose for my artist for CRUX, when she tried to write a novel in SR1, only to find herself discombobulated by the constant recurrence of "sed".

SR1 was invented by Harry Lindgren of Canberra, who founded the Spelling Action Society on 1st September 1971. It's now so sad to look at that date, insofar as a lot of progressive ideas were put into action in the seventies, only to be eroded away during the incredibly dreary conservatism and backsliding that became all the rage from 1979 on. NATION REVIEW was another publication with an interesting house style, although it didn't use SR1. But where is it now? In my own zines such as THE MATALAN RAVE I have kept using SR1 and other reforms (naughty, naughty!) in defiance of the times. If I have failed to move with the times, to follow the latest fads, if I'm a dinosaur, then I'm proud of it, damn it.

The original idea of WAY BACK WHEN was to compare notes with you, to tell you what I was doing on the same day that you did something described in your tale. However, because I lost most of my diaries, I can't give an exact date for all the highlights of my exploits and experiences that year, and I felt that some of these (such as the truck pulled out of the fiord) were noteworthy in their own right, even without a precise date. Since you published my tale, for some reason I came to reminisce a lot on another detail, which I for some reason didn't include other than a most brief passing mention. It was one of the two "dreadful potato picking jobs" I got during my stay in Dundee, and I'll give the details of one of these here, as that short episode took place exactly twenty-two years ago today, yet it was like time travel, a trip back into the darkest nineteenth century (a trip, on which, by the way, the Establishment is hell-bent on taking us now).

The job wasn't at Dundee but at a place called Humbie, a little southeast of Edinburgh. The parents of the young father, (real toffs they were), with whose family Tony boarded, gave me a lift thither. According to my battered diary I started work that same day under a despotic Irishman, who employed a large gang of itinerant workers mostly from the bogs of Ireland themselves. I say "according to" it, because there's a day missing somewhere. This faulty diary ses that by the end of that day, spent working in a fierce gale, not knocking off till seven o'clock, I decided not to stick it. The next day, which must have been the 18th September, a Friday like

today, I was called out to work in the shed. (I was called by no other name than the fellow with the beard, bringing titters from some of the other workers.) Well, that was a thoroughly exhausting day. It seemed that those people had never heard of the 40-hour week or other such modern working conditions. We were kept going so fast and furiously, that, although we were in an open shed on a cold wet day, most of us worked bare above the waist for most of the day. My job was mainly carrying paper bags full of potatoes, and by the end of the day my body and arms were covered in cuts and scratches from that nasty sharp paper. I'd had enough. I yode to the boss that evening and told him I wanted to quit. He answered that that was pretty lousy of me, since I'd taken the job and all that, but I stood up the bastard. I wasn't one of his bogirish slaves that he could bully about, and he seemed to respect me for that. He told me that he'd put me in the shed because I wasn't "fit" to pick potatoes in the field; I was too slow, but we agreed that I work back in the field next day. Now I find it almost incredible that I preferred to work bent double all day picking potatoes at a ridiculously furious speed rather than in the shed, where I could at least work with a straight back. And indeed I found that next day extremely gruelling with an agonizing backache. I think though, that what especially appalled me about the day in the shed was the unbelievably miserable short lunch-break we got, only a quarter of an hour. But time has greatly dimmed my memory of the details, so I don't remember just how exhausting it was, I gess. In no way could I stand up to work anywhere near that hard nowadays, but I see myself back then as still young, fit and vigorous, albeit never very strong or robust, and unburdened by the crippling chronic illness that struck me three years later.

Maybe I should have tried to stick it out a bit longer, but it was such a depressing environment. Our lodgings were as filthy, and some of the other workers were depressing too, especially one sour-tempered man who also worked in the shed. He was a drunken bum, who tended to lose control of his bowels whenever he got on the grog (which was almost every day), but in the interests of decency I'll spare you the details of that. Anyway, I finished up that Saturday evening, but I had to wait around almost all day on the Sunday to get my money off the boss. His wife had went quite unfriendly on me and had no name for me other than "Beardy". I spent most of that Sunday, the day of rest, sitting around talking to some of the others and reading Fred Hoyle's OCTOBER THE FIRST IS TOO LATE, perhaps rather fitting in the circumstances, since it is a time-travel tale of a kind. At last I reached Edinburgh late that evening but had to wait around for most of the night on the station for a train back to Dundee.

Briefly harkening back to SR1 and the objection to "weather" becoming "wether", to quote myself from CRUX #5, "the homophone argument just doesn't hold water... (T)o take that argument to its logical conclusion, we would need different spellings to show the sundry meanings of words like ash, bar, bear, boil, char, mint, mole, pale, pole, row and seal." To that list one can add "letter" and "present", and I'm sure anyone could think of a good few more besides. Ah well, who knows? I don't know whether the weather will be good for the wether.

The mention of THE SHEEP LOOK UP is interesting, insofar as I got to thinking about that book after hearing about the recent riots in Los Angeles. A friend of mine, who grew up in the States, thinks it would be a good thing if the riots spread across the nation in a great holocaust of self-destruction, which is the fate of America in THE SHEEP LOOK UP, wherein the smoke drifts across the Atlantic to Europe.

The third paragraph on page 37 of my trip report is very clumsy and badly put. What I wanted to say was: Nowadays I would see the blaming of Quisling as an example of the vindictiveness of the victorious Allies (even in liberated Norway) rather than "yet another vile machination (of) the Establishment", but this is not to say that my earlier view was wrong or even inaccurate, for the two are basically the same thing. Besides, it even seems now that the German invasion of Norway was provoked by a British invasion - or attempted invasion - at Narvik, a flagrant breach of Norway's neutrality.

However, Ron, my piece with all its faults is not helped by your typos. I'm not complaining about the odd misspelling or obvious mistake but those which cause real confusion or mislead. My main quarrel is with the first paragraph, where you put in "1969", when I thought we were both writing about 1970. More serious is the case of the fourth sentence, which you have beginning: "I was probably there on that very date that Arab frogmen blew up two ships..." Well of course I was there (in Eilat) when those ships were blown up. The sentence should begin: "It was probably there on that very date that..."

[Actually, I am pretty sure what went in TM re the bombing is what was in your MSS, but I can't find it at the moment. - Ron.]

How can Andrew Darlington dismiss C.S. Lewis's THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH to a slight piece of "occult flim-flam" (that) would have been forgotten if not for the furnace heat of its two predecessors"? It made a deep impression on me, as I said in WAY BACK WHEN. I read it before the said predecessors. I was impressed by the depiction of the wicked scientists, who amongst other goals wanted to wipe out all the animals economically useless to man. That spoke to me very tellingly of the dreary scientism that pervaded the world at the time (the late sixties).

Since beginning this letter I have dug out THE MENTOR #74 to check up on Don Boyd's address, only to realize with a shock that I had only looked at it and not actually read it! So I'll make a couple of comments thereon here.

Andrew deals a lot better with W.E. Johns than with C.S. Lewis. As a boy I read what must have been the first of the Clinton books. THE KINGS OF SPACE, and I made a comment thereon in CRUX #34, so I'll just add to that here. Johns describes Jupiter as "still burning" after the holocaust that created the asteroids thousands of years earlier. At one stage the heroes approach that burning planet, whereupon one of the characters warns: "We'd better keep clear of that big fellow." (or something like that).

Lastly, if we're going to criticize such nuts and bolts as spelling and grammar, I'd like to point out that

Coulson writes "(verb or preposition) (So-and-so) and I" no less than thrice all in column 2 on page 5. That irritates that hell out of I. (18.9.92)

DUNCAN EVANS, RMB 1392 Mt Gambler Rd, Casterton, Vic 3311.

TM #76 arrived safely a couple of weeks ago. Alas, it went straight onto the "pending" shelf. Between trying to write stories, helping to finish the parents' house, training two pups, getting through all my other reading, and the old man throwing his back out, I was having trouble making time to sit down and give TM the attention it deserves. Then yesterday morning we had a power failure. *Right, I thought, here's your chance.*

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK by Sean Williams. Well done, though I had a little trouble buying it when the two characters fell in love. Sure, maybe it does come under the heading of "Something That Was Meant To Be". But we can only infer this from what we later learn about each character's history; at the time, it just struck me as unconvincing. Gauntley's reaction when he finds Karin waiting in the back of the car was convincing. The old reality gauge went *ping!* Spot on. Ah, love. Jon Anderson would get right into this one. A good yarn.

USED BOOKS by Shane Dix. Figured it out well before the half way mark, but I still thought it was nicely written.

NOTHING NICE by Duncan Evans. Stylized waffle. And the typo where a line from page 74 pops up again very early on page 75, happens in kind of an unfortunate place. What a time to break for a coffee, Ron.

THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER by Evan Rainer. Nice one. A hint of Harrison. A shade of Sheckley. Slightly muddy in places, however. I'm dazed-and-confused enough already, so I get a bit distressed when I'm reading a story where the same character is referred to by a different tag almost every time he's mentioned (ie: "the nerd", "Jimmy Astor", "the nerd" again, "Jimmy Astor" again, then just "Jimmy", then back to "Jimmy Astor", then "the geek", then "the nerd" again, then "Jimmy again, etc.) I'm looking at what I've just written, and it seems like I'm nit-picking. I'm not. It really does make a difference. Stick to just plain "Jimmy", or whoever, and the story will flow more smoothly, - which can only make it even better than it already is. I liked it a lot. *Shit, now I sound patronising.*

COMPACT by James Verran. Good, but I reckon more could have been done with it. The "story-heard-in-a-pub setting wasn't, perhaps, the most suitable way to approach this one.

TREES ALONG A DELTA by Brent Lillie. Good idea, but this is another one that would benefit from a bit of expansion. I found it difficult to care much about what happened to anyone in it.

THE FARM STORY by Grai Hughes. I liked the image of the grandfather out in the field, chucking a fit while he's bound up in bailing wire - put me in mind of the stone age Corn Man "*The bread cries out for blood!*" Yeah.) I also liked the straw cattle with flowers for their faces. I was waiting for the old guy to start blowing holes

in the kids, but he never got around to it. Excellent. I appreciate being wrong about stuff like that. Nice ambiguous ending. A good yarn.

C. S. LEWIS: A MINUET OF GIANTS by Andrew Darlington. Another good piece, but now I'll have to get pedantic because I'm not sure about science fiction being "an essentially atheistic medium". More like "agnostic", I'd have thought. Ask an atheist about God and he or she will tell you there isn't one. Whereas an agnostic will say, "I don't know." Without scientific evidence either way, she or he will suspend judgement and stay wobbling on the fence. Which means that atheism, in the absence of real proof that a God *doesn't* exist, becomes as much a matter of faith as theism, deism or any other ism. I thought a big part of science fiction was about keeping an open mind and saying, "Well... maybe." Isn't it? I'm just quibbling over words here. Don't mean anything by it.

If I haven't mentioned the other articles it's only because I had nothing specific to say. I enjoyed them all. TM #6 was a darn good read. (24.9.92)

GEORGE IVANOFF, 30 3rd St., Mentone, Vic 3194.

Thanks for TM 76. I thought the fiction in this issue was definitely better than the last - certainly not as depressing.

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK by Sean Williams was a well written piece that had my undivided attention from start to finish. USED BOOKS by Shane Dix was a tad predictable, but entertaining nevertheless. I found THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER by Evan Rainer extremely tedious. COMPACT by James Verran was good, but like USED BOOKS, a little predictable.

NOTHING NICE by Duncan Evans and TREES ALONG A DELTA by Brent Lillie were my favourite stories. I hope we get to see more of their writing. I enjoyed THE FARM STORY by Grai Hughes, but I don't understand why it was printed in TM. It's not a genre story.

Bill Congreve's article on Terry Dowling was excellent. I've read two of Dowling's books, RYNOSSEROS and WORMWOOD. Although I enjoyed both, I thought WORMWOOD was the superior. Dowling's ability to create such detailed and intriguing societies never ceases to amaze me. I will definitely be buying a copy of BLUE TYSON, and of any other books he has published in the future. (27.9.92)

STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Pl, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England.

Of the "minainthology" of pollution/devastation-themed stories in #75, I found SANCTUARY the most empathic - I cared about the protagonists - which I didn't either in the, in plot terms, much more developed HEARTBREAK HOTEL, or in GREY CLOUDS. ASHTA THE FOOL was entertaining as a twist-parable; with LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS my first reaction, I have to admit, was "Oh god, not talking trees again", and ROCK A BYE BABY, despite a lot of power, I found grew increasingly unbelievable - even allowing for regression,

the central figure didn't ring true as a scientist, whereas if he'd been the initial button-pusher who started the war his verbal-mental outburst would have seemed more credible - and, above all, given close supervision, how on earth did he manage to get the body parts to assemble his Frankenstein child, and how had he kept them deep frozen, and so on - a pity, because the image of holding the "shreds and patches" of child is a very powerful one in itself.

The folksong history of Indiana sounds fascinating - perhaps if you asked him nicely Buck Coulson might let you print the words of one or two, or maybe they will be appearing in book form?

Your printing of Pavel Viazulkov's prose piece, followed by the statement that you will only print Australian fic, is an ingenious paradox, reminiscent of the '60s postcards with THIS IN A BLANK SPACE printed on - or perhaps you would say it isn't fiction, but, as Pavel himself says, "prose-poem" - definitional questions again. Has an appealing timeless/folk tale feel, anyhow.

Andy Darlington's article on CITIES IN FLIGHT was a reminder of how much pleasure the books gave me, years ago (even though I still think Amalfi was a fink the way he betrayed the "march" of the Okie cities for justice) I'm sure there must've been other ways such a "New Machiavelli" could've unmasked the Vegan orbital fort without that particular "failure of class solidarity").

Various points in locs that stir impulse to respond, but only two sufficiently... first, to praise Verran's self-addressed rejection slip, a gem... reminds me of an idea, unfortunately never brought to fruition, of reviewing mags (under a pen-name, for safety's sake!) in terms of their rejection slips/letters ("Corkscrew Slug's rejection slip, apart from its three glaring grammatical errors, and the fact that it is printed on old toilet paper, has a typographical quirkiness worthy of a better cause" etc.) Grai Hughes' "All SF is revolutionary...: thus poetry" sentence, it seems to me, is in logical contradiction to his final par re poetry... the illogically, I think, becomes apparent with the point ("Sneyd's Law", he says brazenly) that *no* poetry can depict reality wholly/accurately. Therefore *all* poetry is fantasy. QED.

Of the art, the mazing/amazing cover illo has triggered off a poem, which is hereunder: Mentioning poetry in context of Grai Hughes' letter, and above paragraph, brings me to this's Poetry Supplement. Thought Julie Vaux' evocative APOLOGY FOR THE SPHINX o'ded a bit on rhetorical questions. THE MAN IN BLUE is ingenious in the way it used the paradox-poem genre to capture the paradox-being of a vampire. Favourite this time, tho, for me has to be Robertson's ADRIFT, even though third stanza is more like chorus than culmination.

WHERE THE WHALE-ROAD WENT

up, up from stark rock fang
alone in endless isolating ocean
tremulous lavish polyp cluster rises
as only dreamland domes and turrents can

in brightly-coloured books, light-years ago, of far-off childhood: they, Camelot, Ys, Babylon, Ecbatans, rose, remember, in that self-same spire-bright way.

Wave-skimmer scoutship halts: here, enrapt in smiles of reminiscent wonder, crew, porthole-clustered, entranced, stare, blind, deaf to what happens under

their hull. There, tree-thick, god-strong, tendrils arising from drowned deep clutch, grasp, grip. Escape is at full power, just, with buckled damaged plates that weep.

Limping to rendezvous they see far-off another polyp castle-cluster crown distant pinnacle - then, horror, discover their own ship is its upthrunder -

will never fly them on again on search unending through the galaxy - but then, here, they have found their Xanadu the dream come true that will not set them free.

(3.10.92)

THE MENTOR #76 arrived this week. Great cover - Edwina Currie or is it Esther Rantzen (sorry about those Brit-centred references) to the life.

Sorry to see the Poetry Section has shrunk - though I do like the way the survivor is used as a backcover - and the illo, though at first unrelated, does take on a "strange attractor" style link as the poem proceeds.

P.78 - if the Thomas the Rhymer book (blurb or content) sets the story in England, sorry, it's wrong; Thomas the Rhymer was Thomas of Ercildoune in the S. of Scotland - a different country, as any Scot will forcibly make clear.

Struck by the Alderson loc re a de-industrialised town trying to boot-strapise by a media event. The Dearne Valley E. of here, one of the earlier victims of our government's crazed attempt to destroy our coal industry, as final revenge on Arthur Scovgill or whatever, is trying something similar, building up to staging a massive folk opera with cast of thousands next year in hopes the world will notice. Good luck to both places.

Re the ongoing saga of Peter Brodie's FORBIDDEN PLANET researches, and comments thereon, PB might like to know that STRANGE ADVENTURES magazine here plans a special commemorative issue on FORBIDDEN PLANET (recently did a massive BLADERUNNER one), and I imagine wd jump at the chance to use his latest data/discoveries (STRANGE ADVENTURES is Tony Lee, 13 Hazely Combe, Arreton, Isle of Wight PO30 3AJ, England.)

Must read Blish's THE NIGHT SHAPES, not looked at it for years but remembered it w. pleasure. Re Michael Hailstone's spelling, in fairness it shd be pointed out that he's an adherent of one of the simplified spelling movements, ie he spells like that out of principle (albeit not one I share rather) than ignorance. Doubtless he'll

send his own defense, but I feel that point shd be "on the record".

I thought *computers* were for the pale-and-interesting who can't afford real therapy (is there such thing, and does it work?) - ie today the "socially challenged" sink into the screen rather than the scan.

Grai Hughes' story is superb, the SFnal only in the fact that he follows a frequent SF tradition of embedding a poem in a story. COMPACT and TREES ALONG A DELTA work strongly, too, effectively controlled nightmares. NOTHING NICE was very well written, but cnd't escape the knowledge a happy ending was coming. MARTIAN CADAVER I think hung uneasily between tongue-in-cheek parody and straight pulp actioner. USED BOOKS was a nice idea but too long for what it was, and LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK was a case where I couldn't find the characters interesting enough to care about the unfolding explications, sorry.

Of the articles, enjoyed Andy Darlington's insights into the C.S. Lewis trilogy - it was also refreshing to have a Lewis analysis that didn't depend on dubious speculation about the writer's sexual preferences. The piece on Argentine SF, like a recent one re Lithuanian SF I saw somewhere is a reminder how much has gone on that the Anglo world has missed out on down the years. Perhaps enough such looks at SF terra incognitas will leave to translations being made available. (8.11.92)

GLEN CHAPMAN, 29 Janice St., Seven Hills, NSW 2147.

Thanks for issue 76 of THE MENTOR, didn't like the cover illustration, looked like something I would see after a few too many ales. Mind you I was impressed with the paper used for the binding.

Sean Williams offering LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK, was an interesting story, one of my biggest complaints with stories in THE MENTOR is the author doesn't take the time or effort to develop the background in which he/she is working in.

Not Sean, the information, about a possible future universe, and how it came into being was first rate. I could be a little over reacting but the texture of the story struck me as showing strong influences by authors such as Larry Niven.

My complaint about the story was the prose. The story read as if I had opened a tin of cream of chicken soup, only to find chunky style inside, an example of what I mean is the last sentence on page 3. It runs for over forty words, using only two punctuation marks. That's a hell of a chunk for someone looking for a quick read to swallow. Also in other places it seemed too many words were being used, to no real advantage of the story.

Among the rest of the fiction I really couldn't find enough to get excited about, the notable exception being THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER, by Evan Rainer. Shit title, otherwise excellent in every department. Don't laugh, a while ago Stanley Schmidt, (Editor of ANALOG) wrote a good article on the value of story titles, in particular for unknown authors trying to get out of the sludge pile, into print for the first time.

NOT BIG BROTHER, by Rachel McGrath-Kerr (why do I know that name) offered quite a lot of food for thought. No pun intended. I also belong to the well upholstered section of our society (unlike Ron, the lean mean editing machine). I must say her article give rise to quite a number of very interesting story-lines based on her musing about where we are going with big brother. Lastly on the subject of "fat" characters in sci-fi, one did come to mind. The lead negro from the comedy RED DWARF, currently doing the rounds on the ABC.

Noticing the natives getting restless in the R&R Department, good to see after a couple issues of people being nice to each other. Firstly to Shane Dix, it's good to see your insults are as uninspired as your writing, I would suggest you write to Pete Brodie, for a course on how to really insult people.

I hope Buck Coulson was writing tongue in cheek about an Australian having the hide to screw with the English language, after all Buck you do come from the land that gave us such chestnuts as sox, nite, etc.

On the subject of Buck I must agree with your philosophy of only writing for money, however knowing Grai, I can see his point too, often he has remarked to me that he only sometimes writes for financial gain, preferring at times to do it simply for pleasure.

Re David Tansey's comments about the operational limits of spitfires, part of being an author, a responsibility actually, is to get the facts right!! As for not giving a fuck, I know at least three readers of THE MENTOR, currently trying to find out the information. No particular reason, just for the love of knowing.

John Alderson's letter about an attempt at a land speed record was of interest. It's a funny thing about Australians, most of us take quite a time to get moving on anything (it's not apathy, really just part of our culture), but when we turn our hand at a project, we can at times be among the most resourceful people on this planet. A fine example of this was in 1974, when cyclone Tracy trashed Darwin, destruction on a par with the recent events in Florida. The whole country seemed for a while to focus on helping the thousands of homeless at our top and to rebuild their lives.

An interesting side-light to those events was a sign placed outside the wreckage of the local cinema, it read "NOW SHOWING, GONE WITH THE WIND, STARRING CYCLONE TRACY".

To close, answering Julie Vaux's question about Halley's comet, probably not. Comets have a notoriously short life span. In all likelihood Halleys has only been swinging past since about the time of the pyramids (about five thousand years ago). (9.10.92)

LORRAINE CORMACK, PO Box 983, Woden, ACT 2606.

On the whole, I liked TM 76 much better than #75. I don't intend a slur on the quality of the work in TM 75, but the whole issue did end up with rather a doom laden feel - which proved a bit much for me in the end.

Not meaning to dump you in it, Ron, but Maria Louise Stephens took offence at my comment about the girl's "first" visit. I'd like to point out that I *did* quote her

correctly as referring to the "last" visit - it was obviously one of those typos which appear when you're retyping someone who's quoting someone else again. If you re-read my comments, Maria, with the correct quote - it still stands. You haven't shown us that she loves the "white fortress". The sentence jars and it isn't necessary. (And anyway, to me you implied the girl in the flashback was an earlier self of the modern girl, or at the very least, strongly emotionally linked. I can't see much reason for the earlier girl to love the place. Why would her counterpart?)

My other quibble was about bringing in the foreign language. In the light of Maria's response I'll partially withdraw the comment. As I said, because of the way that last little section was written, I had the impression the first piece of Hindi was spoken by the boatman, and that she answered him in Hindi, then translated her words for the benefit of the reader.

If the boatman wasn't talking, then you should clarify that. It's confusing. If he did make the first Hindi speech, then my comment stands. Her translation is awkward.

But don't ignore that I described these as two relatively small quibbles in a piece I enjoyed overall. Enough arguing about past issues. (I just hate being accused of inaccuracy, especially if the accusation itself isn't accurate.) I'll turn to TM 76.

LOOKING FORWARD... didn't get to me in the same way HEARTBREAK HOTEL did. The thing I really hate about time travel stories is their tendency to get tangled in people doing something because they know if they did it; or looping around and around, displaying footwork which is just too fancy for words...

There wasn't actually anything wrong with the story - the writing was good, so was the characterisation, and I read it through despite my dislike of this kind of story.

THE AFFAIR OF... was another story which fitted neatly into my few categorical hates in fiction. I cannot abide stories based on a stupid misunderstanding which just keeps going on and on and on. Especially when more similarly stupid misunderstandings are thrown in. I couldn't bear to read more than a few pages of this.

To be fair, though, what I did read seemed reasonably well written. I didn't think the characterisation was very strong, although there were some promising flashes. And a couple of times there were real jumps in the narrative. For example, between the paragraph at the bottom of column one (page 35) and the para at the top of the next column. That was such a jerk, for a moment I thought Ron might have accidentally overlooked a transitional paragraph. You did it somewhere else, though, even in the few pages I read, so I guess he didn't.

Look, I hated the premise of this so much that negative comments keep popping up on my screen. I didn't like the story, but apart from the comments above, I quite liked your writing style.

On the other hand, I can say lots of good things about NOTHING NICE. One of those pieces which really appealed to me for no very rational reason. It's well written, lively, not a wasted word - and leaves a lovely

tantalising end floating loose. I'm rather partial to that, done well. My pick of the issue.

I liked USED BOOKS too. A simple but intriguing premise which Shane didn't overload with explanation or deep and meaningful overtones. It caught my interest, and kept it; and the writing itself was smooth, with nothing sticking out for me to pick on.

COMPACT didn't have much wrong that I could put my finger on (apart from some slightly erratic punctuation and dialogue which didn't quite ring true), but somehow it just didn't come off.

Brent Lillie started off well with TREES ALONG A DELTA, but lost his way about halfway through. It was a neat idea, and not stretched too far. But there wasn't any real emotion there - not horror, no fear - it all just collapsed in a heap. THE FARM STORY managed just the opposite, sustaining a plot which seemed almost invisible with a strong dose of emotion. I liked it. A bit over the top in places, but it didn't detract from the overall impact.

I didn't enjoy - and didn't read all of - the Argentine history of SF and fandom. Too much description of the plots of books, and not enough about where they were coming from. And although I usually enjoy Andrew Darlington's articles, the same flaw deterred me from reading this one about C.S. Lewis.

Rachel McGrath-Kerr's article was lively and interesting. I particularly enjoyed Buck Coulson's column this issue - great stories; they really made me laugh.

Overall, another good issue, which I enjoyed - thanks for sharing. (7.10.92)

RACHEL MCGRATH-KERR, 20/65 Park Ave, Kingswood, NSW 2747.

I'm finally in my new flat, and although most of my belongings are still in boxes and there's hardly any furniture, I've nevertheless unpacked my typewriter and have started dealing with a pile of long overdue correspondence. In fact, I really ought to think of investing in a vacuum cleaner before anything else. The carpet layer came here this morning, and while the new carpet looks heaps better than the last stuff, the carpet layer would qualify as a less-than-tidy person, i.e. there are too many carpet scraps and stray tacks lurking in wait for bare feet.

Thanks to those who wrote in with their ideas on s-f poetry. For the moment, I think I'll avoid writing it (sighs of relief perhaps?) but I'll still continue to read it, maybe giving poetry in s-f zines a bit more critical thought.

One of my first re-introductions to Oz was the meeting of the Science Fiction Society of Western Sydney as soon as I returned to Penrith. (For those unfamiliar with this area of Oz, Penrith, of which Kingswood is a suburb, is a city that is so far west of Sydney that it finishes at the base of the Blue Mountains). Okay, the word "meeting" could possibly sound boring, conjuring up visions of minutes, seconding motions, tedious arguments, etc. Ours would be more correctly termed video nights, writing discussions, and more. Just a fun way to spend a Friday evening. This time it was a video evening: THE

DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS and AMERICA 3000 (so bad it was funny).

I didn't like the cover of TM 76. I'm unsure whether it's the artistic style, the illo's content, or the several interpretations that I made. It would be a dull world if all illos were the same style or equally bland, however.

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK really caught my attention once I'd ploughed past the first three or four pages. Some of the "scientific explanations" lost me completely, despite re-reading them, and only became partially clearer quite a while later. However, I liked the basic premise and the conclusion provoked some thought about what would happen next.

I read Grai Hughes' THE FARM STORY with interest. Having grown in farming districts, I've met a range of farmers, but never one like Grandad. Quiet desperation and a continual struggle are common to all too many of those on the land, almost taken as a fact of life. It seems strange reading of such an extreme, particularly the way the story deceptively starts with the commonplace and lures the reader into thinking that the fantastic could possibly happen. (20.10.92)

WALTER WILLIS, 32 Warren Rd., Donaghadee, N Ireland BT21 OPD.

I found THE MENTOR 75 awaiting my return from Magicon, but nobly refrained from even opening it while I could still read my notes and finish a trip report. That done, I turn to commenting on the fmz that arrived during my absence, of which, lo, THE MENTOR's name leads all the rest.

Of the stories this time my favourite was ASHTA THE FOOL. I thought it was a neat variant of NIGHTFALL, and so well done it fooled me.

Of the rest of the contents, my favourite was the Hailstone travelogue. It reminds me vividly of the similar instalments he published in his own fanzine, down to the idiosyncratic spelling and neologisms. And to his habit of touching on fascinating aspects of his journeying without explaining them fully. For instance I would like to hear more about this accident he was involved in, apparently caused by his inability to fasten his safety belt. I cannot understand why the driver was not furious with him for his wilful stupidity, instead of offering to pay his medical bills.

The juxtaposition of his account and yours works well. I have this clear picture of a map of the Eastern Hemisphere on which moving lights trace the respective movements of yourself and Michael.

In the letter section, I particularly enjoyed Peter Brodie's exposure of the dreaded manila folders.

In answer to Rachel McGrath-Kerr, I have seen each instalment of QUANTUM LEAP since the beginning, but don't remember any very satisfactory explanation of how the hero got into time-hopping in such a major fashion.

I've been wondering what to say about the poetry section. All the pieces are literate, but they all seemed to me to be excessively obscure. They give me the impression of having been thought over so intensely that

essential elements have been left out because they now seem so obvious to the author.

Andrew Darlington's piece about Blish was short, but well worth publishing. It reminds me of the sheer merit of Blish's work, taken as a whole, and makes me determined to read it all again. (22.10.92)

SHANE DIX, 7 McGillp Ave, Glengowrie, SA 5044.

Some excellent fiction in TM #76. I was very impressed by Duncan Evans' writing, though found the conclusion to the story disappointing. Nevertheless, nice style and some superb descriptions. And another good one from Grai Hughes, too. I was surprised that there hasn't been more of his work published professionally (or has there?). Brent Lillie's was a good idea, though I felt it could have been used to better effect. Liked the title, too, though fucked if I could see the relevance (but then, that's just me: Mr Thickly [sounds like a good title for the Mr Men series, eh?]). Big stories, big LoCs; if Sean Williams keeps this up there isn't going to be any room in TM's pages for anyone else. I did like his story though. The best of the batch. A good yarn with an interesting twist on the old time-travel theme. (Of course, I withdraw these comments should the bastard have anything bad to say about me in his LoC.) I also loved Josef Szekeres' accompanying illustration to my own story.

Blair Hunt: I also was unsure of your gender, Blair. This is strange, as one of my old hoon-day acquaintances was this rather burly bugger by the same name. Clad in leather, clouded by drugs, he would just as soon smash your face in as talk to you (in fact, he often confused the two, which became something of a problem). So I can only assume that my confusion came from the combination of the actresses Linda Blair and Linda Hunt. Anyway, who really gives a toss, right?

And only one poem this issue. Funny, seemed like more. (29.10.92).

[I get nearly as much poetry as ficiton, but the authors tend to send more than one at a time - of course there are writers who also do that.... - Ron]

PAVEL A. VIAZNIKOV, P/Box 344, Moscow A-502, Russia SU-125502.

Thank you for sending me a copy of TM and for putting in IN THE FARAWAY LAND... All I wanted was to share it, so who cares in which part of the zine it gets? I would be most grateful and really indebted to you if you could find it possible to send me your readers' letters about it (if any). I say "indebted", because I cannot see any way in which I could pay you - we here do not get IRCs, or do I have a possibility to send a money-order. My salary is 8,000 roubles - more than many people's, but, as today US1=354 R. - well, you see. (Prices are not like abroad, too, so we manage somehow. But \$5 for a copy, even Australian dollars...) See, I have to beg. Huh.

[Don't worry, Pavel. This is why fanzines are available for "the usual" - that is, articles, fiction and Letters of Comment. Many people are like you, and editors accept things that writers have put time into, as well as ca\$h. I have published comments on your story/Loc in this issue's R&R Dept - Ron]

If they get a copy of FIREBIRD in the Moscow Foreign Literature Library, I'll surely read it - as even now I *did* laugh at the review. Thanks! By the way, have you read any Russian SF? I could recommend you the Strugatsky brothers - their novels (some of them) have been translated into English; Theodore Sturgeon wrote an article about one, and it was published in DEFINITELY MAYBE. I know that others were translated, too. We have lots of *very* good writers here, but, of course, the language is a problem and you can not enjoy stories by Olga Larionova, Kir Bylichov, E and L. Lukins, Anotoly Rybakov, Alexander Bushkov, Sergey Lukyanenko, Vladislav Krapivin and many others - be it that they were translated, you'd be amazed at how much excellent SF is hidden from you.

By the way - how come you named Ron Hubbard's FEAR as an "excellent fantasy"? I have not read anything that boring since we had Scientific Communism at the University! This Hubbard reminded me of our well-(but ill)-known writer Yuri Petukhov, a person of fantastic workability and of equally remarkable absence of fantasy and good taste. For one thing, he publishes a right-wing, chauvinistic-orientated SF paper VOICE OF THE UNIVERSE (GOLOS VSELENNY) - he claims that many articles in it, esp. anti-semitic or naming Yu. Petukhov "Europe's best SF writer" - are written by the Universal Spirit or the Absolute Conscience. He also publishes reports from Hell and other dimensions, which, as he says, are true as the Truth itself. And his novels For one, STAR REVENGE: Ivan the Star Ranger goes somewhere to save his girlfriend, "they" catch him and hang him head down in a tower - he is not affected, being a trained spaceman. "They" are The Enemies - could be extra-terrestrials, parallel world maniacs, Chthluthlu punks or CIA agents (mutated). Ivan escapes, they catch him anew and restore him to his bottom-up position. He escapes again, etc. And again. At last he gets somewhere (I don't know where - and it does not matter), and there finds his girl who is being turned into an egg-laying device, like an ant-queen. Why, is not explained. So he just saves her

And I wish you could have a glimpse of fan life here. For one thing, we have *crowds* of JRRT fans, many of them writing sequels to LOTR, rewriting all the Tolkien books from the point of view of the Black Forces, having role games of all types, and claiming that they are elves/gnomes/valar/Nazguls/magicians reborn - they mean it! Some even refuse to answer to their real names.

[Sounds like some people in fandom here... - Ron]

Some write alternate histories of the world - esp. of this country (as few people are satisfied with its real history). My friend Seva Vsevolod Martynenko makes models of fighter planes which could have been built but never were.

Well, there are many ways to pass time.

Perhaps you've noticed it at Volgacon. (20.20.92)

[No, Volgacon was pretty quiet - though there were parties. - Ron.]

JOY BUCHANAN, Lot 1093 Andromeda Drive Cranbrook, NSW.

I thought I might let the readers of The Mentor know about the meetings we have here in Penrith that Bill Congreve mentioned in his LOC in #76.

Our last meeting was held on the 21th of August. Informality is the rule of our SF nights which are usually held every three to four weeks (we are quite happy to talk during the commercial breaks when a big footy game is on, I'm actually getting to understand the game now), They are usually held either at my place or Linda's, Glen thought that having a SF meeting at Andromeda Drive is fairly novel.

Rachel and I started these meetings up about 18 mths ago as the ones being held up in the Blue Mountains were hard to get to (no car), thou we don't have a large attendance we've got regular SF nighters.

The nights normally start about 7.30 pm and end? (depends if Glen Chapman is in a real talkative mood or not). I managed to tape one morning at 3am an SF movie called AMERICA 3000 by Golden and Globus (need I say too much). A spaghetti SF movie and one of the funniest I've seen a long time. So we watched it at the last meeting and it went down really well. I did feel a little out-numbered thou as the story was about the Faus (females) against the Machos (males). I was the only female there that night and was surrounded by some fairly (shit) stirring males. The only way to enjoy some of these movies is to take them to pieces and I can assure you we DO.

We intend to make every second meeting a movie night and the race is on to find the worst movie of all time. We usually spent our meetings talking about any and everything, from SF, movies, football, work and Uni: I've gone back to Tafe and hope to get into Uni in 94, (sometimes miracles can happen). So I tended to glean as much help from the guys as I can, but mostly we talk about books. Where to buy good second-hand ones, which ones to avoid, also new releases. We do end up having the occasional fantasy vs fiction vs horror arguments, I'm the Anne McCaffrey, Andre Norton (only got 45 of them but I'm working on it) fan, or fanatic, if you want to be technical, while Bill and Linda are our Stephen King readers, Glen and Craig seem more in to fiction and Ron and Maria tend to sit on the fence.

Bob is a newcomer and I'm not too sure on what he likes (no nasty remarks Glen if I said the wrong thing) and Rachel when she isn't jaunting around Europe is our resident Dr Who and Red Dwarf expert. So this combination can really make for some very different and interesting discussions. At these nights I've gotten some really really good advice about how to write stories, what to do to get them published and where to send them. To a struggling writer (one small item in The Mentor) this advice is greatly appreciated. To all budding SF or any type of writers I really recommend this. You can get a heck of a lot of information just by asking, all SF writers just love to talk.

If you'd like to hear more about when our nights are on you can either write to me at the above address or give Ron a call (sorry no phone, or car).

Oh, is there any wealthy SF nut out there that likes short, fat, slightly warped females? If so, let me know). (-.10.92)

NED BROOKS, 713 Paul St, Newport News, VA 23605, USA.

Darroll Pardoe is mailing his zine in a plastic baggie that way, and has gotten some with a surface prepared to write on and stick stamps to. With your circulation it is no doubt better to computer-print the address and put it inside. I used a software (free from the PO) to put our postal barcodes on IGOTS this year, though it meant that I had to separate out the non-US addresses.

Great cover by Steve Fox. The fiction is interesting if not great - odd that the first two stories have people freezing in a post-holocaust world. And two stories with extreme acid rain too - is this telepathy or editor's choice? I liked Blair Hunt's ASHTA THE FOOL!

Are the endless typos in Hailstone's piece his or yours? It's an interesting account otherwise.

Pavel Viazulikov's POEM IN PROSE that you didn't publish because he isn't Australian is really pretty good! The slightly misquoted last four lines of Poe's ANNABEL LEE at the beginning and end should have been credited though. (7.11.92).

PAMELA BOAL, 4 Westfield Way, Charlton Heights, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW, England.

The Mentor 76 has the impeccable appearance we have all come to expect but do I detect rather more typos than usual? The front cover is well drawn and designed. I hate the savagery it evokes. My heart (which I confess is essentially a romantic one) is also saddened by the beautiful flowing mermaid (back cover) being given a skull to hold.

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK has excellent pace which is just as well because it carries the reader through the pseudo scientific gobbledy gook which can be a little intrusive. If you are giving explanations make sure you believe and understand the answers yourself or avoid letting your characters demand explanations. The reader is aware that Sorenson is female almost immediately so I see no point in delaying Gauntly's discovery of the fact. Likewise, the fact that Sorenson destroyed her home world is signalled too soon. If I seem a bit picky it is because I can feel an excellent novel in that short story and would love to see it written.

A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION & FANDOM IN ARGENTINA. A subject not without interest and the author presents us with a wealth of well researched material. Perhaps a little too much material, the presentation a little too pedantic. I found it heavy going and found myself distanced from information I wanted to assimilate. The fault could well be my own and I do contratulate you Ron and the broad range of material you obtain for TM.

USED BOOKS. A neatly crafted story, though I'm happier if the I in a first person tale identifies themselves. I was also a little unhappy with the aggressive nature of the story-teller, curiosity is a strong enough motive to take him (assuming I is a him) back to the shop

so he doesn't need anger with the shopkeeper to forward the plot.

The conclusion of Rachel McGrath-Kerr's article made me realise that it was all rather tongue in cheek. Even so there is a definite link between excess weight and a range of health problems, in my extended family I can cite heart, lung and kidney problems and (very near to home) late onset diabetes. While the healthy ratio of weight to height and age has a much greater span than the slimming industry would have us believe, there is a limit, an individual who weighs in above that limit will not be recruited by a number of services (not only the armed forces) thus an overweight (as opposed to plump) first officer of either sex is an unlikely extrapolation.

The solution to weight problems (in relation to health rather than media image) is being tackled now, education in schools and of young parents regarding healthy eating. Of course ingredients of a healthy diet (note healthy not slimming) are subject to change, an apple a day may still keep the doctor away but apples are now considered a route to the dentist. However most SF is set in the future and we must hope that in the future a healthy diet is agreed and that there is adequate and effective care or those who have emotionally engendered eating disorders.

As for the PC group they are creating the very bigotry they imagine they are fighting. Linguistically tortuous labels have much better handles for the bigot to grasp than the existing labels the PC group are trying to replace. There is a lot more to me and my life than dealing with the effects of an impaired body, calling me "Physically Challenged" implies there is not. Far too many members of pressure groups are in it because they enjoy a fight or because there is a living to be made out of the situation. Self help groups who's members support each other towards a full and integrated life are much more relevant. I'm sure Rachel's lifestyle provides an example that is much more helpful than any shouting about fatism.

NOTHING NICE. An author who can so effectively recall the emotions and mental processes of a seven year old has my vote as an author most likely to succeed.

THE FARM. An excellent piece of writing and a sad but true slice of life. Evan Rainer lost my interest when he made Roy an alcoholic and gave Jimmy such stilted and improbable dialogue just to create confusion over the numbers one, two and three. The days when SF could do no better than take Chandler or cowboys into space are long gone.

TREES ALONG A DELTA. For me this story doesn't quite make it, I think because there is an implication that Den jumps through time yet at the same time it implies that he lives a full normal life while his mind is blacked out. Why did he kill his wife? The final scene implied that the toxic effect of the plant has not made him violent. It seemed to me that the author was so keen to tell the reader that the plant was spreading that he forgot to work out for himself just what the plant did to those who ate the berries nor did he give any real thought to the psychological effect of the blackouts/time jumping.

Buck Coulson is always smile worthy. Andrew Darlington's well written article substantiates and clarifies my own (and I'm sure other peoples) thoughts on C.S. Lewis. I find myself agreeing with Bill Congreve's analysis of Terry Dowling's effective use of language. (10.11.92)

TERRY BROOME, 92 Ramshead Cresc, Seacroft, Leeds LS14 1PH, England.

(THE MENTOR) has improved in leaps and bounds since I first wrote - the gorgeous paper, particularly the green textured card covers, is a real treat, and disguises the flaws of the cover illustrations wonderfully, turning them into much better illustrations than I fear they would seem on plain white paper.

The internal art is something else again. You have gone from using mainly sub-standard art familiar from many other fanzines, to such a high standard that the best work of THE MENTOR a couple of years ago is now the worst, and that in a minority. The Jozef Szekeres illustration on page 27 is *so* good I feel like kissing it. If that was drawn from a real person, my address is above!! I could gush over most of the art now, but I was particularly impressed by that on pages 23, 30, 45 and 84 (which did benefit from the textured paper.)

It's also encouraging to see two in-depth critical essays - is this the shape of things to come? I hope so. It won't be long before you begin attracting author interviews and articles from professional writers. I wonder if I'm beginning to see an Australian INTERZONE or LOCUS in the making, the kind of thing which starts from humble beginnings and ends up with glossy covers, a huge subscription and dozens of awards?

[Unlikely. For one thing the sf population in Oz couldn't support such a zine. - Ron.]

And it was amusing to read that we can expect *swill* in response to Steve Sneyd's letter on the way his mind works. I am sure Steve would appreciate plenty of it! (Only joking, Steve). Seriously, quite fascinating reading that. Maybe you ought to do a little section some time, where your poets can talk about the processes they go through to come up with the finished product. I envisage a Poet's Masterclass, where they dissect one of their poems and tell us why that word was changed, and why that sentence was swapped around and so on, what they hoped to achieve and whether or not they think they succeeded.

Saying all this, I still don't know why you send THE MENTOR. I stopped reading the stories some time ago, on the advice of that rascal, Steve Sneyd (who said I could do better devote my time to doing some writing myself) - well, he said, I could better use my energies writing stories rather than criticising them, and I agreed with him. I stopped *reading* the stories, because the fun was advising the writers later, and with so much other reading matter, I couldn't devote the time to it any longer. I really think you would get more return sending THE MENTOR to someone else. I feel guilty that you rarely get a letter from me these days and that I'm not doing your work the service it deserves. (11.11.92)

[There are several readers of TM that don't read the stories - that isn't to say that they don't read the other

contents. You might find, though, that when you read the comments on the stories in the R&R DEPT that it might help your writing in that you wouldn't make the same mistakes. As to not writing: I want letters of comment (like this one), and if you can't get around to writing one of these every second or third issue, then I will certainly drop such a reader. I am currently trimming dead-wood off, because of the scarcity of ca\$h. - Ron.]

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS, 27 Borough Rd., Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, England.

I must admit the back cover (of TM 76) should have been on the front this issue. Much more pleasant to look at - and why shouldn't a poem go on the cover? It would be distinctive.

The illustration on page 23 reminded me very much of the old pulps of the thirties. We now have a glorified shopping mall in Kingston that looks much the same - it's only taken them sixty years to catch up with sf illustrators. The pic on page 45 was also appealing.

This time, unusually, the fiction has it all over the non-fiction. As I enjoyed all the stories, it's difficult to pick a winner. It's unfortunate that Australian writers are doing so well at a time when shorts stories seem to be going out of commercial fashion.

The article on sf in the Argentine was interesting because nothing much gets published on this area.

The Syncon report could have been much longer, and I hope similar items will be in future. Not many overseas fans can get there, after all.

Obviously, American humour is different from English. Buck's stories were interesting, but i didn't find them funny.

The best non-fiction this issue was Bill Congreve on Terry Dowling. Which is odd because I tend to give reviews a miss. But I found this fascinating, and he certainly made me want to read these books. Hopefully they will get a wider audience in time.

Reviews: Robeson's WHITE EYES might interest me if I ever come across it. I've just read Pratchett's MOVING PICTURES; good fun, but he does seem to be getting serious these days. (12.11.92)

JOHN FRANCIS HAINES, 5 Cross Farm, Station Road, Padgate, Warrington WA2 0QG, England.

Ugh! 'orrible front cover (on TM 76), that thing's face looks like Mick Jagger.

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK was an excellent time-travel story - I take it we are to assume the Earth has been "moved" somewhere, not destroyed (and placed in orbit round another sun, we hope, otherwise the forests will be very, very dead.).

The Argentine SF piece was fascinating - it's so easy to think the SF world consists of the English-speaking countries, and to forget the possible contribution that of other cultures may have. Part of the problem is the lack of stuff available in translation, for I'm ashamed to admit that English is the only language I've ever even half-mastered; my French is on a franglais level, everything else is non-existent.

USED BOOKS was the star story this issue - I'm never going to be able to look at second-hand bookshops in quite the same way again! They can be like stepping into another world, especially those with cellars, dim-lit and isolated from all sound from outside; and yes, you get the proprietors who only grunt in answer to questions, seem reluctant to sell, or buy, wave you vaguely in the direction of the stock you want - or even deny they have things, despite them being clearly visible!

NOT BIG BROTHER was witty with a serious message - when did you last read an SF novel with a disabled hero? Bob Shaw's NIGHT WALK springs to my mind, but that was written a long time ago now, and I'm sure other loccers will bring other instances to light.

NOTHING NICE was another goodie - suspect Barney could feature in more than one story (hint).

Con reports I have my doubts about - they're fine as reminders of what happened if you were there, but to those not attending they can seem a bit mandarin.

THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER had, I suspect, too high a ratio of Australian in-jokes for us fuuriners to get much out of it. I'm all in favour of humour in SF, but found this a bit too whimsical.

Buck's reminiscences are very well written, but just a tiny bit too fannish for me - like the con reports, OK if you were there or know the person involved, otherwise it's a bit like peeking into someone's diary or letters.

CONTACT reminded me a lot of the kind of story I used to read in anthologies of the 1950s and early 1960s, well told but seems very old-fashioned. The "writers' block" device was particularly hoary as a means of advancing the yarn.

I don't know why I've never become a C.S. Lewis fan - I have SCREWTAPE but I've never been attracted by his other novels for some reason - yet I like his mate Tolkien, and his essay on alliterative poetry is very interesting. Excellent work from Andy, as usual.

TREES ALONG A DELTA was different enough to be enjoyable.

Terry Dowling is a new name to me. His work certainly sounds strange, though I'm not sure if I would enjoy it - I think the interdependence of it all would put me off a bit because there seems to be an obligation on the part of the reader to read it all, not just the odd one or two.

THE FARM STORY was very moving - it could have appeared in a "straight" magazine as well as an SF one, there being hardly any SF elements to it.

My thanks to Bill Congreve for being kind enough to soften the blows he dealt me a loc or three back. Suitably chastened, I shall try and not jump in with both feet in future.

Julie Vaux' poem made a nice finish to an excellent issue. (12.11.92)

BILL CONGREVE, 1/26 Central Ave., Westmead, NSW 2145.

There has been a little interest in my review of Sean McMullen's CALL TO THE EDGE. I enjoyed the book.

I would like to pass on a little information I've received since then. John Tipper sent along the specs for

the Spitfires in production at the time. It turns out that some later model Spitfires could reach Germany from England by carrying an external fuel tank. Obviously they wouldn't have much fuel left over for dogfighting once they got there. I've had it from a couple of sources that Spitfires didn't escort the American daylight bombing raids. However, officially, all kinds of Allied fighters used to shadow the bombers in an attempt to shoot down one of the German jets or rocket fighters low on fuel.

British heavy bombers such as the Lancaster and the Halifax were generally not used for daylight missions except for some special raids where the Lancaster's greater payload was necessary. Again, this changed right at the end of the war due to the operational need to bomb Germany and its people into the fifth dimension before the war ended. (Is anybody wondering right now about the rise of Nazism amongst Germany's youth in the 90s? In what context, I wonder? Is it connected, or do thugs just need to see how ugly they are in the newspapers as well as the mirror in the morning?)

None of this need detract from any reader enjoying Sean's marvellous story. And yes, he has done his research. 1.12.92

SHERYL BIRKHEAD, 23629 Woodfield Rd., Galtersburg, MD 20882, USA.

Perhaps it is just that I am tuning in late - but the colors of THE MENTOR covers are deliciously tasty - this one (TM 75) is a nice tangerine

Great to "see" Buck again - diabetes is a disease that is all too often sloughed off by Americans (perhaps others, too, but I can't speak for them) - it can be a devastating disease. I have looked for a physiological/biochemical explanation for some of the things that happen - in detail - the circulatory problems... the eye problems - but have not been satisfied with the information.

For me, over here, I don't see much of Steve Fox's work these days. I like the piece you chose to use as the cover illo and the one on page 19 lacks the (to me at times excessive) detail that is often his trademark. Don't get me wrong, the pieces are obviously vintage Fox - just different!

The baby in the Ranson piece on page 24 is just before the smile crinkles up at the sides of the mouth in a cooing "ooh Daddy - more, more!"

The Fox piece on p. 33 has more of the details (which distract me) which I mentioned being absent in the other two illos.

Michael Hailstone's column takes on in the tradition of the travelogue in THE MATALAN RAVE.

Just out of curiosity - do you print up pages with the R&R color "logo" and then use what you need - or do you print it up individually each issue?

[I print up about a ream of each colour and use it up every 3 or 4 issues - that way it lasts. Each time I use a colour I have to clean down the press completely. - Ron.]

As an I-think-I-know-the-answer to Rachel - in QUANTUM LEAP, the accelerator (I think that is the name) needed testing, but funding was in danger (now that sounds realistic) and a guinea pig was needed to see what

would happen - I believe the idea was to go and come back, but something went wrong and Sam is trapped in "linking" jumps. I am not that much of an aficionado, but I do enjoy the show.

Ego(artistically)istically I scanned the lettercol looking for comments on Peggy's cover to see if other fans make more comments on art than US fans... nope. Short plug - a lot of loccers mention that they don't know anything about art and therefore don't say anything. Heck - all it takes is a statement that you liked or didn't like a piece - and artists just as writers look for those comments. I keep asking fans to say more, but so far it isn't happening. Oddly enough, those that comment on fiction seem to do a more in-depth analysis and have more constructive criticisms than other loccers. Just an observation. (21.11.92

WAHF:

Wayne Edwards, J. G. Jackson, R. Lorraine Tutihasi, Marie-Louise Stephens, Margaret Pearce, Andrew Darlington and William P. Robertson.





THE UNTOLD LEGEND OF THE BATMAN by Wein, Aparo & Byrne. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1982. 156 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

Now, this is interesting. Going by the copyright and printing details, this is the first, 1988 edition.

THE UNTOLD LEGEND... is a comic in pocket-book form, and is written by Len Wein, illustrated by Jim Aparo and John Byrne. The volume is about the origins of Batman, Robin and his butler and of how the trio started out. I say trio as the *three* are really a team. Herein is told how Batman as a youngster was with his father and mother at a party where Batman, wearing a costume as a bat, put down an attempted robbery. Some time later both parents were killed because of this and Bruce Wayne swore vengeance on the killer/s. He picked a detective to help train him and managed to persuade that detective to help him. From then on the legend of The Batman started. I found it interesting that The Batman's original costume was that of the future Robin.

This comic is not really kids stuff - I read it on the train coming home from work, and thought the story was coherent and believable.

TIMEDIVERS DAWN by L.E. Modesitt, Jr. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1992. 348 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

I thought that this novel, with its L Ron Hubbard look-alike cover, would be one of those blast 'em and be damned novels. I read it, and found that it wasn't - it is actually worth reading.

The story is set either on an Earth of the far future - when all the metals have run out - or a planet much like Earth. The government is always on the look-out for resources, and when they start looking at the second planet from the sun - a furnace hell, but rich in metals - they find that it is inhabited - by beings a few degrees above zero K. The orbiting station tries to destroy these beings, and are themselves destroyed. The "Frost Giants" then attack the third planet, destroying most of the government, buildings

and people. The plot follows the adventures of Sammis, as he escapes the government soldiers that destroyed his house and killed his parents.

After many adventures he finds himself in the thick of the war against the "Frost Giants" and along with the beautiful scientist who is leading them, lends his weight and psychic talents in attempting to repel the invaders. Rollicking SF adventure.

MAIRELON THE MAGICIAN by Patricia C. Wrede. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1991. 280 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

Another fantasy from Tor. I have never heard of these authors - presumably they are Tor's own stable, and since Tor hasn't been distributed here in any great quantities, this is the first I've heard of them.

MAIRELON THE MAGICIAN commences with the urchin Kim watching as a sun-faded wagon pulled up at the markets and an old man set up the stage in its side. In a puff of smoke another man, who announced himself as Mairelon the Magician appeared and started to do magic tricks. Kim timed how long it took for the show to last and at the next showing snuck into the wagon to look for a bowl that a toff had offered her five pounds to look for.

Wrede writes with a smooth style and gets the reader in from the first. The society Wrede sets up reads as fairly coherent and is based somewhat on the early nineteenth century society in England (London). The story flows well and would suit those lovers of period fantasy (if such a thing exists). A good read.

A FIRE UPON THE DEEP by Vernor Vinge. Millennium h/c, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. (C) 1992. 391 pp. A\$34.95. On sale now.

There are several other novels of Vinge's that I have read, the more notable being THE PEACE WAR and MAROONED IN REALTIME.

A FIRE UPON THE DEEP is an ambitious novel - there are two basic plot strands - one follows the survivors of a research laboratory searching a two billion year old Archive, and the Pervasion they let loose, the other tells of the events that follow the attack by that perversion on that section of Galactic space called the Beyond.

There are zones around the galaxy - zones of slowness. There is the Unthinking Depths, the Slow Zone and the Beyond, where the Powers (races that have transcended themselves) dwell. The deeper one goes towards the galactic core the less well things work - for example you can't have FTL travel in the Slow Zone for very long.

The refugees reach a world but crash-land. The inhabitants of that world work in packs - about four individuals work together using a sort of telepathy and they are very slowly progressing. The refugees land and the adults are slaughtered, leaving the two children who are not in deep sleep separated. I found this novel very engrossing and I can *Recommend* it.

THE DRAGON REBORN by Robert Jordan. Orbit trade pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 595 pp. incl Glossary. A\$29.95. On sale now.

Quite a large book, this. This trade pb. is as large as a hardcover and nearly the price.

For those readers who have been following the events in the two previous Wheel of Time novels, THE EYE OF THE WORLD and THE GREAT HORN, this awaited novel will get them out in the shops buying it.

It is three thousand years since Therin Kinslayer with his one hundred companions had repaired the break in the Dark One's prison. Humanity had slowly build up from the rubble of the destroyed world and now there were three "Dragons" proclaiming themselves in the nearby lands. It did not matter than they were not really Dragons - some people still flocked to them. Forces were building around them and around others who were opposed to them. The warriors of the Children of Light - backed up by the Inquisitional soldiers - were attempting to keep their own lands under martial order, but changes were about to criss-cross the land and it might be that all their plans would be for nought.

Excellent fantasy.

A COMPANY OF STARS by Christopher Stasheff. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1991. 309pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

I have not read any SF by Christopher Stasheff before, and I was pleasantly surprised by this one. There are several SF novels about troupers amongst the stars - travelling live theatre companies and even actors - Heinlein's DOUBLE STAR springs to mind - but there aren't many that are well done and have that touch of apparent knowledge that makes the book ring true.

This is the first book of a series - by the end of the book the company is on the way. The novel is not slow going; there is plenty happening and lots of action (and philosophising, but it does not slow the plot). Several old

troupers in a future Broadway decide to break out of some old moulds and take the theatre to the frontier planets, but their going is accelerated by a proponent of a political party called the LORDS - a party using the tactics of the Moral Majority.

I found the novel interesting reading, though the very small print will give some readers trouble.

VOYAGE TO THE RED PLANET by Terry Bisson. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1990. 236pp. ja\$10.95. On sale now.

This novel is another with theatrical people in it - in this case Hollywood. It is several hundred years in the future and most of the US government has been sold off to private enterprise.

Markham had the idea to film a major motion picture on Mars - but there is only one spacecraft - built just before NASA was sold off the Disney. He manages to get a film crew, ship crew and two Stars off onto it and fly it out of orbit before one of the major corporations gets its legal claws into the ownership of the ship, the *Mary Poppins*. The ship makes Mars, and all but one of the crew lands to shoot the picture.

Bisson has written a good sf adventure story with VOYAGE, and with good distribution it should sell well. It has the ring of an old-time hard sf novel - and most of the readers of THE MENTOR will enjoy reading it. It is not a heavy read, but it satisfying.

WAS by Geoff Ryman. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 356 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now.

This is a "What if" fantasy tale - so convincingly told using facts from many sources - that you wonder where fact ends and fantasy starts. It is a multi-generation story starting in Kansas where a newly orphaned Dorothy Gael comes to the farm of her uncle and aunt, and moving through the different times and people so smoothly, that it moves as a constant flow.

Frances Gumm, who became Judy Garland, yet another tragedy figure touched by "Oz" (which is an ancient Red Indian dialect), and her family. Then young Jonathon, an autistic child who is drawn out of his solitary world by the movie OZ as he searches out where Dorothy Gael really lived with her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry. It is a cyclic tragedy tale, beautifully and realistically told, weaving back and forth. How L Frank Baum came to write the book is perhaps one of the most emotional parts of the story. Not for anyone who wants light fantasy. Instead, it is a good solid read that I just had to get through in one sitting. Compulsive reading. - Susan Clarke.

DOMES OF FIRE by David Eddings. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (c) 1992. 470 pp. A\$35. On sale now.

Book one of the Tamuli. When I first saw this book I thought "Not another Eddings!!" I was beginning to think that I was getting sick of his fantasies. Reading through THE SEERESS OF KELL and THE SAPPHIRE ROSE (he had two series going at once...) I found myself

beginning to slow down in reading them. I suppose it was reading the two series simultaneously. When I read this one, a sequel to *THE SEERESS OF KELL*, I didn't have any trouble in finishing it and enjoying it.

Sparhawk has married Ehlana and they were just getting settled when one of the bad eggs from the previous volume turned up. Sparhawk found himself, his wife and all his friends on a journey to visit the Tarmul Empire to the East. It looked like that the Troll gods were again loose, with the help of another God whose identity they had just figured out by the end of this book.

As with all Eddings works, *DOMES OF FIRE* is well written, with excellent characterisation and the quipping that marks all his fiction. A really good read.

MERIDIAN DAYS by Eric Brown. Pan Macmillan trade pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1992. 165pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

When I first saw this book, I thought, a new novel by Frederick Brown. Then I had a closer look.

Brown's style in the first few pages is very reminiscent of Ballard. He soon settles down into this stride, though, and this slant disappears. I found the book easy to read and it lasted about an hour and a half in reading time.

Meridian is a planet which receives its food supply from Earth by matter transmitter. It is a stark planet, with one face always held towards its star. The far face has a pool of molten lava facing the sun - on the backside humans can live, on islands in the narrow sea. It is basically an artist's colony - some rich and augmented physically and some Changed physically. The plot centres around a retired space-ship pilot who was forcibly retired when he was involved in an accident where a hundred or so of his passengers died. One of the rich artists was holding some "events" and he met the woman's daughter, Fire, and promptly fell for the girl. Nicely done SF adventure, with a mystery thrown in.

RAISING THE STONES by Sheri S. Tepper. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1990. 620 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

RAISING THE STONES is a novel about religion and bigotry. It is also a novel about the perceived difference between men and their wars and women and their static societies.

Hobbs Land was on a planet colonised long ago by humans from Earth. They also colonised Voorstad, another part of the planet, which was a most inhospitable place, with stark moors and everlasting damp and mist. Those in Voorstad were of that "Old Time Religion" and their god was full of fire and brimstone and death to others. All had been quiet until the people of Hobbs Land laid to rest the last of the native aliens' gods. The children of the settlers used the abandoned temple for playing in, and it was they who first came into contact with the resurrection of the aliens' god.

There is much feminist philosophy/lecturing in the novel - it is a little obtrusive at times - but all in all *RAISING THE STONES* is a good read and engrossing.

RULE GOLDEN and DOUBLE MEANING by Damon Knight. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1953 & 1954. 188 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

Damon Knight has not had many books in print lately, at least any that I have read, and it is good to see this volume of two of his novellas.

RULE GOLDEN is a moralistic story which answers the question of what would happen if what we did do others was automatically done to us. When an alien was captured by the US government, its influence spread unseen over the countryside. It was not till later, when it convinced the protagonist to help it escape and thus spread its aura over the rest of the world that the influence was really felt. What happens when a policeman shoots a fleeing criminal? Or when wars abruptly stop because when one soldier shoots another, they both die?

DOUBLE MEANING is also a story about an alien loose on Earth - though this time the novelette is more a murder mystery. The protagonist is a bureaucrat who has to endure a colonial who knows more about the alien than those on Earth. By the end of the story the alien is close to being killed, but the bureaucrat is also nearly at the end of his tether. Both stories are very well told and have not aged. A very engrossing read.

SMALL GODS by Terry Pratchett. Gollancz h/c, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 272 pp. A\$29.95. On sale now.

If you were one of those who thought that Terry Pratchett was getting close to mining out the Disc World, *SMALL GODS* will show that you were wrong.

Said *SMALL GODS* is about a small god - the size of a small tortoise. The god was much bigger a time ago - you see the more believers a god has, the greater its power. The god had many followers and the church hierarchy and its armies were very powerful. Unfortunately for the god, those followers did not *believe* in him; thus he was well on his way to the desert that the small gods ended up in. So the god took himself in hand and went in search of the one follower who still *believed* in him. Said follower was quite a simple soul - and being a gardener was quite low in the church. However he did *believe*.

This novel has Pratchett's humour and puns; it also has some well thought-out philosophy and some satire on religion - the Tepper may be full of sound and fury, but the Pratchett also makes his points made - and only the reader can judge whose will be remembered in future times.

GRUNTS by Mary Gentle. Bantam h/c, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 429 pp. A\$29.95. On sale now.

GRUNTS is subtitled by the publisher "A Fantasy With Attitude" and they're right! Some idea of what the novel is about can be gleaned by the cover painting - it shows that well-known scene of raising the stars and stripes at one of the Pacific islands in WW II, except what are shown are orcs, and the flag they are raising is the skulls and bars, with a black eagle superimposed.

The whole novel is a satire on fantasy novels - you know, those with the Last Battle between the forces of Dark and Light, and many other fantasies thrown in. When a band of orcs invade the hoard of a dragon which, with it's dying breath curses that what they steal from the hoard will shape them to it, they find modern (20th C Earth) weapons - AK 47s, bazookas, helicopters, 100 mm cannon, etc. In a world of magic you may think that would make a difference. What *does* make a difference is that the orcs base their new organisation on the US Marines - so the novel is a spoof on them, as well.

I chuckled all through this novel - it is a fresh and funny approach to this theme - *Highly Recommended*.

XENOCIDE by Orson Scott Card. Legend pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1991. 562 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

XENOCIDE is the third volume dealing with Ender, the others being ENDER'S GAME and SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD.

This novel deals with many things. The planet Lusitania is the centre of a galaxy wide struggle, though only those who live on it, some of the politicians in Congress, and two people on the world of Path know it. There are two alien races on Lusitania - the piggies, and the buggers, the queen of the former Ender had set free to continue her species' expansion. The queen is quite different from the time she was engaging humans in a fight to the death - she knows humans through Ender and knows that there are more ways to get things done than through violence.

The human Congress has sent a war fleet to bomb Lusitania, and only through the intervention of the entity known as Jane, who cuts off the ansible message to them authorising the bombing, is there any hope at all for the colony.

I found this novel an exceptional read, though the Christian dogma did intrude several times.

BLOOD AND HONOUR by Simon Green. VGSF trade pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 316 pp. A\$18. On sale now.

A fantasy set in the usual medieval type world, but the author at least has some little writing ability to keep the reader satisfied while they are reading.

Jordan was an actor. Though in his late twenties, he was very good at his art. So good, in fact, that the nobility enlisted his aid to help them in their fight against the Unreal. The king was dead and the three princes were trying to hold things together. One of the princes was deathly ill - and Jordan soon found himself - for a princely sum - impersonating him. The impersonation would go on for longer than Jordan really liked, and it taxed his acting ability, even with the memory voice whispering in his ear details of what he needed to know.

Simon Green also wrote BLUE MOON RISING; he is apparently, if these two novels are anything to go by, going to create a niche for himself in the field.

BEDLAM by Harry Adam Knight. Gollancz h/c, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 215 pp. A\$38.95. On sale now.

This time it's a horror novel. After a series of disappearances, the police find the den of a man they named the Bone Man, because of the way the remains of his victims were displayed.

Seven years after the man had been caught, the inhabitants of a block of flats experienced a vivid erotic dream - they dreamed a blond man had intercourse with them - even when the dreamers were male. It took some time, but eventually it was found out that experiments were being made of a new drug that enhanced dreaming. In fact it did more than that, but you'll have to get the book to find out what.

Knight is a horror writer who has had one other novel out that received good reviews: THE FUNGUS. I think that readers of horror will like this one, also.

MICROSOFT WORD FOR WINDOWS 2 by Pamela Beason and Stephen Guild. Wiley pb (19x23.5 cm), dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 400 pp. A\$39.95. On sale now.

WINDOWS 2 is the latest version of Word For Windows, the desktop publisher that I use for THE MENTOR. This is a "Self-Teaching Guide" and steps through all that you would need to master the program, and then some - for instance they go into how to do mailing labels, which is really neat, and which is what I use for TMs mailing labels.

Some people find that figuring out a Word Processing program is hard - and some of the things that need to be done, such as changing the default so that your data directory comes up where you actually have the data files (I have mine on D drive, not C) is hard to find in the Word manual, but it set out here nice and easy.

I find Word 2, with its updated files and new accessories, very easy to use and user friendly. And this book is well worth the outlay to get Word 2 running smoothly, and to make full use of the program.

DHALGREN by Samuel R. Delany. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1974. 879 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now.

This is the first time I've read DHALGREN all the way through. I attempted it in the 1970s, but gave up after a chapter or two. This time I made it through, but it took me two weeks. The novel isn't such that you can read through rapidly - one has to take one's time and keep track of things that way.

The protagonist is a drifter - he is of Amerind extraction and thus he isn't fully white - this is of some import when he reaches Bellona, one of the "ten biggest US cities" that is having some sort of hiccup with reality. For some reason the rest of the country has written it off and doesn't talk much about it - which would not happen in real life. The place would be crawling with scientists. Anyway, he meets up with some people at a commune in the park, then later, after meeting some loners, joins a "nest", where about halfway through the novel he finds himself in charge. He is also bi-sexual, and all through

the novel he has very close relationships with several persons of either sexes.

Most of the novel is straight-forward, but there are several passages near the end where his diary is shown to have pages missing, and is printed out of order. Still, this novel is one the serious sf reader should read, sometime in her/his career. And what is a "natural", some kind of hair-do"?

THE THRONE OF SCONE by Patricia Kennealy. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 475 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

Book 3 of The Keltiad. A fantasy series based on Celtic mythology. The series is a strange blend of ancient magic and modern spaceships. In an earlier volume a spaceship from Earth had found the hidden kingdom of Keltia - formed by Kelts fleeing earth in the third century AD. The modern story follows the landing of the earth ship and its crew become embroiled in the local politics.

In this volume, Queen Aeron flees again from her enemies and finds herself on a quest again - a quest for the treasure of King Arthur, who fifteen centuries before had taken the weapons - which were powered by magic - from the Keltia kingdom and hidden them.

For those readers who like those Celtic adventures in both Sf and fantasy.

THE KING'S BUCCANEER by Raymond E. Feist. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 465 pp. A\$35. On sale now.

The second in the Riftwar Saga, the first being **PRINCE OF THE BLOOD**.

This novel is set ten years after the adventures told in **PRINCE OF THE BLOOD**. Time has given Prince Arutha's children maturity, but his third son, Nicholas, has not ventured outside the Court, and it is decided that he needs experience. He sets out with Harry, his squire, to journey through his lands to learn something of the people and to visit his uncle Martin. They have adventures along the way, but not till they get to Crydee do they find that being away from the country they know could be fearsome - the castle is attacked and destroyed and two young women of the Court are kidnapped. Thus begins a quest that is full of dire portents. Pirates have taken the women and the journey undertaken to get them back brings more on the young nobleman than this simple kidnapping.

Well told fantasy by one of the better known practitioners of the craft.

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS by Clive Barker. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 229 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

If you are wondering about that price for a hard-cover book - well, the volume is illustrated by the author, and there are full page illustrations every five or so pages.

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS is a fable, as delineated on the contents page - it is about a house a thousand years old and it's owner: Mr Hood. He had had children having holidays there for a thousand years or so, and his new guest, Harvey Swick, had been invited one grey February night. Harvey thought that he would have a

good time - and he did. The house, of course, has some dark secrets, and Harvey does not find out about these until later, when he tries to leave. For though every cloud has a silver lining, someone has to polish it.

Clive Barker is well known for his short stories - a thick collection of them came out several years ago, and over the last couple of years he has been concentrating on novels. This is a good one.

ROGET'S 21st CENTURY THESAURUS edited by Barbara Ann Kipfer. Dell h/c, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 978 pp. A\$24.95. On sale now.

This is a hefty and well made volume. The Thesaurus is in dictionary form - at long last! - and has 450,000 synonyms, which yield over one million word choices.

There are concise definitions for each main entry; there is a "concept index" which groups main entry words that share the same idea or property. In this there are ten general categories of interest - actions, causes, field of human activity, life forms, objects, the planet, qualities, senses, states and weights and measures. The dictionary *does* use American English, unfortunately, (one of the examples is that abomination, "businessperson"), but overall the volume is a must for writers and those who are serious about what they produce in the way of well written text. And there are thumb indents.

As an example of an entry, we could look at "fascism": [n] political system of dictatorship. *absolutism, authoritarianism, autocracy, bureaucracy, despotism, Nazism, one-party system, party government, racism, regimentation, totalitarianism*; SEE CONCEPTS 299, 301, 689. I suppose from the above you could say the US political system is fascist.

Highly Recommended.

CRYSTAL LINE by Anne McCaffrey. Bantam h/c, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 271 pp. A\$29.95. On sale now.

The world of the Crystal Singers has had several of McCaffrey's novel set in it. **CRYSTAL LINE** is also and gives more information of that singular world and its inhabitants.

There is another type of crystal, though, different from the usual. It is the black crystal - and cutting it is much more dangerous than cutting the other crystals. When a singer cuts the black crystal there is a chance that they can loose their minds, even with the Ballybran in their blood. Killashandra was getting stir crazy and wanted to get off-planet for a holiday - but their flyer was crushed and she and Lars did not have enough cash to have their holiday. Then they heard of the planet Opal, and the piece of jewel that had everyone wondering. They found themselves on the way to Opal and were soon experimenting with the alien jewel.

McCaffrey fans will like this one - there is romance aplenty for her many devoted fans.

TEK LAB by William Shatner. Pan trade pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1991. 223 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

The third in the TekWar series. TEK LAB follows the further adventures of Jake and Gomez and they try to find Jake's missing son Dan and in the doing of, attempt to dodge the various attempts to kill them.

People are being killed all over the world by someone called The Unknown Soldier and no-one can figure out a motive. Jake and Gomez think that another group has allied itself with the Tek Lords, Excalibur, who appear to have an enhanced version of Tek. The action goes to Britain, which is in deep trouble financially and morally.

All comes together in the end and loose threads are tied up. I note that on the copyright page Shatner mentions others in the "team" - Ron Goulart, Carmen LaVia, Lisa Wager, Ivy Stone, Susan Allison and Fifi Osgard. Action adventure sf.

FLOATER FACTOR by Melisa Michaels. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1988. 281 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

When someone dropped off a new-born baby in the airlock of Sky rider's asteroid, she is naturally left wondering, as none of the alarms were set off by the intruding ship. Then two shuttles attacked the rock, firing at the airlock the baby had been left in.

She and her boyfriend Ian had a big fight over the baby and the fact that he was an Earther and the Earther's were attacking Floaters and the baby was a floater (she wanted to get rid of the baby to an orphanage). Ian took her shuttle and left; Sky rider called up one of her old friends who had a young child, who had a baby-sitter and who was trying to flee the expanding Earther influence. When they arrive she left the baby in their care and taking their ship, went to Mars, where the shuttles she had destroyed attacking her had come from, to try to find out why they attacked her.

FLOATER FACTOR is well written space opera. If you want a break from reading all that heavy stuff (such as DHALGREN) then this novel is just the thing.

SYMPHONY OF TERROR by Somtow Sucharitkul. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1988. 243 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

This is the second book in the "V" series that Sucharitkul has written, the first being THE ALIEN SWORDMASTER.

Set in the years after the Visitors have been driven to the other side of the moon and are attempting to re-establish themselves on earth, the novel follows the exploits of Matt Jones, the martial arts instructor as he destroys the high command of the Eastern region of the Visitors in Japan. That last ended THE ALIEN SWORDMASTER; that being had survived and was determined to help bring down the power of the Visitors and help those of Earth.

A young biochemist had discovered that the red dust that killed the Visitors on Earth lost its potency in those countries that did not have ice cold winters - when

the Visitors found this they would soon swarm over these areas of the Earth, subdue them, and then expand to other areas.

More adventure sf, based on the TV series.

THE BRENTFORD TRIANGLE by Robert Rankin. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1982. 237 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now.

The second in the Brentford Trilogy, the first being THE ANTI-POPE.

Brentford was a town in England that had the usual buildings - library, post office, pub, flats, shops, etc. In the pub, the *Flying Swan*, was a machine called The Captain Laser Alien Attack machine, which was, needless to say, more than it appeared. The novel starts out with the discovery of Noah's Ark by a man in saffron robes, and ends with that ark arriving in Brentford, or what was left of it.

The novel tells on the attempt to invade Brentford by an invasion force that is flying giant spaceships. They attempt to land, but the inhabitants of that town are wise to what is happening and when they find just what The Captain Laser Alien Attack machine was, they quickly pull off it's skirting and alter the electronic guts.

Rankin is also the author of the Armageddon Series, the third of which is due out later this year or early next. Poms will enjoy this book more than others, I think - it does have a twisted sense of humour, though.

RACTAL MODE by Piers Anthony. HarperCollins trade pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 291 pp. A\$19.95 (h/c \$32.95). On sale now.

Piers Anthony must have followers of his writing - otherwise why do the publishers publish all this fantasy of his? RACTAL MODE is the second in another Mode series, the first being VIRTUAL MODE.

The novel is set up with separate chapters, each dealing with the subject set up by that heading. The chapters are: Nona; Colene; Darius; Oria; Jupiter; Angus; Earle; Secret; Virtual; Rabble; Slick; Duel; Esta; Deal; Radical and Anima. At the end is the usual discourse by the author which fills pages at the back of the book - this time nine pages.

As can be seen by the chapter names, the plot is the adventures of Colene, Darius, Provos and Squirro the telepathic horse as they set out across an alien dimension to find adventure. The author has discovered fractals and sets out the background of same in chapter 15. For Anthony collectors.

MAGIC'S PRICE by Mercedes Lackey. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1990. 351 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now.

Book 3 of The Last Herald-Mage.

Fantasy books are coming out of the woodwork, and most of them are part of a series. It's too bad that most of these fantasies are quest novels - they make good adventure stories, but after ten years of them flooding the market, this reader, at least, is getting thoroughly sick of them. I am getting sick of wading through all this guff looking for that plot that has that bit extra. There isn't

much around - most of the time the reader must be content with the quality of writing or characterisation, which is why I like Eddings.

Mercedes Lackey writes long novels - **MAGIC'S PRICE** is 351 pages long, of nine point print, so you get quite a few hours reading for your money. Though if you are, like I am, getting tired of authors using terms like "helm", then you will, like me, be picky. This novel would suit those who like the novels published by TSR - younger reading who are into gaming will love it. I am sure that the trilogy would make a good present for the young reader who is into fantasy war gaming.

JELLYFISH MASK by William L. Ramseyer, illust by Kathryn Ootshi, Avail from Buy Yourself Press, POB 2885, Atascadero, CA 93423-2885, USA. (C) 1992. 59 pp. US\$12.25 posted. On sale now.

This collection of short stories by William Ramseyer is a very good looking book. It is printed on glossy paper and alternate pages are white type on black ink. The size is 15x22.5 cm.

The stories are a mixture of fantasy, speculative fiction and science fiction. There are twelve stories altogether, with page counts ranging from one to five and a half pages. The titles are: CONVEYOR BELT; A MATTER OF TIME; ZERO SUM GAME, POSSESS THE POSSESSOR; RAIN STATION; A HOLE IN THE DARKNESS; ROBOT DOG; PEOPLE POUND; NUTS; ROBOT DIVORCE; MUSEUM and LIFEGUARD. All are quite well written and are enjoyable reading. Though apparently a self-published book, it is not amateurish either in writing or production.

Worth a look.

THE INVISIBLE MAN by H.G. Wells. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1992 - new bits. 178 pp. A\$7.95. On sale now.

The new bits are a note on the life of H.G. Wells, a Foreword and an Afterword, all by Gregory Benford.

Would you believe this is the first time I've read **THE INVISIBLE MAN**? I had read the Classics Illustrated version about thirty years ago, but until now hadn't read the full version. Most readers would have seen the various movies. If you don't have this volume in your library, now is a good opportunity to get it. The story of the albino scientist who had a sudden brilliant idea about the refractive properties of flesh and spent three years researching the idea; finally coming up with the chemicals and vibratory apparatus for making his flesh the same refractive qualities as air and thus becoming invisible was one of the truly new ideas in SF.

Griffin had great plans for his invisibility, but events conspired against him and he soon found himself on the run. Buy it if you haven't already got it.

ZIMIAMVIA; A Trilogy by E. R. Eddison. Dell pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1935-58. 855 pp incl indices and maps. A\$18.95. On sale now.

The spine US price is \$16 and the Canadian is \$20, so at long last we have parity. The three novels - **MISTRESS OF MISTRESSES, A FISH DINNER IN**

MEMISON and **THE MEZENTION GATE** are here brought together and thus make a package that is an excellent buy.

For those who read **THE WORM OUROBOROS** these three novels will be of more import than those who have not as yet gotten around to reading it. After reading **ZIMIAMVIA** they will most likely search out **THE WORM OROBOROS** and read it. There is an Introduction and notes by Paul Thomas and a foreword by Douglas Winter.

The book is not easy to assimilate, being couched in medieval-type English, but a slow reading of it will enable the reader to build up the rich background that Eddison gives to give these works that which has made them classics in the fantasy field.

DEMON DRUMS by Carol Severance. Del Ray, pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1992. 243 pp. A\$8.95. On sale now.

I suppose you could say that this fantasy is about the "noble savage", or at least the heroine is such. She was an inwardly peaceful person, and all was quiet on her island paradise until she and some friends were captured by those who used the "devil drums". Said drums were drums of human skin and the natives decided that *her* skin was particularly suited for a female war drum. Needless to say, she was not amused.

The drummers start to tattoo Iuti - she had a reputation as a warrior woman, and they could use her *angst* in the blood music they would create with the war drum. The book is a fantasy - Iuti and the sorcerers use spells for various purposes.

Severance is a new author, and in **DEMON DRUMS** she writes clearly and concisely, creating images with ease. A new talent.

CHILDREN OF THE EARTH by Catherine Wells. Del Ray pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1992.

A sequel to **THE EARTH IS ALL THAT LASTS**. In that original novel, Coonino had helped destroy a starship from Earth's colonies so that news could not get back that the Earth had not been destroyed, but had regenerated, and that would keep them from returning and ravaging the world again. An accident had thrust him forward into time and now he had come into the world again, a world that still had to deal with the invading colonists.

Conservation based stories are still the going thing in the North American continent, it appears, and novels about Mother Earth and characters in novels having the ability to "hear the Earth as the People did" are not usually the type of novels I enjoy reading.

Actually, I think those readers who enjoy Anne McCaffrey's latest would also like these novels. The characters have names like Phoenix, Karen, Red Snake, Zachery and Chelsea.

DARWIN by Adrian Desmond & James Moore. Penguin pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 808 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

This biography of Charles Darwin is actually 677 pages - the rest are Notes, Bibliography, and Index. There are also 42 illustrations and photographs.

I requested this for a review copy because I thought it would be of interest - it is, of immense interest. It gives an excellent insight into how a scientist should work - his methods and ideas. The book gives a depth to Darwin's life and studies that has only been possible in the last five years because of the transcription of his notes which were recently found, and his 14,000 letters. His life's background is followed, from his grandfather, through to his burial in Westminster Abbey - even though he was an agnostic.

What was particularly interesting was the background - the rule of the Church had not been broken, and one could be fired from a public service job for blasphemy. There were riots of working-class men (as there are now) and the Tory government in the 1830s came under fire from militants of and for the working class. Is not usually mooted in discussions of evolution that it works even through human societies - the survival of the fittest, which is probably why some peace-keeping forces such as those in Yugoslavia are having such a hard time of it.

Essential reading.

NIGHTMARE CHILD by Daniel Ransom. SMP pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1990. 163 pp. A\$8.95. On sale now.

Daniel Ransom is the author of **THE BABYSITTER** and **TOYS IN THE ATTIC**. **NIGHTMARE CHILD** is certainly not a book for children, though it is about a child.

Jenny was Mindy's little sister, but blood did not prove to be thicker than water when Mindy and Jeff decide to murder her to get Jenny's share of an inheritance. They tied the young girl up and suffocate her in the boot of their BMW. They then bury her near their house. All was well until one day they heard a knocking on the front door, and when they opened it, there was Jenny. She had been, they found out later, possessed by a demon, who proceeded to murder - dismember, actually - several people, including Jeff and Mindy.

In the end the demon departed, leaving Jenny with a neighbour, but still apparently alive. She had also murdered Robert, the boyfriend of the woman she eventually stayed with. Readable horror.

DARK VOICES 4 The Pan Book of Horror, edited by David Sutton and Stephen Jones. (C) 1989-92. 308 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

The first volume of this series was published 33 years ago. This time there are 20 stories with the vast majority having 1992 copyright dates.

The stories are: **ON EDGE** by Christopher Fowler; **ABSENCE OF BEAST** by Graham Masterton; **THE LITTLE GREEN ONES** by Les Daniels; **RAZOR WHITE** by Charles Gramlich; **PROPELLER** by Peter James; **THEY TAKE** by John Brunner; **THE LAST DROP** by Nicholas Royle; **PICK ME UP** by David J. Schow; **THE FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME** by R. Chetwynd-Hayes;

HIGH-FLYING, ADORED by Daniel Fox; **A NIGHT WITH CLAUDETTE** by Bernard Donoghue; **CASEY, WHERE HE LIES** by Stephen Gallagher; **THE VISITOR** by Peter Crowther; **BOOK END** by Tony J. Forder; **WEEK WOMAN** by Kim Newman; **NECROPHILIAC** by Philip J. Cockburn; **RETURN OF THE SHROUD** by Norman Partridge; **COLD AS IRON** by W. Elizabeth Turner; **A TIME OF WAITING** by Michael Marshall Smith and **BIZARRE HANDS** by Joe R. Landsdale.

A collection worth the money, as readers who collect Pan's horror novels know. What is noticeable though, is the dearth of female writers in the above? Would fans of horror go along with this sex ratio in their authors?

THE EDGE OF TOMORROW by Isaac Asimov. Tor pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1985. 462 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now

THE EDGE OF TOMORROW is a collection of articles and fiction that portrays scientists - those in the past, the present and the future. The essays are from *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

The writings included herein are: **UNIQUE IS WHERE YOU FIND IT**; **THE EUREKA PHENOMENON**; **THE FEELING OF POWER**; **THE COMET THAT WASN'T**; **FOUND!**; **TWINKLE, TWINKLE, MICROWAVES**; **PATE DE FOIE GRAS**; **THE BRIDGE OF THE GODS**; **BELIEF**; **EUCLID'S FIFTH**; **THE PLANE TRUTH**; **THE BILLIARD BALL**; **THE WINDS OF CHANGE**; **THE FIGURE OF THE FASTEST**; **THE DEAD PAST**; **THE FATEFUL LIGHTNING**; **BREEDS THERE A MAN?**; **THE MAN WHO MASSED THE EARTH**; **NIGHTFALL**; **THE PLANET THAT WASN'T**; **THE UGLY LITTLE BOY**; **THE THREE WHO DIED TOO SOON**; **THE LAST QUESTION** and **THE NOBEL PRIZE THAT WASN'T**.

There is a foreword by Ben Bova and an Introduction by Asimov. A good example of Asimov's science essays.

TAILCHASER'S SONG by Tad Williams. Legend pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1992. 283 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

Tad Williams wrote **THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR** and **STONE OF FAREWELL**. With **TAILCHASER'S SONG** he is venturing into that part of the country of the strange inhabited by the likes of **WATERSHIP DOWN**. I think that the blurb writer of this book has made a grievous mistake, as far as Australian sales is concerned: "The adventures of a band of feral cats..." What with the media attention on feral cats destroying wildlife and denuding the countryside of rare animals, with a Sydney council planning to sterilise all the cats in its district, and the RSPCA looking to destroy 30,000 cats, it is all a bit lacking...

I am sure that this is the book for cat lovers - the soft furry things, with good characterisation and told with saccharin sweetness - is sure to bring them in. Not that the tale is not well written. It is - though the badgers, foxes and rabbits might not think much of the feral cats.

PATH TO CONQUEST by Howard Weinstein. Tor pb. dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1987. 209 pp. A\$8.95. On sale now.

I'm not sure where these books were found - I thought all non-returned books in the US had their covers torn off, but these came from somewhere with their 1987 print date. I don't know how well they sell with the TV show "V" long gone, though I suppose the closet fans will be after their missing volumes.

In this novel, the alien reptiles are still trying to destroy the Resistance. This novel isn't from any of the episodes, so is all new. Under Diana's leadership the aliens are altering the Earth's weather patterns to bring a freezing winter to the planet. Or at least the Northern hemisphere. Which is egocentric for those living down there. As with Flash Gordon, the hero is an (ex-)baseball star; the female part is played by a diplomat - Lauren Stewart. The two, along with two human scientists, must try to stop the aliens freeze the humans to death. The second prong of the aliens attack is on oil - a commodity that the world needs to pass the Winter and which is also a key ingredient of the human's struggle.

Action adventure SF.

A TASTE OF BLOOD WINE by Freda Warrington. Pan trade pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1992. 446 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

I haven't read anything by Freda Warrington before, but judging by the acknowledgements she is part of the UK fantasy/horror writer's set (Storm Constantine, David Gemmell, etc).

The book is set in 1923 and is about a vampire. That does not give anything away.... Actually the book is written in a very laid back tone: even the characters are laid back when the vampire shows himself by attacking and nearly killing a young man and grabbing a young woman and making off with her - and those looking on let him get away with her. The whole thing is very uppercrust and there is much discussion both about and with the vampire, Karl von Wultendorf.

The cover shows said Karl, in a very vampirish pose with his black and red cloak. The book itself is not unusual in its presentation of the vampires qualities - the heroine falls in love with him, of course - and will suit those into everyday horror as portrayed in movies and TV. Don't look for anything outstanding in this one.

A DARK AND HUNGRY GOD ARISES by Stephen Donaldson. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. 477 pp. A\$35. On sale now

A part of the series The Gap Into Power, this latest SF novel by Donaldson continues his advance into creating his name in SF as well as fantasy.

Morn Hyland continues her descent into madness as she is given to the alien Amnion. Her forced-through-life son, Davies Hyland, is taken by Nick Succorso to the pirate shipbuilder Billigate, whose asteroid floats in the forbidden zone in the alien territory. Angus Thermopyle had been allowed to escape from the United Mining Co's Police and ended up on that asteroid also. He had been

turned into an android, controlled by a datacore. Milos had been sent to keep an eye on him.'

Back in the UMCP, its director was following his plan to try to get the UMCP out of the UMC's clutches once and forever and was using his second in command to run messages. The whole book is full of plots and counterplots and a reader needs to get all the previous books to really enjoy this one. I think this is really enjoyable space opera - *adult* space opera.

THE FOREVER KING by Molly Cochran & Warren Murphy. Millennium trade pb & h/c, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. (C) 1992. 364 pp. Trade pb A\$19.95, h/c \$34.95. On sale now.

Once again an Arthurian legend comes to us. This one is set in the present day, using the character of Camelot - some reborn, some immortal.

The beginning was most off-putting, describing a character that was so much like the psychopath in *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* that I thought the whole book would be a derivative exercise, but I was delightfully surprised. After that less-than-brilliant beginning (including the obscure teaser), the book became a quickly paced adventure, the traditional quest for the Holy Grail (and here it was assumed that the Grail is a meteorite with special qualities) that was intelligently handled and didn't bog down with lengthy descriptions. The characterisations of Arthur and Galahad were carefully and believably drawn (King Arthur and Galahad respectively who had been reborn). The idea that love and loyalty can last and meet again despite countless rebirths and lifetimes of searchings, is beautiful so that the book ended with a positive note. The good guys have won, and the world would be awaiting the forever king's coming at the beginning of the millenium - so will the reader.

For those who like their fantasy touched with realism, and enjoy the Arthurian legend in all its forms, then this book is recommended. - Susan Clarke.

SHADOW MAZE by Jonathan Wylie. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 384 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

This one is also a quest fantasy. In this case there are two heroes, and one heroine.

When Varo and Brostek's village was destroyed and its people slaughtered, they thought that the world had ended. They had each gained the token of manhood - one had killed a boar, the other a wolf. Just before they entered their village to show their kills, a wolf cub had appeared - obviously it was the cub of the wolf killed. The cub followed them to the village. The village had been wiped out. It had been attacked by Knifemen - who had taken the young and able-bodied and killed the others. The bodies had several small slits in them, but all the blood had been taken from the bodies. Varo and Brostek decided to avenge their village and commenced a vendetta against the Knifemen and those who helped them. The rest the novel takes up four years after the village massacre.

SHADOW MAZE is a well written adventurous fantasy - well worth reading.

NEW EDITIONS OF PREVIOUSLY RELEASED WORKS:

VOYAGE OF VENGEANCE by L. Ron Hubbard. New Era pb, dist in Aust by New Era. (C) 1989. 423 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now. Volume 7 in the Mission Earth saga. Some readers may have found the hardcovers beyond their means - here is the pb edition. The 10 volume set is sure to be a read for younger readers - if you have the others, then you will know the basic plot/s by now.

GARDEN OF RAMA by Arthur C. Clarke & Gentry Lee. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 593 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now. Another book in the Rama series. The plot tells of interesting as the Rama starship reaches the area from which it was dispatched and the humans still living in it came into contact with the aliens which serviced the huge craft. Excellent hard SF.

THE SHADOW OF HEAVEN by Bob Shaw. VGSF pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1969, 1991. 174 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now. I enjoyed the hardcover tale of the great floating anti-gravity garden called Heaven and the ragged band of ragamuffins that ranged over it, trying to keep away from government eyes and to get one up on each other. An adventurous yarn.

BLUE MOON RISING by Simon Green. VGSF pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1991. 448 pp. On sale now. It's been only a year since the trade pb of this came out at nearly double the price. A fantasy that readers of the author's BLOOD AND HONOUR will find to their liking. There is quest, dragons, and a peculiarly modern princess. And the print is small, for all the 448 pages.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE by Gary Gentle. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1991. 252 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now. Another novel of Valentine, the Soldier-Scholar. This time she is also in deep, as she and her fat lover attempt to destroy the various evil magicals that are destroying the countryside and the buildings in their home city. Adventure fantasy.

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY by Douglas Adams. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1979-'84. 590 pp. A\$24.95. On sale now. Sub-titled *A Trilogy In Four Parts*. The four Hitchhiker books: THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY; THE RESTAURANT AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE; LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING and SO LONG, AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH. If you've missed some of these volumes, or have none of them at all - this is an excellent opportunity to get this classic. The print is small, and even at \$24.95 it is much cheaper than buying all 5 separately.

TWILIGHT by Peter James. Signet pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 432 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now. A well written horror story about strange occurrences in East Sussex. Out-of-body experiences and graphic sex add a little more to this novel about certain

scientific experiments performed on patients. There are a lot of these mad scientists around.

DAMIA by Anne McCaffrey. Bantam trade pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 365 pp. A\$18.95. On sale now. Another novel about the people with the Talent to move masses - cargo or people, from one place to another. The heroine this time is Damia, a supremely gifted woman who was destined to be one of the most powerful Primes of all. For McCaffrey fans.

DARK PRINCE by David Gemmell. Legend pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1991. 545 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now. The sequel to LION OF MACEDON, the novel follows the further career of Parmenion in the time of the Greeks in 352 BC. Heroic fantasy by one of the better authors of such.

OTHER CURRENT RELEASES:

HARPERCOLLINS - RED MARS by Kim Robinson
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- THE TALE OF THE ETERNAL
CHAMPION Vols 1-4
by Michael Moorcock.
- WHITE MISTS OF POWER by Kristine Rusch

PENGUIN - THE PLANET PIRATES by McCaffrey & Moon.

- SECRETS OF POWER by Nigel Findley
- WOLF PACK by Robert Charrette
- THE DEATH GUARD by Philip Chadwick
- THE SHADOW RISING by Robert Jordan
- VAMPYRES by Christopher Frayling

