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To come to the press is more dangerous than to be pressed to death, for the pain of those tortures last but a few minutes; but he that lies upon the rack in print hath the flesh torn off by the teeth of Envy and Calumny even he means nobody any hurt in his grave.

(Thomas Dekker, 1606)

Contents

Plus reviews of recent paperbacks by:-

K.V. Bailey	Ken Lake
Alan Fraser	Helen McNabb
Denise Gorse	Nik Morton
Margaret Hall	Phil Nichols
Joy Hibbert	Christopher Ogden
L.J. Hurst	Nigel Richardson
Edward James	Andy Sawyer
	Sue Thomason.

Grateful thanks to Chris Bailey and Edward James for magazine reviews; Nik Morton for the artwork.

Rust Never Sleeps...

There are various stances I could aim PAPERBACK INFERNO towards, but presenting an authoritative view of SF isn't one of them.

I'm aware as I write that that sounds like a cop-out, and I have to add at once that I don't believe in the old saw that "it's all subjective" when someone gives an opinion about a book. Is it really true - if you hold that opinion - that there is no way of distinguishing a good from a bad book? Of course, 'good' and 'bad' are loaded terms, and we're treading in a semantic minefield here: even so, our judgements are based upon opinions and experience which may be more or less informed. Everyone's entitled to their opinions, but some people's opinions are more worth regarding than others.

And of course, the nearer those opinions coincide with mine, the more worth regarding they are.

So - I could present reviews from a number of like-minded people which would have the advantage of giving a unified stance to the magazine. Or I could do as I am doing, presenting views from widely differing approaches to SF, with the risk that certain books may not receive the reviews that another reviewer may give them.

At this point it might be wise to turn to Ken Lake's review of Gordon R. Dickson's THE FINAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA while I reflect that there are areas of agreement - and quite subtle ones - which can be found in PI. Perhaps the best illustration of this may be my own reaction to two books which I had intended to review. Christopher Ogden's review of Donald Cotton's amusing DR WHO: THE MYTH MAKERS stresses what I felt (perhaps over-strongly since I had a long and passionate childhood love affair with Homeric myth) that this is an above average entertainment: something which we cannot always take for granted even in books meant to be nothing more than such. I was particularly interested by Margaret Hall's response to Derek Sawde's SCEPTRE MORTAL, which mirrored my own less straightforward reaction to the book. In many ways, the book deserves condemnation, but there are elements in it which make it something other than a thoroughly bad book, and Margaret crystallised my own opinion when she wrote in her covering letter "I actually feel that there's a good book in there struggling to get out."

Of course, I'm shaping the area of debate from my position as editor, so perhaps these areas of agreement don't quite illuminate the point I made at the beginning. Finished Ken Lake's review yet? Now, I don't want to

encourage a long string of unsolicited reviews that I can't use, but, not knowing that I had sent the book for review elsewhere, and being impressed by it, Alan Fraser sent me his opinion of THE FINAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA. Ken, you'll note, found it tedious. Alan, on the other hand, found it " the most mature of Dickson's books...an all-action yarn that rattles from planet to planet, with a skillfully balanced plot, and well-crafted characters that I cared about."

So who's right - Ken or Alan? Here's where I do cop out, I suppose, and admit that I haven't yet finished the book and advise you to make your own decision for yourselves. But I don't really think that it is necessarily a matter of 'right' or 'wrong' . The question is not whether THE FINAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA really is a good book or a bad book but that there is an area of debate which illuminates the process of book-reviewing. Reviews are more than "just someone's opinion" but less than the Authorised Gospel engraved on tablets of marble.

Even my reviews...

Choosing selections for the 'Closer Encounters' spot proved difficult this time: finally I selected Mary Shelley's THE LAST MAN on the grounds that, while few would, I guess, find it light-and-easy reading it's well worth persevering with for its images of a future England which are really rather peculiar in their fidelity to the structures of early 19th-century society. They cause you to look at the revamped 20th-century of most 'far future' SF in a more critical light. Also included in this spot is Wells' IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET. I had intended to look at it in even greater depth in the light of George May's recent article on reprinting fiction. Pressure of work prevented me, for which I apologise.

MAGAZINE

"Upon the rack in print . . ."

REVIEWS

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MONTHLY and ANALOG, July - November 1985

(Reviewed by Edward James)

There are quite a few goodies in this batch of magazines, mostly, as for the last two or three years, from Asimov's. It is the longer fiction that stick's most in my mind, a sign of intellectual laziness no doubt. Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Green Mars' (September Asimov's) must confirm him as one of the best of the new generation writers. An astonishingly realistic account of a climb up the highest mountain in the Solar System (Mons Olympus, Mars): either Robinson has been reading a lot of books on mountaineering, or he does it. The suspense, which is well done, is only the setting in which his characters can explore the twin themes of the story: the ethics of terraforming and the psychology of immortals. Until I read the Robinson I was going to plump for Roger Zelazny's '24 Views of Mount Fuji, by Hokusai' (July Asimov's) as the best in these issues. The idea of the marriage of human and computer consciousness is almost old hat by now, but Zelazny wrings new interest from it. It cries out for an illustrated edition, as each of the 24 sections relates to a Hokusai print, only some of which I could visualize. An overpriced trade paperback to follow?

The novellas in the August Asimov's were a bit less satisfying: Kate Wilhelm's 'The Gorgon Field', beautifully written with a convincingly eerie Colorado setting, but underpinned by a good deal of mystical/pseudo-scientific garbage (centres of power, Glastonbury Tor, Croagh Patrick etc. ad nauseam meam). The other was a Spinrad romp, 'World War Last' - outrageous, fun, over-the-top, ultimately rather empty; the latter judgement could apply in a rather different way to Bruce Sterling's 'Green Days in Brunei' (October Asimov's) too: well written, with an interesting setting, but devoid of new ideas and with an implausible deus ex machina ending. Which was true only in a technical sense in the most recent of Asimov's novellas, 'Deus Ex Machina' by J.V. Brummels (November) - yet another post-catastrophe story, but with enough differences in the nature of the catastrophe (solar activity) and in the response of humanity to make it an interesting and promising first story. In the same issue is George R.R. Martin's 'Portraits of his Children', which the introductory blurb suggests might be an SF award winner. It is a powerful and subtle story about the relationship between an author and his characters. Highly recommended. A probable award-winner. The fact that it is not SF and only marginally fantasy, perhaps, has after all proved no hindrance in the past.

To rival these, Analog offered ideas rather than writing, as usual. A four-part serial by Timothy Zahn (July-October) called 'Spinneret'. Take a David Brin universe (ingredients, plenty of aliens, lots of skullduggery); add a pinch of Clarke, J. Brian or, if in season, Arthur C. (a mysterious ancient and powerful alien artefact); add a few technological cliches (Dyson spoere); and mix in Analog world-view (untrustworthy Hispanics, villainous United Nations, and visionary, but

pragmatic Americans). Quite fun, in a way, and the Analog world-view does get a bit of implicit criticism. But altogether too mechanical, and not up to the standard of Zahn's short fiction. Alongside this serial there has been a sub-standard Charles Harness, 'George Washington slept here' (July) a standard Charles Sheffield, 'Trader's Secret' (August) about exploitation of the Moon, not by the Americans, who are rather into decadence by this time but by the sober, hardworking and go-ahead Japanese and Chinese. And in September, a neat novelette by Analog stalwart Eric G. Iverson (from now on to be referred to as Harry Turtledove) called 'Vilest Beast', set in an alternate seventeenth century, in which the English are trying to colonise an America inhabited only by sentient apes. (If one wanted to be cynical, one might wonder if it would have made much difference as far as the 17th century English were concerned.) September also has a contribution to what must be one of the oddest series running, Gordon R. Dickson's 'See now, a pilgrim'. For the record, you could find the two previous stories in this saga of earth under the alien heel in Analog August 1974 and August 1980. The fictional events have covered a few months; the stories are separated by 11 years. Keep your eyes out for the next episode, in Aug/Sept 1990... George R.R. Martin has a rather more traditional space opera series running too: it started with a two-part serial 'The Plague Star' (Jan-Feb) and has continued with 'Loaves and Fishes' (October) and 'Second Helpings' (November), and features a rather likeable eccentric called Haviland Tuf who has come into possession of a gigantic spaceship stuffed with the superscience of a long-lost alien race. Etc. Etc. You know the sort of thing.

Of the short fiction, one of the best, yet again, is the latest (third?) story by Northern Irish writer Ian McDonald, 'Scenes from a Shadowplay' (Asimov's July), a baroque chiller about honour and revenge in an electronic age. He's the only British writer in these six issues, if you exclude Charles Sheffield, and one I hope we'll see a lot more of: he is now a nominee for the J.W. Campbell award, and has the cover story coming up in the December Asimov's. I'd also pick out from Asimov's 'On for the long haul' by T. Coraghessan Boyle (August), one in the eye for the survivalists; a nightmarish story from Michael Bishop about a child's fantasies, 'A gift for the Gravlanders' (September); Gary Alexander's sordid little 'Buddies' (same issue) - sometimes Asimov's reads so like Interzone; and, just because it reminds me of the joys of teaching history, as term gets more horrendous, W.R. Thompson, 'History Lesson' (Analog, August), in which school-kids give their far-future assessments of the importance of the 20th century, and Paul A. Carter's intriguing 'fact' article (Analog, October), 'The Constitutional Origins of Westly v. Simmons', in which he investigates how the right-wing fundamentalist world of Isaac Asimov's 'Trends' (Astounding July 1939) might actually have come about. A nice exercise in alternate history.

If I may just slip in a news item at the end. Recent issues of the two magazines have carried ads by Micro Information Concepts (P.O. Box 2163, Dallas, Texas 75221). I wrote to them to get information and my free copy of the November 1949 issue of Astounding - Heinlein's 'Gulf', Sturgeon's 'What dead men tell', etc. The copy is very well produced, no doubt long-lasting - but on microfiche of course. M.I.C. are selling a complete edition of all 641 issues of Astounding/Analog (1933 -1984) for $760, including colour covers and Mike Ashley's Index. Or any decade's worth for $140. Or any year's worth for $16. Cheap, really, if you don't mind reading microfiche. They are also going to do complete sets of Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Amazing, Asimov's, Unknown Worlds, Science Fiction Times, the complete works of James Gunn, etc etc: a huge SF library reduced to the size of a shoe-box. I doubt that it will satisfy the collector's instinct: so much better to have those beautiful yellowing pages that fall apart as you read them - but excellent for libraries, scholars and serious readers. I wonder if we'll ever have a Microfiche Inferno...

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, September and October 1985

(Reviewed by Chris Bailey)

While affording no masterpieces, the September F&SF is overall a better than average issue, four substantial pieces meriting consideration. The delicate conclusion to Wayne Wightman's 'The Great Wall' leaves a sweet aftertaste, no small achievement after the perfectly ridiculous alien who featured in the body of the story. Stephen Gallagher's 'No Life For Me Without You, Vodyanoi' again demonstrates his susceptibility to incidental detail for its own sake, but this is an interesting story of a 'double' outcast, finishing thoughtfully. 'The Dragon's Boy' is Jane Yolen in relaxed mood. In PI 55 I stated that Yolen was becoming succinct to the point of curtness in her stories - so much for such magisterial pronouncements, as the present piece rambles expansively and enjoyably through T.H. White territory ("None of the others, Cai or Bedvere or Lancot, could read half as well as he. They could only just make

out the instructions on packets of love philtres.") Keith Roberts's 'Richenda' demonstrates his talent for simultaneously warming and troubling the reader, besdides being a rather cunning piece of writing. The tale ends with an horrendous cliche, which the appalled reader begs to be excused; yet accept the cliche and you have a neat parable concerning the creative process. The first-person narrator is a writer who also happens to be an occasional illustrator, and when I was wondering while I read as to how much of the story was autobiographical, Roberts must have had me well within his web.

I have a theory that the September F&SF is slung out as a stopgap issue, editor Ferman meanwhile marshalling the big guns for each years anniversary special in October. That is a mean slur on Ferman's professionalism... Even so, the pat remark that September's issue is bound to be better slips past me. That was certainly the case this year, the October issue being very poor. There is a turgid fantasy from Marion Zimmer Bradley, a cheerful gimmick piece from John Brunner and a dreadfully dull story of deep space exploration from James Tiptree Jr. The best story, opening avenues of interesting moral exploration, comes from a writer my mentors taught me to revile, Orson Scott Card, even though I was not convinced by his posture of weary nihilism. If you do come across the October issue, just have a quick peep at the film review column - who plays David and who Goliath as Harlan Ellison grapples with Rambo?

Closer Encounters

Mary Shelley - - THE LAST MAN (Hogarth Press, 342 pp. £3.95, originally published 1826)

(Reviewed by Edward James)

At least two of the themes so common in modern science fiction are to be found in Mary Shelley's novels: the scientist meddling with secrets beyond his control (a gross simplification of FRANKENSTEIN, I admit), and, in THE LAST MAN, the helplessness of mankind in the face of nature. This was not perhaps a new theme; Brian Aldiss, in his useful introduction to this edition, cites several other literary predecessors in the two decades prior to Mary Shelley's novel, notably LE DERNIER HOMME ('The Last Man'), by J-B Cousin de Grainville (1805). But it well illustrates Aldiss's contention that Mary Shelley, or her generation, invented science fiction. The end of mankind or of the world had, of course, been imagined many times before, but always in the context of Christian eschatology. In THE LAST MAN, mankind dies for entirely secular reasons; God plays no role at all. It was a result of the increasing tendency to think in scientific or mechanistic terms about the universe, and also, no doubt, of the impact of the French Revolution, which showed to Mary Shelley's generation that human society was not immutably set in its ways. It could go "down the ringing grooves of change" (Tennyson); it could progress, or it could vanish. The Romantic mind was prepared to contemplate the end of civilisation with a frisson almost of delight, just as Lord Macaulay, not long afterwards (but never mentioned in histories of SF?), imagined a far-future New Zealander contemplating the uninhabited ruins of London. "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (Mrs Shelley's husband). (Quoting gets a habit after reading Mary Shelley; her narrator, writing in the year 2100, is forever quoting Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley.)

THE LAST MAN, then, is undoubtedly important in the history of SF. In terms of the ideas it deals with, it is even an important novel. Some of its descriptions and images, notably of the slow death of almost all Europes's population and the emptying of its cities, in the last volume, are very powerful and effective. But it is not really surprising that it is so little known, or has remained out of print for so long. It is long-winded, highly rhetorical, quite lacking in humour or wit, and really rather odd. The oddness is perhaps due to Mrs Shelley's decision to delay the theme of the plague which ends human civilisation until half way through, and fill the rest with a fictional representation of her husband, P.B. Shelley, and friends, notably Lord Byron, and their dreams of political improvement.

The scene is this. The narrator, Lionel Verney (Mrs Shelley?), is befriended by Adrian (Mr Shelley), the son of the last king of England, who abdicated to take the title of Earl of Windsor. Verney marries Adrian's sister; Verney's sister marries their friend Lord Raymond, who has dreams of liberating Greece from the Turks. Raymond became Lord Protector in England (to save it from democracy): "he was continually surrounded by projectors and projects, which were to render England one scene of fertility and magnificence; the state of poverty was to be abolished; men were to be transported from place to place almost with the same facility as the Princes in the Arabian Nights." (p. 76) He resigns, and leads an army to victory in Greece. Raymond, of course, is Byron, who died in the year this novel was published, trying to liberate Greece from the

Turks. In the novel Raymond dies, somewhat paradoxically, in Constantinople, trying to liberate Turkey from the Turks... But all the plans for political reform come to nothing with the slow progress of the plague from east to west - just as cholera was moving westwards as Mrs Shelley wrote, to arrive in England in 1831 (you can still see the cholera cemetary in York, half a mile from where I write). Europe dies; London succombs; and a small band of survivors moves south across an almost empty Europe, meeting, in Paris, some people whose response to disaster was religious fanaticism: an "imposter prophet" and his "deluded crew" of "methodists" (to use the strongest word for fanatics Mrs Shelley could find). Verney, alone, recovers from the disease. The end of the book sees him living in a deserted Rome (where Mr Shelley had been buries in 1822, next to Keats), writing his account, carving '2100' on the topmost stone of St Peter's (Byron used to vandalise ancient monuments too), and finally deciding to sail around the Mediterranean, in "a tiny bark, freighted with Verney - the LAST MAN". How many times we've seen SF novels end with a similar scene! The novel is not going to appeal to many readers today; but Hogarth Press should be congratulated for letting us see that it is not just FRANKENSTEIN that gives Mary Shelley a claim to be the originator of SF.

H.G. Wells - - IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET (Hogarth Press, 249pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

The factors which have lead to the reprinting of this novel (first published 1906 in anticipation of the last visit of Halley's Comet in 1910) are, I think, interesting.

The comet's imminent return has been greeted by 'National Astronomy Week' and a flood of literature. The ubiquitous Fred Hoyle's new novel is entitled COMET HALLEY. The Times Educational Supplement recently reviewed no less than eleven Halley's Comet books or audio-visual presentations (including, and I have my hand on my heart, THE HALLEY'S COMET POP-UP BOOK by Patrick Moore!)

The Hogarth Press reprint of Wells' IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET came with a press handout stressing the connection between the book's original publication and the Comet's last appearance. It also previewed the current attention to be given to the comet, with some examples such as the afore-mentioned 'National Astronomy Week' and the 'Giotto' space probe. So - is this a timely reprint designed to squeeze the maximum out of Halleymania?

Well, not exactly. The book appears as part of a projected series of Wells' less-frequently reprinted fiction (including CHRISTINA ALBERT'S FATHER and MR BRITLING SEES IT THROUGH, with introductions by Christopher Priest) and although it has connections with Wells' earlier scientific romances, it's not published as SF but as part of Hogarth Press's imaginative general fiction list. In his introduction, Brian Aldiss rightly concentrates on the book's status as a social novel.

The year the book was published was the year the Labour Movement found itself with an appreciable Parliamentary representation and a year in which the problems of dealing with mass unemployment filled the political stage. (It was the year groups of political activists seized and cultivated unused land in London, Leeds and Manchester.) The mass squalor and despair of the time composes one of the triumvirate of forces which propels the novel: the narrator's love affair with Nettie, seduced by the aristocrat Verral and the approach of the comet are the other two.

Leadford - the narrator - portrays his younger self as ill-mannered, inconsiderate, a "wounded, smarting egotist" and potentially a murderer. Yet his limited horizons are forced upon him by the society in which he lives. And a mysterious element introduced into the Earth's atmosphere by the comet 'awakens' mankind into a Utopian future. It is a Utopia in which all questions are not answered - Leadford's love for Nettie and her love for Verrall remain, a source of anguish, although they can see themselves rationally to a solution which many of Wells' readers in 1906 found unbearably shocking. (Anthony West, in H.G. WELLS: ASPECTS OF A LIFE, comments that "Its happy ending, not the burden of the argument, was what was found unendurable.") Nevertheless, it is a Utopia and as such, we cannot really imagine it, cannot truely grasp the nature of transition.

The 'Change' comes from outside; a magical change never really explained. (We're reminded of the traditional symbolism of comets as agents of change, usually for the worse.) It's the problem of all Utopias, but essentially it's the problem of any conception of social change, of how, after analysing the problem, to get to the solution. This is explored in Leadford's own socialism, where Wells makes it clear that he is well aware that his fable is distanced from reality: Leadford's solution is as 'magical' as Wells' comet. "It had merely to be asserted now with sufficient rhetoric and vehemence to change the face of the whole world." (p. 38)

Wells' comet is very much a symbol of the conceptual change necessary for real progress. We aren't as 'interested' in the strange gas it produces as we are in the Time Machine or even Cavourite. It doesn't grip our imaginations in quite that way (the way we read much SF). But its power as symbol suff-

uses the story, hovering in the night over the squalid concerns of humanity, showing the possibility of transformation. Reading the book some 80 years after original publication we receive at time contradictory messages. The waste, the limitation, of much human life under capitalism, the antiheroic stance of the young Leadford, right in his feelings but so profoundly immature in his weekly-paper socialism: the parallels between similar forces contending in Wells' day and our own: the old myth of strange portents in the sky foreshadowing change. "The comet" - as Brian Aldiss puts it - "has yet to come."

Overview...

A LOOK BEHIND THE REVIEWS: JOURNEYMAN PRESS.

JOURNEYMAN PRESS is a small "one and a half person" operation which has been operating for ten years and has built up a useful and interesting list.

Mainly political and social history (including, for example, Charles Poulen's essential THE ENGLISH REBELS), Journeyman's list contains some books of interest to the SF reader, particularly the SF reader who is interested in exploring the margins of the genre or who sees it as reflecting social or political concerns.

I've included reviews of some near-SF here, but anyone interested in finding out more about Journeyman's stock could contact them at 97 Ferme Park Road, Crouch End, London N8 9SA, as indeed you'd probably be best doing if you want to buy any of their books reviewed here: small left-wing publishing houses may not be widely represented in your local Smith's. (But any good Community Bookshop should have a selection of their titles.)

Perhaps the nearest thing to a 'real' SF writer in their list is Jack London, whose THE IRON HEEL, a chilling prediction of facism and revolution, is his "finest achievement in SF, and perhaps his masterpiece" (ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF SF).

This was Journeyman's first venture and their edition has recently been reprinted. Regretfully - particularly after the kind and effi cient co-operation of Peter Sinclair of JP - the review which should have appeared of this is a victim of a local post strike.

Meanwhile, Jack London's THE STAR ROVER, a more conventional proto-SF epic of time travel through reincarnation, is set for November publication. I hope to run reviews of both books next issue and - pending this - can only apologise for the technical breakdown and suggest (from what I remember of them) that you investigate Jack London's novels.

(Andy Sawyer)

Gerd Brantenberg - - THE DAUGHTERS OF EGALIA (Journeyman Press, 269pp. £4.95)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

Completely putdownable role-reversal satire first published in 1977 as EGALIAS DOTRE in Norway. The kindest thing I can think of to say about this book is that humour of this kind is notoriously difficult to translate. Probably a useful sociological document for those interested in sex roles in the late 1960s - early 1970s.

Thomas Campanella - - THE CITY OF THE SUN (Journeyman Chapbook 7, 62pp. £1.95)

William Morris - - A DREAM OF JOHN BALL (Oriole Chapbooks, 76pp. £0.75)

(Reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Within the remit of PAPERBACK INFERNO, these slim booklets are marginal, no doubt. But if concern for the future and the utopian strand is part of SF, then these books, however fringe, are worthy of comment. Both are written out of a serious examination of the writers' societies with the possibility of future change: when much present-day SF presents futures with the more mundane features of the present, their example is worth consideration.

This is not to suggest that everyone will enjoy these books. THE CITY OF THE SUN is a Utopian fiction written by an Italian monk in 1602 (and several times revised). It describes an imaginary city organised on the principles of rational philosophy; a benevolent and omnipotent state. Modern readers will find totalitarian elements present - particularly in the treatment of sexuality - while the perceptive SF reader will note the development of science: flight, powerful telescopes, and a form of radio are suggested. Both readings, though, are incomplete. It is speculation itself which is important here.

Morris's A DREAM OF JOHN BALL is apparently Victorian medievalism at its most escapist, with Morris's 'Dream' of the 1381 Peasan's Revolt so undercut by his romantic description of Medieval life that it's impossible to understand why these hearty, well-fed yeomen ever revolted in the first place. The meat of the pamphlet, though, comes in a few pages where the narrator explains to a bemused John Ball the nature of British capitalism in the 19th century, and Morris's real heart shine through.

Who, now, will write the 'Dream of William Morris'?

REVIEWS

Suzette Haden Elgin - - NATIVE TONGUE (Women's Press, 301pp. £2.50)

Jan Green/Sarah Le Fanu (eds.) - - DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONTIERS OF THE FEMALE MIND (Women's Press, 248pp. £2.50)

Naomi Mitchison - - MEMOIRS OF A SPACEWOMAN (Women's Press, 160 pp. £1.95)

Joanna Russ - - THE ADVENTURES OF ALYX (Women's Press, 192pp. £1.95)

(Reviewed by Joy Hibbert)

Another selection of feminist (or allegedly feminist, science fiction from The Women's Press. Again, mostly reprints, disappointingly.

Happily, the only book which is disappointing in its contents is THE ADVENTURES OF ALYX. No doubt the story of Alyx's development, how she overcame her upbringing and learned to think, is uplifting and feminist, but what she does with herself after that is another matter entirely, as most of the stories portray her as a woman equal to the worst of men (the two characters that spring to mind on first reading this collection are Heinlein's Farnham and Poul Anderson's Van Rijn) with much the same attitude to interpersonal relations - i.e. "I've got this gun, so do as I say". It is particularly surprising to see this character coming from Russ who satirises this attitude in 'The Chiches From Outer Space', one of the items in DESPATCHES. 'Cliches' consists of four very short pieces, exaggerating "conventional prose narratives of the sfnal kind". The first deals hilariously with the woman who learns to like men after being raped and impregnated by some sort of alien, in this case a plant. The last is entitled 'The Turnabout Story' in which the women are far more obviously based on male fantasy than Alyx is, but the principle - women would be far worse than any man given half a chance - is, I think, the same.

The rest of DESPATCHES is very mixed, and will surely put paid to any idea of WP writers following a party line, or any myths about women's limitations where SF is concerned. Is it coincidence, I wonder, that the established SF writers have tended to produce stories which are ultimately depressing or heartrending, while the newer women are more inspiring or hopeful? Stories of the world of advertising taken to its nauseating extreme, of nuclear destruction, of catatonia caused by a difference in perception (odd seeing a 'things man was not meant to know' story coming from Mitchison) come from established authors, together with 'Love Alters' by Tanith Lee and 'Morality Meat' by Racoona Sheldon. How Tanith Lee's story got into a feminist collection will always be a mystery to me. I have read so many SF stories with a message to the effect that a homosexual society would be a bad idea because it would treat heterosexuality as abnormal, so why is this different? It claims that "It isn't only the future that's on trial here, but the present." In what way? I wonder. More confusing is Sheldon's tale of a world where the anti-abortionists have been totally successful. The way the story is laid out suggests that she has tried, unsuccessfully, to build up suspense before the rather obvious climax of the story - if this is so, the story is ultimately unsuccessful. However, she may feel, understandably, that the theme is sufficiently horrific as not to need suspense. Happier tales come from newer, or non-SF, writers. Margaret Elphinstone charms with an uplifting and amusing retelling of 'Beauty and the Beast', while Beverley Ireland tells of a time when all the heavy work is done by telekinesis and Penny Casdagli shows us a beautiful tiny child, the product of parthenogenesis. Many have speculated that our archetypes and myths are the product of alien interference, and the final and most empathic story in this collection is Sue Thomason's attempt to tell us how it must feel to deliberately commit this interference, for the good of the culture in question.

One query: why does the book have a picture of Virginia Woolf on the cover when she is not mentioned inside at all?

Naomi Mitchison has often expressed herself as being out of sympathy with modern feminism, as the men of her family have always treated her as an equal, and thus it is surprising that her novel fits so well into the anti-imperialist mood of modern feminism. The anti-imperialist mood is a heated discussion of how much interference in other societies is acceptable, if any. MEMOIRS deals with the question of interference with societies on other planets, and raises interesting moral/ethical questions in an oddly-laid-out novel. Unlike most novels it doesn't have anything resembling a beginning and a resolution, starting with a few pages ramble about ethical problems in general, and ending with the character, Mary, resting before the next expedition. Mary is an explorer, specialising in communication with aliens, and describes the events of various expeditions and experiments, each with their own problems. Communic-

ation methods are not specified, though there never seem to be problems in that area, so I assume the communicators must be telepathic, at least to some extent; or at least empathic. A very thoughtful and thoughtprovoking book, which rewards careful rereading.

NATIVE TONGUE is also concerned with communication. It is set 200 years in the future, a future where the 'Moral Majority' or some similar group have been successful. Reagan's birthday is a bank holiday, contraception and abortion are illegal, women have the same rights as a pet animal, and divorce is seriously frowned upon. The only thing about the future that is unexpected is the fact that humans are communicating and trading with humanoid aliens, peacefull. This is made possible by a group of 13 families collectively known as the Linguist families, who work very hard from a very early age (like about 1 year) to learn alien languages and the social rules that surround them. Women's legal position is the result of 'proof' of female intellectual inferiority having been found, though women linguists work as hard as their men, who cling to the comforting fiction that linguistic skill is not connected to intelligence. The story concerns the life of Nazareth Chornyak, born a linguist, particularly skilled, married to an insecure man for genetic reasons, and finally sent to Chornyak Barren House (where old Chornyak women live) after unnecessarily mutilating surgery for cancer. A subtheme concerns the attempts of the government to work out a way of learning non-humanoid alien languages without killing the student. When you read the book, it all seems very logical and hopeful - the women are working on a women's language which they believe will change people's consciousness, and eventually it does. But, as in most stories, various holes appear after a little thought. Is it simply American chauvinism that makes Elgin assume that all the linguist families, even the ones in Africa, will be devoutly Christian, or does she believe the 'Moral Majority' will destroy Islam? If a girl of 15 has been told throughout her life that the women's language project is just a time-wasting method for old women, is it likely she will face life with an unbearable man in order to work on this project after the menopause? Laadan is a fascinating idea, a language made simple to pronounce and including all the concepts that would be useful to women that male-dominated languages just don't have words for, for example

> radiidin: non-holiday, a time allegedly a holiday but actually so much a burden because of work and preparations that it is a dreadful occasion...
> rashida: non-game, a cruel 'playing' that is a game only for the dominant 'players' with the power to force others to participate.

Elgin suggests the reason men have traditionally been impatient with female conversation is because women have to use so many words to get concepts like these across, but it also raises the uestion of concepts in language that men allege are female concepts and nothing to do with them. If a language is masculine why does it have some female concepts (e.g. affection) and not others? Or are these female concepts merely male concepts, or neuter concepts that men are afraid of acknowledging?

But the ending of the story is a bit of a let down. Yes, the language improves the lot of the linguist women, to a small extent, but has no effect on the lives of the non-linguists, and doesn't change woman's legal or social position. (What does it say about men who define women as sub-human and still find them attractive? All languages have words for such a perversion, and none of them are polite). NATIVE TONGUE is a collection of fascinating concepts, many of which I haven't the space to discuss here, inside a story which could have been better thought out.

Piers Anthony - - THOUSANDSTAR (Bantam, 294pp. £2.95)

VISCOUS CIRCLE (Bantam, 266pp. £2.95)
(Also available from Granada @ £2.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

The 'Cluster' series is set some three million years after the collapse - or disappearance - of a galaxy-spanning civilisation. Although longgone from our galaxy this civilization has left behind them a number or archaeological remains. Occasionally these Ancient Sites contain functioning examples of the Ancients' technology and these 'live' sites are eagerly sought by most of the galaxy's intelligent species. It is with the quests for two of these sites that these books are concerned.

in THOUSANDSTAR, a functioning Ancient Site has been discovered and, in order to prevent conflict, a race is organised to decide possession. The winner of this race, which is a test of physical and mental abilities, will take possession of the site on behalf of his/her species. Transfer, developed from Ancient Technology, is the process of transferring the Aura, or soul, from one body to another. In this way the competitors are teamed up with an alien host from one of three species: the Squem are snake-like carnivores, and ruthless with it; the Erbs are basically mobile plants, capable of violence where needed; whilst the HydrO are spherical beings who communicate with

chemical sprays. It is with a HydrO called Heem of the Highfalls that Jessica of Etamin, the Solarian (human) candidate is paired.

Much of the background of these two characters - and they are real characters - is revealed in a series of flashbacks, the details of Heem's early life being particularly well described. The relationship between the two characters is also explored, the differences between the two leading to moments of genuine humour.

Although I have my doubts as to the credibility of the aliens, they are at least interesting, and my favourites are the Bands from VISCOUS CIRCLE. Their physical structure is that of fine iron particles suspended in a magnetic field, and they live in a carefree, pacifistic society.

Ronald Snowden is a Transfer agent inhabiting a Band host, but having lost his memory believes himself to actually be a Band, calling himself Rondl. He has been sent to discover the location of an Ancient Site, but on regaining his memory he decides to save the Bands from the extermination that his own race - the 'Monsters' - will undoubtedly inflict upon them in their search for the site. The Viscous Cirle is, according to Band belief, a gestalt to which all Bands return at death, a belief which bolsters their pacifistic nature.

These books are described by the publishers as "grand outer space opera" and this is certainly an apt description. Nevertheless they are competently written, if a little overlong, and they have a nice leavening of humour, something lacking in too many works.

Isaac Asimov/ Patrick Warrick/ Martin Greenberg (eds.) - - MACHINES THAT THINK (Penguin, 627pp. £4.95)

(Reviewed by Nigel Richardson)

Twenty nine reprinted stories about robots and computers. Most have been anthologised many times before. Many you'll already have on your shelf, such as 'I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream', 'The Monkey Wrench', 'The Bicentennial Man', etc. Two thirds of the stories were written before 1958 and many are so old as to be unreadable unless you have a soft spot for the likes of Murray Leinster or Harl Vincent. The most up-to-date story is dated 1976, so if you're looking for up-to-the-minute speculation on artificial intelligence you will be disappointed. Five of the stories are by Isaac Asimov, as is the perfunctory, smug and self-congratulatory introduction.

Penguin publish very little SF, but what they do is generally not worth bothering with. Back in the sixties things were different and Penguin's SF line was adventurous and exciting with some of the best cover art to grace any publication. I cannot bring myself to describe how bad the cover of MACHINES THAT THINK is.

Utterly pointless, out-of-date and overpriced. What more could you ask for?

Spider Robinson - - MINDKILLER (Sphere, 246pp. £2.25)

(Reviewed by F.V. Bailey)

By an adroit switching between separated time sequences in alternate chapters, and also between corresponding third person and first person (amnesic) narration, MINDKILLER creates and maintains its tensions, forges its way through mazes of psychosis, mayhem and a rather cloudy crusading idealism. These routes converge in the final revelations and resolutions - though you are left feeling that the journey has perhaps been better than the contrived arrival. There is certainly a lot that's good along the way: descriptions of "wireheading" - direct stimulation of the hypothalamus - in both its ecstatic and destructive functionings; sex experiences (bondage, lesbian, auro-erotic you name them) that have the great virtue of being integral to characterisation and plot development; best of all a sense of place, the Nova Scotian scene and heritage at times so strongly pervasive that I was happiest following the story with a large-scale atlas to hand.

As an exercise in computer-facilated detection, in its speculative investigations of the nature of mind, memory, and consciousness, this is lively and very readable SF. In its save-the-human-race dimensions, however, it may come a little too close to the 'Illuminati' stereotype for imaginative comfort.

Arthur C. Clarke - - 1984: SPRING. A CHOICE OF FUTURES (Panther, 272pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Alan Fraser)

In the preface of this volume, Clarke states his aim was to produce in 1984 a book of optimism about the future to set against Orwell's dark vision. 1984: SPRING consists of a varied selection of magazine articles, speeches, book prefaces and letters, most of which date from the early eighties. The material is divided into four sections; 'The Weapons of Peace', which discusses the future of technology and its effect here on Earth, particularly in the Third World; 'Apollo and After', which discusses the future of space exploration; 'The Literary Scene', articles about both science fiction and mainstream fiction; and 'From the Coast of Coral', views of life in Sri Lanka.

Clarke describes himself as a liberal optimist and a 'space cadet' - fervently in favour of the use of technology to better Mankind's lot and in favour of space exploration, and fervently against the waste of scientific resources represented by the nuclear arms race and the 'Star Wars' programme. His enthusiasm for flooding the developing nations with solar-powered trannies, tellies and 'electronic tutors' may annoy some readers, but most will agree with his denunciation of the misues of technology to provide weaponry. Clarke believes strongly that to shun technology because it allows us to build fearsome weapons is throwing the baby out with the bath water.

This book suffers badly because of its origins, because much of the material is repeated from chapter to chapter, and there is really no cohesive plan to link together the four sections. Taken as a whole, however, the book does give a clear picture of Clarke's views and the breadth of his interests from space flight to scuba diving, meeting with Brendan Behan and George Bernard Shaw on the way. I would class it along with another book for Clarke fans only, THE LOST WORLDS OF 2001, which contains chapters and other material left out of 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY as the book went through the transition from 'The Sentinel' via the screenplay to the book of the film. I approached the review with the aim of rereading two non-fiction books of Clarke's from the sixties, PROFILES OF THE FUTURE and VOICES FROM THE SKY, and contrasting his predictions then with those he is making in the eighties. However, I decided in the end that the content of 1984: SPRING was not similar enough to those books to justify the exercise, and that the book requires an independent judgement. If you want a book about the future of the human race, this isn't it - if you want a book about Arthur C. Clarke in the eighties, then this is for you.

Terry Brooks - - THE WISHSONG OF SHANNARA (Futura, 498pp. £4.95)

(Reviewed by Nik Morton)

This, the "triumphant finale to the best-selling Shannara trilogy", is a trade paperback, with interior and cover illustrations by Sweet, and two maps by the Brothers Hildebrandt. I haven't read the two earlier volumes, and probably won't, though that is not because I didn't enjoy WISHSONG. If you have travelled with the Ohmsfords before, then there will probably be familiar ground and names for you; if not, then the preceeding books are not prerequisites to your understanding. The book stands alone. The action takes place just over 20 years after Wil Ohmsford had used the Elf-

stones given him by the Druid Allanon in his efforts to protect the Chosen Amberle Elessedil in her quest for the Bloodfire. Wil's children, his daughter Brin and younger son Jair, had been born with Elven magic in them, legacies of the Elfstones: each possessed the Wishsong, Jair's merely able to create remarkable illusions while Brin's was real and powerful. Inevitably, they become sucked into a quest, spurred on by the uncanny appearance of Allanon. Black Walkers - Mord Wraiths - are abroad, and the Four Lands are slowly dying: dark magic is again threatening. Brin's sweetheart, Rone Leah, accompanies them, with the Sword of Leah, the same weapon his grandfather Menion had carried in his search for the Sword of Shannara more than 70 years ago, and thus the threads intertwine...

There is a steady build-up of both threat and conflict until the siege of Cilliidellan by the Mord Wraiths, where the imagery really comes alive. Indeed, most of the battles were powerfully shown, be it between Allanon and the terrible Jachyra who fed on pain or the moor cat Whisper clawing the dark Wraiths.

Brin's quest for the destruction of the Ildatch, the immemorial book of evil spells, achieves an awakening of her wishsong powers and she and her brother grow with the ensuing experiences. The story is about power, wielded for good or evil designs, and about love, too. Its major appeal is probably for adolescents - but adults with any vestige of a sense of wonder left should find satisfaction in the unravelling of the quest, as the pace increases and the dangers mount. Death is not shirked, there is sadness, and the heroics are generally not histrionic. The end does tend to presage another "far distant and beyond the lives of generations of Ohmsfords yet unborn, when the magic will be needed

again." Perhaps Brooks is just hedging his bets in case another sequence springs to mind, or he may already be constructing it. I only hope it does not also involve a quest... I may have enjoyed this one but question having to embark on another!

Josh Pachter (ed.) - - TOP SCIENCE FICTION: THE AUTHORS' CHOICE (Dent, 430 pp. £2.95)

In 1983, Josh Pachter wrote to over 100 "of the greatest living SF authors, inviting them to select and introduce the very best SF story they had ever written, or their favourite own story, or the story which they felt was most representative of their work in the genre. Well over half responded; while some stories were too long for the collection, 49 were selected, comprising over 700 pages of material - yet the British audience only gets 25 authors and 340 pages, wheras Holland will get the lot, in two volumes... Inevitably, then, many favoutites are missing from this collection. Still, the selection is good, and often revealing.

Obviously, the author's choice will not always run in accord with his fans' opinions. I was pleased to reread Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains" and wasn't surprised at its selection; it was effectively treated on radio some years back, too - and is appropriate in this memorial year of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The prolific Isaac Asimov is as nauseatingly self-congratulatory as ever. His "The Last Question" was read out in a planetarium version: he concluded, "...the very best story I had written - and perhaps (for I am not modest) the very best SF short story anyone had ever written." As he wrote the story in 1956, my conclusion is he has been past his best for 30 years! (And I thought authors grew, improved, matured, with age and continual honing of their art, like Aldiss, perhaps...)

Clearly, the danger - and the fun - in including authors' comments is in reading the background to stories' creations or perceiving the self-images projected by some authors. Asimov has competition in the guise of Larry Niven, who is full of himself. He'd like to see "The Green Marauder" is basic science textbooks, for he's a compulsive teacher who unfortunately can't suffer fools gladly, so would not qualify as a teacher. But he can write stories - he says so, though I doubt if the story mentioned would ever appear in a basic English textbook... Alan Dean Foster's "Why Johnny Can't Speed" is virtually a slightly different viewpoint of Harlan Ellison's"Along the Scenic Route" without the latter's dramatic imaginative drive (no pun intended!) The background to Leiber's"Endfray of the Ofay" was more interesting than the story, Pohl chose "Day Million"as he felt it should have won a Nebula or a Hugo.It leaves me cold at every reading. If you've been counting, that is five authors slated - the remainder have been represented by commendable efforts and the following are definitely very worthy of inclusion under the 'Top' banner:

"All the World's Tears" (Aldiss), "Internal Combustion" (de Camp), "The Engineer and the Executioner" (Stableford), "Daisy, in the Sun" (Willis), "In Looking-Glass Castle" (Wolfe), and "Capricorn Games" (Silverberg). Pisercchia's "A Typical Day" was excellent, and extrapolated genetic engineering with a sure believable touch. I'd not read any Connie Willis before, but after her story's memorable style I shall gladly keep an eye out for other works by her.

Ranging from 1926 to 1983, the stories have worn surprisingly well. If you don't have many of these stories in various collections, then this is a worthwhile book to buy. It is good value for money.

(Nik Morton)

Barbara Hambly - - THE WALLS OF AIR (Unwin/Unicorn, 314pp. £2.50)

Book Two of the Darwath Trilogy is rather better than Book One (THE TIME OF THE DARK, reviewed in PI 55) but would probably strike me as a much less good novel if I hadn't read the latter relatively recently. Our protagonists, Rudy and Gil, are busy doing the kind of thing we have come to expect people from 'our world' to do in a fantasy world, though this incarnation of the common theme is rather better and more stylishly written than most. Rudy is learning how to be a wizard from Ingold Inglorion while carrying on a secret love-affair with the reigning queen, Minalde. Gil is learning to be a warrior, or rather discovering her vocation as a warrior in the realm of Darwath, and being unrequitedly in love with Ingold.

The main action of the plot is the journey of Ingold and Rudy to Quo, the Hidden City of the Wizards. I won't tell you what they find there, but it's something genuinely disturbing in its implications, and very well written.

This is rather a wait-and-see sort of review, because the book is good in itself, but deserves to be judged not simply on its own merits, but as the middle third of a trilogy, the final volume of which isn't published (at time of writing). Some interim comments: Hambly seems to be falling into the common trap of being far too fond of all her major characters to kill them

off, even when the logic of the plot suggests that a no-win situation is about to take place. This is understandable, because on the whole her characters are very interesting and likeable people (though I'm not fond of Rudy. Rudy is not only a bum, he's a spineless bum - too much like me for comfort, perhaps!)

Also, I dislike books which rely on the loneliness of the long-distance lover as their primary emotional dynamic. It's too easy to build up the idealistic passion through frustration after frustration, missed opportunity after missed opportunity, to get the reader hooked and keep her interested (definately her rather than him; this is a traditional plot device in the "womens' fiction" of romantic-historical writing, though I'm not saying men can't appreciate it.

The world of the books is well enough realised to be pleasingly convincing, though there is a good deal of fairly overt borrowing from the masters of the genre. My final feeling: so far, so good. I await the resolution of Book Three with considerable interest.

(Sue Thomason)

Barbara Hambly - - THE ARMIES OF DAYLIGHT (Unwin/Unicorn, 311pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Sue Thomason)

This is the concluding volume of the Darwath Trilogy (the first and second books are THE TIME OF THE DARK and THE WALLS OF AIR and I strongly reccommend that you read them first). ARMIES is as good an indepentant novel as the two earlier volumes, as it is mainly concerned with untangling the loose ends left by all the major characters in the previous books, and providing a satisfying and original conclusion to the problem of the Dark. The Darwath books are certainly a cut above the 'average' fantasy novel, with both breadth and depth of writing, a very well-realised and self-consistent world, believable and varied characters with considerable emotional range, and a good taut plot. Thoroughly reccommended as a 'good read'.

David Gemmell - - THE KING BEYOND THE GATE (Century, 309 pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Denise Gorse)

More swords than sorcery in this one, as half-breed prince Tenaka Khan sets out to kill the man who betrayed his comrades and enslaved his father's people, the Drenai. Gemmell, who is apparently a student of historic battles "from Thermopylae to the Ardennes campaign" has no particular feel for language or the development of character, his main interest being in swordplay and tactics. The fantasy element too is minimal, and largely irrelevant to the plot. One point comes to mind, and that is the lack of a map - usually obligatory (but superfluous) in novels of this kind. I found it difficult to visualise the geography of the regions in which Gemmell's battles were taking place, and since these are the main point of the story the omission is surprising. In conclusion: a fair enough read for a wet Sunday or the proverbial train journey, but unless you share the author's enthusiasm for things military your £2.95 could probably be better spent.

Gordon R. Dickson - - THE FINAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA (Sphere, 692 pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by Ken Lake)

I've read and enjoyed the entire DORSAI cycle - part of the projected Childe Cycle that might be regarded as Dickson's magnum opus - and eagerly awaited this culminating work. I've been disappointed.

For the record, the complete sequence is NECROMANCER (1962), TACTICS OF MISTAKE (1971), SOLDIER, ASK NOT (1967), DORSAI! (1960), THE SPIRIT OF DORSAI (1979), LOST DORSAI (1980) and the present work.

We open with the obligatory quick killing scene, pass through a wodge of corny 19th-century poetic quotations which purport to establish culture and ethos, and then are led through a vast number of perfectly ordinary events, made duller by the vast over-description that goes into the contemporary American blockbuster (at 250 pages this would have been a taut, gripping and essentially meaningful work).

Sure, it's well written in the sense that there are few verbal infelicities - though naming a character Amid was rather silly as it leads to constant misunderstandings. The apostrophes are in the right places, the sentences flow as does the action - a bit turgidly but with verisimilitude except when we snap into Superman overdrive - but the other SF cliche also reveals itself all too frequently, whereby Our Hero acts so quixotically and stupidly that he sets himself up to be attacked over and over by the very people he could easily have wiped out on several occasions.

The book has apocalyptic breadth and scope - but not depth, I'm afraid. Our Hero is not only the hidden salvation of all mankind, but all the goodies love him on sight and shield him, while even the baddies mostly

respect and fear him. When, on page 272, he finally decides he cannot be killed because his sense of mission is so strong (he changes his mind later, of course), I longed for a sniper to knock him off speedily and save me a further 420 pages of tedium.

And, of course, the real complaint to aim at this vast work is that it's a swindle. The cover inscription tells us it is "The majestic culmination of the Dorsai cycle" but when we finally fight through to p. 680, Our Hero and The Antagonist are both alive, the battle has yet to begin, the heroine is still out in the sticks getting ready for guerilla warfare, the misleading scene of mayhem depicted on the cover is found to be merely a preliminary smalltime scuffle... no, there's nothing FINAL about The Final Encyclopaedia, I'm afraid.

To bulk out the book even more we have a dozen pages of Sandra Miesel's unnecessary psychological analysis of the seven bokks and their inner meanings. Since Dickson has lost no opportunity throughout this latest book to reiterate and reiterate, till we're plumb tuckered with skipping yet another explanation, this does rather seem like guilding the lily. It's all about as useful as the introductory 'star map', which can be summed up in the author's own words as "not to scale".

But I persevered, and I am sure that all Dorsai devotees will persevere, but I'm afraid they will mostly wish Dickson had continued in the terse and striking style of his sixties works. We all know it's going to come out right in the end; we all know most of the things that remain hidden from Hal's own understanding, at least from about p. 20, and it's a long, long trail a-winding to get to Home Base.

Alan Lee - - CASTLES (Unwin/Unicorn, 192pp. £7.95)

Steve Jackson/ Ian Livingstone - - OUT OF THE PIT (Puffin, 128pp. £3.95)

Michael Hague (Illustrator) - - THE TOLKIEN CALENDAR 1986 (Unwin, £3.95)

(reviewed by Andy Sawyer)

Three possibilities for Yule presents if you're still looking...CASTLES is basically a collection of Alan Lee's illustrations, with descriptive text from David Day. 'The Age of Myth' is the age of the Hall of the Volsungs, Asgard, and the Faerie castles of Celtic lore; 'The Age of Romance' is Camelot, Joyous Garde, and the mountain castles of the Rhine; 'The Age of Fantasy' begins with the castles of Renaissance allegory through Orlando Furioso to fairy-tale castles and the modern fantasies of Poe, Kafka, Tolkien and Peake. Lee's delicate illustrations are a world away from the overblown sword-and-sorcery fantasies of Frank Frazetta (see last issue): the soaring romantic spires or windswept wave-battered ruins of Lee's pictures capture the essence of 'The Castle' as a place of mystery on the borders of the fields we know. The word 'fey' can have perjorative connotations, and CASTLES doesn't escape this charge in places, but there's enough true magic in its pages to make it a good collection to be dipped into and used as a base to explore more fully the tales it illustrates.

Likewise aimed at the present-buying market, OUTOF THE PIT is a glossy compendium of monsters from the authors' Fighting Fantasy gamebooks. 250 creatures from the Aakor (a kind of winged wolf) to the Zombie are listed, with their game-ratings and encyclopaedic background information. Well worth purchasing for anyone involved in Fighting Fantasy, and an enjoyable excursion into the genre for the novice. Very well produced and worth the money, with an extra bonus of eight full-page colour plates.

The Tolkien Calendar for 1986 is based upon Michael Hague's illustrations for the recent edition of THE HOBBITT. They're reminiscent of stills from an animated cartoon - Hague admits to influences from Disney as well as Arthur Rackham - and I can't say I like them a lot. In particular, Gandalf's flowing white hair and beard and long pointed hat make him as numinous as a Woolworth's Santa Claus. For completists only.

Derek Sawde - - SCEPTRE MORTAL (Oriflamme, 294pp. £2.95)

(Reviewed by Margaret Hall)

If you imagine a collaboration between Tolkien and William Hope Hodgson you'll get something of the flavour of this book:characters from THE SILMARILLION, senario from THE NIGHT LAND.

The style is 'high fantasy' and though avoiding many of the pitfalls of mock archaic, the prose reads rather flat. The books also lacks narrative drive, mainly because it is difficult to become involved with the characters. In fact, it wasn't until the numbers had been whittled down somewhat by Horrible Deaths that I managed to be able to sort them out at all.

A new enemy, the Drarkh, threatens the lands of Alban and the Northlands, but the real danger comes from Ral, the Witch Queen/White Goddess who was not destroyed in the War of the Sceptres as everyone thought, but is alive and well and gathering her forces to take over the world. Selenthoril, the High Magician, summons Prince Talarnidh and the eleven Lords of Wenyaltrir (all with names like Wondrith, Melandir,

Tasarnil, Erathrir and Yeselwir, hence the confusion) to search for the Sceptre Mortal which is the only thing capable of killing Ral. The quest leads Talarnidh et. al. through suitably drear and desolate lands infested with curses, undead rotting corpses and walking skeletons. Finally there is the traditional last battle with the elves, sylphs, gnomes and dwarves fighting against the assembled trolls, giants,goblins, dragons and werebats of Ral. And, of course, at the end, the real, darkest evil is unmasked and defeated.

There is a lot of confusing ancient history, but very little detailed description, not even of the main characters, which makes telling them all apart terribly difficult. The forces of evil are cliches of hideousness and the Pine Wose bordered on the whimsical, a poor substitute for a Tolkienian Ent.

The book does have its dramatic moments and there are some strong ideas lost in the plot, but Sawde never exploits them to the full.

Frederick Pohl - - DEMON IN THE SKULL (Penguin, 172pp, £1.95)

(Reviewed by Helen McNabb)

It is a revised edition of A PLAGUE OF PYTHONS, which was published in 1965 and about which the ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION said "it exhibits a distinct uneasiness in plot construction". That must have been one of the things Pohl revised because I found the plotting generally quite good except for Chandler's too frequent escapes from death which did stretch my credulity beyond reasonable limits. The story follows Chandler making his haphazard way in a world where supposed aliens can take control of a person without warning, to commit rape, murder, torture and other evils, which is what happens ro Chandler. After various adventures he ends up in Hawaii, where the mind controllers live (no I'm not telling you who/what they are) as a pampered pet/gigolo to one of them.

It is very readable; Pohl's style is clear, literate and kept my interest throughout. The central development of the story is not technological but human. Chandler is appalled by the cruelty of the controlling powers. He is outraged as only a decent, moral, thoughtful liberal man would be. The wastage of human lives is abhorrent to him; his hope is to survive and somehow - somehow - to destroy the controllers and give mankind back its own destiny. How this alters Chandler, how he compromises his integrity for what he sees as a long term good so that the man at the end of the story is radically different from the one at the beginning is intriguing and makes worthwhile reading. I recommend the book.

Donald Cotton - - DR WHO: THE MYTH MAKERS (Target, 144pp. £1.50)

(Reviewed by Christopher Ogden)

The myth in question is that of the siege of Troy.

Arriving in the midst of a battle between the Trojan Hector and the Greek Achilles, the Doctor - William Hartnell's Doctor - is hailed by the latter as Zeus. However, not everybody in the Greek camp is convinced of the Doctor's divinity and so, in order to prove himself, Odysseus sets our hero the task of finding a way to bring about the destruction of Troy. Steven - one of the Doctor's companions - suggests the inevitable, a suggestion which the Doctor rejects on the grounds of impracticality; but eventually a wooden horse it is. A complication to this plot is the fact that Vicki, the Doctor's other companion, is within the city of Troy where, under the assumed name of Cressida, she has been declared a prophetess and has fallen foul of Cassandra.

A fairly straightforward adventure, it would seem, but what raises it above the mundane is the level of humour employed, from punning chapter titles such as 'Zeus Ex Machina' to the various characterisations - that of Menelaus is particularly memorable - to the anachronism of 20th century slang as used by the supposed writer of the book, Homer, who is himself quite a character. (I doubt, however, that there are plans to issue THE MYTH MAKERS as a Penguin Classic!)

Like most of you, I take my SF fairly seriously. There are times, however, when I want a light, undemanding and entertaining read. At such times I often reach for a Dr. Who book. And THE MYTH MAKERS has got to be one of the best.

David Pringle - - SCIENCE FICTION: THE 100 BEST NOVELS (Xanadu, 224pp. £3.95)

(Reviewed by L.J. Hurst)

When Anthony Burgess brought out his NINETY-NINE NOVELS: THE BEST IN ENGLISH SINCE 1939 two years ago, David Pringle replied with a list of ninety-nine works of pure SF. He has now modified his list and annotated it. Each novel, as in Burgess, is dealt with in a two page essay with bibliographical details appended. It starts with Orwell's 1984, progresses through Clement's MISSION OF GRAVITY, Burroughs' NOVA EXPRESS, Ian Watson's THE EMBEDDING, Russ' FEMALE MAN, Hoban's RIDDLEY WALKER, and ends with NEUROMANCER by William Gibson. A catholic selection indeed.

There is no point in arguing whether these are the best novels. They are certainly representative, either of their period or of a strand within the genre; some may also be evidence of the pitfalls and failures. Some I rate highly as novels per se, let alone as SF; oth-

ers I do not or cannot tolerate. Given all that, two things need to be considered: the development of SF exemplified by this skeleton library, and David Pringle's treatment of it. Let's take the list as given.

The development of SF reveals several major elements. The earliest books were written as neither SF nor literary but as an attempt to influence all readers possible; yet, even while the subjects remained important, these seemed to canalise in the fifties into a generic treatment that limited their effect. Too easily, science and fantasy became confused - just look at no. 47, Dick's DR. BLOODMONEY or 62, Spinrad's BUG JACK BARRON, predicated on the incredible belief that anyone would want immortality. Then in the 1970s other elements started to appear - the annexation of feminism, for instance, and other elements disappeared - progressive or socialist beliefs. There are no socialist or liberal texts after no. 70, Reynolds' LOOKING BACKWARDS, FROM THE YEAR 2000, as if Charnas' WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD (72), Russ (78) or Piercy's WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME (81) had stolen their seats on the SF bus. And given what David Pringle calls the "crude senario" of the feminists it is easy to see why the worlds of inner space have vanished, although I would have thought their rarity would make them a thing to be desired.

But given the body of its history, surely anyone at any time in the last 35 years could only be encouraged to believe that it was worthwhile going on by the sports, not the normal run of texts. The standard above which these books shone was and is low.

David Pringle's treatment of each book tends to synopsis. He mentions the special elements relevant to each work, then usually gives the gist of the story. I am not sure that this is a good idea. I would have preferred a more critical work - that is, more commentary and less re-telling. Occasional comments and paragraphs about certain books tend to show flashes of great insight but they make the absence on other essays more obvious. This is a book to be read once thoroughly, and then only selectively re-read. To be re-read, though.

Ian Watson - - THE BOOK OF THE RIVER (Granada, 240 pp. £1.95)

Michael Shea - - NIFFT THE LEAN (Granada, 363pp. £2.50)

(Reviewed by Phil Nichols)

THE BOOK OF THE RIVER chronicles, in first person, the life of a young woman, Yaleen, on a world divided by a forbidding black current in the river's midstream. She lives on the eastern bank in a society of diversified power and trade; a land of peace, plenty and tradition. Women sail the river freely, plying their trade. Each man is restricted to travelling the river only once in his life. Her brother Capsi's curiousity draws Yaleen reluctantly to wonder about life on the west bank. Capsi travels beneath the black current to reach the other side - and is captured and killed. Yaleen, too, makes the crossing and discovers a masculine society of centralised authority; a land of vindictiveness and dogma, for whose inhabitants the river is evil.

NIFFT THE LEAN chronicles, through a mosaic of four storytellers, the life of a thief and his companions in a typical fantasy-medieval world. It is a world where the very ground may strain and rupture into human form, where entrances to hell are commonplace, and where the rivers of hell thrive with wretched life. Among Nifft's tasks are the dragging of a whining man through the portals of death to face the retribution of a betrayed lover; the rescue of a precocious adolescent from the depths of hell; and the cheating of a vampire queen.

NIFFT's impact is visceral: a rollicking set of adventures replete with all manner of blood-curdling tortures. In Nifft's world all relationships seem based on possession of body, mind or spirit. To pass through the underworld one must pay the inhabitants with flesh ("manskin") of their choosing, be it a finger, an ear or an eye. The Vampire Queen preserves her youth and beauty by gorging on the blood of a Year King in an orgiastic sacrifice. Told with a sly good humour, every sense is appealed to as Nifft and Barnar scheme and connive across a world constructed solely of the four elements - and evil.

RIVER's tale is also a rollicking adventure, but here the appeal is largely to the mind. Yaleen's growth is along a rising curve of knowledge: she begins as an unquestioning novice who learns the traditions and practices of her guild; she learns of the current, the western shore and the world-girdling worm at the river's heart; she gains knowledge approaching omniscience in the belly of the worm, ultimately controlling the worm itself. An attempt is made concurrently to characterise Yaleen. She loses her brother and, returning home to deliver the news of his death, discovers that her mother is pregnant. Unable to break the bad news, and supplanted in her parents' affections, she returns to the river, now forever isolated from her former family. Her familial isolation drives her towards the many acts which lead to the potential uniting of the river-divided world.

NIFFT THE LEAN is a brisk read, each scene carefully set up and developed, each development advanced with a sense of poignancy and a tone of prurriance. But little is learned by its characters or its reader; just so many

incidents of cunning, trickery or possession. THE BOOK OF THE RIVER is brimful of ideas, as one has come to expect of Watson. Though I must carp at the sometimes uneven pace, nevertheless this work is one to be read, re-read and highly recommended.

Jefferson P. Swycaffer - - BECOME THE HUNTED (Avon, 160pp. £2.95)

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

BECOME THE HUNTED is a chase thriller that could just as easily have been set on Earth in New York or the Wild West. The plot grows moderately complex for the first two-thirds but then loses its way.

A Space Navy surgeon, Athalos Steldan, is on the run, with several groups after him. He takes refuge in the underworld, which inconveniently is being cleaned up by the police, while bounty hunters as well as naval intelligence are after him. Chases and captures all run against the clock of a fuel-tanker explosion, in the confusion of which Steldan hopes to get off-planet.

The explosion never occurs (luckily, as this would blacken Steldan's name and he is a goody) but preventing it helps the navy to capture Steldan. On his capture he is immediately exonerated and his evil superiors exposed. Planetary crime is ended, and, accepting the fact that naval crooks end with a pension rather than punishment, all ends happily.

BECOME THE HUNTED is odd because it is based on two role-playing games. It would, I think, account for the problems Swycaffer has dealing with the personalities of his characters. None of them have one. Steldan's actions are hardly consistent and this is very true of his liason with "a beautiful bounty hunter who comes to believe in him and his desperate mission. He leaves her tied up in a cupboard. BECOME THE HUNTED will pass an hour but it is marginal SF.

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

ALSO RECEIVED:- (This does not preclude further reviews)

Parke Godwin - THE LAST RAINBOW (Bantam) // K.C. Flint - MASTER OF THE SIDHE (Bantam)// Harry Harrison - WEST OF EDEN (Bantam)// Norman Spinrad - SONGS FROM THE STARS (Bantam) // Sh-ila Finch - INFINITY'S WEB (Bantam) // E. Scarborough - THE CHRISTENING QUEST (Bantam) // S. Marshak & M. Culbreath - STAR TREK: THE NEW VOYAGES 1 & 2 (Bantam) // Kilian Crawford - EYAS (Bantam) // S.E. Delarey - STARS IN MY POCKET LIKE GRAINS OF SAND (Bantam) // Somtow Sucharitkul - THE DARKLING WIND (Bantam) // R.A. MacAvoy - THE BOOK OF KELLS (Bantam) // Mike McQuay - MY SCIENCE PROJECT (Bantam) // Rick Raphael - CODE THREE (Granada) // Lynn Beach - CONQUEST OF THE TIME MASTER (Avon) // R.L. Stine - CHALLENGE OF THE WOLF KNIGHT (Avon) // Robert E. Vardeman - THE CRYSTAL CLOUDS (Avon) // Poul Anderson & Gordon Dickson - EARTHMAN'S BURDEN (Avon) // Barrington Bayley - THE ROD OF LIGHT (Methuen) // S. Jackson & I. Livingstone - REBEL PLANET (Puffin) // Keith Roberts - MOLLY ZERO (Penguin) // David Langford - THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT (Sphere) // James P. Hogan - CODE OF THE LIFEMAKER (Penguin) // Moyra Caldecott - THE TOWER OF THE EMERALD (Arrow) // David Drake - CROSS THE STARS (Arrow) // Wolf von Niebelschutz - THE BADGER OF GHISSI (Unicorn) // Joy Chant - THE HIGH KINGS (Bantam) // Paul Cook - DUENDE MEADOW (Bantam) // E.E. Smith - REVOLT OF THE GALAXY (Grafton) // P.K. Dick - LIES, INC. (Granada) // Barry Longyear - ELEPHANT'S SONG (Orbit) // Jack L. Chalker - THE RIVER OF DANCING GODS (Orbit) // M.Z. Bradley - NIGHT'S DAUGHTER (Sphere) and HAWKMISTRESS (Arrow) // Bob Shaw - FIRE PATTERN (Grafton) // Jack Vance - PLANET OF ADVENTURE (Grafton) // Karel Capek - WAR WITH THE NEWTS // Dave Langford - THE TRANSATLANTIC HEARING AID (from the author at 94 London Road, Reading, Berks RG1 5AU £2.25 including postage. An everyday saga of convention-going folk: all profits to T.A.F.F. and WELL WORTH GETTING!)