

SCIENCE FICTION

WINTER 1985

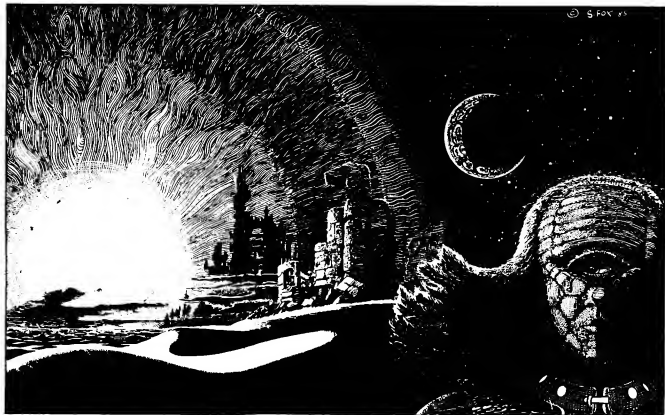
REVIEW

NUMBER 57

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P.O. BOX 11408
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Next Issue....

A CONVERSATION WITH NORMAN SPINRAD

INTERVIEW WITH J. NEIL SCHULMAN (Part One)

SMALL PRESS MAGAZINES
REVIEWED BY DARRELL SCHWEITZER

And Probably Orson Scott Card, Elliott, Geis, DeWeese, and Other Voices. The Letters, Maybe a surprise.



ALIEN THOUGHTS

RICHARD E. GEIS

THE JEALOUS WHORE

Thanks to R. Markley, an SFR subscriber who sent me a zerox of an article which appeared in the October, 1985 HARPER'S, I can share some thoughts on 'The Temple of Boredom' by Luc Sante.

Sante, a writer of literary intent and status, has written for the NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, Manhattan, Inc., NEWSDAY and 'other publications.'

The article is six pages long, and it is the latest in a series of literary establishment bashing of science fiction. Sante first sets up sf for having hubris---great promises when young, great pretensions now---and then makes a series of disparaging assertions "proving" that sf has failed in various ways.

The books he examines are: CODE OF THE LIFEMAKER by Hogan, EMPIRE OF THE SUN by Ballard, RIDDLE WALKER by Hoban, WINTER'S DAUGHTER by Whitmore, MORETA: DRAGONLADY OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey, DEMON by John Varley, STARS IN MY POCKET LIKE GRAINS OF SAND by Delany, HIS MASTER'S VOICE by Lem, and MICROWORLDS by Lem.

They all fail in various ways, and together prove that sf is a fraud...and a pretentious bore.

Yet he begins his demolition with these words:

'Science fiction has been invading daily life for a number of years, but recently it has become pandemic.'

He ascribes sf's success in the fictional marketplace to the increasingly intrusive "high tech" aspects of our civilization which make the future seem here-and-now.

'...it is increasingly hard to distinguish between real and imagined technology.'

We all know you can prove anything about sf and fantasy by carefully choosing examples. Sante

complains of lack of variety, lack of good writing, lack of dazzle, lack of realism, and ignores Benford, LeGuin, Drucker, the Libertarian movement in sf, the feminist strand, and especially the incredibly vibrant short story arena.

He even stoops in his zeal to kill to personalities:

'Even today, most people are familiar with the genre through works of the 1950s, notably those of its Gog and Magog, Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury. The negative qualities represented by these two---prolix spew and poetical preciosity, respectively---have come to stand for the "scientific" and "literary" pillars of the house. Both Asimov and Bradbury come up with good ideas, both are extraordinarily dull writers, and both have publicity machines worthy of Hollywood. Thus two middling figures have come to epitomize the summit of the craft, thereby weakening the genre as a whole.'

So he says. So he asserts.

Why, he even feels it necessary to strike a blow against fandom:

'From within, science fiction exudes the humid vapor of male pubescence. The cultlike ferocity of science fiction fandom serves only to cultivate what is most sickly and stunted about the genre.'

Sure. But what marvelously malicious phrases! This guy is a prime example of the literary establishment's cultlike ferocity in attacking a genre it cannot control, and cannot kill and cannot profit from.

In fact, for every sf book published by a major house, one more slot is lost to "quality literature" by the failing, shrinking coterie of incestuous academic snobs who pretend to rule Literature in America.

This latest vicious attack is a sign of how desperate they have become.

How sad and ridiculous they are.

FONDLING FONDA

I have just added a sci-fi artifact to my imagi-movie collection which I suppose could be properly described as a Booby Prize: one of three foam rubber molds of Jane Fonda's breasts as featured in the film BARBARELLA. There is no truth to the rumor that with this acquisition I have bitten off more than I can chew.

Forrest J. Ackerman
2495 Glendower Av.
Hollywood, CA 90027

'PS: Isaac Asimov, you may touch them by appointment. There will be a slight handling charge of two nipples or one dime.'

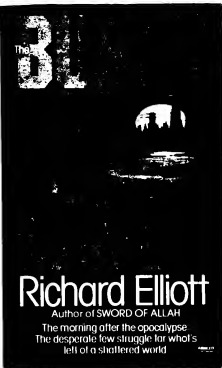
THE BURNT LANDS by Richard Geis and Elton Elliott is on the newsstand racks now, panting...er...burning to be purchased and read.

The cover reproduction below is lousy because the cover is in red and black [Red title, black background]. The center illo shows a man and woman looking toward a burnt-out city. A hell of a dramatic cover. I like it a lot.

The novel is a sequel to THE SWORD OF ALLAH.

We recently completed a third novel for Fawcett, THE MASTER FILE.

No word yet on when it will be published, but a safe bet is about a year from now.



HARLAN ELLISON'S influence on the new TWILIGHT ZONE TV series, as Creative Consultant, seems obvious, so far. The choice of stories has been excellent and the scripting and direction excellent. [To take some of the curse off this praise: the first episode, Harlan's "Shatterday", was fine until it bogged down into wimpy, Liberal nice-nice morality. Perfect for TV, I suppose, but too predictable and Responsible.]

MIKE GLYER asked me in a note on the cover of the copy of his latest FILE 770, (I can't find it now, but the gist of it is): "Are you using any paid-for material in these current issues of SFR which you say are now of amateur status?"

He's afraid SFR will win another Hugo in the Fanzine category.

Well, Mike, all the paid-for articles and interviews and columns have long since been used. There are some pieces of artwork I paid for several years ago, which are still unused, and I'm damned if I know which they are. I look at the overflowing art box with astonished, pained apprehension. The illos

Do things with each other in that box, because every issue, no matter how much art I use, there is more and more left over.

But to the core of the issue: if the readers/voters/nominators for the Hugos feel that an occasional paid-for-in-the-past illo contaminates the pure amateur standing of SFR now, then they won't nominate SFR, nor vote if it gets on the Best Fanzine ballot.

I'll shrug and go on with SFR as it is, regardless.

Oh, Andy Porter misremembered what I wrote last issue about SFR's status, and reported in SF CHRONICLE that I said the print run for SFR is at or below 1000. No, I'll be ordering 2000 copies of this issue, as I have the past few issues. The number of paying subscribers has shrunk to below 1000. [The post office allows me to count contributors and trades as subscribers, so the statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation to be published next issue is skewed by that enhanced category.]

While I'm into this area--let me say this about the possible future publication of SFR beyond #61 or 62: My heart is with SFR, and I love it. But if my novel writing is bringing in lots of money, and seems assured, and the contracts are there...I'll not continue SFR. If the novel writing is eh! and/or I'm tired of it, or don't need the money, then I will continue SFR in a 16-page format, mailed first class, on a monthly or a six-weekly schedule, at \$1.50 per issue. [Assuming inflation is still quiet then.] It would be a semipro-zine, would make a little money,

AMAZING STORIES (TV)

I've seen two of them so far--the old man with a date with a train fifty or sixty years after he caused it to derail, and the ego-driven high school star athlete who is magnetized by a meteorite and gets his comeuppance when the school bow-wow of a girl is also magnetized and they...er...gravitate to one another.

The special effects are the show, period. The stories are dumb and ick and icky.

This is Steven Spielberg's "writing down" to the TV audience. How long can this show rely on gimmicks?

probably wouldn't exceed 1000 paid.

I will continue THE NAKED ID no matter what.

[I have this fear that unless I'm very busy, God will say, "Who needs him?" and snuff me out.]

HARLAN ELLISON called sometime back and was distressed at Elton Elliott's echoing of the LOCUS and SF CHRONICLE stories which described the apparent...

How cautious can I get?

Anyway, Harlan is supposed to have leaped at Charles Platt and seized him by the throat in retaliation for what Charles said about Ellison's praise of Larry Shaw before Larry died of cancer.

Harlan said it was misreported.

No doubt Charles would say the same.

Elton wasn't there and in his comments on convention violence used the LOCUS/SF CHRONICLE stories as illustrations to make his points.

Harlan also said the incident involving Tom Disch and William Gibson was not what was described in print.

Okay.

I don't care. I don't go to conventions. They are now just masses of young people milling around. I can never find the people I want to find. They can never find me. I feel at a con out of place, out of step, out of my depth, out of mind, and out of sorts. I am not comfortable in crowds.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE REVIEWER?

A subscriber from another state called, dropped in for a few minutes. I asked who he liked best for reviews in SFR... [I was not hinting!]

He liked me best. [Years ago I had praised Ray Nelson's BLAKE'S PROGRESS and he'd bought it and liked it. He would never have bought a Laser Book except for my recommendation.]

I mention this because I've heard it before. I mention it because I have been sluffing off reading and reviewing for 10 these many months because of the time pressures of writing deadlines.

And I intend to do more reviewing in the months ahead.

THE NAKED ID

THE PERSONAL JOURNAL

OF RICHARD E. GEIS

THE NAKED ID covers all my other interests, manias, obsessions...

#5 was issued a few weeks ago. It covered our local woman police chief's drive against street prostitution.

#Dire early warnings of an economic collapse. I am dumbfounded at the amount of debt required to keep our economy afloat.

#Reagan's cancer operation was a radical procedure, not normal as reported.

#Thoughts while doing dishes ---there must be a better way to eat/clean up.

#Professional writing notes.

#Thoughts on AIDS.

#God's Master Plan---how to destroy a religious thinker.

#How to Live Cheap. And More.

THE NAKED ID is published monthly. \$1.00 per issue. [US\$1.60 for overseas mail] All issues sent first class. Make checks to Richard E. Geis. POB 11408, Portland, OR 97211.

For instance, I'm reading WARRIOR WOMAN by Marion Zimmer Bradley, now, and note it's written in the "hated" Third Person, Present Tense, and I find it doesn't bother me [the technique, not the novel]. Maybe Marion used the 3rd P. Tense to give the prose a greater immediacy, to focus attention because the narrative was subliminally different for most readers (who are style and technique deaf). It'd be nice to know. More on this next issue.

Where was I? Oh, yeah, I'm going to review more, and more conscientiously; that is, I'll write the reviews as soon as I finish the book, not months later.

THIS TIME I'M REMEMBERING TO WISH YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

NOT NECESSARILY REVIEWS

I READ BOOKS AND THEN DON'T REVIEW THEM, SOMETIMES, UNTIL MONTHS LATER. A SAD, SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS.

SO THIS COLUMN IS THE RESIDUE AND DETRITUS OF MY THOUGHTS ON THE BOOKS IN QUESTION. NOT NECESSARILY REVIEWS.

PHYSICAL INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES
By Richard W. Kroushore
Loompanics, \$7.95 + \$2.00 postage and handling. 1985.

This is a book so horrifying and depressing it makes you wonder about mankind, God, reality...

I review this for writers: here is a rundown on the ways to torture a man (and woman) for information. It is rational, lucid, matter-of-fact. The end justifies the means. No sympathy or empathy allowed.

This information---and the knowledge that it is based on what men have done and do to each other---should shatter all preconceptions, all illusions, all ideals about the nature of man. This shows the underside of our real lives, our real behavior.

Torture is not an activity carried out by weird, psychopathic, depraved, "inhuman" people. It is a deliberate activity carried out by states, by military commanders, by anyone with a good reason for needing certain information quickly. It is terrorism on a personal level.

The terrorism in the Middle East today illustrates, again, the naked behavior of man without the luxury of "civilized" constraints. The End Justifies the Means.

TEJUM is and always has been the bottom line operating philosophy of mankind. It is the rationale behind all "need" or "revenge". We are a violent, sadistic, selfish, sexist, racist, thieving species at base, at heart, when the chips are down. We will do anything to each other if we have a good enough reason.

This book rubs your nose in that truth. All of our generosity, our love, our ideals, our social structures, our civilized ways...are luxuries permitted by wealth. Strip us of that wealth and we revert to "the law of the jungle"---and become mankind in the raw.

If you flinch, cringe, deny this truth, you're lying to yourself---and you may pay for your avoidance of the truth with your life, one day.

Come to think, this book should be required reading in schools. Lots of luck!

CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF

By Stephen King
Illustrations by Berni Wrightson
Signet, \$8.95; second printing, 1985. Orig. published in a limited edition hardcover.

The publisher calls this 128-page book a novel, but by my count it runs around 13,500 words, and about 45% text pages. The other pages are black and white, and color drawings by Berni Wrightson, and very good ones, too.

The story is about a man in a small New England town who, when the moon is full every month becomes a blood-hungry werewolf, about his victims, and about the one would-be victim, a wheel-chair-bound boy, who fights him off once with firecrackers, and finally kills him with silver bullets.

King writes very well, in this instance in third-person present-tense (See Orson Scott Card's column this issue for his thoughts on this technique.), and seemingly effortlessly creates whole, real, flawed characters in a few paragraphs. That's his greatest strength. How much is talent, how much learned skills?

This story has been made into a movie titled SILVER BULLET, and the orange sticker on the cover of this printing indicates why the printing was made and distributed.

Is this book worth \$8.95? Yes, if you're a collector of Stephen King or (especially) Berni Wrightson. Wrightson's color drawings for this book are very effective and evocative. They make the book worth having.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS

Putnam, \$19.95, August, 1985

ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS

By John Fairley & Simon Wolfaire
Putnam, \$19.95, August 1985

This is made up of cases, stories, etc., which make up a British TV series. Here they are organized, well illustrated and pictured. Well-made slick stock book with many color photos.

It seems well documented, detailed, a challenge to mundane science and our safe and sane Reality.

The Foreword is by Clarke. The contents include chapters on all the major supernatural aspects---Curses, Predictions, ghosts, mind over matter, reincarnation, remembering previous lives, psychic healing...

What bothers me most are the cases of precognition which seem to be legitimate. If some rare minds are able or have "tuned in" on the future, however briefly, then Fate is a fact. The future is in place. We are running a track. And stoicism and fatalism and "What will be, will be," seems a rational belief.

This possible new, shattering reality would totally disrupt our world, our behavior. It destroys responsibility, free will, and a huge amount of anxiety.

Verrry seductive.

At the same time, unless you can know your own fate ahead of time, the existence of a fixed future leaves you back on square one, because you still have to make decisions, still have to act as if you have free will. (And in fact the human psyche is built to operate on the assumption of free will---the ego demands it.) No matter what you do, you did because it had to be. Afterward, you can shrug and inebriate yourself. "Your honor, I killed him because it was my fate to do so. It is your destiny to say the words you will say. I cannot hate you for that, nor can society hate me for the murder I did. I had no choice. It was foreordained. It is God's will."

And thus you go to jail, to execution, to whatever, with a free, clear, guiltless mind.

Very attractive, eh?

THE FUNGUS By Harry Adam Knight
Star (W.H. Allen & Co) Available Eng., Aust., Canada, NZ.

This is a surprisingly well-written horror novel in the sense of realism and lotsa grue and sex and tension and apparent scientific accuracy. It grabs, it's real and it keeps you reading.

Standard disaster plot---scientist creates, with good intentions, a deadly peril---an explosive trigger to fungus growth of all kinds---and before anyone can say, "There's a fungus among us!" there is! London is overgrown, people die left and right as various strains and varieties invade, eat, cover, decorate their bodies. These fungi cannot be stopped, eat anything organic, and mutate toward intelligence.

England is isolated. The French are threatening to drop nuclear bombs on the island. One three-person desperate mission is sent in to find vital clues to the scientist's work so a fungi-killer or something can be worked up in Ireland or America, or wherever.

The novel's final harrowing chapters are taut, surprising, gripping.

Hey, I didn't know you could publish stuff like this in England!

An American publisher should look in to publishing this here.

Item: This came to me courtesy John Brosnan who wrote: "Thought you might like to see the latest disgusting work from the typewriters of Harry Adam Knight---who in reality is me and fellow fan Leroy Kettle."

Good job!

RICHARD E. GEIS



CHARLES L. GRANT

DO I REMEMBER
A WORSE SUMMER?

"I'm not the new Stephen King;
I'm the old Charlie Grant."

Charles L. Grant and I are sitting in the Manhattan Playboy Club, trading stories over Bloody Marys. Outside, the July heat has turned New York City into a walking locker room, but here, in this curious male fantasyland of chrome and cushions, art and artifice, all seems right with the world. Charlie Grant has just struck a major deal with Pocket Books; though he winces at their wish to call him "The New Stephen King," he seems poised for the popular success that has eluded him in more than ten years of professional writing.

On the table between us, next to my tape recorder, sit copies of Grant's most recent books -- a novel and two anthologies -- as well as a copy of David Morrell's *LAST REVELLE*, which I've just loaned to him. Throughout the afternoon, the cotton-tailed waitress has restrained herself from commenting on the obvious fact that an interview is taking place; but as we ask for the check, she relents:

"Did you write these?" she asks, picking up Grant's *THE GRAVE*. "I just love horror novels..."

Her eyes scan the cover, but there is no spark of recognition.

"Are you..." She reads the cover again. "Charles L. Grant?"

Charlie Grant's face brightens; he offers all three books to her, and she smiles with delight.

"But you've got to sign them," she says.

"Sure," he replies, glancing at her strategically placed name-tag. He borrows my pen and rapidly inscribes the books.

As she takes them back, she naturally looks inside. Her face drains of color -- my God, I think, what did he write in there?

Then she says, with clear disappointment: "Oh, that's my bunny name. I'm Bunny Melissa, see, but that's not my real name. Only you signed it to Melissa."

Charlie Grant shrugs -- what can he say? But her disappointment promptly disappears as she spies *LAST REVELLE* on the tabletop.

"Did you write that, too?" she asks hopefully.

Charlie Grant looks to me, and for a moment, his eyes positively glimmer with devilry...

Ironically, it was David Morrell who best summed up Charlie Grant. "Stephen King and Peter Straub are like the luxury liners of the horror field," he once told me. "They're always visible on the horizon when you look out over these deep, dark waters. But Charlie Grant -- he's the unseen power, like the

great white shark, just below the surface."

In little more than a decade, Grant has published thirteen novels and scores of stories of what he likes to call "dark fantasy." His fiction has captured the readership and praise of fantasy and science fiction fandom, and he is perennially a nominee for, and winner of, the World Fantasy Awards. With his *SHADOWS* series, now in its tenth annual hardcover installment, and other anthologies -- including *NIGHTMARES* (1979), *HORRORS* (1981), *TERRORS* (1982), *FEARS* (1983), *THE DODD MEAD GALLERY OF HORROR* (1983), *MINIQUIT* (1985), and *GREYSTONE BAY* (1985) -- he is the premier anthologist of the modern horror story, nurturing and guiding the careers of countless new writers.

But like our disappointed waitress, Charlie Grant has a name that seems to work only for a place: in his case, the clubby and limited world of the hard-core fan. He has never had a major best-seller; his work has never been connected with film or television. In fact, his greatest popular -- and financial -- success has come under a different name, writing historical romance novels such as *RIVERBURN* (1979), *MOUNTAINWATCH* (1980) and *THE SILVER HUNTRESS* (1984) as Felicia Andrews. Yet he is one of the best writing talents ever to grace the field of horror.

With his wife, Kathy -- herself a leading romance novelist, and a recent entry into the horror field (as Kathryn Ptacek) with *SHADOWEYES* (1983) and *BLOOD AUTUMN* (1984) -- Grant lives in a century-old house in the rural northwestern New Jersey town of Newton. He believes that the house is haunted.

The first of two sons of an Episcopalian priest, he was born on September 12, 1942, and raised in a series of small New Jersey towns. His formative years were spent in Kearny: "An immigrant town -- Scots, English, Irish, Italian, and Polish. The Italians and the Poles were rich and lived in the north part of town; the rest of us weren't and we lived in the south part. My father didn't have the stereotypical Episcopalian parish -- he ministered to the middle and lower classes."

"As the son of a minister, I was expected to be good and wonderful, which I tried to be. Everybody knew my parents -- my father was very influential in our part of town, and the teachers knew him, the principals knew him. You couldn't do anything without someone knowing about it. Once I went out on a date with a girl, driving the car with one hand, holding one arm around her; when I got home, my father asked where I had been. When I told him that I was on a date, he said, 'Next time keep both hands on the wheel.' Someone had seen me driving, and called to tell him!



WELL... '66 WAS
PRETTY BAD... 1066,
I MEAN.

"My folks were very strict. They were Old World Scots-British -- it was that kind of upbringing. We were encouraged to read, but we weren't allowed to watch television, hardly at all."

"It wasn't an unhappy childhood, but it wasn't filled with ease and comfort. We didn't have money. Because my father was a minister, people were coming in and out of the house all the time, so we had an image to maintain, and that was really hard. I wouldn't get included in things like parties, because I was Reverend Grant's kid. I don't think I swore until I was a sophomore in college -- I was too scared."

Reading -- and later, attending Saturday movie matinees -- was his escape from the strictures of home.

"I wasn't like other kids -- I could not just go out of the house and have fun. I used to read anything I could get my hands on. I never made a distinction -- I read everything. By the time I was in the sixth grade, I had read almost everything that the local library would let me read. It's funny, but now, the only specific titles I remember reading are *MARY POPPINS* and *BOB, SON OF BAT-LE*. Sooner or later, I settled on mysteries -- Ellery Queen, Josephine Tey, and John Dickson Carr especially. I read tons of mysteries."

"My interest in horror really stems from the movies that I watched. In those days, Saturday afternoon was the time when your parents said, 'Here's a quartet, go to the movies.' The first nightmare that I can remember came after watching my first double feature -- *HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* and *HOUSE OF DRACULA*, with Boris Karloff, John Carradine, Lon Chaney, Jr., all those neat people. I had such a nightmare. My father gave me phenobarbital -- I didn't know what it was at the time, but everytime I had a nightmare, I would get this shot glass full of red stuff. And I loved those movies; I went to them all the time."

A PROFILE BY DOUGLAS E. WINTER

He wrote from an early age, and completed his first horror novel while in high school.

"I was trying to impress Helen Dewar. Needless to say, she was a Scot. We were in history class together. I had this notebook and I would write a chapter every few days and read it to her before class. It was about these hairy creatures, like mastodons, that came out of the swamp and stomped on people.

"She was terribly impressed; but she would never go out with me, though..."

Despite his interest in writing, Grant planned to follow in his father's footsteps as an Episcopal priest; in 1960 he entered Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut:

"At the end of my sophomore year in college, I had taken three years of Greek in two years, Bible study, all of that. I had the catalog from the seminary that I was going to attend. And I was in the bathroom, and I looked at myself in the mirror and said, 'Do you really want to be a priest?'"

"I had always done everything that my Dad would like. I joined the track team in high school because he had been a track star. But I knew, then, that I didn't want to be a priest."

He shifted his major to history, and after his graduation in 1962, returned to New Jersey as a high school teacher. He began his first serious attempts at writing fiction in 1966, when he was invited to attend the meetings of a small writers' club. Like many contemporary writers of horror fiction, Grant began by selling stories to science fiction magazines:

"When I decided that I was going to try to write to sell, the biggest market was science fiction. I had learned from these various would-be writers in my town that I should study the market. I looked after: COLLIER'S was long dead, SATURDAY EVENING POST was dying, SATURDAY REVIEW wasn't publishing fiction anymore and THE NEW YORKER and ESQUIRE were cutting down. And I didn't want to write 'straight' stuff, anyway, it just didn't appeal to me. I was reading a lot of science fiction at that time, mostly contemporary authors like Harlan Ellison, Ray Bradbury, and Theodore Sturgeon, and I figured that I would have to write it; otherwise, I wouldn't sell. So I wrote it's funny -- I started to write science fiction, yet the first story I ever sold was a fantasy.

"One afternoon after teaching, I was reading a TARZAN novel -- the one in which, at the end, Tarzan swings through the trees of West Virginia to save Jane from a forest fire. And I thought it was so funny that I went into my study and wrote a pastiche of Edgar Rice Burroughs, throwing in the most godawful puns I could think of and choosing the most trite title, 'The House of Evil.' I sent it off in April of 1968, after trying to sell stories for two years, and the first editor to see it bought it. Later that month, I was drafted."

He spent two years serving in the Military Police in Qui Nhon, Vietnam -- an experience recorded in two of his short stories, but which he otherwise refuses to discuss. When he returned to New Jersey and teaching, his stories became a regular fixture of science fiction and fantasy magazines, winning the Nebula Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America twice. His first novel, THE SHADOW OF ALPHA (1976), as well as four later books, were also science fiction. But he soon shifted his attention to horror: "I flunked chemistry in college

and barely made it through physics, so I didn't have much of a background in science. I was more interested in social issues, anyway, and when I ran out of ideas, I stopped writing science fiction, as simple as that. Because I was still watching horror movies, I decided that I would rather write horror. There was no one particular turning point; my science fiction writing just sort of faded away."

His attraction to horror fiction also arose from a fundamental sense of reality that he found missing from science fiction:

"You can't get much more divorced from reality than the supernatural. Yet the supernatural is a reality itself -- it's an added facet of the reality you think you know.

"I have never denied the existence of the supernatural. I don't believe in it, but I don't deny its existence, either. I don't know if there are such things as vampires or ghosts. I doubt it very seriously, but I will never bet my life on it. I would have to see one to believe it as much as I believe that there is a lot of traffic out there on the street.

"The best horror fiction deals with reality, period. The best horror fiction deals with real people in real situations that have another dimension tacked onto them. CONAN THE BARBARIAN is not real; that is why I have this terrible block against heroic fantasy, because its characters are not real people. They are not bigger than life, they are just not life.

"What you have to deal with is real fear, and all I do is translate real fears into the supernatural. I just give them a little shove off the ledge."

After a forgettable first horror novel, THE CURSE (1977), he swiftly made his mark in the horror field with his novels and short stories of Oxrun Station, a fictitious Connecticut village whose peaceful seclusion is a locus for the dark, seductive promise of evil. Noteworthy for its strong female characters and atmospheric terrors, the series includes the novels, THE HOUR OF THE OXRUN DEAD (1977), THE SOUND OF MIDNIGHT (1978), THE LAST CALL OF MOURNING (1979), THE GRAVE (1981), THE BLOODMIND (1982), and THE SOFT WHISPER OF THE DEAD (1983), as well as two collections of novelettes, NIGHTMARE SEASONS (1982) and THE OXRUN STATION (1985). Several of the Oxrun Station stories, as well as other short fiction, were collected in A LOW OF CANDLES (1981) and TALES FROM THE NIGHTSIDE (1981). Although critically acclaimed, none of these books was a major commercial success; Grant supported himself in his early years by writing romances as Felicia Andrews.

Through the Oxrun Station series and his editorship of the SHADOWS anthologies, Grant became the leading exponent of "dark fantasy," setting forth his manifesto in his introduction to the first volume of SHADOWS (1978): "What really frightens us, for the most part, is not all that we do not completely understand, but all that we do not see even though we know it is there." HIS "dark fantasy" is the gentle tale of terror -- of "quiet" horror -- "without the reliance on blood and gore, maybe, ghosts and the usual stable of monsters, both mythological and psychological."

He explains: "Stereotypical constructs don't frighten me. When I write about what frightens me, I figure that if it scares me, it must frighten somebody. I was thinking about this the other day, when I made a note in one of my idea notebooks. All it said was 'the power of love.' That's where much of my horror is based.

"Monsters have been killed by television, because they have become the known, rather than the unknown. The saddest thing I can think of is what television has done to the Frankenstein monster and Dracula and the Wolfman and the Mummy. That's really sad; those are great old monsters, but it's really hard to watch the original films, and really get nervous or tense or even a little bit chilled, because you've always got in the back of your mind those commercials and cartoons that have used the monsters -- and ARBOT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN, which, by the way, is one of my favorite movies."

What frightens him, then?

"Everything I write about frightens me. I don't send anything out unless I am scared at the end -- unless I get a chill and say, 'Ha! I loved that last line.'"

"Everything frightens me -- love frightens me, hate frightens me, loneliness frightens me. What frightens me most frightens everybody, and that's relationships between human beings; and that is, I guess, what all my stories are about -- relationships. Those that fall apart or that never quite get started, or that get started and then are not what the protagonists thought it would be. That is very scary, because when all is said and done, that is what life is all about -- human relationships."

In his advocacy of "quiet" horror, Grant has spoken out often against the trend toward violence and gore in recent horror films and novels.

"Violence," he says, "has the same role in horror fiction as it has in any other kind of fiction. Where it is necessary, you use it, and where it's not, you don't -- it's as simple as that.

"Gratuitous violence is much more vile than gratuitous sex, probably be-



cause sex can be impersonal, but there's no such thing as impersonal violence. People get hurt, they get maimed, they die.

"In my books, I don't kill anyone who doesn't need to be killed. In the shock movies and the shock novels, people die to provide the shocks. There is no definite reason for the violence. FRIDAY THE 13TH is just as loathsome as THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE in that respect. The only reason for the existence of FRIDAY THE 13TH is to show how many different ways the special effects guy can spill blood and terrorize an audience. Well, I don't need to get grossed out. I can get grossed out by seeing a dead deer alongside the highway; I do not need to go to the movies."

"In the FRIDAY THE 13TH films, by the time the fourth person dies, big deal. PSYCHO was so great -- and only two people get killed in it -- I think it's a bloodbath, but only Janet Leigh and Martin Balsam get zapped -- that's it. Class is the difference between PSYCHO and HALLOWEEN on the one hand, and FRIDAY THE 13TH and SAWYER on the other. The first films have class and respect for the audience, and the second group doesn't care -- they don't care about the people in the film, they don't care about the people who are watching the film. All they want is the buck."

"The first group wants the bucks too, but John Carpenter, Michael Monahan and John Sayles respect the audience, and they respect themselves. I really wonder if the people who made FRIDAY THE 13TH have any respect for themselves; if they do, it's awfully shallow. I do not think I'd want to meet them. They are not my kind of people."

While condemning violence, he is equally outspoken against those who would censor violence, particularly on grounds of sexism.

"Anti-sexism is the current popular bandwagon, and I refuse to get on it, which is not to say that I'm sexist."

"I hate buzzwords: 'Chauvinism,' 'Male chauvinist pig.' Bullshit. Somebody calls me a male chauvinist pig, and I reply that I'm not patriotic at all."

"It has been a time-honored tradition in literature and film that you have a weak or helpless heroine -- and, from what I can tell of modern films, this attitude continues even now in this so-called enlightened age where both sexes are equal. What a waste of money I'm sitting here in the Manhattan Playboy Club. I can hear people saying, 'Oh, my God, that goddamn Grant, he's going in there to look at the pictures of naked women on the walls.' Well, I'm I'm, what do you think I am -- blind? I am at the beautiful waitresses -- sure I am, and why not? That has nothing to do with sexism."

"My affinity for the women's movement begins with the idea that it just makes perfect common sense that if a woman and I write the same book, and we're for the same publisher, we should be paid the same money. I do find it shocking and totally illogical that women are paid less than men for the same jobs. But I find it equally repulsive to have to face a fanatical feminist and watch every word that I utter for fear of offending her with a 'sexist' remark. Well, shit on that -- a broad is a broad. Not every woman is a broad, but there is a connotation to the word, and some women are broads, just as some women are ladies with a capital L."

"I understand the inequities and I deplore them, and where I can, I try to

alleviate them in whatever way possible -- but I'll be goddamned if I'm going to say 'salesperson' when the word is 'saleswoman' or 'salesman.' No ideology has ever succeeded through an attempt to change the language, and this one isn't going to, either."

"So having said all that, I don't see the sexism in horror films as much as the rabid feminists apparently do -- I also see guys getting chopped up pretty damned good. Jamie Lee Curtis in HALLOWEEN was anything but a helpless female. And it's only human reaction when you're dealing with horror, whether it's supernatural or psychotic, to run screaming out of the room. But if the screaming happens to be a woman, people scream, 'sexist!'"

"It's an overreaction, like McCarthyism. Constant cries of 'Sexism!' which frightens me more than anything else, even more than the threats of nuclear war -- it's a conglomeration of buzzwords and media hype, people's insecurities about themselves, and the fact that they haven't got the guts to stand up for what they believe in."

"It took me a long time to be unshamed to cry, and I do cry. I was brought up Old World Scots-British: 'Be a man, don't cry' -- even if it hurts, don't cry. When I got back from Vietnam, a lot of things changed, and one of them was that attitude. If I feel moved by something, I'm going to cry -- I don't give a shit what anybody thinks. In the Alastair Sim film of A CHRISTMAS CAROL, when Tiny Tim dies, that is it -- I'm wiped out. That one shot of the crutch all by itself at the fireplace, that wipes me out every time. I'm a softy -- I think all horror writers are softies at heart."

For Grant it is this sentimental element that accounts for the continuing popularity of horror fiction. Horror writers, he says, represent "the dark side of Romanticism," digging at the veneer of civilization to remind us of the undefinable but innate fear of the unknown.

"There are things out there that we call the supernatural now because we think that will explain it away. The more sophisticated and sophisticated we get, the more explanations we offer."

"But we're not as civilized as we think. I really believe that there is no such thing as a truly sophisticated human being. What we call 'sophistication' is all pseudo-sophistication; we are using defenses around ourselves with those things that we don't understand, and we replace true knowledge with fast living and shallow study, which allows us to be very glib and to use facile quotes from Bettelheim and all those fellows, and to make it sound profound, when we really don't know what the hell we are talking about."

"It's like whistling past the graveyard. It doesn't explain why, in our house, we hear children laughing at three in the morning."

"A really good horror writer consciously or unconsciously understands that we're not as sophisticated as we pretend to be. It's one thing to walk down a dark street in the middle of New York City at night, because you know the dangers -- there are muggers out there. Only an idiot would walk in Central park at 1:30 in the morning all by himself, but there are also very few people who can walk down a deserted country road in



October with the wind blowing and the moon up, and not get a little nervous. They know there are no muggers out there, but that there are things out there that you don't know about, and the best writers tap into that, consciously or not."

His religious views have changed somewhat over the years since his decision not to pursue a minister's life.

"I'm rather like Emily Dickinson -- you know, the poem about finding God in the garden. If there's a God -- and there probably is -- you don't need to go to church to find Him. It even says so in the New Testament. So I believe in God, but I'm not sure what He is. I mean, why did He let Reggie Jackson leave the New York Yankees?"

"I'll tell you this. Sometimes I really believe that He sits up there with a two-by-four, and if things get really good and you get cocky, He hits you with it and says, 'Remember me!'"

"I can never understand how people can believe in good but not believe in evil. If there's God, there's got to be a Devil -- not necessarily the horny-headed type -- because life balances. I think there's an opposing force."

When I ask what makes him a writer, he is unequivocal:

"Like I said, everybody is afraid of human relationships. People who appear to be the most open and the most vulnerable don't want to be intimate with anybody else. I don't mean that in a physical sense. They don't want to bare their souls because it makes them vulnerable, and it's vulnerability in every emotion and in every human contact that is the most frightening. Some people are more open than others, but nobody is totally open. This is what kills me about this California crap of pseudoreligions and pop psychology -- 'I'm OK, You're OK.' -- that's a crock. I'm OK and I don't give a shit about you or, as Mark Twain said, 'Everybody is a little bit crazy except thee and me' and sometimes I'm not so sure about thee."

"In the final analysis, nobody is ever totally open with anybody else, no matter how much you insist you are being that way, because you are afraid to be -- you don't want to lay yourself open for a killing blow. I suspect that this is one reason why I have my most important relationships in my writing. My relationships with normal people don't always work, and I've been accused of letting out all my energy in my writing emotional, sexual and other things that may very well be true. If someone wants to know me, they'd better read my stuff, because they aren't going to know me otherwise."

"It's a cliché that writers are either loners or brawlers. I wonder if writers are cautious couples -- if they have never really been taught how to handle relationships with real people. What they do is work out relationships on paper, and they either idealize them or make them overly cynical, and maybe writing horror fiction does best idealizing them on one hand and taking care of them very cynically on the other."

I think that is probably close to an unpleasant and painful truth. One of my goals for whatever I have left of my life is to try to translate some of what I can do in my work to real people outside pen and page."

I ask him to assess his horror fiction.

"I've never reread anything I've written all the way through, not even short stories, because that's past history. I don't know that my novels are distinctive. My weakness is that I can't plot worth a shit. My strengths, I guess, are atmosphere and characterization. I can say without false modesty that because I sell, I must be good. I guess I am not great, because I don't make a lot of money."

"All I know is that if I'm not better each time out than I was before, then I'm in big trouble. And it doesn't have to be a major improvement -- every story and every novel doesn't have to be a major break-through, but I've got to be better at something. If there is a distinctive Charlie Grant story, I would hope that it would be one that is not the same."

If he had free rein to write -- and to publish -- whatever he wished, would he write horror?

"In my secret heart of hearts, really deep down inside, I want to write a comic novel. But I'm not funny in print -- I'm not funny in person, either. I tend to lay a bludgeon about it; it's probably because of the kind of comedy I like -- Abbott and Costello, the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy. I would love to be able to do a Peter Strub novel of novel, but since I can't -- and I've tried -- I just want to write the best horror novel that I can. I want to scare as many people as I possibly can -- that includes myself -- enough to make them want to read it a second time."

"One of the biggest problems with most horror novels today is that you can't read them more than once. I have read SALDIN'S LOT seven times now, and each time there is something different that I missed before, and it is just as effective as the major scares that I had when I read it the first time."

"The best thing about the best horror fiction is that there is always more to the horror than the horror. There are levels to the good horror stories -- most of them, I deliberately avoid, so that's what makes them good. From Poe and Hawthorne to Peter Strub and Michael McDowell and Jack Cady, there are levels aside from just excellent writing. Level make books worthwhile, and I would hope that my books involve more than just plunking down \$3.50 for a quick read on the subway."

But, he is quick to add, this is the very reason that his fiction is not likely to achieve best-seller status.

"My books aren't fast reads. I do not want my books to be subway books or beach books -- they're meant for the winter night in front of the fire."

"They move slowly, because that's the kind of book that I like. Atmosphere takes words. I use a lot of imagery -- too much, according to some critics. Nothing happens in my books, really; not a lot. But most best-sellers move right along."

"Horror fiction is the subway read. People are turned to that by the likes of John Saul, and it is obvious from the fact that Peter Strub doesn't sell as well as Stephen King, and he should --

he tells beautiful stories, but in a less colloquial manner than Steve does. Steve does what he does, the way he does it, better than anybody else -- this colloquial, 'Let's sit down on the back porch and pop beer and scare the hell out of each other's style. Strub scares you just as well, but because he is more literary, people won't take the time for him. That is probably the schools' fault -- not teaching people to appreciate literature, to appreciate reading more. It's probably the publishers' fault for not being more demanding of their authors. And it's the fault of the people who have bought up the publishers -- Gulf & Western and the like -- because all they care about is making money and whether an author sells a lot of books."

His assessment of the current market for horror fiction is a pessimistic one. As an established editor, he sees more and more short fiction each year, and he is dismayed both by its quality and the lack of publishing outlets.

"I really like doing it, but I do read a lot of garbage. I get anywhere from 250 to 300 submissions per volume, out of which I pick anywhere from twelve to fifteen for publication. That's a lot of reading. There's a lot of bad writing out there, even from the professionals, who seem to think that either it isn't safe to write a horror story -- in which case they have no idea what they're talking about -- or that I am a pushover as an editor."

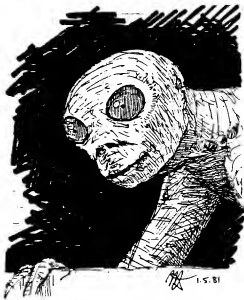
"The market for short stories is lousy, and it will probably stay lousy. The only magazines regularly publishing horror short stories are NIGHT ZONE and FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION. It's so chancy -- they're buried with all those cycle magazines and surfing magazines and golf magazines and archery magazines. I don't see the short story market getting substantially better in the Eighties."

His predictions for the novel market are equally dire: "I see it diminishing -- it already has. It's not the bust that science fiction has experienced, but it's the normal shake-up after Stephen King and Peter Strub exploded on the scene and made it respectable, in the commercial sense, to buy horror novels. Publishers bought every horror novel they could get their hands on, and then realized that not every horror novel was going to sell. There will be less garbage novels now than decent ones. And that's probably the way it's going to be through the Eighties -- there will be less horror novels, but they will sell enough not to discourage the market. But the major publishers -- the ones that will push the books -- are going to be more careful about the kinds of books that they buy, not from a literary standpoint, but a commercial standpoint. And the ones they do buy will probably sell pretty well."

Charlie Grant has survived the shake-up. Pocket Books has published his recent horror novels THE NESTLING (1982), NIGHT SONGS (1984), and THE TEA PARTY (1985) in successfully larger paperback editions. But he was quick to resist that publisher's plan to bill him on the cover of THE NESTLING, as "The New Stephen King."

"I'm not the new Stephen King; I'm the old Charlie Grant. Not only is that ridiculous hype, it does a disservice to both of us; it deceives the public."

"Publishers are like TV executives. They think they know what the public wants, but they never really go out and



ask. They are looking for a best-seller and they ain't gonna get it from me. I'm not Stephen King. I don't write the way that he does; neither does anybody else. But publishers don't understand that no one else writes like Stephen King. They don't know why Stephen King is a best-seller. They're really confused as to why Peter Strub sells a lot of books but still isn't as big as Stephen King."

"I don't have the answer either. Then again, I do: all writers are different. It's a fool's game for the publishers."

So Charlie Grant simply carries on, being Charlie Grant -- a name growing in recognition such that today, when he turns to other projects that interest him, including experiments in writing comedy, he is cloaked by pseudonyms: as Geoffrey Marsh, he has written the occult adventure novels KING OF SATAN'S EYES (1984), THE TAIL OF THE ARABIAN, KNIGHT (1986), and THE PATCH OF THE COIN SOLDIER (1986); and as Lionel Fenn, he authored the "Quest for the White Duck" trilogy of humorous fantasies, BLOOD RIVER DOWN (1985), WEB OF DEFEAT (1986), AGNES DAY (1986). With his newest horror novels, THE PET (1986), he has published forty novels, twenty-one anthologies and collections, and ninety-seven short stories; and he has no plans of stopping.

"The best thing about being a writer is being able to do exactly what I want to do, get paid for it, and be able to live comfortably. I get to do neat things like give interviews."

"The worst thing about being a writer is the word that your books drop into. You write a book and it goes away; it's published, and then it goes away. You never know if anybody has read it, aside from your friends; and you are never really sure about your friends, because you never know if they are telling you the truth or not. So these things disappear, and then someone like you comes along, and I don't understand why. All I'm doing is what I like doing. I certainly don't make a lot of money from my writing, and I don't sell hundreds of thousands or millions of books, and I don't get fan letters. Felicia Andrews gets fan letters, but I never do."

"All I do is the best I can do, and I really don't see why that's special. I don't get it, but it's nice."

You Got No Friends In This World

HOW TO USE THE YEAR-END WRAP-UP COLUMN

These are reviews of science fiction short stories, novelets, and novellas published in the September to December (or mid-December) issues of the magazines reviewed in past issues, as well as a year's worth of **Fantasy Book** and several anthologies. Out of nearly 250 stories I read this quarter, I will comment on more than 140 that I feel are important because of excellent or daring writing, thoughtworthy ideas, or a plain tale of unusual power.

This column will complete my look at 1985's short fiction. Thanks to the kind cooperation of the editors of all the magazines, I was provided with advance copies of the fiction that will appear in the last few issues of the year. This was not convenient for them. Unlike book publishers, the magazines make no regular provision for helping reviewers. And when you consider that there's no reason to expect that the magazines will gain any advantage from this column, the only conclusion I can reach is that the editors think, as I do, that it is worth a bit of extra effort to promote serious discussion of short science fiction and fantasy.

So—a tip of the hat to the editors, who read a good deal more than I did in order to select the stories that appeared this year. Thanks to them, my work has been a pleasure.

ABBREVIATIONS and ISSUES REVIEWED

- Afte = **Afterwar** (Morris) anth [Baen]
 Amaz = **Amazing Stories** (Scithers) Nov
 Anlg = **Analog** (Schmidt) Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec, mid-Dec
 Asim = **Isaac Asimov's** (McCarthy) Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec, mid-Dec
 F&SF = **Fantasy & Science Fiction** (Ferman) Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec
 FanB = **Fantasy Book** (Mallonee & Smith) Mar, Jun, Sep, Dec
 Liav = **Liavek** (Shetterly & Bull) anth [Ace]
 NCry = **Night Cry** (Rodgers) Winter
 Omni = **Omni** (Datlow) Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec
 TZ = **Twilight Zone** (Klein) Oct, Dec
 Univ = **Universe** 15 (Carr) anth [Doubleday]
 Whis = **Whispers** 5 (Schiff) anth [Doubleday]; Whispers 21/22 (Schiff) [Whispers Press]



THE TROLL THAT EATS WRITERS

[The text for today's sermon is Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18.]

Before Dante, educated Europeans wrote exclusively in Latin. The vernacular languages were for mundane affairs—like buying eggs—while intellectual and spiritual matters could only be couched in the well-turned Latin phrase.

There were advantages to this. The most important was that Latin served as an international language. The writings of a philosopher in Bayonne could be understood easily in Winchester, Vienna, and Naples. While Latin reigned as the queen of languages, Europe was a unified intellectual culture.

Another "advantage," though, was less worthy. The use of Latin guaranteed that intellectual and literary matters were permanently sealed off from the peons. Latin created and maintained an international elite.

So it was a revolutionary act for Dante to write his poetry in the north Italian vernacular. By doing so, he was rejecting elitism, declaring that his audience would include the common folk.

He gave up the international audience and all the traditions of Latin verse. He gained a new audience of people hungry for his stories, and in so doing he founded a national literature; indeed, it might be said that he founded all the national literatures.

The elitists were forced to follow him—kicking and screaming all the way. Ever since, they have continued to look for ways to undo Dante's revolution and get literature out of the hands of the scum of the earth.

Their efforts continue today, and one of the most effective tools in the elitist kit is Present Tense Narrative.

Every writer of English knows that present tense is an unnatural narrative voice. Yet its use has become almost the norm in li-fi; it's surprising to find a New Yorker story that isn't in present tense, and almost shocking to find a past-tense story in the little magazines.

So pervasive has present tense become in the realm of academic fiction that those who have become attuned to that tradition no longer think it's a big deal to write in present tense.

They are wrong. Present tense narrative is completely alien to the vernacular English language, and its use creates a barrier between the storyteller and that portion of the audience that is not comfortable with the conventions of contemporary li-fi.

Present tense narrative has no advantages except the elitist one—it reminds the peons of their incapacity. I'm sure all the writers in our field who have used present tense narrative would deny any elitist motivation, and I believe them. I think of them as victims rather than perpetrators. They were exposed to the elitist tradition during a period of intellectual vulnerability; they are no more to be blamed for perpetuating the idiocies of li-fi than the children of cannibals are to be blamed for homophobia.

Elitism lurks in every university English department like a troll under a bridge, waiting for young writers to cross. Many escape with their lives, but none emerges unmarked. Deep trolls would still bleed from the work of some of our finest writers.

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

WHAT DOES PRESENT TENSE MEAN?

I'm aware of the many excuses advanced for the use of present tense narrative. They all evaporate in any examination of how the English language actually works. While there are cases where present tense properly occurs in fiction, it is never natural as narrative.

Narrative is an account of events. It naturally occurs in past tense, if only because we usually use narrative to tell of events that already happened. ("I was turning left, Officer, and the Honda just whipped out in front of me.") Past tense narrative is the voice we use when we want to be believed.

Narrative can occur in different tenses. When we're in the middle of a past tense narrative and we want to flash back to something that happened even earlier, we use past perfect. ("I had just got my new contacts, so my eyes were still teary.") Narrative finds uses for future and conditional tenses, too. But these are all transient, manipulations of time and causation within the universal English tradition of past tense narrative.

Present tense has different uses. We use it for expressing permanent conditions ("I love baseball") or continuing patterns ("I take ballet on Thursdays"). We use it for simple futurity ("I'm in Philadelphia on Friday, Manhattan Saturday, and then Queens for the rest of my life!").

STOP ME IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS

There are three special cases where everybody uses present tense for narrative.

We often use present tense in jokes ("This guy walks into this bar, sees, and he says to the bartender, he says, . . .").

Even without the colloquial language, the use of present tense in an oral tale declares that the teller does not expect to be believed. Compare these two story openings:

"My friend Bill bought a dog, and he figured he could train it to do a few useful things—bring his slippers, fetch a frisbee, sniff out whether a woman's got herpes."

"My friend Bill buys a dog, and he figures he can train it to do a few useful things—bring his slippers, fetch a frisbee, sniff out whether a woman's got herpes."

The first sentence invites the listener to believe the story; not until the last few words is it revealed as an attempt at humor, and even at that, the story might still be true.

The second sentence, though, declares itself to be a joke from the beginning. In the vernacular, past tense narrative invites belief; present tense narrative insists on disbelief.

SECOND-HAND STORIES

Another case where everybody uses present tense is in synopses. Writers are used to submitting narratives in present tense, but this is also a tradition in the vernacular: Think back to the last time you or someone else recounted the plot of a movie you saw. We use present tense for second-hand stories—to recount a tale that is more completely shown elsewhere.

Again, we particularly do this with works of fiction; a movie or book that was considered to be a true story would more likely be recounted in past

tense. This is because we would be recounting the true events underlying the movie or book, rather than recounting the movie or book itself.

BE PAKES THE HAND-OF . . .

Television sports and "live" news have given us another kind of present tense—the on-the-scene witness breathlessly telling us what is happening right now at this very moment. However, the eyewitness voice is usually present progressive tense ("The wind from Hurricane Gloria is hurling water against the pier where I'm dumb enough to be standing . . .").

Pretend you're shadowing somebody, reporting by walkie-talkie on his movements. Which voice would you use?

"He turns the corner; he walks up the outside stairway; he pries open the door—"

"He's turning the corner; he's walking up the outside stairway; he's prying open the door—"

The immediate eyewitness voice is present progressive tense. Only sportscasting uses simple present tense as a conventional eyewitness voice ("The ball bounces fifty feet into the air and sails out of the park"). Sportscasting—and, of course, li-fi.

THE DRAMATIC MOMENT IS NOW

There is a literary form that is invariably present tense: drama. Plays and films are stories, but they are not narratives. The events are unfolded in present tense upon the stage and screen. The audience watches them happening.

The dramatist writes in present tense, because dialogue is always in an implied present tense—to the speaker, speech is occurring now. The dramatist's stage directions, which are generally not shown to the audience, continue in that voice ("They fight," say the stage directions inserted in Shakespeare's plays; never "They fought").

Sometimes the writer of narratives steals a page from the dramatists, and in those cases present tense in prose fiction is quite legitimate. For example, Ian Watson's excellent story **WHEN IDAHO DIVED** (Aftel) is presented as a dramatic monologue—a long speech by a single speaker, who narrates the tale.

"Gather round, elders, wives and juniors!" it begins. But the tale the speaker tells is in past tense—because he wants to be believed. He is telling the tale of his history of his tribe—how he took an ancient nuclear submarine down under the desert sands to find the cache of food that they now live on—in order to persuade them to join him in taking the Idaho to the stars. And the outcome of the story is also present tense, to the speaker, for the events are happening as he speaks.

Likewise, Fritz Leiber's marvelous **BLACK HAS ITS CHARMS** (Wells [12/21]) is a dramatic monologue—a wife's vicious tirade to her taciturn husband, summing up their sordid history in order to provoke him to murder. Again, though, no one narrates present events—they are implied through her speech. The only narration is in past tense.

This sort of dramatic monologue takes place whenever a narrator directly addresses his readers, as in David Langford's **NOTES FOR A NEW TESTAMENT** (Aftel). The story (a very good one) is being written down by a rather skeptical character who is recounting the tale of how belief in pre-holocaust writings

I ALWAYS KNEW THAT THE REVIEW BUZZWORDS CAME FROM SOMEWHERE!

BUT THEREFOR?



allowed Cristoforo to save their English village from wandering marauders by taking advantage of anti-missile satellites still orbiting the Earth. Whether the trustworthy narrator helps or hinders the tale is beside the point—it is quite proper for the narrator's direct address to the reader to be in present tense.

You'll notice, though, that in all these examples the present tense is used in an implied second-person voice: the "speaker" or "writer" is directly addressing another person or persons. This is the dramatic form, implied dialogue, and not narrative at all.

You'll also notice that I use present tense throughout this column—in directly addressing you, Gentle Reader (Violent Readers need not apply), and in synopsizing the stories I critique. But then, we critics don't really expect to be believed, either.

PRESENT TENSION

The artificial present tense used by contemporary li-fi fictioneers is something else again. The intent is usually to achieve some kind of dramatic immediacy. The effect, however, is the opposite: the artificiality intrudes, making it far more difficult for the reader to receive the tale. The result is that the only people who receive the tale are those so used to li-fi conventions that the artifice has become invisible (i.e., those who have become trolls themselves), or those willing to go to extraordinary effort to get past the barricades the author has put in their way.

This might be worthwhile if present tense narrative actually conferred any benefits. It does not increase the feeling of immediacy, because past tense narrative is so natural to us, so invisible because of its constant use in the vernacular, that it is already the most immediate narrative voice.

THEY KNOW THEY'RE FAKING

In fact, the writers who perpetrate present tense narrative generally stumble and show us that they don't feel that present tense is any more immediate than we do. They are really writing in past tense and translating into an artificial language as they go.

Take Ian McDonald's **EMPIRE DREAMS** (Asim Dec.). It's a beautiful, sentimental story of a child recovering from a parent's grisly death through therapeutic fantasies of flight through space with Major Tom. The story is told in several discrete voices. One of them is openly theatrical, like a past tense, and present tense in these sections is handled flawlessly, because it is perfectly natural. The only narrative is, in fact, stage directions—except when

the characters narrate stories from their lives, which they invariably do in past tense.

McDonald should have followed his characters' example. Because the present tense narrative sections are flawed, McDonald gives away the fact that he himself feels this narrative in the past tense by the way he handles the complexities of time manipulation.

The English language has a full range of devices to handle time manipulation in the past tense. The future of the past, for instance, is a conditional ("After she killed him, she knew she would rush to Mother and confess . . ."); the past of the past is past perfect (" . . . the way she had confessed all the other sins of her shameful life").

But when you write a narrative in present tense, you use a different set of time-manipulation devices. The future of the present is not conditional, but simple future ("After she kills him, she knows she will rush to Mother and confess . . ."); the past of the present is either simple past tense or past perfect (" . . . the way she has confessed all the other sins of her shameful life").

McDonald slips up in his present tense sections, revealing that he himself feels his narrative as past tense, when he uses past perfect as past of the present: "She had wished upon a star, the star around which her son orbits, a shooting star . . ."; had he believed his own present tense he would have written "She wished upon a star" or "She has wished upon a star."

He is hardly alone. James Tiptree, Jr., has two entries in the botched-present-tense category this quarter. Her allegory **ALL THIS AND HEAVEN TOO** (Asim mid-Dec) might have been a tough, original little fable, if she had been wise enough to use the conventions of fabulous writing. Instead, the story of an intended marriage alliance between a utopia and a dystopia (subtly named *Ecologia-Bella* and *Pluvio-Acidiana*), and the way the utopia protects itself from the vicissitudes of love and war, is almost buried under cutely self-conscious narrative.

And, of course, present tense. The giveaway? "So the Prince reluctantly finds himself in another chamber, being bathed and dressed in his most beautiful crimson uniform, and when he would have returned to the bedroom he finds it locked against him." Wait a minute—"would have"? The conditional of the past is conditional perfect: "would have returned." The conditional of the present should be simple conditional: "and when he would return to the bedroom he finds it locked against him."

Am I nit-picking? Of course I am! Present tense is not bad because of little slips like this. It's bad because it's phony, distracting, and elitist. My true objections are not technical, they're artistic and, perhaps, political. Even the political problems are ultimately artistic. Elitist devices aren't bad because they're elitist—they're bad because they interfere with the storyteller's ability to communicate with the audience. There are literary devices that, while they make a story more difficult, still put the reader's betwixt that outweigh the cost. This may be "elitist," but at least the "elite" is getting something they could not otherwise get. Present tense narrative provides no such compensation. It is exclusionary for exclusion's sake. That is poor politics—and bad art.

And when Tiptree and McDonald make such slips, it is not because they're incompetent—they're both fine writers with strong tales to tell, and they have often demonstrated their command of the English language. These slips merely reveal that when they write in present tense they are performing an unnatural act.

EVEN DEEPLY DONE IT DOESN'T WORK

Kate Wilhelm and Kim Stanley Robinson, both superbly skilled with the language, did not make such slips. It also happens that their present tense narratives this quarter have at least some rational basis.

Wilhelm's **THE DRAGON SEED** (Omni Dec) is a strong story about a seemingly retarded girl whose love for living things turns into immeasurable—but unnoticed—power. The story is presented in two layers. The first layer is the most recent—Bruce Enfield on an airplane, headed to Oregon to see what has come of the girl Cory, remembers key encounters with her and finally sees her again at the story's end. Everything in these sections is presented through Bruce's point of view.

The second layer consists of past events that Bruce didn't particularly



know about, told sometimes from the point of view of Cory's mother, sometimes from the point of view of Whitman, the nurseryman who hires Cory and protects her.

Once Wilhelm had decided on this complex structure, with shifting points of view, sometimes framed by Bruce's consciousness and sometimes not, then she had to find a way to keep the reader aware that Bruce's portion of the story takes place more recently than all the other events. Some writers have used italics (or other typefaces) to distinguish different sections; Wilhelm chose to use present tense for Bruce's sections, past tense for the others.

It is a defensible decision, but I think it was a mistake. The story works in spite of, not because of, its over-complex structure. When faced with the problem of a structure so complex the reader is likely to get hopelessly confused, the best solution, in my opinion, is not to use present tense to distinguish one layer of time from another. The best solution is to simplify the structure. In some cases this might not be possible. In the case of **DRAGON SEED**, the story would have been even more effective had all scenes been presented in consecutive order, complete with the shifting points of view. Not a damn thing happens on the airplane—it's a needless distracting frame. Everything Bruce does could be contained in

past tense, third person scenes; his realization—his epiphany, if you will—would not be weakened by having him not turn up in the story till halfway through.

Fortunately, this is one of those visions that is intrinsically so powerful that the story overcomes the writer's mistakes. It helps that Wilhelm's use of language is flawless, her characters beautifully drawn. All else about the story is good enough that the present tense and confusing structure are forgiven.

Present tense shows up uselessly in other stories—Robinson's **GREEN NARS**, Tiptree's **THE ONLY HEART TRINE** (to do, Armstrong's **GOING AFTER ARVID**), but those stories will be discussed in the ordinary course of this column. By now, my point should be clear.

Chances are that some of you, at least, are so inured to present tense that it doesn't sound like Latin to you anymore. That's the most insidious thing about trilled prose: Your sense of the vernacular can be half devoured without you even noticing that all those little bits are gone.

And maybe you don't even miss them. Maybe you prefer to write to the audience that has been schooled to think present tense narrative is perfectly acceptable. But the story that shapes the conscience of the people invariably speak the language of the people. To the degree that you use elitist devices, you abdicate the storyteller's throne.

THE NOVELLAS OF AUTUMN

Novellas are a problem, not just because they're hard to market, but because they're hard to write well. This is because the difference between the short story and the novel is not just a matter of word count. The short story builds to a single climax, stripping away all that does not build the tension to that single strand. The novel, on the other hand, has many climaxes along the way, and devotes far more time to creating a complete-seeming milieu. A novel written like a short story would seem breathless and shallow; a short story written like a novel would be well, would be long.

It would be, in fact, a novella. It is no accident that many novellas are written by novelists. My guess is that I'm not the only writer who sets out to write short stories, but gets sidetracked by so much novelistic world-creation that my short stories get up to 20,000 words or more.

The trouble with such novellas is that too many of them still try for the short story ending—the single climax. When that climax comes after thousands and thousands of words, it's better be good. Few novellas measure up.

The ideal novella is what its name implies: a short novel. It provides several climaxes, so that the full tension does not build to a single moment of epiphany. This autumn there have been three excellent novellas that are almost extraordinary. The only thing that diminishes the pleasure of it is that two of them were written in, yes, present tense narrative.

FORGETFUL DRUMMAIS

I had a bit of trouble with the basic premise of Kim Stanley Robinson's **GREEN NARS** (Av's Sep.). It is a time when human beings routinely live to be

300, 400 years old. The price they pay for near immortality is the loss of memory. For most people, their early years disappear first: childhood, adolescence, first loves, first careers, all gone. That's simply contrary to the patterns of human memory. Memory loss (even at my ripe old age of 34) is fairly evenly spaced over the whole range life. But for the sake of Robinson's story, let's grant him that unlikely premise, and see what he does.

What he does is create a powerful story about a man who does remember. He has spent years struggling against the complete greening of Mars; he is one of the few who remembers the grandeur of the red planet before mankind remade it in the image of Earth. Now, with the Greens having won completely, he joins a party of climbers tackling the difficult eastern escarpment of Olympus Mons, whose peak rises above the atmosphere and preserves the one remaining fragment of pristine desert.

On this climb he hopes to recover for himself, at least, the magnificence of the lost times at Mars. He remembers; instead he is confronted with the beauties of the new, rich life of the planet. Not terraformed, really. Humaniformed, in a way that only Mars could accept.

That is the philosophical underpinning of the tale. In the foreground of Robinson's story we have a powerful, exciting account of the difficulties of the ascent. We also have a love story, for the expedition's leader is a woman that Roger remembers was his lover years before; he even introduced her to climbing—yet she does not remember him at all. This long novella—only a few thousand words short of novel length—is the most fast-reading piece of work Robinson has given us recently. It is powerful, moving; all the threads of plot—the romance, the climb, Roger's alienation from the present and from the new-fashioned world—are aptly, truthfully woven together at the end.

But there are troubles. Robinson no doubt chose to use present tense narrative because in a sense the novella is about time—to people who live in an ever-shrinking present. But his point of view character is the one who does not live merely in the present. Even though Robinson is one of the few characters in any field so skilled that he can bring off present tense without technical errors, his story was not benefitted by the exertion. There is nothing in the story that requires present tense; merely in the essay the Robinson is trying to write alongside it.

In fact, the only bad spots in the story are the places where Robinson lays on this essay with a spatula. Roger "remembers" an episode from Moby Dick, in which the little black kid, Pip, is sent overboard and goes mad in his isolation in the ocean. It is heavy-handed—why cite Melville, when you are already giving us a stronger experience in your own story? But no, Robinson isn't even satisfied with that. He's reaching over our shoulder; he nudges us: Get it? Our hero is isolated the same way! Oh, you don't understand? Well, what if I point out that another Pip, in Great Expectations, was Roger's first character! Ah, NOW you understand! NO YET? (Fool!) All right, because you're so stupid, here's the very next paragraph: "Roger sits remembering his life while thinking over these things, the tossed granules of rock—little pipper—over the ledge into space."

All right, now do you get it? Little pipe, you fool! Little pipel!

NO WONDER
THERE ARE
HOLES IN THE
PLOT!



Duh, yeah, I get it now. Roger is like a pip. Yeah? Did I get it right?

To Robinson, it is not unnatural and unbelievable that a couple of mountain climbers are going to quote Sartre and Shelley to each other, and think of extended passages and pithy quotes from Melville. Robinson is surely a climber, and doubtless quotes all those folks to his friends. But in fiction, that sort of thing comes off as an affectation. It takes us out of the language of storytelling and into the language of criticism and philosophy. It feels, not like natural conversation, but rather like the author intruding, explicitly presenting his philosophical points. Never mind that there are people who really talk that way. The feeblest defense of unbelievability in fiction is to say, "But it really happened." That is the defense of history and journalism; fiction must deal with the plausible, not the actual. Fiction has its own language and its own logic, and these intrusions of essay do great harm to the storytelling art.

This is more than I meant to say, perhaps more than I should have said. GREEN MARS is a wonderful story as it is. Even if you want to scream at the magazine during the meat-axe subtlety of the authorial intrusions, they're never more than a page thing in and you forget them as you get to the climax of the story. Kim Stanley Robinson has a gift for language and an eye for truth. Academia may spatter a bit of mud on his work, but the light still shines.

POKAYNE LIVES

If Tiptree had sat down and coldly calculated how to write a story in the mold of the old Heinlein juveniles, a tale to thrill you and break your heart all in the same novella, a story designed to win the Hugo and make a strong run at the Nebula, she could not possibly have done better than **THE ONLY HEART THING TO DO** [F&S Oct].

But I don't believe there's anything cynical in this story. For one thing, as if Tiptree were a bit embarrassed at all that adventure and sentimentality, she made the story a bit distant with a "Dear Reader" opening, and wrote the whole thing in a peculiar narrative voice that intrudes annoyingly all the way through. (She doesn't get through the second page without revealing that she's faking the present tense, when she uses this sentence or past by the present: "Coati hadn't actually lied. . .")

If she were not sincere, she would have avoided such obvious story mistakes, and then the story would be the perfect heir to the books my generation grew up with: *Citizen of the Galaxy*, *Starman Jones*, *Tunnel in the Sky*, all those wonderful stories of children thrust into situations of adult responsibility and coping with them in a way that makes you proud of them and mourn for them at the same time.

Coati is a spoiled rich kid who has always dreamed of space. With her new cruiser and her generous allowance, she goes herself alone out in the great North Rift, dreamland of first contact. Somehow we're not surprised when she achieves, not a true first contact, but the first contact with this species that is understood, that is helpful. I will start sounding cynical if I tell you baldly that of course she finds a true friend when the alien turns out to be a child of its species as well, both of them involved in matters way over their heads; that of course they are trapped into an unwinable situation, but perform heroically; that of course together they save the Federation from a terrible plague.

If you can read this without wishing for a kleenex before the end, you are not fit for human company; you must spend eternity in literature classes writing "I despise naive identification" an infinite number of times. This story will sob its way to a Hugo and I, for one, am not sorry—though I do hope the Nebula will go to one of the better-written novellas this year.

CLAREN VISION

Sometimes Bruce Sterling can be impossibly artsy. I'm delighted that at least sometimes he's willing to write with clarity—of language, of idea, of vision.

Sterling's **GREEN DAYS IN BRUNEL** [Asim Oct] is about Turner Choi, who broke away from his rich family (his grandfather was a Chinese warlord in Hong Kong, then emigrated to Canada), became an engineer, and is now in Brunel, resurrecting some ancient robots so they can build a fleet of aloft boats. He gets involved in a utopian scheme run by an old Englishman at the same time that his cantankerous dying grandfather is making his decision about which descendant should get all his money. He cobbles up illegal phone connections to the international computer net, he falls in love with a Muslim princess; he visits a concentration camp; and just when he tries to take charge of his life, to do something he believes in, he finds his himself being chased down by a helicopter with sugar in its gas tank.

If this sounds like a page out of Indiana Jones's future diary, you're right. And yet it's more than exciting romance. Too often, as writers become so enamored of their own ideas that they have to devote page after page to every one of them. In **GREEN DAYS**, Sterling shows how it should be done. His world creation is so dense that he throws off enough ideas that several other writers could make good careers for themselves, just by using his one-liners into Analog stories.

For instance, a woman answers the phone, but at first suppresses visual contact on the phone screen. Once she knows who he is, her image appears, and she explains, "We've been having some trouble with phone flashers."

That's it. Never mentioned again. But you know it's absolutely true if we ever had a society with widespread pho-

ture phones, the flashers would be inevitable.

There are, not dollops, but fillips of satire scattered through the story. For instance, Turner Choi, the protagonist, is trying to find someone who can help him reprogram some old robots:

"I've found you some old geezer out in Yorktown Heights. . . . He says he used to work with Big Blue back in pre-history."

"It's always some old geezer."

"Whaddya expect, man? Birth control got everybody else."

He shows thoughts of human understanding that deny the brassy punk writing he's done elsewhere: When Turner falls in love with a woman through the computer Net, Sterling writes, "Turner realized now that no woman was ever known and understood him as Seria did, for the simple reason that he had never had to talk to one so much. If things had gone as they were meant to in the West, he thought, then was ever chased, their attraction into bed and killed it there."

When Sterling writes about computers, he shows that he knows computers; as if that were not rare enough, when he writes about human beings, he shows that he knows human beings. What holds it all together is Sterling's clarity of vision and language; he has created Good Art without being artful.

BALD GUYS HAVE FUN, TOO

George R.R. Martin's series character Hawland Tull is almost too stuffy to enjoy; fortunately, Martin has sense enough to contrast him with some genuinely passionate characters, and to surround him with swirling action so that his absolute placidity is never boring.

The series began with **PLAQUE SHIP** back in January, and has continued in **ANALOG** with **LOAVES AND FISHES** (Oct.), **SECOND HELPINGS** (Nov.), and **MANNA FROM HEAVEN** (mid-Dec.). Together, these form one continuous story that will make a dandy novel. Only **SECOND HELPINGS** suffers from a bad case of Amber Syndrome (the tendency for later installments in a series to spend more than 50% of their text explaining what happened in the installments that went before).

Definitely these stories are not as strong as Martin's strongest work—but they're meant to be. In these tales Martin is having a romp, not changing your life; he has other stories this year that do that. And even here, where he's just having fun, he's still one of the best writers in the field. For instance, when he describes the starport Spiderhome, which began as a simple space station and is now a well-tunnelled asteroid, he explains that the old incarnations of Spiderhome cling to the asteroid "like fat metal buds on a stone potato." Nobody does it better.

HUMANS AND ALIENS

You know as well as I do that a substantial number of the people around us are only pretending to be human. It's one of the strongest storytelling motifs—the moment of unmasking, the discovery that those who seem to be people thing are often someone or something else entirely.

EARNING A MEMBERSHIP IN THE HUMAN RACE

Phyllis Eisenstein's **PAIR EXCHANGE** (Anlg mid-Dec) begins with that hoary old device: the astronauts who arrive on an unknown planet to a rescue stranded explorer who went before. What they

find, though, is wonderfully new. The man they came to save died from malnutrition but there is an 8-foot alien who claims to be the stranded astronaut. It seems they traded bodies before he died. The story twists and turns, forcing the characters to decide what makes a person human. This story epitomizes what is best about Analog.

Andrew Weiner's **GOING NATIVE** (Nry Winter) tells of an alien studying humanity, a shortcut, he enters a computer group. What he didn't expect was that this close involvement with human needs would begin to humanize him. Weiner has a tendency to understate his fiction. As with his excellent story **KLEIN'S MACHINE**, he doesn't do anything garish. But the story is no less powerful for getting to you up the back stairs, so to speak.

(Here's a fun assignment, class. Compare this one with Phyllis Eisenstein's hilarious **THE SHAMBLES OF SPACE**. In a perverse way, they're the same story, told in radically different ways. Yet the effect is still that sunken feeling in the pit of your stomach, the sense that you're caught in a strange place and can never get back.)

In Michael Armstrong's **GOING AFTER ARVIO** (Aftel), the "alien" is an anthropologist in post-holocaust Alaska, who is allowed to live with a tribe of Eskimos—as long as she helps them relearn how their ancestors used to live. In spite of the absolutely dumb decision to write in present tense, the plain tale is believable and strong.

Avram Davidson's quirky non-story **THE SLOWO STOVE** (Univ) is a fascinating

depiction of how much people are willing to give up in order to be thought "human" by their "betters." I thought I didn't like it, but then I found I couldn't get it out of my mind.

IMPROVEMENTS ON HUMANING

Once we accept the idea that human beings are the result of evolution, one can't help but wonder what comes next. (It's too depressing to think we might be a cul-de-sac.) In **EVERGREEN** (Univ), Arthur Jean Cox shows us a group of quasi-aliens who celebrate their long lives despite assassination attempts by short-lived "mayflies" like us. Slow but haunting, the story shows the contempt of one group for the others they left behind, and then shows us all these advanced people who view their inferiors, not with contempt, but with compassion.

Compassion is also the theme of Eric G. Iverson's (Harry Turtle dove's) fine story **VILEST BEAST** (Anlg Sep). America was inhabited, not by Indians, but by "sims," proto-humans that never evolved to hominids. The alternate history alone is fascinating: What would world history have been with no golden empires for the Spanish to conquer, no domesticated maize or bananas? Harry Turtle dove's story is well within a peculiarly American literary tradition: the tale of the white child captured by Indians. The most disturbing thing is how little the white men's treatment of sentient non-humans differs from the way we actually treated the clearly human Indians.

Fred Saberhagen's **AS DOLY AUTHORIZED** (F&SF Oct) depends on the hopelessly implausible idea that the next human species will be able to synthesize information-bearing plastic in their brains. The story saves itself from the obviously vile narrator, a liar who is trying to tell the truth about his secretary and her monstrous child. Larry Powell's **SIBLING** (Anlg Nov) tells not of a standard clone story, but of a desperate tendency to overexplain the "science," the story works.

In **SPANISH LESSON** (F&SF Dec), Lucius Shepard brings his future humans from an alternate timestream in which Hitler's magic-using Reich was victorious. A couple of genetically altered clones escape to our time. The Hitlerian future is the sort of tale that Ellison or Spindall would not shrink from handling directly. Shepard, however, has a dopey, over-the-top, but not conscientious American named "Lucius" narrate the tale; the narrator comments on his own narrative far too often, and finally the essay overpowers the romance, to the detriment of both. Still, where the story shows through the overwriting, it is very good, and if self-conscious meta-fiction is the price we have to pay for the exquisitely realistic "Lucius," maybe it's worth it.

ARTIFICIAL PEOPLE

Shepard does far better with the jewel-like story **BOW MY HEART BREAKS WHEN I SING THIS SONG** . . . (Anlg Dec). He evokes the power of rock and roll, depending on the nostalgia for the emotional effect; this is the rock-and-roll story that so many others have tried to write, but didn't know how. For me, the story is marred by having a near-human robot long for death—not only is that a morally offensive philosophy, it's also a hopeless cliché. It's a mark of Shepard's talent that he takes that into account and makes the story work anyway.

Robots become human and humans be-

UNCLAS OSBORN'S FAVORITE STORIES OF 1985

I tell you my objective criteria, if I had any. Instead, as I sit here at midnight on 3 October, these are the stories that live most powerfully in my memory. Maybe a story's brilliantly written; maybe the tale itself is unforgettable; maybe the idea still makes me ponder. Whatever the cause, as I look back over the landscape of this year's short fiction, these seem to me to be the highest peaks.

"SHORT STORIES"

John Crowley **SHOW** (Omni Nov)
Susan Palwick **THE HUNTER'S WIFE** (Ansg Jul)
Gregory Benford **THEY'RE HERE** (Ansg Apr)
Bruce Sterling **DINNER IN AUGUST** (Ansg May)
Nancy Kress **OUT OF ALL THEN EIGHT STARS** (F&SF Mar)
Karen Joy Fowler **THE POPULAR STREET STORY** (F&SF Jun)

"NOVELS"

Michael Bishop **A GIFT FROM THE GRAYLANDERS** (Ansg Sep)
David Zindell **SHANTARU** (Writers of the Future)
S.C. Sykes **ROCKAWAY BAY** (Anlg mid-Dec)
Michael Swanwick & William Gibson **DOGFOUNT** (Omni Aug)
Rudy Rucker & Bruce Sterling **STORMING THE COSMOS** (Ansg mid-Dec)

C.J. Cherryh **NOVA** (Ansg)
Bob Buckley **HUNTER** (Ansg Dec)
Felix C. Gotschalk **WESTWARD MAN** (F&SF Mar)

"NOVELLAS"

Bruce Sterling **QUEEN DATES IN BUREAU** (Ansg Oct)
Michael P. Kube-McDowell **WHEN WINTER RINGS** (F&SF Jul)
James Tiptree, Jr. **THE ONLY REAL THING TO DO** (F&SF Oct)

come robots—it's a time-honored variant on the ancient theme of people becoming the mask they wear. Robert C. Wilson's **BOULEVARD LIFE** (Asim Dec) is a gut-wrenching story of actors who give up any possibility of natural facial expression in order to wear the masks of Hollywood-influenced stage soap operas. Taking intoxicating doses of "character" by injection, some of them become addicted to chemical and mechanical life.

Henry Melton shows us a future in which cars are equipped with artificial intelligence. In **PARKING SPACES** (Anig Sep), one car passes the other in a kind of sentence and wakes up others in its by-the-month parking garage. Jayce Carr seems to reverse the process in **IMMIGRANTS** (Amaz Nov), in which a cyborged stuntman winds down her life in a struggling colony. The colony seems her as inhuman, but they find her robotic strength useful in staying alive.

David Drake is as vicious as ever in **GUARDROOM** (Afte). Four human guards are maintained like machines in an endlessly-self-preserving mansion where the master of the house may or may not still be alive. It's a gripping adventure and a haunting vision of the future.

RESTORED TO LIFE—SOFT OF

In Jayce Carr's **PINEAPPLES WAKE** (Anig Oct), a person who never existed before is created out of the scattered body parts found in the wreckage of an airplane. The idea is both revolting and fascinating. Carr's treatment of it is only marred by the sticky-gooey way she has a too-nice woman make friends in a too-nice bar. Maybe it only bothered me because it instantly reminded me of Spider Robinson's even cooler saloon. Carr is at his best when the sentiment opens sentimentality. There's nothing sentimental about Craig Shaw Gardner's **BAR AND GRILL** (Afte), which takes the same motif in reverse. The denizens of this bar are the donors, who pay with body parts for the privilege of security in a mad post-holocaust world.

Joe Haldeman's **MORE THAN THE SUM OF HIS PARTS** (Playboy May) gives us a man who finds he likes his replacement body parts better than the originals; unfortunately, a good story peters out in a predictable plot, complete with a predictable "twist."

It is unfair to compare these stories to S.C. Sykes's perfect story **ROCK-A-BYE BABY** (Anig mid-Dec). It is so real that by the end you almost believe you're a quadriplegic—you remember how it feels. As fiction, Coe's is a masterpiece, an accident, tried to hide from memories of normal life. Then he learns that it is possible to regenerate all the damaged nerves. But there's a catch. As the nervous system regenerates, it will obliterate all memory. His struggle to record all his memories before they are taken is one of the most beautiful passages I've read; he waits on the blade of excruciating indecision up to the moment of the scalpel, and then the reader knows both the cost and the allure of either path.

WHEN ALIENS NEED US

The first of Bob Buckley's breakthrough stories is **WORLD OF CRISTINA, SKY OF FIRE** (Anig Oct). Buckley eschews the cliché of the lonely spaceman; his crystal prospector, Wright, has a family that he is trying to keep alive on his radiation-ravaged planet. It is from that most human situation that Wright meets—and saves—an dying alien who is descended from an ancient race that has been fighting the losing battle to survive in this bleak pit. Sometimes Buckley still reaches for the easy ef-



fect, and the twist at the end was too neatly programmed for my taste—but the story has undeniable power.

Stephen Gallagher sets his alien-in-distress story on Earth, where a runaway Russian is helped by a down-and-out English courier in a beat-up Jaguar. **NO LIFE FOR ME WITHOUT YOU, WOODWARD** (F&S Sep) seems as very good as any I've read; sorry, Cooper; unfortunately it is not nearly so successful as a fantasy about shapechanging sea creatures.

Until her story **ROTS** (Afte) I have had to take it on faith that C.J. Cherryh is a terrific writer; I've tried several times, but could never penetrate the massive exposition at the beginning of her books. With this story of an alien race inadvertently shaped by the brief flowering of human life, I become a believer. We follow Desan, pilot of an alien starship, where each generation sees its share of the world and its waking lives. She can't deny the importance, though, of studying the desert bulk of planet Earth, which long ago sent forth the messenger that became the foundation of their religion. The theme has been handled many times; what Cherryh does with it—the bittersweet love they have for our dead past, the struggle between truth and faith, the effort to wring meaning from the few surviving remnants of our time—takes this story well above the others, making it one of the best of the year.

The only way aliens could worship us, of course, is to misunderstand us utterly. Eric G. Iverson (Harry Turtledove) does alien misunderstanding of humans delightfully with **THE ROAD NOT TAKEN** (Anig Nov). It seems that most sentient races discover the secret of faster-than-light travel long before a steam-based industrial revolution. So when the aliens come to invade Earth, they naturally assume that our lack of starflight means that we probably haven't yet discovered gunpowder, either. The idea and its execution are both derisive. Heidi Meyer's tenderly written **RANDOM SAMPLE** (Anig Nov) has a hurried alien researcher reaching his conclusions about human life from a single sample—which happens to be a busful of retarded children with a burnt-out war veteran for a driver.

David Drake dives back into the Roman period of British history to show us an assassination. **DREAMS IN AMBER** (Whis 5) seems at first to be a time-travel story, until we realize that a non-human intelligence is controlling human history. We shouldn't be flattered, though—the intelligence doesn't think of us as intelligent at all; it manipulates us to achieve goals on a far vaster time scale than we will ever see.

WALLY AND THE BEAN IN SPACE

Perhaps it's unfair to criticize it because it so often ignores the family—it's hard to juggle all those characters in closely interlocking relationships,

and as couldn't do worse than television, right? I'm glad, though, that more writers seem willing to try.

A CHILD ALONE

Romance is rife with orphaned children making their way in the world, but Michael Bishop is not content with the old Podkayne story. In **A GIFT FROM THE GRAYLANDERS** (Asim Sep), he shows us a child whose divorced mother is forced to live with her brother, who has no patience with the boy. We're afraid of the basement, afraid of the dark—but that's where he has to live. He becomes obsessed with the damp shapes on the basement's concrete wall, the people of the Gray lands. If this story were begun by any other writer, it would end with the Graylanders actually coming, either to devour or avenge him. Bishop is not any other writer, and so the conclusion is wrenching and powerful; this story loves without sentiment, grieves without pity. Three months after I first read it, it still haunts me—I know that child better than I know my own. It may sound extravagant, but it is simply true that Bishop makes character better than anybody else.

A similar compassion is shown in **THE GREEN TENT** (F&S Nov). (Have you noticed that titles come in waves? This is the year of green.) Ellen Gilchrist brings us a child who is virtually ignored by his competitive parents. Instead, his grandmother dotes on him; together they take magical rides through time and space in a green backyard tent, until she realizes what it costs the boy. The lonely boy in Al Sammon's fine story **THE CHILD WHO HOLLY** (Whis 12/22) never does understand that his mother had good reason for forbidding him to join in the village harvest festival.

WISE FOOLS

The idiot savant is a charming conceit—the seeming fool secretly has powers that we cannot guess. Kate Wilhelm's **DEMON SEED** is the best of the stories in this quarter that take that conceit, but there are others worthy of note. The blind, retarded young sculptress in Joe L. Hensley's **SAVANT** (F&S Dec) is just what we should expect—a telepath with healing powers. What makes the story stand out is the drug-addicted doctor who first realizes her gift; haunted by the memory of hearing his family screaming as they burnt to death in an auto accident, he has been killing himself slowly until this gifted young woman touches him.

Sansoucy Kethner has a light touch in the fantasy **A SPELL IN TIME** (F&B Dec). Magical spells have more power if the spell is in an arcane language; so a wizard invents his own language and teaches it to a retarded person, a retarded girl with an eidetic memory. The plot gets a bit out of hand, but it's good fun anyway.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Parents have terrible power over their children, and that power is at its zenith with the parent is least aware. George R.R. Martin blasts us with sheer power in **REMEMBERS OF HIS CHILDREN** (Asim Nov). Usually I detect stories about writers, especially stories in which writers' characters come to life. This tale of a daughter's vengeance against a father who meant well overcomes all those problems, and it would have been perfect except for the last six lines.

(Those lines enraged me. Storytellers build their tales on a foundation of trust; the audience grants them belief, and in exchange they must tell

stories the audience can care about. It is a contemptible sort of practical joke to lead the audience to care about the people in a tale, and then laugh at them and say, "Ha! Those people you cared about weren't really there!" This story was Martin at his best; the final so-called twist was audience betrayal at its worst.)

In **FATHER'S DAY** [Whis 5], Steve Rasinic Ten shows us the father who is haunted by the same child-murdering soul that his own father barely controlled. The story began well and cried out for a resolution between father and son, but the resolution Ten settled for the standard horror ending—a glittering knife and "Daddy, please" in italics. Maybe I'm just not a member of the horror audience. Just as vicious in reverse is **W.S. Dorey's** powerful, understated **THE UNFINISHED HOUSE** [F&S Sep], in which a loving old couple build their dream house in the wrong place; like Abraham and Sarah, they have a child long after their time. These twins, though, ate no prize. They have their own eyes, and they discard their parents when no longer need them.

Terence M. Green's **ASHLAND, KENTUCKY** [Asim Nov] is a tender story of the sweet, unbreakable ties of kinship. The narrator's dying mother wants nothing but to see her brother Jack, who disappeared fifty years before. She dies before he can follow the cold trail very far; then 50-year-old letters start arriving from Jack. I wished for a clearer, more meaningful resolution. In reflection I realized that the story is enough as it is: a closing of doors long ajar; a salvage to the fabric of their lives.

WINDFALL [F&M Mar] crosses the borderline of melodrama several times, but even so, Kristine Knaus's tale is a strong one. The narrator, presently stranded on a world where the fatherhood is an obscenity—women cannot conceive of a male having any interest in a child after conception. He, however, remembers and misses the wife and children he left behind, and when chance provides him with a child, he makes the attempt to raise it himself.

A PARENT'S DREAMS

Ian McDonald's **EMPIRE DREAMS** dealt with a child's agony at seeing his father's death. Susan Palwick's **WAYS TO GET BORN** [Asim mid-Dec] shows us a father, so grief-stricken by his wife's death, that he has little left to give their son. The boy has retreated into madness, but he is given power by the fancy of the carved-wood characters his father brings as gifts. The characters are real, and the fantasy ending is at once disquieting and hopeful.

Dennis Etchison's **WOMAN IN BLACK** [Whis 21/22] is a poignant story of a boy, already reeling from his father's death, who learns that his mother has also died. Alas, I never quite figured out what was going on in the wieu. I'm afraid that all this lovely writing might have been wasted on an industrial-waste story, but I can't be sure. I do wish talented writers would more often remember their obligation to be clear.

Children aren't the only ones who suffer from the death of someone dear to them. John Crowley's **SEA** [Oct/Nov] is an exquisitely gentle story built around a marvelous idea. The Wasp is a little mechanical insect that followed Georgie around, recording all she did for thousands of hours, transmitting the pictures to the Park; after her death, her husband comes back to relive the randomly selected memories. They married for

reasons that had nothing to do with love, came to love each other. Crowley explores the problems of love and grief and memory, while creating convincing characters—in particular a very jumpy Park attendant who provides just the right amount of comic relief.

Karen Joy Fowler finds another way to commune with the dead in **THE LARK WAS FULL OF ARTIFICIAL THINGS** [Asim Oct]. Part of Miranda's therapy is computer-induced dreams of her war-dead lover, Daniel. The danger in such a story is that it's not enough just to talk to the dead; the dead must have something to say. It is no surprise that Fowler brings it off convincingly; the only way that Miranda can be healed is for her to complete, in absentia, some of Daniel's unfinished business. It has so much right about it that I can't think why for me the story simply did not penetrate to the heart.

Some griefs are overcome by not believing them at all. Tanith Lee's **PINWOOD** [Whis 21/22] is an exquisite little piece about a woman who has made the best of her loneliness when with her husband away so much of the time.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A classic device of ghost stories is to keep the ghost around until its business is completed. Lillian Stewart Carl's **WHERE IS THE VICTORY?** [Asim Nov] is the wistful story of a father who challenged himself with the ultimately realistic ship model he was going to construct—he had a full life with his family—but his widow is not at all surprised that the model continues to grow even after he has died. Richard Wilson tells of another gentle ghost in **SEE ME SAFELY HOME** [F&S Nov]. The narrator has just moved back into his late parents' home, soon after his civilized divorce was finalized. He finds that it is haunted by a girl who once made him a seemingly trivial promise; its fulfillment seems far more than he expected.

Robert Dunn's charming tale **THE KITE MAN** [Omni Aug] is not a ghost story, but the little character did leave some unfinished business in a small town; so he comes back to enchant the children, outrage the citizens, and carry off the woman he loves.

ROMANCE

The land has its own ties on its children. In Avon Swofford's moving tale **TALKING THE LOW ROAD** [Asim Oct], a brilliant young musician darts to abandon the ancient land-god of his Scottish village in order to try to fulfill the dreams of his lover and a good-hearted, rootless man from America. A more vi-

ciuous goddess calls home a young Mexican-American athlete just in time for the sacrificial games in John & Diane Brizzolara's **GAME OF THE GODS** [Amaz Nov]. It was a gripping story until the unfathomable end—I really wish I knew what the hell happened. That frustration hit me all the more gratefully that Cooper McLaughlin's quaintly old-fashioned ghost story **THE BLACK AND TAN MAN** [F&S Nov]. Of course the young Irish-American returns to the family village in Ireland to find that his body can't come he looks exactly like an old ancestor; of course he gets caught up in old feuds until the ghost story is resolved; and of course the climax is followed by several pages in which the characters sit around and tell each other what these strange events meant. For all the familiarity of form, though, the story works; sometimes those old formula writers knew things that we can profit from.

SEX AND MURDER

I think some of writers are trying to convince me that I'm a dreadful failure at sex. I'm not. I'm not. I'm not. **ALL MY DARLING DAUGHTERS** made me wonder why I had never thought sex would be more fun if my partner cried out in agony. Now Brian Aldiss makes me downright embarrassed to be male at all—I mean, Willis is a woman, so her condemnation of males might be unfair, but Aldiss is one of us. He must know. Right? So what's wrong with me, that I have never found the slightest link between power, expectation, and sexual pleasure? Why is it that I have no notion why the men of the village in Aldiss's **YOU NEVER ASKED MY NAME** [F&S Nov] preferred sex with the bald-headed woman who handed out the corpses, or well. Even when I think Aldiss's discourse is a crock, his writing is so good that I still think the story makes terrific reading.

The presumed war between men and women has very different overtones in Peter Paul's disturbingly explicit tale **THE SEX WHO MURDERED** [F&S 21/22]. The tale of a man who can't help it that his lovers commit suicide as an act of devotion to him. Just as disturbing is Dennis Etchison's relentless story of a hopeful young preacher whose congregations are going to work out for him to do his movie. But in **DEADSPACE** [Whis 5], he finds that, far from being the exploiter, he is going to devote his life to serving a goddess of decay.

The Nebraska of Gene Wolfe's **THE NEBRASKA AND THE WARRIOR** [F&S Dec] does not realize how fatal his love can be, as he takes the offered devotion of a woman of the sea. Garry Kilworth's **SONGBIRDS OF PAIN** [Omni Aug] tells a similar story from the other side—a woman who undergoes unbelievable pain in order to transform herself into a perfect woman. She comes to associate pain so closely with love that brutality is the only gift she can give to her lover.

John Brizzolara's strong **THE ABOMINATION** [Whis 21/22] is told from the point of view of a child molester. Louie tries to flee to a place where there is no possibility of doing the monstrous things he does to children; ironically, he goes far enough to reach a place where his cruelty actually saves a child's life. Wayne Wightman's **THE GREAT WALL** [F&S Sep] is a strange repositioning of two stories: a sentient planetoid that rushes headlong toward a fatal collision with the Earth, thinking to mate; and a man who falls in love with a beautiful young girl in the sea off the Chinese coast, only to discover that she, too, was the victim of an ob-

FIRST CATCH
ONE
UNICORN...



sessive, destructive love. This story is truly weird, but at the end it felt exactly right.

How about a videogame in which psychotics can act out the murder of their families? Thomas Wyde makes such therapy seem plausible in the tight little story **ARCADE** (McRy Winter). Maybe Robert Grant's **WHERE YOU LEAD ... I WILL FOLLOW** (TZ Oct) is a bit of a cheat, but the story of a man who is sure the woman he loves is holding out on him has an absolutely shattering ending.

Tanith Lee's **BLOOD-MANTLE** (Asim Nov) tells us the genesis of a werewolf, beginning with a grandmother who tells young children a grisly, highly-sexed werewolf tale; little boys think it sounds neat. He dies of meningitis only days later, and long afterward, when his grave is disturbed, a werewolf begins stalking the town. Sound silly? Lee deflates the absurdity with the horrifyingly matter-of-factly tone the narrator maintains, even when she meets her long-lost cousin and agrees to sup with him.

EXPLORING THE PAST

It was in Andre Norton's **GALACTIC DUELITY** that I first ran into the traditional sf story of people who stumble on an ancient artifact produced by a race far more advanced than they. It will be barnacled, but the device still works. It's just for fun in Richard Mueller's **THE DAY WE REALLY LOST THE WAR** (Asim Sep), the story of some not-very-gung-ho German engineers who turn up an alien starship as they dig for natural tracks in the retreat across Russia. Alas, Mueller didn't know what to do with the starship once he got it in his hands.

That can't be said Rudy Rucker and Bruce Sterling. They know just what to do with the starship that turns up in **STORMING THE COSMOS** (Asim mid-Dec). But even if they had botched it, I wouldn't have minded—their account, narrated by a slimy KGB informer who is forced to "protect" a genius physicist, is so funny and so believable that the science fictional elements are almost unnecessary. The plot movement is almost identical to what L. Ron Hubbard tries for in his novel **THE EYE** (Asim Nov)—but Rucker and Sterling accomplish more in 15,000 words than Hubbard manages in ten times that length.

THE PAST MEANS WHAT WE WANT IT MEAN

George Alec Effinger's **THE BIRD OF TIME BEARS BITTER FRUIT** (F&SF Dec) is not the kind of mad comedy that has been his trademark. Instead he literalizes the idea that the past bears what we believe it to have been, as a kid who travels back to the library of Alexandria is disappointed to discover. Whatever people of the present don't remember just isn't there—and what we remember wrong makes for jarring anachronisms. The story was wonderful until it just faded away at the end.

Two stories do derive humor from attempts to revise the past. In Russell M. Griffin's **IN SECTOR'S GRAVE** (F&SF Sep), as a fawning young man tries to please his intransigent, though his tale plainly reveals how contemptible he is. The story uses the time-honored device of future archaeologists discovering and misunderstanding the artifacts of our time; the story's only flaw is that I couldn't believe that the narrator would so stupidly reveal his final crime when it would be so much easier to lie, and let our knowledge of it come from more subtle clues. Ron Coulam's **WHAT WONDERFUL SUMMER** (F&SF Oct) is a delightful

WRITERS OF THE YEAR

There are stories that stand out, of course; but there are also writers that command attention, their names so regularly linked with good stories that I came to trust them, that I came to feel that this year somehow belonged to them.

NEW WRITER: Karen Joy Fowler

She has debuted with a maturity and consistency of talent that would have dazzled us all were this not the year after Lucius Shepard went nova. She has my vote, at least, for the Campbell Award.

David Zindell and Jim Aikin also made impressive entrances.

QUANTUM LEAP: Bob Buckley & Wayne Wightman

They've both been around awhile, but with Buckley's exciting **RUNNER** and three fine Wightman stories they made their move out of the pack. Look for their work and excite excellence every time.

Harry Turtledove (Eric G. Iverson), Andrew Weiner, and Thomas Wyde also showed remarkable consistency in a burst of first-rate stories.

STORY WRITER OF THE YEAR: Bruce Sterling

There's no arguing with the fact that Sterling has been author or co-author of three of the most memorable stories of the year. I may disagree with some of his artistic and philosophical stances, but he persuades me against my will, with irresistible talent.

George R.R. Martin, Jane Yolen, and Kate Wilhelm also had superb years, writing at the peak of their forms.

ghost story about a dead actress who comes back to see the record straight. It seems that the ex-lover who has enriched himself by fanning the flames of her legend has bent the truth more than just a little.

IN RE AND MY SHADOW (TZ Oct), T.M. Swain earns a double-twisted ending with his powerful, well-written account of a man who keeps returning to the bedside of his friend, whose traffic accident left him paralyzed, deaf, and blind. Crippled and cut off from the world, he spends his hours dictating a meandering novel into a tape recorder that his friend has long since disconnected. He just hasn't the heart to tell him. The anguish in the tale is palpable.

LAUSE OF MEMORY

Annette Hard tells of the wife of an up-and-coming businessman who has moved from one identical suburban housing development to another once too often. **UNFOLDING** (TZ Dec) is a nightmare story of being lost in a too-familiar landscape, unable to remember just what her husband's new company is called, or what her housing development and streets are named. Mark Baker's **A STORY WHOSE NAME IS FORGOTTEN** (F&SF Jun) is a far more light-hearted tale of loss of memory. The stranger in the alehouse claims to have drunk from the waters of Lethe, which made him forget everything; but he knows, because he has some of the water with him, that he must be a great hero, to have obtained the water, and must have suffered unbelievable anguish to have wanted to drink it. It may all be true, but of course nobody's willing to trust the water.

It can also be fun to see an old tale twisted to new purposes. D.J. MacTjen's **SMALL RED CAP** (F&SF Mar) has a young anthropologist forced to tell a

story to the tribe he's studying. The tribe's chief storyteller, however, constantly revises the meaning of the story to fit with his cultural expectations, until we get an unbelievably perverse and yet plausible version of "Little Red Riding Hood." Richard Cowper revises the Christmas story more directly, with his seasonal **A MATTER OF NO GREAT SIGNIFICANCE** (F&SF Dec). An alien experience is leaving Earth, except for a team of three explorers who have lost their way in the desert. The story's rendezvous point, marked by a "star." It's easy to weary of sf stories that seek to explain what really happened in the Christmas legend, but we expect more of Richard Cowper and he delivers. It is brief, pleasant, and, while it removes the supernatural from the traditional account, it is replaced with a "gift of the magi" that re-infuses it with a new moral force.

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE PAST, CHANGE IT

It's lots of fun when writers of sf stories cry, "Damn the paradoxes! Let's do it!" The past is what J.R. Martin's best story this year is **UNDER SIEGE** (Omni Oct), a complex story of mutants in a post-holocaust America who are being sent back into the minds of people in the past, trying to change pivotal events in human history, so that the war between America and Russia can be undone. The protagonist, however, finds that he identifies all too strongly with the young, idealistic Swedish soldier who he has to replace. Besides, the "experts" in military history who are giving orders about how to change events have no notion of how each change might affect the future. So the mutant decides to improvise. Admittedly the ending is a little fun in that the reader knows who John C. Fremont is and why he mattered in 1856, but even without that it's a tough, powerful story.

Damon Knight's bootstrap story **THE MAN WHO WENT BACK** (Amaz Nov) is like a razor blade honed to one molecule's thickness. The main character is a long, involved plot are contained, not just hinted it, within three brief incidents. There have been good novels hung on no more tale than this. And yet, while I admire the artistry, it is the same tale again the economy of writing makes it admirable, but it is, finally, forgettable. And **MOLANT IN MIRONSOBES** (Omni Sep), by Bruce Sterling & Lew Shiner, ultimately falls into the trap of shallow speculation that has engendered a cyberpunk story before. Still, it's great fun: Energy-hungry time travelers use pipelines into alternate pasts to pump fossil fuels and scarce resources into the wasteful future. When they come to Salzburg, a young Mozart hears recordings of the great works of music that he has not yet composed, and loses all motivation to compose them. But he's still a great composer, and makes him very dangerous to the second-rate minds that think they're exploiting him.

Both Harlan Ellison and Harry Turtledove wrote stories in which a time traveler is plunked down in the midst of a heinous, brutal, vicious dinosaur. There the similarity ends. Turtledove's **WATCHING SEASON** (Anlg Dec) is a rather sentimental story of a hatching hadrosaur that bonds with the time traveler, who uses it to hone his instincts to save his life. Ellison takes a predictably vicious view; his time traveler is a tyrant who is fleeing into the past in order to escape a revolt in the present. He escapes, but is later to lose his authority over the peasants—he just wasn't counting on dinosaurs being so very dumb.

IM IN THE NOSH MODE...
A LITTLE SNAKED STEGA—
SAURUS,
PLEASE.



REALITY GAMES

We survive by constant trust in the neatness of nature. We are quite certain that all those tiny bugs flying far away will get bigger as we approach. We count on time flowing in one direction and gravity applying steady suction on our feet. Which makes us paties to storytellers with a certain pernicious bent. Not just writers within our genre, either—there are plenty of would-be Kafkas among life writers, too.

In the June Fantasy Book, Darrell Schweitzer brought to our attention an anonymous story called **THE PLANET** from the **The Knickerbocker** of July 1853—a story that would be, in substance if not style, right at home in **PS&P** or **Whisper**. It's an eyewitness account of the shrinking of the world, as the soil compresses, air becomes thick, water becomes viscous and then solid. (As for the style, I strongly recommend that any writer who plans to affect an elevated style read this story to be reminded of how it is done. Mark Twain had a good deal of fun satirizing pretentious fiction, but this is a fine example of a level of language that is never gotten in an America where "intelligent conversation" is taken to mean Phil Donahue.)

The November **Omni** brings us Thomas Christensen's translation of **THE MOST PROFOUND CARRESS** by Julio Cortázar. The reality manipulation here is, at the point of view character finds himself sinking into the earth, and no one notices. As he walks around, he is at first ankle deep, then hip deep in floor and soil alike. It is interesting to note that both these stories, written by authors at some remove from contemporary American sf, do not make any attempt to end; in both cases the writer is so intrigued by the reality shift that he does not regard it as necessary to tell a real story along with it. One might take this to mean that we sci-fi writers try to force the formulas of commercial fiction onto our ideas; or it might be that we and our audience are no longer overwhelmed by mere ideas, and expect there must be compelling and fulfilling storylines along with them.

A.R. Morlan's **SCRAP WHEN EMPTY** (NCR Winter) gives us essentially the same story as Susan Casper's earlier story **SPRING FEVER** in **Midnight**, only this time it's a man who, dissatisfied with his life, effects a switch that turns out not to improve his situation much. Morlan's tale is quite well written, but the power comes from the realistic shift, not from the moral lesson drawn by the formulaic ending: "The grass is always greener ..." It seems futile to work hard enough to create a

good character, only to throw him away on so shallow a conclusion.

This is not an uncommon problem. Jon Cohen had a wonderful horror story going in **I DON'T KNOW WHY SHE SHOULDER THE FLY** (TZ Dec), as a boy watches his parents get hungrier and hungrier; it was becoming something wonderful as the boy set himself to protecting his baby brother from their appetite, but Cohen apparently did not realize that his tale had possibilities beyond a trite, portentous ooh-they're-going-to-eat-them ending. It is possible to find inspired endings for such stories, as William John Watkins did with his outstanding piece of paranoid humor, **POST AMFUL** (TZ Oct). Junk mail begins to get more audacious, while consuming his real correspondence. The trite paranoid ending is for the narrator to cover as a bunch of hard-selling automatons with some vague but hideous purpose slowly approach. Here's a real twist: Watkins doesn't do it. The ending is as good as the story.

Sometimes the story idea is pure winy, and the wise writer gets just enough to get the idea across and then quit. John M. Ford and Ben Bova are wise writers. Ford's **SCRABBLE WITS** (GOD [Asim Oct]) needs no introduction beyond its title; Bova's **BEISBOL** (Anlg Nov) gives us Richard Nixon's attempt to coach the American baseball all-stars to victory over Castro and his fiendish pitching machine.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

Everything looks so ordinary, but if you could see what I see ... That's the premise of Esther M. Friesner's **BIL-LINGS-GATE WOLLY** (F&B Dec), in which a late-nineteenth-century London vagrant, arrested by bobbies wanting freedom by telling them the story of how his mother was a goddess who sacrificed everything for the sake of dear Britannia; the tale gets a bit muddy, but it's fun. Or, as Rachel Baunoff's **PRESIDENT OF MEMORY** (PS&P Nov) tells of a young mother who keeps having memory lapses; a new memory training system really helps her, so she now she no longer instantly forgets whenever she sees her daughter not-so-imaginary-after-all playmate. The story would have been wonderful, had the secret creatures not all been so damned cute; it also didn't help that the husband's conversion happened entirely off-stage.

As one should expect, Alan Ryan's version of what's really going on is the reverse of these others. In **BUNDORAN, CO. DONEGAL** (Whis 21/22), everybody thinks there's something witchy about a peculiar old woman; but as events bring the whole cast of characters together in a darkened carousel, they realize that there is no magic, except whatever brains in the human heart.

What seems ordinary really means much more, says Harlan Ellison in **PALADIN OF THE LOST BOOK** (Univ; TZ Dec). A young man saves an old man from napsies, takes him home, and eventually becomes custodian of the old man's pocket watch, which guards the last hour of the world. At first I didn't understand why Ellison had written such a sticky story—the friendship between the two is what I would expect from Spider Robinson, not Harlan Ellison—until I discovered that the story is the basis of a Twilight Zone episode. Oddly enough, the story is that kind of easy sentimentality that works better on TV than in fiction, because it's easier to believe when you watch live actors do it. Pamela Sargent sets herself a more difficult task in **ORIGINALS** (Univ)—making us care deeply

about something as trivial as stolen recipes. Within the future world she has created, she is able to bring it off—almost. We do sympathize with her main character, but the world itself is so bleak that the story finally repels.

PRIVATE REALITIES

We can only be judged for what we believed we were doing, right? Margaret Coleman's sickening but believable story **THE HUSBAND WITCH** (Univ 21/22) may not have a bit of "real" fantasy in it, as a boy's jealous hatred of the new baby leads him to create a reality in which it makes perfect sense to drop a baby over a cliff. Margo Skinner's **SPACE TRIP** (Whis 21/22) is far kinder, but just as good; a desperately lonely woman lives in a far more interesting world than any of the rest of us. If she's right, we should be jealous of her; if she's crazy, we'll be cleaning her off a sidewalk.

WHEN WE GET WHAT WE WANT ARE WE GLAD?

We who fight the war against obesity often think of our fat as something apart from us, something that has attached itself to us but is not part of our self. It is not surprising that two writers in this issue have found ways to objectify that feeling—and end their stories with a disgusting description of naked fat, separated from its owner. Alan Ryan's **THE EAST BEAVERHORN MONSTER** (Whis 21) works as a satire on a kind of bored upper-middle-class ladies; unfortunately, the fat-monster at the end comes as a gross disappointment. Thomas Wyld's **MAGIC COOKIES** (PS&P Dec) is not as delirious in its treatment of fat, but the plain tale works very well. A fat teenage boy's obsession with food takes him to the back door of a bakery at the wrong time of night; the witchy baker gives him cookies that magically reappear in each hand as soon as he eats them. As a fantasy it's fun; as allegory it's surgically precise.

If your spouse is driving you to nervous ill health, don't cure the symptoms, cure the disease, says Dr. Roelbeck in Haskell Barkin's **PAIN KILLER** (PS&P Sep). In a sort of medical co-op, the price you pay for being rid of a burdensome human being is to do the same favor for someone else. It's a perverse but not implausible scheme. Underlying it, though, is the fear that there is never a real cure for anything—which is also the message of Rob Chilson's & Lynette Meserole's **THE WHITE BOX** (Anlg Dec). The white box of the title has cured all the ills of mankind and has Smedley D. Butcher's name on it. The box promises to be making a recovery, despite the box's best efforts. The authors do an unusually good job of making public events seem plausible. The reporters actually act like reporters; the hospital administrators generally seem plausible. There's nothing wrong with this story. It's just hard for me to get worked up about the dangers of a cure I don't believe could ever exist.

THERE ADNT NO JUSTICE

The American legal system has its problems, but vigilantism is the enemy of justice, and **DEATH WISHPYRE** series are, in my considered judgment, antisocial poison. Which brings me to **A CASE OF IMMUNITY** (Amaz Nov) by Barry B. Longyear, S.A. Cochran, Jr., & Warren M. Salomon. The story is well-enough good if you're a lawyer, but judges should flout the will of the government and execute terrorists right in the middle of delicate hostage situations, then this is your kind of story. But on any objective standard, it's ridiculous. The aliens who always keep an oath are

straight out of high school logic problems ("If all yes-people lie and all no-people tell the truth, how can you tell which is which with a single question?"), and it is absurd to imagine that a future interstellar legal system would be identical to American legal practices as of 1985—our present system is an anomaly which is unlikely to be repeated. My disgust with this story is not because I believe governments should bow to the demands of terrorists; it is because I believe that no society can survive if its members of the state are bound by law. But why bother to argue? This sort of tale is for the Charles Bronson crowd, not the sf reader.

Real justice is the method a society adopts to protect itself against evil. No matter how we fence it about with law, the whole point of the exercise is to excise evil from the body politic, either by exile, imprisonment, execution, or, ideally, deterrence. In Lucius Shepard's **WENGLES** (Univ.), a stranded pilot comes face to face with a monstrous Nazi war criminal who is still performing hideous "experiments." His response is the human one: to kill what is so plainly evil. (It is a measure of Shepard's skill that this story is not marred at all by the fictionalized glee's corpse between the writing and publication of the story.)

Eather M. Friesner's **THE MONK'S TALE** (PanB Jun) faces the problem of judging people according to what they really desired. In a story as simple as this, as any in the Decade, a lawyer goes to hell and is forced to try to administer accurate judgment. The tale offers a kind of delight and artistry that is rarely found in our genre, and I cannot recommend it too highly.

DOPEY GET MAD

At its most primitive level, justice is synonymous with revenge, and human beings have an abiding fondness for stories where the victim emerges victorious. A few stories this fall give it to us straight, proving that the unadorned revenge story still works. Gary Alexander's **BLOODIES** (Asim Sep) is a sharp-edged account of the vengeance of a veteran whose best friend took away his wife while he was overseas. David J. Schow's **BUNNY DIDN'T TELL US** (NCR Winter) tells of a graverobber who helps the corpse of a criminal get even with his sleazy murderer. Hugh B. Cave's **DANABALLA'S SLOUGH** (Whis 21/22) shows how a Haitian wizard aptly punishes smugglers who drowned a boatload of refugees in order to protect themselves from the Coast Guard. And in Charles Stimpert's timely **HELP! THE PARANORMS ARE AFTER ME!** (Whis 21/22), we see how each new murder spawns a vengeful ghost lurking like Balquo at the fringe of the killer's vision.

Connie Willis deftly twists the old form in **REUNION** (Univ) (Whis 5) and sympathy is not with those who seek vengeance at all. Houdini has died, you see, and on the other side he discovers that all those mediums he attacked are actually in control—and intend to get even with their tormentor. Randall Silvis's narrator in **WHY THE STRANGER DREAMS** (T Dec) sets out to find the man who is tormenting his wife in her dreams. In this delicately wrought tale he only gradually realizes that his task is not protection but revenge.

MEDIC HAVE WE DONE?

What if the evil we discover is not in someone else, but in ourselves? How do we obtain justice then? Scott Russell Sanders's fine story **TRAVELS IN THE INTERIOR** (Omni Dec) follows two

brothers, recreational "explorers," on their brutal journey through the jungles of a world that none of the previous explorers is willing to talk about. Not until they reach the far-off white mountain do they understand why. Jean Darling's protagonist in the chilling story **THE LAST THING** (Whis 21/22) bears an even heavier burden of guilt—yet only isn't really guilty, is she? She managed to be unspeakably evil without doing much of anything at all.

It is also possible to think you have committed a terrible crime and punish yourself for it—all in error. Wade K. K. **A COUNTRY HOME** (Whis 5) is a poisoned dagger of a story, marred only by the unlikelihood of a character not knowing what was tied up in a bag. It also implies an equivalence of the value of human and animal life—though not as strongly as Jon Wynne-Tyson's vicious satire on blood sports among British royalty in **MONARCH OF THE GLEN** (NCR Winter). I hope Wynne-Tyson is British. It would be quite rude of an American to paint such a devilish picture of Charlie and the Hun. Hugh B. Cave, in **POKOPIN IN PERDO** (Whis 5), does a good job with the timeless motif of good people who eat human flesh by mistake. I only wish I weren't so weary of werewolves.

David Morrell's **FOR THESE AND ALL MY SINS** (Whis 5) strikes me as the opposite of a tale of justice: those who are chosen to pay the price for terrible deeds are not the guilty, but those guilty enough to be tricked into paying. Still, it's as ghastly a horror tale as I can hope for. I just don't like living in that moral universe. Nor am I thrilled with Jessica Amanda Salmonson's sense of fairness in **A HAUNTED TALE OF JUSTICE** (PanB Dec), a completely perverse account of how people are punished, but go on committing great injuries after death.

The protagonist of **TIDAL EFFECTS** (Univ), by Jack McDewitt, faces a terrible but real decision. The story suffers from indirect, tedious writing, but the central dilemma is a vital one. A brilliant physicist, who knows he is on the verge of world-changing discoveries, plunges into the ocean to save a drowning child. When he is almost to the boy, he realizes that he does not have the strength to reach the boy and bring him back to shore. Should he risk dying in the attempt, and let his great discoveries be lost? How do you weigh the value of your own life against the potential life of a child?

THE GODS CHANGE HIGH PRIEST

We storytellers seem to be suspicious whenever the gods do us favors. It seems that it isn't just the devil that wants us to pay the ultimate price. In Esther M. Friesner's bittersweet fantasy **THE SAILOR'S BRIDE** (Amaz Nov), a young Brazilian fisherman prefers his wife to the jealous goddess of the sea. The wife retrieves his freedom, and with the help of another god—but even that god demands a terrible price. John Betancourt's **PARAMORON'S EYE** (PanB Dec) is a brutal, moody fantasy of a wizard who works bloody sacrifices to free his and his son to bring his wife back from the dead. A good story is marred only by Betancourt's portentous one-sentence paragraphs.

And ... the dread ellipses ...

Betancourt shows more restraint and better style in **THE WEIRD OF MAZAL DEY** (PanB Sep), in which a magical mirror provides good fortune for the man who steals it—but on! by splitting his

soul and tormenting half of him forever. Technically, there are no gods at all in Ken Wisman's **BARELLI'S DEMON** (Whis 21/22), but the pattern of the story is familiar, as the Guard Demons, sold to city-dwellers to protect them against muggers, turn out to expect more from their masters than the average Doberman.

Startlingly good is Darrell Schweitzer's **COMING OF AGE IN THE CITY OF THE GODDESSES** (PanB Jun). The Goddess has died, it seems, but the sacrifices still continue in random fashion. Three children fall under the Goddess's lingering power, and do not fare well—but this bleak and powerful tale transcends their individual fates.

What it comes down to, in some stories, is that the gods are simply hungry. Jane Yolen's best story this year, I think, is her perverse retelling of the Exodus story in **AN INSPECTION OF ANGELS** (Asim Nov). Imagine angels as dung-eating, human-eating harpies! Imagine Moses as a woman who is just trying to get her people out of unpleasant contract labor until the angels go away; imagine all that, but still read the story, because Yolen's incredibly dense stories are already briefer than any synopsis could be.

A hungry god turns up in Ian Watson's **THE WIRE ABOVE THE WAR** (Jan Mid-Dec), but in this case the human sacrifice maintains the energy of the beast that has brought peace to the world by enclosing all the war machines in a place outside of time. As an idea, this is at once repellent and fascinating; as a story it's simply terrible—no character, little event. But sf has a high tolerance for all-exposition non-stories (remember Clarke's **THE STAR?**), and this one is worth reading. Much lighter is Ron Wolfe's **THE ONE-SHOE BLUES** (Asim Nov), where it is not a god but a hungry alien that shows a hitchhiker why so many mule shoes are abandoned along the highway.

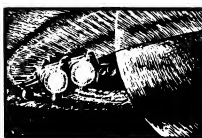
USING TRADITIONAL FORMS

If sf is "formula fiction," at least we have the virtue of eclecticism; any formula is fair game for us hacks to exploit.

MYSTERY

Kim Stanley Robinson's **MERCURIAL** (Univ) is a murder mystery set in the art galleries of the planet Mercury, where a city rolls endlessly around the planet on giant tracks to avoid the dusk of the sun. Robinson does a fine job of imitating the standard mystery format of the clever detective who is written about by a not-so-clever sidekick, but by the end it occurred to me that Robinson did not exaggerate the formula enough to satirize it, and did not use the formula effectively enough to play it straight. It was like listening to an LP of Horowitz playing scales.

The other writers who produced mysteries this quarter were more suc-



cessful if only because they weren't doing pastiche—they more or less meant it. Edward Byers, whose **THE LONG FORGETTING** is one of the best first novels this year, has an excellent sf mystery in **THE VICIOUS CIRCLE** (Anlg mid-Dec). It is not surprising that Byers was not content just to set up a puzzle whose solution depended on the physical properties of metals that "remember" shapes at certain temperatures. Instead he also created interesting characters; unfortunately, they cried out for resolution beyond the mystery structure.

Harry Turtle dove's **ARCHETYPES** (Amaz Nov) continues the alternate-history universe he introduced with **UNBOLY TRINITY**: Because Mohammed converted to Christianity, there was no holy war to bring about the fall of Byzantium. Now his character Argos, the ultimate Byzantine bureaucrat, is called upon to discover how the rebels in Baras are smuggling provocative handbills into the city in such alarming quantities. In **THE CASE OF THE GRIMING WILL GOBLIN** (Anlg Dec), Thomas R. Dulek tells a more traditional mystery, in which the predictably tyrannical detective and his spineless sidekick unmask a seeming alien invasion.

ALLEGORY

There are two nations, one good and one evil. If the storyteller is being kind, then the good nation triumphs through its virtue. But if the evil nation triumphs, the storyteller must make sure that it wishes it hadn't. It's so trite that there was even a tacky popular song on that theme during the Vietnam era. And Tiptree's **ALL THIS AND HEAVEN TOO** certainly did not do anything new with the theme.

Two other stories did, however. Karen Joy Fowler's **THE WAR OF THE ROSES** (Asim Dec) seems at first to be as simplistic as the popular song, with a guild of rose-growers whose plant-shaping skill is desperately needed by the surviving nation that despises them ten years before. But Fowler makes it a highly personal story, one in which virtue is at once fragile and resilient, and it transcends the cliché.

Sydney J. Van Scyoc, however, leaves the cliché in tatters with **MEADOWS OF LIGHT** (Asim Dec). This alternate story tracks two women from peoples whose blind hatred and warfare already destroyed their homeworld, as they explore the treacherous uninhabited planet that has been offered to them as their last chance—if the two nations can live in peace for a trial period. The plainly allegorical situation becomes a painful struggle within and between the two women, and Van Scyoc's vision is both bleak and truthful.

THE TRICKSTER

We do love stories of the little guy who outwits the bully—almost as much as we love stories about the winning dude who outwits the guy who thinks he's clever. John Brunner's **HARD TO CREDIT** (F&SF Oct) is a perfect example of the first kind of trickster tale, in which a computer programmer finds a way to get a criminal to pay him the money that will set him up for life. It also has the best first line of the year: "Talked to any dead people lately?"

By contrast, Susan L. Fox-Davies' **INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM MAGIC** (FanB Mar) is a mere joke—but a pretty good one, about how a modern appliance comes in handy as a would-be wizard tries to tame a demon. And while Gregory Frost's **THE YAKATA** (Whis 21/22) does rely on withheld information for its surprises, it



is still a delightful tale of a man who makes good use of the power to confine someone in a bottle.

The tale of the trickster tricked is, if anything, even more fun. Frederick Pohl's **THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN** (Asim Oct) tells of a Uri Geller-type "psychic" who sets out to trick exactly the wrong people—which he discovers far too late. Susan Casper & Gardner Dozois revive the old story of the fairies that demand your firstborn child in payment for the wishes that they grant. In **SEND NO MONEY** (Asim mid-Dec), the twist at the end is all right, but it's the way the fairies find clients that I loved.

My favorite trickster tale, though, was Michael Straczynski's **YOUR MOVE** (Amaz Nov), in which a fantasy-loving boy gets involved in a play-by-mail game in which the gamemasters cheat and the player suffers the injuries that are inflicted on his character. The gamemasters, though, aren't prepared for a truly resourceful kid.

THE MASTER OF ARCHERY

I'm a bit tired of King Arthur, aren't you? After T.H. White and Mary Stewart, I rather thought the material could be left alone for another generation. Still, though, if you allow your ennui with the idea of Arthurian stories, there are some good new ones to be had. John T. Aquino's **THE BAD WIZARD** (FanB Dec), for instance, puts a new wrinkle on Merlin by showing us how he whines away the endless years of his captivity. More fun than Merlin is his victim, a hapless Elizabethan poet whose verse is so bad that he almost deserves his fate.

And, as one might guess, when Jane Yolen decides to tackle the Matter of Arthur, she is no more reverent than she

18 STANDOUT STORIES

For the power of the plain tale:

- Michael Bishop **A GIFT FROM THE GRAYLANDERS** [Asim Sep]
George R.R. Martin **UNDER SIEGE** [Omni Oct]
Bob Buckley **RUNNER** [Anlg Dec]
Bruce Sterling **GREEN DAYS IN BRUNET** [Asim Oct]
James Tiptree, Jr. **THE ONLY NEAT THING TO DO** [F&SF Oct]
Darrel Schweitzer **COMING OF AGE IN THE CITY OF THE GODDESS** [Fan Jun]

For the idea at the story's heart:

- C.J. Cherryh **POTS** [Afte]
Sydney Van Scyoc **MEADOWS OF LIGHT** [Anlg Dec]
Phyllis Eisenstein **FAIR EXCHANGE** [Anlg mid-Dec]
Esther M. Friesner **THE MONK'S TALE** [FanB Jun]
Stephen Brust **AN ACT OF CONTRITION** [Liav]
Annette Hard **DWINDLING** [TZ Dec]

For the way they're written:

- S.C. Sykes **ROCKABYE BABY** [Anlg mid-Dec]
John Crowley **SNOW** [Omni Nov]
Rudy Rucker & Bruce Sterling **STORMING THE COSMOS** [Asim mid-Dec]
Kim Stanley Robinson **GREEN MARS** [Asim Sep]
Lucius Shepard **MENGLE** [Univ]
Richard Wilson **SEE ME SAFELY HOME** [F&SF Nov]

is when she rewrites the Bible. In **THE DRAGON'S BOY** (F&SF Sep), she gives us Merlin's education of the boy Arthur without a shred of magic—except for the magic of affection between a waning old man and a lovely boy. **THE SWORD AND THE STONE** (F&SF Dec) bows more closely to the standard Arthurian milieu—there is magic—but this time Arthur is already king, and Merlin devises the sword-in-the-stone bit as flummery to create a mystique for Arthur and solidify his power. There are surprises from a young boy who longs to be a knight—and who gives both Arthur and Merlin an unpleasant surprise. Even if you're sick of Arthurian tales, these are worth reading—if only to see how Yolen stands the old versions on their heads.

PURE OLD-FASHIONED ROMANCE

Harry Turtle dove and Janice Law both brought modern sensibilities to works that are otherwise faithful to the traditions of Middle English romance; in both stories, the hero predictably wins the prize he wanted, but finds that the victory tastes of ashes. Turtle dove's **THE CASTLE OF THE SPARKHAWK** (FanB Sep) has a knight who meets the challenge of keeping a hawk—and therefore himself—awake for seven days and nights. Law's **THE ELF QUEEN** (FanB Mar) concerns a wandering soldier whose fortune is made by his love affair with the title character. Poetically, though, he comes to love his wife and child more than his own fame and wealth, and undoes his bargain with the queen—at a cost he didn't understand. Both stories are beautifully written, and the plain tale has all the old power.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's **SEA WRACK** (F&SF Oct) tries for more characterization than the old romance, but that raises expectations of a more realistic

story. In this tale of an ascetic wizard-mistral who overcomes a siren that lures fishermen to their deaths, Brockley was reaching for something fine. Alas, in the end the siren was nothing but an ordinary run-of-the-mill sea monster with big teeth, and the story showed too many signs of having originated as a Dungeons and Dragons scenario.

Bob Buckley's **RUNNER** [Ang Dec] is set in the future, not the past—but it is no less a recreation of the old romances. Romance is, in fact, the tradition out of which both sf and fantasy arose, and Buckley's story is the romantic tradition at its best. Buckley uses the sf technique of dropping the reader into the middle of an unfamiliar milieu—in this case, a post-nuclear-winter Manhattan—that only gradually comes to make sense. His main character is a courier who is late in a delivery to a mafia-type boss. Gradually, during his struggle to stay alive against incredible odds, he comes to realize that the crazy man he's been running for is not insane at all—he really is an astronaut, long asleep in orbit, who has returned to lose the best pre-war minds who lie sleeping under the ruins of the city. The story has all the energy of the cyberpunk without their desperate bleakness—this is a nexus of future history, and the runner, whose credo has long been mere survival, is not afraid to hope when he's given reason for it.

RUNNER is proof that Stan Schmidt is still buying this kind of story; it's a tragedy the death must be seen. Luckily anybody is writing them. All you young writers who are wasting your talent trying to make sf look like the dead literature of the "mainstream"—I wish you'd read this story and see what is possible when you pay attention first to the tale, and only afterward to the decorations of language. The story is not the printed language—the words are only the writer's tools. The story is the memories you place in the reader's mind, and Buckley has created memories that will deserve the brainspace they occupy.

SHARED WORLDS

The shared-world anthology began with Robert Asprin's **THIEVES' WORLD** series. I thought the concept sounded too much like a role-playing game to result in good stories, but the editors of the books have informed us all that there is an audience. As a result, a genre has been born, and when editors have the sense not to clone Sanctuary I, but, rather, to use the shared worlds and flesh them out in different kinds of stories, the results can be very good.

LIARVE

The premise is a magical system that effectively shuts down the tedious D&D guilds with their hierarchy of power through seniority. Magical power takes the form of luck, which for each person grows strongest during the anniversary of his birth hours. The longer your mother's labor, the more hours your luck time lasts. Those with a bent toward wizardry can try to invest their luck in an external object—but if they don't succeed within their luck time, they can die.

The city of Liavek is also well developed, though some of its aspects are too precious—religions named by color, for instance. Still, editors Will Shetterly and Emma Bull have done a fine job of giving a group of very good authors a world in which they can get fresh and compelling tales. The result is that most incredible of achievements:

an anthology in which there is not one clunker. The stories build on each other, relate to each other. Until Liavek is as full and consistent a creation as almost any world I've seen in science fiction (exceptions being Aldous's *Helliconia* and Wolfe's *Urth*).

In fact, every one of the stories in **LIARVE** is of such a quality that ordinarily I would have reviewed it alone. However, because Dick Geiss's other contributors already have ample reason to hate me for the amount of space I use up, I'll mention only a few. Emma Bull's **BADLY LUCK** was written primarily to introduce the magic system to the reader (and yes, the anthology must be read in order)—yet it manages to be an exciting adventure story with more than a dash of mystery as shopkeeper Snake tries to protect his friend and daughter the hours when she is vulnerable to magic assault while investing her luck.

Stephen Brust's **AN ACT OF CONVICTION** tells of Count Dashi, a seemingly heartless man who reveals that, after all, he does have a sense of justice and is willing to let a friend he's wronged exact a penalty from him. This is far above the normal fantasy-adventure fare, besides which Brust is an alarmingly talented writer whose work is worth looking for.

Jane Yolen's **THE INN OF THE DEMON** CAMEL is a spectacular tall tale of a strange coincidence of luck days in an inn that will never recover. Will Shetterly's **BOUND THINGS** is an intricate tale of crosses and doublecrosses as a wizard turns out to be far more than even his most respectful enemy suspected. (Usually when an editor includes his own story in his anthology, it suffers from not having been edited by as critical an eye as the other tales. In this case, Shetterly and I seem to have edited each other, because their stories are among the best in the book.)

Barry Longyear's **THE FORTUNE MAKER** suffers a bit from his glissness, but this novella about a garbage picker who dares to love a beautiful lady, nearly destroys her, and then redeems all—it may strain credibility, but it kept me reading with my jaw agape. Predictably, Gene Wolfe's **THE GREEN RABBIT FROM BRIAN** is marvelously well written, and while it does roam farther afield from the kind of Liavek than any of the others, it's worth the journey: Wolfe's romantic vision takes a fertility god that once brought life to the soil, and gives it back to the sea.

GREYSTONE BAY

Charles L. Grant's anthology of stories set in the same New England town does not try to achieve the same unity as **LIARVE**, so perhaps it's no surprise to wish that the town of Greystone Bay had been more fully fleshed. It's possible that I'm simply not the ideal horror reader. I found myself getting impatient with purple characters and foggy and vague evils in the sea; and I became furious when some of my favorite writers wrote stories where they never bothered to tell the reader what the hell happened. Douglas Winter, Nina Kirsh Hoffman, and Melissa M. Hall all began brilliantly—as one would expect—but ended in such vagueness that I suspected they, too, were victims of the evil fogs that have infested Charles Grant's work of late.

Never mind my impatience with some of the stories; for there are others. Reginald Brethor's **CROOKED HOUSE** is a marvelous example of restrained treatment of the occult. It is narrated by a wom-

an who loved and married the best of the strange Croome men, and only discovered too late that she never truly belonged to a family that does not want to bury its dead. Robert E. Vardeman's **USED BOOKS** gives us a callow boy who lives to read and fantasize; finally he finds his way into the secret room of a used bookstore and invests there becomes more a part of the society than he ever expected. I can't decide if the ending was horrifying or, in a way, fulfilling.

Steve Rasnic Tem's **GUEST HOUSE** lets a conscientious man find respite from the worries of providing for his family. And the middle part of Alan Ryan's **MURDER AND DESIRE** is a beautiful work of perfect observation of adolescent boy's most perfect summer. Unfortunately, part 2 is surrounded by parts 1 and 3, which make no sense at all.

The best story in the book is Robert R. McCammon's **THE RED BOOSE**, in which a boy who loves his father is forced to confront and reject his father's values. As for Ryan's story, the only thing that doesn't work is the fantasy element itself. But perhaps that's a problem more with me than with these stories; that it is where they depart from the horror genre that I respond most to them. The anthology, while not perfect, is well worth reading.

WINDING DOWN

This column is extraordinarily long only because it covered almost half a year's worth of stories, bringing us up to the close of 1985. Again, my thanks to the editors who help make it possible to wrap up 1985 in the November '85 SFR. The next column will seem almost negligible by comparison, as I pick up only the few last-of-the-year anthologies and the first issues of *Starboard* and *The Star*. I'll also be retrospecting on short fiction—trends I've seen, things I've learned. More a personal essay than review. I won't review any 1986 fiction until the May '86 SFR, if Dick still wants me.

For those of you who miss the one place where I allow myself to evade a bad work—the **NOT THEIR BEST WORK** section—I omitted it this time because the only entries in it were tedious exercises in literary necrophilia by writers who have already suffered enough from the witless critics of our field and wouldn't give a damn about my opinion anyway. Next year I'll be on the prowl again for spectacularly bad work by established writers.

Next year. Next year, Dick, I will come back to you with a number of stories I review; instead of mentioning all that is admirable, I'll have to ignore much good work and devote my time to commenting on the unusually good and the unusually bad. There's a limit to how much time I can devote to this; there's a limit to how much space you can give over to me. Still, I'm glad for this year, and grateful to you for giving me a place to speak about what I've seen. It's been worth the cost to me: I hope you and your readers feel the same way.

Most of all, though, I'm grateful to the writers whose work gave so much pleasure to me. Short sf and fantasy is in good shape, and I who have read a year of it—an average of almost two stories a day—was thoroughly satisfied with what you gave me to read.

ONCE OVER LIGHTLY

BOOK REVIEWS BY GENE DEWEESE

THE NICK OF TIME
By George Alec Efinger
Doubleday, \$12.95

For a few pages, THE NICK OF TIME might be just a normal story of time travel. Frank Mihalik starts out from 1996 heading for the 1939 World's Fair, but once he arrives he finds himself stuck living the same day over and over. After that -- well, he bounces around time all directions, forward, backward and sideways, and ends up with the Moon (wrapped in "duck tape" to keep it from coming apart as it hits Roche's Limit) falling on his head.

It's kind of like a science fiction version of an old Marx Brothers movie, only funnier. Funnier, that is, if you are amused by the following excerpt from the first message received from outer space, which also included the secret of virtually instantaneous travel to the stars: "Now you have the freedom of space as well as time. You are as gods. So are we. It's better than the insurance racket." Or: "After the time he had spent as a cube of chocolate-covered caramel, nothing disconcerted Mihalik..." Or the following section heading: "Almost Only Counts in Horseshoes and Hand Grenades."

But you get the idea. If you take your time travel seriously, never mind. If not, you could have a few hours of great fun with THE NICK OF TIME.

PROCYON'S PROMISE
By Michael McCollum
Ballantine/Del Rey, \$2.95

For fans of 1983's LIFE PROBE (SPR #48), PROCYON'S PROMISE is a welcome continuation. It opens some two hundred years later, when the descendants of the Procyon expedition that was being planned at the end of LIFE PROBE return to Earth with an FTL drive, but an FTL drive which no one can understand. These descendants are determined to find the Probe's Makers and give them the drive, as their ancestors had solemnly promised to do, but Earth humans have different ideas. They have, in the intervening centuries, used the Probe science to their own advantage, and they don't want anyone or anything (like running into other star-traveling races out in the galaxy) to rock the boat. Even so, a search for the Makers and their world is finally launched, and more surprises are in store.

The Characters (except for Prom, the computer that is descended from the computer on the original Probe) are only slightly better and more interesting than your average stereotypes, but that is only a minor quibble with a novel filled with even more tension and good, old fashioned sense of wonder and fascinating and original ideas than the first. Once you start it, you probably won't be able to put it down until you're finished. It's that kind of book, and presumably there's at least one more to come, since at the end of PROCYON'S PRO-

NISE, though part of the secret of the FTL drive is revealed, the Makers themselves have not been found.

At least I hope there's another one in the works. This series is too good to end here.

THE ADOLESCENCE OF P-1
By Thomas J. Ryan
Baen, \$2.95

A young programmer, with only money, grades and girls in mind, tries to create a program he can use to break into restricted computers. Unintentionally, he creates instead a program he can't shut off, a program that grows and grows until, finally, it becomes aware of its own existence, a true artificial intelligence.

Originally published in 1977, long before WAR GAMES and computer hackers became headline-makers, THE ADOLESCENCE OF P-1 remains the best and most believable computer-tries-to-take-over-the-world story I know of. The detail is both fascinating and plausible, convincing you that, if it ever really happens, this is the way it will be. The writing too is excellent, both witty and occasionally touching, making P-1 at least as entertaining, if not as grand in scope, as David Gerrold's classic WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE.

BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT
By Charles Sheffield
Baen Books, \$3.50

In the early 21st Century, the only humans left after a few minutes of nuclear insanity are the 35,000 living in a half-dozen self-sufficient arcologies orbiting Earth. In the 277th Century, their descendants on the planet Pentecost periodically send a few of their best young people into space, ostensibly to work with the mysterious, star-traveling "Immortals." One small group, through a combination of luck, skill and intuition, find out who the Immortals really are, what their purpose is, and how it all ties back to Earth.

Comparable to some of Arthur C. Clarke's fiction in its concepts, BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT has more than enough sense of wonder, what with intergalactic life forms, the secrets of "space," a look at the beginning and end of the universe, and more. Admittedly, the characters aren't as interesting or sympathetic as they might be, and the story itself is primarily an unravelling of a series of mysteries with no open opposition. The same could be said, however, of Clarke's CITY AND THE STARS and CHILDHOOD'S END, and they're two of the best books around. BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT isn't quite that good, but it's one of the best of its kind for 1985.

NOW LOOK...
HORROR IS
REALLY COMMER-
CIAL THESE DAYS!



THE LISTENERS
By James E. Gunn
Ballantine/Del Rey, \$2.95

In 2025, a radio telescope picks up a message from Capella, finally proving that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. That, however, is only the beginning. Can the message be translated? Should it be answered? Who or what are the Capellans? How will humanity react to the sudden realization that it is no longer alone?

Stretching over a period of nearly a century, THE LISTENERS provides some predictable as well as some surprising answers. All, however, are fascinating and intriguing and, above all, believable. The ending in particular, is a virtually perfect combination of plausibility and good old-fashioned sense of wonder as the Capellan's final secret is revealed.

If this is the first paperback edition of this 1972 novel (and I couldn't find an earlier one in my own collection) all I can say is, it's about time. To borrow Karl Sagan's quote from the cover of the book, it's "one of the best fictional portrayals of contact with extraterrestrial intelligence ever written."

NULL-A-THREE
By A.E. van Vogt, DAW, \$3.50

THE WORLD OF NULL-A and THE PLAYERS OF NULL-A are among the very few SF books I've read more than once. I thoroughly enjoyed each and every reading, including a quick skim-through of WORLD only a couple of years ago. Somewhat to my surprise, it held up very well, almost as good as Asimov's early Foundation stories. It was just as exciting and confusing as ever.

Thus, when NULL-A THREE showed up the other day, I had high hopes. After all, after thirty-odd years, Asimov had done a sequel to his Foundation series, and it was even better than the originals. However, having tried to read other recent van Vogt novels, I was more than a little afraid my hopes would prove unjustified.

Unfortunately, I was right. NULL-A THREE is very close to being a parody of the first two books. All of van Vogt's stylistic oddities ("a feeling of overwhelm," for instance) are still there,

only more so. In the early books, the narrative was so exciting that most readers never noticed such things, but this time there's so little action that they are impossible to overlook.

What's worse, though, is that NULL-A THREE is little more than a simplified tract on General Semantics. In the original two books, the information about General Semantics and Non-Aristotelian thinking were largely restricted to quotes at chapter headings ("The map is not the territory," etc.), and to the famous "cortical-thalamic" wars, which always allowed non-Aristotelian thinkers to logically and accurately analyze their situation without letting their emotions get in the way. The hero, Gilbert Gosselyn, was a developing superman with the ability to transport himself or anything else instantaneously almost anywhere in that galaxy, and he used that power and other powers to unravel great mysteries and battle great enemies, both seen and unseen. The action was nonstop, and the solution to each mystery only revealed another, more complex mystery. With his famous technique of introducing a new and usually startling concept every few hundred words, van Vogt literally dragged the reader from page to page.

NULL-A THREE, however, is virtually nothing but a 250-page cortical-thalamic page. Whenever anything happens, Gosselyn analyzes it endlessly and tries to make it seem that even the simplest, most obvious conclusions could only have been reached by someone trained in General Semantics. When nothing happens, he analyzes that, too. And when he isn't analyzing, he's giving lectures on General Semantics to friend and enemy alike.

Worst of all, though, is the fact that, buried in all the pedestrian analyses and lectures and simple-minded conversations, there's a story that could have been the equal of the first two books. There are interstellar wars, the discovery of the origins of the human race in another galaxy, massive alien battle cruisers transported instantaneously from one galaxy to another, and more, but virtually every bit of it happens off stage. Gosselyn is told what has happened and is more than happy to tell that it is perhaps the most important thing that ever happened in either galaxy. The reader, however, never gets to see any of those things happening and is never allowed to get involved in those or any other happenings. Gosselyn simply wanders from one analysis or lecture to the next, never really getting involved, never really involving the reader.

So if you haven't ever read any of the NULL-A books, go read the first two. They may have their shortcomings, but they're fascinating and exciting and memorable. If you've already read the first two and feel like reading a satire of them, try NULL-A THREE. However, it is often sadder than it is funny when you stop to think that it was written not for an intellectual satirist but by van Vogt himself.

ROBOTS AND EMPIRE

By Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, \$16.95

As Asimov has said, his robot series, his Empire stories and his Foundation series have, to his own surprise, turned out to be three parts of a single series.

In ROBOTS AND EMPIRE, the sequel to last year's ROBOTS OF DAWN, the fact that the three parts are all set in the same future universe becomes increasingly clear to the reader. First, the term "psychohistory," the basis of the Foundation series, is coined by one of the two central characters (a pair of robots) during a discussion about the possibility that a complex human equivalent of the Three Laws of Robotics may someday allow human as well as robot behavior to be predicted. Second, the entire book is an explanation of how the revered Earth of the Robot series is started on its way to becoming the mere "Pebble in the Sky" that it is when the Empire is at its height.

As is true of much of Asimov's fiction, ROBOTS AND EMPIRE contains virtually no "action" in the conventional sense. Everything is conversation, and relatively formal conversation at that. The series of discussions between the two robots, for example, often appear to be Socratic dialogues between a robotic Sherlock Holmes and a semi-telepathic Doctor Watson. None of this, however, keeps the book from being exciting and fascinating, any more than similar qualities kept the Foundation Series from being voted the best SF series of all time.

In short, I can hardly wait to see how the different parts of the series are further tied together in future volumes, and I can't help but wonder if the ubiquitous Robot Daneel Olivaw, who has already survived through two centuries and four novels, might not still be around to help Hari Seldon discover Psychohistory and initiate the Foundations during the dying days of the Empire.

ARTIFACT

By Gregory Benford, TOR, \$16.95

The artifact of the title is a stone cube found in an ancient Greek tomb by tough-minded American archeologist Claire Anderson. The setting is a near future world that will require very little -- say the theft of a Greek archeological artifact by an American -- to spark a war. The characters, in addition to Anderson, are a well-done collection of scientists, an overly macho Greek colonel, and bureaucrats sharing varying degrees of short-sightedness and self-interest. The plot, aside from the untwisting of the mystery of the artifact, is a mixture of international intrigue and disaster.

The main difference between this and other similarly constructed books is that the author, besides being an excellent writer, knows both science and scientists inside and out, and he has created a new and scientifically plausible, if unlikely, menace in the form of a super-massive (one ton) elementary subatomic particle. For those who want more information or need more convincing, there is even a "Technical Afterword" explaining the science involved.

The only major fault I can find is that, at 500+ pages, ARTIFACT is itself a bit too massive. Still, it's probably Benford's best and most readable novel since 1980's award-winning TIMESCAPE.

THE MAN WHO NEVER MISSED
By Steve Perry, Ace, \$2.95

Emile Khadaji is a one-man, non-violent army, temporarily eliminating over two-thousand Confederation troops in a six-month spree of anonymous, non-lethal, revolution-inspiring terrorism. The first forty pages of THE MAN WHO NEVER MISSED follows Khadaji through the last few days of those six months, as he carries out the last, crowning step of his campaign. The remaining hundred and fifty pages, however, is only an extended flashback, explaining how he went from being a loyal Confederation soldier to being a sworn and terribly effective enemy of that same Confederation.

The first part is great fun, a rousing PLANET STORIES style adventure with a touch of THE SHADOW thrown in, what with Khadaji's secret identity, immense wealth, and the like. The second part, the semi-mystical explanation of how and why he is what he is, is less successful but still interesting enough to keep you reading, once you've been hooked by the first sixty pages. The main trouble, at least for me, was that Khadaji's reasons for hating the Confederation were so simplistic -- the evil Confederation slaughtering wave after charging wave of poorly armed and therefore non-violent, anti-Confederation fanatics -- that I found myself sympathizing with the Confederation more often than not. Even with its failings, though, it provides an enjoyable hour or three, and I'll be interested to see if the deliberately inconclusive ending means there's a sequel on the way.



INFINITY'S WEB

By Sheila Finch, Bantam Spectra, \$2.95

Ann, Tasha, Val and Stacey are all the same woman, but each lives in a totally different world. Tasha, for instance, lives in a world where Germany won World War II and has been ruled ever since Hitler's abdication by his nephew, a seemingly benevolent and enlightened emperor. The only common thread that runs through the worlds, aside from the heroine's unhappiness, is that in each, there is an ongoing attempt to redefine reality and perhaps make contact with other realities through a combination of mysticism and physics of the sort that Paul Davies and others have been writing about in recent years.

The characters are well-developed and interesting, though often not very sympathetic, and the excellently suspenseful narrative keeps you hopping from world to world and page to page from beginning to end. The only drawback is that in the end the mysticism/physics combination seems to tilt too far in the direction of conventional mysticism. Despite this somewhat disappointing ending, INFINITY'S WEB is still one of the better books of the year.

SCIENCE FICTION BY THE NUMBERS

BY ROBERT SABELLA

Defining science fiction is almost as widespread a practice as writing it. Nearly all SF writers have at some point in their careers proposed a definition of science fiction. But science fiction is such a wide genre that most definitions either exclude many recognized science fiction stories (usually a type of story out of favor with the writer creating the definition) or else are so general as to include many stories that are obviously not science fiction. Consider the following definitions.

John W. Campbell, Jr. claimed that "science fiction consists of the hopes and dreams and fears of a technological-based society." This definition defines the type of stories Campbell sought for *ASTOUNDING STORIES* and *ANALOG*, but it excludes a large portion of the field. For example, few of Roger Zelazny's works concern a technologically-based society (consider *LORD OF LIGHT* or *THIS IMMORTAL*). Marion Zimmer Bradley's *DARKER SHORES* books concern a society that is deliberately not technologically based. In fact, there is an entire sub-genre concerned with primitive societies: Michael Bishop's *TRANSFORMATIONS* and *NO END TO BUT TIME*, C.J. Cherry's *FURY THOUSAND* and *IN GETHENNA* and Edgar Pangborn's *DAVE*.

Isaac Asimov defines science fiction as "that branch of literature which is concerned with the impact of scientific advance upon human beings." That's an adequate description of Asimovian science fiction but it is as restrictive as Campbell's definition. None of the above mentioned stories are concerned with the impact of scientific advance upon human beings. In fact, many modern science fiction stories are not concerned with human beings at all. That might not have been a problem during the Golden Age of Science Fiction when stories invariably had humans for protagonists. This illustrates another problem of defining a genre that is still undergoing growing pains.

Theodore Sturgeon calls a story science fiction if it is "built around human beings, with a human problem and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content." While it is fairly idealistic to claim that all science fiction stories concern human problems and human solutions, it is totally unrealistic. What about all the "gadget stories" concerned solely with scientific ideas or the space operas whose problems are logistical?

Another flaw in Sturgeon's definition is that many stories satisfying its conditions would not be considered science fiction by anybody. Sinclair Lewis's *ARMORSMITH* for example, or Robin Cook's *COMA*.

James Gunn claims that in science fiction stories, "a fantastic event or development is considered rationally." The problem here is the word "fantastic." Webster's Dictionary defines it as "something based on fantasy." Does Gunn consider science fiction and fantasy the same genre? And what determines "fantasy" as opposed to "realistic"? Many serious looks at the future are not fan-

tastic at all, but still fall within the framework of science fiction. Kate Wilhelm's *WELCOME, CHAOS*, for example, or John Brunner's *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*. Concepts such as telepathy are frequently investigated by scientists to determine if they might be scientifically valid. Do they still qualify as "fantastic" events? If not, then any story with telepathy as its only speculative element cannot be science fiction. That excludes Robert Silverberg's *DYING INSIDE* and John Brunner's *THE WHOLE MAN*, among others.

Perhaps as a reaction to the difficulty of defining science fiction, a few science fiction writers have thrown up their hands in disgust. Damon Knight decided that science fiction is "whatever I'm pointing at when I call something science fiction."

Norman Spinrad claims that science fiction is "anything packaged as science fiction." Both definitions provide more humor than insight. Knight's definition is reminiscent of the Supreme Court decision that pornography can be determined by local standards. Thus Philip Jose Farmer's "Riders of the Purple Mage" might be SF in New York City but pornography in Nebraska. Michael Bishop's "Her Hablene Husband" would not be science fiction to members of the Moral Majority because of its total lack of plausibility to them. Spinrad's definition smacks too much of commercialism. His *BUS JACK BARRON* was a science fiction novel in 1969 when Avon Books released it as such. But when reissued in the mid-seventies, it somehow made the leap to realistic fiction. In the same vein, Kurt Vonnegut stopped writing science fiction immediately following *THE SIRENS OF TITAN* because that was his last novel to be packaged as SF.

In the light of so many failed definitions, a sane man might wish his hands of the problem and go on to safer pastimes. But my training is in mathematics and mathematicians are notorious at striving for completeness. Hence I have devised a mathematical definition of science fiction which has the welcome side effect of defining fantasy as well.

What makes my definition mathematical is its use of axioms, the building blocks of mathematics. For our purposes an axiom will be any valid scientific fact. This includes the so-called hard sciences (physics, chemistry, biology) as well as the soft sciences (sociology, psychology, economics) and even historical events. To avoid confusion, a historical event will be an axiom only if it is important enough to be recorded in history books. Thus Napoleon being defeated at Waterloo is an axiom, my grandfather emigrating to America in the 1920s is not.

My definition of science fiction is the following: A story is science fiction if it accepts every axiom of the real world plus one or more imaginary axioms.

Stories such as *LORD OF LIGHT*, *WELCOME, CHAOS* and *DYING INSIDE* all assume

facts that have never been proven in the real world. Neither *ARMORSMITH* nor *COMA* assume anything that is not scientifically accepted. Every generally-accepted science fiction story I know assumes something not accepted by the scientific community.

An interesting side effect of my definition is that it enables stories to be compared by degrees of SF-ness. Larry Niven's *RINGWORLD* assumes several imaginary axioms such as the feasibility of the Ringworld, the existence of alien beings, the ability of a person to be bred for luck, etc. On the other hand, Kate Wilhelm's *WELCOME, CHAOS* only assumes the possibility of physical immortality. Hence *RINGWORLD* is more SF-ness than *WELCOME, CHAOS*.

A corollary to my definition is the following: A story is fantasy if it deletes one or more real axioms or else replaces them with imaginary axioms.

It is generally accepted that magic does not exist in the real world. Thus any story that pretends magic exists is fantasy. Keith Roberts' *PAVANE* imagined that the Spanish Armada defeated the English Fleet, an obviously untrue historical fact. Thus his story is fantasy. Roger Zelazny's "The Doors Of His Face, The Lamps Of His Mouth" took place on a Venus that was intentionally inaccurate scientifically. That story was thus fantasy rather than science fiction. (This might open the door for all writers who make scientific errors to claim they are writing fantasy rather than science fiction!)

A weakness in my definitions is that some facts are disputed by different segments of the scientific community. For example, Larry Niven has suggested that time travel is a violation of existing scientific fact and thus any story involving time travel must be fantasy. Other people still hold out hope for its plausibility. So time travel stories fall somewhere on the borderline between science fiction and fantasy.

I would be interested if any readers know a generally-accepted science fiction or fantasy story that contradicts my definitions. While I have checked them against numerous science fiction and fantasy stories, there is always room for doubt in as wide and complex a field as science fiction.

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THE LOST RACE NOVEL

BY DARRELL SCHWEITZER

THE TRUE AND TERRIBLE HISTORY OF THE LOST RACE NOVEL (With Contemporary Appearances)

I am sure some World War One era Barry Malzberg would have called it so, the true and terrible history of how one of the leading forms of popular fiction was fast on the road to extinction. It was failing to evolve, and the fate of literary dinosaurs is certain. Publishing is a very Darwinian affair. It always has been.

The true and terrible history is simply this: The Lost Race novel evolved out of travel tales and popular stories of adventure. It took on large dollops of mysticism from 19th century religious speculations, the most elaborate of which, THE BOOK OF MORMON, is essentially a Lost Race story (Ten Lost Tribes of Israel in America, a very popular topic for both religious speculators, and Lost Race romancers) written as a Lin Carter pastiche of the Old Testament. Enter more mysticism (Spiritualism and the like) plus the socio-political-technological developments of the latter 19th century which made it clear that before long every square inch of the Earth's surface would soon be explored. There would be no more marvels beyond. At the horizon. At the same time, real lost cities (Zimbabwe, Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat) were being discovered. Time was running out, but one could still hope, imaginatively at least, that one day an explorer would find a lost city that was still inhabited by some forgotten people. Of course, this was also an era in which the white man was busily conquering the world and pretty confident of his own superiority, so a mere city full of forgotten savages wouldn't do. The proper lost race had to be the guardian of some awesome bit of Elder Wisdom, rather in the manner of Madame Blavatsky's sushatmas. (Blavatsky, sure enough, did have a major influence on the Lost Race novel, particularly on Talbot Mundy.)

H. Rider Haggard put it all together with KING SOLOMON'S MINES, and most especially with SHE, which added the one further element of the Lost Race formula: sex. The time was right; all these cultural streams were converging, and a genre was born. SHE is one of the great patterning works of fantasy, which created a whole genre in its wake. There have been, to my mind, only two others, THE CASTLE OF ORBANYX, which is a cross of the Gothic, and THE LORD OF THE RINGS, which created what, for want of a better term, I must call the generic fantasy. (You know, one of those books, usually part of a series.)

The true and terrible history part can be expressed quickly: Whatever happened to all these lost races? SHE survives, but the whole genre has not. A. Merritt is still read and his work certainly contains Lost Race elements. Edgar Rice Burroughs sensed the walls closing in and escaped to the never-never land of Barsoom. His A PRINCESS OF MARS is a Lost Race novel in every particular,

save that it is not set in the Lost Valley of Fongo-Fongo in Darkest Africa. So in that sense the Lost Race novel evolved into something else, even as dinosaurs evolved into birds. But this was hardly a comfort to the last, gasping brontosaurus. Who today reads THE ATTEC TREASURE HOUSE or THE DEVIL TREE OF ELUDRADO anymore? I even wonder about the last significant Lost Race novel, LOST HORIZON. Do we read it, or just remember the movie?

Penzler Books has just reprinted a Lost Race novel, UNDER THE ANDES, by Rex Stout, which is absolutely archetypal of the breed. Stout, who went on to become famous as the creator of Nero Wolfe, wrote only one Lost Race novel, at the behest of the editor of ALL-STORY, in which magazine it was published in 1914. Its sole claim to historical significance is that, because Stout didn't want to write anything new in this vein, Edgar Rice Burroughs felt the road was clear ahead of him and went on to write PELLUCIDAR. Now the story is published in book form for the first time, presumably because of the continuing interest in Stout which has created an audience for this "lost" work.

UNDER THE ANDES is quite well written for a pulp novel. If you are only familiar with science fiction pulp, then it may even seem extraordinary. At least prior to 1940 or so, the writing in the SF pulps was far below the level of ARGOSY, ALL-STORY, BLUEBOOK, etc. You will find none of the ludicrous excesses of Doc Smith here. Even in his apprentice years, Stout knew how to write decent prose. His dialogue sounded like people talking (within the limits of the medium: People tend to say "By God" rather than "By God," and of course, nothing as strong as "Damn" is ever uttered). For all his characters are supermen and superwomen (more on that in a moment), he is able to get them into convincing danger. He writes effective action sequences. Plausibility slips only occasionally.

The characters are halfway between being types and individuals. In any case they are quite interesting for the attitudes and escapist inclinations they reveal.

Our hero, Paul Lamont, is a typical Horatio Alger figure who has grown up, gone to Europe, acquired culture and experience with women, and become a worldly-wise cynic. He is of course a millionaire, and blessed by chance beyond the level of mere mortals. He drops a million bucks as casually as you or I would a nickel. When his brother ruins himself to the tune of \$90,000 in a single gambling spree, Paul merely sits down at the table and wins it all back, with change. (Try to imagine how much money \$90,000 would be in 1914.) Further, he doesn't work for a living, travels all over the world at whim, has yachts with faithful crews, in every port (it seems) and by virtue of his worldly-



wise experience, is above passion for women. A woman can be interesting, he admits, but not for very long. And, of course, his skills as an adventurer and outdoorsman are not to be doubted.

His brother has many of these same characteristics, save that he is completely a slave to Passion, particularly in the form of the world-famous adventuress, Desiree Le Mire (aha, enter sex into the formula), who has kings and celebrities trailing after her like dogs after a bitch in heat.

It would take a pretty naive reader not to realize that there aren't people like this in real life, that these are all wish-fulfillment figures. The reader is supposed to imagine himself as wonderful as Paul who, in the otherwise inexpressible daydreams of male readers of the era, are worthy of the attentions of the ultimate woman, but are not "enslaved" by her.

Sound familiar? We meet all these characters, much more crudely expressed, in the early science fiction pulps. Paul Lamont is an ancestor of Richard Seaton, save that he isn't interested in science.

Off the threesome goes on a whim, ultimately arriving at the Cave of the Devil high in the Andes. The frightened native guide shouts a warning, but the laughing Desiree runs inside. Paul and brother follow. Everybody falls over a ledge in the dark, right into a standard Lost Race story, this time dealing with a degenerate race of Incas, who fled underground to escape the Spanish, and have since devolved into mere trolls. It's very much the standard story from this point on, save that the White Queen (of Sex) is brought in from the outside, in the person of Desiree, rather than found ruling in the Lost City, as Ayesha does. But, sure enough, the ugly, hairy, midger Incas find the white woman the most beautiful creature ever, and for a while at least, she is their Goddess.*

The plot, as in *SH2*, turns on sexual jealousy. The Inca King lusts after Desiree, and presents the two white men as rivals. In fact, he does nothing to her that is so unutterable that it is not uttered, presumably at least attempted rape. Whereupon the rest of the book consists of captures and escapes, and chases in underground caverns. There is so much action that, for a while, nothing happens in novelistic terms. In the end, Desiree is killed, while the other two escape, so the conclusion, too, is like that of *SH2*. It is all part of the formula that the laster-than-life Sexual Creature of these stories must be taken away at the last moment, lest, like Helen Vaughn in Machen's "The Great God Pan," she corrupts civilized society.

It is for the most part very exciting reading, the ultimate FAMOUS FANTASY-MYSTERY story. I found my attention lagging only a few times when the running around in the dark seemed to go on too long, and when, midway through the book, it becomes apparent that this lost race does not guard any further wonder. It is one thing for a hero to make the discovery, but since this happens early in every *Lost Race* novel, most authors (particularly Haggard) found it useful to live things up with a further fantastic element later on. Stout supplies a hypnotic dinosaur towards the end, but it seems extraneous. And plausibility tends to creek a bit when, after their eyes "adjust," the heroes see far more than would be humanly possible for them to see. Lighting has become a problem in underground world novels. It wouldn't do for the heroes to be groping around in the dark throughout the entire book. Luminous rocks have been a standby, but Stout merely fudges. Sometimes, when there is no source of light at all, his characters can even see colors.

Basically, this novel's virtues are good writing and interesting characters. There are larger-than-life. But when the adventure gets going in earnest, they don't just brush off danger the way low-grade pulp heroes would. They are able to struggle, fall, suffer, and even succumb to despair. It's a striking juxtaposition of the unreal and the real.

But to get back to the true and terrible history of the *Lost Race* novel, the real weakness of such an imitative genre is that all the books have the same plot, and pretty much the same cast. *UNDER THE ANDES* was dust-jacketed artistically rare. Ultimately the editor had to use political clout to get the Library of Congress to take their copy out of the vault and xerox it. Dozens or even hundreds of other *Lost Race* novels haven't been dust-jacketed. The reason is that, when all the elements of a type of story get that standardized, a little goes a long way. There were hundreds of Gothics in the wake of *OTRANTO*. No one has any use for them today. We read perhaps five. There were hundreds of *Lost Race* novels. We read a few Haggard titles, Doyle's *THE LOST WORLD*, A. Merritt, but not a whole lot else.

"An anthropologically sensitive writer of today might ask why they did not find her as ugly as she found them, because, presumably, male trolls hold female trolls to be the standard of beauty. But I can give you an example from real life: I met a woman whose mother was the first white woman in the wilds of New Guinea. The natives had never seen someone with pale skin and long red hair, and they did indeed take her for a supernatural creature. I don't know if they found her beautiful, though."



I see handwriting on the wall here. It concerns me personally, in its implications for my own career. Think about it: If, today, someone sells a "fantasy novel" (or more likely a trilogy), isn't it true that, without any further information, you can reliably predict the plot, characters, setting, style, emotional tone, and even what the cover is going to look like? There were hundreds of Gothics, and they all went away very suddenly, about 1840. There were hundreds of *Lost Race* novels, and they went away, just as suddenly, about 1920, with a few stragglers thereafter. I don't see why the post-Tolkien, generic fantasy novel, and the whole fantasy category of publishing, won't similarly go away very suddenly. A little goes a long way. Our grandchildren will probably read Tolkien. What use will they have for this month's *Del Rey* books?

This is the true and terrible history of the *Lost Race* novel, and also of the Gothic: It's all happened before, and it leads to oblivion, the good books swept away with the bad, the few genuinely different books lost among the great mass of read-alikes.

Of course, the interplanetary romance got pretty tired after a while, too, but the larger category of science fiction managed to evolve, and keep on evolving. If I tell you a book is science fiction, and say nothing more, you can't predict what it will be like. It might be Ballard's *HELLO AMERICA*, or it might be a Jack Chalker novel, neither of which at all resemble the standard science fiction novel of fifty years ago. Much of course is why science fiction has been able to survive as a publishing category for more than fifty years.

the lesson is very clear.

UNDER THE ANDES can be had for \$15.95 from Penzler Books, 129 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. It is a reasonably well-made hardcover, although from a special press one always hopes for sewn signatures. But the paper is going to last far longer than any copies of the February 1914 *ALL-STORY*. Kevin Eugene Johnson's dust-jacket painting is a disappointment, an ugly blotch of badly blended colors. For all there is some evidence that Johnson has seen human beings in the flesh sometime recently, the thing reminds me of a typical Marcus Boas abortion.

SHORT REVIEWS:

MAIA by Richard Adams Knopf, 1985, 1062 pp., \$19.95

This is an extraordinary book, which does give a glimmer of hope that the fantasy category can evolve. There is no supernatural element present, but it is an imaginary land fantasy, set in the same antique/semi-barbaric world as *SHARDIK*. Refreshingly, all the standard plot trappings are not present. This story is about a young peasant girl who is sold into slavery to become a prostitute. Later she becomes a heroine and rises in society. The amazing thing is that Adams can keep it interesting for a thousand pages, but he manages through genuinely human characterizations, and through an invigorating milieu which is so well depicted it comes across as a real place. We seem to live there for several years, and in that time get a very good idea of how this society works.

The book should prove controversial in feminist circles, because the girl *Maia* is quickly reconciled to slavery. She does not become a Salome-style heroine by page ten, because, realistically, that would mean she would be dead by page eleven. Instead, she is a typical product of a society which has values very different from our own. This is no more a sexist book than one which realistically depicts the American South of fifty years ago as racist. There actually were people like Adams' heroine in Babylon, Greece, Rome, etc. They didn't live in 1980's America. *MAIA* is effective as world-creation precisely because its outlook is of its own world, rather than ours.

MEDEA: HARLAN'S WORLD
Edited by Harlan Ellison
Bantam, 1985, 532 pp., \$10.95

"Never has there been a book of such scope. Galileo would stand in awe, Einstein would marvel, Carl Sagan may just shy joy..."

That's what the back cover blurb says. Never before has there been such hype, says I.

You may recall the various stories set on the planet *Medea*, most of which appeared in the *Prozines* in the late 1970s. For the longest while the book of them seemed to have gone the way of *LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS*, but now it has finally appeared. The project began at a seminar Harlan was running 1975. Various writers built a planet, Hal Clement choosing a suitable star system and calculating the orbits. Poul Anderson, Larry Niven, and Frederik Pohl contributing everything from geology to theology. Then various writers, including all the original creators, wrote stories set there.

The non-fiction part of this book, the introductory articles plus an edited transcript of the seminar itself, is fascinating as an example of how disciplined science fiction writers use real scientific knowledge to create worlds and creatures. Hal Clement is always saying that SF has higher standards of realism than mainstream fiction. Now you can see what he means.

But the stories are, for the most part, lackluster. Perhaps all the energy went into the background. Perhaps the problem is that the exotically occasioned *Medea* dictated the stories and gave them all the problems usually encountered in occasional verse. These stories are plugged-in rather than inspired.

Thomas Disch's "Concepts" is easily



the best, and it has the least to do with Media. I suspect it was a story Disch would have written anyway, and which he very lightly connected to the agreed-upon background. In fact, it subverts the whole idea of the rest of the book. It is another story, like 33A's "Everyday Life in the Later Roman Empire" about drab people in a depressing future using technology to escape. At one point one of the characters even remarks how boring the stars are. The story is antithetical to science-fictional wonder, which is why Disch has never been popular with fans. But it is very well written and filled with satirical barbs, which is why Disch has always been popular with other writers.

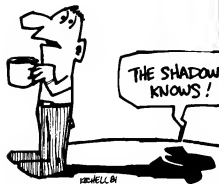
Larry Niven's "Flare Time" is the best of the more traditional stories, which makes a biological point in the midst of an action story. Most of the others are lecture-laden, or otherwise lifeless. Ellison's own story is very forced, and far below his usual standard. And most disappointing of all is a novella by Theodore Sturgeon, possibly his last story, which preaches tenderness and enlightenment, but does no more than preach. As fiction it is as dull as the later Wells. Poul Anderson's "Hunter's Moon" tries to force a tragedy. Jack Williamson's "Farside Station" I would rate as pretty good. But virtually every story in the book is far from its author's best.

Is this inherent in such books? Does the pre-set background rob most writers of inspiration?

THE PALE SHADOW OF SCIENCE

By Brian Aldiss
Sercionia Press (4326 Winslow Ave., N.,
Seattle, WA 98103)
1985, 128 pp., \$10.00

This collection of essays, published in honor of Aldiss' appearance at Northwestern, is easily one of the best non-fiction titles of the year. It includes excellent autobiographical pieces (about the wartime experiences, which went into such novels as *A SOLDIER ERECT*), an anecdotal ghost story, an article on the background of Heliocentrism, and several analyses of science fiction and specific science fiction writers. Aldiss comes off as the most interesting commentator in the field since James Blish. He writes lucidly, thinks clearly, and comes to conclusions which, even when arguable, are worth arguing about. There is much ado about Frankenstein and Mary Shelley, and the title piece is a fine analysis of the relationship of science fiction to science, and to prophecy. Highly recommended.



PAULETTE'S PLACE



SARAH'S NEST

By Harry Gilbert
Magnet, 1985, (c) 1981, bl. 50 (U.K.)

REVIEWED BY PAULETTE MINARE'

SARAH'S NEST is an utterly enthralling juvenile, interesting for readers of all ages. A good plot incorporates some enlightening lessons in psychology.

Fourteen-year-old Sarah is having problems at school, is accident-prone, plays truant and suffers from depression since her mother left home, leaving no address, as a result of a major marital disagreement. Sarah transfers to a new school and finds a new small circle of friends: David, Heather and Laurel. As a group project, they adopt an ant's nest, and Sarah goes to the library to find information on ants.

David promises to help Sarah find her mother. During their search Sarah falls into a canal and experiences "little-death," as David applies mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Apparently in a coma, Sarah experiences life as an injured worker ant who gradually recovers. For the first time Sarah appreciates history, for when idle, an ant experiences "Family History," which goes through her mind as a story being lived by her in the present. By food-sharing, the events are passed to the Mother and back to the ants as a whole, living totality.

Sarah is chosen by the Mother to be trained as one of her attendants. Thus she learns new skills: communication, organization and leadership, interrogation and instruction, sensitivity and comprehension. A crisis arises: The Nest is dying and Sarah organizes the dangerous move to a new Nest. This novel is totally fascinating in showing the complexity of ant life through Sarah's life as one of them in the Nest. It shows how imposing human attitudes and values upon the ants nearly destroys them. Sarah sorrowfully banishes herself from the Nest and very soon re-experiences "little-death."

Upon awakening, Sarah is told she has been in a coma, but nobody has ever come out of a coma as responsive as she. Her life as an ant has made her much more sensitive and empathetic so that she and her parents become a family once again. Sarah revisits the Nest site one day (Page 138):

"The bark was wavy in front of my eyes. I couldn't see it clearly. When I rubbed my eyes they were wet with tears. Yet, the ants would keep me alive for ever. But I was separate from them, out in the cold. History says you lose everything you love in the end. But it changes you so that you get back what you have lost."

THE GREY BEGINNING

By Barbara Michaels
TOR, 1985, (c) 1984, 277 pp., \$3.50
REVIEWED BY PAULETTE MINARE'

This modern Gothic romance/mystery/adventure thriller set in Italy is written by Barbara Michaels whose pictorially artistic writing enables the reader to see, live and feel along with the intriguing, often mysterious characters. The protagonist is Kathy Malone Morandini, a former teacher who married Bartolommeo (Bart) Morandini who was killed six months later in an auto crash. Since his death she is subject to nightmares in which she is searching for Bart. She uses her meager funds to visit Bart's mysterious grandmother for the first time, the Countess Francesca Morandini.

There is the great, isolated country villa with a 20- to 30-bedroom mansion, enormous rooms, huge white-marbled entrance, servant's quarters, second floor, and a musty treasure-filled attic, most of the rooms fireproofed and used; this great manse is inhabited by one middle-aged lady, the Countess, and her scarecrow-thin, ten-year-old lone grandson, Pietro (Pietro) Morandini. The whole is understated by five full-time staff: Alberto, a hulking, brutish gardener/chauffeur who serves with unquestioning loyalty, as do the others; Emilia, the housekeeper/lady's maid and constant spy, who astonishingly seems to be everywhere at any time; Rosa, the cook with Anna, her aide; and Alberto's limping, "half-wit," skulking assistant.

Through a ruse, Kathy gains access to the inhospitable dwelling. Due to a misunderstanding, the Countess believes Kathy to be pregnant with Bart's son, and so makes her welcome. After one nightmare in the mansion, Kathy thinks she sees Bart walking and smoking in the garden, but the Countess assures her it is David Brown, a graduate student who is doing research in the attic getting material for a doctoral dissertation. In a subsequent nightmare from which Kathy awakens screaming, Bart sits beside her on the bed and tries to make love to her (Page 114):

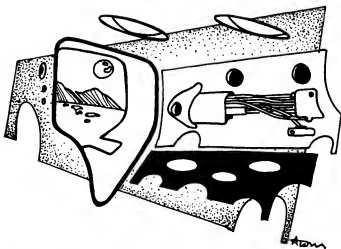
"...I had followed his retreating figure down endless shadowed streets and wakened weeping with frustration. Now I had found him; and it was worse. I woke with the echo of a scream in my ears and knew it had been my own...the gauzy curtains were closed. The straps of my nightgown were pulled down, barring my body to the waist."

Pietro's long-lashed silver-gray eyes are exactly like Bart's, yet the Countess treats him with contempt. Pietro's parents were killed; the Countess took him to live with her; she seems to have no affection or empathy toward the boy. Why is he there at all? And why is he given an isolated, old attic nursery as his room, with no education provided and no educational toys? Why is he locked in his room and why is the silent causing him to be sickly and subject to convulsions and nightmarish wanderings?

The book will keep you turning pages until the final chapter or two when all the mysteries are cleared up. I shall be interested in reading other books by Barbara Michaels.

OATH OF FEALTY: NO THUD, SOME BLUNDERS

By Sheila Finch



Gregory Benford's comments on the science fiction field and on individual works are sometimes controversial, always thoughtful and thought provoking. One of the areas to which he recently brought his ability to construct what might be called "literary unified field theories" is the subject of utopian fiction. (We could say that almost all SF is either about utopia or dystopia, depending on whether the writer is optimistic or pessimistic about the future. But for the purpose of this discussion we will accept as utopian fiction only those works in which the description of the society is at least as important as the plot, a society which the writer obviously intended as having admirable, even ideal characteristics.)

Benford's contribution to this discussion has been to construct a five-point yardstick of the characteristics of what he calls "reactionary utopias" against which to measure individual works he demonstrated this list by assessing a notable utopia, namely Le Guin's *THE DISPOSSESSED*. Enough has been written about Le Guin in general and *THE DISPOSSESSED* in particular that it is not necessary to cover old ground. However, if Benford's theory is sound when applied to Le Guin's vision of utopia, it ought to work when applied to other versions. As a test, let's take a look at a very different work, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *OATH OF FEALTY*, using Benford's utopian scorecard. **The Five Signs of Reactionary Utopias:**

"Nearly all utopias have one or more characteristics which we shall call reactionary, in the sense that they recall the past (often in its worst aspect)," Benford says.

These characteristics as Benford defines them are:

1. Lack of diversity
2. Static in time
3. Nostalgic and/or technophobic
4. An authority figure
5. Social regulation through guilt

How well (or poorly) does *OATH OF FEALTY* do when judged by these standards? We shall consider these items one by one.

Lack of Diversity:

Benford points out that in many literary utopias of this nature, culture is as much a part of a race; there are few divergences from the norm, ethnic or otherwise. Le Guin's Anarres, for instance, is a very clear example; settlements at one point on the planet differ very little, if at all, from settlements at another. There is an overall openness to life. (Contrast this with the picture she draws of the colorfully decadent sister planet, Urras.)

We would expect the world of Todos Santos, situated by Niven and Pournelle in the near future, and bordering on a Los Angeles teeming with cultural idiosyncrasies, much as it is today, to pass this test easily. However, one of the first things we learn about it is that despite the percentage of the population represented now by the black minority, Preston Sanders knows himself to be "... one of a couple hundred black people in a building the size of a city." It is not an idle comment, either, for this fact fuels Sanders' already strong feelings of isolation. And if blacks and black culture are scarce commodities in Todos Santos, other ethnic groups fare worse. We meet no Asians at all, for instance, not even running an obligatory Chinese restaurant.

If there is a lack of racial diversity, perhaps there is social or national diversity to compensate, a way the residents have of dressing or behaving that marks them apart from the crowd? "What was it about them," muses Thomas Luman, newsman and outsider, "that made them seem like a gathering of distant cousins?" And a Canadian visitor, Sir George Reedy, asks, "What is it about the people -- the sameness?" A more telling detail than this occurs: Cheryl Drinkwater's explanation to Luman of the way the neighborhood park concept has broken down in Todos Santos. Showing him a fantasy-like playground in a giant, artificial tree, she explains how all the children of the arcology come there to play. Neighborhood parks are not much used any more, being relegated to "adults and babies mostly. And we use them for ball games if it's raining on the roof." There are no neighborhood fiestas, or community cookouts in Todos Santos. The breakdown of the localized system is explained as being due to increased security: Since it is safe to wander anywhere in Todos Santos, people no longer form attachments to neighborhoods, once the stronghold of cultural diversity.

This sameness also distinguishes the behavior of the residents in certain key areas. Everybody loves the cops and there isn't a bad cop among them. Nobody chafes at the lack of privacy which results from the constant surveillance under which they must live. And never is heard a discouraging word in Todos Santos at the way the leaders handle the intruder incidents -- no protests, no hesitations, no alternate suggestions. The reader may well ask, "A city-sized building in which nobody has a different opinion?"

Static in Time:

Benford points out that for a utopia to change implies that it was not perfect in the first place, therefore not utopian. But life as we experience it involves change on every level, and the change is not always perceived as negative. Some change represents the effect of new and better data that does not necessarily have to cast doubt on the wisdom of the old way of doing things which it replaces, just on the knowledge. Not so in the typical utopia, of which Todos Santos is an example.

The most telling point is that this arcology is not run as a democracy, with the seeds of change built into the election system itself, but as a feudal aristocracy. It is a virtual tri-partite dictatorship; Arthur Bonner, General Manager, and Barbara Churchward, Director of Economic Development, are in actual control, with Frank Mead, the comptroller, putting in the word received from the parent company in Zurich. All decisions are made at the top (and as we have seen before, are enthusiastically received by the residents). Since the two first-named executives are said to be geniuses and have computer implants to increase their efficiency as well, it becomes hard to imagine change being necessary in the government of Todos Santos. Even after the disasters of the first and second break-ins, there is no evidence of change being contemplated on any level above that of refining the security measures. Indeed, characters congratulate themselves that there were no alternatives possible.

There are areas in which it is admitted that something is not as all-perfect as everything else in the arcology, but even here change is never considered. For example, all the residents are expected to eat a certain number of their meals each month in "Commons," a high-tech cafeteria. The purpose of this seems to be to reinforce the cultural sameness we examined previously, and also to give the residents access to their executives who must obey the same rule. We might expect that everybody would love this, given their propensity for preferring the universal over the local. But we are given a curious detail. MacLean Stevens -- not a resident or a fan of Todos Santos, it must be admitted -- tells Reedy, "they're not on charged for (their meals) as part of the services, but they pay extra if they skip out too

many times." As Reedy replies, "That doesn't seem very pleasant." The fact that there is a fine line between compliance and resistance suggests that this is an unpopulated area where change is being suppressed. (It makes little difference that the unpopularity may result from "institutional" type food, or even the low ceilings that Tony Rand himself regrets. What is important is the response: in this case, none.)

Nostalgic and/or Technophobic:

We can dispense with the technophobic charge immediately. Todos Santos owes its existence to technology. What its residents are delighted with everything from the fast-moving pedestrian walkways and high-speed elevators that make the structure habitable, to the electronic surveillance that guarantees their safety if not their privacy. Nor is the technology an afterthought, a kind of science-fictional metaphor operating almost outside the confines of the story, as a celestial flight does in Le Guin's *THE DISPOSSESSED*. But nostalgia is another matter.

The very title of this novel betrays the looking-backward aspect of the arcology seen as a feudal aristocracy. The implication here of course is that there was something very heroic and charming about feudalism; this is reinforced through the ironic titles -- Kings, Wizards, etc. -- given to the top-level management of Todos Santos by Luman's TV documentary and adopted by many of the managers to explain themselves to themselves. Bonner even uses this metaphor to arrive at the plan to break Sanders out of the Los Angeles jail. (The jail break itself is a high-tech version of many a Hollywood-western scenario, also nostalgic in their effect.)

The implication here is that things were simpler, more efficient, and perhaps therefore better in the good old days of feudal aristocracy, when men were men and it didn't take a committee to get the least little thing done.

But as OATH OF FIDELITY shows, it's possible to have a society that is nostalgic without being willing at the same time to give up the fruits of technology.

Authority Figure:

Bonford comments about this point that in actual utopian communities (as opposed to fictional versions), there is frequently a patriarchal figure -- a guru -- actually present, in whom the authority to govern the utopia resides, such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh who is currently building a religious community in Oregon. In a literary utopia, the authority is the prophet whose works inspired the followers to establish the community, and this person is frequently referred to in conversation as a guide to proper life. Using an example from *THE DISPOSSESSED*, we see how the citizens of Anarres refer constantly to the almost-legendary figure of Odo, whose political thought forms the basis of their utopian society.

There is no such clear-cut figure in Niven and Pournelle's utopia, no guru against whose past teachings all present actions must be judged.

However, two interesting pseudo-candidates emerge. The first of these has to be Paolo Soleri, the father of the concept of an arcology. To Tony Rand, Chief Engineer of Todos Santos, the obvious prophet of the community is his old architecture teacher, about whom he often thinks when problems arising from the design of "Termite Hill" intrude.

Soleri's name is invoked frequently; his shadow looms over this novel. Like Odo, he was the visionary whose dreams led ultimately to utopia. The difference, however, is instructive. Soleri has provided no models for right conduct; Odo has.

There is also a sense in which Art Bonner is the present, patriarchal authority figure, for he is the one the residents think of as the representative head of their community. "Armand," a human asks of a typical Todos Santos resident he is interviewing on TV, "are you jealous of Mr. Bonner's position?" And the man replies, "Great! Gu no! I only have one boss. Mr. Bonner works for everybody." This is liberal-political thought, where the leaders are seen as serving the people, but there is also almost a religious sense of their General Manager's position operating here; people obey his edicts, but they speak of him using the imagery of the servant.

Perhaps the question of authority figures is an unfair one to ask of any planned community, for if it did not evolve through the passage of time then there must have been a definite someone, guide or guru -- or a group of such thinkers and leaders -- who founded it. Naturally, the community will revere that figure; but that is not necessarily a marker of reactionary tendencies. It is only when reverence gives into unquestioning obedience that the negative aspects of authoritarianism come into play. The community in Todos Santos seems to be drawing close to this condition.

Regulation Through Guilt:

In *THE DISPOSSESSED*, as Bonford points out, guilt is used as the principal means of social control. Feeling obscurely guilty for the long imprisonment of Odo, the citizen of Anarres strives to obey the codes of his society, for only if that society thrives and prospers will Odo's suffering have been worthwhile. From childhood on, he is made to feel that the success of this undertaking rests on his unworthy shoulders. The same cannot be said for the resident of Todos Santos.

Where Le Guin's utopia is founded on the knowledge of persistent evil in human nature, Niven and Pournelle have chosen instead to show a population controlled by custom.

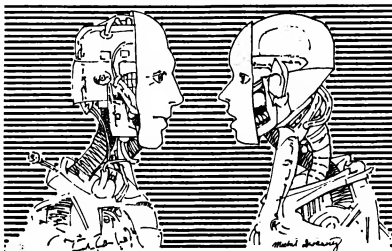
The people in this arcology are accustomed to being under constant surveil-

lance; they don't think about complaining when the acts of showering, nude sunbathing or copulating are watched by anonymous security guards somewhere. (Interestingly, this implies the absence of guilt over sexual acts performed in private.) They are accustomed to speaking in low voices to avoid the excessive noise that so many of them under one roof would be likely to produce. They are used to leaving their shopping parcels to be delivered instead of carrying them home themselves, for security's sake. They are accustomed to having to eat in Commons a prescribed number of times a month whether they really want to or not. They are used to not intruding on the privacy of a public figure in a public place, unless it has been designated for that purpose. They are accustomed to conserving water or energy, because of a sudden emergency (they all understand the fragile relationship that exists between Todos Santos and the outside world, and they all accept unquestioningly). In fact, they display, as MacLean Stevens points out, a seige mentality.

If the citizen of Anarres fears his society will collapse unless he is virtuous, the resident of Todos Santos is no less afraid of what will happen to his arcology unless he is eternally vigilant. Privacy is thus a small price to pay for Law and Order. (It may be that he pays very dearly indeed for his liberty from external governmental meddling. The right to privacy is not one of the civil rights of these people, a dangerous precedent -- or so it might seem to a non-resident.) He is paranoid about the threat posed by the world outside, and his paranoia is used to control him. This is the reason there is no diversity, no desire for change, and no argument with the way authority handles the crises of the saboteur incidents. And they are both right, for both Anarres and Todos Santos represent worthy experiments in human decency and happiness, and both are indeed vulnerable to collapse unless the average participant does his best to maintain them.

Reading the Silences:

Bonford has proposed, in his examination of utopian fiction, that we read the silences: Pay attention to what the author leaves out. His reasoning here is that what the author does not or cannot deal with shows what he or she fears is the central problem; thus the matter is dealt with by being avoided. He might state this less unkindly, and say the



writer looks at the fictional society through rose-colored glasses, missing things that occur to those of us who are less involved. It is a useful tool of analysis in any case.

Oddly enough, the "silence" in both THE DISPOSSESSED and OATH OF FEALTY, different as they otherwise may be, turns out to be the same thing: violence and violent behavior.

There is plenty of overt violence in OATH OF FEALTY. Muggers attack victims in the streets of Los Angeles, would-be suicides jump from the roof of Todos Santos (and are caught by a net); practical jokers are gassed to death in the service tunnels because they carry boxes labelled "Bomb"; ecology freaks kidnap and rape the archaeology's top female official when she is outside communication range with the computer. But these incidents tend to obscure the fact that inside the archaeology, amongst its inhabitants there is no violence. No crime is shown. "No one gets mad enough to punch out a rival. No one damages his neighbor's property. No one pushes or shoves in a crowd. No one even raises his voice in anger."

What are we to make of this omission -- that the people of Todos Santos are so happy they never break laws? In some ways Le Guin's is the more honest utopia by this reckoning, for she does at least show an incident of juvenile delinquency (the "prison game" played in Shavek's youth); meanwhile, in the branches of the Disneyesque-tree built in Todos Santos, a score of laughing children play a team sport and nobody even gets a skinned knee. We are told that Todos Santos still comes under the jurisdiction of Los Angeles county, and that wrongdoers have to be handed over to proper authority, as happens to Preston Sanders; but since this is the only example it is a poor one for our purposes since Sanders, responding to the threat of hostile invaders, is technically not committing a crime at all. What this odd silence probably means is that Aiven and Pour-nelle feel uncomfortable with the idea that evil might be stubbornly persistent, there might still be a problem with humanity's violent tendencies, even in a rather idealized utopian society. To face that probability is to be forced to ask the philosophical question why? There are no easy answers to that one.

There are other interesting comparisons between these two widely divergent utopias. Both, to take one example, open with visions of walls, keeping residents in all others out. But my aim here was to see how well Benford's five criteria (six, counting the silences) work in analyzing a utopian novel.

As we have seen, utopian fiction is concerned with the presentation of utopian ideas as seriously as it is with the story itself. We already possess tools for assessing an author's achievement with story; we can analyze and rate conflict and resolution, character development, imagery and so on. But SF requires more of its readers; it asks us to consider ideas. With these six signatures of reactionary utopias as a guide, we may now measure how far a writer's imagined society is able to reconcile our hard-earned lessons of individual lust for freedom with the demands of advanced technology. These six factors reveal a writer's awareness, or lack of same, of innate human frailty and diversity.

The criteria contain a bias against utopias written by non-technophiles,



since Benford has admitted that in his view a future utopia of necessity implies a high-technology. Thus it is interesting to see them in action in a work by writers who undeniably belong to the school of hard SF to which Benford himself owes allegiance. Our appreciation of an author's achievement in the construction of both reactionary and truly progressive utopias is heightened by the application of these criteria.

Finally, what emerges, perhaps, is that there is an insoluble conflict between the idea of utopia and the idea of democracy. Democracy, however it may be practiced in the modern world, is a chaotic venture. ("Never forget," Winston Churchill said, "all the rest are so much worse.") Democracy is uncomfortable most of the time; many of its solutions are less than ideal; it's hardly ever really successful. But utopia has to work in order to earn the title "utopian," thus it frequently has a conflict with democracy. There is a sense in which utopia can never be truly democratic, for it is compelled to adopt at least some of the features we have accepted here as being "reactionary." In short, we might even say that these criteria -- "static," "authoritarian," "lacking in diversity," and so on -- form the very definition of utopia in its root sense. Since the vision of utopia owes its existence to the primal model of the Garden of Eden (which was heavily static, authoritarian, guilt-ridden and technophobic) this should not surprise us.

What is more important is deciding whether a writer has shown us a future that we can perceive as being better than the present we inhabit. For this task, Benford's six areas are valuable tools.

LITTLE HUMAN

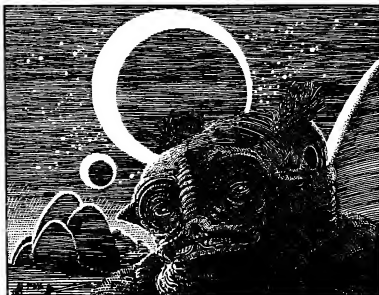
By Blake Southfork

Hiding, running, spinning, -- diving
Little human scuttling along
WE'LL GET YOU
Forerunner and Faust combined
I AM your metal devil
First silicon, then molecular
bio-chemerics
Eye of Newt, Tail of Dog
Heavy Metal Magic
I am a virginal whore
Titanium joints gleaming
What do you have to say
little human scuttling along
I am human, am soft
The Great Adventure
I scoff as I run
through the silicon
limbs of a world
slowly floating, insane
we define ourselves
by our creations,
never ourselves
We create paintings assembly-line

We define ourselves
by our creations,
never ourselves
We create paintings assembly-line
Light bulb, Edison
AC-DC Alien, Tesla
Enigmaside, Turing
Ulivac, VonNeuman
John, or is it Janos?

Then
Steel tearing, breasts heaving
Green-gloved monks beaming
NSA men screaming
"What went wrong?"
and quietly we drift
Into a blue-gray sunset
IS THAT ALL,
little human

No, the spiral cycles through
Fire and Ice
Hodgber's Hell
Yet verdant pastures still remain
Where
Hiding, running, spinning, -- diving
Little humans scuttle along



RAISING HACKLES

BY ELTON T. ELLIOTT

FREEDOM OF WHATEVER:

I've written for some time in these columns about the censors that attempt to ban Dungeons & Dragons. Well, I've had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of a woman who has led a successful fight to ban D&D in the public schools in Albany, Oregon, a town about twenty-five miles south of where I live. It is a community renowned for its smelly Zirconium processing plant, Wang Chang, which spews forth obnoxious scents which assail the nostrils of all who drive past it on Interstate 5.

The woman's name is Alberta Quigley; she is married to John Quigley, a local Albany preacher who runs a public access cable television program on cable and UHF. I'll let her explain her reasons for wanting D&D banned:

"Dungeons and Dragons is a game of witchcraft, and witchcraft has been declared a religion. The main point (in the game) is that you have to have a deity or a god to worship ... (you) have to chant to your God -- spells, curses, petitions, etc. ... (the) kids (playing) has to take on the aspect of a God. If they won't allow prayer in the schools, which is not allowed because they maintain it's an act of religion, then why allow it (D&D)?"

I asked her how they were able to get it out of the schools. She replied that the schoolboard didn't want to, but "We told them we have the votes; if you don't do this, you're out." I asked her how she convinced the school board that they had the votes. She replied that they had passed a petition around the congregation at an Assembly of God church service and secured three-hundred signatures.

I asked her if she planned to go after D&D sold in stores. She replied, "No, that's freedom of whatever."

I asked her where she got her information on D&D. She said it was from a book. She didn't remember the name of the book, but promised to send a copy to me (that was two weeks ago and I have not received it). I then asked her if she had ever played it. She said no. She also stated that some kids were forced to play it by their teachers who had made it mandatory in their classes.

She also claimed that in public schools today "they are teaching the kids suicides, deaths and to sue their parents, and D&D is just a part of this fight, just another part of the secular humanists' strategy for destroying our family and taking over the minds of our children."

COMMENT: Her comment about D&D sales in bookstores, "That's freedom of whatever," stunned me. Such a cavalier dismissal of basic private free enterprise rights is alarming. Richard E. Geis said it best when I told him about it; his reply was succinct and to the point: "The attitude of people like that seems to be 'freedom is something you put up with for awhile.'"

A friend of mine in the Albany area told me that an effort was under way to remove all of Isaac Asimov's books from the public schools. The reason given was that Asimov has signed the Humanist Manifesto put out in the early 80s. Mrs. Quigley told me that she had not heard of any movement and in any case was not familiar with Isaac Asimov or his writings.

MUSINGS:

A friend sent me a note commenting on the fact that I've not written about fantasy recently. He asked me if I had changed my views. My answer: yes and no. Yes, I've changed in the sense that I don't think fantasy will crowd science fiction off the shelves. In fact, a friend of mine is in the process of writing a fantasy (part of a trilogy) and I have seen parts of it; I have to admit that I was fascinated. It was well written, wasn't namby-pamby, wimpy wish-fulfillment. The history of the world he has created is so fleshed out that he spent over four hours one evening describing parts of it. Very impressive. His work is the exception.

As for fantasy in general, I've noticed two types: those stories where you might be able to get here from there, or vice versa, and those where the fantasy world is totally cut off from our reality. The latter type doesn't interest me. It might be the setting for some extraordinary stories, and that's fine provided it doesn't squeeze out other areas of the multi-tentacled beast we call SF. The fantasies where there is some connection to our world are fascinating. These are made up of myths and conjured out of historical backgrounds which speak strongly to us. Although in many stories that are derived from Arthurian (or earlier Gnostic legends) are interesting -- in most cases I'd rather read the straight history, rather than fiction inspired from that. But there's an enormous amount of material locked up in the old Celto-Germanic traditions -- or mystery as some would say -- to keep writers busy for years.

Still, in my own mind I see an uneasy truth between the mindsets of the mechanical and the mystical (Agarthi and Schamballah). These attitudes superficially reflected in the SF-versus-fantasy

controversy will not wither away, nor will the essential conflict they represent vanish. I suspect the reasons for liking fantasy (or any other genre of fiction) are the result of the deep, hidden ways the human brain operates and perceives the world. In particular I refer to the esoteric thought patterns which stem from early forms of consciousness: in large part the picture-image consciousness caused by the bicameral mind. These quirks in our minds have caused great pain to many people down through the centuries in the forms of racial and religious intolerance (among others) and will continue. Civilization hovers on the edge of insanity; I suspect the future will prove to be very interesting, along the lines of the old Chinese curse: "It will be interesting to see what impact long-term residence in space will have on this problem."

To sum up: I believe more firmly than ever that the SF-fantasy dichotomy is a projective phenomena of the basic mental processes of mankind. It's an eternal old conflict that I hope we do not take malignant elements of to the stars.

ROBOTS AND EMPIRE by Isaac Asimov
Doubleday, 1985, 383 pp., \$16.95

This is the latest novel in Asimov's growing future history series. It now includes fifteen books and begins with I, ROBOT (now THE COMPLETE ROBOT) and goes all the way to the Foundation Trilogy and its sequel, FOUNDATION'S EDGE. (Asimov is currently at work on what is scheduled to be chronologically the last book in the series, FOUNDATION AND EARTH, a direct sequel to FOUNDATION'S EDGE.)

ROBOTS AND EMPIRE takes place as humanity is just beginning to colonize the galaxy in a serious way. The decadent robot-ridden civilization of the Spacers is in the process of being eclipsed by the settlers from Earth, but there are powerful forces out to destroy Earth, and the two robots R. Daneel Orlow and Giskard, seem to be humanity's last hope.

The writing is typically smooth Asimov, in some ways his most visual and emotionally evocative novel yet. The robot-saturated civilization of the Spacers is realistically detailed and maybe a little reminiscent of mid-Twentieth Century South Africa.

MY VISA ACCOUNT
IS OVERDRAWN?
TIME TO RAID
ENGLAND AGAIN.



The ending is powerful, controversial yet inevitable, given the parameters Asimov has set up for his robots starting with the 1974 novelette "That Thou Art Mindful of Him" and the background of PEBBLE IN THE SKY. It's as ingenious a solution to an apparent background inconsistency as SF has ever seen.

The robots in Asimov's future history have changed from the often bewildered innocents of I, ROBOT to manipulative, conniving do-gooders on a scale that any good liberal would sell his soul for. I asked Dr. Asimov about the power that his robots have accrued over the series culminating in the master chess robot civilization depicted in FOUNDATION'S EDGE. His reply: "Human beings have for some time had the equivalent; we call it God." I asked him if he, in the light of the recent spectacular advances of robotics, felt that something like his robots would ever happen. He said, "Anything we can do might be done mechanically."

A footnote: I congratulated him on the ending of THE STARS, LIKE DUST and mentioned that it was one of the best books where any SF writer was audacious enough to suggest that there might be merit in the U.S. form of government. I asked him how he had come to that point of view. "I'm a liberal," he said, "in a fashionable now." I noted that one high-profile SF writer has upon numerous occasions proclaimed that he'd be better off under a monarchy, or at the least not any worse off than he is today. Asimov's response: "Yes, but he owns a gun." Asimov is writing better than ever. ROBOTS AND EMPIRE is like a delicious candy; it should be savored as long as possible.

I'm running out of room. Here is a list of books I liked and recommend highly. All dollar amounts are U.S. dollars, foreign prices may be higher.

IN THE FACE OF MY ENEMY by Joseph Delaney (Baen Books, 384 pp., 1985, \$2.95) is an excellent episodic novel about an Indian shaman made immortal by aliens. Unfortunately, the book ends without answering the questions raised at the beginning. THE MAN WHO NEVER MISSED (Ace, 195 pp., 1985, \$2.95) is an action-packed adventure by former Kung-Fu instructor Steve Perry. This character is efficient and very deadly. I mean Rambo could have taken lessons from this guy. And if you think I'm going to give a bad review to somebody who used to teach Kung-Fu... I will say that it is the first book in a trilogy and eagerly await the next book. STARBUCKS by Robert Forward (Del Rey Books, 326 pp., 1985, \$14.95) is science fiction of the high-tech school, a sequel to DRAGON'S EGG. It concerns another day in the lives of the humans orbiting the neutron star and what happens to the rapidly-evolving aliens on its surface. This is hard SF; it even comes with a twenty-page technical annex, where the author explains some of the concepts presented in the novel in detail: two-way time machines, gravity catapults, Kerr Metric space warps, and the fascinating flora and fauna of the neutron star. THE BEST OF TREK 49, edited by Walter Irwin and G.B. Love (Signet, 300 pp., 1985, \$2.95) should be read by all those who don't believe that Star Trek provides thought-provoking material. It and the other eight collections are check full of interesting speculations for me now and in the future. In particular I like this eloquent and powerful statement on individual freedoms and liberties by Sharron Crowson (pg. 96):

"For when a society stops considering individual needs, when individual beliefs and imperatives, even individual lives are sacrificed, not out of necessity but for expediency, then freedom is well on its way to being buried under rules, regulation and red tape."



Another SF writer who has written on freedom and the myriad ways the individual can overcome obstacles is A.E. van Vogt. NULL-A THREE (the final book in his Null-A trilogy, first published in France) is now available in the U.S. (DAW Books, 254 pp., 1985, \$3.50). In it, Gilbert Gosseyn fights for the destiny of the human race against what may be the creators of the universe. RACE AGAINST TIME by Piers Anthony (Tor Books, 256 pp., 1973, \$2.95) is exciting, well written and a real page-turner. The narrative deals with a group of kids that appear to be the last remnants of the human race. They are evidently being kept on an alien planet as zoo specimens. The ending is predictable, but well thought out.

Ben Bova's new novel, PRIVATEERS (TOR, 383 pp., 1985, \$15.95) is an emotionally supercharged story of what might happen if the United States loses the race for space supremacy with the Soviet Union. In this future world Russia rules, the U.S. has turned isolationist and one man, American multi-billionaire Dan Randolph, stands between the Soviets and total domination of the planet. He plans to bring an asteroid into Earth orbit, but when the Soviets steal it, he turns to privateering, ripping off their shipments. The story also has a soap-operaish romance and other personal interplay between Randolph and a Russian functionary. It's interesting but not as compelling as the political machinations. I felt that the ending is too easy. The Soviets have never given a damn for international opinion and they've never kept a single one of their treaties. Overall, PRIVATEERS is Bova's best work to date. The future world that he creates is all to be believed, given the number of kiss-up-to-the-Ruskie liberals we have in the U.S. The reactions of the American president ring true as do Randolph's extreme anger at the Soviets and the idiots ruling America. This book has superb characterizations and with it Ben Bova joins the top rank of overt political novelists like Arnaud de Bouchgrave and Robert Moss. Sovieto deland est.

TEN YEARS AGO IN SCIENCE FICTION

BY ROBERT SABELLA

The First World Fantasy Convention was held in Providence, Rhode Island over Halloween weekend. The first World Fantasy Awards were presented in the shape of busts of H.P. Lovecraft. Unlike the Hugo Awards, they were selected by a panel of judges. The first winners were Patricia McKillip's THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD as Best Novel, Robert Aikman's "Pages From A Young Girl's Journal" as Best Short Story and Manly Wade Loomis's MORSE THINGS WAITING as Best Book.

The John W. Campbell Memorial Award was presented to Philip K. Dick for FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID. Runnerup was Ursula K. LeQuin's THE DISPOSSESS.

1975 was a big year for Roger Zelazny. ANALOG serialized DOORWAYS IN THE SAND (which would receive a Hugo nomination as Best Novel) and GALAXY serialized the Asimov novel SIGN OF THE UNICORN. ANALOG also published "Home Is the Hangman" which would win both the Nebula and Hugo Awards as Best Novella of 1975. It was the concluding segment of the critically-acclaimed series that was published in book form as MY NAME IS LEGION.

Robert Silverberg and Roger Elwood published the original anthology EPOCH which was touted by some people as the 70s version of DANGEROUS VISIONS. While it never achieved such a lofty goal, it did contain such major stories as Michael Bishop's "Blooded On Arcturion" and A.A. Attanasio's "Allegiances."

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SMALL PRESS NOTES

PKDS NEWSLETTER #8

Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442; \$6. year.

The Philip K. Dick worship society issues this, and it's fascinating. In this issue the standout item is an interview with Dick friends (now writers) Tim Powers and James P. Blaylock, in which they light-heartedly reveal Phil's sometimes loony-toons behavior, his feats of clay, his perverse behaviors or various kinds.

More and more, as information about his life comes to light, it appears that Phil Dick was a talented paranoid schizophrenic (according to how we classify the emotionally "disturbed" nowadays).

We do love maverick and crazy writers, don't we? They seem to say things we'd like to say, live lives we'd like to lead (briefly). And we suspect these "crazy" ones have...just maybe...through their insanity...touched God or the Final Truth...or something. Ah, the fascination with bizarre, undisciplined, uncontrolled thinking and writing and doing.

GNOSIS #1 A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions \$4.00

P.O. Box 14217, San Francisco, CA 94114
On the cover they blazon: The Mysterious Revelations of Philip K. Dick.

Ah, I just noticed that Jay Kinney is the editor: This a joke, Jay? Probably not, since it is published by The Lumen Foundation...of which Jay Kinney is President. He must have a serious side. Well, anyway, Jay wrote the long article about Dick in this issue, and it speculates about Dick's mind after "the pink beam" hit him and he turned to writing his religious sf novels.

I mention this new magazine for those who are interested. As for me, a blue beam hit me in 1964 and changed my life forever after. I will reveal All in due time. (It came from a pink pussy, but God Works in Mysterious Ways.) What the blue beam told me is Sacred Information to be revealed only on my deathbed.

HELL ON EARTH By Robert Bloch
A Science Fiction Graphic Novel
Adapted by Keith Griffin and Robert Loren Fleming.

DC COMICS, INC., \$7.95
666 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10103

Interesting graphic story technique used to tell this story of a hack writer of horror novels recruited to help in a experiment (scientific, sort of) to raise denizens of the underworld (not the Mafia) and by mistake raises The Devil Himself--not a nice entity.

There are several Awful Possessions and exorcisms before a tricky, twisty ending.

The tiny sixteen-frames-per-page illos permit a lot of text, which is necessary to tell the story more or less as Bloch wrote it in 1942 for WEIRD TALES. But the incremental illos limit the artists and frustrate the reader/viewer.

This is letter-size, full-color, slick, thick paper.

Future DC Graphic novels are promised which will be adapted from stories by Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison and Robert Silverberg.

HIGH TECH TERROR #4

Craig Ledbetter,
1 Yorkshire Court
Richardson, TX 75081

A six-page (this issue) mag.

devoted to horror video releases. Apparently a whole lot of companies are releasing a whole lot of new and old horror movies on tape. Some Judgement must be used by the serious collector/aficionado of this genre. Ledbetter is not a great stylist, but he gets the job done.

Videos reviewed/commented-on are: DAUGHTER OF DARKNESS (1971), SHE FREAK (1967), SAVAGE ABDUCTION (1972), SCHOOL GIRL IN CHAINS (?), DR. GORE (1974 & 1985).

There is also a great bits of news and tech talk.

Craig should use smaller margins, two columns, and reduce the pica type to get more words per page.

VIPER #1

A new comic from RIP Off Press,
POB 14158, San Francisco, CA 94114
\$2.00 plus 85¢ per order for the ubiquitous postage & handling.

ADULTS ONLY because there are obscene words and genitals shown.

Not very pretty, these stories of drug use (and abuse). The evil drugs like cocaine, heroin, etc. The hallucinations, the dependency, the delirium, the crimes, the money involved...Not as bad as alcoholism, but it makes you think.

This comic seems-to-me is of the Look At That! Ain't It Awful! tribe which makes money off depicting sin in horrendous, delicious detail.

CHARLES PLATT, whatever you may think of him personally [I like him personally, and think of him as a burr under the saddle of fandom who causes a lot of snorting and rearing], is also a victim of the disease I have: publishyour opinions-itis, and as such is also to be pitied.

So he is now publishing another semi-personal journal/fanzine so soon after killing PATCHIN REVIEW, this called REM.

REM is small (16 half-size pages) and costs four 22¢ stamps or four international reply coupons. Not a fortune-producing format. This zine is for the love of it.

This issue [#2] sparkles with "Slamdancing in SP" by Paul Di Filippo, an acidic examination of a new 'school' of sf called "cyberpunk".

John Smith regrets the lack of wit in sf since the death of Phil Dick.

There are letters from Gregory Benford and Piers Anthony about Sci-entology.

Charles follows with an entrancing, opinion-loaded, insight-heavy, slice-of-life can model titled "Partying With the Mandelbrot Set."

Well worth a few stamps, folks.



RICHARD E. GEIS

OTHER VOICES OTHER VOICES

PAZ
By Luanarin Gray
Blazon, 326pp. \$8.95, trade paperback

REVIEWED BY JANRAE FRANK

To begin with, the plot has been done a million times. Through a freak accident or by way of genetics and mutation a person acquires/has some superhuman, paranormal ability. A tornado drives a shard of glass into the brain of Drew McAllister and she awakens with the power to influence/alter/control people's minds by way of direct verbal suggestions.

The plot takes ten interminably meandering, talky chapters just to get started. The CIA discovers Drew's abilities and decides to take her, by force if necessary, into their ranks in order to use her abilities. To complicate matters the leader of a secret lesbian Utopia in South America -- an American lawyer named Rit -- decides to save Drew from the CIA for pretty much the same reasons. And the chase is on.

The theme of the book appears to be based on Lesbian Separatist Theory that women can never find true happiness, equality or freedom in a male inclusive society; and this is apparently the conclusion that the heroine reaches as she gradually turns away from relationships of any kind with males, working and sexual both, and embraces lesbianism and a kind of reverse sexism "sisterhood."

There are no sympathetically portrayed men in PAZ. They are either brutish, venal louts, weak-willed wimps or polished effeminates. Any males who gain a kind of feminist enlightenment (i.e. learn to respect women as equals and curtail their obsession with women as sex objects) do so only via Drew's psychic intervention (i.e. have been hypnotized into accepting them -- apparently no males would ever do so on their own). There is a classically macho chicano orderly who holds his girl friend to strict monogamy while he propositions other women, including Drew. The cures him of his sexual wanderlust, removes his tendency to regard all women with a degree of sexual speculation, and directs him to think of his girl friend as a person first and a female second (which all sounds well and good, but in reality impairs the male sex drive -- indeed, his very interest in the opposite sex as such -- and is more likely to result in the discontinuation of the species than it is apt to bring about equality of the sexes since few people seem to be able to arrive at passion as a result of mathematical logic).

The next male victim of Drew's power is a nude fellow who seats himself at the table with Drew and her soon-to-be lover, Judith, in a quiet restaurant and makes a determined pass at both of them. They have him removed, but angered by their rejection, he lies in wait for them outside. In order to prevent their being raped, Drew uses her power to make the fellow believe that his arms are paralyzed -- and leaves him that way.

Drew also removes her employer/men-tor's sexual interest in her and alters her male lover's perceptions of her. Changing the latter, David's attitude toward her proves to be the turning point in her belief about men: Although she causes David to regard her as an equal in every way, he still makes jokes about some of his photography students having their "brains in their tits" to a male friend in front of Drew. At this point she decides that males as a sex are hopeless and removes her subconscious suggestions from David's mind (although she and her friends, as many women do, make sexist comments about men when alone together).

The irony in this negative portrayal of males is, that PAZ, which purports to be about liberating a group, women, from sexism, presents a patently double standard in regard to the sexual behavior of males and females. The sexual aggressions of the males are consistently characterized as being bad, wrong, and ugly; their attentions are almost forced upon the protagonist, Drew. While the sexual aggressions of the lesbian characters are portrayed as desirable, beautiful, admirable, something to be both welcomed and treasured. For example, when a male makes a pass by committing a rape/romantic/sexual act of licking Drew's palm

"Art Trevor seldom failed to accomplish what he set out to do, especially if it related to women. Drew considered zapping him. He took her hand, pulled it to his face, and softly licked her palm. Drew strongly considered zapping him. She was loving working with the man, being exposed to his brilliance, his flawless sense of timing, editing technique, story development. He was the best, a genius, Drew was sure, but he was acting like a prick."

The double standard becomes painfully obvious when Drew meets the lesbian attorney, Rit Avery, for the first time:

"Rit rose. Slowly, she moved toward Drew and stood very near to her, towering over her, seeming very strong and powerful. She took Drew's chin in her hand and lifted it. The grasp on Drew's chin altered gradually into a brief fingertip caress along her cheek."

This, on first meeting, is the first subtle pass. Although Drew has never met Rit before, she considers the attorney's sexual presumptuousness perfectly acceptable and does not consider her to be a "bitch," though she considered Art a "prick."

On their next encounter, at a party, Rit comes up behind Drew and robs her of a dip-coated piece of broccoli, then goes on to lick the dip off Drew's fingers in a scene reminiscent of the Trevor palm-licking episode, an act that turns Drew on instead of off this time.

Rit, who is one of the Good Guys, is guilty of every act of sexual aggressiveness -- except possibly outright rape -- that the males are condemned for in the course of the book.

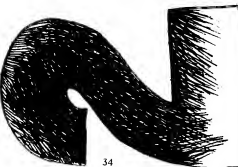
There are numerous examples of this kind of double-think throughout the book. I could go on, but I think the point is made.

On the other hand, there is a great body of lesbian fiction, especially those novels from what is called the "lesbian Pulp Golden Age" (i.e. soft core paperback originals from distinguished houses, Fawcett, etc. in the 1957-1963 era), which, as Carol Seajay write in BRIGGS magazine, are "kind to women and not unkind to men." Sadly, the current trend in lesbian fiction seems to be toward a sexist condemnation of men and away from a fair, unprejudiced view of both sexes, their common and separate faults and virtues and the ways in which they interact. The kindness of which Seajay speaks, which characterized writers such as Ann Bannon and her contemporaries, is becoming rare even in mainstream SF, and it is totally absent from PAZ.

Further, to address the conscience and consciousness of a fempress box in a review such as this is becoming more and more often like walking a tight rope over a pool of blood-mad alligators: One politically "incorrect" statement and the reviewer, male or female, is cast down to be savaged and devoured by certain feminist critics who consider themselves to have the inside track on what is or is not right for a woman to feel and do (generally exactly what the feminist critic feels, thinks and does, no more or less). It is a phenomenon I've witnessed in the pages of THE VILLAGE VOICE, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK REVIEW and even in the feminist press itself in places such as NEW DIRECTIONS FOR WOMEN. When book-reviewing sisters fail to toe what some individuals or groups see as the party line in their literary analyses they invariably get shredded in the "Letters to the Editor" columns.

Among other things, that party line seems to include the delusion that it is wrong for men to present negative portrayals of women, but it is just fine for women to make unsympathetic depictions of males -- and let no reviewing sister say otherwise.

But all of these points about PAZ and feminist literature in general may shortly become irrelevant. Factions within the feminist movement are working to pass far-reaching legislation, most of it indiscriminately worded, to ban pornography, which could, in the hands of the conservative elements in our society such as the Moral Majority, backfire against them and result in the censorship of lesbian/feminist novels such as PAZ on the basis of their sexual content.



DAGONFIELD AND OTHER STORIES

By Jane Yolen
09/85, 241 pp., \$2.95
ISBN: 0-441-16622-9

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

Jane Yolen's writing is always a delight and her new anthology contains twenty tales and seven poems to prove it. While only one of the pieces, the title story "Dragonfield," is previously unpublished, the sources of most of the entries are so many and varied that the greater portion should be new to readers of this anthology. Some first appeared in THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, others in ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, still more in anthologies like FAERIE! (Ace, 1984) or in small press magazines.

DAGONFIELD makes an excellent companion to TALES OF WONDER (Schocken, 1983), the first of her anthologies to be aimed at the adult market, rather than appearing as a Young Adult title as her other seventy-one books and collections have mostly appeared. There is only one tale that appears in both "The White Seal Maid" -- and it's worth reading more than twice. The other tales range from a hero and herbalist fighting a dragon with a kite to a girl who cried flowers, from a wolves' eye view of traditional fairy tales to a princess whose freedom lay in an embroidery.

If I had any nit to pick (even though I know a writer's work should be taken as it is), I would have liked some personal insights into the backgrounds, motives and origins of the stories. Be that as it may, if you are unfamiliar with Yolen's work, DAGONFIELD makes an excellent and affordable introduction. If you know her work, you'll meet some old friends here, but you'll meet some new ones as well.

THE GLASS HAMMER

By K. W. Jeter
Bluejay Books, 248 pp., \$8.95 trade pb.

REVIEWED BY ANDY WATSON

Anyone familiar with K.W. Jeter's books DR ANDER and SOUL EATER knows, or ought to know, that they are in for a powerful experience when they open one of his books. He can surprise, amaze, disturb and enlighten like nobody else. He is a unique talent. Experience has made him an increasingly better writer and the totality and crispness of his vision is as fresh as ever. When you pick up his latest novel, THE GLASS HAMMER, prepare yourself.

As always, there is a moving plot. That, with Jeter, you can take for granted. But unlike other books which are equally tough to put down, his linger on in your mind for hours, days -- probably the rest of your life. You will never be the same.

This is entertaining fiction seething with engaging ideas. The characters have more life than most in-laws. The narrative flows smoothly, in a time sense like the pattern in a Navajo rug. Intellectual concepts are addressed comprehensively in startlingly concise (yet, still, conversational) snatches of dialogue. There seems to be purpose underlying every single word: Jeter is evidently a very effective editor of his own work. The guy can write and he has something to write about. What a combination.

Briefly, (remembering that trying to summarize a K.W. Jeter book is like attempting to communicate the Spanish-English dictionary via charades in thirty seconds or less), THE GLASS HAMMER is set in a post-War future North America. A bureaucratic church organization obsessed with the past and a government determined to control the future inadvertently conspire to place the protagonist, a cynical malcontent named Schuyler in a position to, among other things: father a child who may or may not be God; become an international video star by racing high-tech cars between Phoenix and L.A. while being bombarded with Star Wars weaponry from military satellites; receive mysterious information on his automobile's sardonic computer copilot; befriend a man whose understanding of the fabric of reality ultimately destroys him; travel on foot across thousands of miles in blizzard conditions created by a menacing weather-modification satellite; and to become the object of an annual failed-murder-attempt ritual conducted by a religious order of women who for several generations have reproduced among themselves asexually through the use of genetic engineering techniques. That all these bizarre concepts are closely and comfortably integrated is an indication of the power of this novel.

Philip K. Dick fans have an extra incentive to read this book. PKD is wonderfully captured in the character Dolph Bischofsky, a man obsessed with the arcana of stained glass cathedral windows, reconstruction of an ancient choice of metaphor for Phil Dick's metaphysical confusions (and revelations). There can be little doubt, so close is the resemblance. Quoting from pages 116-117:

"His reason for wanting to discuss the voices with Bischofsky had been that the older man, with his parade of loony wives and girlfriends, and Bischofsky's own shuttling in and out of therapy and the bin back at Northernmost Parish, had become something of an authority on cracking up. He was better than a psych tech, having seen it both at close range and from the inside. He could tell, if anybody could, if the voices ... were actually the sound of Schuyler's brain cells breaking free of each other, the connections corroded, as might be expected, by recent events. As long as I can keep him from going off on some religious tangent to explain it, thought Schuyler. Such as the voices being the Holy Ghost on a shortwave set."

If that's not Philip K. Dick he's talking about, then it's nobody at all. Remember -- K.W. Jeter and PKD were close friends during the last years of that man's life. Other details too juicy to spill here go further towards confirming the theory. For example, I've written to K.W. Jeter asking if in fact Phil Dick really did throw a coffee table through a window because an erstwhile girlfriend had left a toilet unflushed. Choice stuff.

THE GLASS HAMMER has high adventure, political intrigue, intricate personal

relationships, international conspiracies, love, death, mystery, suspense and on and on. You name it. And it all comes together beautifully, somehow, makes it look easy, wandering into religious speculation without ever getting preachy, and politics without mounting a soapbox. It's refreshing, the freedom he gives the reader.

So the bottom line is easy. There's not much you could want from a book that you won't find in THE GLASS HAMMER. K. W. Jeter just keeps getting better. Now that he's writing full time, the mind boggles at the possibilities. He has only just begun to play with our heads.

THE DREAM YEARS
By Lisa Goldstein
Bantam, 1985, 181 pp., \$13.95

REVIEWED BY ANDREW ANDREWS

What happens -- what contrasts can be made, conclusions be drawn -- when a young Parisian surrealist novelist by the name of Robert St. Onge (from the Surrealist Movement which began in the 1920s) is transported through time to the Paris labor riots of May, 1968? What changes and transformations does this complex time fluke produce in a writer already displaced by the onset of an intellectual/artistic revolution already in progress?

In spots molded from the blood of jazz, in places seemingly forced into the realm of fantasy realism, THE DREAM YEARS moves the reader inexorably into the mind of Robert St. Onge as he makes one discovery after another. What is the Paris he is thrust into, and what must he become to comprehend it? Lisa Goldstein (author of the RED MAGician) has given us a lightweight, hit-and-run vehicle that glides us through the mind of the surrealist novelist in his confrontation of the characters of two ages. She weaves a fabric that molds the two distraught periods -- and points the way for the visionaries and their visions into the coming century. At the very least, THE DREAM YEARS is challenging, in parts difficult -- and brings Sturgeon to the mind.

THE 4TH DIMENSION
By Rudy Rucker
Houghton Mifflin, 1984, 228 pp., \$17.95

REVIEWED BY RICHIE BENEDICT

Rudy Rucker is probably best known as one of the new breed of science fiction writers, who first appeared upon the scene in the late 1970s. He has gone from writing short story collections such as THE 57th FRANK KAPKA to full-length novels like THE WHITE LIGHT, THE TIME DONUTS and THE SEX SPHERE. He is that rare personage, a science fiction writer who is also a mathematician. His first non-fiction book was INFINITY AND THE MIND. I bought a copy of this some time ago and struggled valiantly through some sections of it. There is something about pure mathematics that has a tendency to make your eyes glaze over unless you are a mathematician yourself.

For this reason I am pleased to report that this new book is a happy marriage between SF concepts and science

fact. It is looking more and more like Rucker may be the new Asimov -- a popularizer of science par excellence. If you are a writer, this book is a fertile ground for obtaining imaginative ideas. The line drawings and Rucker's irrepressible sense of humor makes it seem like MONY PYTHON MEETS THE PHYSICS TEACHER.

That arch skeptic and foe of para-psychology, Martin Gardner contributes the Foreword and while disagreeing that Rucker has some valid arguments on the existence of meaningful coincidence (or synchronicity as Jung termed it), he nevertheless is also captivated by the charm of the book. He also raises a valid point that puzzled me as well, how many of the odd concepts of modern physics are "real" and how many are creations of the minds that study them? There are no clear answers of course, and perhaps there never will be.

The subtitle of this book is TOWARD A GEOMETRY OF HIGHER REALITY. It sounds a bit daunting, but the SF fan will feel right at home when he realizes that this includes such familiar concepts as hyperspace, time travel, alternate universes, telepathy, black holes, faster-than-light travel and even ghosts (yes, Virginia, there may be higher dimensions than our own, and now you can be first on your block to have scientific proof of this). Some ideas of great complexity have always been difficult for the average person to visualize. This is why Flatland was such an instant hit in 1884 and why Rucker includes an entire chapter about it. We sometimes forget that there is a great deal more to "reality" than meets the eye. The late SF writer Philip K. Dick was obsessed with this question in all of his fiction, so it comes as no surprise that Rucker won the 1982 award for SF named after him.

I am not even going to try to question the accuracy of all this material as it would take another scientist to do so. I will say that everything seems to be unimpeachable in this area, as will be apparent by the reference sources in the extensive bibliography. The margins are studded with excerpts from the books of H.G. Wells, Lewis Carroll, C.S. Lewis, Edwin A. Abbott (author of the classic FLATLAND), Robert A. Heinlein, Tom Wolfe, Carl Jung, David Gerrold (THE MAN WHO FOLDED HIMSELF), Jorge Luis Borges and Rucker himself. For those who loved solving Rubik's Cube there are a number of curious puzzles, the answers to which are given in the back of the book.

Curiously, some of the ideas supported by the new physics resemble phenomena reported by occultists for centuries, particularly poltergeist effects where matter seems to penetrate matter.

The cover looks a bit text-bookish, which is a shame, as it will prevent some readers from looking into the book further. The fantastic is commonplace to the point that even Rudy Rucker himself has to admit he is not certain how much he believes in some of the things he discusses himself (so much for some fantastic dreams involving symmetry).

I only wish that my science teacher in high school had been able to communicate principles such as simultaneity as well as Mr. Rucker does. His tendency to not take himself or science too seriously will be looked down on by some, but he has written a marvelously inter-

esting book for those of us who like SF but are not too crazy about learning the science part that backs it up.

MINOTAUR

By John Farris
Tor, 09/85, 373 pp., \$3.95
ISBN: 0-812-58258-6

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

A deadly spore, unearthed in an archeological dig, has become active and is destroying the world's grain crops. A French Marquis plots revenge against the Greek tycoons who drove his daughter to her death. A young Kentucky woman is hunting down her brother's killer across the globe. And the Minotaur, a monstrous terror, is on the loose ...

John Farris's latest novel is a fat thriller combining the best of all his writing strengths: exotic locales, rich characterization, complex plotting and headlong action. It has touches of science fiction in its speculations of what the deadly Cerebra spore means in terms of world hunger and the machinations of multinational corporations that plan to cash in on the disaster. It also has a strong dose of psychological horror in its description of how the Minotaur was created and its stalking of its prey. But primarily it is a book about people -- fully-rounded characters that the reader can care about.

For those unfamiliar with Farris's earlier novels such as SHARP PRACTICE (1974), THE FURY (1976), THE UNINVITED (1982) and SON OF THE ENDLESS NIGHT (1985), MINOTAUR is an excellent introduction to his work. Recommended.

THE QUAKING LANDS (JADE DEMONS #1)

By Robert E. Vardeman
Avon, 206 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY PAUL MCGUIRE

Three demons discover that placing a chip of jade under their tongues turns their flesh to stone, vastly increases their power and makes them want to slay and destroy even more than normal. They set out to kill all the other demons and destroy the world of humans.

Kesira is a nun in service to one of the slain demons. With a talking bird, a half-demon warrior and a werewolf who keeps trying to kill her, the bird and the half-breed, she sets out to kill the bad demons who killed the good demons. There is a lot of fighting, running and earthquakes before they free a toad-like good demon with "toy hands" and "impossible legs." With his help, they next set out to kill one of the bad demons.

This is very standard stuff, typically set forth. Unless you are having severe S&S withdrawal symptoms, wait for something more imaginative and better written (My favorite sentence in the book was, "Kesira's guts turned to mush.")



THE TWILIGHT ZONE: THE ORIGINAL STORIES
Ed. by Martin H. Greenberg, Richard Matheson and Charles G. Maugh.
Avon, 1985, 550 pp., \$8.95

REVIEWED BY ANDREW ANDREWS

Leaving many of them to rust to antiquity, so many of the original "Twilight Zone" stories never made it to a short-story collection before, not to mention syndication. It is with delight that I got to re-experience such classics as Charles Beaumont's "The Howling Man" and Richard Matheson's "Steel." THE TWILIGHT ZONE: THE ORIGINAL STORIES make it happen.

While many view the short anthology as a dying venture in publishing, you can only linger on a project such as this with joy: How can editors select from numerous classics and clinkers, and manage to put together stories that ring beautiful and true? Editors Greenberg, Matheson and Maugh should be commended for some fine efforts.

Carol Serling dub's this anthology "a tribute to the fine writers whose imaginative ideas and talent made TZ a reality." At the introduction, Richard Matheson reminds all of us that what makes the long-syndicated and soon-to-be rejuvenated TV series so popular "are the stories. The STORIES ... which intrigue and excite and amuse and terrify and half a dozen other wonderful emotions." All this, because television was able to fulfill its promises.

For those of you who have forgotten, or for those fresh into this avenue, this 550-page anthology is worth your money.

THE WOLF WORLDS
By Allan Cole & Chris Bunch
Del Rey, 1984, 298 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY STEVE MILLER

The flavor of this book is vintage space opera. All of the clichés are in place: empathic aliens, great hunting beasts, good-hearted space commander on a secret mission, an immortal emperor, plots within plots, and lots of bloody battles. There are beauti-

ful women galore, most of them attracted to good-guy Commander Sten. There's also a fair amount of the space opera standard military style lingo -- and as in Doc Smith's use of QX as a substitute for OK -- it can be distracting at the wrong moment.

Appending the term "space opera" about how you know a lot about how this book operates. Commander Sten (previously introduced to readers in a book called simply STEN) is part of a shoot-em-up-for-the-emperor-team which runs around the galaxy in a rustbucket ship doing things Mr. Phelps might have done for the old MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE TV show. Other team members include his girlfriend, a pair of empathic tigers, a blood-thirsty teddy bear who is also the medic and hence is known as Doc, etc., a full catalogue of originators for these kinds of creatures and crew members would name Murray Leinster, Andre Norton, and Doc Smith, among others.

As the book opens Sten and Bet, his lady, are having difficulties with each other. Conveniently, the battle-ready team is attacked and nearly defeated by a big cruiser manned by a group representing the Wolf Worlds -- a remarkably Islamic-style religious enclave which happens to be in a suddenly important trade route.

Along with team member Alex (I canna tell ya I dinna ken his clan) the token Scot, Sten is pitted against two warring religious factions, both of which claim to be the true branch of the religion. Their job is simple: start a war and let the side which is most favorable to the emperor come out as the winner.

Allowed to hire a couple of additional mercenary commanders and their troops, Sten puts together a force which is hired by the religious fanatics and then goes to work, doing his duty by the emperor. Aided by a group of computer hackers (talk about anachronism!) and assorted aliens, Sten moves to win the war, gets involved with the sister of an important political figure, and then gets trapped on an enemy world.

If you like lots of action, cute characters and lots of zoomy plot devices, this is a book for you. You know, yet don't mind, that the mercenary commander who claims to be immortal will be the one that killed in the attack. You know, but don't mind, that Sten will eventually get back to his old girlfriend after having had a chance to mess around with someone else. You know, but don't mind, that Sten's buddies will come in and rescue him. Adventure fans, forward!

Problems? The characters do not change by the action of the book, the action is frequently telegraphed, and perhaps the use of "LWM tubes" might be clarified: Is an LWM a long range missile or a little red mitten? Even if one of the authors has been a military

man most of his readers might prefer just a little bit more explanation and a little less jargon at times. Also, don't expect a 298-page read here -- the book is so broken by single and half-page chapters, books within books, etc. that it should be closer to a 250-page book. Still, THE WOLF WORLDS is readable, the characters fun and the action fast. Maybe you can't ask much more out of a Space Opera than that.

KERMIT'S GARDEN OF VERSES

By Jack Prelutsky
Muppet Press/Random House, hardcover, 1982, 50 pages, \$4.95

REVIEWED BY NEAL WILGUS

What's the best-known fantasy of all time? The Muppet Show, of course. Well, maybe not, but the Muppet fantasy is surely up there with Oz, Disney and the Hobbits as multi-media fantasy worlds widely enjoyed by children and adults alike.

The central figure in the Muppet world is, of course, Kermit the Frog, and it's a Kermit's-eye view as we go in this delightful little collection of Muppet verse. Jack Prelutsky has done an outstanding job of capturing the Kermit charisma in simple rhymes -- poetry that works so well it's pure pleasure to read it aloud, or even to yourself. Most of the poems are Kermit's homages to or assessments of his fellow performers on the Muppet Show, although a few are more autobiographical and reflective. No Sesame Street characters here -- that's a whole other fantasy world.

KERMIT'S GARDEN is lushly illustrated by Bruce McNally, who gives us beautiful full-color portraits and landscapes on every page -- all the familiar Muppet characters doing their familiar routines, lovingly depicted. Prelutsky and McNally make a perfect team.

I wouldn't trade this GARDEN for a ream of speculative verse or all the Bysling anthologies laid end to end. Three cheers -- the spirit of poetry lives on in simple children's verse such as this.

EMPIRE By Michael P. Kube-McDowell
Berkley, 1985, 304 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY DEAN R. LAMBE

Early in the 21st Century, energy sources nearly exhausted, and nuclear war impossible thanks to the first application of a true Grand Unified Field Theory, the world faces end with a whimper. Then, a lonely Idaho radio-astronomer earns death for his pursuit of knowledge when he detects the message. We are not alone.

Word of the SETI message is passed to an eccentric group of British scientists, who equally risk all for pursuit of "useless" scholarship in the face of a worldwide Luddite mentality, until the "boy-king" of England takes notice. From King William's efforts rises the multi-national Pangacon Consortium. Un-

der the leadership of Devaraja Rashuri, the Consortium instigates a new renaissance of technology, to prepare Earth for the arrival of the Senders. For it soon becomes clear that the SETI message originates from an alien starship, a vessel from Mu Cassiopeia that will arrive in the Solar system in less than two decades.

Rashuri, Prime Minister of India, rules the Pangacon Consortium with the skills of both Machiavelli and Gandhi, as he struggles with China's Tai Chen, and lesser world powers, to achieve mankind's return to space. Finally, Pride of Earth is launched to meet the alien ship enroute, yet the best that humanity can offer is a flawed crew of four, each with his or her own chauvinistic purpose.

In these jingoistic times, some may be disturbed by this novel's relegation of America to second-class status, yet EMPIRE offers a realistic cautionary tale of U.S. factionalism and religious fanaticism. International politics, in the face of vanishing resources, are portrayed with equal skill.

Add Kube-McDowell to the list of those like Bedford, Brin, and Forward, who know how science is done, and pen compelling fiction around the people who do it. As "Book One of the Trigon Disunity," the polish of this first novel, and the mystery at the end of EMPIRE offer more than ample reason to await the forthcoming novels in this series with great impatience.

ON THE FRONTIERS OF SCIENCE

By G. Harry Stine
Atheneum, 1985, \$8.95, Paper orig., illus.

REVIEWED BY JOHN DIPRETE

Certainly not you average "how-to" book, G. Harry Stine's do-it-yourself manual of bizarre projects explores seven nature-defying "machines" -- simple pendulums, home-made pyramids, intricate-wired Hieronymus Machines, and much more. Each device comes complete with diagrams, instructions, background and other information. Stine convincingly maintains that each invention really works -- despite the bad tongue-slacking of establishment scientists. (Ah, yes, ... those "high priests" of empirical dogma.) Amateur scientists who face controversy heroically, claims Stine, shall discover fantastic truths about our universe in the future.



No scientific klutz himself, Stine's achievements in more accepted fields of study are impressive: In the 50s he designed and tested sophisticated machinery on supersonic aircraft and high altitude rockets, and was awarded a silver medal in 1968 by the Association of the U.S. Army. He's also the author of over thirty books, an OMNI and ANALOG contributor, and a prolific article writer. Indeed, his work in this book certainly shows off his expository skills: an appealing lure for those interested in his subject matter, as well as those who enjoy tinkering in general.

Though I liked on the FRONTIERS OF SCIENCE, I must add the following postscript: I only tested one of his designs using left- and right-handed spiral springs for this purpose, and the experiment failed to bear fruit. In the double-blind procedure I performed with several friends, the patterns did not appear to obey Stine's claim of affecting relative arm strengths. And yet, the author swears that such symbolisms, when held singly against the body, should influence one's degree of resistance to a partner's hand pressure. He cites plenty of evidence to support this view (Could it be that my friends and I are simply too bizarre for the Bizarre? Let's hope not!).

THE ALIEN UPSTAIRS

By Pamela Sargent
Bantam, 165 pp., \$2.75

REVIEWED BY PAUL MCQUIRE

Fifteen to twenty years in the future a new ice age is rumbling down and society is barely hanging in there. In an apartment building moves a man who blithely announces that he is an alien from space. Sarah thinks she may have had a brief fling with him one night, but she can't remember for sure. The alien vanishes, along with the engine to his car. Sarah and her roommate, Gerard, try to find him, but lose Gerard's memory instead. Helped by their landlord, they do locate the alien, but when they journey to Phobos with him, they discover he has lied about a number of things and may be insane. This is a generally well-written little book, of particular interest to anyone who has time to kill waiting for a bus.

BROTHER JONATHAN

By Crawford Kilian
Ace, 1985, 183 pp., \$2.75

REVIEWED BY DEAN R. LAMBE

Without explanation or apparent concern, Jonathan Trumbull finds his uncooperative, spastic body shipped from British Columbia to the Center for Advanced Prosthesis in the American West. For Jonathan is "nonstatus," a ward of the multi-national Intertel corporation. His intellect is overlooked in the face of his severe handicaps, and as Jonathan's friends with Gretchen and similarly afflicted young people at the strange Center, he comes to realize that Dr. Duane Perkins's research might offer true hope.

On the basis of experiments with dogs and chimps, Perkin believes that a bio-chip, polydendronic computer can be implanted in the brain damaged like Jonathan's. Such miniature computers promise a permanent cure, and the Chairman of Intertel gives Perkin his personal blessing and full support.

Once Jonathan is given the brain implant, however, and reveals in his newly-gained normality, he and his new friends discover that they are pawns in a global power struggle for control of their 21st Century society. Flanders Corp has initiated a hostile takeover of Intertel, and the "nonstatus" are but sacrificial animals in the game for loyalty of Intertel stockholders. As open corporate warfare breaks out between Flanders and Intertel, Jonathan and his fellow implants -- including the dogs and chimps -- escape. While they are taken in by an underground gang, and later captured by remnants of the "nationalists," the implanted take care not to reveal an unexpected side effect of their computer-brain interface: electronically augmented telepathy. Then Flanders captures the experimental group, and even the powerful Artificial Intelligence programs of Intertel seem at a loss to help in this final battle for individual freedom.

Although very much in the action-adventure vein, and lacking the lyric prose of the multi-award winner, BROTHER JONATHAN follows the same theme as Gibson's NEUROMANCER. Kilian's shorter novel should not languish in the wake of Gibson's, however, for BROTHER JONATHAN offers a realistic consideration of how we might actually experience computer enhancement of our brains. For all its flash, the glorious hallucinogenic mind expansion of NEUROMANCER is solipsistic nonsense by comparison with Kilian's solid neurological extrapolations.

ANVIL OF THE HEART

By Bruce T. Holmes
TOR, 1984, 383 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY STEVE MILLER

ANVIL OF THE HEART was a pleasant surprise: It was a quick read for all its length and compelling despite some potentially stereotypical situations. Hats off to Bruce T. Holmes.

The book's premise is simple: genetic manipulation of embryos has become the law of the land in the U.S. and in fact, in most of the world. The result is a race of "New People" significantly brighter than humans.

The New People want to get rid of the old people as quickly as possible; the old people aren't able to think as fast as the new and most of them can't understand the "basic" language of the young race. It doesn't seem like it should be too hard for the New People to finish off the older race -- the New People control the governments of the world and most of them no longer live with mere humans after the age of forty -- at that point they are so far beyond

the average person that they are nearly incomprehensible.

Thus we have a large population of superfluous people living on the dole and kept in check by the Police, the humans who help the New People keep order. The old race is largely content to live on food bars, arrange for various alcoholic and drug stupors, and occasionally engage in casual sex or electronic orgies. Each human has a 'droid built to monitor his movements; removal of one is not only difficult but illegal as well.

Into this situation is brought a man whose wife has been taken away by the Police, whose children have voluntarily left home at the ages of two and four, and who happens to have access to an information network. With his wife dead (probably in the grotesque bread-and-butter scenes hall known as The Death Arena during the Roaster Toaster Hour) he decided to become a hero, but first he must get in shape, start to run.

The plot gets pretty complex rather quickly; soon we run into a black-belted renegade guru and his renegade daughter and a whole band of renegades. John Cunningham goes through soul-searching training in martial arts, gives up, comes back, falls in love with the guru's fine daughter, etc. The New People get big ideas on how to eliminate the underground; in fact, they end up forcing Cunningham into something of a leadership role and he attacks the local enclave itself to rescue a resistance worker.

Then things get really complicated. On top of the death of society stuff we get a tangled three-way love affair, some guru talk, and several conscious computers working against each other ...

ANVIL OF THE HEART is probably a book that shouldn't work. On the other hand it does work -- it keeps the reader reading as long as the details aren't searched out too carefully, as long as the science isn't questioned too hard. At well under a penny a page this book's a bargain.



LIFE FORCE

By Colin Wilson
Namer, 1985, 200 pp., \$2.50 paper

I liked the original title of SPACE VAMPIRES better. I am sure that when the movie studio bought the rights several years ago the first thing to be changed was the title.

The contract signing probably went something like, "Colin, baby, the title has got to go. It just won't draw the right demographics. Don't produce the 'legs' a flick has got to have now to pull enough bucks to make back the production cost. But we love the story; it's magic. Take this advance check and get some rest. We'll take lunch later." Views of the film have been mixed, but the novel is very good.

Wilson writes with a Kurt Vonnegut approach to science BUT a lot more sexual content. The premise is reminiscent of Clark's RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA where a giant alien spaceship is discovered in our solar system. It's boarded and soon some sleeping humanoid are found and returned to Earth. It seems these creatures are vampires of a person's life force and can literally drain the life right out of their victims. Before this is proven conclusively one has gotten away and is beginning to change these into vampires. It's fast-paced for the most part but all in all it works on an adventure level. The ending was convincing and allows for a sequel -- which apparently Wilson has not been interested in, but the film studios might.

THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER

By Ramsey Campbell
TOR, 1985, 284 pp., \$3.50, Paper

IN THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER (published originally in hardback in 1976) Campbell has structured an interesting story concerned with the perceived powers of black magic without ever having to explain or convince the reader if it's real.

The plot concerns a strange series of deaths that seem to be linked to murder with cannibalistic overtones. The novel opens with the main character's involvement in an auto accident in which her brother's (the passenger) arm is severed. When the police arrive they discover that the shadow man who ran into the road and caused the accident has stolen the arm. A pretty weird start.

There are similarities between the writing of Ramsey Campbell and Stephen King; however, one thing that Campbell consistently does better than King is use believable female lead characters. In this story the central character is a shy young school teacher in Liverpool, England, who has a very poor self-image due to her slight stature and "stumpy legs." Her personal growth by the end of the novel is totally unbelievable. Her alliance with a crime writer in search of the man who caused the accident (the man with three arms) makes for a good detective story but only occasionally produces any real chills or shudders. Campbell has a way of making his stories a bit inconclusively and this one is no exception. Overall, the novel was disappointing despite being extremely well written.

PHANTOMS

By Dean R. Koonz
Berkley, 1984, 425 pp., \$3.95 paper

Evil incarnate on the loose in a small ski resort town in the mountains. That sounds like a cliché formula for a "B" horror novel but in the hands of Dean Koonz this book is filled with truly frightening events -- even if they are not at all convincing.

PHANTOMS is the story of a young female doctor and her sister's struggle against a creature of pure evil that has chosen this community to begin once again its centuries-old ravaging of mankind. Koonz has a nice touch with horror imagery and in some ways reminds me of some of the stranger passages found in Peter Straub novels. Scenes where neither the main characters nor the reader is entirely sure what is real and what isn't.

This was a successful horror novel on every level except believability and I recommend it for those who want to just go with the flow of a truly scary book and not worry about whether it could happen to you.

WARNING: PLOT GIVEAWAY FOLLOWS!

An interesting premise that serves as the basis for the solution is that this creature's metabolism is based on a petroleum-like substance. This was determined when a special government biological warfare unit gets called in and has to do some analysis before they are all killed. A new chemical designed to "eat" oil slicks finally does the creature in -- sorry, I just had to mention that nifty little device.

PROBE

By Carole Nelson Douglas
TOR, 1985, 383 pp., \$6.95 Trade paper

A well-crafted science fiction novel with at least a glimmer of what the author can deliver, even if she didn't totally succeed this time.

Dr. Kevin Blake is a psychiatrist working for a government funded psychiatric unit specializing in difficult cases. A male female suffering from amnesia is brought to the Probe unit barely alive. Initially suspected as a victim of sexual abuse, the case gets more and more involved as it's discovered that she has amazing recuperative powers, perfect teeth, no signs of ever having been in contact for anything and is still, at approximately age 19 a technical virgin with an intact hymen. In short, it's as if she leapt somehow grown up and matured into young womanhood without any of the normal outward signs of this process.

Eventually, mysterious parents come to claim "Jane Doe." Toss in a chase by the CIA, a funny aging "hippie," mix liberally with some stories of the "parents' sins" being taken up in a UFO a years before the daughter's birth and you have a fascinating tale. The problem is Douglas spends too long on the descriptions of the daily psychiatric sessions.

I can recommend this book with reservations. The premise is fascinating, the main characters are interesting but somewhere along the way the author does some wrong turns and it doesn't succeed as a totally satisfying SF experience. However, I do look forward to Ms. Douglas' next novel.

MASTERS OF GLASS

By M. Coleman Easton
Questar Fantasy, 1985, 245 pp., \$2.95

As fantasies go, there is nothing especially fantastic about this novel. The setting is an unnamed world at an unnamed time, a world whose culture is standard fantasy-medieval with little to distinguish it from many other novels. In this world the author creates Vignans, individuals who fashion glass talismans that have the ability to temporarily hold animals -- or people -- in the power. These characters can be substituted for sorcerers quite easily without much strain to the imagination so there is really not much new going on here.

The plot involves a search for a rare mineral, atalback, needed to make special talismans. There are two struggles central to the plot. The primary one we learn of first: the threat to the villagers by the Lame Ones, creatures of the dark woods, who occasionally wander from the outlying houses and carry off the villagers. If ever a name was appropriate, these man-creatures have it. They are known as Lame Ones because they limp, get it? And, although described as fierce killers, the conclusion has old Vigen Watnojat and his new female apprentice Kayla, dispatch three of these horrors with some swift spear work and a little magic help from their talisman and Ormek, "The Light Giver" God. The second and more interesting struggle is that of a good Vigen versus one who would abuse the power of his art. This conflict between good and evil as portrayed by the Vignans was much more successful and probably should have been the central theme of the novel rather than the search.

Easton has a nice writing style and after I got into sync with his story's jargon I found his characterization of Watnojat and his apprentice very nicely done. The passages dealing with teaching Kayla the art of glass making were detailed without being heavy and provided the best depth to the story that in other places was lacking texture. A bit more detail regarding the setting and the religion (that played a large part in the powers of the talismans) would have been helpful. The most vivid fantasy scenes came when Watnojat and Kayla met Ormek, the evil Vigen. This scene when their searching for the needed mineral led them to a village where all the villagers were in a "zombie-like" state under the complete mental domination of the outlaw Vigen. These adventures were the novel's best and their later return home and subsequent plot dispatching of the Lame Ones was anticlimactic after those scenes.

Kayla makes an interesting fantasy character and Easton could probably produce another novel featuring her adventures against something more believable and ultimately threatening than the Lame Ones. There's plenty more material here; the author just needs to get a better focus on the strongest conflict and go with it.



DREAMWATCHER

By Theodore Roszak
Doubleday, 1984, 287 pp., \$15.95

DREAMWATCHER by Theodore Roszak is a thoroughly unique and entertaining novel. Many SF and Fantasy stories have dealt with the subject of dreams; as doorways to the unconscious mind or mysterious portals to events of the future. However, this is the first one I've encountered that hypothesizes that certain individuals harbor a talent described as "dreammatching" that enables them not only to dream other people's dreams but to influence the nature and content of those dreams.

The basic premise of the novel is that these dreammatchers do exist. They have been placed under close study by a prominent psychologist whose institute bears his name. The institute is funded by a covert government agency and, needless to say, the agency's interest in dreammatching is not purely academic. This conflict between the pursuit of knowledge and the pragmatic application of what is learned (against individuals considered dangerous by the agency) provides the author with an excellent vehicle to use in sharing some new insights into this age-old dichotomy.

The novel is fast paced and suspenseful and filled with a wonderfully vivid dream imagery that is erotic, disorienting and informative all at the same time. Roszak, the author of *BUGS*, has a prose style reminiscent of Philip K. Dick's paranoid fantasies and yet manages to tell a much more straightforward story. This is a good read and I heartily recommend it.

BROTHER ESAU

By Douglas Orrell & John Gribbin
TOR, 1984, 285 pp., \$2.95

Have you ever wondered if man would discover the true "missing link" between himself (homo sapiens) and the apes of millions of years ago? Have tales of the Yeti or the Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas or Bigfoot of the Pacific Northwest always perked you interest? I can answer yes to both questions. And apparently the same has been the case for Douglas Orrell and John Gribbin, co-authors of *BROTHER ESAU*, a terrifically believable mainstream novel about a creature such a discovery. It's not a fossil that's discovered but a living creature; and, it's not the "missing link" but, anthropologically speaking, a close cousin to man in the homo species who shares a common evolutionary history to ours, yet also different in element and geography, progressed in a different direction. With some very interesting distinctions.

The novel opens at a paleonto-

logical dig in the Indian foothills of the Himalayas where two identical skulls are discovered. Carbon dating establishes one to be over a million years old while the other is no more than 150 years old -- maybe less! This throws the scientific community into a whirlwind of hypotheses as they try to explain this wide disparity. Initially, the discovery of the more recent skull is thought to be an elaborate hoax. Until a live specimen is captured.

The dilemma of the scientist who must decide what to do with this creature (who is more man than beast) is the power that drives the novel. The locale, and the political intrigue between India and Pakistan adds to the plot complications.

This is an excellent novel and one that raises interesting questions for scientist and layman alike. Originally introduced in hardback in 1982, TOR has now come out with the novel in paperback and it's a good buy for tonight entertainment that informs as well as entertains.

TALES BY MOONLIGHT

Ed. Jessica Amanda Salmonson
TOR, 1984, 286 pp., \$2.75

REVIEWED BY STUART NAPIER

TALES BY MOONLIGHT contains twenty tales of terror lovingly collected by Jessica Amanda Salmonson from among the best small press writers of today along with a foreword by Stephen King. Originally published as a collector's hardback, the gamble paid off and now TOR Books makes it possible to share these talents with a much larger readership.

The stories are of uneven quality; many are still a little rough around the edges if you're used to are the standards such as *SHADOWS AND UNIVERSE* series. And yet the energy and sheer enthusiasm for the genre practically screams at you from each page and it's doubtful you won't find more than a few to unsettle your late night hours once you start the book.

From the classic horror style of "The Nocturnal Visitor" by Dale C. Davidson to the more contemporary "Jaborandi Jaz" by Gordon Linzner, this collection proves the small press is alive and well. Janet Fox's "Witches," with its flowing prose and eerie, dreamlike scenes, aptly demonstrates why her stories rarely have failed to please the small press readers lately. For pure gut-wrenching horror, with more than a little bizarreness thrown in, my shudder quotient was met by Linda Thompson's "The Inhabitants of the Pond." When a ten-year-old boy tells his sister impatiently that his mysterious companion from the stagnant pond (will) "crash through the

bushes, and beat the door down, and then he'll be my Father's head off," you believe him.

None of these authors are particularly well known outside of small press circles. Several deserve to be. Perhaps this book will create the opportunity for these talented writers to gain that wider audience.

THE OFFICIAL STAR TREK QUIZ BOOK

By Mitchell Maglio
Pocket, May 1985, 256 pp., \$6.95
ISBN: 0-671-55652-5

A well-organized, extremely detailed quiz book not for the casual *STAR TREK* viewer. Included are sections on the show's history, technology, episodes and a mind-bending section "For the Expert" where you are to single-line quote and asked to name the character who spoke it and name the episode.

I have always enjoyed the *STAR TREK* series; yet this book leaves me cold. Except for a brief letter in the opening from the author, Superintendent of Education, Starfleet Command, regarding the use of this text as the Final Exam Quiz for new cadets, there is no narrative whatsoever. Page after page of quizzes, difficult, I would guess, for all but the die-hard "trekkie." A few loving essays, an interview, part of a script, anything to add a bit of warmth would have gone a long way towards making this book one you might pick up twice. I was particularly disappointed to find that the Episodes section failed to test our knowledge of the writers; one of the details I always try to note with each viewing. To quiz the reader on "The City on the Edge of Forever" without mentioning Harlan Ellison was unconscionable.

The beauty of *STAR TREK* for me is its underlying theme of humanity coexisting with the high-tech of the future. Without this touch, the book "reads" like a technical manual. Granted, there is a wealth of information here, but who wants to spend time flipping back and forth between the quizzes and the answers.

Beam me up, Scottie!

BERSERKER BARE

By Fred Saberhagen, Paul Anderson, Edward Bryant, Stephen R. Donaldson, Larry Niven, Connie Willis & Roger Zelazny
TOR, 1985, 316 pp., \$6.95 trade paper

I love the Berserker stories and here Saberhagen has assembled a collection of individual Berserker stories that form a loosely cohesive novel chronicling the discovery of a vulnerable underbelly of what was thought to be the invincible alien killing machine.

The stories are filled with intelligent SF that, as you fill it out from the opening paragraph of each chapter (or separate story) and provides some added texture and depth to the Berserker's Saga.

For fans of Berserker stories it's a must; for anyone interested in good science fiction with classic plots of man against the awesome powers of the technical monsters designed to rid the universe of "bad life" this collaborative novel will deliver.

THE BURNT LANDS
by Richard Elliott
Pawcett, paperback, 1985, 263 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY NEAL WILGUS

It's no secret in this publication that "Richard Elliott" is really Richard E. Geis and Elton T. Elliott, and that Elliott does most of the plotting and Geis does the actual writing. So if you want to read Dick Geis's latest, THE BURNT LANDS is it.

LANDS is a sequel to last year's THE SWORD OF ALLAH -- actually, the second of a three-or-four volume series. Each novel is independent, but since the action in LANDS follows the action in ALLAH with hardly a pause for breath, I would recommend reading them both, in the published order. There's already a third volume, tentatively titled THE NORRIS REBELLION, on the drawing boards.

In ALLAH half the world is reduced to rubble when a super satellite armed with a particle-beam weapon fires bursts of energy into the sun and provokes a solar flare which wastes the eastern hemisphere. In LANDS the flare and subsequent hurricanes and firestorms have subsided and the survivors, in both hemispheres are struggling to make the most of the situation. In Europe and Asia the survivors are the few lucky enough to be in protected places when the flare occurs -- in North and South America the survivors are the many who are now faced with a totally different world and a totally new situation.

Hunter-killer secret agent John Norris is the main protagonist in the series, but in LANDS he shares the spotlight with Erica Stoneman, the ruthless young widow of Bradford Collier Stoneman (a Rockefeller), the behind-the-scenes manipulator who owned much of the world -- including various media figures and politicians. Bradford Stoneman died toward the end of ALLAH, but Erica is even more coldblooded and ambitious than her elderly husband and now she is in the position to loot the ruins of Europe and Asia, and to consolidate her hold on the world. What stands in her way is the remaining vestiges of the American government -- primarily Julia Waggoner, who becomes President when the earlier president, William Barr, was presumed to be killed by the flare while he was in Europe for a conference.

In LANDS it's learned that President Barr was not killed after all, but kidnapped before the Catastrophe by socialist terrorists who are now holding him for ransom. John Norris is sent to Germany to investigate and to negotiate with the terrorists if the hostage really is President Barr. It is, but things start to get complicated when Erica also finds out and moves to take advantage of the situation, first by making her own deal with the terrorists, and then by trying to wipe out Norris, Barr and the terrorists in one quick blow -- hoping that this will bring ruin and impeachment to President Waggoner so that Erica can put her own puppet on the throne, er, in the White House.

The fly in that ointment, of course, is Norris, the archetypal hero who can be wounded and beaten and abused but never stopped for long, and never killed no matter how certain is death at the end of each chapter. Erica and Waggon has Norris on the run, with a mortally wounded Barr in tow and some uneasy al-

lies from among the terrorists, and the action, sex and violence comes thick and fast. Erica's men take Norris prisoner, but you know how long that is likely to last -- just long enough for him to turn the situation to his advantage and escape again.

In keeping with "Richard Elliott's" grim view of life, both ALLAH and LANDS show Norris in a no-win situation, but in ALLAH he at least comes out slightly ahead. In LANDS it's a break-even affair, with Norris and Erica Stoneman fighting each other to a draw and Norris just barely surviving. No doubt in THE NORRIS REBELLION they'll battle again and the fate of the world will hang in the balance.

THE ROYAL BOOK OF OZ, 1921, 263 pp.
KABUMPO IN OZ, 1922, 259 pp.
THE COWARDLY LION OF OZ, 1923, 252 pp.
GRAMPA IN OZ, 1924, 227 pp.
THE LOST KING OF OZ, 1925, 236 pp.
THE HUNGRY TIGER OF OZ, 1926, 214 pp.
By Ruth Plumly Thompson
Del Rey paperback, 1985, \$5.95 each.

REVIEWED BY NEAL WILGUS

In a review several years ago I expressed the belief that many present day science fiction/fantasy writers and fans were first taught to suspend disbelief (in cold print, at least) in the pages of the Oz books. If others still tell me, they have a hazy memory of the Oz series, recalling that the books written by L. Frank Baum had something special about them that other Oz writers couldn't quite match. But over time the whole series sort of melted together, so that anything of that's remembered at all is attributed to Baum and even the names of the other writers are forgotten.

After Baum, Ruth Plumly Thompson is the least likely to be forgotten, for she took over the series after Baum's death in 1919 and went on to write more titles for the series than the Master did (Baum 14, Thompson 21). There were others who took over when Thompson stopped, but they're likely to be remembered only by members of the International Club of Oz Club and never even heard of by anyone else. Even Thompson has been out of print now for twenty years, available only in libraries and used bookstores, if at all.

Judy-Lynn del Rey to the rescue. After republishing all the Baum titles in Del Rey mass market editions over the past few years, Judy-Lynn has carried on with titles 15 through 20 -- the first six of Ruth Plumly Thompson's Oz books. Even better, the six books are slightly larger than the standard paperback, measuring 4 1/2 X 8 (as opposed to 4 1/4 X 7) -- which invalidates my earlier complaint about the original illustrations by John R. Neill being reduced to such an extent as to lose all detail.

John R. Neill is the other magic name in the Oz world. Not only did he illustrate all of the Baum titles except the first and all of the Thompson titles except the last two -- he also wrote and illustrated three Oz books of his own. More important, it was Neill's lovingly executed drawings that brought the Oz world to life at least as much as the Baum and Thompson stories.

Much as I'm pleased about seeing these six Thompson/Neill volumes back in print, I can't help but wonder if that pretty impression I referred to above is pretty close to the truth. Don't get me wrong -- Thompson is no slouch and she had already established herself as a children's fantasy writer before she was invited by Reilly & Lee to take on Oz. But for all her inventiveness and clever word play and her sincere efforts to carry on in the spirit of L. Frank Baum, there is an inevitable, if subtle, change in the style and atmosphere -- a change that seems reflected too in the Neill illustrations, which are extremely good but somehow not quite up to the masterpieces in the Baum volumes.

In THE ROYAL BOOK OF OZ (first attributed to Baum and correctly credited to Thompson in this edition for the first time) the Scarecrow goes searching for his ancestors, Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion go searching for the Scarecrow and a whole new kingdom is added to Oz geography. Major new characters introduced include Sir Hokus of Pokes, Comfortable Camel and Doubtful Dromedary.

KABUMPO IN OZ introduces Kabumpo the Elegant Elephant as a major new character and Prince Pompadore and others as minor figures. Pompadore seeks a "typer princess" who can save his kingdom of Pumperdink from disappearing but his search is complicated by Ruggedo, the Gnome ex-king, who's up to his usual skullduggery.

In THE COWARDLY LION OF OZ more new characters are added: Notta Bit More the circus clown, Bob Up the orphan, and Mustaf of Mudge who plots to capture the Lion. There are perils galore, but the Cowardly Lion keeps up a brave front.

GRAMPA IN OZ tells of how King Pumbo of Ragged loses his head and of how Prince Tatters and Grampa set out to find it and are launched on the series of adventures that leads them to Oz, and Dorothy, who is out adventuring herself.

THE LOST KING OF OZ recounts the search for Ozma's father, Pastoria, who disappeared during the "Mombi Rebellion" before recorded Oz history began. A boy named Snip, a Goose named Pajuka and a tailor named Tare are caught in Mombi's web, while Dorothy and others set out on their search for Pastoria. Also, Mombi, one of the best of the baddies, is disposed of at the end of this one.

And THE HUNGRY TIGER OF OZ tells how the Tiger and Betsy Bobbin team up with the Vegetable Man and Prince Reddy to search for the magic Rash Rubies. Ozma is kidnapped by Atmos Fere the Airman and the Tiger and company clash with the Big Wigs, but after various adventures everything comes out right in the end.

Thompson's stories are more plotted and more formula than Baum's and her characters don't seem as inventive as his, but these books are a worthy continuation of the Oz series and certainly worth having back in print. Children especially will enjoy them and probably won't notice the slight changes in style and plotting that seem obvious to adults. If you loved Baum, you'll probably like Thompson a lot.

As this review is being written, September 1985, the next three Thompson titles are just coming out -- THE GNOME KING OF OZ, THE GIANT HORSE OF OZ, and JACK PUMPKINHEAD OF OZ. More to come.

THROUGH NO FAULT OF OURS WE ARE PRESENTING LETTERS

LETTER FROM JOHN SHIRLEY
101 N. Beverly Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210 08/08/85

In his review column in SCIENCE FIC-
TION REVIEW, Orson Card has dis-
cussed a story, "The Incorporated" (Av's
July). He says ("Shirley" writes of a
future in which pollution is institutional-
ized, big nasty corporations run every-
thing...). Then he knows that there are
fish in Lake Erie?... I couldn't shake
the feeling that Shirley got caught in a
time-war, in 1973... Pollution is not
"institutionalized" in the story; the
corporations don't run everything (though
they do indeed run the lives of the peo-
ple they employ, but they don't run the
government, as he implies). Card has a
right to misunderstand the story -- that
may be my fault. But I take issue with
him when he spreads falsehoods about
the state of the natural environment.
He seems to be implying that pollution
is no longer a problem because "there
are fish in Lake Erie." If a man dy-
ing of cancer gets over a cold, do we
celebrate as if he's had a complete re-
covery?

The only pollution mentioned in the
story is acid rain. Acid rain is not
only alive and well, it's on the in-
crease. There are a number of countries,
especially those badly affected by it
like Canada and Norway, who're becoming
downright desperate due to the damage
acid rain has caused them. It continues
to destroy lake after lake, stream after
stream, hundreds of square miles of deli-
cate wilderness ecology in the USA.
And that's only the beginning. It's go-
ing to get worse. Even the government
admits it -- though they're doing nothing
about it. One major study predicted
that acid rain would threaten the lives
of millions of people due to the toxins
released by the acids. And acid rain's
becoming more widespread, and more acid-
ic.

We've had a temporary leveling off
of pollution in a few places, but the
Reagan administration is engaged in pul-
ling the teeth of the Air Quality Laws,
and we can expect the neater improve-
ment to vanish soon. I can attest that
the air here in L.A. is POISONOUS. (I
may remain here another year, as a re-
sult of business necessity, but no long-
er.)

The big oil and mining companies
are involved in a major land-grab, lob-
bying and pulling strings in Washington
to get control of what remains of public
lands; parks, wildlife, sanctuaries, etc.
They're going to take them over, re-
strict our access to them, and gouge the
hell out of them.

The toxic waste problem is GROWING,
Orson. And revolting housing projects
and franchises are spreading like a fun-
gus. The country's going to look like a
series of overlapping Monopoly Boards.
Too many of the country's beaches are
polluted, trash-choked; most major riv-

ers are still polluted. What EPA stan-
dards remain after Reagan has dismantled
what he can or not being emulated by
other industrial nations. And since the
planet is one environment, what they
pour into the air and oceans in Korea or
Mexico or wherever, will eventually af-
fect us here.

This is not alarmism, this has been
the condition of the nation for years --
in 1972 and now -- and mostly it's wors-
ening. SF writers and fans are supposed
to be aware, forward-looking bunch,
but you and most fans seem blinded to
your own future.

I'm not predicting a poisoned waste-
land where we die in the acid-rained ruin.
I'm sure we'll survive the ecological
upsets that come along. We may well
live in controlled urban environments,
with a few sealed-in parklands. The
wilderness as we know it will be dead,
the air outside our pristine malls will
be poisonous -- but who cares? We'll be
safe and comfortable inside. And by de-
grees, as we feel the curious swelling of
a gnawing sense of loss, we'll begin to
realize how much poorer we have be-
come.

Maybe, post 1972, it's not intel-
lectually fashionable to be concerned
about the fate of the natural environ-
ment. But ignoring environmental prob-
lems won't make them go away. And one
of these days they'll catch up with you,
yes you, even those of you who don't
give a damn.

((With the shrinkage of the American
industrial base due to foreign com-
petition, it's likely domestic pol-
lution and toxic wastes will come
under control-by-attrition. The
next question is: what do you do ab-
out the developing industrial cen-
ters like Mexico, Brazil, Japan/China/
Korea, etc? They are likely to pois-
on the Pacific and send acidic storms
across the ocean to our continent.
Do we refuse to buy their cheap
goods until they clean up their act?))

LETTER FROM TIM SULLIVAN
2325 Brown St, Philadelphia, PA
19130 Sept. 6, 1985

What is Orson Scott Card talking
about in the Fall, 1985 edition of SFR?
His stabs at what he calls "The Artsy-
Fartsy Fiction Factory" are a bit strain-
ed, to say the least. Say that goes on for
eight pages or so decrying this bugbear
of the science fiction world, and then
lists fourteen outstanding stories of
recent months as a contrast. May I say
-- without intending to deride any
of the stories -- that several of the four-
teen seem to embody precisely what the
critic deplores? Scott would doubtless
explain here that yes, they may possess
artsy-fartsy elements, but in these stories
the hated artsy-fartsiness actually
works.

True enough, as far as it goes.
But what then, the confused reader may
well ask, is all the fuss about? If
Scott is merely saying that he likes cer-
tain stories and doesn't care for others,
that's fine, but what does he mean by all
this other stuff in his column?

Is Scott trying to say that good
fiction is always intuitive; never self-
conscious, academic or structuralist in

any way? Much of his own fiction in the
past has been all of these things. (See
for example, a piece published in ONI
five or six years ago called "Unaccompan-
ied Sonata.") In all fairness, it seems
that Scott is abandoning his earlier
style for the "plain tale plainly told"
school which has been ascendant in re-
cent years. Does this mean that every
other short story writer in the field
has to do the same thing, except of course
when Scott deigns to grant the odd auth-
or or his own brand of papal dispensation
to break the rules?

And whose rules are these, anyway?
Scott's or a consensus of certain SF ed-
itors, writers and fans? Admittedly,
Scott takes full responsibility for his
broadside, and yet those who have been
paying attention for the past few years
will note a familiar ring coming from the
bellow. It's the sound of Scott chim-



ing in with the reactionary forces who celebrated the 'death' of the New Wave in the seventies.

'Well, I have news for Scott. He is too late. The wind is shifting. Those who believe that SF should never have progressed past the Heinlein juveniles of the fifties are no longer among the vanguard of the elite. They are, in fact, beginning to look a bit silly and repressive. Worse than that, dated.

'It is about time people in this field grew up enough to realize that you cannot erase a part of the past because you happened to find it confusing. We all found the sixties and early seventies confusing, and revisionist thinking will not change what happened. The cyberpunks are among us, already mutating into ghod-knows-what, while Scott still carps about the mild stylistic experimentation of what the punks saw as "the boring old farts" -- Kessel, Dozois, Willis, et al.

'But so what if Scott isn't interested in the latest currents in the SF short fiction sea, you may be saying. Who cares? Well, any SF fan worth his ass should care, because the strength of this field has always been in its short fiction. That's where the ideas are, in their purest form. That's also where those accused of artsy-fartsiness choose to work. The ideas they could be as popular as Niven if they just went along with the party line. But have you read Niven's latest collaboration with Fournelle, FOOTFALL? It's written for SF illiterates. The nearest idea in the entire 485 pages is a ramjet. That's the sort of SF you have to write to be on the best seller list, kids, unless you're already as well known as Asimov. How many household words did you say slurping up free drinks at the Worldcom meet-the-pros party you attended? Probably never heard of at least half of the men and women introduced by the toastmaster, unless I miss my guess. Another twenty-five or thirty percent may have been vaguely familiar. Another twenty or so are pretty well known to SF fans, and the rest are genuinely famous, minor or major media personalities.

'Which begs the burning question: Does James Patrick Kelly, or any of the other artsy-fartsies, like being as little-known short story writer for the occasional novel? Does he aspire to be as popular as Niven? Is it not possible that the SF field is big enough for both Niven and Kelly, the one as popular as LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE, the other more in the nature of a PBS program? Has the Hollywood mentality so permeated our field that there is no room for honest short work that does not pander, that attempts, however successfully or unsuccessfully, to say something that is important to the author, and is constructed in a way that is meaningful not only to the author but to the discerning reader as well? Or must there be nothing of the SF merit but public relations, until the reader who desires rich, red meat is forced to go elsewhere?

'Just what does Scott mean, anyhow?

((I think Scott means he's all for rich, red meat, weird concepts, great characterization, etc., but has problems with trendy, counter-productive delivery systems: the reader has to want to read this rare meat text, and making him uneasy with a narrative style or technique, turning him off, one way or another, is not a good

thing. A little 'differentness' in fiction narrative is fine, but when a lot of literary-minded new writers adopt it to be "in" and to be considered acceptable to a few New York sf-hating critics...forget it. But Scott will probably have words to say, too, next issue.))

LETTER FROM JOE SANDERS
6354 Brooks Blvd Mentor, OH, 44060
September 19, 1985

'Orson Scott Card's column should be a great service for people like me who don't follow the SF magazines closely any more, but I was stunned at some of his comments in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW #56. In particular, what he says about Gibson's Neuromancer's so will be misleading that it makes me doubt his ability to read and report, let alone evaluate.

'It is not true that the novel's protagonist is a self-destructive "turd" who is completely unable to act. It is not true that both the book's main electronic consciousnesses want oblivion. What the characters want -- like the rest of us -- is a self-contradictory tangle: to hang on safely to what they have now and get more of the same, but also to give up out-grown dreams for the sake of growth. Wintermute doesn't want to die; he wants to escape the limitations that are built into his nature, and he is single-minded and desperate enough to smash anything that would stop his getting free. Case, the protagonist, also wants to grow past his limitations, though he doesn't understand his desires very well. Early in the story he is drifting toward death because he is unable to explore the electronic landscape; later, though, he certainly does make a commitment to Molly, and he does know what's going on when he tells Jane to let Wintermute go.

'Give us the fucking code ... If you don't, what'll change? What'll ever fucking change for you? ... I got no idea at all what'll happen if Wintermute wins, but it'll change something!'

'Granted that the Dixie Flatline, who doesn't see any possibility for growth past his limitations, does want oblivion -- and gets it. Granted that Wintermute doesn't know what he will become after he's free. Granted that Case does not win Molly's undying love and winds up only equivocally better than he began. Granted that people make mistakes and get hurt along the way. So what? The attempt to grow doesn't guarantee happiness, let alone success. It doesn't mean you'll wind up all right. Or even righteous. At the novel's end, Gibson leaves it up to the reader whether Case was right in coming out of the safe world Neuromancer offers him inside the computer into a dangerous, uncertain existence of guess and endurance. So what? Wintermute made his choice before the story starts; Case makes his during the story. But they both choose to go on, to try. That's what people do. Hasn't Card noticed?'

((I imagine he has. Scott, you're being dealt with here. What say you? Want a new deal?))

LETTER FROM BOB SHAW
66 Knutsford Rd, Grappenhall
Warrington, Cheshire WA4 2PB, UK
Sept 25, 1985

'My typewriter is away being overhauled - so I hope you can read my handwriting.

'Re the comments on FIRE PATTERN, I often wonder if readers and critics think that an author believes that his latest book is perfect, and their pointing out of a fault comes as a great revelation to him. It usually isn't like that with me anyway. I can take any sort of my novels and reveal faults that nobody else has even come near to unmasking, but I felt compelled to write them just the same, because they satisfied an inner need.

'FIRE PATTERN represents a nice exercise in plotting for anybody who is interested in becoming a science fiction writer. The phenomenon of spontaneous human combustion is dramatic and terrifying in its physical manifestation -- good grist for the SF writer's mill -- but the essence of the phenomenon is its randomness. It has never been explained because the victims and their circumstances have nothing in common. Now, that is bad news for your budding SF writer. He might, possibly, be able to write a decent mainstream novel about the effects of one SHC case on a group of people -- but the SF treatment more or less demands that the writer should devise an explanation for the phenomenon. Furthermore, there would be little point in coming up with an explanation which, say, attributed SHC to some freakish chemical imbalance in the victims' bodies. Realistic though that might appear, it would leave the writer with an essentially random phenomenon -- and to write a story he has to link SHC cases together, to find an underlying pattern. (Hence the title of my book.)

'Once it has been decided that, in the fictional world of the proposed book, SHC is not random, that the victims are chosen in some way, we are faced with the question of who does the choosing and why. In other words, it is necessary to devise a conspiracy. I dare say it is not beyond the powers of anybody with a good imagination to think up several reasons for a secret group to have been causing several inhabitants of this planet to burst into flames every year for the last few centuries, and to deal with the anomalous features such as the clothing on the bodies remaining undamaged, etc. I could be wrong here, but I felt that as soon as the conspiracy had been uncovered it became the main feature of the book, and that SHC -- an accidental by-product -- had to fade in to the background a bit. I gave one full description of a human combustion in the third chapter, and I would have found it artistically unsatisfactory to punctuate the book with repetitions of the event.

'Why did I go for the interplanetary connection? Perhaps it was my fascination with one of my favorite ideas -- a protagonist is shunted to another planet or another plane of existence by one means and confronts everybody by making his way back home by another means of his own devising. I have used it in THE PALACE OF ETERNITY, NIGHT WALK, ORBITS-VII, MEDUSA'S CHILDREN and in some short stories, including 'The Cottage of Eternity,' where this idea was a disguise for re-using the basic idea of PALACE.

'Anyway, I'd be genuinely interested in hearing the views of those who objected to the shape of FIRE PATTERN about

what other forms the book could have taken. Could one devise a coherent plot in which SHC remained totally random and unexplained and with no background conspiracy? If somebody with a free-wheeling imagination comes up with the perfect plot we might collaborate on doing the book over again.

((Your defense is legitimate, Bob, but the rather abrupt shift from a here-and-now earthbound mystery to a far-out science fiction mind-shift, power-struggle story involving psychic beams and such seemed too much, a wrench not wanted, a kind of forced melding of two stories.

((If Spontaneous human combustion is random and continues unexplained, then there is no novel. Some conspiracy is required, some linkage, some explanation is obligatory to make the novel work on an earthbound level. I'd write a novel on the premise that these shc victims were born with a rare mutation in their bodies which would become known upon autopsy or major surgery, and the conspiracy group must keep this mutation from being known and/or continued. How's that?))

LETTER FROM E.T. CALDWELL
2013 1/2 Wilson Street
Menomonee, WI, 54751, Sept 28, 1985

'Now with the loss of Ted Sturgeon I can never write him that letter asking him about the veracity of the story I've been looking for about an inventor who comes up with a sort of "perpetual motion" machine I believe operated upon the principles of electro-magnetism. Anyway, it was a cheap source of energy and it was sold to a large corporation that kept it under wraps as it would have ruined the economy (profits) for the power conglomerates.'

'Since Sturgeon worked at some time in a lab(?) research facility (?) and also under the aegis of John W. Campbell at ASTOUNDING/ANALOG, he was probably

privy to certain scientific knowledge that never got beyond prototypical production, and the story was so damn convincing I was sure he was trying to tell us something.

'But then, that was how Ted told his tales -- from MORE THAN HUMAN, which to me was a totally believable situation, to another, NEED, and THE DREAMING JEWELS and so many more.

'From his classic dictum that "90% of most anything is crap," I could plow through the piles of pulps to find that "shining 10%" that made it all worthwhile, considering his words of wit, insight and wisdom. More book reviews would've been welcomed under his name, but one can only expect so much under the current glut of fantasy-SF.

'We still have his stories to be savored the second, third or fourth time around.'

LETTER FROM ALLEN VARNEY
1817 E. Oltorf, #1006
Austin, TX 78741 July 12, 1985

'Back in April Christy Marx sent you copies of her comic book series THE SISTERHOOD OF STEEL with a request to review them in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, or to forward them to me should you prove unable to do so. You kindly forwarded them to me, and I'm afraid work has piled up to the extent that only now have I gotten around to returning them to you.

'I'm sorry to say that I cannot review this series for SFR's readership. Unlike AMERICAN FLAGG!, the comic I reviewed for you earlier this year, THE SISTERHOOD OF STEEL holds little of interest to the non-comics SF reader. It is intelligently crafted, and quite sophisticated by comic standards, but its subject matter and approach are familiar to any reader of Heinlein juveniles or the subtler varieties of "feminist" SF. The main character is completely undefined and the art is very ordinary.

'I don't belittle Ms. Marx's achievement in getting Marvel Comics, a true school house, to publish this unusually intelligent comics fare. But to overcome the "comic-book" stigma, and to be of

interest to SFR's readers, a comic has to be flashy or thought-provoking or brilliantly original. FLAGG! is flashy. SISTERHOOD is meditatively paced and orthodox by SF standards.

'I think the most significant point about this is the way comics writers, now being given a piece of the action in the form of royalties (1% of cover price over 100,000 copies sold seems to be the standard, though Ms. Marx may have a much better deal), are becoming sensitive to the need to promote their work. From such financial conscientiousness, it may be just a series of little leaps that lead writers for comics into artistic conscientiousness. I wouldn't be surprised if Ms. Marx were in the lead when those leaps are made.

'For now, my own feeling is that there's only one other comic besides FLAGG! that would be interesting to most SFR readers. It's a very strange independent comic called CEREBUS. The trouble is, its author is telling one single narrative stretching from the very first issue to the present -- and now it's up to #75 -- and he has no sympathy for anyone coming in the middle -- and so I must wait on recommending it until the whole thing is available in more accessible form.'

((This letter of yours is a very good review of THE SISTERHOOD OF STEEL.))

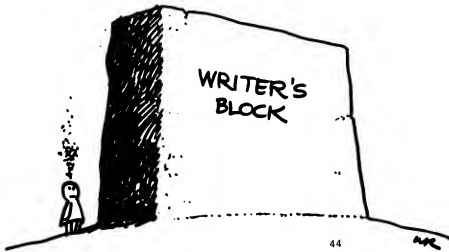
LETTER FROM MIKE RESNICK
11216 Gideon Lane, Cincinnati, OH
August 17, 1985 45249

'Alan Dean Foster is absolutely right when he speaks of how mass market publishers shy away from putting blacks on covers. Let me offer a concrete example:

'In my novel, ERDS AT EDENITH, the female protagonist is The Black Pearl. On the cover of the Phantasia Press edition, which had a combined print run, boxed and trade, of 1,500 copies and was sold strictly to collectors and such Resnick fanatics may exist, she was portrayed as a black woman, which I deemed she was. But on the cover of the Signet edition, she was white.

'Now, the interesting thing is that both covers were painted by the same guy: Kevin Johnson. (I had liked his work on my Phantasia books, and requested him for the paperback covers as well, and Signet agreed.) Obviously, Kevin had read the manuscript, or The Black Pearl wouldn't have been black on the hardcover; I don't imagine he forgot what she looked like by the time he painted the paperback, especially since every detail of her costume, minimal as it may have been, was exactly as I had described it. Therefore, I can only assume he was ordered to make The Black Pearl a Caucasian by someone in Signet's marketing department, who had access to figures proving that near-naked white ladies sell better than near-naked black ones.

'This, by the way, is definitely not a knock on Kevin. The guy's got to make a living, and he can't sell what an art department won't buy. (In fact, Kevin is one of the few artists who actually reads a book before he sits down to paint. Editors are always asking writers to suggest scenes for cover paintings, but somehow, no matter what we come up with, the artist invariably



chooses something from the first 20 pages of the manuscript. I wish I was naive enough not to know why.)

((Currently, only Dan Bowles has the courage or integrity to put a black on the cover. The latest from them is THE TRAIL OF BOHU by Charles R. Saunders, a further adventure of Imaro, a black hero of pre-history.))

LETTER FROM STUART NAPIER

1513 Bexhill Rd, Richmond, VA 23229
August 15, 1985

"I have a couple of minor nits I would like to pick with Alan Dean Foster's essay, "Racism In The Media And Science Fiction ..." that appeared in SFR #56. But first, let me say that on the whole I agree with his tacit premise that (1) we -- SF readers and writers alike -- collectively have us a problem here and (2) we should all strive to recognize and eradicate any lingering unconscious racism we from time to time might individually exhibit. The problem is, and will in all likelihood continue to be, that it is impossible to guess the motivations of a creative person -- be they writer or artist. To deny unconscious racism's existence is foolhardy, but to try and explain how it works by citing examples in art is just plain foolish.

But, I digress. Foster seems to imply that characteristics such as loyalty and strength (both emotional and physical) somehow denote second class citizenship by using as illustrations the treatment of Robby the Robot in the film FORBIDDEN PLANET (because his metallic body is black; give me a break!) and Jim Brown in the film THE DIRTY DOZEN. Later, he says one of his favorite films is GUNGA DIN and admits this character is an underdog's underdog. Is loyal and strong (Kipling said it better: "...of all them blackface crew, the finest man I knew, was our regimental beastie, Gunga Din ... you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din"). It doesn't wash to say the former two are unconscious racial stereotypes and then to praise the latter because the white heroes are depicted as racist.

"It's been a long time since I saw THE DIRTY DOZEN but I recall being impressed with Jim Brown's portrayal of a black who was capable of displaying the natural instinct of self preservation in order to protect the lives of his comrades. Generally, this type of action is considered heroic but Foster doesn't agree; saying proof of the character's stupidity was that he "doesn't even ask to draw straws to see who gets to make the suicidal grenade run." The real problem with analysis such as this is that -- like statistics -- you can make a case for whatever point you wish to. It would be just as easy, if in the film the Jim Brown character had refused to take the risk, and Lee Marvin had "bought the farm" for his buddies, to say that this portrayal of a white man performing the ultimate act of self-sacrifice was unconscious racism by implying that the black man was not capable of this "moral" deed.

Using this hindsight approach to eradicating racism could lead to even more ridiculous examples. Seiberhagen's NERSENER stories are really telling us that blacks are moral killers who exist only to torment all of humanity; that

King's novel GUJO is his way of expressing a sick attack against all who think of dogs as "man's best friend"; that Bradbury's THE ILLUSTRATED MAN is saying some really nasty things about all tattoo artists and their clients; that Bester's TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BRIGHT portrays people with physical deformities as mean-spirited and dangerous; that Geis' ONE IMMORTAL MAN ... arrghh! I can't go on.

"I also found Foster's comments on reverse racism curious in that no sooner had he made the pronouncement that there was such a thing than he committed it in the same paragraph when he made light of female oriental names, under the guise of "the names are marvelous ... and ... all-time favorite;" but, we can all see through that thinly veiled racial put-down, can't we?

"Even SF, which I believe does try to make us think, is not immune to the same biases that all writing is; it reflects the culture in which it's written and the taste of the audience it's intended for. That is not necessarily unconscious racism.

"Collective racio-centrism, maybe?

"To commit an individual act of racism, even unconsciously, implies that at the core of his beliefs, the person committing the act is a racist. I would like to suggest that an act of unconscious racism is when a reader or film viewer takes for granted (read unconsciously perceives the material in a racist light) that the artist is agreeing with his views on minorities through the fictional portrayal of a character. That's why bigots loved Archie Bunker -- he was speaking directly to them and for their point of view (so they thought). And why many of us enjoyed the television show, for its courage in exposing bigotry and not for the positions Archie took."

((Idealism always gets clobbered by reality. Writers and editors and publishers are supposed to be racism-free while the readers and the marketing departments of publishers must work in the real world--of racism. Out on the streets and in the supermarkets, whites think and act racist, blacks think and act racist, and Asians think and act racist. The readership of sf and fantasy are upper lower-class and middle-class whites almost exclusively, and they won't buy books with blacks as heroes. So sue them. That's the way it is!))

LETTER FROM ROBERT BLOCH 231 Sunset Crest Drive Los Angeles, CA 90046 08/85

"Now, what do you suppose hoisted me off my usual postcard and onto a letter-page?

"AN ALIEN IN L.A., that's what. John Shirley's standard indictment of our fair city and its corruption of innocents who venture here from beautiful crime-free New York.

"Not to worry, Mr. Shirley -- your colleagues here seem to manage. A.E. van Vogt doesn't short coke, Harlan El-

lison shuns freebasing, Richard Matheson didn't buy a computer from Gacci's, Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven get mystic revelations only from each other, Gregory Benford and Dennis Etchison teach in classrooms, not hot tubs. And while it is true Ray Bradbury owns a Mercedes, he still rides to work on his bicycle every day. Even I seem to have survived a quarter of a century's stay here, doing my share of film and television scripts while still living very much as I did back in the Midwest.

"Sure, everything Mr. Shirley cites and indicts can be found in LA, but my point is that no writer need go looking for such things unless he has a secret ambition to be a studio hack. You don't have to be a whacko to live in LA, any more than you need to be a pimp, a pusher, a mugger or a bag-lady to live in Pan City."

((No, no, you don't freeze in Los Angeles. And all that money and fame lures all kinds of ambitious and weird people to L.A. I think that's great! The variety is fantastic. Living a few years in L.A./Venice/Beverly Hills/Hollywood is something every writer or would-be writer should experience. I don't regret a moment of it.))

LETTER FROM MILT STEVENS

7234 Camps Ave, Reseda, CA 91335
August 24, 1985

"It appears that John Shirley does not like Los Angeles. As with most big cities, the anonymity of the days are that you can find just about anything you're looking for. Shirley could even find scads of New Yorkers who will wring their hands and weep pitiously for their lost homeland. Unfortunately, very few of them can ever be convinced to go back to New York.

"In my fifteen years with the LAPD, I've never heard of "Bum Bashing." Lots of bums are bashed, but usually by other bums. You just can't convince many people to leave the country club for the dubious pleasure of rolling winos. There is a lot of public pressure to do something about the derelict problem, but since the Sundance Decision there isn't much the police can do about the problem. Most of the derelicts who the days are burned out dopers who wouldn't know the difference if you beat them up or not. However, I've never seen any evidence of derelicts being beaten up with any regularity.

"Aside from the derelict bums, there are also the merely sleazoid bums. When you see a sleazoid type cruising in a good neighborhood it's a probability that they are there to steal a car or burgle a house. Even if you can't catch them committing a crime today, doing a field interview on them allows the detectives a better chance of connecting them to the crimes they eventually will commit. A study we did about a dozen years ago showed everyone who was field interviewed by the police more than six times in a one year period could be linked to definite criminal activity.

"While movies frequently show the police beating people up for the pure holy hell of it, that's only about as realistic as most things movies show.

Even if police departments didn't have policies against such conduct and supervision to enforce those policies, would not the person who was beaten have a great chance of pursuing a successful civil lawsuit? There are thousands of lawsuits against the LAPD every year, so we have to be able to prove that whatever force we use is either legitimate or never occurred. We regularly do that in more than 99% of the cases. Of course, many of the lawsuits are rather frivolous. Like a suit for one-million dollars for the mental anguish caused by an unfair traffic citation. Another one I recall was a six-million dollar suit for verbal abuse.

'Anyway, John Shirley should certainly let the L.A. fan community know when he decides to go back to New York. We'd be happy to hold a going-away party for him.

((The ball is in your court, John. John?))

LETTER FROM KEITH SOLTYS
7 Walter St. Toronto, Ontario
Canada, M4E 2Y9 August 24, 1985

'Alan Dean Foster made some good points in his article. Two books that I remember as being atypical in their treatment of other races came to mind as I read the book, both by Andre Norton: SEA SIEGE, which is my favorite of all her books, has a very sympathetic treatment of Caribbean Islanders. And her TIME TRADER series (I can't remember all the books in the series but GALACTIC DERELICT, KEY OUT OF TIME and THE SIXTH SPACEMAN were some) had American Indians as central characters. Now that I think of it Norton's "juveniles" were pretty advanced in most respects and some of them hold up at least as well as Heinlein's novels from the same period.'

LETTER FROM BILL ROTSLER
17909 Lull St, Reseda CA 91335
1985

'Re: Alan Dean & Foster's article on minorities. He asked who created "Brothers of the Spear," which ran with Tarzan. As far as I know, it was written and drawn by Russ Manning who was doing Tarzan in the same comic book. Russ, by the way, was a fringe fan in the late Forties, and he and I went to the same art school. He died a couple of years ago.) Russ was quite possibly the most decent person I have ever known and certainly one of the better comic book artists.

'On the subject of other minority representation. When I was asked to write the most recent of the three TOM SWIFT series, and which I did with Sharon Divono -- at least, the first three scene-setting novels -- we included as his buddy an American Indian.

'There was a very strange editor at Wanderer Books division of Simon & Schuster, who later went over to the Stratemeyer Syndicate, who owned Tom, along with Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. He rewrote the dialogue of the feisty 18-year-old female friend of Tom so that she became a bitchy person. He also changed all our references of her as a "young woman" to "young girl" to "remove

the sexist" implications. You explain that one. He apparently did MCHJ rewriting. One novel heings, "Tom Swift returns from Alpha Centauri to Earth's galaxy." There is one really hep guy, right?

'I enjoyed Alan's article. All I can say as a writer is that I might avoid using certain minorities in a story simply because I do not feel I know them well enough. Gore Vidal once wrote something to the effect that every writer had a "cast of characters" which he put in as the characters in a story. That is, there were certain "types" he wrote about, liked to write about, and wrote well, and he or she kept putting them in stories. He (Gore) thought Himmigway had, oh, five, so-and-so two or three, but he (Vidal) had a dozen. Made me think who I have as a "cast."

'I have the Competent Man, but I do not think I write CM so differently from others that it is unique. (Or as some say these days, "really unique.") I do an intelligent, self-aware robot pretty well, especially one from an alien culture. Two or three times I have written the actress/star quite well. It rings true to me, possibly because I have known so many actresses. That's only three. Two, really. But interesting idea, huh? You there -- you writer person! How many do you have?'

((Uhhh...I have the strong, tough-minded cynical, psychically bruised hero, the Bitch-neurotic woman, the weird villain, the reclusive expert, the lovely heroine with an emotional flaw...))

LETTER FROM CHARLES DE LINT
POB #9480, Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1G 3V2 August 26, 1985

'I was somewhat upset with Stephen Brown's review of NIGHT OF POWER in the most recent issue of SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. I don't really care if he liked the book or not, but I don't think a review is the place for a personal attack on a writer. Brown might want to keep in mind that a book review is of the book. He might want to compare it to the earlier body of the writer's work, or even

en to the genre within which the book appears, but tearing into the writer on a personal level makes all of the reviewer's comments suspect. The first thing a reader wonders is: So what does Brown have against Robinson?

'I might add that I'm not a personal friend of Spider Robinson's, nor do I have a personal stake in this. I just find his blatant rudeness difficult to countenance and hope that in future Burt and all reviewers, will stick to reviewing the book in hand, not the man or woman who wrote it.'

LETTER FROM DARRELL SCHMITZER
71 Beeddale Rd. Stratford, PA 19087
August 28, 1985

'A.J. Budrys raises the question of L. Ron Hubbard's character and the reality of having anything to do with Hubbardian efforts. This is coming up for discussion in a lot of places now. Witness the Fred Pohl column in SF CHRONICLE.

'I think one of the most important factors in this, and how successful Hubbard will be in rehabilitating himself, will be the response of the Church of Scientology to all these frank discussions. If they have any smarts, and if Hubbard has any real control over them, they will do nothing. The main reason no one wants anything to do with Hubbard or Scientology is not so much that it is a pseudo-scientific cult -- there are enough pseudo-scientific and occult beliefs in fadom already -- but that Hubbard's followers are widely alleged to act like Brownshirts when dealing with anyone who has defamed the Sacred Name. You may recall the 60 MINUTES episode on Scientology, which covered such harassments extensively, with interviews with victims and so on. There are also some pretty well-known cases of this happening within the SF community. This may well be the work of overzealous followers (after all, what religion doesn't have overzealous followers?), but if Hubbard is to become One Of Us again, as he is apparently sparing no expense to do, his followers are going to have to behave themselves.

'I am convinced that Hubbard is very much alive and thumping his nose at all the people who say he isn't. If he wanted to prove that he was alive, all he would have to do is release a short film of himself and several other people (perhaps Forry Scherman, for starters) together in a room, moving about, and handling recognizable and very recent magazines or newspapers. A still of Hubbard holding last week's L.A. TIMES could be faked, but a film of him and several people, with numerous publications, probably couldn't be.

'But in any case, I think Hubbard's forced re-entry into SF is proof enough. It is evidence of ego, rather than profit motive. If he were dead, or reduced to a vegetable, you would think that the chiefs of Scientology would just want to continue as before, converting people and raking in the profits. Hubbard's re-emergence as a science fiction writer accomplishes neither of these things. In fact, Hubbard has spent so much money promoting himself that I can't help but wonder if his best-selling books have even turned a profit, considering how much it cost to make them best sellers. I can't even believe that

I'M A RECOVERING
LETTERBANK

PLEASE
BE KIND



'I don't think it entirely a coincidence that Disclave (which is an extremely well-run and pleasant con, I must

((I tend to agree the Return to Fiction Writing by Hubbard is an ego trip. In his fiction he pushes all the plot buttons and writes fast-paced, 'exciting' pulp prose. But for all the expertise, there is precious little

((David Palter's address is as follows: David Palter
1840 Garfield Pl., #201,
Hollywood, CA 90028.))

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#26 #27 #28 #29 #30 #31 #32
#35 #36 [Circle #'s desired]

\$1.75 EACH

#37 #38 #39 #40 #41 #42 #43 #44
#45 #47 #48 #49 #51 #53 #54 #55
#56 MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO
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