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By Darrell Schweitzer
And a lot of Richard E. Geis

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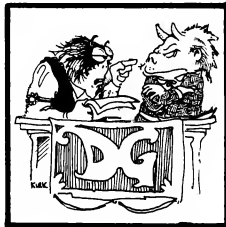
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Ten Years Ago In Science Fiction - 1976

By Robert Sabella

Davis Publications announced a major new science fiction magazine. In keeping with their policy of naming magazines after prominent people (Ellery Queen, Alfred Hitchcock), it would be called ISAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE. George Scithers was the editor.

New writer C.J. Cherryh released her second novel in less than six months: first was her debut fantasy GATES OF IVREL followed by her first SF novel BROTHERS OF EARTH. She was the second major science fiction writer to burst into prominence in less than eighteen months. The first -- John Varley -- took the traditional route of publishing a series of first-rate stories in the science fiction magazines. Cherryh achieved recognition entirely through publication of original novels, a route pioneered by Ursula K. LeGuin with the publication of THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS in 1969. It became an increasingly common route in the late Seventies and Eighties as theazines steadily waned in influence. Following Cherryh, writers such as Stephen Donaldson, John Crowley, R.A. MacAvoy and Tim Powers achieved prominence without appearing in theazines.

LAST WORDS

These last two issues--64 pages each--have been extraordinary. Fine issues, if I do say so myself. This issue is so jam-packed...even with reduced type beyond former issues.

However, SFR #60 and #61 will have to return to the 48-page format in order to save some money for 1987.

I had to pull A CONVERSATION WITH FREDERICK POHL and THE CHANGES I'VE SEEN by Robert A.W. Lowndes from this issue to make room for the longer than expected Orson Scott Card short fiction column. And this issue will probably be about five days late due to a weekend and an unavoidable delay the nature of which I shall keep to myself. Five days isn't so bad, is it?

I want to call your attention... "Here, Attention! Here! Come to Geis! Here boy! Here girl!..." to the heading for TEN YEARS AGO IN SF below, as that for the INTERVIEW WITH TIM POWERS and JAMES P. BLAYLOCK and NOISE LEVEL by John Brunner. These were done for me (and many others in future will be) by BLACK DAWN GRAPHICS using a computer and a laser printer/copier. They also do typesetting, layouts, printing and (I suspect) things one can only whisper about in secrecy. Their address is: BLACK DAWN GRAPHICS, P.O. Box 94, Long Beach, CA 90801-0094. Phone: (213) 590-0486.

The Hugo Awards for 1975 were announced: Best Novel was THE FOREIGNER WAR by Joe Haldeman; Best Novella was "Home is the Hangman" by Roger Zelazny; Best Novellette was "The Borderland of Sol" by Larry Niven and Best Short Story was "Catch That Zeppelin!" by Fritz Leiber. In a major upset, Tom Reamy won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer over John Varley.

Important publications included Frank Herbert's bestselling CHILDREN OF DUNE which was announced as the conclusion of the "Dune Trilogy," Joe Haldeman's MINDBRIDGE, Larry Niven's A WORLD OUT OF TIME and Phillip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny's DEUS IRAE.

LETTER FROM ROBERT SABELLA: Feb. 17, 1986
By the way you made a small typo in my review of THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION that blew my critique of John Varley's "Press Enter!." I stated that it was atypical Varley, but you added a space and made it a typical Varley, just the opposite meaning. But that's the first typographical complaint I've had with your editing in five years of columns/reviews, so what the heck!

ALIEN THOUGHTS

RICHARD E. GEIS

ALTER-EGO R&R (RANTING & RAVING)

"All right, Geis, get your nose out of BUSINESS WEEK, get your eyes off Financial News Network, and get your thumb out of your ass! Time to do something important."

"Go away, Alter. The stock market is going up and down like a berserk yo-yo, Vice President Bush is all the way to Saudi Arabia to ask them to lower production of oil to save the asses of his oil industry and oil bank bosses by driving crude oil prices up while of course not interfering in the free market, and the commodity markets are heading down again. All this while your former host, R.W.R. is so hot to take out Khadafi and overthrow the freely elected government of Nigargua that's he's pissing his pants and itching to do--"

"Geis, if you must mix metaphors--"

"Your weird desire to talk about sf and fantasy books seems small potatoes and small beer to me. I have world-shaking matters to analyze and ponder."

"All you ever ponder, Geis, is whether or not you'll ever have another erection. You can't bullshit me. I'm your alter-ego, remember? I have my finger on your pulse, my eye on your thalamus, and my left center tendril in your pituitary. Your body is my playground."

"So you're responsible! Why don't you leave me alone? Why don't you go back where you belong, in the brain of a baboon, or worse, in the brain of a state legislator?"

"I was assigned to you, and we're both stuck with that. It's unlikely I'll be removed from you again for special assignment. So you might as well cave in and suffer in silence for a few minutes."

"I'll suffer, Ghod knows I'll suffer, but never in silence. Okay, on go, on go and babble about the books you've read."

"I'm going to rant about the books I started and didn't or couldn't complete. YOU review everything I finish!"

"And a good thing, too. Your critical judgement, your taste, your perception of..."

"The sooner you stop bitching, Geis, the sooner I'll be done. I've only got four comments to make. Okay?"

"Get on with it."

"Wait till I concentrate. I have a gly crawling on my right trtl. I can't write worth a damn while--- Ah, it's gone. Now---"

"What in hell is a trtl?"

"It's a connection between my nervous system and yours. Now---"

"So what's a gly?"

"WILL YOU SHUT UP? You're a gly, if you want to know! A super, king-sized pain in the ass!"

"Go ahead, Alter. Write! Make a fool of yourself! But remember, I'm the one who will get the blame. I'll be the one the people offended will write or call. You'll sit back there in my brain and smirk and make snide comments."

"And rightly so. I never said this 'arrangement' we have is fair, because life isn't fair. Justice is a purely human fantasy, as you should know by now."

"Yeah, do I ever!"

"Okay, now, now will you permit me to write my thoughts?"

"Sigh" "Go ahead."

"First, Greg Benford, who is becoming one of the field's premier commentators, has performed a slice and dice operation on Reactionary Utopias (another variation of idealism) which is as usual much in vogue among literary academics, social 'reformers' and those writers who share those world fantasies. Greg, in his surgery on Reactionary Utopias, which appears in the Winter, 1985 issue of FAR FRONTIERS (Edited by Jerry Pournelle and Jim Baen) points out that idealists love to construct utopias nobody (least of all themselves)

could stand to live in for long. They ignore basic truths about human nature, and pretend a lot. They say they believe violence can be diminished or eliminated by proper social organization or 'education'. They usually hate capitalism because it is the basis, the creator, of true freedom in all other areas of society.

"These Reactionary Utopias have several similarities: They all have a lack of diversity; they are static in time; they are nostalgic and anti-technology; they have a strong authority figure alive or dead; they enforce social rules by guilt and (if necessary) force.

"And they pretend some aspects of instinctual human behavior don't exist (while other, 'good' aspects are enhanced) or can be controlled by social structure (lack of freedoms) or by exile of offenders.

"And Greg centers on Ursula LeGuin as a prime example of left-wing reactionary as exemplified in her novel, THE DISPOSSESSED.

"He details his analysis and traces influences to European/Russian writers and philosophers.

"Personally, I look at Russia





today and I see a utopia--a leftist reactionary utopia--which in real life was tried and which has manifestly failed. Utopias cannot cope with, cannot endure, and cannot be sustained if they allow significant freedoms to the individual. They cannot allow science and technology to reach the people (no personal computers, no personal printing presses or copiers, no CB radios). And they cannot permit real political freedom (contrary, alternate opinion). And they hate and abhor the concept of competition (conflict, freedom); better to assign work, and allow the state to decide how much, when, where and why. The state (the social order personified) is the mother and father, and the citizens are the children. The nation is supposed to be a giant family. Reactionary Utopias are avoidances of the real world of struggle, violence, competition, war, money... They are wombs."

"And wombs are for those who cannot face reality, hm, Alter?"

"Exactly, Geis. As religion is a kind of womb for the majority of humans who cannot face the ultimate reality of death, of final extinction."

"Yeah, but Alter, isn't the need for religion an instinct? Could the human animal function without the illusion that there is an afterlife of some kind?"

"Probably not, Geis. But the impulse to religion isn't exactly an instinct. It's more a natural consequence of consciousness and intelligence. Science has become a kind of religion, now, because it has promise of actually extending human life, at least putting off death. But since death ultimately prevails, the ultimate horror--final extinction of the "I"--remains, and religion in one form or another, no matter what science proves about the falsity of religious dogma, will always exist. It helps humans get through the night."

"Do you have a religion, Alter?"

"Ahh...no, Geis. I'm immortal."

"Tuh! So, after I die, you go on to another poor soul."

"Yep. Until my tour of duty is done here on Earth. Then I'll get a hundred thousand hojka vacation and

take another assignment."

"What's a hojka?"

"A period of time equivalent to six point eight Earth years."

"Oh. Were you born...original-ly?"

"No, I was created. I'm altered to fit each species I help guide. But my essence remains the same."

"Umm...could I volunteer for this work? Could I become an Alter-Geo?"

"No, Geis. You can't get there from here. You have a keen mind--warped, twisted, kinky, but keen--which explains partly why you became aware of me in the first place, but not the type of essence the Master-mind wants. Sorry. You'll just have to die like everybody else."

"I suspected that would be the answer. Well... Are you finished offending authors and such?"

"Hell, no! I've got three more books here to complain about."

"Get on with it, then!"

"No need to be testy, Geis. It's not my fault you can't be immortal."

"Write, Alter!"

"Humans! All right. I started THE HARP OF THE GREY ROSE by Charles de Lint. He reviews a lot for you, I thought I'd look in on him..."

"He'll never review for SFR again, of course."

"Everyone isn't as small-minded, mean-spirited, and grudge-keeping as you are. But be that as it may, I started this fantasy, which has illustrations by George Barr and is published in trade paperback format by Donning at \$7.95, and I found myself immersed in a kind of juvenile about a young man named Cerin of important lineage who has been raised by a witch and who is smitten by a maid of some mystery called The Grey Rose. Naturally they fall in love."

"You were bored?"

"Well, it all seemed so formula, so predictable, so unbelievable. I can't believe in magic, not very often, anyway, and I suppose I objected to the slow start, the setting of the medieval scene, the... Anyway, I stopped at page 39. I was sleepy, I closed the book intend-

ing to read more another night, but I knew, too, it would be obligatory, duty-reading, and somehow I never opened it again. Other, more interesting novels and magazines and non-fiction books claimed my time."

"All right, you've done it to Charles. Who's next?"

"Wait till I get a firm grip on your adrenal gland...your thyroid...your hypothalamus... Okay. I didn't like--"

"I'm going to hate this, right?"

"Riiiiiight. I got bogged down in HEART OF THE COMET by Gregory Benford and David Brin. I--"

"WHAT? Who the fuck are you, Alter, to say this is a bad book? Who are you to say--"

"I didn't say anything yet, Geis! I said I got bogged down in it. Page 105, to be exact. The opening sequences of danger and death were gripping and exciting. After that the politics and "racism" of the two breeds of humans began to wear on my attention span. True-to-life writing can be a virtue if the true-to-life slow pace of most real life is avoided. The tension level lowered and I fidgeted. I'm not a patient entity, Geis. Everyday life--even in the head of Hall-ey's comet--can be slow-going."

"Alter, you were raised on pulp fiction! You can't expect--"

"I don't. I know that "quality" fiction and "literary" fiction is often slow and tedious, and I know that all readers have a duty to trudge through the slow parts to get to the high-energy, action/adventure/suspense parts. But I can't help it. I want inner turmoil and tension if I can't have outer goodies. The really fine writers of fiction keep me in their claws all the time, by force of style and talent and acute character observation and bits of business. Greg Benford plugs along, touches all the character bases, but he makes me feel he's working at it. He makes me feel guilty because I don't appreciate all the hard work."

"I can't believe you're saying these things! He wins awards! He is recognized--"

OUT IN THE OORT CLOUD A COMET HEARS THE CALL TO DUTY!



"I can't help it, Geis. The emperor is only wearing a jock strap."

"But this was a collaboration between Benford and Brin. What about--"

"I don't know who did what. But this novel reads like Greg did the work. Sorry. It reads like his work."

"I'm ruined. I'll have to eat humble pie the rest of my life. No one will believe you wrote this and that I have no control, no censor butron."

"I know. That's the cream of the jest, that we know I exist, but everybody else thinks I'm a clever literary device you use. You're trapped, Geis. You'll go to your grave protesting that Alter-made-me-do-it, and nobody will take you seriously. I love it!"

"Insidious viper! Agent of Satan! I'll have you exorcized! I'll go to church and---- Arrrgggghhh! You're forcing me to turn to religion! See what you're doing?"

"Cop out. You'll get religion in about ten more years. When you feel the cold, clammy hand of the grim reaper, then you'll cave in and turn to JEEESSUSSSSSS like all the rest."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so much about my inevitable death, Alter!"

"Just holding your nose to the gristle of reality, Geis."

"Well, my nose is bloody, and it hurts. Get on with your damned exercise in unethical reviewing."

"As you wish. My final uncompleted novel is PARA, by Vaughn Abrams, published by Seven Suns, Route 1, Box 120, Fairfield, IA 52556. Available from Seven Suns only. This is a well-produced hardcover novel, costing...well, I have misplaced the material giving the book's price---about \$15.95, I presume, since the following novel in this sage is titled ORAH, DANCER OF ETAN is so priced."

"What is it about, Alter? Why didn't you finish it?"

"It's about 347 pages, and it has a 25-page glossary of words of arcane and esoteric meaning which are in the novel and which have to be more or less defined and explained separately. I didn't finish it because I found it alienating and boring. I confess that now, several weeks later, after stopping at page 51, I can remember nothing of it."

"That's shameful!"

"It certainly is. A writer who, given 50 pages, cannot impress his story or his characters---not one!--on a reasonably alert, intelligent professional reader, is a failure, in my view. I see from the covering letter from Debbie Smith, Executive Vice-President of Seven Suns Publications, that the novel is supposed to uplift the spirit and fill the heart. Also, it is considered a holistic art experience (there are impressive paintings in

the novel showing Christlike men in robes and ancient garb, in holy settings, and decorations, in holy postures) and further the novel and saga are also described as mythic fantasy. We'll not comment on it being a masterpiece of literature. The writing is stilted and trapped in its attempt to be mythic and far-removed in time and space. It has an Indian flavor, an Eastern ambience. The ancient history the author force-feeds the reader, all the odd names of people, places, things (remember the 25-page glossary!) combine with the awkward style to glaze the eyes and switch off the mind. This is for those who Seek Enlightenment and the Meaning of Love and Life and the superiority of mysticism over the now of the eternal sorrow."

"No need to be sarcastic, Alter."

"You're right, Geis. This novel and the fine artwork are labours of love and dedication and adherence to a higher law, a higher religion, a higher spiritual plane of existence, a higher level of self-delusion."

"Cruel. You're so cruel."

"No, I'm not. If I were cruel, Geis, I'd go on another three pages about life in general and your shortcomings in particular. I'm kind and gentle and considerate. I'll stop here."

"Thank God!"

THE P.R. IMPERITIVES

A subscriber in NY sent along a piece from an unidentified newspaper in NY, a letter-to-the-editor, I believe, written by Ed Van Dyne of Elmira, NY. I think it sketches a scenario and motivation and pressure sequence which is probably a lot more true than mistaken.

"Some day historians may fill out the story of the Challenger explosion something like this:

"Putting a school teacher in space was a carefully crafted and orchestrated PR gimmick hatched in the oval office and aimed at reselling the public on the space program (read Star Wars)."

"The idea was to select a personable female who would win our hearts, lecture the nation's schools from space and, on return, tour the country in a massive "educational" campaign; a "trickle up" plan whereby school kids, teachers and ultimately parents would be imbued with SDI enthusiasm."

"Launch was scheduled just ahead of the President's State of the Union address, which was to

include self-congratulation on our conquest of space plus, I'd wager, a chat with the orbiting astronauts direct from the presidential podium."

"On the big day there was postponement due to minor glitches; ditto on Sunday and Monday. Came Tuesday, the date of the address, truly serious problems emerged, not the least sub-freezing temperatures with its known effect on the booster seals."

"Another delay was in order, but from on high came the command: "get it in the air." They did. "Farfetched? I don't think so."

"I don't either, though I'd estimate the White House staff conceived the PR use of a teacher and got the presidential okay for the plan and timing. Once the upper levels of NASA officials got the message, they risked all in order to please the president and insure the next NASA funding appropriation. This has the stink of reality---the way the government works---not the dreamy aroma of fantasy."

GOODBYE, JUDY

Judy-Lynn del Rey died February 20, 1986 from a brain hemorrhage which occurred October 16, 1985. She was 43 years old.

Judy-Lynn became the most important and successful science fiction editor in the world since she assumed editorial control of the Ballantine sf line in 1973.

She had a "feel" for what the readers wanted, and discovered many new writers. She also gave little-known writers an opportunity to become superstars, and expanded the reputations and readerships of existing well-known sf writers.

She "knew", she had that certain editorial instinct which makes for greatness.

What a tragedy it is that she has been taken from us so soon, in the prime of her life, both as an editor and as a woman.

Goodbye, Judy.



PAULETTE'S PLACE

THE BEAST OF HEAVEN

By Victor Kelleher
 Univ. of Queensland Press, 08/85, \$10.00
 SF, 205 pp., Winner 1984 Ditmar Award

REVIEWED BY PAULETTE MINARE

THE BEAST OF HEAVEN is an engrossing fable set over 100,000 years in the future. Hyld, a Sensor since his tenth year, has the ability to hear the Spirits of the Ancients who move deep in the earth making brittle, sad, fearful cries, but of course, these are really warnings, as Golt, leader of the Gatherers admonishes, since they are the benevolent protectors. They have provided their mainstay diet, the dark-glimmering mushroom called Mustool which grows wild in places sheltered from the wind in the dust-laden earth.

The Gatherers live on the heights, but here "the sweetness is fading from the earth" and the Mustool is now inadequate, as the power of the Ancients appears to be fading. The ever-present dust tastes dead as they lick it from their children's eyes after one of the periodic fierce dust storms.

The Ancients speak to Hyld in sounds and feelings, not in words; Pella, the Reader, is the keeper of the actual Words. From her carrying case she takes artifacts found in ancient excavations; she selects a transparent slip of plastic from many, that she may read with the aid of an ancient lens, to interpret the Words of the Ancients, the murmuring heard by Hyld, and so guide the unquestioning clan to live now on the plains where the soil is rich in sweetness and Mustool.

Lomar, the Tracker, at great danger to life and limb, collects the safeguards the cold-shimmering milk of the Houdin, food provided by the Ancients for their well-being. This Beast of Heaven is an enormous quadruped who reluctantly allows himself to be milked by Lomar and his aides, only if they are very careful, very quiet, very unobtrusive. The worst danger is the season when the Houdin male, in the necessity of the "must," tramples and gores them unheeding as he frenziedly mounts the female; in so doing he lovingly selects the Chosen, opening to them the Gates of Heaven.

Shen, as Priest, conducts their religious rituals. Following is one of his hymns of thanks. Do you recognize the meaning of the reference to "the sign in the sky" and the "holy shape of the Mustool?" (From pages 13 & 14.)

"Praised be the Ancients,
 for they are the fathers
 of peace;

At their departure, burning
 upon the sky the sign
 of their bounty;

A sign locked forever in the
 holy shape of the Mustool;
 The beauty of that burning
 hidden in the sweetness
 of earth and air.

Praised be the Ancients,
 for they are the enemies
 of suffering;

At their going, bequeathing
 to us their treasure,
 the Houdin; Horned One,
 two-edged sword, whose

milk sustains
 and heals us,
 Whose swift anger opens
 for us the gates
 of Heaven."

As the Gatherers traverse the plains of thick dust, they come to a huge rock dome with a narrow crack running down one edge, from which issues sweet searing heat with a red glow. The Mustool here glows much more brightly and some burst and scatter seed, so that Shen pronounces, "We have come to the seedling ground of the world," the "birthplace of all things."

They find a dust-obiterated emergency ventilator; Hyld has found "the narrow way," as written by the Ancients. Upon entering he finds skeletal remains of the Ancients, and a closed red-lit doorway marked ALERT. Pella, who can read, masters the opening of the locked doors with the words MANUAL OVERRIDE. Inside they find drawers of slips of plastic similar to the fragments Pella always carries, and a screen which magnifies the Words of Wisdom of the Ancients, explaining the debate, Project A2Z, between the two computers marked A and Z.

In addition to the story line of the Gatherers and a sub-plot of the dust-eating Houdin himself, there is the related sub-plot of the two computers who debate philosophically on good (A) versus evil (Z). They have been programmed to decide whether to liberate the "device" to humanity. Events silence their debate for 100,000 years, then is resumed when Pella activates the power switch.

Will the Gatherers die due to mushroom poisoning or because of some other contamination? Is the "device" good or evil, will it be loosed and what will occur if it is? You have definitely not guessed it all; there is much I have not touched upon and there is an unexpected ending in store. This is another excellent book you may well want for your library.

TAILCHASER'S SONG

By Tad Williams

DAW, 11/85, 333 pp., \$15.95 (Juv./adult)

REVIEWED BY PAULETTE MINARE

TAILCHASER'S SONG is a charming adventure for cat lovers of all ages. Fritti Tailchaser, a young ginger tomcat, lives on the edge of the dwellings of M'an, the Big Ones, whose origin is explained according to feline legend: Prime Nine-birds tried to usurp cat kingship but was fought and conquered by Lord Tangaloor Firefoot --

... "Firefoot caught the scruff of the Prince's neck and pulled, stretching his body and legs until they were thrice as long as a cat's are meant to be... and all his descendants went ever after on their hind legs, and do today, for M'an's forelegs have been stretched too far away to touch the ground..." (p. 11)

Tangaloor Firefoot is one of the first Masters of legend. In the beginning, Meerclat Almar in her cold Eye-light, rubbed her paws together to produce a sky-spark which grew until she threw it up into the sky where its warm light still shines by day until the hour of Unfolding Dark. The Altmother brought forth The Two, Harar Goldeneyes and his mate, Skydancer. Their three Firstborn were Viror Whitewind, superior in speed and strength; clever Tangaloor Firefoot; and jealous, murderous Hearteater who was driven underground by Firefoot where legend says he lives still, working dark deeds.

Tailchaser, who will have his Ninth Eye in a few more sun-turns, sets out on a quest to investigate the disappearance of many community folk, including his feline friend, Hushpad. He is followed by the young kitting, Pouncequick, who is often more hindrance than help on their journey to Firthstone to appeal to Queen Sunback. First-Walker Quiverclaw teaches Tailchaser a prayer to use when in danger to summon aid of any First-Walkers nearby:

"Tangaloor, fire-bright
 Flame-foot, farthest walker
 Your hunter speaks
 In need he walks
 In need, but never in fear." (P.88)

They meet a strange, raving cat called Eatbags, color hidden under caked mud, pine needles and all sorts of clutter, who accompanies them except when he goes snarling off in one of his fits. The three are attacked and kidnapped by Claw-guards of the enormous, many-tunneled Mound which shelters cruel underground cats, henchmen to the evil Hearteater, who use them as tunnel-guiding slaves.

Barely surviving many dangers from overwork, malnutrition and mistreatment, the Hunt-Brothers are taken to the Great Cavern of the Pit, on top of which rests the enormous, bloated body of the Master of All, Lord Hearteater, who reveals a sinister reason for lying as he does on top of a huge pile of tortured, dead and dying small animals.

At one point Tailchaser is attacked by the deranged Eatbags. When he remembers to recite the prayer learned earlier, amazing events occur, and the true ka returns to Eatbags, whose identity is revealed. Eventually they make a harrowing escape from the collapsing Mound and then begin an adventure-filled trek back home.

Tad Williams, a new talent, has created many memorable animal characters, both good and evil; the plot moves along at a satisfying pace from one engrossing situation to another. This is a unique fantasy epic which you will want on your shelf.



You Got No Friends In This World

IN PRAISE OF ILL-TEMPERED WHALES

It's 1:30 on the afternoon of April 15. The day every freelancer is glad he's an American citizen as blood drips from his veins into the IRS envelope. I believe that if every American had to pay taxes in cash, with nothing withheld and no hope of a tax refund, there'd be a revolution before taxes rose above 5 percent. Which is, of course, why they withhold.

April 15 is also the day after our F-111s dropped bombs on terrorist-support targets in Libya. By the time you read this, of course, you'll know what I don't: what happened to the crew of the missing jet; what the damage was in Libya; what the Libyan response was. Right now all I get on CNN is propaganda pictures from Libya of bleeding bodies and one terrifyingly insane face in a Libyan mob; congressmen grandstanding as they either "stand with our President in this bold and necessary act of self-defense" or resentfully snivel about how the President didn't tell them until the planes were already airborne and so he probably violated the War Powers Act—which is probably unconstitutional in the first place; and speculations about how our allies will react.

Even though I know even less than our poor ignorant Congressmen, some thoughts come to mind. The circuitous route our jets had to fly in order to avoid French and Spanish air space gives new meaning to the word "ally." I have the normal human discomfort of knowing that we—and, therefore, I—have caused the deaths of people who were under those bombs. I also have the equally normal community feelings of pride and vengeful satisfaction, thinking of a baby sucked out of a hole in a jet, a cripple shot and thrown over the side of a ship, and all the other attacks on members of my community.

Because I'm a storyteller, I endlessly loop backward through all the causal chains—Qaddafi may be insane, but the basic Arab resentment he exploits has merit that we have never

properly addressed. I suspect that the jingoism of Rambo is dangerous to the American soul; like the prudish preacher who admits that sex is necessary, as long as you don't enjoy it, I find myself thinking that we may be having too much fun beating up on little countries—we might start thinking we can beat *anybody*, and then lose our conscience and our self-restraint.

I'm a news junkie and a history fanatic. When something like this is going on it's hard for me to concentrate on anything else. I even go through the standard "liberal-wimp" self-questioning: What value does storytelling have at a time like this? Who cares about sci-fi when people are dying?

Fortunately, I quickly suppress those idiotic questions. People are dying all the time, that's one of the many reasons why we tell stories to invent causal chains that invest our inevitable deaths with meaning. In fact, people die in wars largely because of the stories their leaders believe—and the stories that leaders can persuade their people to believe.

JOHN KESSEL'S WHALE

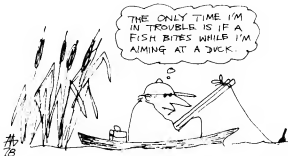
Which brings me to a not-unrelated story. A few weeks ago, John Kessel invited me to attend a reading that Rudy Rucker was giving at NC State. Some of us ended up at John's house, and the conversation wandered freely among many topics. It happened that John mentioned his love for the novel **MOBY DICK** in a tone of voice that by its fervency made a great impression on me. The conversation moved on, but I did not forget.

Driving home that night, I kept thinking how much I had come to respect and trust John's judgment. My days at Sycamore Hill, my association with him on the Nebula Rules Committee, and his remarkable talent and dedication to creating true and powerful stories, all had made their impression on me. And I realized that I trusted his opinion enough that it made me question my own long-held disdain for **MOBY DICK** as an unreadable, pretentious, self-indulgent novel.

When had I actually read **MOBY DICK**? I remember turning the pages, the heft of the book—and in that memory I am sitting in the school library of Mesa High School. Fifteen years old. Now, I was a precocious 15-year-old. I didn't have to crack a dictionary to read the book. Still, it was ridiculous that I was still making comments about a book that others considered to be the greatest novel of the 19th century, based entirely on what I was able to understand as a 15-year-old. In short, I resolved to read the book again.

A few days later, I picked up a little pocket-sized hardcover of **MOBY DICK** from the Oldard World's and began to read. And discovered a few things.

The book is funny. That had never once occurred to me at the age of 15. Melville is snide, satirical, ironic, vicious, alapstick in his humor. Those long "boring" descriptive passages are rich and rewarding in ways that I had been ill-equipped to realize as an adolescent. Now as I moved through the book, slugging my



BY ORSON SCOTT CARD 8

way through the endless dissections of the whale that I'm sure I skipped over back in high school, I began to recognize how Melville was deliberately evoking all the forms of Greek and Elizabethan tragedy. He was self-consciously creating, in a then-contemporary setting, precisely the art form that was considered the pinnacle of poetic achievement in his day. It was ambitious, even audacious of him, but to a remarkable degree he succeeded. The result was a colder kind of tension and release than is normal in fiction. The work remains austere. But brilliant and admirable. John Kessel was right, and I had been wrong.

I also recognized, as I went through the book, how many echoes of Melville I had been finding, unknowingly, in the works of some contemporaries. Science fiction, pulp magazines, lines, of course, but that is the cheapest sort of influence. Some writers had obviously benefited from their exposure to **MOBY DICK**. But many, many more had not. Melville's choices in **MOBY DICK** were appropriate to his specific purpose; those who imitate him often use Melville's techniques without reaching for the same purpose, so they are not appropriate; or without the same skill, so they simply fail.

Indeed, it occurs to me that **MOBY DICK** was itself an anachronism, partly ahead of its time, partly behind it. As the definitive novel of whaling, it was published far too soon—it has gained power in the century since he published it, for its milieu has become more distant and exotic. Yet as a Greek tragedy, it was written far too late. The tale of hubris that the Greeks believed is not the epic of our present time, nor was it of Melville's own. He reached into the dead past to find, not just the form, but the myth, under the history of his living present; the result was a work of genius, but one that belongs somewhat to all time, somewhat to none.

THE VALUE OF TALES IN THE REAL WORLD

Which brings me back (you wondered when it would happen) to the value of storytelling in a world where we drop bombs on people and then we feel awful and it makes us feel good. The storytellers provide us the myth that makes sense out of events. They tell us the cause and purpose—we are bombing because they blew up, beat up, or shot our helpless citizens; we are bombing in order to make them realize that the cost of continued terrorism is too great for them to pay.

The journalists report in the first flush of the moment, caught up in the inevitable swing of opinion: gung-ho today, doubtful and complaining tomorrow. The historians begin almost immediately trying to revise past history in order to accommodate present events, and trying to revise present events in order to make them comprehensible within the already existing framework of past history.

But we fictioneers, especially those of us who dabble in prose futurism, attempt something at once easier and more difficult. We tell stories that make sense of events in general. We don't make sense of this war

--we try to make sense of all war. Because our tales stand outside of time, we are free to shape them as we like; because our audience must receive our tales within their own quite specific lives, we set ourselves the labor of telling myths so powerful and true that they leap over the boundaries of our individual story and are received, not as Tale, but as Truth.

There are always competing myths, of course, and attempted reconciliations. I shudder to echo Marx, but *Starship Troopers* called forth *The Forever War*; then the tension between these two myths, both of which are "true," has provoked later writers to produce novels like *ENDER'S GAME*, which seeks to account for both those myths and merge them into one sensible, if paradoxical, moral whole: a tale of humanity that names us Blood-thirsty and Compassionate in a single breath.

It is a waste of time to try to determine which view is "true" in an absolute sense. What matters is that every storyteller, in every tale he tells, creates a community of believers, for whom the myth of the story is true. Each tale creates a moral universe, and all who believe it will, to one degree or another, behave in the future as if they lived in that moral universe; and the more people who come to live in that moral universe, the more the myth of the story begins to become true in the "real world."

In short, we fictioneers don't report what is, we attempt to create what will be. Not that we want specific events in our stories to become real—I, for one, would have to be a real sicko to wish for that. Rather, in our stories we set up causal patterns and moral judgments: what is good, what is bad, what is noble, what is worthwhile, what is wasteful, what is cruel; what motive justifies an act, and what acts cannot be justified at all. We create that unwittingly out of the moral universe we unquestioningly live in; our readers join us, and their moral universe is bent and twisted—or strengthened—by our own.

And now, at last, I'm back to *Moby Dick*—*Moebius Dick*, by now, with all these twists and turns. Melville succeeded in creating a tragedy in Greek terms, and it affected me as I am affected by the great Greek tragedies: I am moved, I am in awe, but ultimately I am detached from the

proud hero who brings about his own fall by daring the gods to strike him down, lacks the deep emotional resonance I feel with Shakespeare's plainly English moral universe; the English rational touch, and the American love affair with the common man, have shaped me to the degree that it is Ishmael and Queequeg, not Ahab, who occupy the center of the book. Consciously, Melville wrote the tragedy of Ahab; unconsciously, he let the chorus and the clown steal the show. It was not the form he borrowed from the distant past that moved me most, it was the truth he told about his own time, which is much nearer to my own.

Which is why I believe that deliberate, slavish imitation of old masters is a dead-end road. When we can learn useful techniques from them, then by all means let us steal, beg, or borrow what we can. But what will have value in our work is what comes out of our own life, out of our own community, and which we then put back into that community, reshaping it according to the truth we see. Even if you could write another *MOBY DICK*, you still should not do so. *MOBY DICK* has been written. Your true tale has not.

Instead of answering the dead, the storyteller speaks to the living. Yes, inevitably our stories contain echoes of countless generations of stories in the past, because it is only through stories that we create ourselves and our communities. But the duty of the storyteller is not to do homage to past practitioners of the trade. It is to speak to present audiences, in order to create future worlds. As a fairly young writer, I am not responsible for what the world is today—but I will share responsibility for what it is a generation from now.

THE INTENSE MILLIEU

What Melville did, when he wasn't being Greek, was write the definitive story of 19th-century Yankee whalers. He could write so powerfully and convincingly of this milieu, not just because he had worked on a whaling boat, not just because he'd tasted pitch in his teeth, burned his legs on hemp, and plunged his arms deep into sensuous rendered blubber, but because he knew and loved and understood the community that lived on that boat.

Much of the strength of this kind of intense milieu creation comes,



not from what the writer consciously describes, but from what he unconsciously drops into the tale. When you have been committed to a community, that community always remains with you; you still live there in your heart, no matter how long ago you might have left. And when you re-create that community in your fiction, your memory will put things into your story that no amount of deliberate world-creation could put there. The most powerful kind of milieu cannot be invented or faked.

Which is why Lucius Shepard is doing his most powerful work, right now, in his series of Central American war stories. In some ways, the war he writes about is Vietnam with stronger drugs and nastier weapons—jungle warfare, doped up soldiers who don't know what they're fighting for, and desperate civilians who are not altogether sure what side they're on. He doesn't wish the war would simply go away.

But there is more in Shepard's tales than our collective memory of Vietnam. Shepard has lived in Central America—even owns a little house in Honduras—and he knows these people. He knows the cities and the landscapes from years of being there, and the result is a natural use of the landscape that imagination and study cannot duplicate.

Cannot duplicate. Having lived two years in Brazil, I can tell within two pages of a story set in Brazil whether the writer is faking it or not. Richard Paul Russo's **FOR A PLACE LIKE THIS** (Asimov) does it. He tells the story of a man who half-knowingly commits terrible war crimes in the Amazon basin, all to earn a place on a shuttle into the haven of artificial habitats in space. Russo is a good writer, and he did all that imagination could do. But anyone who reads a story about Latin American Jungle Wars invites comparison with Lucius Shepard, just as anyone who writes about human-computer interfacing invites comparison with William Gibson. And Russo's story simply does not have the intensity of milieu that Shepard's has. It isn't just because Russo isn't as good a writer as Shepard (damn few writers are). It's because Russo doesn't know Brazil the way that Shepard knows and loves Honduras.

I say that, not just because the Portuguese is hopelessly wrong, though it is. (I repeat an old cliché made before. Any writer who wants to have Portuguese dialogue in a story set in Brazil, I'll be glad to vet a reasonable amount of the language for you, for free; don't try to fake it, because the result is always awful.) Nor is it because of surface details, like seeing ruins of houses made of "stone or wood or cement," when almost all construction on the outskirts of São Paulo, rich or poor, is plaster on red brick or Cinderblock, with endless ceramic tiles. These details, yes, but they can be overlooked just as you can overlook wrong scientific facts—the way we do with old stories that have Mercury always showing the same face to the sun.

The real problem is the same one you get in a story about scientists by someone who has never known scientists. It just doesn't feel right. People feel stilted, controlled, in-

The following abbreviations are used for the magazines and anthologies reviewed.

Amaz = Amazing Stories, Jan-May
AMJ = After Midnight [Tor] anthol.
Anlg = Analog, Jan-May
Asim = Isaac Asimov's, Jan-May
Bord = Borderland [Signet] anthol.
F&SF = Fantasy & Science Fiction, Jan-Jun
FF = Far Frontiers [Bantam Books] anthol.
Int = Interzone [St. Martin's] anthol.
Nake = Naked to the Sun [Starmont]
NCry = Night Cry, Spring-Summer
Omni = Omni, Jan-Apr
Play = Playboy, Feb, May
TZ = Twilight Zone, Feb-Apr

vented. The background keeps receding whenever you look at it. I'm giving subjective impressions, of course, but they're no less real. Most sci-fi and fantasy has exactly this problem, so it's not something that only one or two writers are lacking. We don't even notice the shallowness of the milieu until somebody like Shepard comes along and shows us what real intensity is.

Begin with his novelet **FIRE ZONE EMERALD** (Play Feb). It might be the sf elements that first catch your eye—the half-animated soldier suit that makes a supernova out of the protagonist. It might be the fantasy—the cat-goddess who may or may not be prowling the island, helping determine which possible lover she will allow to survive.

But what makes the story so utterly real is the fact that Lucius Shepard knows the place. He has cut his way through jungle. He knows, without having to consult a book or imagine what might be there or rely on clichés from half-remembered Tarzan books which themselves relied on even older clichés—he knows what you can see, and feel, and climb, and touch in such a place.

Take Shepard out of the jungle and put him in a village, and the effect is even stronger. I dare say that Shepard's **R&R** (Asim Apr) is, quite simply, the novella of the year. Eventually it will be subsumed in the novel **Shards** he's working on. But that novel comes out, it will be without question the novel of the year, as well, the novel of many years. Because to a degree impossible to achieve in most science fiction or horror, the Central American milieu is absolutely, unquestionably real.

But milieu isn't everything. And it isn't all that Shepard relies on. You want a future war story so gripping that it threatens to release your sphincter muscles for you? You'll find it in **R&R**, as enemy sappers break into the catacombs of an American underground base. You want character, epiphany, even tragedy? Try living for a while with these three American soldiers, on leave in a dead little town, where the only choices are to die, to desert, or to return to the horrors of the war. In **R&R**, Shepard gives to us in **R&R** are strong and true; you can't read the story without it changing you.

That's what we all try for, in every tale we tell—and in this story, Shepard makes it.

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW?

Am I saying we should subscribe to that old dictum, "Write what you know"? Not a chance. Imagination is vital to writing, and it's equally vital to our audience. But the imagination does have to be rooted in reality. It also has to be rooted in the writer's intense belief.

Which is why many writers do their best work when writing about their own people. It can also be a writer's most difficult work, as I've found in writing about Mormons in some recent stories. That may be why I put off writing about my own people for so long, just as Somtow Sucharitkul put off writing about his. **FIDDLING FOR WATERBUFFALOES** (Anlg Apr) is his first story about his people. That's the tale of two Thai brothers who invent Siamese dialogue for American movies, it is hilarious and wry and truthful, the best work I've seen from Sucharitkul since his stories first began appearing five or so years ago. It might have been especially difficult for him because, while the Thai are his people, he grew up abroad; **FIDDLING** may in part represent a homecoming to a place that almost never was his home. But the people are his people, and the story reflects that affection and commitment.

Shepard knows his community. Sucharitkul is committed to his; but there is a third route to achieving an intensely real story. It is neither more nor less difficult to achieve. The writer must understand human nature and human communities to such depth that he can, no matter how, know what people would do even in situations that the writer could not possibly have experienced, could not possibly sympathize with.

That is what Geoff Ryman has achieved in his unforgettable **O HAPPY DAY!** (Inte). It is a future America in which a ruling class of women are systematically exterminating men who make a profession of violence: police, soldiers, prison guard, criminals. The story takes place among homosexuals, who themselves marked for death, are kept alive in order to process the violence they are doing. Homosexuality makes them more akin to women, "safer," somehow, more removed from the violence of other men. So they herd drugged-up victims onto death trains; when the trains return, they unload the bodies and dispose of them.

In a fit of compassion—or some less noble motive—the narrator selects Royce, a young and attractive black man, who quickly realizes that he must be thought a homosexual in order to survive. He quickly upends the social order, among the death trains, and he has a close, intimate level of contact with the anonymous women who watch their every movement through ubiquitous cameras. It is a story of stark cruelty and exalting empathy, and from beginning to end it is true to the war. It's the novel of the year. **O HAPPY DAY!** is the novelet.

There are substitutes for knowing a milieu. William Gibson has been noted for the extravagance of realis-

tic detail in his cyberfutures. The technique he uses, which has a long history in sf but now seems to have been patented by those who dabble in cyberpunkery, is simple to describe, but difficult to do. The writer drops in references to dozens of unexplained but evocative details in the milieu. The best story this year that relies on that technique is certainly James Patrick Kelly's **RAT** [**F&SF** Jun]. The protagonist a sentient rat who smuggles drugs by swallowing insoluble capsules, then defecating them back in his secure house. The story itself is a marvelous rogue's tale; but equally dazzling is how he decorates the set!

For one thing, the rat is taken for granted by everyone. Not only is he treated as a citizen, with rights like a human's, but his fake passport even declares him to be the father of the human girl traveling with him—and nobody bats an eye. Of course he may be, after a fashion, but he is not wholly human—he collects priceless old books in order to tatter and gnaw, and sleeps in a bed of torn-up thousand-dollar bills.

As important as how he is treated is the world he moves through. A world of smart doors and shoot-first security systems, where the driver routinely gasses people both inside and outside the cab; where automated heat-seeking security lasers can slice you in half; robot pimps that exude pheromones and consider rats to be potential customers; wildcat toll booths set up by the best gangster; laser penlights; practical-joke stinkballs that are just under the pollution index; an elevator that informs him, "The pool is open for lap swimmers only. All environments except for the weightless rooms are currently in use; the sensory deprivation tanks will be occupied until eleven. The surrogatorium is temporarily out of female chassis; we apologize for any inconvenience."

This is all "throwaway" detail. Little of it actually affects the flow of the story. It serves the purpose of implying a much wider, more complete world than the story itself explores. The danger is that, carried too far or applied to a tale that is simply too weak, the weight of all this extraneous detail can crush the story. Kelly uses it deftly, however, so that butters a story that is already strong. The result is dazzling. **RAT** is a first-rate story—the technique can work.

It is only when compared with the intensely real milieu of Shepard's work that this method thins. It is what every theatrical costumer knows. Evil. Carl reviews mutant films for Grossman, a man who is not so much cruel as utterly unconcerned with human feeling. He likes watching the way people wiggle when they're dying; he likes making them live as if they were already dead. Carl wants very much to kill him—but he seems to be helpless, utterly under Grossman's

control.

It feels like a play with no scenery. No milieu creation at all. Just a handful of people, saying what they say, doing what they do. The tale stripped down to naked human life. It is here that the bonds between human beings become most visible. It's another way to tell stories that are powerful, truthful, and good. Who's to say that one technique is "better" than another? Ultimately what decides the value of the story for any reader is what that reader believes in, cares about, understands. Wightman can open me up like an elevator door. So can Shepard, so can Ryan, so can Kelly. I go up and down when they push the buttons, and whenever they call me, you can bet I'll come back for more.

DON'T TELL HOW WE GET THERE FROM HERE

Why do so many writers feel compelled, when developing a near-future story, to explain all the events that led from the present day to the situation of the story? It never, never works. Because it is only in retrospect that history is plausible. If you've written a story in 1932 about a future in which an Austrian madman won power in Germany and took the Rhineland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia without firing a shot, nobody would have believed it for a second. But you might have written a story in which a powerful new German Empire, stretching from the Carpathians to the Saar, was ruled by a madman. As long as you didn't specify the path that led into that unlikely future, your audience can swallow hard and believe.

Charles Sheffield's **TRADER'S BLOOD** [**Anlg** May] is a fast-moving, gripping adventure story about a Trader whose internship is a solo trip into the heart of a deadly and dangerous stronghold among the Strines, or Australians. The science, as expected, is fascinating, and the characters and communities are quite believable. If only Sheffield had broken his fingers before letting himself type in those unbelievable, tale-wrecking explanations of how the world got from here to there. Grit your teeth and read on—it's worth it.

Kim Stanley Robinson restrains himself much better in his bitterly satirical **DOWN AND OUT IN THE YEAR 2000** [**Asin** Apr]. The hero is a not-so-young man trying to keep his ailing wife alive at the desperate edge of starvation in a future Washington, D.C. Robinson did allow as how it was Gramm-Rudman-type cutbacks and poverty programs that keeps this underclass in

such desperate straits, but these references are subtle; the real story is not how awful Reaganomics is, but how human the protagonist remains, even when he loses all hope; how he does not waver in his commitment to his wife, even when he loses all grounds for hope. It is far more powerful as the story of Job than it is as a political tract.

PISTOL-PACKING MOTHERS

The more romantic and impossible a story is, the more important it is to surround it with a realistic milieu to distract the reader and keep him believing. This is particularly important with spy thrillers and detective fiction, where the wealth of details and the low-key voice convince us that the gunplay might actually happen in the real world—that the villain might actually leave the hero a half hour in which to make an escape, instead of just pushing him out of a helicopter or blasting off the top of his head.

That's what the flood of detail is for in most cyberpunk stories. In William Gibson's, at least, it usually works—take a look at **THE WINTER MARKET** in his collection **BURNING CHROME** (Arbor House). And it works at least as well in F. Paul Wilson's hard-boiled detective story **DYEBETOWN GIRL** [**FF** 4]. This is not a tongue-in-cheek pastiche, mind you. Wilson plays it straight, as a beautiful girl—a clone—hires a bigoted detective to help her find the man who promised to marry her—just as if she were a real person. There are betrayals and hideous murders, broken hearts and hearts of gold; and from beginning to end, it works.

Stephen Gallagher uses the mad killer plot in **TO DANCE BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON** [**F&SF** Jan], but writes it well enough that you don't care that it ends the way all these things end, with a victim trapped in a lonely building with the killer, stumbling over assorted corpses as she tries to get away. I've read two Gallagher stories now in which the story would be vastly improved if the fantasy element had been left out. We're mainstream and thriller writers, and when he finally realizes it, he's going to make a lot more money than any of us sci-fi writers.

Doris Egan's **TIMERIDER** (Amaz Mar) is a stunning debut—Egan's first story sale, and a fine piece of work. Cece is a Timerider, snatched from 1974 before her suicide. Without permission, she is snatched a promising young artist during a robbery of an



THE HUGO AWARD RALLY

Jeff Copeland of the Confederation Hugo Committee announced that the following works are finalists for the 1986 Hugo Awards:

SHORT STORY

Bruc Sterling **DINNER IN AUTOGRAPH**
Frederick Pohl **PERM AND PROXY**
Howard Waldrop **FLYING SAUCER ROCK AND ROLL**
William F. Wu **HOW'S RUDDY**
John Crowley **SHOW**

NOVEL

Michael Swenick & William Gibson **DOCKLIGHT**
Orson Scott Card **THE PRINCE**
Michael Bishop **A GIFT FROM THE CRATLANDERS**
Harlan Ellison **PALADIN OF THE LOST HOUR**
George R.R. Martin **POETRIES OF HIS CHILDREN**

NOVELLA

Roger Zelazny **24 VIEWS OF MT. FUJI, NY**

NOVEL

Kim Stanley Robinson **GREEN MARS**
James Tiptree, Jr. **THE ONLY BEAT THING TO DO**
Robert Silverberg **SAILING TO HYANTZANT**
C.J. Cherryh **SCAFFOLD**

NOVEL

Greg Bear **BLOOD MUSIC**
C.J. Cherryh **CODKOK'S BOG**
Orson Scott Card **EMERSON'S GAME**
Larry Niven & Jerry Rosenfield **POETRY**
David Brin **THE POSSESSOR**

irreplaceable work of art that otherwise would have been lost in a fire. The plot is intricate, the characters interesting and believable. Ultimately, it's a story of the machinations of the gods, playing with mortal lives -- told from the gods' point of view. Harry Harrison's **IN THE BEGINNING** (Amaz Way). On the other hand, begins with wonderful spy thriller, then is thrown away in a hopelessly trite and unprepared-for "twist."

LITTLE ODITIES IN THE REAL WORLD

It might seem contradictory to speak of "realistic" fantasy, but when you see it in action, it makes perfect sense. Stephen King popularized the technique among horror writers, Stephen Spielberg among film fantasists: it's an absolutely believable suburban setting, and then hideous things start happening. The more realistic the starting point, the better the story turns out to be.

Well, it's happening with high fantasy now, too. Megan Lindholm's excellent novel **WIZARD OF THE PIGBONS** is a first-rate example of how high fantasy can be presented in a realistic contemporary setting. For a shorter but no less powerful example, look at Richard Kearns's **GRAVE ANGELS** (F&SF Apr). A little boy in a Bradbury-esque town is befriended by the old black gravedigger, who always seems to know when to dig a grave, so it's ready even before it occupies up and dies. The boy becomes his apprentice, with the sweet agony of digging graves for his own loved ones—including the old black man.

The fantasy element is a function of slowed-down (or sped-up) time in two stories this year. In Malcolm McDonald's **ATTEMPTING TO RISE**, a small section of an English neighborhood is caught in a space-time anomaly--at the intersection of three shock waves from a nuclear blast, the people see the

conforming waves as slowly creeping walls, while they live days of their lives in the knowledge of certain death.

Time is even more powerfully used in Bradley Denton's outstanding **IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME** (F&SF May), in which a young man who feels responsible for a car accident finds his girlfriend died gradually slows down more and more, so that he feels hours and days and weeks passing while the clock shows that only minutes have gone by. Denton creates a set of family and community relationships that are utterly true, which makes them all the more painful.

Pat Murphy's **A FALLING STAR IS A ROCK FROM OUTER SPACE** (Asim Mar) should not have worked--it's a standard paranoid fantasy ("They're taking over the world") combined with an equally standard story of a girl who is "triflingly I had understood my daughter!"). Not surprisingly, it is Murphy's delicate style and realistic approach that make the story work. And it is the lack of realistic detail that works against **REDUCTION** (Asim Jan), which Gregory Frost and John Kessel can't quite make us care about the protagonist's vanishing world because we're not shown enough detail of his life to know who it is who's disappearing. A good ten-minute Twilight Zone blackout, but nothing more.

Contemporary fantasy works well in short stories, but period high fantasy usually does not, perhaps because familiar contemporary settings are easier to evoke in only a few pages. Two noteworthy works this year:

Tanitih Lee's **INTO GODDIT** (Asim Mar) is a high fantasy so ambitious that it asks to be compared to C.S. Lewis's **TILL WE HAVE FACES**. Lee's prose is so lush that I almost always have trouble engaging with the story for many paragraphs; but it is worth the work, as she spins a morally complex tale of a loyal soldier who thinks he is saving his master's son from a witch. Good intentions, agonizingly, Judith Tarr's **THE RESISTANCE** (Asim Apr) is a darkly funny story of a confrontation between two men competing to be royal cook for the King of Jerusalem. Predictable? Sure. But no less delightful to read.

PUNK FANTASY?

It's an idea that sounds interesting until you read the stories that result. What about a series of punk rock-n-roll stories set in a near future in which fairyland returns, just west of California. The shared-world anthology **BORDERLAND** (Signet) brings four good writers together, with generally disappointing results. The problem is that there was no particular reason for the elves to be alive. They used magic, yes, but there was nothing magical about them. The stories might as well have been science fiction, with the elves as an alien intrusion. And the constant intrusion of rock-n-roll, often sentimentally and outrageously, made the stories even more confusing. Worse yet, the anthology is billed as "young adult" fiction--but the prose is so laden with needlessly foul language that it becomes coarse and repellent--

not exactly the effect usually sought by either fantasy or fiction. The result was punk future fantasy, new genre whose time, I assure you, has not come.

And yet, despite those general comments, all of the writers and a couple of the stories are worth note. There isn't a bad writer among them--and two stories managed to transcend the weakness of the premise. Charles de Lint's **SPICE** is about a young man who almost single-handedly maintains order and safety--a self-appointed sheriff, if you will. When the show-down comes, he is not without allies, and the story is entertaining. Ellen Kushner's **CRANES** is better, however. It's a story in the book that manages to achieve the magical feel that we have come to expect from high fantasy--that is, I think, high fantasy's raison d'être. A human girl who can pass for elvish the night she is living through a Romeo-and-Juliet romance, only to find she is being used as a pawn in larger political concerns.

THROWING OUT REALISM

Much as it pains me to admit it, there are reasons to tell stories besides storytelling. That is, sometimes the form of the story is adopted in order to sweeten or add force to an idea. In this case, it is not character and event that matter, but the idea revealed by them. (Plato did it, after all, as did Nietzsche. Then again, so did Khalil Gibran.) Just because I don't write that kind of story doesn't mean I can't recognize when it's done well--but I warn you, I'm likely to prefer the "idea" story that is also a good character-and-event story. I know it isn't fair to judge one type of story by the standards of another, but then, I never said I was fair.

ALLEGORICAL RELIGION

The best of the stories this year that deal allegorically with religious ideas is William Kotzwinkle's **THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE** (Ornni Feb). Now, I know that's a hard one to point out that there is no overt religiousness in the story itself; it's about religion the way that Beckett's **WAITING FOR GODOT** is about religion--a fair comparison, except that Kotzwinkle's hero isn't waiting, he's searching, trying to find a man who keeps leaving him tantalizing messages, promises, hints, yet remains ever out of reach and out of sight. The story is, in short, about the Meaning of Life; it is also beautiful, unforgettable.

Michael Collings's poem **ONE WITH HIM** (Mars) is a grandly perverse view of Christian myth, with the flow of time reversed. The idea is captivating. Imagine that Jesus is uncrucified, takes food from the multitude, turns wine into water, and finally preaches the Sermon on the Mount. Pollack's **ANGEL BABY** (Inte) is even more excruciatingly perverse, in her account of a woman who is raped by a vicious angel in the IBM parking lot, her life transformed in a far less pleasant way than is usually shown in beatific pictures of the Annunciation.

The bitterest anti-religious allegory this year is **THE FURRY TRICE THEY PLAYED ON OLD MCDONALD'S SON** (Nrcy Sum-

mer]. George Allec Effinger and Jack C. Haldeman II show us a man who, victim of a cruel and endless joke, devotes his entire life to a meaningless effort to save his soul from a devil who never existed. If he had only outgrown his belief in the hoax and given up the meaningless ritual, his life might have been worth living.

How to deal with madness? Two writers try. In Susan Palwick's **THE SOUL AS A NEW MACHINE** [Asim Mar], a feminist puts all men and their institutions to shame by causing an oak to burst into flower. It is a lovely, bitter, effective story; and yet I found that I could not believe the public response. In Michael Bishop's **CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH THE DEATH MACHINE** [F&SF Feb], a feminist puts all men and their institutions to shame by causing a burning bush. Limbless genius Demetrio Urzaza, who devised the grand unified theory, volunteers for a one-way mission to Fomalhaut in search of potentially life-bearing planets. Near the goal, he sees a singularly turns aside, and sees the face of God. A powerful idea; yet, for me, at least, a cold, austere tale.

LIFE, IF ANY, AFTER DEATH

Oh, we do love to invent our infernos. C.J. Cherry's shared world anthology, **HEROES IN HELL**, spawned a good Gregory Benford story, **NEWTON SLEEP** [F&SF Jan]. Benford does not use the afterlife for satire; rather, it is a legitimate scientific commodity. We meet Hemingway, Newton, Guevara, Hadrian, caught up in a cycle of half-life and death. Settings like this usually fail in fiction—anything can happen, so who cares? Once you invade the famous chaotic, messy, muddy obscure could rise to prominence (in hell?) across the stage, it all gets tedious. Benford, to his credit, keeps things under control, and wrestles directly with moral ideas. His Satan, his god, his borrowed characters are never silly, and the story is a strong one.

A more plausible afterlife is revealed in Susan Palwick's **THE SOUL AS A NEW MACHINE** [Asim Mar]. A dramatic monologue, it is the words of a salesman urging a customer to have a small cybernetic device enclosed in his head. At the with last year's brilliant **THE NEIGHBOR'S WIFE**, Palwick shows herself able to put more story into twenty lines of verse than most other writers can manage in a novella.

Other storytellers came up with dazzling ideas for the afterlife, but their stories don't do much more, alas, than present the idea. Stephen Popkes's **HELICOPTER** [NCRy Spring] posits that hell is one man's mind, and all the evil souls have to live in it. William Wu's **INDIGO SHADE, ALIEN LIGHT** [Amaz Jan] takes its protagonist to the secret place where all lost things can be recovered, hoping to find the love he lost in three painful visions, he finds out that his love wasn't lost at all. It is unfortunate that a story that works in its broad strokes should be crippled in detail. Peter Raymont's **THE CROSSING** [T2 Feb] is perhaps the most successful—and depressing—of these three,

as the hero struggles to cross an endless freeway, only to discover that beyond the far wall is—nothing much.

WHERE TECHIE & ARTSY MEET

The idea story is where the high-tech "Analog" story and the literary story share one dangerous flaw in common: the author is so anxious to explore an idea that other story values can suffer. In such stories, characterization, if attempted, ends up being pointless anyway. It doesn't matter who the character was. The "characters" exist only to make a point.

Sometimes the story works anyway. John Grisham's **RANDOM VARIABLE** [Anlg Feb] is the story of a man who knows that his time machine will work—about one in a billion times. That's because the calibration has to be so fine that it runs up against the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (or Planck's Constant, or whatever—I have an M.A., not an M.S., folks). But the inventor isn't worried—he knows that the only universe he'll see is the one in which it does work. A clever idea, a clever story—Grisham doesn't waste our time with endless characterization. Richard Mueller's **BULLIVANT'S KNIFE** [F&SF Jun] is a clever story about a knife whose edge will sent one half of the thing it cuts into the past the other half into the future. The discovery of the idea is the climax of the tale, as it is in Robert F. Young's **REVOLUTION 20** [F&SF Jun], in which a time traveler arrives twenty years after Armageddon—which was not a war between good and evil, but rather a war between living and the dead. In both these tales, there is enough detail to make the characters plausible—but no more.

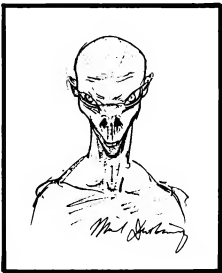
The idea in an idea story can be scientific, magical, religious, psychological, political; what makes it an idea story is that it is about discovering the idea. Usually the characters discover it, but in Kim Stanley Robinson's **A TRANSECT** [F&SF May] and Karen Joy Fowler's **WILD BOYS** [F&SF Mar], it is not the characters but the readers who discover the idea. The intellectual climax does not take place within the story at all. Both stories present two characters who are widely separated, alternating sections of each tale, demanding that the reader make connections between them. Since the connections can't be causal, they have to be thematic—each tale works ultimately as an essay. But the story value is strong: idea and character work together unusually well.

With Robinson's, the two characters are men riding trains—the one, a white businessman riding between Canada and the U.S.; the other, a black man returning home through South Africa. Robinson does not clearly show the transition between one train and the other—he deliberately startles the reader with each switch, until the two worlds merge in a wordless encounter by the lavatory, and the men are changed—or unchanged?—by having met. With Fowler's story, the separation is of time, not space; two boys who for very different but compelling reasons take refuge in a hidden, wild place.

ALIENS AND ALIENATION

It's passe to declare that stories about aliens are "really" stories about humans. And it isn't always true, either. Sometimes stories about aliens are stories about God. Gregory Benford's **OF SPACE-TIME AND THE RIVER** [Asim Feb] brings aliens to Earth—but all they care about are the relics of ancient Egypt. They carefully detach a long section of the Nile and the surrounding countryside, and lift it into space—along with inhabitants who are gradually transformed into ancient Egyptians. The idea is splendid, but the story suffers from Rama Syndrome—the human characters work and sweat, but all they do amounts to doddle. Does that mean I wanted it to be a Niven story, in which the hero penetrates to the heart of the alien installation and takes over? Come on, give me credit. I don't know what I wanted. I just know that I was left completely frustrated and dissatisfied at the end of a story that I knew was very good. I had a similar problem with Robert F. Young's **VISIONARY SHAPES** [F&SF Apr], in which a scoutship pilot finds himself suddenly transported to a desert world, with his spaceship and his weapons all turned to plastic. Benford and Young both got me all excited to find out what it all meant, and then they didn't tell.

Aliens "heal" us in two other stories. In Scott Baker's moving **SEA CHANGE** [F&SF Mar], the Tla establish themselves in the ruins of Venice—and then die. Only a little boy realizes that they are still alive, but transformed into the next stage of their life. An underwater stage, in which he resolves to join them, or is he just finding an insane, suicidal escape from his parents' collapsing marriage? In Richard Mueller's **A CREATURE OF WATER**, a musician gone deaf from an alien disease goes to another world, where he gets his music back, but at the cost of some of his humanity. Both stories are beautiful but bitter—they tell of the cost of becoming whole and new. Yet in both cases, the character chooses to pay the price. This is the theme that S.C. Sykes handled so brilliantly in **ROCKETE BABY** last year.



GETTING ALONG WITH ALIENS

Another common fictional use for aliens is to show how the tensions between human races or nations or religions can be resolved. I have little patience with pat little stories that say "We're all the same under the skin." I don't believe it, and neither does anybody else who's ever lived in a truly foreign place. We are similar, but not identical, and if that is true of human communities, how much more it should be true of aliens.

So I have a very, very hard time with stories like James Tiptree, Jr.'s, **COLLISION** [Asim May], one of her series of Rift space operas. After setting up how different the aliens are (water is the acid to which they breath CO₂; they have good reason to hate humans), everything is neatly resolved by incredible coincidence--the aliens' life support plants happen to fail just when the ships are about to do battle; digitalis just happens to have a salutary effect on an alien "heart" that pumps non-liquid blood; humans invent faster-than-light travel just in time to rescue them; and a strange telepathic effect felt nowhere else in the universe causes both races to have a powerful empathy effect. Come on, folks! Even when I was 12 this would have been too much for me!

(Things are hardly better in **GOOD-NIGHT, SWEETHEARTS** [F&S Mar], a rescue-your-long-lost-love-from-the-pirates story that is just as predictable as you think. Like jello when you take it out of the fridge, these stories seem to hold together for a while; but think about them long enough and they collapse. When I read **THE ONLY NEAT THING TO DO** last year--the first in this series--it felt refreshing. Seeing now how carelessly speculative Tiptree is in these tales, I have second thoughts about **THE ONLY NEAT THING TO DO**--and wish I had put Robinson's sincere and memorable **GREEN MARS** on my 1985 best-of-the-year list instead. Nothing like time to give perspective.)

Do you want to know how to handle human-alien differences damn near perfectly? Read **PROJECTILE WEAPONS AND WILD ALIEN WATER** (Amaz, May) by Rebecca Brown--incredibly enough, her first of story sale. Because she writes largely from the space-born aliens' point of view, Brown lets us experience Earth's commonplace events as if we had never seen them before. It is also a powerful character story. Don Sakers also gives us a fine story in his **A VOICE IN EVERY WIND** (Amaz Jan), in which a human struggles to find real contact with an alien species that only achieves sentence under certain ideal conditions. Sakers' aliens are even more unhuman than Brown's, and he is no less successful in making at least one alien character come to life.

And then there's Paul J. McAuley's powerful **THE AIRS OF EARTH** (Amaz Jan), in which the alien is human, in a bleak but moving account of a free-spacer caught up in the games of jaded immortals. (Notice that all three of these stories--**PROJECTILE WEAPONS**, **VOICE IN EVERY WIND**, and **AIRS OF EARTH**--appeared in Amazing. If you read only the standard magazines--F&S, Asimov's, and Omni--you're doing your-

self no favors. You've missed out on all three of these excellent stories, most of Harry Turtledove's work, S.C. Sykes' and Bob Buckley's excellent stories last year--and you'll miss out on more of the best sf in the future.)

UNANNOUNCED ARRIVALS

The aliens don't make a big formal announcement of their arrival on Earth, in these four light but entertaining stories. In Neil W. Hiller's delightful **PEACE FEELERS** [F&S Mar], the eyeless aliens have a terrible time invading Manhattan, since they have no concept of vision and can't understand how we all communicate with each other. Larry Tritten's **SERENDIPITY** [F&S Apr] gives us an aging hippie who earns a few bucks by finding dogs--until he finds a dog that doesn't seem quite right, a dog that belongs to a man who definitely isn't quite right, either.

Roger MacBride Allen's **PHREAK ENCOUNTER** (Amaz May) has aliens testing computer hackers to see which are worthy to communicate with them--a good story marked only by some pretty silly mistakes of logic in the set-up. W.T. Quick's satirical **GENTRIFICATION BLUES** (Amaz Mar) is much more successful, as alien settlers in suburbia quickly become more suburban than the humans. Finally, a valid reason for red-lining neighborhoods.

POSSESSION BY ALIENS

Ever since Heinlein had them riding on our necks, we've used aliens in place of devils to possess human beings. But not many times has the intent. In his gentle tale **SPECIAL EDUCATION** (Amaz Jan), Tim Sullivan shows us aliens who don't so much possess as coexist, painlessly healing the soul that they inhabit. Scott Bradfield's alien in **THE FLAME** [Amaz Int'l] is just as gentle as you could expect; where Sullivan's alien improves you, Bradfield's takes your worst vice and goads you on until really ugly things happen.

In **SNAKE EYES** (Omni Apr), by Tom Maddox, the alien is a computer installed in the brain. And it is not really possessing its victims. It is releasing their deepest, strongest story that manages to be cyber without being punk.

BECOMING SOMETHING ELSE

If you had the chance to become someone else, the person you always dreamed of being, would you take the chance? Or remain who you are? Judging by the number of diet books sold in America, the most common answer would be yes. But not in three of the strongest stories this year. Pat Cadigan's **PRETTY BOY CROSSES** [Amaz Jan], the protagonist is a Saturday Night Fever type--being Pretty is the focus of his life. He is offered a chance to be Pretty forever--if he's willing to live only as data in a computer. Terence Cuneo's **POINT ZERO** [F&S May] starts with a hero who is anything but Pretty. He is shown all his possible lives, of which the one he actually lived is the very worst; he is given a chance to "move up" to the next best life, which will bump all his other selves up one notch, too. But does our worst possible self want to be any better?

In Lew Shiner's **JEFF BECK** (Amaz Jan), the protagonist actually acquires Jeff Beck's guitar-playing ability--but learns that to play the guitar like that, you have to live only for the music. Too high a price. A story I would have liked better if he hadn't acquired the guitar-playing ability with a pill, for heaven's sake.

In her Twilight Zone prize-winning story, **THE PLANTING ROOM** [Apr], K.E. Morrison takes another slant. Her protagonist discovers that his annoying, detestable neighbor is secretly transforming people into their better selves--by planting them in soil and nurturing them into new life. A bright vision for such a dark story.

I don't know if I believe that a single important event in life can transform a person, but such is the assertion of Brian Aldiss in **THE DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED IN PHOTOGRAPHING NIX OLYMPICA** (Amaz May), a story that resembles Robinson's **GREEN MARS** more than in its coincidental setting at the great volcano on Mars. Two soldiers on Mars take time out from a stupid war to photograph the great mountain from ground level. In **THE DRIVING OF THE YEAR MAIL** (Apr), by Stephen Popkes, the young character comes of age at the crisis of a flood that comes every generation or so, forcing the whole village to climb to higher ground. And in **STORYTELLER** (Amaz Mar), Mildred Downey Broxon has an archaeologist encounter the soul of a long-dead Eskimo storyteller, who needs to complete his journey to the moon.



BOUND TOGETHER

One of our favorite romantic conceits is the idea that certain people belong together. Try as they might to break free, they are inextricably connected. Two excellent stories in the June **F&SF** explore that conceit. **HOW COLD SHE IS**, and **DUMB**, by John Barnes, is a science fiction ghost story that depends on character more than sci-fi explanations or horror—but does a good job of delivering those, too. A girl involved in a ghost-making project at a university accidentally kills herself; her sentient remnant waits until the man she loved returns to free her. A really fine story.

Even more powerful, and far more disturbing, is Judith Moffett's **SURVIVING**. The narrator was obsessed since childhood with Tarzan stories, and devoted her career as a psychologist to examining the case of Sally Barnes, a girl who lived with wild chimpanzees from age 7 to 12, and then was re-civilized. They finally meet, and after much difficulty become painfully intimate friends. Reading this tale is not fun—but it will move you, haunt you, I promise.

We all believe in love at first sight, right? Felix Gotschalk puts a twist on the old romance, though, in his biting, unadorned story **RECOMING HOME IN THE CITY** [**F&SF** May], for the lovers are only about 13½ human, and the part that is not machine, the part that loves, is now viewed as a defect.

In Robert F. Young's **COSINS** [**Amig** Apr], an astronaut returns from a generations-long voyage which was only a few years to him. He learns that his lover had not only died, she was pregnant when he left; now he falls in love with his great-granddaughter, who has virtually worshipped her voyaging ancestor since childhood. The story could have been maudlin or sappy; instead it is hard-boiled, coldly it strikes just the right note.

Harry Turtledove has done some excellent work in his "Sim" stories, set in an alternate timestream in which, instead of Indians, a pre-sentient human species inhabits the New World. In **AROUND THE SALT LICK** [**Amig** Feb], Turtledove shows a Leatherstocking and a sim denationalizing loyalty that transcends species differences.

CREATING—AND DESTROYING—CHILDREN

I usually despise meta-fiction—stories about how writers came to write their stories. There is one fervent exception in the case of Angela Carter's **THE CABINET OF EDGAR ALLAN POE** [Inte], a florid, elegant, often magical biography of Poe. In the images of his backstage upbringing, his legacy from his mother, we see the sources of all the beauty and horror of his adult writings. The story depends on the notion that we can never escape the childhood our parents give us.

The same theme is powerfully developed by Amyas Nagee's **THE RISE AND FALL OF FATHER ALICE** [**F&SF** Jan], in which the notion of city as a game cannot escape from the ever-hungry audience, even in missionary work in a distant, uncivilized jungle.

It is parents' deepest fear that their children might die; and the worst horror of all is to imagine that the parent might inadvertently be the cause. In **RED** [**NCry** Summer], Richard Christian Matheson gives an agonizing, very short expression of that fear in a story of a man whose little girl grabbed onto his car just as he was driving off to work. The story is so explicit and so painful that I can't recommend it to anyone who has children, or forgive Matheson for writing it. Rochelle Lynn Holt is almost lyrical in her powerful verse story **THE ACCIDENT** [**NCry** Summer], in which a mother finds the consequences of realizing that she is flying with her child in a swing.

CLONES

It has always seemed obvious to me that clones would be no more the same person than twins—far less so, in fact, if they are not the same age. Still, clones are a useful metaphor for self-confrontation, and they keep cropping up in some very good fiction. The club based between clones is explored in Susan Schwartz's **SURVIVOR GUILT** [**Amig** Feb], a good novel that was, unfortunately, rushed and crushed into a somewhat weak novelet. Both sides in the confrontation are trying to deal with guilt over having committed genocide.

Much stronger is John Morressy's **LAUGH CLONE LAUGH** [Play May], in which identical clones all share the same legal identity. They are different individuals, but represent only one citizen—and have only one legal name. To show this, Morressy uses numbers with names and pronouns, and as he weaves his way through a very distinctive story, he convolutes the language delightfully.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Regret is the most pathetic and irresistible of human emotions. If only I had done this, or that, everything would have been different. Personally, I think that "if only" is a causal fallacy—few events have a single proximate cause, so that changing one thing is not likely to change the course of a life, let alone of history. Still, causation is the essence of story—we have a vast catalogue of time travel stories that depend utterly on the if-only fallacy. And so I usually grit my teeth and try to enjoy the story anyway.

No teeth-gritting, however, with **CHANCE** [Amig May]. Connie Willis's moving story of regret. Instead of pointing to a single incident that led to Elizabeth's unhappy life, it was her long-sustained stubbornness, a basic flaw in herself. Now, returning with her unloving husband to the college campus where she rejected the one man she might have loved, she sees students who are duplicating her life—and her mistakes. The quiet romantic story works; and Willis does a fine job of evoking the adolescent intensity of college life.

In Jayce Carr's **DROP-OUT** [**Amig** Jan], a hard-core city artist (I'll bound to Antonio, who abandoned a once-promising city career to raise a family in a more natural setting.

They chose to part—and they were right. A good love story, married only by a need to escape the city. The haunting poem **DANGEROUS FISSION** [**Amig** Apr], Kenneth Hill looks at regret through both sides of the mirror—as if his character had made both choices, to voyage in space and stay on Earth. In parallel, both selves at once regret and glory in the choice.

Sometimes you do things that you know you will regret—regret that you can't stop your self. In Robert Charles Wilson's bittersweet **STATE OF THE ART**, Rogan loves his wife—but can't resist replacing as much of his body as possible with new, long-lasting machinery until he is no longer human. But as Margaret Atwood bound together. David S. Garnett writes of a woman who did not understand that it was looming death that made her an artist; in **STILL LIFE** [**F&SF** Mar], she chooses immortality, and so loses her work and the love of her loved. The quiet, world-weary story is weakened by the fact that her choice is based on a stupid misunderstanding—a device more useful in farce than character fiction.

DESTROYING EACH OTHER

We can be as tightly bound together in hatred as in love. In Jon Cohen's story **RUTH'S POOL** [TZ Apr], the characters have more than a passing resemblance to Ahab and Moby Dick, for Ruth is more than a little whale-like, and Billy broods about watery revenge. **MARRIAGE VOWS** [**Amig**], by Leslie Alan Horvitz, is a more substantial story, about an obsessive father who arranges a posthumous marriage for his son, who died too young.

It is Roger Zelazny's **PERMAPOST** [**Omni** Apr] that does the best job of making a case out of love. The story reeks of artifice, but by and large it does not interfere, and I heartily recommend his story of a woman whose all-consuming love for a despicable man does not end, even after he leaves her to die.

MADNESS AND OTHER PECULIARITIES

What goes on in the madman's mind? Lisa Goldstein essays an answer to that question in her strong story **DAILY VOICES** [**Amig** Apr], about a woman whose life is absolutely dominated by voices that only she can hear. Recovering her sanity requires rebellion, not therapy. W. Warren Wager's protagonist in **THE DAY OF NO JUDGMENT** [**F&SF** Apr] thinks he is mad, too, when reality starts changing in subtle ways—a historical figure, for instance, who is suddenly erased from history. Then he finds corroboration, and things start coming back into focus. Things remaining stable. A very well-written story right down to the final acts of betrayal.

WHAT CINDY SAW [Inte] is the best John Shirley story I've read, a detailed portrayal of a schizoid child's journey through the underworld, where events in the "real" world are controlled. The story works so well, particularly because Shirley does not play guessing games—we are never in doubt that the author expects us to regard what Cindy sees as real.

A.R. Morlan's **GARBAGE DAY** IN **EVERTON** [**NCry** Summer] is a truly hor-

rifying portrayal of a mother who is, with some regret, carefully working with her husband to murder their only daughter. The reader can see that she is utterly insane, with no conscience at all; yet because the tale is told from her point of view, we are forced to see that from her perspective everything she does is necessary and desirable.

R.A. Lafferty, on the other hand, can make a reader wonder if the author is insane. Lafferty is an extravagantly talented writer, whose acidly absurd comic stories get far less attention and recognition than they deserve. Because his writing falls in no recognized pigeonhole (except, perhaps, theatrical Absurdism), it seems people generally overlook him when they think of the best of science fiction--his work is almost always right on target, but it isn't the same as the other writers are aiming for. **JUNKYARD THOUGHTS** [Asim Feb] is Lafferty at his best. This parody of Holmesian detective fiction is as powerful a piece of existentialist fiction as I've ever seen. It's also funny as hell.

LOVE OF MURDER

Killing must be fun, right? Why else would so many murders be committed just for the fun of it? John Kessel's gripping story **THE MORE KESSEL** [Asim Mar] is told by a time traveler who can't die even when he tries. He tours the U.S. in a random but elegant crime spree. If you ever wanted an anti-hero, this guy is it; yet, narrating his own tale, he is a matter-of-fact, so normal, that you almost begin to accept his moral code. (John Kessel likes tight writing and loose structure; I prefer tight plotting and let the language fall however it squirts out. So though I was frustrated at his weird question-and-answer in this story, I knew from the start that they might not be. Don't look for a neat wrap-up ending; with this story, the ride is all there is.)

J.N. Williamson's **THE BOOK OF WEBSTER** [NCRy Spring] features a man and woman who torture and kill random victims for the fun of it. The writing is excellent, the story is gripping; but I do find myself resenting stories whose whole purpose seems to be to kill the point-of-view character. In **THE OBJECT OF THE ATTACK** [Inte], J.G. Ballard cleverly twists us around until we begin to approve of the actions of a clearly insane assassin. Alan Ryan goes even farther, proposing that there is a special kind of brotherhood felt by those who have killed others. In **HEAR THE WHISTLE BLOWING** [Amid], a railroad engineer whose train makes a crash that the experience, hideous as it was, is one he looks forward to repeating.

Murder must certainly be all right, if it's part of a sacrifice, right? In **THE BURN** [Amid], Joe R. Lansdale--as nice a family man as you could hope to meet--shows us a small town where men don't really come of age until they've gone on their first hunt--and it ain't for ducks. In Paul Witkov's **CATALAN** [NCRy Spring], a visitor to Guatemala finds it really easy to make friends with the natives--until he finds out just how much and why they really need him.

18 OUTSTANDING STORIES

In the first five months of 1986, I read more than 200 stories (and a smattering of poems). Here are the 18 tales that I thought were the most powerful, admirable, and valuable of the lot:

** FOR THE POWER OF THE PLAIN TALE **

Lucius Shepard **RAI** [Asim Apr]
Wayne Wightman **METAPHYSICAL GUN** [F&SF Feb]
James Patrick Kelly **RAT** [F&SF Jun]
P. Paul Wilson **DICTIONARY GIMEL** [FF 4]
Boris Rian **TIMBERLOVE** [Nove Mar]
Kim Stanley Robinson **DOWN AND OUT IN THE YEAR 2000** [Asim Apr]

** FOR THE WAY THE STORY IS WRITTEN **

Rebecca Brown **PROJECTILE WEAPONS AND WILD WATER** [Nove Mar]
R.A. Lafferty **JUNKYARD THOUGHTS** [Asim Feb]
Judith Moffett **SURVIVING** [F&SF Jun]
Harry Turtledove **AND SO TO BED** [Anlg Jan]
Sontow Sucharitkul **FINDING FOR WATERMULDORES** [Anlg Apr]
Felix Gotschalk **RESCUE MAN IN THE CITY** [F&SF May]

** FOR THE IDEA AT THE STORY'S HEART **

Geoff Ryan **O HAPPY DAI!** [Inte]
Richard Kearns **GRAVE ANGELS** [F&SF Apr]
RC Wilson **STATE OF THE ART** [F&SF Jan]
Bradford Deaton **IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME** [F&SF May]
William Kotzwinkle **THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE** [Omni Feb]
Pat Cadigan **PRETTY HOT CROSSOVER** [Asim Jan]

PENDING OFF DEATH

Most of us, though, don't approve of death--our own, or anybody else's. Cherry Wilder's **SOMETHING COMING THROUGH** [Inte] is a magical tale of a man trying to free his step-daughter and her lover from the heartless justice of a sub-Saharan empire. Juxtaposed with this is the introduction of a mind-altering leaf that has sprouted in the deserts near the site of a nuclear accident. Willard's reality like a billboard or facade, hiding an airy kingdom of dreams and light and flying, dying birds.

Ironic, the lengths we'll go to to avoid death, even though we know that it cannot be avoided. David Redd's **ON THE DECK OF THE FLYING BOB** [Inte] is an unpleasant little allegory of the citizen as a stayaway on an airship bound for self-annihilation in an effort to destroy an enemy. The stayaway is carefully planning an escape, of course. Guess whether he gets away. Death is just as relentless in Michael Collins' dramatic monologue **THE LAST PASTORAL** [Nake], the speaker is one of two men stranded on the moon without hope of rescue, since Earth has blown itself to bits.

HOLDING SOMEONE ELSE'S SOUL

What if you could be preserved, somehow; what some aspect of your soul--your memories, or even more--could be recorded, duplicated, used? In the lovely story **MEMORIES OF GWYNETH** [F&SF Feb], Jennifer Black's first of sale, the narrator arrives at a village where she is to be the new corpse-herder; but her life is all the more complicated because she has been

implanted with some of the memories of Gwyneth, the previous fishwoman in the town. She takes quiet, serious, her responsibility to the person whose last remnants of life have been entrusted to her.

Much lighter is **ME AND MY SHADOW** [F&SF Feb], by Larry Eisenberg, in which Don Foglio is a scientist who is "blocked"--he can't solve a particularly urgent problem. A similarity of his mind is required, so psychologists can discover how to unblock him; instead, the shadow simply solves the problem. Who then gets credit for the discovery?

STRANGE CREATURES

It takes a kind of greatness for a person to look at a strange creature and see an aspect of himself. In **AND SO TO BED** [Anlg Jan], a remarkable tour-de-force, Harry Turtledove takes on the greatest diarist in the English language, Samuel Pepys. Pepys has been observing the behavior of a sim brought from the New World to London, and gradually reaches the conclusion that sims, while not human, are very nearly so, and he begins to reach for the Theory of Evolution.

Evolution figures also in **THE RAMSEY GRIFPHORN** [Asim May], Ianthe Radford's debut story. A skeptical journalist goes to investigate a supposed living archeopteryx, found in a Bible-belt household. The fundamentalist father wants to use the creature to disprove evolution, but the journalist and the man's son find another explanation in this fine and gentle tale.

In Blackwood Beach, a bit of witchcraft is perfectly natural, but one keeps it under control. Shad Stilwell makes the mistake of freeing a strange man caught in an old willow, and the final result is an up to an unavoidable collision between two powerful forces--which, to my delight, are not good and evil. Written with charm and humor, **YELLOWING BOWERS** [NCRy Summer], by Paul Di Filippo, is a first-rate light fantasy.

What, though, if the strange creature is yourself? Robley Wilson's **CELEBRITY** [TG Apr] is a gorgeous story of a woman who swallowed caries--or, rather, had a knack for getting canaries to fly gladly down her throat. Like Kotzwinkle's **THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE**, it is a fable, a lifetime compressed into a short and simple tale.

JUSTICE

In my own fiction I have often explored moral complexities--what do you do when the only good choice is one that, by all you believe in, is immoral? Tom Ligon tackles such a situation in **THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLACK VOID** [Anlg Jan], which is, to my mind, the "Analog story" at its best. The protagonist is trying to save a world of warring pacifists from a cruel and militant religious fanatic to do it, he has to commit the unspeakable crime of murder. When the deed is done, even though no one knows of his guilt, he still punishes himself, because he has to with his own conscience. In **THE KNIGHT STRANGER**, in **PARADISE** [F&SF Apr] deals with a similar discovery of guilt, by a poet who

immediately stopped writing, except for a single poem that tells the secret shame of Paradise. A masterful moral tale.

Justice is a little more crude in revenge stories. Michael Shea manages to wring some humor from the way a murdered man gets even with his killers in **UNCLE TUGGS** [F&SF May]. Paul di Filippo's **SKINWISTER** [F&SF Mar] tells of a telekinetic surgeon who can't cope with his patients' desire to heal them, he has to share their suffering, and because he can't do that, he allowed a patient to die. Now someone wants to make him pay for the crime. A good story, whose only flaw is structural.

Robert Bloch uses the standard plot device of the biter getting bit, but his writing is so good that in **THE YODGOSLAVES** [NCR Spring] the old device still works. I wish other horror writers would learn from the piercing clarity of Bloch's writing--the story is all the stronger because at the end you know exactly what happened. None of the vagueness that haunts so many horror writers' work.

It's nice to pretend that the universe will eventually make sense, but to pay for their crimes, but since it doesn't, we call it "poetic" justice. That's why Lynn Marron's **WE CALL THEM FLOWERS** [F&SF Feb] is so satisfying. A selfish daughter of social climbers is devoted to oneupmanship, and so keeps draining her parents to pay for "flowers"--alien crystalline implants that cause decorative growths on her flesh.

HUNOR

Call me dour, but I just don't enjoy silly humor as much as the kind of humor that grows out of believable characters, irony, subtlety. I like humor with a bite. Which is why I tend to have more sympathy with satire than silliness.

SILLY STUFF

Still, there are some silly stories this year that I've enjoyed. Harry Turtledove's **THE BARBECUE, THE MOVIE, AND OTHER UNFORTUNATELY NOT SO RELEVANT MATERIAL** [Anlg Mar] has what I usually regard as the kiss of death: a long title that is trying to sound funny itself. And the story depends entirely on a completely unbelievable case of mistaken identity--but it's still fun. Nowhere near as much fun, though, as Turtledove's **EYES OF ARGOS** [Anlg Jan], which uses humor and irony along with a compelling straight story. **ARGOS** is a prequel to Turtledove's series of Byzantine alternate history stories, in which the hero is "captured" by savages in order to discover what magic they're using to let them see things so far away. It turns out to be a telescope, of course; Turtledove may actually make a career out of treating gunpowder, lenses, and the printing press as high-tech hard sf.

More silly but fun stories: George Alec Efinger's **MADDERN BIRNBAUM AT THE EARTH'S CORE** [F&SF Feb], which is exactly what it sounds like; Ron Goulart's **EX-CHANKLESON** [F&SF May], about a shape-changing interstellar

detective; and Ian Stewart's **MISSING LINK** [Anlg Jan], a Billy the Goat story, is probably the funniest of the lot.

Susan MacTabert's first sale is **SEE YOU** [Anlg May], which is an intriguing little story of an elf whose whole career is based on his ability to watch rooms for hours without being noticed. Robert Frazier's **REVISITING HOLLYWOOD** [NCR Summer] consists of three pieces about the wild age of classic horror movie monsters; while Anita Krantz Schlank's **SPECIAL DELIVERY** [NCR Summer] is a truly sick joke about a man who keeps getting human body parts in the mail.

SATIRE

Ah, but give me the stories that take a bite out of somebody. Mindless bureaucracy is attacked by three very funny stories: Alexander Jaklovsky's **HAPPY ARE THE GODS OF MAYHEM** [Anlg Mar], John Barnes's **286** [Anlg Mar], and Robert Sheckley's **ROBOTVENDOR REX** [Omni Feb]. Michael Blumlein's **TISSUE ABLATION AND VARIANT REGENERATION** [Inte] is meant to be a funny attack on Ronald Reagan--describing his vivisection in clinical language; fortunately, despite good writing, it will be forgotten along with other stupid and mean-spirited ad hominem attacks like **MACBIRD**.

HALF A YEAR ALREADY GONE

What I can't believe is that by April 15 almost half the year's short fiction has already appeared. The Nebula banquet is still more than a week away; the Hugo ballot was only just announced; it seems like a horrible case of jet lag, to be this deep in 1986 fiction while other people are still so interested in all that old stuff from last year.

Well, I'm still interested, too, I guess, and not just in the fate of my own work that weaseled its way onto the ballots. I've been trying to figure out what good those awards do. Certainly nobody in his right mind thinks that the winning works are certifiably the absolute best of the year in their category. I would guess that in most years the award-winners are the first choice of a good deal fewer than half the voters.

But in the long run, the list of winners is not important to the field as a whole. Having winners helps us the way the Oscars have helped the once-despised movie industry. The persistence of the Nebula and to a degree, the Hugos, promotes the field as a whole, showing that we sci-fi writers are artists who try to achieve quality, not just sales. We writers, when we're in touch with reality, know that our stories are not in competition with each other. When it comes to art, there is no limit to the number of high-quality works that can co-exist. (Selfish space is another question, of course. I'm keenly aware of what goes on between Roughs and Chalk on the bookstore racks.)

The existence of awards--and, for that matter, criticism like this column--does keep all more aware of

what is good and new and interesting and admirable. Nobody's going to agree with all my favorites, any more than I agree with all that ends up on the award ballots. But even in disagreeing with me, you would have to do some reading, evaluating, thinking about what makes good things good, bad things bad. That is where we all gain from the process.

When a work I didn't enjoy gets a lot of attention from other people, I am forced to try to understand what they saw in it. It is intellectually lazy and dishonest to assume that those who liked a work you hated are all either snobs or fools, though I do hear a good deal of both those empty-headed viewpoints. And when a work I thought was wonderful gets ignored, well, I write this column, to try to draw some attention to overlooked writers and undervalued work. To some degree--a significant one, I believe--awards and criticism have a good influence on writers and readers alike, either by affirming or annoying them. Especially by annoying them.

So if I have irritated any of you with my words in this issue, then all my hard work ain't been in vain for nothing.

GEIS NOTES

Word from the worldcon that SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW is on the final Hugo ballot this year, as a simprozine. LOCUS will win that Hugo again. But I am also a finalist for the Best Fan Writer Hugo, and I have hopes for that.

George Scithers, John Betancourt and Darrell Schweitzer have formed the Owslick Literary Agency. Address: 4426 Larchwood, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Phone: (215) 382-5415.

Darrell Schweitzer reports he is the book reviewer for Charles Ryan's new prozine, **ABORIGINAL SF**. The first deadline for the magazine is June 1.

For those who follow the writing career of "Richard Elliott" (Richard Geis & Elton Elliott): Our third novel will be published by Fawcett Gold Medal in September. It is titled **THE MASTER FILE**. Ever wonder what it would be like to have a computer in your brain? This novel is about that experience...and others.

Interview with Tim Powers & J.B. Reynolds

By Andy Watson and J.B. Reynolds

James P. Blaylock

Tape transcription by J.B. Reynolds
Edited & introduced by Andy Watson

There is a sense of community among writers. It is a world-wide, most palpable in its components of national, regional, genre or medium. The value of this community is the same for any community and that is the quality of mutual support. Tim Powers and Jim Blaylock have that, and more, in microcosm.

Each has published three widely available novels in the SF/Fantasy field. Powers won the Philip K. Dick award for his second, *THE ANUBIS GATES*. His others, not counting two early appearances in Roger Elwood's Laser Series, were *THE DRAWING OF THE DARK* and the recently released *DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE*. All three could be called adventure stories, or historical science fiction (though *DEVIANT'S PALACE* would be future-historical SF). Blaylock's first two books, *THE ELFIN SHIP* and *THE DISAPPEARING DMARF*, were both characterized by warmth and humanity rarely encountered among modern fantastic fiction, which tends towards sword and sorcery, blood and guts, syrupy love and sordid lust. His latest novel, *THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN*, is difficult to describe. It is charming, witty, wildly unpredictable and almost believable. It is also a fantasy, but one set among the familiar trappings of American suburbia.

Blaylock writes full time, and teaches courses in composition and creative writing at Pullerton Community College and Cal State Pullerton, on a part-time basis. Powers has recently resigned his daytime retail sales job to devote all his working hours to his writing, as well.

Both of these men were close friends of Philip K. Dick during the last years of Phil's life. They continue to be friends of K.W. Jeter, though now removed by thousands of miles and international borders. It was apparent from speaking with them that their community, while having been reduced by half, (first through Phil's death and then through Jeter's relocation), is still sound, still viable, still providing the basis for the optimism they both bring to their work.

The interview took place in Tim's apartment in Santa Ana, California, on Sunday afternoon, June 23, 1985. More of this same interview, (not included here, focussing on their recollections of Philip K. Dick), appeared in the Newsletter of the Philip K. Dick Society, Issue #8. For information about the Society, write to: PKDS, POB #611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442.

POWERS: The best thing a writer can get is a good editor. Blaylock and I have both been real lucky in that. And that's luck. You hope your book falls into the hands of a good editor. We've both had Lester Del Rey and Beth Meacham. Both of them are very good at saying, "Now, this is a nice little book. I'm not knocking this little book you've made; but we're going to fold it through the fourth dimension and come out with a good book. Okay?" They do, and you help, and it is a much better book at the end of the process. Then you look at the original version with embarrassment and loathing...

BLAYLOCK: In fact, when I sent *THE ELFIN SHIP* to Lester Del Rey in what I thought was its finished form, I found out that half of it had to go into the dumpster. And it deserved to go into the dumpster, there's no doubt about it. For *THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN*, on the other hand, I do not think there were more than two paragraphs worth of changes suggested by the editor. There I was fortunate enough to get Beth Meacham, who was willing to take a chance on a very bizarre proposal, and who has since then made any number

of astute suggestions and comments about my writing. So, I'll say that a good editor certainly is of vastly more importance than anything else aside from the writer.

REYNOLDS: You both agree that extra hands on the material have improved it?

BLAYLOCK: Extra good hands, certainly.

POWERS: If they're not jerks.

BLAYLOCK: Although, certainly, it's the writer who did it. If it weren't for the writer there wouldn't be any book, and if it weren't for the writers there wouldn't be any editors. Consequently, editors are secondary. But thank God for good editors.

POWERS: I don't know where I'd be without an editor. Lester Del Rey made *DRAWING OF THE DARK* what it was. It was half the length, and nothing much happened in the second half of the book in its original state. *THE ANUBIS GATES* was an eighth again as long, in its original version, as it is now, and it was entirely fat, that eighth. None of it was essential. If somebody today was to say, "We could publish it the way you originally wrote it if you want, Powers," I'd give them ten dollars to forget the idea.

REYNOLDS: Do you actively seek out feedback now, from these people?

POWERS: We don't have to seek it out.

REYNOLDS: But, for personal or for professional reasons, do you feel you like to?

BLAYLOCK: I seek it out.

POWERS: They give it to you. They're not going to not give it to us!

BLAYLOCK: I mailed off the first sixty pages of the book I'm working on right now to Lester and Judy Lynn Del Rey, and said, "Tell me what you think." They wrote back and said, "This is fine."

REYNOLDS: This is of your own volition? Not because they said, "Send us the first sixty pages," Jim?

BLAYLOCK: No no no. It was entirely my own volition. I wanted to know, first, whether it was so horrible that they were likely to reject it wholesale in the end, which I'd like to know right now. Number two, whether or not they mightn't see some way to make it even better than it was, even though it is okay now. As it turned out, they made no suggestions whatsoever, which is fine with me. I take that to mean that it's okay now and I've at least satisfied my curiosity on these points. Yeah, I seek it out. I look for it.

WATSON: Is Del Rey harder to please than other publishers, then?



POWERS: He buys good books. I think he sometimes turns down good books, but he always does buy good books. Evidently he told a friend of ours about THE ANURUS GATES, "I don't care what awards that book wins, it is not a good book!" Well, you know, it's not a Del Rey book. It's not one of the books Del Rey buys. When he rejected it, he wrote a detailed letter saying why he didn't want it. So I fixed it up according to his objections before Ace saw it.

WATSON: Did you re-submit it to him after you got it back?

POWERS: No. He didn't want to see it again. (Laughter) He made that clear. But he did, as I say, make a lot of suggestions that did demonstrably improve the book.

WATSON: Well, that's wonderful. You don't just get a Xeroxed rejection slip.

POWERS: Oh, not ever. My god, you're lucky if you get less than ten pages from him!

BLAYLOCK: He sent me four pages to reject a twelve-page outline. And as Tim pointed out, it wasn't just, "Here's ways you can fix it up." It's "Here's four pages of reasons that this is a worthless outline from end to end, and has to be scrapped." Very convincing. Very.

REYNOLDS: Do you rely, then, just on him, on his professional ear? Or do you have a secret sounding board, a relative or friend, that you've trusted for opinions?

BLAYLOCK: I force Powers to read things first. I think Lester Del Rey would probably heartily dislike the sort of book THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN is. If he would read it, and I doubt that he would ever undertake it.

POWERS: He'd hate it. He'd hate it, and it's your best book by a mile!

BLAYLOCK: It is my best book by a mile, and he wouldn't like it at all because it's not the sort of book that he likes. That's very understandable, because there are certain books that I don't like at all, and that I wouldn't undertake to read either. And if I were an editor, I suppose I wouldn't undertake to buy them.

WATSON: The whole idea of sequels and presequels and whatnot -- was that your own? Or is it something the publisher prompted you to do? Did you first mail compel you to write more on it?

BLAYLOCK: All three, to a degree. A lot of fan mail I've gotten suggests or hopes that I'll write sequels. However, that wouldn't compel me to write a sequel if I wanted to do something else. When I finished THE DISAPPEARING DWARF, I dreamed up an outline for the third Jonathan King novel. Lester Del Rey didn't like it and rejected it. By the time I'd begun to think of another possible outline, I'd sold the proposal for THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN and was off on nine months of working on it. Then, not too long back, Lester himself suggested that it was high time there was some sort of sequel. At the World Science Fiction Convention in Anaheim, Lester and Judy Lynn took my wife and I out to lunch, and Lester presented me with an envelope containing a rough synopsis of the first few chapters of the novel. He said, "Blaylock, your outlines generally stink. Here's the beginning of an

outline that doesn't. Why don't you finish it up?" And I did! He made a couple of suggestions to get the show on the road, and his suggestions amounted to a bit more than the ideas that I had in the previous outline, the one I'd submitted to him. After working through it a couple of times, getting it all turned around, it actually came out very, very nice. I'm working on it right now. I am about half done. It takes place in Balumia, the same place the second book took place in. Right now, it's called THE ROAD TO BALUMIA. That was Lester Del Rey's title, and it'll probably stick. It's a sequel to the first two, and doesn't involve Jonathan King or the professor. (The professor) makes kind of a cameo appearance at the beginning, as a young man, but Escargot is the main character.

WATSON: He seems to be the thread tying things together. You build him up as something of a folk hero long before he ever makes his first appearance.

BLAYLOCK: Yeah, Dooley mentions him a few times.

WATSON: This is refreshing, a very positive writer/publisher interaction story. Normally, it's the opposite extreme, where the writer wants to do what he wants to do, and the publisher won't let him.

BLAYLOCK: Anybody who's worked with Lester -- I think anybody -- knows that he doesn't pull any punches. You send him an outline or a book or whatever it might happen to be, saying, "Here's my child, the child of my imagination." He writes back and says, "This is quite possibly the worst thing I've ever read in any language. And I know eight of them." (Laughter) I'm always tempted to think, "Oh, come on. Lester's gone nuts." Then two or three days later I look at it again and it's diminished a little. I look at it again, and pretty soon I'm thinking, "How in the world did I ever think this was worth sending to anybody?" He changes it all, and it turns out he's done me a great favor. Lester has been a very positive influence on this whole business.

My first two Del Rey novels were almost entirely my own. There might have been one or two little elements, like Escargot's invisible cloak. I think it was my agent (Andrew Wylie) who thought up the invisible cloak gag.

WATSON: It seems like there are some possibilities for a sequel at the end of DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE.

TRY PRUNES BRAN FLAKES,
AND LOTS OF WATER.

AND NEXT TIME YOU EAT
A WRITER, MAKE SURE
HE ISN'T BLOCKED!



POWERS: Generally I'm against sequels. If a publisher was to say, "We've had tremendous interest in this and we'll be able to write you a significantly bigger check for a sequel than for a fresh book," I might revise my opinion. I could do a prequel. That would be entertaining enough to do. But in general, by the time I'm finished with a book I'm sick of the characters, the world, the conflicts, the interest, everything I hate them. I figure, "To hell with these guys." I could have Rivas wander away with that dumb thing around his neck, but it'd make me tired before I even started.

WATSON: Your heroes are unusual, Brian Duffy, Brendan Doyle, Gregorio Rivas. They're all reluctant heroes, all busily feeling sorry for themselves about something that went wrong once before. They don't want to be disturbed. They want to just go away, fade off, and they're dragged kicking and screaming every step of the way. They fight it and fight it and fight it, all the way through the book. I can see where you'd become tired of them as individuals, because of the way you've constructed them. You have to drag them from one step to the next to the next.

POWERS: The big thing in each of their lives has happened by the time I'm done with the book. After this they're going to build a nation, or an outdoor bar-b-q, and I just can't picture writing a book about that.

REYNOLDS: You're not writing archetypic characters, who are inclined towards adventure.

POWERS: No, I can't imagine a protagonist like that. The ads for books you see in LOCUS, for example, where they say, "The gods brought Ding-dong the Barbarian a mission! His mission was to clean out the Mole People from Kansas!..."

BLAYLOCK: Nothing quite that good, actually.

POWERS: "Yessir!" he says to the gods. "I'll get right on it!" And I think, "Why? Why didn't he change his name and leave the state?" I would have. Screw the Mole People! You deal with them. I don't care about them. I can't get a character into a conflict except reluctantly. Who goes into it joyfully? "I'm going to get the shit kicked out of me!" Who wakes up in the morning and figures that's their goal for the day? What everybody wants to do every morning is sit the back porch and drink beer. Count the crows that go by. Read a book. If you wind up having a crisis, like you

try to drive to work and you run out of gas. It's in spite of your efforts. Even Travis McGee and Conan didn't mean to get into every adventure they got into. It's in spite of themselves. They're just trying to go get a hamburger somewhere and these things happen on the way.

WATSON: In your books, though, their reluctance isn't just a hurdle to get over.

POWERS: They keep wanting to go back to the back porch.

WATSON: Even ninety percent of the way through the book!

POWERS: They still think, "Can't I please go back to my back porch?"

REYNOLDS: So is that how you see heroes in general, as characters produced by situations?

POWERS: Goaded to it. In fact, not quite that simply. The thing I had most in mind when I wrote DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE was CASABLANCA. Humphrey Bogart has got a nice job. He's got this bar he runs and he doesn't need to mess with anybody; he just sits around and gets drunk every night. It's a perfect life. Yes, in his past he used to have these passionate ethical concerns that took him into risky arenas, but he's outgrown that. Then in comes old Ilsa Lund, the girlfriend from the past, and he discovers that, no, he cannot comfortably abandon all his ethical convictions. He's got to once again pull on the old shorts and dive in. That is the only way I can picture a guy doing anything heroic. Reluctantly. This may be because I myself am really lazy. All I want to do is sit on the back porch and read John D. MacDonald all day.

REYNOLDS: Then what do you feel makes a heroic character?

POWERS: A guy who is forced into some risky behavior because of some ethical thing he can't find any way around, though he should try first to find some way around it. Being left with courage after trying every variation of cowardice. (Laughter) I don't understand Hillary... What was his name? Climbed...?

REYNOLDS: Sir Edmund Hillary.

POWERS: Yeah. I don't understand, "Because it was there." I don't understand the guy who decides to save the world. I mean if it was me, I'd say, "Let the next guy that drives up Main Street save the world." I don't understand selfless, instinctive heroism. And since I have such a lack of sympathy for it, (and I like to think I'm the average reader), I don't think the average reader is going to have much sympathy for it. Frank and Joe Hardy don't make it.

BLAYLOCK: I don't know; I'm not sure that the average reader doesn't wish he were in a world full of selfless heroes, thereby...

WATSON: Perhaps they like to think of themselves as selfless heroes. Whether or not they are is not important.

POWERS: But Christ! Pick a book. Who is it?

REYNOLDS: A Jules Verne character is somewhat heroic; he takes the world upon his shoulders to do it his way...

POWERS: He just wants to run his submarine or his blimp, or whatever he has,

WATSON: What about you, Jim? How do you feel about heroes?

BLAYLOCK: The problem I have with the books Powers is talking about is that they're all so humorless, I suppose.

POWERS: Yes.

BLAYLOCK: Any heroes that I come across (and have any sympathy for), have to be fallible types.

REYNOLDS: Less Arthurian?

BLAYLOCK: Much less Arthurian, in the sense that I think you mean.

POWERS: Perfection.

BLAYLOCK: Honorable perfection.

POWERS: He's got that crown on.

BLAYLOCK: He talks in some funny language that no human being ever spoke on Earth.

POWERS: He's got no time to go out for beer.

BLAYLOCK: That sort of thing bothers me. I do, however, buy into the reality of people who behave heroically because it seems to be the right thing to do. It's just that they'd better wear funny hats and forget to zip their pants up and stuff like that on the way, or else I don't believe in them at all. I believe they'll set out to do it, but whether they actually accomplish it with the style with which it's accomplished in those epic Fantasy types of books, I'm not sure.

POWERS: I think everybody figures that if you're walking by a riverbank and there's an old lady drowning, you should go save her. But you'd pay a hundred dollars not to be walking along that riverbank.

BLAYLOCK: You would go save her.

POWERS: But cursing. (Laughter)

BLAYLOCK: 'Cause it's wrecking your clothes and everything...

POWERS: ...And you got somewhere to be. The people who routinely do these things, such as Philip Marlowe and James Bond -- and I don't mean the movie James Bond, I mean Ian Fleming's -- do them in almost the same way a priest would go to a house with bubonic plague. When they signed up with the job, they signed up for it all.

REYNOLDS: "Fred, you knew the job was dangerous when you took it."



POWERS: It's all part of it. With Bond, it's a sort of old school Eton loyalty to England, and with Marlowe it's some sort of innate ethic he came with. Though you believe it. You do believe it. "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not..." Etc., etc.

REYNOLDS: I'm thinking now of THE BLUE DAHLIA. Even though his wife was a complete bitch, somebody shot her, and it's his wife, and by gum, he's gonna find out who done it.

POWERS: How about (imitating Bogart), "When a guy's partner gets shot, he's got to do something about it." You respect that. You recognize it and respect it. Since I don't share it, though, I can't write about it.

WATSON: You're referring to a sense of obligation.

POWERS: Yeah. You got to. You don't want to. James Bond never wants to go to these terrible things. Neither does McGee or Philip Marlowe. They have to. If they didn't, their whole life....

WATSON: But the act of being a spy is a voluntary act. You said before, they have taken the job so they get everything that comes with it. But they didn't have to take the job. And when they said, "Yes, I'll be a spy," they knew what they were saying yes to. You can always back it up to a previous incident. Unless they were forced to become a spy rather than take some other job.

POWERS: No, I think they chose it. But as a reader, I do mistrust selfless heroes who instinctively say, "I've got a nice house here, a good job, beer in the refrigerator, but I'm going to give all that up and go save the world from these lizards."

BLAYLOCK: The characters should have a bit more motivation than that.

POWERS: This is what you pay taxes for! For some military gang to take care of the lizards that are arriving in space ships!

REYNOLDS: Have you read THE PLAGUE, by Albert Camus?

POWERS: No, I haven't.

BLAYLOCK: I have.

POWERS: Camus puzzles me.

REYNOLDS: There's Dr. Rieux, who just happens to live in this town where the plague happens to strike. Yet he won't leave. Because he's a doctor and people are suffering and dying, though there's nothing he can do, (there's no antidote, there's no way even to ease the suffering), he stays.

BLAYLOCK: That's easy to believe, though. There are doctors who do that all the time.

REYNOLDS: Well, does that seem heroic to you? Or fatalistic? Or just futile?

BLAYLOCK: It strikes me as heroic.

POWERS: It certainly sounds like it.

BLAYLOCK: He's so full of compassion and all sorts of other nifty things, that you develop a great admiration for him as the story goes on.

REYNOLDS: So that could be a criterion for a heroic character, his compassion.

POWERS: Not mine. They don't do it for no compassion in my books. They do it because they're going to die if they do

not. Or something.

POWERS: There's that penalty hanging over their head all the time. It's interesting, though, that in DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE, the main thing hanging over Rivas' head is the thought of trying to live with himself afterwards, if he gives up.

POWERS: His definition of himself forces him to do that. Though he finally ditched, I think, that definition of himself.

REYNOLDS: But the force is a moral and ethical force, not a physical force.

POWERS: ANUBIS GATES is interesting, because all he (Brendan Doyle) does is run from everything! He doesn't even choose to do anything, he just meets monsters coming and runs that way!

WATSON: That happens in real life too.

BLAYLOCK: The problem with a character whose motivation is just selfless, committing himself to carrying the world on his shoulders, or saving the world, or whatever, the problem with that guy is that he is so utterly uninteresting. If that's the substance of his character...

POWERS: He eats Grapenuts for breakfast.

BLAYLOCK: ...then the hell with him. Who cares?

REYNOLDS: You've got him in one sentence right there. You don't need to know anything more about him.

BLAYLOCK: You don't. So (as a writer) you want to start doing funny things to him, to turn him into somebody you're interested in reading about. Make his motivation a little bit more complicated, a little bit more interesting. Making him a little bit more complicated and interesting turns out not to yield that selfless sword-wielding travesty.

REYNOLDS: Related to that, then, do you find that the characters you come up with to be ones that you find particularly interesting? Or are they ones that you think the readers will find interesting?

BLAYLOCK: They interest me. I take it on faith that they're readers, there are looking for the same thing. Being a reader myself, a long-time bookworm, I'm convinced that the books I've been reading have stayed in print all these years because other people are reading them too.

POWERS: You have to assume you're representative of the readership in general out there.

BLAYLOCK: I think you have to write, as somebody once said, "for an audience of one," if you're gonna do it honestly.

POWERS: Who're you gonna write for? Your landlord?

REYNOLDS: Lester Del Rey! (Laughter)

BLAYLOCK: If it were assumed that I'd written THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN with a particular reader in mind, it would be neat to hear somebody describe that reader, where he lives, and what his name is. I'd like to meet him.

WATSON: It's interesting that you have the character "William Ashbless" in that book (THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN), and you even make reference to Brendan Doyle in passing. Of course, both of those characters are also in (Tim Powers' novel) THE ANUBIS GATES. We looked in the



ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA --

REYNOLDS: Carefully! Thoroughly!

BLAYLOCK: Well, you probably had the wrong issue. (Laughter)

POWERS: You were looking under his pen name. You have to look under his real name.

BLAYLOCK: Actually, William Ashbless was a creation of Powers and I together, one day. April what? Can't remember now.

POWERS: I think it was March 10th, 1974.

BLAYLOCK: Is this the place to reveal all this? In this interview? Right here? (Long silence while Blaylock exchanges meaningful glances with Powers)

POWERS: Can't hurt.

BLAYLOCK: We wrote a bunch of poetry under the pen name of William Ashbless. Powers would write a line, then I'd write a line, back and forth. We've got these books and heaps of it. It was printed in the school newspaper and made quite a splash. They thought we were brilliant young poets.

POWERS: They thought Ashbless was a brilliant young poet.

BLAYLOCK: A brilliant young poet. They didn't know Powers and Blaylock existed. Once we'd invented him and had a lot of fun with him in college, any time either one of us would need a name for a poet, especially for kind of a wild and loony poet, we'd use Ashbless. He showed up in my 1972 version of this book, too. I had him killed in the end. They found him in a gutter in Santa Monica. He simply was transferred to this. I was working on this at the same time Tim was working on THE ANUBIS GATES.

POWERS: I sent THE ANUBIS GATES to Ace and Beth Meacham bought it. Then Blaylock sends THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN. She says, "What is this? What's this Ashbless?" And I said, "Oh, Christ. You mean Blaylock had Ashbless in his book?" (Laughter)

BLAYLOCK: I sent her a letter that said, "Powers' book is in the works. I can

easily change the name of this character. Call him Joe Schmo or something like that." She wrote back and said, "No, you're helping to keep him. I want to meet with this."

POWERS: We didn't mean anything. Each of us happened to use the name Ashbless, as we had many times before.

BLAYLOCK: In fact, Ashbless is mentioned in both of these two books. (His novels, THE ELFIN SHIP and THE DISAPPEARING DNARF) They quote Ashbless.

POWERS: And he's mentioned in my two Laser books.

BLAYLOCK: Anyway, she said, "In fact, I can't cut him out of there." She said, "If you see room to glorify it a little bit, and build it up, go ahead and do it." It was then that it became very clear that Ashbless not only doesn't die at the end of THE ANUBIS GATES but there's some indication that this cleansing that he gets when he goes through the Anubis Gates may well make it conceivable that he'd appear in Los Angeles a hundred and some years later.

WATSON: I thought that you guys had gotten together and brainstormed on it a little bit, because it does work out.

POWERS: Luck.

BLAYLOCK: It was luck. Oh, we did a little brainstorming later, I suppose. In fact, I added references to Brendan Doyle and so forth.

POWERS: After Beth said, "Keep it," we got together and I told him some names to put in, because if it's going to be the same character we wanted to have at least a gesture toward continuity.

BLAYLOCK: He wasn't entirely the same guy. That was pretty apparent. But then we started to think, "Gee whiz, he's two hundred years old by that time! So how the hell would he be the same guy?"

POWERS: Our own LAZARUS LONG (the Heinlein character).

WATSON: Are you going to use him again?

POWERS: Oh, yeah.

BLAYLOCK: Quite likely he'll appear again.

POWERS: At this point, it'd be kind of a shame to leave him out.

BLAYLOCK: I mention him again in HOMINIDUS, (soon to be published by Ace), in several places. His works are mentioned, but he doesn't appear as a character.

POWERS: And I quote from him in DEVIANT'S PALACE.

WATSON: Yes. And you quoted from him in the first two books. So you actually have a body of poetry by this...

BLAYLOCK: Yeah, and good stuff.

POWERS: Though when we quote from him we make it up as we go. We're not actually quoting from something written before.

WATSON: There was no poem "Twelve Hours of The Night?"

POWERS: No, not until I chose to make it up. Though Ashbless does have a considerable backlog of stuff.

BLAYLOCK: Some of it's pretty damn quotable. Line by line anyway. Taken all together it's a little rough.

POWERS: I like to think that we'll some

time write a story -- God knows which of us or both of us -- having Ashbless be, for example, the alternate driver of Kesey's Magic Bus, when Neal Cassidy was too tired to drive. God knows where he might show up.

BLAYLOCK: We've got him living through a hundred plus years of history, so he can filter in any time he chooses.

WATSON: Speaking of history, how do you approach writing your historical fiction? Do you start out with actual historical events and then weave a plot around them, or do you start out with the plot and find a historical niche for it?

POWERS: I'll find the historical niche first. Always. In the case of THE ANUBIS GATES it (came from my being) a Byron freak. I was reading Byron's letters and I found a letter that said something like, (I quoted it in the book), "God damndest thing! Back in 1810 come people said they saw me in London. Several people saw me. One even followed me and saw me sign "Lord Byron" on a petition expressing concern for the health of the king. But at the time these guys were seeing this fake Lord Byron in London, I was sick with a terrible fever in Turkey!" I thought, "Well, hell! I could have some fun with this!" That eventually led to everything else that happened. THE ANUBIS GATES. In fact, I only had him go to Egypt because I happened to have a couple of good descriptions of that big massacre of the Mameluke Beys in 1811, and I only had him flash back to 1684 because I happened to have a very good description of that in the winter. I even had some pictures to look at. I thought, "You're jumping around in time anyway, why not have him go back to 1684? You can use all this stuff." I think I tied it in well enough. DRAWING OF THE DARK was a project Jeter, Ray Nelson and I were doing for Robert, historical complications of King Arthur being reborn throughout history.

WATSON: There's some resemblance to (K.W. Jeter's) MORLOCK NIGHT.

POWERS: Yes. Uncomfortable resemblance. They were both originally part of a series. We each got to pick times in history we wanted to write about, and I really wanted to write about the siege of Malta, where Suleiman the Magnificent, in his old age, tried to take Malta and failed, but Ray Nelson had grabbed a date too close to that, so I couldn't have it. I was sulking, and Jeter said, "Well, Powers, look. Earlier in his career, Suleiman tried to take Vienna. Why don't you write about that?" And I said, "Well Christ, what happened there? I don't know nothing about Vienna!" He says, "No? It was real good. Why don't you just take it on faith. Come on. It was a great battle, really. You'll be able to write a good book about it." So I said, "Oh, okay." That was obviously not chosen because of the period. Now I'm currently doing one set in 1718 in the Caribbean, with Blackbeard and the Fountain of Youth and voodoo and sword fights and sea battles, mostly because I wanted to write about pirates and Blackbeard and the Fountain of Youth and all that, and then try to tie a plot that would fit comfortably into it.

WATSON: What's the working title?

POWERS: ON STRANGER TIDES. Which I think I'm going to insist on.

BLAYLOCK: Good title.

POWERS: I looked up an Ashbless quote for it to be a quote from. (Laughter) I'm not calling him Ashbless; I'm calling him Guillermo Ciniza Bendiga, which means William Ash Bless.

WATSON: Do you do a lot of research first, before you start working?

POWERS: I don't even know what the plot is before I do the research.

WATSON: What stage are you in right now?

POWERS: I'm re-writing it. Every book I do, I write once to what I think is perfection and mail it to the editor. They send it back and say, "Idiot! Does this really look like a publishable book to you?" I re-read it and think, "Oh, my gawd. No, you're right! Let me fix it!" So I spend another year re-writing it. At the moment I'm about half through the re-write.

WATSON: You've already gone through the research phase.

POWERS: Yeah. though every time they send it back and say, "It's junk, Powers. Re-do it." I re-do the research, because by that time I've forgotten everything.

WATSON: Hemingway once said, "Writing is the hardest work there is."

BLAYLOCK: I think of 'Hemingway was yanking somebody around.

REYNOLDS: After three or four bottles of Pernod it's not so easy... (laughter)

BLAYLOCK: I did about six years of construction cleanup, and it took a little more out of me to do that than it does to write, to tell you the truth.

WATSON: He used to claim that he would agonize over every word, that there were two or three times as many words crossed out on his original manuscripts as there were words that were left in.

BLAYLOCK: You know, it's hard to argue with Hemingway, because he did get it right.

POWERS: In ANUBIS GATES the street names, the names of the bars on the streets, are more often accurate than not. Rat's Castle, the place Horriban hung out in, is real. There was a place called that, with a hospital in the basement. Captain Copenhagen Jack, the Beggar-master of Pye Street was real. The huge dinners they used to have were evidently accurate, according to the sources I read. More is historically accurate than anyone will ever notice, which I figure will cover the bits where I've

bluffed and had no idea of whether it was correct or not. I won't call attention to those bits, because I turned out to be wrong, because I don't want to needlessly turn people on to that. I tend to research the hell out of them before I do it.

REYNOLDS: Why is that? Do you feel it gives your stuff a certain verisimilitude? Or is it because it gives you more material from which you can extract ideas?

POWERS: It gives you more material. A number of people in Blaylock's THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN are real -- Roycroft Squires, and Phil Mays the bug collector who has a butterfly the size of a heron pinned to his wall with an epee. I do not think he actually has that, but there is really a Roy Squires and a Phil Mays...

BLAYLOCK: They creep in. There's room for them. Roy Squires actually lives in Glendale, pretty much where I put him, and Phil Mays lives in Tarzana.

POWERS: As a matter of fact, Squires has appeared in a Fritz Leiber novel, and... I forgot what other stuff.

BLAYLOCK: There's a Powers novel dedicated to him.

POWERS: That's right.

BLAYLOCK: I don't think I include anybody who I'm not pretty sure has a sense of humor, because I don't want anybody to take offense at some looney thing that I say. I get a grin on my face and say, "I think I'll slide a second soul in here; I put a pair of funny pants on him and make him say something idiotic so he'll get mad later on."

WATSON: Is there a real-life model for William Hastings?

BLAYLOCK: He always struck me as an attempt to paint a picture of a lunatic, of the lunatic that I would become. (Laughter)

WATSON: He's just bottled up inside you.

BLAYLOCK: Yeah. He's in there. Two or three of the characters in combination are pretty much just me, as far as I understand myself. In fact, he's not based on anybody in reality so much as on Tristram Shandy's father in (Laurence Sterne's classic novel) TRISTRAM SHANDY. I was real impressed with his father, and Uncle Toby, and all those characters. He grew out of that, a combination of things.

WATSON: I heard you mention Acres of Books over dinner. I gather that that really is a place. How much else in THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN is real?

BLAYLOCK: I wrote it with a map in my hand, so all the streets work. There are some streets up around Glendale, specifically in Roycroft Squires' neighborhood.

WATSON: Rexroth.

BLAYLOCK: And Patchen. Those street names I made up just because I thought it'd be a little thick to give Squires' address in the novel.

WATSON: That's his actual name?

BLAYLOCK: Yeah, Roy Squires. I didn't change it. Well, I did. His name isn't Roycroft. I called him Roycroft Squires just because of my interest in arts and crafts furniture, and a group called the Roycroffers. I think that kind of irritated him just a bit, because they were kind of nutty people. Squires is not nutty in any way, shape or form.



DAVID L. TRANSDO

WATSON: He's not portrayed that way in the book either. He's a sober influence.

BLAYLOCK: He's solid.

POMERS: He's the most levelheaded of them all.

WATSON: He's the guy with the boat. Does the real Roy have a boat?

BLAYLOCK: No, he has no boat. I thought I'd give him a tugboat.

WATSON: Did you actually take into account the actual sewer pipe system?

BLAYLOCK: No, I just sort of figured out that they existed, and I'd read a little bit about them.

WATSON: You could say pretty much what you want about them, because who's to say you're wrong?

BLAYLOCK: That's right. Although I remember pointed out that I had the flow of water from east to west (or something) in Glendale. Actually, it runs west to east (or whatever) because the hills are over there. He caught me on that one.

REYNOLDS: Well, you'll have to correct that in the next edition then.

BLAYLOCK: I will. Only I can't now remember exactly what screwup I made! It might be north to south...

POMERS: Just make it different.

BLAYLOCK: There is an Acres of Books, and Egg Heaven does exist in Long Beach.

WATSON: Rusty's Cantina?

BLAYLOCK: Yeah.

WATSON: Have you investigated tide pools off Palos Verdes?

BLAYLOCK: Yeah, I've hit a few tide pools in my time.

WATSON: Real deep ones?

BLAYLOCK: You know, I'm not going to say I haven't. I'm not going to say that there's any that I consider to be bottomless, but there are some out there along the California coast that are pretty remarkable -- for their depth, and for how odd it becomes if the water's very very clear, and they're very very deep. The only reason you can't see to the bottom is that maybe they've gone around a couple of little bends and there's some seaweed in the way, and every once in a while it blows back, and whom! You can see way down there.

POMERS: And we know a lady who swears that you can sail a submarine under Los Angeles.

BLAYLOCK: As far back as I said. That is true, according to some accounts. (Laughter)

WATSON: What about the Hudson Wasp?

BLAYLOCK: That's just a car I've always wanted to own. I've always thought they were interesting looking cars. Big balloons. When the guy who drew Flash Gordon wanted to draw a picture of the car that Martians would land in if they landed in a car, he would have drawn a Hudson Wasp. I've always admired that car. Also the Hudson Wasp is connected to the goofy perspective on science in the book. It's a ludicrous machine. All machines in the book are ludicrous, and there's ludicrous in every book I write. As far as I know, they're all ludicrous in reality too.

WATSON: You put that into Hastings'

mouth. You have him say, "Let a literary



man loose on science and you'll go somewhere. I think that's the spirit of a lot of the references to science in all three of your books. You had the Professor spouting all kinds of nonsense about The Five Standard Shapes, Bestial Sciences, The Third Law Of Stasis And Termination, All Things Seek Like Things, and so on. These sound very legitimate.

BLAYLOCK: I just made that stuff up. There's some stuff in the DIGGING LEVIATHAN that I didn't make up. The sound sensor stuff, and the anti-gravity jars are all valid physics... (Laughter)... although what happens to it, of course, is a little bit invalid.

REYNOLDS: How do you react to critical review?

BLAYLOCK: Well, obviously, being as vain as I am, I'd like everybody to like my books, and when they don't like my books, it seems to a degree like a personal affront. Consequently, I tend to be insulted. I take offense with it. But I haven't had enough of that to really become too offended. It hasn't happened that often. People complained that my first book was too nice. Too sugar-coated, which struck me as being a little bit idiotic. Obviously, it's a comment by a reviewer who didn't like that sort of thing. I have a number of friends who I simply wouldn't advise to read my first two novels. I've never asked K.W. (Jeter) to read my first two novels. Even though I think he's read them just because of...

WATSON: Loyalty.

BLAYLOCK: Loyalty, yeah. But they are not at all the sort of thing that he would normally like to read.

POMERS: He said they stink.

BLAYLOCK: Of course he did! (Laughter) I don't think I'd have as much of a problem recommending THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN, which isn't quite as nice in that way. But they were what they were intended to be, and if somebody doesn't like what they were intended to be, then that's his to work out.

POMERS: To hell with him.

BLAYLOCK: There's no accounting for taste, I suppose.

WATSON: If somebody doesn't like science fiction there's no point in them reviewing a science fiction book. If somebody doesn't like nice fantasy books, then they shouldn't read your books. Or shouldn't review them, anyway. Those aren't any grounds for criticism, nor is it what people who read critics are looking for.

BLAYLOCK: It can be a bit misleading.

REYNOLDS: Do you sit down and write back to them?

BLAYLOCK: No, not at all!

WATSON: What about you, Tim? How do you feel about critics?

POMERS: I think literary criticism is like having a toy train set in your basement. I hope you get fun out of it, but don't expect everybody outside to care. And don't expect it to apply to anything outside. If they like my books, I think very highly of them and want to buy them a drink. If they don't like them I think they're morons and I hope I drive by some time when they've got a flat tire and no spare, so I can keep driving.

WATSON: Have you had a lot of flack?

POMERS: Hmm. I think, like Blaylock, I've been lucky. My reviews have been more good than bad. The bad ones, well, you tell yourself, "This is a jerk. He missed the point. This isn't the guy I was writing for. This guy wants to read James Joyce and me. What's he wasting his time with science fiction for?" It doesn't bother me to get a bad review. I think it would bother me if I got a string of them.

WATSON: You might think there was something to it at that point.

POMERS: You'd start to think maybe you had better pay attention. So far, that has not been the case.

WATSON: Do you read critical stuff yourself? Of other people's work?

POMERS: I read a lot of book reviews, just to kind of get an idea of who I want to read. You get reviewers you trust, or trust always to be wrong, which can be as valuable. For criticism I mostly just read older stuff; Hemingway and A.E. Houseman might be the most recent. Well, no -- Star Robinson's book on Phil Dick. I read that and thought it was very good.

REYNOLDS: Do you believe that literary criticism is a viable means of creative expression, or is it just a way of some pissant to grind his axes for a living?

POMERS: Much of it strikes me as being every bit as valuable as a guy who makes a replica of the Chartres Cathedral out of toothpicks. Takes a lot of effort, it ain't by any means easy, and it's intricate and nice to look at, but absolutely unimportant.

REYNOLDS: Do you believe that people who produce judgment on your work affect its sales? Affect its popularity?

BLAYLOCK: Inasmuch as the most of the judgment has been positive, I would hope that that's the case, although most of the periodicals that those reviews have appeared in haven't had a wide enough circulation to have accomplished very much, I'm sure. If you were panned in the Washington Post or the L.A. Times it could have a bad effect.

POMERS: I got panned in an important newspaper by a guy who hadn't read the book.

BLAYLOCK: That's always fascinating.

POMERS: He told me he hadn't read it.

WATSON: But did he read in the review that he hadn't read it?

POWERS: No.

WATSON: Which book was that?

POWERS: That was *DEVIANT'S PALACE*.

WATSON: That's too bad.

BLAYLOCK: One of the things the critical commentary on *THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN* has had in common is that they've all complained about the picture on the cover! Not about the art work, which is really very nice.

POWERS: I like it.

BLAYLOCK: I wish I had the original, to tell you the truth. The beautiful painting, but it is reminiscent of a juvenile. You know, there's a kid who's obviously thirteen or fourteen years old on this wacky machine, a machine which doesn't appear in the book, actually. And it's not a juvenile. The protagonist is not fifteen years old, the protagonist is about fifty-seven or something like that. Consequently, it's a misleading picture. I'd say there have been three reviewers so far who've said pointblank that they "passed the book by," several times in the bookstore before it was finally recommended by somebody else. When they got it they found out they'd been passing it by for the wrong reason.

REYNOLDS: Does that make you mad?

BLAYLOCK: Well... I've seen worse covers. I think it makes me happy that it's a nice cover. In fact...

POWERS: At least they finally found it.

BLAYLOCK: ...I called Ace and I said, "Gee whiz, how you...? I haven't seen the cover yet. I understand there's a cover proof out." And they said, "Oh, you'll love the cover. It's very cute." I thought, "OH GOD!" (Laughter) "My career is over!" (Laughter) Then they said, "No no no, it's not cute that way, it's like a cartoon."

REYNOLDS: Cute with a C, not a K. (Laughter)

BLAYLOCK: Either way, it went from bad to worse. When I actually saw it and discovered that it was such an admirably painted picture, I thought, "Gee. That is not at all bad." I like the idea that the title is sort of weighty. *THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN*, and here's this idiotic machine falling into a hole that's about three feet deep! (Laughter) I love that. That quality is very nice.

REYNOLDS: Does the reference to (Edgar Rice) Burroughs on the cover --

I wish it wasn't there. It bothers me. "Pellicular or Bust!" It didn't appear any place in the story. That's not the sort of thing I would ever say.

It is interesting, though, that there is a kid on the machine on the cover and there are young people in the book playing important roles. The title of *THE DISAPPEARING DWARF* and *THE ELFIN SHIP*, as well. You give significant roles to boys.

In fact, in the original incarnation of the book, the one that I started writing in 1972 or so, it bounced around between the narrator at, let's say, seventy years old, and the narrator at about fourteen years old. Six pages of seventy years old living in post-cataclysm Berkeley, (the cataclysm actually occurs, the one they're threatened with

in *THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN*), and then you get twenty pages of L.A., Glendale, Pasadena, and all the funny stuff that's going on there. Back and forth. It was structured interestingly, but since it had no plot, the structure didn't make much sense. When I wrote this, both characters were in fact saved, and the fourteen-year-old character became Jim Hastings and the seventy-year-old character was trimmed down to become William Hastings, essentially. So I got to keep both ends.

This next area/question ties in with young boys making significant contributions to the advancement of your books' plots. Their mothers are either non-existent or have succumbed to some disease or whatever. There are no women in your books at all. Do you do that intentionally? If so, what's your reason? You have one character who talks about how all love poems are just so much waste paper and ink, and that poets really should have been writing poems to coffee because that was a worthwhile sentiment.

I'm probably not much on love myself. I'm not that romantic, in that way.

This is going to look terrible in print, Blaylock.

This is going to look terrible. I've been married for thirteen years and I'm not a misogynist; I'm probably more traditional along those lines than most people. I've submitted outlines to editors, outlines featuring females, if not protagonists, at least strong female characters, and to tell you the truth, I simply haven't sold any of them yet. I'm not trying to say I didn't sell them because they had strong woman characters. The current book that I'm writing for Del Rey (*THE ROAD TO BALUNNA*) has a strong woman character. *HOMUNCULUS* (his new novel to be published by Ace) has three women in it who play quite a bit more of a part than any women in any other story I've written. It just happens that my first three novels were three novels that didn't include women, even though at the same time that I was writing those three novels I was producing outlines, proposals, which did. That's part of the story.

Part of the story is that I didn't see a place to put a woman in these without giving one up to satisfy, to pander to, an audience who would demand one these days. There was a time I think, when an audience demanded very little besides a good story. Now audiences are supposed to be demanding that this, that, and the other thing be included. If they aren't included, (they think) the book isn't as good as it should be. It has always offended me that people would

complain about books on the basis of what wasn't in them rather than on the basis of what was in them.

Finally, I am pretty well convinced, as a long time reader of literature, that men don't do women characters nearly as well as women do women characters, and women don't do men characters nearly as well as men do; and I think it's because they don't understand each other quite as well as they might. I look around at great novels written by men, and there don't seem to be too many women in them. Dickens didn't do good women. Mark Twain didn't do good women. Melville didn't do good women. Women in Dickens, in particular, are horrible! Especially compared to male characters like Pickwick or Nickleby or Pip.

WATSON: So it was a question of not wanting to try to do something that you felt you couldn't do well?

BLAYLOCK: Right, exactly. I was attempting to do it, but I couldn't. Given the subject matter, given the tone of the books, given where I thought the books were going, I thought that I would sacrifice a certain amount of quality if I undertook to plug a woman character into a novel where I had no inclination to put a woman character.

WATSON: Are there female Link Men? Are there female Elves?

BLAYLOCK: Boy, that's a rough one. It's something I hadn't given too much thought to. I suppose so. They've got to reproduce. So I suppose there are. And to tell you the truth, it wouldn't at all surprise me if some of them appeared in a novel in the future.

WATSON: There isn't any love interest either. How could they make a movie out of one of these books without a love interest? It would never get past anybody's desk.

BLAYLOCK: You know, I look around at the books that do have love interests in them who? John D. MacDonald, to pick on one of Powers' favorite writers. Wonderful writer. You just can't put the book down, right? You're cranking through it, everything's working, plot so slick that you can't believe that he thought of it, every scene rendered flawlessly. Then you get to the love interest and you want to throw up!

POWERS: Too often, yeah.

BLAYLOCK: Ugh! Get rid of these four pages! Rip 'em out! Throw 'em away! Then you start reading again and it takes off. I don't know how many men there are who write those sorts of odious love scenes.

WATSON: Even without the love scenes, though, sometimes it's a motivating force in a plot.

BLAYLOCK: It could be. I would suppose that there's an exhibit of some love between William Hastings and his dead wife, or between Jim and his dead mother (in *THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN*).

POWERS: In fact, it's what did Hastings in.

WATSON: The bottle caps were wonderful symbols.

POWERS: Yes! Wasn't that good?

WATSON: Very touching. What a simple thing, but it was...

BLAYLOCK: That's much truer to my under-



standing of romantic love than anything having to do with sex. But then, it's all a little bit beside the point, because, as I say, I'm writing books right now involving woman characters, and I've got books planned for the future. I don't want to slit my own throat by saying that I can't do it, or I don't want to do it. I'm certain that I can. One last thing. Of the books that my writing is to some extent modeled on, if I were to pick out the two or three or four which most inspired me, none of them had any significant female characters that I can see. That might have had a direct effect. THE DIGGING LEVIATHAN would not have been written had I not consciously tried to write something like TRISTRAM SHANDY. There were no female characters in TRISTRAM SHANDY who amounted to anything at all. It was Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim and his father, Tristram and Doctor Slop and all of these men who came around. There's maids who came in and out, but they came in and out of my books too. Consequently, there simply weren't any women. The only thing that I could have done to supply some would have been to think to myself, "Gee, the public these days demands women, because after all, we're conscious of the Women's Movement and that sort of thing. I'd better plug some in." That would have been as false and offensive as could be.

WATSON: I agree. What other authors have you been influenced by? That you emulate?

BLAYLOCK: (Robert Louis) Stevenson, as is apparent, I suppose, to anyone who's read my books. And a writer that nobody reads except me, the world when I've read reads except me, a guy named William Gerhardt, one of the five great authors of the twentieth century. He wrote one of the five greatest books of the twentieth century (which nobody ever reads), THE POLYGLOTS. (Gerhardt was) booted out of Russia by the Bolsheviks. He wandered around Europe and settled in England, like Nabokov and certain others of that ilk.

WATSON: Isn't it humbling? People like Nabokov, and Joseph Conrad, and English isn't even their native language!

BLAYLOCK: And they do it so well you can stand it! So Gerhardt has a big influence. And I love Nabokov, especially his short stories. They've had vast influence on my own short story writing, and on some of the things that I wish I could do with prose. Charles Dickens has been a big influence.

WATSON: That's a hefty handful.

BLAYLOCK: Joyce Cary was for a while. I'm not as influenced by Joyce Cary any more. Mark Twain, certainly.

REYNOLDS: Do you feel you're more influenced by books you read by inclination or from your colleague past?

BLAYLOCK: I suppose it would be mostly by inclination. My most enjoyable Dickens was what I read after I was out. In school I had to read HARD TIMES and OLIVER TWIST and a couple of other books that really are indifferent Dickens, as far as I can see. Of course, you don't read Stevenson at all, because Stevenson is a popular writer and you hate them. The two books that compelled me to write fantasy were (Kenneth Grahame's) THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS and an old Palmer Co. Brownies and Goblins book (exact title forgotten). The illustrations of the

Brownies and Goblins and creatures from the books were pretty much exactly as I described them.

WATSON: Where do the Link Men come from?

BLAYLOCK: They came from a postcard that I saw, an illustration that Arthur Rackham had done of something, probably a fairy. The caption was something like, "Link Men With Spring Cherries on Their Backs," and there's little bitty men going on the road. One had what looked like a bundle over his back. I saw a little bitty twig with two cherries hanging from it, which would have made me, I suppose, about as big as your finger. But I inflated them just a bit. I hadn't any idea what "Link Men" meant. Lester Del Rey one time offered a couple of suggestions of where they might have come from. His explanation is something I've entirely forgotten, but it seemed real sensible at the time. He says a lot of things that seem real sensible, and that was one of them.

WATSON: What about you, Tim?

POWERS: Influences?

WATSON: Influences, authors you admire...

POWERS: Well, let's see. As far as authors that I think I consciously emulate, Fritz Lieber, Kingsley Amis, and Rameau Sabatini along those lines. I would include Phil Dick, MacDonald, James Branch Cabell, Lovecraft...

REYNOLDS: Chandler?

POWERS: Chandler, sure. Clark Ashton Smith.

WATSON: Did you always want to be a writer? How did you get your start?

BLAYLOCK: It never occurred to me that I might be a writer until about the time I got married. I guess that's 1972. At that point it seemed to be that maybe I had some talent along those lines. Although, I've written for sport since as far back as I can remember, which is just about the fourth grade, I suppose. It gets fuzzy before that. And I wrote finished stories in the fifth grade and sixth grade that, actually, weren't altogether bad. They had plots, and characters, and so forth -- they started at point A and ended at point Z. But I do not think it was until I got married, right around the time I met Powers, in fact, that I invented the idea that I might be a writer some day; I started making things out, writing a little bit more heavily.

WATSON: Were you still in school?

AND FOR A SERIOUS ROACH PROBLEM WE HAVE THE "ROACH CONVENTION HOTEL!"



MOST OF THEM NEVER GET PAST REGISTRATION.

BLAYLOCK: Oh, yeah, in '72 I would have been a senior in college, and I had a couple of years of graduate school. Everything I wrote then was unpublished, though. There was nothing very publishable until after I graduated. The first thing I published professionally was a short story. What led to that was that I was lucky enough to have thought of an idea that was a story, and not the sort of wild, plotless extravaganza I'd written before.

REYNOLDS: Is that why you consider them to be unpublishable? Because they're plotless? No structure?

BLAYLOCK: Yeah.

POWERS: That was a great story, too. "Red Planet."

WATSON: Where did it show up?

BLAYLOCK: UNEARTH (#3, Summer 1977).

In fact, in an issue that included the first short stories of William Gibson and Somtow Sucharitkul, as well.

WATSON: So it's a real collector's item.

POWERS: Yeah, a heavy issue.

BLAYLOCK: A neat issue, actually. My first stories were too -- I was in love with words at the time, and the faster I could use them and the wilder I used them, the happier I was. I never really bothered to worry much about structure, getting to the end of something, or making sure that the story, by the time it was done, amounted to some sort of quantifiable thing. Consequently, they were unpublishable. Deservedly so, even though they had good bits.

WATSON: So you eventually wrote a story that was publishable, and then it was published. No funny anecdotes, or anything like that?

BLAYLOCK: Well, I got twenty dollars for it. I suppose that's pretty funny. (Laughter) That's about it. Since then, I'm happy that every short story, save one, that I've written has been published, which is nice. Not that I've published a lot of short stories, but I'm batting about .900, I guess.

REYNOLDS: How many of those you write do you submit?

BLAYLOCK: All of them.

POWERS: That's good.

REYNOLDS: One wasn't published; I rewrote it and sold it. It'll be coming out in October, in fact, in an anthology (IMAGINARY LANDS, edited by Robin McKinley). And another wasn't published for very good reason. Namely, it wasn't very good. I expanded it into this novel that's going to be published as HO-

MINICULUS. So even though it wasn't published, I put it to use.

WATSON: HOMINICULUS?

BLAYLOCK: HOMINICULUS is my fourth novel. It's the same crowd of characters who were in a short story I wrote for an anthology edited by Terry Windling entitled, ELSEWHERE III. I sold a story to Terry entitled, "The Idol's Eye," my version of the whole IDOL'S Eye idea. A couple of guys in Burma or Java or someplace, come upon this idol and gouge out its ruby eye. Twenty years later the idol shows up in London, Kicks the hell out of both of them. In my story, it never gets around to kicking the hell out of them 'cause sit around and drink Scotch instead. (Laughter) Also, I wrote a story for UN-EARTH (#6, Spring 1978) involving the same characters. And last week sold a novella to Asimov's, involving the same characters. Serial characters.

WATSON: And they make their full length-and-breadth appearance in HOMINICULUS?

BLAYLOCK: Yeah.

WATSON: How about you, Tim? How did you get your start; did you always want to be a writer?

POWERS: Ever since I ever read books I wanted to be a writer. In 1965, when I was thirteen, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION had two editorials about how to submit short stories, professionally. I instantly wrote a short story and submitted it. It was rejected. It's amazing that they even got it back to me, because I didn't even know that you should put your name and address somewhere on the manuscript. But they did reject it and did get it back to me, which at thirteen was a pretty much of a kick as having been published. I had a real rejection slip! Hah! From then on I wrote about a short story a year, keeping my hand in but not doing anything much. They were, some of them, fairly smooth, but I had not yet figured out that you need to have a plot. Then, in college, Blaylock and I were each writing a very long novel apiece. Mine was a thing called DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE, though it wasn't the one that's published now. I just loved that title. And both of us were just writing randomly hoping that structure would become evident, that some plot would manifest itself. God damn, we must have got sixty-or-eighty-thousand words apiece on these things.

BLAYLOCK: I got close to a hundred thousand.

POWERS: Well, you are more industrious than me. But neither of them went anywhere because we were simply waiting for a plot to appear.

REYNOLDS: Did you write in emulation of any particular genre or style at the time? Or was it just out of your own head?

POWERS: It was all science fiction. Ever since I was about ten, I read nothing but science fiction, which I'm not sure is healthy. Even today, I can't think of any plot that isn't science fiction.

Then I met K.W. Jeter again, (I knew him in college), and he was house of this English teacher from Cal State Fullerton, Doris, she's Kenny. Little old Irish lady. She has had more to do with Jeter, Blaylock and I turning from guys who would like to write books to guys who have written books than probably any other single influence that any of us underwent. She is very funny and shrewd and literate and realistic. She dramatically helped us trim away

the self-indulgent fat that every young writer tries to crowd his book with. The poetical phrases, the self-conscious literary bits. We were all brought up on James Joyce, right? And we hadn't learned to ditch that yet. She was very shrewd, in spite of being an English professor, at knowing what was realistically publishable and what was not. God, in most of my books, especially DRAWING OF THE DARK, she said, "That's junk, Powers, ditch it," and "That's good. Expand it."

WATSON: So she functioned as an editor on that book?

POWERS: Exactly. She was an editor. So, at one of her gatherings, I met ol' Jeter again, chatted with him some and had lunch with him right down here near Trader Joe's. He said, "Listen, Powers, I've just sold a book to this guy Roger Elwood, who has started a brand new line of science fiction novels..."

WATSON: The Laser Series.

POWERS: We didn't know what it was called then. He said, "The guy is desperate. He needs three books for the summer." Maybe he'd bought one or two, I forget. They were inadequate or something. Jeter says, "You'll never meet a hungrier editor. Send him something!" So I quickly put together a plot and sold it to Jeter. Jeter said, "Well, that ain't bad. That sounds like exactly what he's after. Write me some sample chapters. So I did. I wrote, 'Well, Chrissake now, this is a novel. This is sixty-five thousand words. That seems like nothing today, but it was big then. I thought, well Christ, you'd better start slow. So I started the story long before anything would happen. I got the characters hooked in at childhood, practically. They're sitting around having lunch, talking about stuff, and anything that's going to happen to them is still months in the future. I wrote ten-thousand words of this, the characters wandering around, eating dinner, having drinks and remarking on things."

When I showed it to Jeter, he said, "That's just crap, Powers. Throw that in the trash. What you've got to do is start when the action starts. Begin your book within a page of when something happens. Not just people having lunch and trying to get their cars started." I thought, "Wow, what an idea!" (Laughter) So I did. When I sent it to Elwood, he said, "Yeah, this looks okay, great." That was my first book, THE SKIES DISCLOSED. Got at least one little good review in some fanzine.

As soon as it sold I thought, "God-damn, Powers! You're a writer!" So I quit my job at a pizza parlor, and quit school, in fact. I thought, "Dearist you, man! You don't need a job!" I moved, in fact, here, and for about a year and a half, two years, maybe, made a living just off writing, at about two thousand dollars a year, which is astonishing. I can't imagine what I was eating. Then the Elwood decided to go sour, and I wound up broke again. I had to go back to the pizza parlor and beg for my job back. Luckily, they happened to need somebody again. It was very lean times until Del Rey bought DRAWING OF THE DARK.

REYNOLDS: Do you feel that American society is becoming more visually oriented and less print oriented? That education and youth appeal are much more directed to tubes and screens rather than print?

POWERS: I don't think it's true. You can't carry one of those on a train or a bus. You can't have one in your back pocket.

BLAYLOCK: There are also far more books being sold today than ever before.

WATSON: You can carry a TV around now, the Sony Watchman.

POWERS: I've run into more people who read Stephen King than I thought there were people who wore shoes. (Laughter) In fact, I've heard that there are more, of at least one King title, copies in print in this country than, according to the census, there are people who can read. So I'm not at all worried about the idea that screens are going to replace the printed page. It may happen, but not in my lifetime.

WATSON: IN DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE, Gregor Rivas is one of the few people who's bothered to teach himself to read, and he's probably one of the only people in the book who has actually read anything. Everybody else has been born since the Age of Illiteracy has descended on them. You gave that to him, I think, as a something to elevate him.

POWERS: And to give him information I needed him to have.

WATSON: The Jaybus Cult (in the same book, DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE) is an interesting commentary, I think, on cults in general.

POWERS: It was fun. I read a lot of Ted Patrick before I wrote that. To some extent, the details of the Jaybus Cult are accurate details of a number of cults that really do exist. In fact, Ted Patrick is my hero.

WATSON: Well, what's his motivation? Getting back to heroes, here's somebody who...

POWERS: Christ, all right, but I wouldn't put him in fiction. There's a lot of things that happen in real life that you wouldn't put in fiction. But you're right. His seems to be a selfless concern for humanity, but I'd never dream of motivating a protagonist with that. (Laughter)

WATSON: There's a metaphor for the intrinsic evil of (cults) in your rendition of the Jaybus Cult. If you look right down at the root of it, the "miracle," that motivates it, it's intrinsically evil. It's a parasite from space. If you read that into any other cult, into the Moonies or whatever, a parasite from space being the motivating force, you see it as pure evil. Stay away.

REYNOLDS: Anything you want to say about the Nixon administration? Or Reagan? Or politics in general?

BLAYLOCK: Just that I don't understand any of it. And I don't like any of it.

REYNOLDS: Is that why you write fantasy?

BLAYLOCK: No. Actually, I write the truth. They write the fantasy. (Laughter)



REVIEWED BY J.B. REYNOLDS

It might be something of a proverb around the science fiction pond that if an author makes a dramatic splash with a zinger of a first novel, then the next few offerings cast from the tower do not seem up quite the same spray as their predecessor. Happily, that is not the case with Tim Powers, whose plots and storytelling style have been getting steadily more sophisticated, complex and relevant -- in short, better -- in each successive publication. An obscure graduate student in Orangeburg, Virginia has evolved from a part-time set builder for spy movies to a multiple-award-winning novelist (THE ANUBIS GATES and DINER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE), giving reassurance to all who still believe in Horatio Alger.

We originally saw this book as THE SKIES DISOCCURRED back in 1976, and one hopes that the reason we're seeing it again now isn't just for the timely addition of "AUTHOR OF THE ANUBIS GATES" above the title.

FORSAKE THE SKY isn't a bad little book at all, if you're looking for a strictly old-fashioned kind of read. It is a simple, straight-forward yarn of the rise of your basic small-time 17th ... I mean 25th century kind of guy who does well while doing good as an apprentice oil painter, an forger, a greatest swordsman in all of France, I mean Octavio, working his way up (or down) to become the brigand king of Sherwood Forest. I mean, the vast sewers of the city of Munson. He carves up quite a few of Cardinal Rich... I mean, the Transport Authority's man until finally unseating the evil King John... I mean, Duke Costa in a noisy coup d'etat that costs him one leg and a good copy of "Winnie the Pooh."

That this all sounds like an amusing jumble of familiar stories is true; FORSAKE THE SKY is not an exercise in originality, but an humble and generally readable homage to Alexandre Dumas (Pere) and others. Like his mentors, Powers seems to avoid complex characters or situations but this makes for a less pretentious final product and works in his favor. Historical believability is, with a wide grin, escorted out the door -- an intergalactic empire five thousand light-years wide, and the best weaponry they can muster are swords -- but this is not a sociological essay we're reading, just a lively adventure story. It is fun, not philosophy.

FORSAKE THE SKY is a pretty good first novel because it neatly fulfills what the author set out to do, namely Get A Story Published, preferably one with a beginning, middle and end, and then Knocking the Literary Establishment On Its Ear to others. That SKY could stand improvement is expected, and as mentioned Powers has improved in subsequent works (here the passionate amateur describes a blinding duel in terms of fencing stances, requiring more time to read one sentence than that a duel might really take). But all in all, FORSAKE THE SKY is a capable enough work which, though you may not park it up on the shelf next to the Sturgeons, Herberts and Vernes, you might just hang on to it for the that rainy weekend when a more serious sci-fi isn't what the doctor ordered.

REVIEWED BY ANDY MATSON

There are genre writers who, in their attempt to imbue their work with elements of literature, muddle an otherwise "good read" and lose their audience. Of course, there are those who pull their work with no dilution, and while they are often saddled with the label "writer's writer" their sales do not necessarily suffer, and their popularity may even be expanded. On first glance, this might seem to be what James P. Blaylock has been trying to do with HOMUNCULUS. But with the latest novel, it becomes thoroughly obvious that he is up to something altogether different.

His prose smacks of relaxed confidence. There is no straining for poetic phraseology, yet there is poetry in its lyrical flow, its immediately accessible atmospheric tone, its selective detail and its evocation of characters matched to context, context matched to events. Sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase, it is epigrammatic, witty, charming. Clearly, I am describing a "writer's writer." This is the kernel on which all of his work is grown. Stories may vary from fairy tales of dwarves and elves to a gently mocking parody of the spirit and method of nineteenth century scientific inquiry, but the writing is unmistakably Blaylock, savory and competent. He does not start out with a "good read" and retrofit his style to meet wider standards and academic expectations. It is the other way around. Blaylock is writing literature, and investing it with odd notions, strange possibilities, unlikely discoveries about the underworld of our world which overlap nowhere more clearly than in the wide-eyed naivete of his best dwarf characters.

This does not diminish the simpler pleasure to be had in reading his latest novel, HOMUNCULUS, as a terrific story for its own sake. The plot is so marvelously convoluted and pleasingly handled that I cannot easily put the book down. Events unfold at an astonishing rate, coming together with an orchestration which is more characteristic of a spy thriller than the typical historical fantasy fare. And through it all, an unflinching sense of understated humor creates a world as likely to be ruled by laws of alchemy as by modern physics, peopled by enduringly eccentric characters whose quirks and kinks enliven and entertain: retiring heroes with fabulous pasts, earnest youths with promiscuous futures; unassuming men with hearts of gold and feet of clay, bungling felons with delusions of grandeur; captivating charlatans, secretive adepts; delightfully mad geniuses, touchingly well-meaning lunatics. The literature of James P. Blaylock is not stuffy or dry. It is elevating and invigorating, extraordinary by any measure.

To those familiar with Blaylock's shorter fiction, one will recognize HOMUNCULUS as another episode in the non-sequential series of stories involving the maverick scientist and explorer, Langdon Ives. While playing no less a decisive role in this book than in others (with his capable and reliable Jeeves-like gentleman's gentleman Hasbro) is only one of many players whose work in concert is required to thwart an evil manac-

de the ghostly and mishapen Doctor Ignacio Narbondo, necromancer, biologist, abominating vivisectionist, and implacable misanthrope, an ame-de-boue reminiscent of both A. Conan Doyle's Professor Moriarty and the Doctor Moreau of H.G. Wells, but by far and away less sane than either. St. Ives is in good company, the other members of the Trismegistus Club, vigorous peg-legged sea captain turned tobaccoist; an enigmatic and resourceful fellow of aristocratic bearing whose name and behavior mark him as a *deus ex machina* in human form; a toymaker who has inventiveness and perpetual motion desires only to incorporate it into idle amusements; and the son of a now-deceased scientist/member whose experiments with the life-restoring properties of certain glands excised from the living bodies of carps (the fish, that is) eventually led to his ruination and death (a fate not unconnected with Narbondo and an alien visitor from space). Narbondo, together with his despisable assistant Willis Pule (a character Blaylock handles with exquisite finesse), is in league with the conscienceless millionaire industrialist who is determined to acquire the perpetual motion device and will (you guessed it) stop at nothing in this pursuit.

Events, as often as not, begin in the middle and resolve towards both ends, seemingly isolated in their peculiarity until brought to full fruition in the context of other similarly constructed sequences. A religious fanatic pursues revived corpses from Narbondo with counterfeit coinage, and assembles a shambling army of utterly loyal leaflet distributors to spread the word of the coming Armageddon. The space alien's vehicle is introduced in one of the million of a man's many houses of ill repute (where it is put to perverted application, the depravity of which can only be hinted at). St. Ives's space vehicle (of his own design) is tampered with, and Lord Kelvin's barn suffers as a result. An ancient live carp is stolen from a zoo only to succumb to some disease which renders it nearly useless. The hands from an old woman's skeleton are motivated to play the piano even as another skeleton's hands grip the tiller wheel of a dirigible. The plot is plotted by the madmen. HOMUNCULUS is a collection of outre linearities merging together to form a far less outrageous nonlinear whole. Everything, we learn at the novel's conclusion, is related. There is no excess baggage. As is true of Blaylock's work in general, complexity is ultimately revealed to be obsciously simple and simplicity is demonstrated to persevere in the face of any amount of complication.

HOMUNCULUS, by virtue of its integration of accurate historical detail into an elaborately complex plot, cannot help remind one of THE ANUBIS GATES, the 1983 award-winning novel by Tim Powers. There were a great many reasons to admire THE ANUBIS GATES, and most of them apply to HOMUNCULUS, as well. In fact, HOMUNCULUS is so good, for so many reasons, that one cannot help but agree whole-heartedly with the Tim Powers endorsement on its cover: "The fastest, funniest, most colorful and grotesquely horrifying novel that could ever be written." Victor Segalman writes: "... This is literate fantasy -- or, fantastic literature -- at its best."

SUFFERING FOOLS, NOT GLADLY

BY
GREGORY
BENFORD

By now I suppose much of the SF community has seen the attack titled "The Temple of Boredom," published in HARPER'S in October 1985. It was followed by 13 letters to the editor in the January 1986 issue, and an analysis of the dispute in the Los Angeles Times (Feb 19, 1986).

What I found most notable about this piece and the replies was not the low quality of Sante's argument and his obvious technophobia, but rather how it fits into the general strategy now used against SF. Therein lies a story.

Early in Sante's piece he lets slip the mask of urbane indulgence and comes out against even innovation:

"...innovation itself has become an aesthetic quality, existing for its own sake... Technology has long been science fiction's conceit, now it is a conceit in real life as well..."

Rarely are the snobs so clear.

After all, SF is about the new. And newness, even caked with Spielberg sugar, is fundamentally scary. Even so, the motives of the conventional litbiz community are all too easy to read. We have seen their work before. Somewhere, the Czars are sweatily consulting the archival schedule at the Finland station.

In 1982 the critic Niel Barron wrote Shannon Revelen, the permanent co-editor of THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES, asking why this much-touted annual collection very seldom included SF, despite the plain fact that about half of all English language short stories belong to the genre. She replied (in THE PATCHIN REVIEW #3) that there was no bias against SF, but after reading the year's short stories (prompted by Barron's nudging), she said, "I did not find any stories there which had gone beyond a too heavy reliance on situation and setting, a literary which obscured the necessary literary development of character and language."

I have no doubt that the editors at HARPER'S would respond much the same. But that's not all. When a major national magazine reaches down into the pool of Manhattan's fledgling free-lancers and plucks forth two poorly constructed and highly emotional attacks, there's a hidden agenda. It runs parallel with the lopsided view of the field sought out by THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, as detailed

by Ben Bova in his collection of essays, THE ASTRAL MIRROR (TOR, 1985, p. 77).

That venerable newspaper sought a piece on SF, and when Bova's work did not condemn it sufficiently, they recruited an academic to do the work.

The field of fantastic literature needs criticism as much as any literary arena -- indeed, I'd argue it needs more -- but what I find most obvious about the two-front policy of the conventional-fiction world is its sloppiness. When someone rushes at you with a knife, misses, and falls clumsily into the gutter, you understand immediately that the assault was neither professional nor well-planned. Someone in New York has been irritated, and lashes out.

This is the first front -- literary muggings conducted in public, to scare away the timid and silence the incorrigible.

Contrast this with Ms. Revelen and ESQUIRE, the second front players. When ESQUIRE published a roundup of what 100 writers in the USA were working on, it asked no SF writers. Asked to defend this, they said SF was irrelevant to good writing!

Literature -- meaning litrahchar, y'know -- must be about character and style, not (heavens!) situation and setting. This plainly announced bias betrays much, including ethnocentricity and a dim Babbittlike knowledge of literary history. It explains the increasing irrelevance of much conventional fiction. Despite the fact that the moon landing was in 1969, setting a story there is somehow declassé, un'realistic," y'jeme. Indeed, SF isn't about "real people" or situations which deal with that hoary cliché, The Human Condition.

So the second front ignores SF, finds it beneath contempt. Quietly, through the back door, they import Vonnegut and LeGuin, Huxley and Orwell, lauding them of the SF stigma. (For the most part, writers so honored are quite happy to shuck the albatross label and ascend to a heaven of awards and reviews and sales, as did Vonnegut and LeGuin.)

Their program is a kind of Mandarin claustrophobia, in which the mind's eye admits solely the narrow slit of the present (or the sanctified past; no Apollo landings for us). Straining for a world in which change is slow and technology seldom intrudes, this literary microcosm seeks to lock us into the minor emotionalism and class postures of the conventional. Upholders of this faith meet at their annual P.E.N. gatherings, making brave pledges to support dissident writers against the State -- and averting their gaze from the true dissidents in the world of literature itself, those who do not follow the usual rules.

For Erica Jong to wrap herself in the flag of Solzhenitsyn is pathetically

amusing, for she is simply the literary analog of the limousine liberal, parroting squawks of revolution from her East 50s condo. They invoke suppressed Iron Curtain writers and link arms with Bishop Tutu, but we know they're just mugging for the camera. The closest thing we have to the USSR style Writer's Union here is P.E.N. itself. The revolutionaries of literature are not reenacting tired dramas of romantic opposition to the State, no. They're doing something far harder and less conspicuous -- they are thinking, seeing a world that does not yield to the tools of the 19th century novel or of the compressed NEW YORKER short story.

In his HARPER'S piece, Luc Sante demanded that SF "give us the future." Would any reasonable adult demand of conventional fiction that it give us the past, or even the present? An undergraduate who made such a wall-eyed claim would flunk the course. Sante replied to the 13 letter-writers by saying, "Science fictionists must know that there is something wrong in their province; otherwise why would they feel it so necessary to guard the gates?" Any member of a high school debating team could squash that incredible argument -- but the editors at HARPER'S evidently felt it made sense. Contemplate what Sante would have said had no one replied to his random, dull-witted attack...

Both fronts in this literary land-grab misunderstand the very function of speculative fiction -- to give us visions, to lift us above the concerns and concealments of the day. The principal engine of SF's buoyancy is science, which can give perspective and a pointedly non-anthropocentric view of our predicament.

So who's afraid of SF today? As usual, an elite. Beleaguered by the fundamental fact that our century is shaped and propelled by science and technology, they seek to wrap us in blankets of "humanist" perspective. If a situation should be too exotic, should people be dominated by the "situation and setting" -- meaning, a transfigured landscape, where people may well not think or feel the way we do -- then literature it ain't. The notion of illustrating character by casting it in bizarre surroundings, altered worlds -- that is too risky.

And SF has gotten altogether too up-



city, too. Not content to invade the bestseller lists, an arena the little crew had largely written off decades before anyhow, it is now showing solid sales and even occasional favorable reviews in the very citadels of the elite. The conventional, sensitive, small-scale novel is in deep trouble. Many good novelists are published with hushed respect to print runs of 5000, and enjoy careful assessments in the major reviewing media -- only to fall cold stone dead in the market, consigned to seldom-frequented library shelves, with nary a bid for the paperback rights.

SF is pushing these books out of the publishing houses. Collections of SF short stories quite routinely outsell conventional collections. The usual ESQUIRE story, with its unthinking bourgeois assumptions, ritual angst and sensitivity worn on the sleeve, kindles few readers.

Something must be done. Ignore the intruders (SF is only one of several new directions fiction is taking, let's not forget) -- and while you're at it, commission a few literary muggings to pass the word. Luc Sante remarked to the Los Angeles Times, in a feature piece on the future of his article producers: "The SF community's paranoia is justified in the sense that they really do have something to be defensive about." Reflect that paranoia means unjustified fear of persecution, and that this defender of the supple use of language undertook to judge a field in which he admits he had read only a smattering of the respected works. And that HARPER's senior editor, Mark Danner, maintained to the Los Angeles Times that he simply hadn't noticed that his magazine had run an even more intemperate and sloppily researched attack on SF only a few years before.

The sad aspect of all this litbitch gameplaying is that Sante's piece did make some sound observations of the field. Fairly obvious ones, true, but at least the field was seriously addressed, intermittently. This makes it easy to ignore Sante and his leaden prose.

But his calls for a better written SF should spur us to action, for much remains to be done. He has no understanding of just why it is hard to do characterological studies in SF's deliberately strange surrounds, yet this is one of the glaring problems the field faces. It isn't even theoretically understood, as far as I can tell. Many of the methods of making characters real in realistic fiction simply can't work in SF, because they rest on recognizing the familiar. We've seen people act that way, so we believe it when a conventional novelist simply reports behavior. We have in such fiction few examples of people confronting high technology with a scrap of understanding.

Similarly, few people outside SF see why background or "situation" often must be more than passing odd, if we are to sense the full implications that science unveils. They think we're lusting after new novelty, and dismiss such narrow aims (Or else call it "innovation.") But this gets them into trouble, because only a fool is against change per se. HARPER's editor must have been asleep when that one went by.)

These questions do not even enter the conventional critic's blandly self-assured thoughts. But they should vex

us, for they are the kernel of our present difficulty.

The rash of current attacks on SF suggest that the field will be scrutinized more and more, mostly from mean-spirited motives. We have to think of ways to communicate with the attackers, yes, but the largely neutral audience is the real prize. I'm suggesting that we have to learn to defend SF in terms the audience of HARPER's can understand and sympathize with. We must learn the critics' lingo and use it against them, and go over their heads to the literate public beyond. This means new arguments, more supple logic.

We can't counter mean-spirited opposition solely by shrugging it off. We have to look through it to the unspoken puzzles behind it, and doing better despite the fools.

'On March 5th I become President of the United States. In "Amazon Women of the Moon," a film-within-a-film in the sequel to KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE. What is the first action you would like me to take as Chief Executive of America? (But before that I'll spend five days substituting for Vincent Price in HOLLYWOOD BABYLON. -- They got me for half-Price.)'

Forrest J* Ackerman
Jefferson



SPACEFLARE

They went up -- Boosterism Solid
Little Teacher-Girl, Percy
Small Team Solid, FR Perfect
Nobody Counted On Orange Blossoms
Blooming Suddenly Over Azure Florida
Quick 'We've Had A Major Malfunction'
'We Have No Down Link'
Let's Seal Up The Evidence
Boosterism Solid Blow Up

Death Seering, Phosphor Dots Dying,
Dan Rather Crying
Reagan Sighing, NASA Lying, Orange
Blossoms
A Spielberg Spectacular, Special Effects
By Five Hundred Thousand Pounds of
Liquid Hydrogen,
Oxygen Too, No Lucasfilm, Ltd.
Brought To You In Dying Color
At A Quarter Of Eleven, E.S.T., By NASA
In --Hush Hush -- Freezing Temperatures

Boosterism Solid -- Little Teacher-Girl
And A NASA Six-Pack Of Specialists,
Percolatum Spunkulatum All Over The
Sevagram
By Fading Phosphor Dots --
Tom Brokaw Straighten Your Tie
And Now A Word From Preparation H
Helps Swelling Of Hemorrhoidal Tissues.

-- Blake Southfork

MARKET REPORT

'SWORD AND SORCERESS 4: Well-plotted stories about women, of the kind usually thought of as sword and sorcery; some overlap with fantasy okay but NO modern or post-industrial stories, rewritten fairy or folk tales, or science fiction. All stories must be original; no reprints, no matter how obscure the original printing. Length under 10,000 words preferred length 2000-7500. Payment 2 to 6 cents per word against pro rata share of royalties. Deadline Saturday June 14, 1986. Send SASE for full guidelines before submitting manuscript:

Marion Zimmer Bradley
Box 245-A
Berkeley, CA 94701

THE DISORIENT EXPRESS

BY NEAL WILGUS

Random Press, UT (LEAK) -- Scientists and government officials are urgently searching for an explanation to yesterday's mysterious change in direction(s). As is now universally appreciated, at 2:03 a.m. Greenwich the old sense of direction (and thus all rational orientation) either disappeared or was suspended. The Change has already been likened to the discovery of Fire and the invention of the Screw.

With directional inconsistency now being the order of the day, the common experience is that when one sets out to north (assuming one knows where that is) one would soon find oneself heading south -- or east, west or whatever. Up and down do not seem to be affected. So far.

go north (assuming one knows where that is) one would soon find oneself heading south -- or east, west or whatever. Up and down do not seem to be affected. So far.

To find out why such a change has occurred we sent investigative reporter Ray Team to the University of North to interview the famous Dr. Isaac Einstein, an expert on universal directionality and meteorological consistency. Unfortunately Ray Team called from New Zealand to report that he had lost his way and was stranded indefinitely at some location presently unknown. Other reporters have mentioned similar difficulties.

By sheer coincidence Dr. Isaac Einstein and his assistant Venus Uranus stumbled into the LEAK News Room at that moment, looking for directions. We were unable to help in that department, but took the opportunity to ask about the Change and where we might be headed. He looked mystified and shrugged his elbows.

"We seem to be caught in some kind of directional drift," said Venus Uranus, reading from a prepared script. "The Isaac Einstein Foundation is accepting donations for our Directional Research Project/Find a Way, Inc. Please withhold all donations, however, while negotiations with the Postal Corporation continue."

SMALL PRESS NOTES

THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL LETTERS Volume 1

Edited by Perry A. Chapdelaine, Sr.,
Tony Chapdelaine, and George Hay.
A.C. Projects, Inc.,
Rt.4, Box 137, Franklin, TN 37064.

Hardcover numbered edition: \$35.
Paperback: \$5.95

Add \$1. postage and handling,
all orders.

This is a Big, thick book, non-stop full of letters to virtually every sf writer of significance from the year 1938 to 1971. Over 600 pages. And, obviously, at least one more volume to come.

The cover is a fine Kelly Freas painting of Campbell---head only.

The letters, the letters, the letters! My God, Campbell was willing to write long letters to almost anyone in pursuit of an idea. He explored ideas and concepts and contrary opinions with astonishing enthusiasm and dedication. He knew enormous amounts of historical facts and relationships which he used to illustrate his arguments and ideas.

When you come across some of them its like stepping on a mind bomb.

He was a rationalist. He sought truth and used logic like a rapier. He decried tradition as fossilized emotionally-dictated hypocrisy. He saw instinct as a help to intellect up to a point: the common man. The superior man, the high-IQ man, was the engine of progress and change.

These letters are an amazing education and are in fact addictive. Campbell thought Truth was always under the surface of Accepted Reality, and he was forever digging, burrowing for the veins of pure Truth he knew were there.

A lot of what he believed was, to my mind, now, fool's gold, or half-Truth. But he will make you think! as you read his letters, as you follow his razor-like mind through twists and turns of logic and judgement.

There is a somewhat stunning claim by L. Ron Hubbard in his Introduction to his MISSION EARTH ten-volume novel (Volume One is THE INVADERS PLAN): on page xii and xiii, he claims that when in 1938 he was invited to write for John W. Campbell he decided to write an "inner space" sf story, and the story turned out to be 'The Dangerous Dimension.' He continues (about the story): 'Well, to a typical western mind of the twentieth century, that's pretty radical. I didn't tell John that the idea was actually as old as Buddha and resolved some other sticky questions like time. Besides, he had enough of a problem being ordered to publish whatever I wrote.'

This brought me up short. J. W. Campbell, Jr. had been ordered to buy Hubbard's stories, no matter what?

There are 3 letters in this collection which were to L. Ron Hubbard, one of which, dated Jan. 23, 1939, seems to indicate a privileged position for Hubbard:

'I'm damned glad you'll be with us on the Arabian Nights stuff---and you needn't worry about having it yours. I've been telling a few of the boys to read Washington Irving as an example of pure fantasy and complete acceptance of magic, enchantment, et cetera, and adding that they aren't to do Arabian Nights be-

cause the field is preemphed by you. It's been held open for you.' ... 'And, as I say, I'm reserving the Arabian Nights to you entirely.'

Campbell was discussing his new magazine, UNKNOWN, of course. This is an interesting sidelight, and I'd like to know more about it.

But back to the man and the endless Contrarian ideas Campbell's mind brought forth. He clearly used many of the ideas and arguments in his letters later as topics for his famous, controversial editorials. Reading these letters is like rereading those editorials in ASTOUNDING and ANALOG. They take me back in time... I can see that Campbell (along with H.L. Mencken, Jack Woodford, and G.B. Shaw) were strong influences on me in my teens and twenties. I'm sure he reoriented the thinking of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of his younger readers.

This volume, and any that follow, are must-haves and must-reads for anyone of intelligence who lusts for exciting, challenging reading.

PHILIP K. DICK NEWSLETTER 9/10
POB 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442. \$10.

This double issue is an audio cassette. One side is an extended conversation/interview between Phil Williams and Phil, the other side is dictated notes for a projected novel by Phil, because he could not type because of recent shoulder surgery.

The novel notes were made probably in August, 1984.

The conversation/interview was made during Oct. 30-31, and Nov. 1, 1974.

The conversation carried a freight of background noises (A baby squalling, a radio(?) and Tessa Dick. Phil Dick doesn't sound like himself on this tape, somehow, voicewise.)

The conversation shows his consuming interest in the mind, the ironies and absurdities of life---as when he discusses the life and fate of Mussolini. His critical opinion of Kurt Vonnegut and Vonnegut's novels and life-view are fascinating.

This is a sampling, a teaser; it makes you want to hear more and more, and you wish the conversation had been more focused and wide-ranging. Phil had many, many very perceptive insights into the human condition, and how great it would have been if he had put on tape many many more opinions and evaluations.

The novel notes---better quality sound---are eerie and frightening, for me: I hear an absorption in metaphysical matters---in the human spirit, in God, in contact with massmind, with God, with the subconscious. I

RICHARD E. GEIS

hear ominous foreshadowings of emotional illness.

It all boils down to whether in truth there is an afterlife, mind/consciousness after death, spirits, psychic powers, God...or if these beliefs, feelings, faiths, manifestations are upwells from the maelstrom of our subconsciouses.

There is the naked id in the core of our minds, screaming with our conscious mind that it/we do not want to die! And it collaborates in the subconscious to create a will/need to believe!...in the undying spiritual life in all its masks, aspects, forms.

Is all this business of religion and the supernatural and the spirit, the eternal soul, is it all nothing more than a drive to avoid the reality of eternal death? Is it at base wishful thinking? Or is there really something in our minds/brains which obeys/uses forces and as yet unknown natural laws?

That is the eternal question, isn't it?

Whatever the answer, it seems to be true that mankind needs his "spiritualism" to survive. We are highly intelligent animals who have a thin ice of self-awareness (ego) over an ocean of instincts and drives. Primal fear wedded to ego creates the undying defense-mechanism of the spirit world; the absolutely vital, necessary avoidance of final extinction.

No matter what science learns about the human brain and mind, religion will survive, the supernatural will survive, faith in the existence of the soul will survive.



THE MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE
POETRY \$2.00 Summer-Fall 1985
Edited by Roger Dutcher and
Mark Rich.
P.O. Box 564
Seloit, WI 53511

Why do they send me these things? Masochism? Do they enjoy my scathing reviews? Are they sadists, enjoying my pain and anguish as I look through these issues?

With 99% success, the editors have followed the First Commandment of Modern Poetry: THOU SHALT NOT PERMIT A RHYME TO LIVE!

Well, there is one short poem which rhymes, in the A-B, A-B format. But "Water-Log" by Bonnie Morris doesn't make any sense to me, for all it's pleasing-sound rhymes, so perhaps that qualified it in Dutcher & Rich's eyes.

The rest of these poems are "poems" to my mind: they are almost all prose chopped up into line fragments and stacked to seem like poetry. Form is all!

A sample:
We heard the click when
We crossed the
Threshold; I entered
Your body and set up
Camp. The infantryman,
He is the backbone of any
You see what I mean. Anybody can
do that shit. No skill, no talent.
Where is the discipline? Let me
put that another way:

You see what I
Mean. Anybody can do
That shit.
No skill. No talent.
Where is the
Discipline?
Let me put that
Another way...

Let me, instead, puke.

UNDERGROUND CLASSICS #2, #3
Dealer McDope #1, #2.

By Dave Sheridan
Rip Off Press, Inc.
Box 14158
San Francisco, CA 94114

Sheridan died of cancer in 1982, but his work in collaboration with Gilbert Shelton on episodes of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, and his own major counterculture character, Dealer McDope, live on and this two-comic collection of McDope adventures is a fine display of his work and thinking.

Basically, McDope always (well, almost always) succeeded in making the big score, the huge drug deal, the great drug smuggle, and drugs were Good.

Dave's style changed during his career, beginning psychedelic, loose, irreverent, free-wheeling in drawing and story-telling, then shifted to rather rigid box-panels, and then loosening up again.

Dealer McDope #1 (UNDERGROUND CLASSICS #2) is really great, inspired comic art at all levels.

These two Classics are Adults Only, by the way, and carry a \$2. per cost plus 85¢ postage and handling fee per order.

THE FIRST KINGDOM \$1.75
Book 23: The Choice
By Jack Katz
Bud Panel, Inc.
POB 1886,
Grass Valley, CA 95945

My problems with Katz's drawing style and his story-telling technique continue. In this long, episodic story of aliens and humans in pre-history on Earth, there is virtually only one body type (as if all humans and aliens were clones of one primal set), all are in perfect physical condition, almost all wear only a brief loin covering.

He likes set piece drawings of groups and his story-telling is stiff and formal, the dialog academic, official, and clumsy.

His full-page action/battle scenes are marvels of perspective, rendering and anatomy, with the additional marvel of bloodlessness.

Earlier books of this long series are available from Bud Panel.

MERCHANTS OF VENUS

By Frederick Pohl
Graphic adaptation by Neal
McPheeters and Victoria Petersen
IX Comics, NY \$5.95, 1986

This full-color graphic story version of this famous 1972 novel is well done, nicely crafted to vividly use the life-or-death trap closing in on the hero, Audree Walthers, as he struggles to make enough money for a life-saving liver transplant. His last chance is an expedition to a possible Heechee treasure tunnel under the surface of Venus, in the company of a rich old man and his beautiful companion.

My only grunch is the too-cartoonish style of the drawing, which seems at times to be a joke (as with Walthers' flat-top head and red hair).

THE SOUND OF WONDER, Vol. 1-2
Interviews from "The Science Fiction Radio Show"
By Daryl Lane, William Vernon, and
David Carson
Oryx Press,
2214 North Central at Encanto,
Phoenix, AZ 85004

These two volumes contain 19 very well done interviews with sf/fantasy writers, editors, publishers, an artist, and a sf/fantasy film reviewer.

The most striking aspect about these interviews is the great amount of reading and preparation that went

into them. The interviewers are knowledgeable, literate, fair and disciplined.

Those interviewed are:
Vol. 1: Stephen R. Donaldson
C.J. Cherry
Hal Clement
Charles Harness
Theodore Sturgeon
Howard Waldrop
Jack Williamson
Rudy Rucker
Michael Whelan
Vol. 2: Piers Anthony
Edward Bryant
Philip Jose Farmer
Donald A. Wollheim
James P. Hogan
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Roger Ebert
Gene Wolfe
Gordon R. Dickson
George R.R. Martin

You won't get the subjective reactions-to-people that made Charles Platt's DREAM MAKERS books so revealing and absorbing, but you will get detail and advance planning concerning novels, series, life-works, with a knowledge of how each writer puts words on paper (or screen), how they began to write as a career...

These are well worth your time, if not your money, since each trade paperback volume is priced at \$18.50, postage included.

OUT OF MY HEAD By Robert Bloch
NESFA Press, Box G, MIT Branch P.O.
Cambridge, MA 02139-0910.
\$15.00 + \$1.00 shipping & handling.

This small hardcover book is the annual volume published in honor of the Boskone Guest of Honor.

Here we have 22 short stories and articles by a kind, gentle man who kills people for a living, more or less.

Some of these items are speeches, some appreciations of other writers, some of fans, some about his early days in sf and horror...

Two of these items appeared in THE ALIEN CRITIC, which was the former name of SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW.

There is a slipcased, autographed 200-copy edition available (maybe some left) at \$30.00 per copy.

Dust jacket and interior illos by Bob Eggleston, a very good artist indeed.

TIME NOW TO DO A RUNDOWN OF SOME OF THE SMALL PRESS ITEMS I HAVEN'T READ (FOR LACK OF TIME AND/OR INTEREST) BUT WHICH I THINK SHOULD BE MENTIONED.

NEDFAN
ALERT!
NEDFAN
ALERT!



SPACE & TIME #70 Summer 1986.
Edited and published by Gordon Linzner, 138 W. 70th St., #4B, New York, NY 10023-4432. \$4.00.

Semi-pro fiction, poetry, articles, illustrations. 120 pages, offset.

TNFF, Vol. 46, No. 1
TIGHTBEAM #141

These are the primary publications of The National Fantasy Fan Federation---NSF---which has been in existence since around 1941 and which I, myself, was once a member. It's a great place to learn about sf fandom, and to get to know people who share your interests.

These are available from Lola Andrew, National Secretary, P.O. Box 713, Webster City, IA 50595. Send a dollar for an intro copy or two.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
March, 1986, \$2.00.

Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L,
Melbourne, Vic., Australia 3001.

Serious discussion and analysis of sf. As John Bangsund

WITH ALL ETERNITY TO
PUB YOUR ISH, 'TIMELINESS'
TAKES ON AN EXISTENTIAL



LATE
AGAIN
EH?

surmised in an accompanying note: "...should be a good sleeping pill for you."

Booklet size, 36 pages, offset.

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY Vol. 7, #4
Edited and published by Leland Sapiro, POB 833-044, Richardson, TX 75083.

Serious discussions of sf and fantasy, an interview, columns, letters, poetry.

Not published often, but Sapiro persists, year after year, decade after decade. Some interesting, high-quality thought in this issue.

Booklet size, 62 pages, offset, \$1.50 for one issue.

FACTSHEET FIVE#17 \$2.00
Edited and published by Mike Gunderloy, 41 Lawrence Street, Medford, MA 02155.

An invaluable listing and review of sf and related fanzines, small press efforts, amateur press associations, special literary, audio, visual interests.... An eye-opening accumulation of info and addresses. A source to keep. It even has a listing of hate/racist publications.

A GUIDE TO THE COMMONWEALTH
THE OFFICIAL GUIDE TO ALAN DEAN
FOSTER'S HUMANX COMMONWEALTH
UNIVERSE

By Robert Teague and Michael Goodwin, 4987 South 2700 West, Roy, UT 84067.

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Very fine spaceship cover painting by Goodwin.

FANTASY BOOK #20, June, 1986
Edited and Published by Dennis Mallonee, POB 60126, Pasadena, CA 91106. \$3.95

A quarterly of high production values: excellent full-color cover by Corey Wolfe. Serials by Stephen Goldin and Paul Edward Zimmer. Also two novelettes and five short stories. Poetry, features.

Odd that this magazine consistently has first class covers and second class interior artwork, in my opinion.

Niselevel

By John Brunner

TAE SEE CORSELS'S, AND OTHER THIRD DEGREE BURNS

I was brought up to be a nationalist, and small wonder, since from my age five to age eleven Britain was fighting world war. I remember how shaken I was when I found out later that my people had been at least as much disliked as admired during the heyday of Empire -- the latter for their industrial strength and enterprise, but the former for their smugness, arrogance and generally patronizing attitude towards foreigners. (You may have run across the classic, and reputedly genuine, newspaper headline: "Fog in English Channel -- Continent cut off.")

But that was only the beginning of a whole string of discoveries, of facts that had been hidden from me when I was a kid, and in some cases from the British press, because in time of war the truth was regarded as too dangerous -- for example, virtually nobody in Britain was allowed to know that a sizable group of Indians had rebelled against the Raj and were fighting on the side of the Japanese. Incidentally, as I write, reviews are appearing of a book by Correlli Barnett called THE AUDIT OF WAR, describing how incompetent British management and workers were during the war, to the point where it took over 600 longer to produce a Spitfire than a Messerschmitt Bf109. Also, apparently, the reason why we took so long to fly a jet aircraft was that the Rover car company made a total hash of the original contract and no progress worth mentioning was made until it was switched to Rolls Royce.

Next after nationalism, I was brought up pro-American -- again, entirely naturally. It was the industrial muscle of the United States that provided us with the means to go on fighting when our own resources were running out. Packard built many more Merlin aero-engines than Rolls Royce itself, and quite probably to higher standards.

Today, that is one reason above all why I retain my respect for the USA. It is the Freedom of Information Act, which I regard as the bravest legislation ever adopted by any country in whatever period of history. I wish we had something comparable. We have the Official Secrets Act, its inverse, which has been used under the Thatcher regime to turn Britain into what is often called the most secretive and repressive society in Western Europe.

Still, as yet only a few of us are being arrested for speaking our minds. There was a time when Marjorie and I had our phone tapped and our post regularly arrived a day later than our neighbors', but either Special Branch has become a lot more efficient or the powers that be have decided that we aren't actually plotting to sell out Britain to a foreign power.

Unlike, in that respect, our current cabinet.

Much of what I've learned during a life largely devoted to acquiring facts our lords and masters would rather people overlooked inclines me to the cockup theory of history. But some of it also inclines me to the conspiracy theory. I don't see this so much in the case of a liberal cabal planning to wreck our civilization (though a friend of ours recently spent several months in Italy investigating the Papal Bull that Wojtyla signed at the time he took personal command of Opus Dei, which orders the total destruction of communism by at latest 2000, and finally quit because, as he said, he had no wish to wake up one morning with a bullet in his head).

No, I mean rather that there is a convergence of interest among the powerful, such that it is to their benefit to foment hatred and encourage violence for fear that if people can see their senses their power would be taken away because they have so abused it. This has been happening a lot on the local scale recently -- Haiti, the Philippines -- but closer examination reveals that the resulting changes are mainly cosmetic. The Aquino family still own their huge golf course; colleagues of the Duvaliers are in the successor government; and so on.

In a speech he gave in London recently, that delightful maverick Gore Vidal -- who has an amazing gift for being simultaneously quite outrageous and transparently sane -- quoted Einstein in 1950 to the effect that the American government had no intention of ending the Cold War. He was right, of course. Why? Because it's too profitable. The reason why the United States has enjoyed such prosperity for so long is that the nation has run a permanent war economy. It is necessary in so large a country, indeed it is unavoidable, to keep directing tax money through government channels, in order to lubricate the wheels, as it were. (Remember that fascinating and alarming book REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN? In many respects it is still as valid as when it first appeared almost 20 years ago.) Owing to the nature of American society the most acceptable means by which this can be done is by hanging the label of "defense" on just about everything, and then making it a shibboleth, in the sense that anyone who questions the necessity of "defense" expenditure is regarded as unpatriotic or worse. (We have the same problem, if not on so grandiose a scale because in spite of it we aren't prosperous. Our government can't even do bad things successfully.)

By this time you may have guessed that, in my view, if there is a conspiracy threatening the world it's neither the Illuminati nor the P2 Lodge nor the umpty-seventh Communist International, but the military-industrial complex against which Eisenhower warned us all in 1958.

(Why am I a lot less scared of a Communist conspiracy? Well, there are three main reasons. Massive expenditure on armaments in a capitalist society is of course in the absolute sense a waste of resources; however, it is also the means whereby a small number of people can make colossal profits, and since the rich tend to be noisy and influential they have little trouble convincing the public that "What's good for General Motors is good for the USA" -- or, as Al Capp perceptively put it in the LI'L ABNER musical, "What's Good for General Bullmoose." Contrariwise, in a country with state ownership like the Soviet Union, expenditure on arms impoverishes the nation as a whole. Unfortunately it also provides for people on the make a route to the top, of which there are fewer than in the West. This ensures that over there in the foreseeable future ambition and the innate conservatism of the military -- the military are always conservative -- will continue to win out over common sense and the public well.

(The second reason is that communists tend to be abominably bad at public relations. The only places on the planet where they are making real headway are those where the competition has behaved in such a greedy, stupid or brutal fashion that any alternative looks good. In one of my "Max Curfew" thrillers I gave a line to my narrator that reflected my personal opinion. I quote from memory: "You have to plough and harrow the ground and goddamn manure it for them!" This is efficiently done by supporting e.g. Ba-



tista or Sonoma or Diem, and it may yet turn out that Marcos and Duvalier were underpinned for too long before the lesson sank in at the Washington end.

(The third reason relates to propaganda. See Below.)

My previous "Noise Level" recounted our experiences at a writers' congress in Leningrad. I wrote it in October 1985 (this one is being written in March 1986) and I concluded with a howl of desperation. At the time I was particularly despondent at the box-office records being broken by RAMBO (reportedly Reagan's favorite film). I haven't seen it because the reviews put me off; in all the papers I read it was dismissed as bloodthirsty and sadistic wishful thinking, lacking even the justificatory veneer accorded to the character in FIRST BLOOD. I've visited the States once a year on average since 1964, so I have grounds for stating that the majority of Americans have formed their concept of me on this sort of basis, reinforced by TV and comics. I referred to some Vietnam vets I had heard complaining about the impossibility of getting the general public to listen when they recounted their experiences. And I also had in mind the sort of people who show up at SF conventions in T-shirts reading NUKE THE WHALES or PEACE THROUGH SUPERIOR FIREPOWER -- and think the former is a real neat joke and the latter is a same point of view.

Oh dear....

Now and then, vis-a-vis the States, a foreign friend and admirer like myself is driven into responding like the bosom pal in the classic Lifebuoy ad, the one who plucks up the courage to whisper "BO!" Unfortunately whispering doesn't seem to do much good. This time I decided to try, if not shouting, at least snarling. I expected a fierce reaction. Part of it turned up some nine or ten days ago in the shape of a long excerpt from a letter sent to BBC by Alexis Giliand, which appears elsewhere in this issue, describing in detail a great many US foreign policy decisions and actions.

I am certain that Alexis knows where he speaks. But a point-for-point dispute with him or anyone was no part of my original intention. What I hoped to alert my US friends and readers to, is the overall negative impact that political and actions like those tabulated by Alexis have had and are continuing to have on the rest of the world.

(I need to send this piece off ASAP because I have a July deadline for my next novel and people keep putting obstacles in my way; most recently, Penguin has decided to fly me to Athens for a week because they're mounting a major promotion over there and THE BEST OF TIME, which they're issuing this month, happens to be set on a Greek island. So I shan't have time for any more "Noise Level" for quite some time. Hence I'm dashing this off before receiving any other feedback.)

Revenons a nos moutons.

Now it so happened that on the very day Alexis's letter arrived, and during the following weekend or two, I was full of relevant and illuminating material. So in effect I decided to let the British press do my answering for me, to

THE BOSS IS IN
TROUBLE WITH
THE ELECTION?



YEAH. ALL OF A
SUDDEN OBVIOUS
IS OUT, AND STUPID
ISNT ENOUGH.



demonstrate that negative impact. I photocopied to him the results of a poll by MORI on behalf of the SUNDAY TIMES (scarcely a paper one can accuse of leftist bias inasmuch as it is owned by Rupert Murdoch, a person not entirely unknown in the States). According to said poll, half the people of Britain believe that the United States poses as great a threat to world peace as the Soviet Union or indeed a greater one. (About a third said they were equal; the balance felt the USA was the more to be feared.)

From the GUARDIAN (traditionally associated with the centrist Liberal Party) and the OBSERVER (non-aligned, owned by an independent trust) I added material to illustrate why this feeling has arisen. I won't waste space on verbatim quotes, but there was one cutting about how the US military has attempted to introduce new nerve gases into Europe behind their allies' backs, and another in which a Congressional investigating committee accused the Pentagon of lying about the funds being channelled into support of the Contras. That's right: lying.

This leaves the reader with the clear conviction that the affairs of the United States are no longer directed by its elected representatives, but by a congeries of businessmen and generals, half greedy, half paranoid, and wholly immune from control. (Sure, sometimes they get caught, but by then the ham has already been done.)

And similar stories can be found every week, at least.

I am convinced that the vast majority of my Americans have no faintest notion of the way in which decisions taken on your behalf and sometimes in your name are ruining your nation's reputation, to the point where, as indicated, half the people of the country that more than any other was enthusiastically pro-American in 1945 now suspect you of being at least as big a threat to peace as the USSR.

I have met people in the States who dismiss anything unfavorable to the USA that appears in the foreign press as "god-damn Russian propaganda," so I'll ask point-blank: do you imagine this to be the result of a world-wide, skillfully orchestrated anti-American publicity campaign?

The answer is that it can't be. They don't have the access to our media. Let me give you an example.

A year or so ago my wife Marjorie grew sufficiently exasperated at the predominance of American material on our four TV channels to analyze the programs over one week. She counted 42 hours of American material (i.e. six hours a day on average) and about six or seven hours of other foreign material, almost all accounted for by two or three feature films. As for Russian or other Eastern Bloc material, this was represented exclusively by a run at 12:30 on Sunday of a half-hour language program originally designed for people going to the Moscow Olympics -- and that was produced by the BBC's education department.

Subsequently, I'm pleased to say, the imbalance has been partly corrected. The BBC ran a twelve-part series called COMRADES about people living and working in the Soviet Union, ranging from an eye surgeon to a rock musician, from a film director to a family of Siberian fur trappers. In particular one of the programs featured a Russian girl going through his army recruit training -- something which, apparently, had not even been shown on Soviet TV. Again, though, this was a BBC production, not a Russian one.

Just in case there's anyone who might nonetheless claim that reactions like the one reflected by that opinion poll must necessarily be due to hostile propaganda, I would argue along these lines:

Such a statement implies that continual bombardment with publicity, advertising or even otherwise factual data slanted to enhance a particular point of view, does have an impact on the individual. Surely this is incontrovertible. You do not have to go to a totalitarian state to find the evidence; control enough newspapers, buy enough time on the air, stamp hard enough on noisy people that you disapprove (I use that American journalistic term) and you are being attacked as "dangerously liberal," apparently by the same people who by using falsified "proofs" of its shortcomings are trying to drive the USA out of the United Nations -- and you've got it made even in a so-called "free" society.

In that case, however: What of the propaganda that assails people on every side in Eastern Europe? Is that an exception? Are they the only persons on Earth immune to advertising? If not, then I submit that people surrounded with thousands of posters celebrating (as we saw in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1980) thirty-five years of peace, or simply stating (as in Leningrad and Moscow last year) *Miru Mir!* -- "Peace to the World!" -- back

ed up with constant reminders of the suffering and privation caused by war, constitute ipso facto less of a threat than those who live where the posters are for RAMBO, or other films that travesty the truth into a comic strip.

(In passing: The posturing and chest beating and self adulation of such movies comes across to many Europeans as a sign of underlying insecurity. We remember war-time films designed to encourage patriotism that had the opposite effect. Some rendered the audience helpless with laughter because they were so absurd, while others sent them away muttering, "Things must be even worse than we suspected!")

In my latest piece I described Russians on their day off visiting war graves in Leningrad and asked how many Americans were doing the like. Alexis, in his letter, said he was moved by the Vietnam war memorial.

I can't regard the two cases as comparable. Sorry.

The Vietnam War presented us with the unedifying spectacle of the world's richest country bombing, blasting and burning one of the world's poorest countries, which had never attacked it and never could. The reason why a lot of Europeans admired the Viet Cong was that the war pictures reminded us of the anti-Nazi resistance, or taking shelter from the Blitz. Few people were detached enough to bear in mind, as they watched that memorable film of thatched peasant huts being set alight by US troops, that it was a bold and honorable commitment by American cameramen which discovered these revolting facts to the world.

Now if America had erected a memorial to the dead of both sides, and thrown out of office -- better, put on trial -- those who dragged the nation into the shoddy mess in the first place, it would be a very different state of affairs. That would have impressed the world enormously. But since you didn't even jail Nixon...

At this point someone invariably

THE HUMAN BRAIN PERCEIVES REALITY AND ENABLES US TO EXIST IN THAT SAME REALITY.

WHICH IS WHY THE HUMAN BRAIN IS SO PRONE TO FANTASY.



drags in Afghanistan. "I'll risk putting my neck back up before I admit I must not trespass too far on REG's hospitality. But, in furtherance of my attempt to show how different the world looks from over here, a couple of concluding points.

Now where are my Devil's Advocate-type horns...?

(a) I do wish Americans wouldn't talk about Afghans as though they were so many bastions of freedom and democracy. Their traditional society is little short of disgusting! Its code, *pakhtunwali*, is the vendetta code we've spent centuries trying to get rid of in Europe, that not only glorifies but obliges a man who feels himself insulted to exterminate the offender's clan down to the babes-in-arms. (I do mean "man." Don't bother asking about women.) Also their sexual habits are unspeakable. Deprived on religious grounds of contact with adult females, they routinely abuse underage boys for personal gratification. Anyone who thinks that Europeans in the 19th century had a moral right to invade, say, Dahomey to suppress cannibalism -- they failed, but that's another story -- must also accept that the Soviets have an equivalent right to impose a bit of civilization on the Afghans. In fact, of course, that isn't why they moved in, but if it turns up as a by-product it might be rather a good idea.

Why the Soviets do go in has a lot more to do with the fact that so much of the USSR is Moslem, and the Moslems are breeding so fast. They started to say, "If socialism is so good for us -- and there's no doubt that we're living better now than in our grandpapa's day -- why don't we export some of it to our brothers in Islam over the border? Look at what Zia is up to in Pakistan!" Fearing that if they didn't do something smartish, fundamentalist of the Khomenei stamp would find a fertile breeding ground in the Uzbekistan and the other Moslem republics, the bosses in the Kremlin made the same mistake as lots of other people in a similar position. They decided to appease their subjects while protecting their investments.

(b) The Afghans have a long history of invasion, mainly by the British. To keep the Russians out we attacked them in 1838 and kidnapped the ruler, the Amir. In 1879 we took control of their foreign policy -- again, presumably, to exclude the Russians; they rebelled in 1919 and lost; they rebelled again in 1929 and drove the British out, along with a ruler who had become our puppet; he abdicated in favor of the rebel leader, but he was soon defeated, and the country fell under a military dictatorship... (See what I mean about "bastions of democracy"?)

And so on. Nonetheless, when they wanted to modernize their country it was the West they appealed to for finance and aid. But we turned them down! It was the Russians who built their highways, hydro-electric plants and introduced at least a semblance of modern education. So when their socialist government looked as though it was at risk of being overthrown...

If Americans had a right to invade Grenada to "protect American students" (a book just reviewed over there points

out that so far no evidence for this has been produced) then Russians had a corresponding right to invade Afghanistan to protect not only their nationals but their investments, like the USA in the banana republics. I think it's a lousy excuse, myself, but since the American government says it's a valid one we're stuck with it, aren't we?

Oh, dear! All you good friends of mine in the United States, where I boast of having at least as many friends as ever I acquired in my own homeland:

Do you really not understand the betrayal that your leaders are visiting up on you? Or do you willingly play along? Or do you simply not care?

Do your newspapers and TV channels ever report items like that MORI poll I quoted above? This isn't a local demonstration against the imposition of American cruise missiles. This is a serious survey according to principles pioneered by Gallup in the States. If this is the evidence it turns up...

Shouldn't something be done about it?

I love your bloody country! It could well be thanks to you lot that I didn't grow up under Nazi occupation! But every time I return I find you living more and more under a delusion, to the effect that if it's America it must be right and must be loved.

A succession of American governments has squandered in barely forty years such a capital of goodwill as no other nation ever enjoyed. At the end of 1945 even the Japanese respected you because your occupation of their homeland was so civilized compared to what they'd done to their conquered peoples.

Now... Well, I hark back to that poll, reporting how many Britons are prepared to put on greater their view that America is now a greater threat to peace than Russia.

It wasn't you who did that. But it was your government. Doesn't that worry you? Doesn't that horrify you?

If I were in your shoes... my God, it would me!

WISDOM CORRUPTS BECAUSE YOU COME TO UNDERSTAND HOW CORRUPTION CAN SERVE YOUR INTERESTS.

OF COURSE, YOU ALSO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR INTERESTS ARE SO ITS SELF-LIMITING. KIND OF.



THROUGH NO
FAULT OF
OURS WE
ARE PRESENTING

LETTERS



LETTER FROM GREGORY BENFORD
Univ. of California, Dept of Physics
Irvine, CA 92717 Jan. 15, 1986

I liked Sheila Finch's article on "Oath of Fealty" quite a bit. She's taken the criteria I invented -- which are discussed in a piece titled "Reactionary Utopias," in the winter FAR FRONTIERS, and later in an academic collection -- and extended them with surprising results. Excellent analysis.

"She touches on an important problem: that utopias are almost always seen as static places, as goals. Yet we know cantankerous humanity isn't going to sit still. So any real utopia must be one of process, a society that provides a good, undamaging way to bring about change. Receptivity to change, but with wisdom to evaluate it, must be a cardinal virtue of any decent society. What's more, people working toward utopia can help reach it by developing just these features, rather than fret endlessly about the role of property ownership or the labor theory of value or other worn out, 19th century notions.

It's interesting, seeing Scott Card evaluating present tense and the cyberpunks. I think the present tense has a lot of value, and can be sustained for long works -- as, for example, Faulkner's AS I LAY DYING demonstrates.

The confrontation of definitions of cyberpunk is amusing. John Shirley's heavy-breathing drama has all of the moral earnestness appropriate to kicking over the traces... but I'd feel more optimistic, more willing to think something's actually happening here, if his juxtapositions didn't reek of warmed-up Hubert Humphrey. The rivers are dying, poor people squat over grates, butchers workman out in El Salvador, there's unemployment and even worse... and, as John points out in REM 3, beastly old Larry Niven drinks booze in his coffee, for Chrissakes.

There's a discernable move to the conventional left going on in SF now -- a natural counter to the rightist, quasi-military faction -- and what bothers me isn't the left, it's the conventional. There's got to be something on the so-called left other than this party platform stuff, or the cozy 19th century utopianism of LeQuin, et al.

Rudy Rucker says cyberpunk is about increased information content, but I think this would be more believable if (a) I saw some actual new ideas in the fiction, and (b) Rudy had cited some examples. I'd also like to see criticism that didn't simply assume that dem mean ole corporations were the root of

all evil. Fred Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth said all that in the 50s, and they made it funny.

I enjoy SFR and hope you continue it. All's well here; hope you're flourishing.

((I suppose the ideal utopia would have a strong social structure which provided legal outlets for all the "evil" instincts of mankind in such a way that they were non-threatening to family, religion, government. That's quite a trick, though. And I wonder if mankind doesn't need illegal activities (evil) as a deep psychological need. Like swear words are needed to express intensity of emotion, illegal activities are needed for rebellion in the young and anti-social acts for those with Loser or Punishment life scripts. Could a utopia accommodate these types? Wouldn't theft, assault, kidnapping, rape, murder always be illegal, in any utopia?))

LETTER FROM FRED FOLLEY
1335-E, N. CLIFF VALLEY Way, NE
Atlanta, GA 30319 March 25, 1986

"Norman Spinrad's statements on the difference between science fiction and fantasy elevate the general practice of SF authors -- which is to depict a naturalistic universe when they write SF as opposed to fantasy -- to a rule for writing SF. But I cannot see how writing about what 'could be, but isn't' would force an author to assume, for the purposes of his story that "therefore ... all phenomena are continuous, ... there's no such thing as the supernatural," unless the author assumes, for the purposes of the story, that materialism is true. Of course, most SF authors are, in fact, materialists, or naturalists, if you prefer, but that certainly does not force them to assume that materialism is true in the universe of every SF story they write. Whatever Phil Farmer's real beliefs are, he did not assume that materialism holds in the universe of his novel NIGHT OF LIGHT. Now, it is open to Norman Spinrad to say that NIGHT OF LIGHT is not SF, but then he would be arguing on the basis of what he thinks SF should be, and not on the basis of what it is.

"Orson's clarification of his statements about literary style were helpful, but I think that he still falls into an error common to a great many critics in SF, when he says that "storytelling is storytelling," and leaves it at that. How a story is written depends on what kind of story it is. Michael Bishop's style is not like Robert Heinlein's, because his stories are not like Heinlein's. When we go outside of modern SF, the number of different kinds of stories, and the range of techniques for telling them, increase markedly. Milton and Spenser both wrote narrative poems, but after that the similarities between PARADISE LOST and THE FAERIE QUEENE cease. Miltonic blank verse and Spenserian stanzas are about as far apart in kind as any two verse forms that have ever been used."

((Truly supernatural stories cannot be science fiction, by definition. If the 'supernatural' elements are governed by rules and limits, then they become natural, the way Larry Niven's magic is a useable phenomena, and imposes costs upon its users. Thus magic becomes a different kind of discipline---a different kind of science. Just as radio, TV, computers would be black magic and evil sorcery to most people of ancient Rome, what we now consider the occult and supernatural may someday be another field of science.

((Fiction styles and techniques are many and varied, but only a few are "acceptable" to the reading public in a commercial sense. The real challenge is not to be different, but to use the accepted tools and forms in a way that seems different and yet satisfies the reader and which allows him to read the work without curses and resistances.))

LETTER FROM JOEL ROSENBERG
1477 Chapel B-4
N. Haven, CT 06511 1986

"Thanks for the generally positive review of EMILE AND THE DUTCHMAN; I'm glad you enjoyed it.

I know it's considered gauche to answer criticism of one's work, but in discussing the Dutchman's use of epithets,

easier for you to concede the right of the Soviets to rule others. After all, if they defeated the Nazis, why not the Afghans then Latvia or Germany or Poland or Afghanistan...?

'But still, it's intellectual cowardice.

'In point of fact, despite the almost incredible Russian casualties (which would, of course, have been much lower if Stalin had at first fought Hitler, instead of making a deal with him, part of which included supplying Nazi Germany with war material), the Germans were truly defeated on the Western front, not the Eastern front; as George Patton pointed out in another context, it wasn't the people who died for their country who won -- it was those who made the other sons-of-bitches die'. The US lost "only" 350,000 in WWII because of the US's fortune -- for which I offer no apology -- and its virtue; American generals have long been expected to expend rounds rather than lives, whenever possible; read Patton's WAR AS I KNEW IT for a discussion of why that makes sense.

'Actually, I'd feel a lot more comfortable with the intellectual purity of your argument if you were a Left or a German or a Pole or a Jew -- if it was the British and not the Afghan highlands that the Russians were depicting with poison gas and cluster bombs.

'To paraphrase you, Mr. Brunner, the trouble with you British is this: you'd still regret Chamberlain as a hero upon his return from Munich.'

((Yes, I see what you mean concerning Major Alonzo Norfeldt's use of offensive language. But if somebody called me a filthy Boche I'd only laugh (which would prove me a German hard head, I suppose). Not even being called a meat-eating atheistic bastard or child of Satan would offend me. So I wonder at Norfeldt's 'victims' being so offended. But being called stupid, incompetent, sloppy, careless...with humiliation and contempt attached...ah, that would affect me, and in your story would gain the effect you wanted, I think.

((I generally publish what is offered to me, since I don't pay for material for these fat issues. Milgus and others are generous and I owe them a great debt. The libertarians of sf recognize me as a librarian and so are kindly disposed toward me and SFR. I wasn't aware that Schulman is Koman's agent. Thanks for the information, and for permitting the SFR readership to read certain items with increased awareness. Part of the reason why I'll be doing all the reviewing in the 1987 and onward SFRs is because I've become aware of kissy-kissy friendship or commercial motives in reviews of late, and don't appreciate that sort of thing.

((The following letters, along with your comments, cover the Brunner "Noise Level" column in pretty nearly every aspect possible. There were others which I could not publish for lack of room and redundancy. I hope this political blowup is ended



and sf and fantasy and fiction can take their places as one-two-three in the letter column next issue.))

LETTER FROM ALEXIS A GILLILAND
4030 8th Street, South
Arlington, VA 22204 02/14/86

'John Brunner's column in SFR #58 manages to be simultaneously moving and infuriating. We begin with the moving parts the Russian and Japanese shrines to their war dead, excellent, first rate reporting of what he saw and felt. When I finally went to see the Vietnam War Memorial down on the Mall in Washington, I was unexpectedly moved to tears, so that what he was feeling comes as close to universal as a science fiction author ever gets.

'The infuriating part is harder to sing' that because it is diffused through the entire column. Basically, Mr. Brunner appears to believe that the United States wants war with the Soviet Union, and to support this point of view he cites the popularity of "Rambo" and the Reagan military buildup. This proves that the administration and the population are of one mind on the subject. The flip side of this coin, that the Soviet people want peace, is attested to by the fact that he personally encountered "the" Soviet veteran, and found them peace-loving, that "these are not people lustful after another war."

'I expect that Mr. Brunner's mind is made up on the subject, that he is untroubled by doubt because he knows what he knows, and what he knows supports what he believes. One does not argue in such cases, one politely changes the subject. If one is polite. Consider that I am scratching an itch in public, if you wish. Not so much trying to convert Mr. Brunner (which would be beyond my power in any event) as trying to stop talking to myself after reading his column.

'We begin with the contention that the US wants a war. He will just have to take my word for it that as a result of living in America and dealing with Amer-

icans on a daily basis, I find that most of them (the ones I deal with, anyway) want war as little as those kindly Russians he had the pleasure of associating with. That leaves the Reagan administration, a menace to the peace of mind, if not the peace of the world. Mr. Brunner is clearly familiar with the Reagan rhetoric, which he equally clearly knows at face value. Which is his privilege. The fact is that when you examine the military actions of the Reagan administration, the ferocious Mr. Reagan cannot be distinguished from "Wimpy Jimmy" Carter, his predecessor in office.

'Case in point. Lebanon, immediately after the Israeli invasion, acquired an American presence initially in the form of a screen to permit the evacuation of the Palestinian terrorists (one word, just like damn Yankee. Mr. Brunner, we all have our little tics and twitches) from Beirut, and afterwards it was sent back in at the request of President Reagan, to help prop up his regime, which was in serious difficulty. Mr. Reagan sent the marines in, against the advice of the Joint Chiefs and a background of the most serious congressional reservations. And what was the function of the marines? To straddle a heroic pose. Their function was, in other words, rhetorical. That happened is history. A suicide bomber (not a terrorist; his target was military) killed a barracks full of marines, and Mr. Reagan, his belly-fire cooled by this brush with reality, withdrew the rest.

'There are counter arguments, mainly Grenada, but if you imagine that it is the Congress who has kept the President from going where he wants to go, we have only to consider the Reagan deficit.

'Enough of the arcana of the American way. Let us now consider the peace loving Russians. To begin with, there was never any tyrant that was not a lover of peace. The poor misunderstood souls just wanted their own way.

'Take a quick look at the record. Hungary, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968; Afghanistan, 1979. The IRBMs which the US is currently employing into Western Europe were a direct belated response to the Soviet deployment of similar missiles in Eastern Europe. When you involve yourself with Soviet arcana you find a dark and bloody history. Stalin the Great, or Stalin the Terrible? The Russians themselves have not yet come to terms with their own recent history that Mr. Brunner touches on with such pathos. The Russian and Japanese memorials to their war dead? In 1945 the Japanese army in Manchuria, 650,000 strong, surrendered to the Soviets. A few years later the USSR returned the survivors, all 25,000 of them. There may be a memorial to the 625,000 in Japan, somewhere, but if Mr. Brunner saw it, he fails to mention the fact. More recently, KAL Flight 007 strayed into Soviet airspace and was shot down in a demonstration of bloody-minded incompetence.

'Now I do not ask Mr. Brunner to approve of the US or President Reagan. Bloody-minded incompetence respects no race, creed or color (one calls to mind Marshall Haig, in WWI) and is properly denounced whenever it appears. But I do ask him for intellectual honesty. Don't tell me that Russia is a peace-loving nation on the strength of meeting peace-loving Russians when the Soviet Union invades its neighbors on a regular basis, deploys IRBMs without provocation, and

shoots down civilian aircraft without warning.

'The United Nations, of all people, has finally got around to reporting the Soviet genocide in Afghanistan. A nation that conducts a war by dropping bombs, trapped toys to main children may very well love peace, but it loves peace on its own terms.

'Intellectual honesty is what compels one to admit that the Soviet Union, which has atomic weapons, (for defensive purposes only, just like Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative) is ruled by pretty nasty people. If you are so terrified of atomic weapons that you can't bear to think about them, it must be utterly appalling to contemplate a bunch of slavonuclear Arthur Scargills making policy on the other side. So, naturally, you don't. But if someone points it out to you, you have an obligation to admit the truth.

'What this leaves of Mr. Brunner's argument, I don't know. There didn't seem to be an argument there, only a despairing wish for the peace-loving Russians to stop having to threaten people with nuclear weapons. Couched in the softly hysterical anti-American tones one often hears from leftist Brits.

'That should do. There is an argument which says that nuclear devices no longer qualify as weapons because they are no longer to human scale. Certainly Europe has rarely enjoyed as long a period of peace as the Pax Americana imposed in 1945. And that leaves us with a final question for Mr. Brunner: If you could go back in time, and alter the laws of physics to make the atomic bomb unworkable, would you do so, if you knew that as a result you would have World War III starting in 1968? Think about it, John.

'Ah, me. I start with a letter of comment and end with an article. It's your fault, Geis, that innocent white powder dusting the pages! But I'm glad to see that you are not turning your hand from the plow.'

LETTER FROM LYNN MIMS
36 Country Club Rd., #84
Eatontown, NJ 07724 02/13/86

'If I lived in England, I'd probably be as passionately concerned about the possibility of nuclear war as John Brunner. He can't pretend, as many of us do, that there's a safe place to run to. It makes him more realistic than a lot of us dare to be.

'Nor do I think he was "brainwashed." I do think he went to Leningrad desperately wanting to see exactly what he reports to us -- that his experiences merely confirmed his personal viewpoint. Again, if I were in his shoes I'd cherish any indication I could find that my eastern neighbor wasn't planning to blow me off the face of the earth in the near future, too.

'That doesn't mean I have to take everything he says as gospel. Russian losses during WWII were devastating, yes; but they came after several years of enjoying peace through the Nazi-Soviet agreement and the conquest (by both nations) of Poland. They also came on top of the losses caused by the Stalinist purges. I suppose I'm cynical, but I

wonder how many victims of the purges are counted among those 20 million war dead?

'Mark Twain's allegedly being "one of the most popular authors in the Soviet Union" doesn't surprise me: After all, HUCKLEBERRY FINN is an indictment of slavery and many of Twain's works are savagely critical of 19th-century American mores and culture. I'm not putting them down -- one of the functions of great literature would be to hold a mirror to the face of a culture, and Twain did this very well. Since Brunner was unable to see a Soviet public library himself, we don't know what other American authors are represented or what kind of picture of America a Russian would get from reading them. I doubt it would be any better balanced than the picture we get reading the available Russian literature (limited as it is to mostly Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy -- and Solzhenitsyn, apologies to all for my spelling).

'Finally, the sincere, intelligent, humane people Mr. Brunner worked with are probably just as good as he says they are, but they aren't policymakers. This is so trite, obvious and paranoid I'm almost ashamed to write it -- but it's true, too.

'All in all, Brunner's article raises some uneasy speculations. Apparently, he can meet a Soviet general back from Afghanistan without suffering any discomfort, but finds the American popularity of a wish-fulfillment fantasy (RAMBO) upsetting in the extreme. I expect that if Brunner had had the opportunity to meet an American general just back from Vietnam he'd have been considerably less tolerant.

'Sigh'. Brunner's article feels to me like another example of the "Blame America First" syndrome. An awful lot of people (many of them American) seem to feel that any mention of Soviet misbehavior is taboo. The Nazi-Soviet accord, the conquest of eastern Europe, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Afghanistan, Ethiopia -- all should never be mentioned, in the interest of world peace. Instead, Americans should meditate only on Vietnam and on our sinfulness in general in trying to support regimes that don't or didn't quite hate our guts.'

LETTER FROM TIM HESSE
POB #43, Manhattan, KS, 66502
Feb. 11, 1986

'Concerning John Brunner's "Noise Level:"

'One world view holds that the U.S. government needs the Russian government

(good enemies are hard to find). The conclusion reached is that the chance of a nuclear confrontation between these two is so small as to approach zero.

'Surely John Brunner has been exposed to this as well as other world views. Why he would choose to spend his time and money working against the "pending nuclear holocaust" only he can answer.

'A few questions come to mind: Is Mr. Brunner serious? (It seems so.) Can a confirmed statist have his opinion modified by exposing himself to libertarian literature? Does Mr. Brunner read SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW or just his column in it?

'Perhaps you might be interested in what has been going on in my life since I started reading SFR (with #22, I believe). At about the same time, I acquired a copy of ATLAS SHRUGGED. The world views expressed in most SF and by Ayn Rand seemed reasonable to me.

'I quit my job at a supermarket in 1980 and have been self-employed since then. I am now a cherry picker. I go to garbage/estate/yard sales, buying whatever I think I can sell for a profit. From antiques/collectibles to books, comics, records and used merchandise. I wholesale around 60% to other dealers and sell the rest at flea markets and collector shows on Sundays. There is no coercion when I buy as I pay the seller what he asks. There is no coercion when I sell as no one has to buy from me.

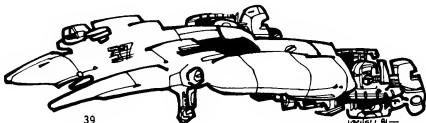
'While I am not getting rich, I do what I want to do when I want to do it. This system works quite well even with my ubiquitous silent partner.'

LETTER FROM PAUL ANDERSON
3 Las Palomas, Orinda, CA 94563
Feb. 7, 1986

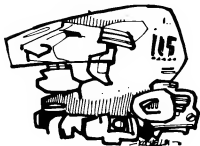
'John Brunner's account of Russians taking flowers to the graves of their war dead is moving. Of course, this is something that people of all nations do. Well, almost all.

'When Karen and I were in Poland last year, we saw an armed guard at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Our local friends explained that this is necessary to prevent the laying of floral tributes, which could be interpreted as an expression of sympathy for the suppressed labor movement Solidarity.

'Incidentally, I have met a fair number of people in the American military-industrial complex, some of them pretty high up. Not a one has expressed any wish to burn Leningrad or the rest of the Soviet Union.



'I don't expect the above to affect John, who made up his mind long ago that this is the most violent country in the world. Could he be right? We do have a few soccer fans.'



LETTER FROM CLIFFORD R MOURRAY
1915 W. MacArthur, #77
Wichita, KS 67217 Feb. 8, 1986

'It's been a hell of a week, hasn't it? Overall, the press and public reaction to the Challenger tragedy has been better than I would have dared to imagine; short-term support for the space program is stronger than ever, and the debate is centered on how best to continue, not whether continuing is worthwhile. We can ask for no more.

'The most insidious side of the public debate are statements from people like John Glenn and Frank Borman, who say private citizens should not be allowed to fly aboard the shuttle for the foreseeable future, because they "don't realize the risks." Somebody should point out that this view is an insult on the intelligence of Christa McAuliffe, and does a grave disservice to her memory. Even if that were true before the accident -- which it certainly was not -- it is no longer true, and Aviation Week and Space Technology reports that not one single applicant for the journalist in space mission has withdrawn his/her application since the explosion. Note that the two men named above are test pilots themselves. They have an ego interest in keeping space to themselves; it's a subtle way of saying that only test pilots are good enough to be allowed to put their lives on the line for the great adventure. All of us non-technical types who hope to go into space need to deluge Glenn and Borman -- and anybody else who takes a similar position -- with mail to keep their big mouths shut, or it will be "space for the elite" for the next twenty years.'

((The Challenger tragedy is a classic case of penny wise, pound foolishness. To save a few days at most, NASA launched in icy weather in spite of warnings, and lost lives, a shuttle and maybe several years. It may be that this shuttle loss along with the non-event of Halley's comet may sour the American people on space. Add Gramm-Rudman, an approaching recession, and heroic budget cuts may put the space program on hold for another ten years. Not a pretty prospect.))

LETTER FROM WILLIAM R YATES
4451 California St, San Francisco,
California, 94118 Feb. 11, 1986

'I am writing in response to a letter from a Sheldon Teitelbaum which appeared in your Spring 1986 issue. The title to my novel, DIASPORAH, is purposely misspelled to draw the attention of prospective readers. I do not pretend to be fluent in modern Hebrew. As far as grammar and usage are concerned, I may be in some points mistaken. However, words, phrases and sentences were lifted directly from a Hebrew language text. If these were "grossly wrong in terms of usage or grammar," the fault can scarcely be found in the individual who repeated them. Somehow, while in Israel, I did manage to make myself understood. Transliteration may have been altered by myself, because I felt that conventional Roman spelling failed to represent a word's true sound. All in all, I am suspicious of Mr. Teitelbaum's criticisms because of the attitude which stands behind them.

'As regards the political bone that Mr. Teitelbaum wants to pick, may I point out to him that Zvi Siman appeared in the prologue is quite clearly Sephardic. Also, in the unedited prologue (found in J.E. Pournelle's THERE WILL BE WAR), I go into great detail as regards the differences between Israeli Sephardic and Ashkenazic cultures. And I had assumed that anyone with half a brain would realize that Sephardim were alive and well in other parts of my space city, Hazera. Mr. Teitelbaum will of course immediately brand my people's natural tendency to live with like people as "ghetto-ization."

'Finally, I must take great umbrage at Mr. Teitelbaum's attacks on the character and motivations of my publishers. I have found both Jim Saen and Getsy Mitchell to be honest and professional. Literature and the arts are two places, despite rumors to the contrary, where greed and greed alone is an almost certain ticket to failure. Their connections to as prestigious a publisher as Simon & Schuster probably means that these are individuals who place a respect for their readers, and for SF as a serious movement in literature, above personal gain. While I will be the first to admit that my novel, DIASPORAH, is flawed, I also have to take great pride in the knowledge that they believe there is something about it which is worth sharing.'

((Maybe not purposely misspelled. Maybe mis-remembered or typed. A lot of prejudging and leaps to conclusions go on in the SFR letter-columns. Why, even I...))

LETTER FROM BRUCE BERGES
513 S. Eucalyptus Ave, #8
Inglewood, CA 90301 Feb. 20, 1986

'Neal Wiggins' interview with "None of the Above," latest winner of the Prometheus Award, reveals more about the prospects of anarcho-libertarianism than he knows. If the Libertarian Futurist Society were more objective and honest about itself and its Prometheus Award it would

publish something like the following announcement in 1986:

"Association of selfish antisocial egomaniacs with philosophical interest in future sociopolitical trends seeks science fiction novels which portray plausible future human societies and situations based upon the obtuse beliefs that are symptomatic of selfish antisocial egomania (our sacred "cause"). Any SF novel hinting that future social organizational patterns might logically follow cumulative civilizational-socialistic trends of the past 10,000 years or so will be disqualified, since that way lies wimp-liberal statism and other unamerican horrors for the next year's prize winner; no award. Nothing published met our standards."

'In the quest for suitable award material, it is inevitable, I would think, for the Libertarian Futurist Society to have selection problems similar to those of the Feudalist Futurist Society, the Anarchist Futurist Society, the Neanderthal Hunter Futurist Society, the Flat Earth Futurist Society, etc.

'In other words: Dead horses flogged fanatically -- whether they are only recently dead or long-since fossilized -- just do not stand up and whinny very well. So it seems likely that as the years pass, "None of the Above" is going to turn out to be the all-time champion accumulator of the most Prometheus Awards. Either that, or the LFS will have to lower its standards by "disgracefully" watering down its Holy Individualist dogmas to the point of SANITY. Wouldn't that be a sad state of affairs?"

((You make your point effectively. The purist Libertarians will always find precious little in even the SF world to satisfy their strict requirements. They do have the option of self-publication of qualified novels. Your description of libertarians as 'selfish antisocial egomaniacs' rankles me, though. What are you, some kind of statist liberal wimp socialist who has a job with the government to protect? Ha!))

LETTER FROM RONALD R LAMBERT
2350 Virginia, Troy, MI 48063
Feb. 5, 1986 MEMBER SFMA

'Your comment to Tamar Lindsay sounds suspiciously like debunking to me. There seems to have been a slight increase in polemic directed against the idea of Psi in the past year or so. But this is doomed to be a futile exercise. Most people (I hesitate to say all people) least I arouse outrage, but that is surely a very large "most") believe there is something to be had in having some direct personal experience with it at one time or another. I wonder if the debunkers really, honestly believe there is no such thing, or are they merely trying to put on the mantle of more-skeptical-than-thou superiority?

'Those people who denounce the idea of Psi because they find a materialistic or mechanistic worldview are skidding toward a monumental crash when they finally

ly collide head-on with the implications of quantum physics. Those implications are far weirder than anything that ever appeared in *FATE* magazine. And quantum physics has been verified by experiment -- the universe really does work this way.

"Quantum physicists speak of "the collapse of the probability wave function." The act of observing by conscious beings alters reality, selecting among alternate realities. This is not speculation. It has been verified by laboratory experiment. Whether parallel universes have real existence is debatable -- but it is debated seriously. Now, if consciousness has the property of altering reality, then what is the reality of consciousness? What kind of thing is most consciousness be if it is capable of choosing among alternate realities -- of collapsing the wave function?

"I do not ask this rhetorically. I ask it genuinely, because I do not know the answer. But I suspect that if consciousness is able to interact with the very nature of reality on a fundamental, causal level, then perhaps consciousness might also, under certain circumstances, be able to sense in some way future probable realities directly (not just by deduction).

"You offered a possible explanation in conventional terms for the personal experience Lindsay cited. I realize that personal anecdotal accounts do not constitute proof, but that does not mean they are valueless. In many areas of human endeavor, they are all we have to go on. For what it is worth, let me offer an account of an experience I once had, one that perhaps you will find a little more difficult to explain away. My memory of this event is not faulty despite the fact that it was many years ago, and I am not lying or embellishing anything.

"Some friends of mine were amusing themselves by betting each other a nickel on the outcome of a coin toss. I did not participate in this because I was raised to regard gambling as a vice, and I did not want to lose any money (as good a reason as any not to gamble). They kept trying to drag me into their game and I was just as persistent in politely declining. Finally one of them asked me yet again, and I said "I don't want to bet any money on it."

"Okay," he said, "you don't have to bet anything. Everybody else has tried it, let's see how you would do."

"So he showed me the coin (it was a normal quarter) and I watched him flip it so it spun end over end as it arced up two or three feet in the air. As agreed, I called it while it was in the air. When the coin came down, he caught it in his hand, slapped it down on his opposite wrist, and then took his hand away so we could both see the coin. He did this the same way each time.

"I called the coin toss right 25 times in a row. The odds against that are 1 to the 25th power. According to my Atari, that figures out at 33,554,382. As this was going on, more of my friends crowded around, watching open-mouthed as the count went into the teens and higher. What was most convincing to me was the subjective feeling I had. From the very first coin toss, I did not feel like I was guessing. I felt sure! I was thinking, "What is the coin going to make me

call it!" And each time except the last time, the clear, certain answer seemed to occur to me as the coin was just beginning to fall. The last time, the answer did not come into my head at the expected moment. I opened my mouth, then closed it. The coin came down, hit my friend's hand wrong and bounced off. It fell to the floor and started rolling. After it had rolled about ten feet and was out of everyone's reach, suddenly the answer came to me and I called it. My call was again right.

"My friend who had done the coin toss got a funny look on his face. When he picked up his coin, he put it away, shaking his head. "That's enough for me!" he announced. The others muttered agreement at that, and they all walked away, glancing back at me dubiously.

"No, to answer your next question, I have not yet succeeded in winning the Michigan Lotto game. I did win \$500 a couple of years ago playing the Michigan Daily Three game (guess a three digit number and win \$500), but that was probably just luck. Of course, I still have some hesitation about gambling, so I never spend much money on the state lottery (only one or two tickets at a dollar apiece each week, and some weeks I do not even play). But if Psi were really relevant, I would be rich now, right? Sigh.

"As for recognition eliminating free will, I would say exactly the opposite is true, in light of quantum physics. What quantum physics does is conclusively show that what we call determinism, that is in a deterministic universe that free will is precluded. We do not live in a determinate universe. That is no longer a matter of philosophical speculation, it is now a matter of physics. It is the nature of quantum reality which might reasonably allow such a thing as precognition to work, and that same quantum reality is a very friendly environment to the concept of free will."

((If what you experienced/accomplished in that 25-times-in-a-row period of correct prediction was precognition or remote physical control of the coin, it would not help you in a state lottery very much. But in a similar, up-close situation -- a crap table at Las Vegas, say -- you could have a chance to make a big bundle of money. But what you really did was guess a 50-50 coin toss 25 times. Very unusual. It would have been equally unusual if you had guessed wrong 25 times. The point is, unless you can do that guess-right performance consistently, it wasn't psi; it was a law of averages phenomenon ((Another explanation of the quantum physics phenomenon you mention, is that the sub-atomic particles influenced by observation may be sentient, or alive in some way we cannot as yet understand. Or, more likely, an aspect of the observation procedure exerted a force of some kind, indirectly, on the field of observation. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle is also interesting, as sub-atomic

particles bounce off each other unpredictably. But in the macro-material world, where we all live and die, we have to deal with predictability and cause and effect as real 99.9999-99999999 of the time. In this world "free will" is a delusion created by hundreds, perhaps thousands of influences involving blood chemistry, nerve impulses, and other environmental factors in interconnected relationships impossible to chart or predict at this time. I still believe "mind" is not free or independent of matter. When the brain/body dies, the electrochemical field that is the mind also dies. Mankind has been trying to wriggle off that hook for thousands of years, but it's still the horrible truth.))

LETTER FROM THRAW, INC

ALAN DEAN FOSTER
4001 Pleasant Valley Dr.
Prescott, AZ 86301 Feb 3, 1986

"Ahem. As regards the matter of whether or not the young lady on the cover of the SF Book Club edition of SEASON OF THE SPELLSING is wearing any underwear, exhaustive inspection of the illustration in question reveals that she is indeed wearing a continuation of what is presumably is some sort of one-piece outfit. In the course of reading a great many tomes over the years I have noted various hues utilized to describe that portion of the female anatomy. Lavender, however, is not among them.

"The fact that a few curves have provoked so much interest, not to mention detailed inspection, is something of a compliment to the artist and certainly does nothing to disprove your assertion



that a certain amount of subliminal appeal is at work in this picture. However, another part (no pun intended) that likewise does not fit is the fact that Mudge is an otter, not a beaver. Nor are subliminal sexual appeals required, since there is plenty of liminal goings-on taking place in the books that gave me no end of concern. The ermine ecstasist, for example, not to mention Mudge's inclination to try and ball anything with warm blood (otters have low hips, but they compensate with speed and agility).

'You are about the thirtieth to comment on the matter of the character's underthings or lack thereof. I wish it were so easy to get readers to devote that kind of attention to the body of the text (so to speak).

'Glad to see SFR continuing.'

LETTER FROM DARRELL SCHWEITZER
113 Deepdale Road
Strafford, PA 19087 Feb. 23, 1986

'I imagine you and your readers will learn soon, if you haven't already, that as of about three weeks ago, George Scithers is no longer editor of AMAZING. Rumors are no doubt flying thick and fast, all about arcane political maneuverings and the like. And I don't doubt that certain muckrakers (Hint: Complete the following verse -- I'd rather be fat/ than -----) will seize the opportunity to spread malicious lies.

'The truth of the matter is that it was an amiable parting, brought about because the folks at TSR, Inc. decided it would be cheaper to have the managing editor in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (where the company is) do all the work, rather than have the magazine edited in Philadelphia. And so they have made Patrick Price editor of AMAZING, and that is pretty much the whole story, not as interesting as a lurid tale of Byzantine backstabbing, but true.

'I went to Boskone about a week after this happened, and the reaction to the news on the part of both fans and pros was extremely negative, best summed up as, "Well, that's the end of AMAZING."

'It isn't so. I am biased myself. My editorial association with AMAZING ends too. All of George's staff is out in the cold: John Betancourt, Dainis Butevics, John Sewick, etc. But we have worked with Pat Price for a long time now, and all of us feel that we have left the magazine in good hands. Price is knowledgeable, enthusiastic and capable. He has his own ideas about the magazine which he will make public as he chooses. (The one thing I feel free to tell you is that he wants more science fiction, although he is by no means eliminating the fantasy.) But he knows what he is doing, and I think he will make a good showing.

'I intend to continue to support AMAZING, reading it and writing for it. I hope everyone else will too.

'For the record: the last issue George assembled is July, 1986, but, of course, his backlog will continue to appear until used up, mixed with things Pat buys. One upcoming story of particular note is "Trenarest," a 30,000 word novella by Keith Roberts, a sequel to KITEWORLD.

'Now, on to another matter. I have come up with another Frivolous Literary Theory, which readers of my article on the subject will particularly appreciate. For those who haven't read the article, let me explain that the basis of the Frivolous Literary Theory is that criticism is Art. Whether it fits reality is irrelevant. It is more important that it be Aesthetically Pleasing.

'My theory, which is mine, which is my ("ahem") theory: Now that his death has been made official, The Truth May Be Told -- Robert E. Howard did not kill himself in 1936. He went into hiding for a short while and then emerged under a new name: L. Ron Hubbard.

'Consider the following evidence:

'1) Age. The fictitious Hubbard persona was 74 years old when death was announced. Howard, born in 1906, would have been 80. Howard as a young man, as he appears in the photographs under his original identity, was a burly, athletic, rather baby-faced fellow, who could easily have claimed to be six years younger without much difficulty.

'2) Careers. At the time of his "suicide" in 1936, Howard had just begun to break into the big-time pulp magazines, notably ARGOSY. A few "posthumous" pieces continued to appear for a couple years including a historical adventure novelet in GOLDEN AGE in 1938, and the Burroughsian ALMURIC in WEIRD TALES in 1939. Toward the end of his "life," Howard expressed an interest in getting out of the fantasy field, and writing more westerns. "Hubbard" suddenly appeared out of nowhere around 1936-37, writing, among other things, pulp westerns for ARGOSY. His first SF appeared in 1938. But by that point it was clear that this "newcomer" was no amateur. He wrote like a practised pro. He got back into sword and sorcery when UNKNOWN began (having become an ARGOSY regular, he dissuaded the paltry WEIRD TALES word rates, save for the salvage sale of ALMURIC, a crude early work "Hubbard" didn't want to bother revising), but with a difference. Novels like SLAVES OF SLEEP tend to be about Caspar Milquetoast types who are forced to become Conanese heroes. There is a light touch, even a good deal of humor evident. Howard, early on, wrote a series of stories about a modern-day weakling named James Allison, who remembers his prior incarnations as various barbarian heroes. But the SES is humorless, for all it showed a broad and rollicking sense of humor in some of his westerns. It was only as he matured that these elements came together, and he was able to write SLAVES OF SLEEP.

'Howard's writing and "Hubbard's" were stylistically similar, both vivid and efficient, with brilliant splashes of color and a great deal of emotional exaggeration.

'How, you might ask, could the author of "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune" and "Worms of the Earth" have written something as awful as BATTLEFIELD EARTH? Well, some of the old vigor is still there, but over the years he succumbed to a Delanyesque self-indulgence and wrecked himself utterly. The later books are his DHALGREN.

'3) Other ideas. Both men had a similar outlook on their literary careers. Writing was a way to make money. They



wrote what sold and paid the highest. Howard as a young man wrote a lot of poetry, but this did not pay for the effort, and as he grew older, he virtually stopped. "Hubbard" wrote none at all.

'Howard passionately believed in reincarnation, which later became one of the tenets of Scientology. We may map his intellectual development as follows: mystical/emotional in the beginning, then at least superficially rational and materialistic under the influence of John Campbell, with the mysticism reappearing later, when he had broken free of Campbell.

'4) Further, the early life of "Hubbard," prior to the "death" of Robert E. Howard, is mysterious. There are few photographs. It is hard to find anyone who knew him. But afterwards, there is lots of evidence.

'You see, Dick? It all fits.

* * *

'Ian Covel has missed my point about Tolkien and the generic fantasy. Yes, I am well aware that Morris, Dunsany, Edmond and others created the epic fantasy novel in an artistic sense. That is, they experimented with the form, and, in Morris's case, wrote before Tolkien was born. (First stories, 1850.) But it was the success of THE LORD OF THE RINGS which brought the fantasy publishing category into existence. Had there been no Tolkien boom, we would never have seen paperback editions of the others. THE WELLS AT THE WORLD'S END was almost totally unknown in the fantasy field as recently as the late '60s. There is no entry on Morris in the Tuck ENCYCLOPEDIA, and yet in more recent reference works he is cited as a major figure. He was rediscovered entirely by Lin Carter, whose reprintings of virtually all the important Morris titles in the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series would not have been possible had not Ballantine books wanted to cash in on the huge fantasy audience created by Tolkien.

'Nowadays, alas, the wave of post-Tolkien fantasy has gone the way of most waves of imitations, and we no longer have classic reprints, just degraded rehashes.

'What is I am hoping will happen to SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW -- what most of us are hoping, I am sure -- is that the new version will take on a life of its own, demanding more pages, until it's back to its old self again. All of us, the loyal readers and contributors, are working toward this end. The Bavarian Illuminati have issued us these little wax figures of a man chained to a typewriter, and a special set of pins'

((But...if L. Ron Hubbard was really Robert E. Howard, then who was Howard Hughes? And while we're at it, did you know that the deaths of Jack Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe were faked by the CIA? They're both alive, living together in an Andes hideaway. And I'm really the secret son of... No, I can't reveal that yet.

((So that's why I have these physical problems! You are all a pain in the neck.))

CARD FROM ROBERT BLOCH
2111 Sunset Crest Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90046 Feb 5, 1986

'I know how you feel -- and share your consternation and alarm over the return of an Alter Ego who will subject you to the grueling grind of monthly publication. On the other hand, he did offer assistance, plus a modus operandi, and you won't be working alone. Think of all the poor writers like myself who don't have an Alter Ego to guide us. We have no one to blame if we make mistakes, no one to complain to; no one to give us any Alter-Ego-boo. Besides, sometimes Alter's ideas seem to make sense and you may very well discover that you enjoy doing a monthly magazine. As long as it has you and pieces as meaningful as this issue's interview with Norman Spinrad, I'm sure your readers will be happy. As for me, I'm glad to learn you're contemplating a change of pace: you are approaching an age where you need all the stimulation you can get.'

((Well, Bob, I used that line on a sweet young thing in a supermarket the other day. I said to her, "My dear, I am approaching an age where I need all the stimulation I can get." She smiled and kneed me in the groin. Talk about stimulation! Got any other ideas?))

LETTER FROM CARL GLOVER
2803 Avondale Dr., Johnson City, TN,
37601 Mar 28, 1986

'Unfortunately, you seem to have missed the point in your "counterattack" to my letter in SFR #58. My basic contention, which I perhaps should have made clearer, is that SF uniquely satisfies adolescent power fantasy needs, or at least those of the socially introverted, "Intellectual" adolescent. This is a

special kind of escape from reality which is generally not provided by any other type of fiction. In fact, this quality is probably what is (operationally) meant by the "sense of wonder" which even you must admit is virtually unique to SF. I do not accept your assertion that making such an observation constitutes elitism or snobishness, which is simply name-calling and unworthy of you.

'Face it, Dick: SF is a juvenile literature. Always has been, always will be.'

((Kaaay...SF satisfies the adolescent power fantasy needs of a certain variety of male adolescent. And RAMBO movies satisfies the power fantasies of another type of male juvenile...with some overlap? The warrior instinct must be served. I would say that SF also serves other functions for readers, as does any kind of fiction. Fiction is an alternate world, another life one can enter and live through. There are those who sneer at any "escape" from the real world: reading fiction, watching fiction on TV, the movies, the theatre, computer games... Any diversion from work, parenting, sleeping, studying is suspect. Sports surely is escapism. Telling a joke... But to the core: SF is not always a juvenile literature. There are actually few specific SF novels written to feed the adolescent male power fantasy needs, though they are packaged to appeal to the juvenile. The large majority of SF books are sold to young adults and middle-aged adults. Anyway, I tire of dealing with the more-mature-than-thou argument, or assertion, because it is so patently tainted by elitism and snobism. You can make a case that the G novels and the Conan novels (and a few others) are a.p.f.'s, but if you don't think the Dune novels are worthy of serious thought and adult attention, and if you don't think they provide adult enjoyment as adult fiction... then...then I will have to shrug and walk away.))

LETTER FROM NEAL WILGUS
POB 25771, Albuquerque, NM 87125
March 12, 1986

'Many thanks for providing further proof of Wilgus' Law, even though none was needed. I'm referring, of course to the minor glitch in the interview with J. Neil Schulman (SFR #58, page 34) which changed the Law from "All systems are good" to "All systems are good." A slight difference in meaning....

'A more serious glitch occurred on the last page -- the "Alternate History News" page with four news items attributed to me. Actually, I can only take credit/blame for the two LEAK News Service stories, since the other two ("Syracuse

Dictator Has Problems" and "Scientist Discovers Slimes, Notions") were written by Gerald Baker and published in INNER WEATHER (Univ. of Northern Iowa) in 1975. The reason they were attributed to me, no doubt, is that I reprinted them in my "Room 101 Revisited" (a contribution to THE MEMORY HOLE, the Revisionist History APA) in such a way that it would be easy to overlook the Baker byline. My apologies to Baker, who runs for various public offices on the Big Deal ticket and can be contacted at 2119 College, Cedar Falls, IA 50613.

'Anyone interested in looking into THE MEMORY HOLE should write to Victor Koman, box 94, Long Beach, CA 90801.

'And while I'm correcting old mistakes, I should at last point out the glitch in my "OZ Report" about the International Wizard of Oz Club (220 N. 11th St., Escanaba, MI 49829), which appeared in SFR #55. First sentence of third paragraph should have said that for your \$10 membership you receive a card, a subscription to THE MAUM BUGLE and THE OZ TRADING POST and a copy of the annual MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY. A much better package than the glitched "Report" indicated.

'Finally, Neil Schulman's "Profile in Silver" did air on THE TWILIGHT ZONE (March 7th) and was very good. But since I'm glitch-hunting, I'll have to point out that to make the time-traveler-who-prevented-the-Kennedy-assassination story work in one hour, Schulman had to accept the Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone scenario! Too bad it wasn't an hour or longer -- Schulman needed room to expand the idea to its proper length. Anyway, watch for the rerun -- it's worth it.'

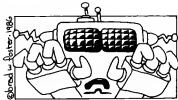
((I am about to commit hari kiri in shame and humiliation for all the typos and mistakes which were printed in SFR. Hand me the ceremonial knife, Alter.

"You've got to be fucking kidding, Geis."

Yeah...you're right. Sorry, Neal. We'll be more careful in the future. Thanks for the corrections. *Alter, stick a spike in his doll!*)

LETTER FROM ED MESKYS
RFD #1, Box 65, Center Harbor, NH
03226-9729 Feb. 11, 1986

'I am preparing two special issues of NIEKAS, one on John Myers Myers which will include a concordance to SILVERLOCK, and the other on Arthurian fantasy through the ages. I am looking for additional material for both issues. I especially need articles on Myers and historical novels, his poetry and his non-fiction. Perhaps some of your readers would be interested in discussing these issues in the pages of NIEKAS.'



ONCE OVER LIGHTLY

BOOK REVIEWS BY GENE DEWEESE

STARQUAKE By Robert L. Forward
Ballantine/DelRey, \$14.95

The thriving Cheela civilization on the neutron star known as Dragon's Egg is virtually wiped out by the neutron star equivalent of an earthquake. Meanwhile, the humans who unwittingly started the Cheela on the road to civilization are still orbiting Egg and have to be rescued when their own equipment, which keeps them from being vaporized by Egg's tidal forces, malfunctions and again when their efforts to aid the Cheela after the quake puts them in danger.

As in **DRAGON'S EGG**, the concept of life on a neutron star is fascinating. Gravity is 67 billion times that on earth and the Cheela, themselves made of nucleonic matter, live a million times faster than humans, going from savagery to a galaxy-spanning civilization in only hours of human time. In **STARQUAKE**, however, the Cheela have become all too human, and too much of the book is devoted not to the differences between the races but their similarities. Much of it, in fact, becomes a political and social satire, which seems a great waste of a fabulous setting.

Even so, there's a fair amount of interesting material here, especially in the technical appendix, made up of excerpts from the 2053 book, **MY VISIT WITH OUR NUCLEONIC FRIENDS**, the only book to win the Nobel, Pulitzer, Hugo, Nebula and Nebula prizes in the same year. However, waiting for the paperback may be advisable this time around.

EON By Greg Bear
Bluejay Books, \$16.95

A huge, hollowed-out asteroid appears in the solar system and takes up orbit around Earth. Expeditions soon find that it was created not by aliens but by a future earth and the deserted chambers are merely the endpoint to a "hyperspace" tunnel that reaches not only throughout our own universe but throughout time and paratime as well.

With a premise like that, it would seem hard to go wrong, but **EON** does to some extent. The main problem is that the book is 500 pages long instead of 200, and the extra length is taken up with Gernsbackian sight-seeing tours through the civilization that maintains the tunnel and others that use it, as well as an analysis of their all too familiar political, social and economic problems. (Among the major factions in the future-earth society, for instance, are the "Naderites.")

As a result, despite the awesomeness of the setting, there is little mystery after the first couple hundred pages, and the sense of wonder is submerged in mundane detail. For those who like that kind of detail, it is done well and exhaustively, but for those like myself who do not, a lot of skimming is in order.

JACKLEEN J. O'MALLEY FOR CONGRESS
(Barnaby #3), by Crockett Johnson
Ballantine/DelRey, \$2.95

This time Barnaby's egotistical and inept fairy godfather runs for Congress -- and wins. Like many real-life Congressmen, he is never seen again, but he still manages to push a few bills through Congress, including one for construction of a power dam with a 30-ton statue of himself on top of it.

Much of the first two volumes of Barnaby, I'd seen before in decades-old hardcover editions, so it was difficult to tell if my liking for them was totally real or part nostalgia. With #3, none of which I have ever seen before, there is no doubt that it's all real. If anything, #3 is even better and funnier than the first two, and I can hardly wait for the rest of the series.

THE LEGION OF TIME By Jack Williamson
Bluejay Books, \$8.95

Two short novels, "The Legion of Time" and "After World's End," both originally published in 1938, make up this handsome trade paperback volume.

In "Legion" the longer and better-known of the pair, two far-future worlds, Jonbar and Oyrnchi, reach back in time in an effort to control the moment at which the time lines that led to their mutually exclusive worlds diverged. Their representatives, beautiful women named Lethonee and Sorainya, respectively, contact idealistic writer and newsman Denny Lanning, through whom they must work, since they themselves cannot interfere directly and physically in their own past.

Neither "Legion" nor "After World's End" holds up as well as Williamson's classic humanoid stories from a few years later, but "Legion" in particular is a good example of the mixture of ideas and adventure that was being published in the thirties. In some ways, even, it was ahead of its time. In fact, I went so far as to dig out my copies of the May, June and July, 1938 issues of **ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION** to see if the surprising modern sounding references to quantum mechanics, the wave nature of elementary particles, and "subatomic indeterminism," were in the original story. And they were, even though those ideas and their implications weren't to become widespread, either in science fiction or in the scientific community, for another four decades.

In short, despite some pulpy prose and melodrama, **THE LEGION OF TIME** is entertaining, intriguing and, considering its age, more than a little surprising.



CONTACT

By Carl Sagan
Simon & Schuster, \$18.95

A message containing 30,000 pages of blueprints for a mysterious machine is received from the star Vega. The machine is built, and the five people who climb into it are taken to visit the machine's designers, only to find that they, like the **OVERLORDS IN CHILDHOOD'S END**, are far from being the end of the line.

I bought **CONTACT** rather than wait and hope for a review copy, and I'm not sorry. It has its faults, and there are major portions that are reminiscent of other books, but it's still one of the most enjoyable of the year and deserves a spot on the Hugo and Nebula ballots.

On the negative side, the love story and the fanatics who oppose the building of the machine are never integral parts of the story but appear to have been included primarily to conform to the "best seller format." They simply never have much real effect on the central character, scientist Eleanor Arroway, or on the building of the machine. They just fade away and are never heard from again.

On the positive side, the books **CONTACT** reminded of -- **CHILDHOOD'S END**, **THE LISTENERS** and **BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT HORIZON** -- are all terrific books, and Sagan has handled the concepts as well as or

PUBLICITY DIRECTORS, EDITORS,
PUBLISHERS, AUTHORS...ARE
URGED TO SEND BOOKS FOR REVIEW
TO GENE DEWEESE

2718 N. Prospect
Milwaukee, WI 53211
He reviews sf and fantasy for
COMIC BUYERS GUIDE, MIDWEST
NOV. REVIEW and other magazines.

better than anyone else ever has. Not only that, he has added some touches that are all his own, particularly in the ending, where he manages to give a spine-tingling sense of wonder to the mathematical values of transcendental numbers such as pi.

HUMAN ERROR

By Paul Preuss, TOR, \$14.95

In the not-too-distant future, computer microchips have been replaced by "biochips," artificially created, living, virus-like organisms which are, at creation, "programmed to learn." As might be expected, they learn far better and faster than their creators thought possible, and people everywhere are soon infected with -- or perhaps possessed by -- this potentially highly intelligent organism. *HUMAN ERROR*, however, is not another bioengineering gone-wrong story. Nor, for that matter, is it another *BLOOD MUSIC*, the excellent Greg Bear novel in which more complex biochips destroy North America before the book is half over. *HUMAN ERROR* is much quieter, with more sympathetic central characters. In a way, it is reminiscent of the fifties movie, *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, only turned upside down and given a mildly awesome though florid happy ending.



VOYAGERS II: THE ALIEN WITHIN

By Ben Bova TOR, \$15.95

At the end of the original *VOYAGERS*, astronaut Keith Stoner reached a derelict alien spacecraft passing through the solar system and elected to stay behind, frozen with the long-dead alien pilot, when the rest of the expedition returned to Earth. Now, eighteen years later, the spacecraft has returned into Earth orbit and Stoner has been thawed and revived. Meanwhile, the science found aboard the spacecraft has changed Earth greatly, not always for the better.

Stoner himself has also been transformed, sharing his mind with that of the dead alien and possessing gradually increasing mental powers, including forms of telepathy and psychokinesis. Once it is learned that he is awake, virtually every major power on Earth, both political and industrial, is after him, but Stoner apparently has goals of his own in mind.

THE ALIEN WITHIN shares some of the pacing and action that made the original *VOYAGERS* the page-turner that it was, but the story seems more disjointed this time, even contrived. There's enough suspense to keep you going to the end, but the characters too often lapse into political lectures, and the seemingly endless revelations of who is really controlling whom become a bit much before the ultimate power finally steps out from behind the throne.

SWEET SAVAGE SCI FI

BY GENE DEWEESE

"He laughed wickedly. 'Me little angel, is that any way to be talking to Tully, your new loveboy? We an' you gonna spend a lot of time together.'" (Prologue, pp. XI, *MOONDUST AND MADNESS*)

"As they seemingly shared respiration, their igneous gases remained locked." (pp. 193, *MOONDUST AND MADNESS*)

At a romance writer's conference last year, it was said that science fiction romances were the coming thing. This may or may not be true, but if it is, I can only hope that the above-quoted \$3.95 Bantam paperback by Janelle Taylor is not typical. If it is, both science fiction and romances could be in deep trouble.

As for my qualifications to make such a statement, let me say that I've read science fiction of all types since the pulps of the forties and reviewed it professionally for the last six years.

I've also seen virtually every one of the truly bad "sci fi" movies of the fifties and sixties, from "Godzilla" to "Robot Monster," and I've even seen a bargain basement Mexican horror movie called "Wrestling Women Versus the Aztec Mummy." In recent years, I've read a fair number of romances, ranging from excellent to atrocious, and even one or three of the hundred-plus porno novels written by an acquaintance of mine.

And yet, thankfully, in all that time, I've never come across anything quite like *MOONDUST AND MADNESS*.

A few of the plot highlights will show you what I mean.

In the Prologue, leather-clad villains (including the inimitable Tully, above) try to kidnap billionaire research scientist Jana Greyson from her palatial Houston estate, but she is rescued by a silver-suited billionaire space captain named Varian Saar. Saar, however, turns out to be a kidnapper as well. He is in the service of the Maffei Galaxy, whose women were wiped out decades ago and who are now stealing alien women to be sold into slavery for breeding purposes. He is, however, an absolutely gorgeous hunk, and even though he fondles the virginal Jana's naked and unconscious body and is barely able to resist raping her before she wakes up ("He could not prevent himself from making contact with that enticing flesh... He groaned as flames licked unmercifully at his manhood."), she is unable to resist his domineering charisma once she does become more or less conscious.

Meanwhile, a meteor is entering the Milky Way Galaxy and will reach Earth's solar system in a few weeks. Only the massed starships of the Maffei Galaxy have even a chance of destroying the meteor before it strikes Earth and destroys the entire Galaxy. The Maffei, however, cannot afford to send the starships because

that would leave their home galaxy unguarded, and they are constantly threatened by another galaxy, this one ruled by Saar's Satanically evil half-brother, the perverted scientific genius, Ryker Tryloni. Instead, they are sending only a few starships, not to deflect the meteor but to skim the cream of the breeding stock from Earth and that other woman-rich planet, Uranus, before the inevitable destruction.

And so it goes for more than 400 pages, each more unbelievable than the last.

This should not, however, be taken as a blanket condemnation of all SF romances. There are, after all, a few good ones out there. Linda Steele's *1815* (DAW Books, \$2.95), for instance, contains both competent SF and a believable human-alien romance. And there is always Philip Jose' Farmer's nineteen-fifties classic, *THE LOVERS*, generally accepted as the first and perhaps the best in that hybrid field.

The trouble with *MOONDUST AND MADNESS* is that it takes the worst elements of the shoddiest examples of both genres, including total scientific illiteracy, the purplest of purple prose, and a women-as-slaves mentality, and magnifies them unmercifully. In fact, it's almost impossible to believe that it was intended as a serious novel rather than a massive MAD MAGAZINE parody, although I do not know even MAD's writers -- or any of the entrants in the annual Bulwer-Lytton "It was a dark and stormy night" contest -- could come up with anything quite as campy as this.



AND THEN I READ....



THE SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH

By Arthur C. Clarke
Del Rey, \$17.95, 1986

In his Introduction, Clarke says he enjoys fantasy science fiction (like *STAR WARS*), but prefers hard, believable sf.

And so he created Thalassa, an ocean world colonized by an Earth doomed by an oncoming nova of Sol.

There is only one cluster of islands inhabitable by mankind, and as a result of strict censorship of Earth records and literature, the humans of Thalassa have developed a kind of low-key, easy-going utopia. They were born from sperm and ova in robot wombs, raised by robots, educated by robots... Until a second generation could take over.

Of course this kind of robot-child society would produce emotional trauma, neurosis, psychosis is among that first generation, and probably more emotional warfare in the second generation, no matter what was taught, no matter how often the robots said, "We love you."

Clarke prefers to believe not. His idealism and rationality require this psycho-social fantasy.

Faster-than-light drives are impossible according to 1985 physics, so the novel conforms to reality in that area.

And then comes a starship from Earth's very last days, manned by people who witnessed the nova that cindered Earth and Mars, who were kept in cryo-sleep until the computers awakened some of them when a suitable planet was reached. They hadn't known a robot ship had colonized Thalassa.

Arthur C. Clarke is a kind, gentle man, an optimist, an idealist, and in this novel his people

do not kill, lust, struggle for power. He has written a placid novel, filled it with rational, mature, adult people.

High drama, high-tension, are not present.

Not even the developing evidence of an alien, sentient lobster-like species under the seas does much to excite the reader.

Not even the aborted, rationally-handled near-mutiny on the newly-arrived Earth ship is very riveting.

Clarke writes in a clear, direct style, a simple style, and his character are uncomplicated, non-neurotic, with only minor problems to be solved.

And he seems to believe that environment---suitably managed---will cure most of mankind's problems. Thus the colony on Thalassa is an example: no baggage of racism, religion, capitalism exists (thanks to the far-seeing idealists on long-dead Earth who programmed the computers and robots on the colony ship), and extreme emotional pressures and kinks are no longer allowed. Jealousy, possessiveness, ambition, lust for power...all are muted.

It all makes for an interesting novel, but not an engrossing, involving novel. Clarke has written a story of plausible high-tech future science and peopled it with implausible, idealized, "nice" humans.

Expensive literary junk.

GALAXY JANE

By Ron Goulart
Berkley, \$2.95, 1986

Once in a while I love a Goulart satirical goulash; a dash of mockery, a splash of mild-mannered malice, a load of action and adventure involving his cartoonish characters and his smart-aleck robots.

You cannot believe his people are real (no, not even Palma, the baldheaded breast-fetishist photographer who always seems to turn up), and so you cannot really care about them. But they get off some damned funny lines, and perform such loony japey, that you read on for fun.

In this one, ace investigative reporter, Jack Summer, is sent to dig into the deadly Zombium drug trade, and in the process uncovers the true identity of drug king Dr. Voodoo. The locale is the planet Murdstone where a movie company is on location making of film about the long-dead space pirate Galaxy Jane.

There are zingers in this novel: an alien birdlike screen writer named Harlan Gryzb who screams constantly about the purity of his lines, how the producers are ruining the movie... (He is credited with having written a brilliant bird novel titled I HAVE NO PERCH, YET I MUST SING, AND THE BEAST THAT SHOUTED BIRDSEED AT THE---); and the tag-along daughter of the owner of NewNet has won the prestigious Platt Award for Incisive Interviewing.

But I have a bone to pick with Ron. He calls robots who are disguised with fake flesh androids. Now, ever since Edmond Hamilton's CAPTAIN FUTURE stories of the '30s and '40s, I've known that an android was a humanoid created with artificial organic flesh and bones, with an organic brain. Robots are mechanical and/or electronic on the inside, regardless of how they look on the surface. Hamilton's android Otho, and his robot Gragg, set in cement the definitions of these types of life/intelligences.

So when Ron's characters rap one of his "androids" on the head and hear a bong-a-metal skull--I know he has lost his way, is confused, has written too many Battlestar Galactica novels.

GOODMAN 2020

By Fred Pfeil
Indiana University Press, \$15.00
10th & Morton Streets,
Bloomington, IN 47405

There's a kind of authorial schizophrenia going on here: The story is taut, suspenseful, gripping, well-told, dramatic--all the good things a reader wants, begs, for, and too often doesn't find.

BUT. The technique used is Third Person, Present Tense (with a few Second-Person inserts here and there):

I'm telling you, Ernie, T.D. is saying. I had Central Data put out tracers on Sampson three times to make sure.

There are no quotes. Dialogue is all says, is saying, or implied. There are no signals. And at times it is difficult and puzzling to figure out if a given sentence is being said or thought or told by the author.

At least twice, (the first words of the novel, especially) the author

RICHARD E. GEIS

is foremost, center stage:

Foggy Bottom, the setting of this story's first scene, is an area of central Washington where political power is presumably held...

And this choice of narrative technique (probably the literary/intellectual "in" thing when this novel was written -- Pfeil is an Assistant Professor of English at Trinity College at Hartford, CT with short-story credits in PLOUGHSHARES, THE SEWANEER REVIEW, FICTION INTERNATIONAL) is counterproductive to the reader; it slows him, confuses him, angers him. The technique is anti-reader. It is anti-story, too, to the extent that it hinders, hampers and limits the reading of this novel.

The novel also touches other fashionable, ever-present academic/intellectual bases: it is fervently anti-capitalist, anti-corporation.

So, why do I like it?

In spite of all the pretentious roadblocks-to-reading, the story of Ernest Goodman in the year 2020 A.D. is a very good study of human character, of morality (and lack of it), of basic human needs perverted by authority.

It is also very real and has marvelous imagination and extrapolation: the human and technical detail are utterly convincing.

Pfeil tells of a world ruled by world corporations in bitter rivalry for control of markets, resources, governments. OMNICO is the corporation-as-villain in this novel, and its power-abusing president is seen as typical; he, like the generals, presidents and dictators he raises to power and topples, is temporary, subject to planned-for replacement when (inevitably) his character flaws yield to the corruption inherent in vast power and he gets himself killed or makes a big-loss mistake.

The world of 2020 is one of an America of walled inner cities inhabited by classes of elite workers and managers who are watched and guarded constantly, who are manipulated and amused to a point of amoral perversion of drugs and sexual and violence delights.

Outside---are the dregs, the malcontents, the 'lesser breeds' who inhabit abandoned suburbs and shantytowns.

The core of the novel is the story of Ernest Goodman, a man who loves his wife and her son, and who is a professional friend to the rich and powerful. He is a personality chameleon, a quick study, who becomes a confidant and buddy to those who need a friend, who will buy a substitute for lack of trusting and loving enough to earn the real thing.

Goodman is picked by Richard Devine, president of OMNICO, to be tested as possible friend...

The tests are terrible, and so are Ernest's moral choices.

This is a fine novel of depravity, terror, murder, evil, temptation... Very basic. Very, very basic.

Pfeil is an excellent writer; it's a pity he couldn't write in the standard narrative style and sell this to a commercial publisher. He would have reached hundreds of thousands more readers...at the price of offending his academic peer group. Writing, "I'm telling you, Ernie," T.D. said, "I had Central Data put out tracers on Sampson three times to make sure." would not have diminished the novel in any way.

But Pfeil might feel it is a sell-out to write 'commercial' fiction. He bleeds for the downtrodden masses in this novel, but God forbid he write for them, eh?



MISSION EARTH

Vol. One: THE INVADERS

PLAN (1985)

Vol. Two: BLACK GENESIS:

Fortress of Evil

By L. Ron Hubbard

Bridge Publications, both \$18.95

There are those in the inner reaches of science fiction who think L. Ron Hubbard did not write BATTLEFIELD EARTH, or the first two volumes of the 10-volume novel, MISSION EARTH. I'm almost positive he did write BATTLEFIELD EARTH, but I have serious reservations about Volumes 1-2 of MISSION EARTH.

I couldn't get very far into

BATTLEFIELD EARTH before concluding it was too juvenile and pulpish for me. It was written skillfully, with talent, but it was written for the golden age of science fiction---13.

I can't recommend these MISSION EARTH volumes to the same readers for the same reasons. The opening Introduction is fine, clear, coherent, skilled, an education in understanding satire. The novel's cute stage-setting documents are jocular, tongue-in-cheek, suited to teenagers in style. They contain the elaborate pretense of having been written by an alien scoundrel as a confession to his lord and master Lord Turn, from prison in Government City, Planet Voltar of the Voltar Confederacy (of planets, all 110 of them). And they are prefaced by an official declaration that the planet Earth doesn't exist, is a fiction!

But the fiction following the set-up material is awkward, clumsy, inept...simply bad, almost amateur in technique and skill. It leads me to think L. Ron Hubbard wrote the opening, and someone else completed the project.

(If ghost-written, couldn't a skilled writer be hired? But if Hubbard's brain were failing, the victim of subtle micro-strokes before The Big One...)

Uncritical, read-anything kids will probably be able to consume MISSION EARTH. And parents shouldn't worry: all swear words have been bleeped out by the translating computer, 54 Charlee Nine.

I'm genuinely sorry I couldn't endure these, and more sorry still that L. Ron Hubbard wrote these and probably forced their publication. I doubt any other than his own publishing company would have accepted them and poured megabucks into their promotion.

But wotthehell, them's the perks of money and power.

AT ANY PRICE

A Hammer's Slammers novel

By David Drake

Baen Books, \$3.50, 1985.

Colonel Alois Hammer's mercenary force has been hired to help the incompetent human forces on the planet Oltenia battle the alien Molts---the indigenous species whose planet has been partially colonized by mankind.

The Molts are hard-shelled creatures with the remarkable abil-

ity to teleport to places nearby where they are "focused".

This makes for a hellish kind of war. And when you add a dictatorial human society, a power-struggle, a clash of cultures....

But this novel leaves Colonel Hammer off-stage almost completely, and concentrates on two of his men ---Sergeant Profile Bourne, and Lieutenant Enzo Hawker---who are assigned to bodyguard and advise the new, young general assigned to command the lazy, fearful, gutless army of the colony.

The colony is Rumanian-oriented, with some interesting cultural twists of Epicurean and paranoid texture.

This is a violent, bloody story, and David Drake does not flinch from graphic detail. He does not like "easy" TV deaths---the victims die quietly, neatly (and let's get on with the story because the censors won't allow "violence" anymore)---which he suspects teach kids that killing is easy and sanitary.

His writing isn't too clean; it encompasses many thoughts, many interrelationships, many technical details of ordnance, armour, tactics.

What is most impressive is his ability to make all these future weapons (with accompanying tactical and strategic factors thrown in) so real and visual.

So this book is interesting and entertaining on several levels: there's a hint of Vietnam here.

There is also a bonus: two short stories at the end of the book involving Hammer's Slammer on other planets, in other mercenary engagements. They are "The Interrogation Team," and "Code-Name Feirefritz."

NEUROMANCER

By William Gibson
Ace Special, \$2.95, 1984

It's hard to believe this really fine sf novel is a first novel. But William Gibson's book reviews in years past for SFR---of very high quality---foretold his writing skills and quality of insight.

NEUROMANCER is a high-tension story of a self-destructive electronic raider ---a Cowboy---who jacks into the worldwide electronic matrix of computer communications and programs and steals data, makes false entries, etc.

He, Case, is superb at his craft, but one time stole something from his employer-of-the-moment, and that entity will get him, sooner or later.

Case is damaged goods, an emotional wreck, surviving by his wits, by drugs, on the perpetual edge of disaster---

---When someone or something rigs his employment for a really big raid and insures his loyalty and motivation by an operation which fixes drug-ruined

glands and adds slow-dissolving poison sacs.

The players in this kaleidoscopic novel are many and vicious: Molly, the assassin with electronic eyes, enhanced reflexes and retractable fingernail knives; Riviera, the sadist who can project hallucinations; Jane, the latest clone in a clanish, super-powerful family who own vast wealth and who are in the grip of their Artificial Intelligence computers, Wintertime and Neuromancer; Armitage, Case's apparent human employer who is a resurrected psychotic with a new personality overlay...

There are goodguys, too, like Dix, the mind-in-a-chip of a legendary Cowboy; Maelcum, the space tug owner, and, ultimately, one of the AI's.

The worlds Case and these others inhabit are mind and meat, drug and matrix, world and non-world, with each as real and important as the others. Case spends more time "out-of-body" than in, as far as the novel goes, and he has a real contempt for his meat existence.

This superb novel---the product of a man using first-class talent, skills and mind---has been called "high-tech punk novel" by Norman Spinrad (because of its use of the criminal underground of this future, its use of high-tech drugs, and computer intelligence?).

Terry Carr is the editor of the Ace Special series, and a great one; his choices win awards and stay on the Must Read lists. His description of NEUROMANCER as extremely visual is right on; Gibson sees and makes the reader see...the unseeable, and feel and taste and hear in this detailed, multi-leveled, multi-realitied bizarre future.

There is a whole lot more to be said about NEUROMANCER, but you don't need me to say it: read the novel and you'll be thinking the same things.



AUEJCON-UK

THE ODYSSEUS SOLUTION

By Michael Banks and Dean R. Lambe
Baen Books, \$2.95, 1986.

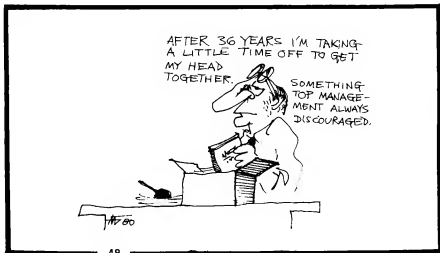
The cover and backcover blurbs make much of the birdlike alien invaders gifts to Earth of matter-duplicators. The machines wrecked the world economy, created chaos, and permitted the Oweom-jik to appear as saviors---and become rulers.

But the novel begins long after the chaos and Collapse of civilization, and follows a young, dumb klutz called Brent Erlanger, a sudden fugitive from his town, as he stumbles into the wilderness and is barely saved by elements of the underground resistance movement.

95% of this novel is narrative busywork---and then he ate, and then he went, and then he fumed and fretted---as the authors try unsuccessfully to create character and interesting, non-klutz dialog.

Structuring scenes for suspense, tension, conflict, danger is beyond or unknown to them. The writing is too often clumsy and unwittingly funny. For instance:

"Holy Mother of God, I counted my chickens before they were dead," he grunted to himself. "Should have checked on that fourth shit-bird first thing. God damned rookie mistake's done killed me. Hope Erlanger has the sense to stay back." Then, wrenching pain struck, and he cried out.



That's a long series of grunts. Another bit struck me between the eyes.

He shouted his frustration and anger in one monosyllabic burst.

The aliens appear very infrequently. Most of the novel is about Erlanger's learning about the underground, being tested, learning skills, a little history...

It's essentially a static, badly written, ill-structured novel.

I read this because Deam R. Lombe has done a lot of reviewing for SFR, I was curious, and I felt I owed him a read. I hope he and Banks have improved if they've sold a second novel.

CLOSED SYSTEM

By Zach Hughes
Signet, \$2.95, March, 1986.

I stopped following this story when the author, following a long tradition in sf, hauled in mindless religious fanatics, a one-man ruler of a planet with dreams of conquering the whole civilized universe with a space fleet of a couple thousand ships and a secret beam weapon.

Previous to these infusions of incredibility Hughes had a loner space freight skipper making a questionable delivery to a dictatorship planet and under commission to pick up a single passenger. The shit hits the fan when a local prospector dangles the universe's largest uncut diamond in his face, the passenger turns out to be a devastatingly beautiful vidstar on the lam from the dictator, and the planet's space fleet tries to prevent his escape.

From there the plot sickens and dies of malignant one-man-saves-the-universe disease.

The writing is pulp hack, the plotting is pulp hack, and I say to hell with it. There's nothing wrong with good pulp-style writing. Good fiction is good fiction, of whatever style and form. This novel is simply filler.

HARD SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin 1986 (\$21.95)
Southern Illinois University Press
POB 3697
Carbondale, IL 62902-3697

Sixteen essays examine so-called hard science fiction from all angles. The emphasis is on its writers and their stories/novels, with good ol' professor's favorite Stanislaw Lem paid most attention (with 75 listings in the Index). Uh, since when is Lem a hard sf writer? Oh, well...

DAD'S NUKE

By Marc Laidlaw
Donald J. Pine, \$15.95, 1986.

You'll feel the cutting edge of this social-sf satire even as you laugh.

Laidlaw---a young writer with much talent---shows you a world dominated by The Cartel, and by a Christian religion gone power-mad. But most of the story is about the Johnson family and their bizarre lives in their walled, laser-defended house and in their walled, laser-defended Neighborhood.

Dad is paranoid with distrust for his across-the-street neighbor.

Son P.J. has been genetically programmed to turn homosexual.

New baby Erica has been engineered to eat the waste of the newly installed nuclear power unit, and daughter Nancy is the victim of pill-induced maturation... All the family are force-aged by pills. You get the impression they live truncated lived of about twenty years from birth to old age. Why? Well, it's a nice satirical touch.

The computer-age gets its lumps, too, as work involves total sensory immersion in the computer whose programs seem to mix use of the human brain with pleasure, and as the Christian computer, sentient and hungry for a body, almost takes over another son, Virgil (who is abruptly old enough to marry, work, but now is too old to read and own books).

Consumerism, religion, corporate America, the family, the suburbs... all are carried to extremes, raked over the hot coals of Laidlaw's mind and talent, and burned to a crisp.

There is hope for humanity--and the remnants of the Johnson family--in the countryside "barbarians" who battle the Christian force, the Cartel, and indoctrinated city folk, and who take in rebels and malcontents from all.

There are some trapped-in-the-computer trips in this novel which will make you look sideways at your PC. And there are some insta-selves full of trunks and other drugs which will make you wonder about that TV dinner you have in the microwave.

And then there's the officious and insistent Dr. Edison, who forces everyone to take their age-acceleration pills on schedule... And the clones of the Cartel representative...

This is a full novel, replete with seductive mockery and vicious jape. I liked it a lot.

The photo on the back of the dust jacket shows Marc Laidlaw, who has sold stories to Asimov's, PFSF, and Omni, to be a young man in his twenties. It should be against the law for a kid that young to have this much skill, perceptiveness and talent. **Grump.**



SOME KIND OF PARADISE: THE EMERGENCE OF AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION

(Contributions to the Study
of Science Fiction and Fantasy,
#16, ISSN 0193-6875)

By Thomas D. Clareson
Greenwood Press 1985 (\$29.95)
88 Post Road West, Box 5007,
Westport, CT 06881

This one traces sf back into the 1800s and examines the entrails. (It's a messy job, but somebody...) The cut-off point seems to be the early thirties, after which sf is presumed to be fully emerged.

The emphasis again is on the writers and novels of the times, a fundamentally biased and wrong slant. See next review.

SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, AND WEIRD FICTION MAGAZINES

Edited by Marshall B. Tymn and Mike Ashley 1985 (\$5.00)
Greenwood Press
88 Post Road West, Box 5007,
Westport, CT 06881

Basically a reference book, but with bonuses all over the place: Seemingly every pulp magazine dealing with sf, fantasy and weird is here detailed with its own history (some, like ASTOUNDING/ANALOG, long and extensive). In addition, related anthologies are covered, along with academic periodicals and the acknowledged major fanzines, and non-English language magazines.

Also it includes an index to major cover artists, and a chronology of all the magazines by founding date.

What most impressed me was the care, detail, fairness and accuracy of the magazine histories, and the evaluations of the editors. Here is the hook upon which I hang a major criticism of 99% of academic literary examinations of sf and fantasy---the learned professors almost always virtually ignore the men who selected and published the

sf and fantasy they so minutely examine for trends, influences, social symptoms, etc. The publishers of even the mass pulps, the chains, had firm editorial policies ---taboos and musts---which governed what could and could not be printed! And some of them were weird, personal and eccentric! The editors---such as Sloane, Tremaine, Sam Merwin, Jr., Sam Mines, H.L. Gold, the Fernans, Boucher, Goldsmith, Pohl, Moorcock, etc., etc., etc. etc., had firm ideas and tastes about what was good and bad. Who were the editors of the Munsey magazines? Who ever mentions the influence of the legendary Leo Margulies? What about Mort Weisinger, the editors of THE ARGO-SY, ALL STORY...?

They didn't simply bow to writers and print what the God-like Authors sent them. Christ, the editors and publishers were the gods!

And with few exceptions, they still are! They decide what sf and fantasy is published. They decide trends and tides and movements, not authors! In my view the editors and publishers are as important (if not more) in the shaping of sf and fantasy as the writers. Yet there is not one mention of Don Wollheim in either of the above-reviewed books, HARD SCIENCE FICTION and SOME KIND OF PARADISE.

That, I submit, is an academic and critical crime. OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

And praise be for Marshall B. Tymn and Mike Ashley for their excellent SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, AND WEIRD FICTION MAGAZINES. A very valuable, needed volume.

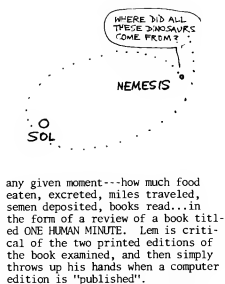
ONE HUMAN MINUTE

By Stanislaw Lem
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986,
\$13.95

It's been a few years since I last read a Lem book (SOLARIS, bits and pieces of others), and I note that he seems to have opened up and become more able to explore areas of thought he perhaps avoided before he left the communist dictatorship of Poland for the essentially capitalist free state of Austria. In any event this one book---especially the third section---is worth the money and the Now-thinking it will provoke.

Lem long ago proposed and then wrote a species of science fiction non-fiction---future non-fiction. The first two sections of this book are in that sub-sub-genre.

"One Human Minute" is a wry, mocking assessment of the magnitudes of what all of mankind does in



any given moment---how much food eaten, excreted, miles traveled, semen deposited, books read...in the form of a review of a book titled ONE HUMAN MINUTE. Lem is critical of the two printed editions of the book examined, and then simply throws up his hands when a computer edition is "published".

The second section, a review of a book titled WEAPONS SYSTEMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY, is eye-opening for its logic and for the appalling future it shows. He follows micro-minutization and computerization to the end of the line in military applications: humans would become too slow and inadequate to use the ever-smarter and precise and deadly weapons developed, and ever-smarter counter-defenses and subsequent weapons would lead to smaller, more agile, more hard-to-kill sentient weapons until---the world would be overrun with billions of insectlike mini-weapons and defenses, with a clustering capability built into some of the weapons to create nuclear bombs from millions of bits of "instinctual" insectlike robots.

But the third section is the best and most thought-provoking. It isn't science fiction. It is a consideration of the latest data and theory of how our solar system came into being and how life and then how human life appeared on Earth.

Briefly---you've got to read the book!---the reason life in the universe is so hard to find is that the chain of events which must happen in precise order (stars must go nova at exactly the right times, in certain sequences, not too close, not too far away!) is so rigorous and freakish for intelligent life to appear and flourish; that the odds are simply enormous, and reduce the likelihood of our ever finding another sentient species in our galaxy to almost zero.

The conclusion you are forced to accept is that instead of teeming billions of civilizations in the universe, there may be only a few dozen. Maybe...maybe only one---us. And that makes you think about special intervention by...

Could advanced cosmology bring

us to a conclusion that the only way life on Earth, and human life as well, could have come about is through an Act of God? Have we come full circle? If you accept the latest data and reasoning, a more rational and scientifically acceptable explanation is that an alien race, incredibly advanced, perhaps a fluke of the universe, knowing its loneliness and its uniqueness, intervened---over billions of years---to stimulate a chosen gas cloud in our galaxy to create more life in the universe. And that mission may be our eventual destiny, too.

As I say, this book is a mindblower.

STARMAN (PG)

lives or dies on Jeff Bridges' ability to convince you he is a human body---force-cloned to manhood within a few minutes ---inhabited by an alien intelligence.

He/it was forced down to Earth as he was on his way to a rendezvous in Arizona with a mothership.

The body he recreates from the DNA found in a lock of hair found in a memory book is that of the recently dead husband of a young woman played very well by Karen Allen.

The bulk of the film is their dash to Arizona from Minnesota where he crash-landed.

They come to love each other in this intense chase sequence (as the Feds close in on them...)

The Evil-Feds side is overdone (as they ready a field autopsy unit for---one thinks---instant vivisection of the alien-in-human-body, and Richard Jackel doesn't soften it any with his hardcase implacable playing of the Director (of the CIA? NSA?) role.

Near the end the clone-human/ alien and the wife make love, and he tells her the baby will be partly alien-in-mind, and will be a teacher. He leaves an alien power/ knowledge spheroid in her care; the child will know what to do with it. The New Christ is Coming indication is an opening for a sequel, if the moneymen think it will fly.

This is a Good Alien movie of some quality, though the Bad Government scenario is wearing thin for me. One might think of this as propaganda, too, of a cultural/religious kind. But I think it's simply commercialized idealism aimed at young adults and teenagers.

RAISING HACKLES



BY ELTON T. ELLIOTT

Well, I'm finally taking the step. With Dick phasing out non-REG reviews in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW and my own growing yen to write, on a more frequent basis, reviews, commentary, non-fiction musings and ramblings about SF, publishing, marketing, fandom, politics, etc., I've decided to start my own journal. It will be titled ELLIOTT'S BOOKLINE and will consist of eight 8 1/2 X 11 pages folded into an envelope. Its frequency will be as soon as I have enough material to fill eight pages (around 4 weeks). Charter subscriptions are ten issues for \$10. Checks should be made out to Elton T. Elliott and mailed to:

ELLIOTT'S BOOKLINE
Elton T. Elliott
1899 Wiessner Dr., NE
Salem, OR 97303

The first issue should be out around the first of May. To facilitate this I am buying a computer/word processor. The printer will be a daisy-wheel, manuscript quality printer. All issues will be mailed first class.

I intend to make ELLIOTT'S BOOKLINE as exciting, controversial and readable as I possibly can. There will be a letter column; I hope to hear from you. In the meantime, have a good spring and here's the rest of my column on its next-to-penultimate appearance in SFR.

IMAGES FROM THE ZOO: OR WHAT NORWESCON 1980 MEANT TO ME

Convention-going is a tightly compacted sensory overload for me. SF Cons are part quasi-family reunion, part business and part zoo -- that is watching the animals, er-ah, talking to the animals, feeding the animals -- even touching some of the animals (animals=some of those in costumes), to say nothing of some of the animals (I was dressed as American Mandamus Lawyer). My memory doesn't store details in a linear fashion. After a couple of days all I remember of a convention is disconnected images, snippets of conversations and a few events such as panels (more on one of those in my next article).

ing one of the animals (I was dressed as American Mandamus Lawyer). My memory doesn't store details in a linear fashion. After a couple of days all I remember of a convention is disconnected images,

snatches of conversations and a few events such as panels (more on one of those in my next article).

Images that float through my head: Simone Welch in a pink dress; John Varley out on the balcony staring into the night; Larry Niven mentioning the differences between penguins (North Pole Penguins Unite!); Varley coming back into the room, quiet intensity eyes from the molten pools of Venus -- or maybe he's just tired; Alexis Gilliland (by the way, thanks for the illos) lecturing me on the higher morality of eating meat and telling me that I'm nicer in person than in print -- thanks, Alexis -- I think -- and also giving me some great advice about thinking through the other person's point of view which I was too sleepy to remember much of; the Norwescon people being very nice and John Hernandez, Randy Prinslow, Bryan Hilterbrand, myself and five very drunk girls in an elevator. Somebody give John -- a handkerchief, please. And the one woman leading another woman on a chain and the young teenage boy next to me who said, "I wonder if they do boys." Don't feed the animals.

Then there was the panel on the "Social Responsibility of Writers" (thanks, Michael for the hard work -- and Robert on the brainstorm panel, which unfortunately turned out to be a braindrizzle). My fellow responsible panelists were Scott Russell Sanders, Norman Spinrad, Frederik Pohl and Dean Ing. I found out that Fred Pohl and I agree on practically nothing when it comes to politics; that Norman and I agree that mandatory drug testing is an abomination and that Dean and Fred disagree violently on the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars). Fred "Buckle Up or Else" Pohl actually believes that the yellow rain in Southeast Asia was beeshit, not nerve gas. Right. Oh, well, at least we agree on our right to disagree.

Thanks again to all those who worked at the convention and to all the readers of this column who said they enjoyed it even if they didn't agree with me all the time. After all, nobody's perfect -- well, maybe the editor and whoever signs the checks. And finally, Gene -- sorry about the six-part harmony. Next time I'm bringing along a couple of kazooes and a few cheerleaders.

IN THE FIERY FURNACE WITHOUT AN ASBESTOS SUIT: OR SF, FANTASY AND THE NEW AGE

I hate panels that begin before noon. At a Science Fiction convention most folks sleep in late. Some are sleeping off the effects of too much booze, others -- like myself -- the effects of staying up late observing those on booze making royal fools of themselves. So when Norwescon scheduled one of my panels at 10 A.M. on Sunday I wasn't thrilled. I feared most of the poor souls up at that hour would be half asleep, irritable as hell -- or usually both. Such was not the case. The room was jam-packed. Most of the audience was wide awake and even the panelists seemed chipper. The subject was "Mysticism of Tomorrow." My, what a nest of snakes was concealed under that innocuous title.

I decided to open up with some comments regarding Constance Cumby and her new book, PLANNED DECEIT (which Richard E. Geis reviewed in THE NAKED ID #10). I pointed out that I felt the New Age movement and other mystics were eventually headed toward a showdown with the fundamentalists both here in the U.S. and in the Arab Middle East and Israel -- in fact, anywhere that monotheism was the predominant religion. I mentioned the connections being drawn by some fundamentalists between New Age mysticism and the gnostic traces in Nazism. I also told some jokes about one person who has been accused by Ms. Cumby of being an occultist but who is actually a rationalist. The audience laughed and seemed amused. I sat back with a smile figuring I had done my job and could now gently go to sleep. But noooo. Such was not to be the case.

The next panelist identified himself as being a mystic, from California and into pyramid power. But, other than confirming some stereotypes about Northwesters hold about Californians, his comments were -- well -- mellow. The next person was Jayne Tannehill Sturgeon (the late Ted Sturgeon's widow) who made some comments about taking the "woo woo" out of mysticism and talked about "little children teleporting into their own reality" and about the "beings that visit us." The next person, Richard Purtill, writes fantasy and murder mysteries and teaches religion and philosophy at Western Washington University. He made some general comments about mysticism and then it was on to the last panelist, artist, Daneon Willoch. The name alone should have been a tip-off as to where

this chap was coming from. He identified himself as Christian, but averred as to how he had once been "on the other side of the fence." He proceeded to slam writers and other artists who he claimed didn't share a sense of responsibility for "writing books that made people go out and shoot others" (sic) and for taking a strong mystical stance. He said he was a Tharmic Engineer (whatever that is) and then said that he would probably disagree with everything that "a fundamentalist like Mr. Elliott believes."

What? I tried to wake myself up. "Just a minute," I blurted out, "I was only commenting on certain trends that I've observed. I never said I was a fundamentalist." The audience laughed. Anybody that reads my rant over the years knows that I have objected strenuously when some fundamentalists have tried to censor books, ideas and opinions that they don't like. I also wrote in my last column that I'm sympathetic to certain concerns that they have, including some of the concerns of Ms. Cumbeys, but that doesn't mean that I agree with all of their positions or all of her statements. (In fact, Dick Geis in an article for LOMPANICS wrote sympathetically of some of the fundamentalists' concerns regarding the public school system; does this make him a fundamentalist?)

I said that if they wanted to categorize me, I'm a dramatist; I think of the universe and mankind's place in it in dramatic terms -- and as a dramatist I can take both sides of a certain issue, in a book, without taking the same side in my personal philosophy. (At the end of this article I'll try to explain my position vis a vis New Age Mysticism and Fundamentalist Christian thought.)

I thought that would be enough. Nooo. An audience member (who later identified himself as Ross Pavlov, well-known fan who chaired a recent Worldcon) took me to task for saying that Constance Cumbeys represented "the mainstream of fundamentalist thought." I replied that I had said no such thing. That I felt Ms. Cumbeys to be an articulate, powerful spokesman for a certain point of view in the fundamentalist Christian community that "was gaining adherents." Later Pavlov in a private conversation expanded his position and said that he felt the New Age

was out to dismantle Christianity but he didn't support Cumbeys because of her "shoddy scholarship."

Several other people from the audience attacked for my opposition to mysticism, saying that "rationalists" such as myself had driven the world to the brink of nuclear war. Without pointing out that I had not been born when the A Bombs went off over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and could not have had anything to do with that, I pointed out that I wasn't a rationalist either. I said that anybody who chose to limit themselves philosophically had the right to do so, but please don't include me. I said my concerns about mysticism becoming a major force in Western Civilization was that I didn't have such a sterling record in India and China and that my concern over the New Age Movement had to do with its ties to Nazism, racist gnosticism and theosophy. After all, if being a mystic and an adept is so great and will make one peaceful and non-violent, how does Adolf Hitler fit in? He considered himself an adept and the reincarnation of Leopold II of Capua and dabbled in mysticism and black magic. It didn't make his worldview less peaceful and humanitarian. It's like parroting the feminist claim that if women led the world we would have no wars. Yeah, more like Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meier and Margaret Thatcher and the theory might hold true. Vegetarians (of which I'm one) often hold the same idiotic view. They forget that Adolf Hitler was a vegetarian. A philosophy or lifestyle says nothing about how that person might act in a position of power. Witness Ronald Reagan's claims to erase the deficit.

This whole thing of the New Age won't end as that panel mercifully did. Already there are indications that some are trying to tie the New Age in with SF and Fantasy. In the March 1986 issue of LOCUS in "The People and Publishing" section, LOCUS reported that Peter Wilfert had left the West German Publishing firm of Goldmann Verlag (Verlag is German for Publishing House) to Sphinx Verlag "where he'll deal with the burgeoning 'New Age' field, believing that fantasy has already reached its zenith." Former Bastei editor, Michael Goerden, will move to Goldmann in April as Wilfert's successor, editing SF, fantasy and "New Age" books.

In this year's Norwescon program booklet a Seattle based musical group, "Laughter and Love," was blurbled as having "received favorable reviews in the New Age, SF and Fantasy communities for their album of refreshing, positive music."

What the two examples mentioned above is part of a trend that I see developing and that I would like to nip in the bud as fast as possible. The New Age, SF and Fantasy are not the same thing. Two of them are areas of literature (mostly commercial entertainment, no matter how different their outlook), and the other is more than a philosophy -- it is an incipient world religion being pushed by numerous groups for their own selfish reasons. (I'm sorry, Alexis, I tried to be even handed -- on some issues maybe -- not on this one.)

What about my own opinions about the New Age Movement? My position can be summed up by quoting from REG's review

of Cumbeys's A PLANNED DECEPTION: "In my view there is a seat of control above those centers defined by Cumbeys, the various aspects of the New Age movement. And the real string-pullers are using the occult, the New Age, the pagan, anti-Christian organizations, the cults as tools in a far-reaching master plan far greater than any she has written about thus far." I don't have that on the overboard when she identifies Isaac Asimov as a "leading occultist" just because he signed the "Humanist Manifesto II." I think that carries the conspiracy argument to ludicrous extremes.

My advice? I say fight the bastards, the censors wherever they appear and in whatever form they choose. My friend Kerry Davis believes that a satellite to the Southern Pacific (or thereabouts) is in order. This attitude is curiously close to the admonition in the Bible "to flee to the mountains." Of course, the Mormons are too busy becoming gods to worry about such things.

What does all of this ultimately represent? I believe that it represents conflicting urges of creativity and destructivity, individuality and group-think as we move to the most fearsome point in human existence -- the leap into space, concurrent with a High-Tech civilization replete with wonders like genetic engineering, longevity, etc. I think this is leading up to a millennial-like confrontation and the question has to be, does this confrontation represent two separate paths or is it a response to something as an explanation which externalizes human psychological topography, or does the conflict in reality stem from external realities which the human psyche internalizes? In other words, external in nature or internal in response to real world realities or interior brain structure. In any case the over-riding question is, can it pose a personal threat? Yes. Maybe. Although the root cause might be psychological, the danger is social and political. The Nazi connection is there. I happened on to that long before Cumbeys's first book. My suggestion -- study. Don't take this mystical human spiritual evolution at face value and watch out for Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell (even disapproves of Robertson as "a little"). God heavens, you don't think it could be all a plot to repopulate the universe with Valies, do you? (Note: To avoid misunderstandings read the dictionary definitions of rationalism, mysticism and fundamentalism.)

MUSINGS

An interesting trend is developing in publishing. Many novels which in the past would've been listed as SF are now coming out as novels, romances, etc. Obvious among the examples are all three of the novels I've written with Dick and Fawcett in publishing: THE SWORD OF ALLAH, THE BURNT LANDS and MASTER FILE. All three depend on developments in science and technology for their narrative. TSOA and TBL are set in the near future. The difference is we aimed them at the general reading public and stayed away from genre conventions like a specialized vocabulary.

Other examples that follow the same pattern of fictional concerns, but non-generalizations are Jean Auel's CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR and its successors, Len Deighton's tale of Britain under Nazi



rule, SS GB. Clive Cussler's novel CYCLOPS which features a secret moon colony and a fight between the U.S. and the Soviet Union over its control.

Two recent books really caught my attention: AMERICA 2040 by Evan Innes (Bantam, April 1986, \$3.95) and Janelle Taylor's MONUMENT AND MAJESTY (also Bantam, May 1986, \$3.95) -- (for a hilarious review of the latter see Gene DeWeese's column). The Innes novel is the first part of a timid derivative series put out by Lyle Kenyon Engle's group. The second is an awful, tasteless romance that is quite simply one of the worst ever published by a commercial publishing house. About the best you could say about these two books is that they open up new markets and new readers for SF writers.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE MESSIAH STONE by Martin Caidin (Baen Books, April 1986, 416 pp., \$3.95) is an unusual thriller. Unusual in not only subject matter, but in the fact that the author claims that the basic idea behind the book is real!

The book concerns the possession of a stone; the person who controls the stone rules the world. The last such person is rumored to be Adolf Hitler -- and before him Christ -- hence the book's title. A group of five wealthy individuals hire mercenary Doug Stavers to find the stone. Harrowing adventure and non-stop action follows, for it seems that Stavers is not the only one after the stone. The Pentagon, the Israelis and the Vatican all want the stone and its supposed magical powers.

If you want action and chilling suspense THE MESSIAH STONE will do quite nicely. The characters are considerably larger than life. The protagonist, Doug Stavers, is fascinating, but somewhat of a mystery throughout the book. He never came into focus for me. I would like to have known what motivated him to lead the bloodthirsty life he leads throughout the novel. A peek into his childhood might help. The ending of the novel seemed anticlimactic and overly reminiscent of Frank M. Robinson's THE POWER.

As for the Caidin's stone in the Afterword that the "Messiah Stone" exists, I find that as fascinating as anything in the novel. When he says "I have been familiar with it for many years," what does he mean? Has he watched too many episodes of THE BIONIC WOMAN? I'd like to read a non-fiction work exploring the Messiah Stone, the Godking Stone of Prometheus or by whatever name it is called. I would have dismissed Caidin's comments had I not run across references to such a stone in my research for a novel on the Nazis and their obsession with religious relics like the Holy Nail. There is clearly something kicking around in the dim and dusty corridors of history that if understood would cause a major reassessment of the historical events of the past 2500 years. What it is I don't know, but like Caidin I'm fascinated by it, although I don't know that I would go so far as to say that it actually exists, whatever it really is.

One final chunk of mystery. Several times in the Afterword Caidin mentions that he can't reveal various details for reasons made clear in the book. Well,

maybe I'm slow, but they remained opaque to me. The story behind this novel is a bigger mystery than anything in the novel proper.

CLOSED SYSTEM by Zach Hughes (Signet, 1986, 222 pp., \$2.95) is a taut, suspenseful space thriller. It is set several hundred years in the future, when an ancient weapon from an ancient war threatens mankind. One man, Pat Howe, space tug operator, is thrust into the middle of events that cost him money -- and maybe his life. The ending is unusual and very moving. Recommended.

ISAC ASIMOV PRESENTS THE GREAT SF STORIES 14 (1952). Edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg (DAW, 1986, 352 pp., \$3.50) is another in what is turning out to be the definitive series of anthologies on science fiction, in the genre magazines. The stories are excellent as are the candid introductions by Asimov and Greenberg. Excellent stories by Bradbury, Leibler, Mark Clifton, Shekley, Farmer, Hamilton and many others including the intense, fascinating "Game For Blondes," by John D. MacDonald. A story that seems slight yet makes its point and at the same time brings home what a superb writer SF lost when he went into the suspense/detective field. This collection shows what a vibrant field magazine SF was in the early 1950s.

I believe that the large number of magazines allowed a great many new writers into the field and that the wide variety of editorial tastes represented by those markets allowed writers the opportunity to develop quicker than they would today, when the entry points for magazine SF writers are extremely limited.

THE KIF STRIKE BACK by C.J. Cherryh (DAW, 1986, 299 pp., \$3.50) is the second in the Chanur Trilogy. A brief commentary by Cherryh at the end of this novel makes it clear to the reader that this is part of a trilogy, something which the first book, CHANUR'S VENTURE did not do. It has a convincing, well-thought and intricately detailed background. These novels are almost political thrillers and it's remarkable that in a field not renowned for the believability of its politics, Cherryh's work is so believable. The aliens are fully fleshed out, but -- for me -- the story is lacking a little fire. I can't see that Cherryh is covering any new ground. It seems like a reshuffle of the first book in the series (an independent novel) THE PRIDE OF CHANUR. I hope the concluding volume in the trilogy, CHANUR'S HOMEcoming, proves me wrong. The writing is superb though, as is the pace and tension. Cherryh and Chanur fans should enjoy this immensely and look forward to the last book in the trilogy.

NOTE: Several issues ago I mentioned my irritation at the fact that CHANUR'S VENTURE was not identified as being Part I of a series. In the Afterword, Cherryh explains that DAW Books allowed her to publish a long novel in three separate parts without the narrative juggling involved in trying to give each book a beginning, middle and end. So actually THE KIF STRIKE BACK is only the middle of a book. It is nice to see the reader warned -- even if at the end of this book. Let's hope that in its next editions of CHANUR'S VENTURE a similar notice is published.

IN ALIEN FLESH by Gregory Benford (TOR, 1986, 280 pp., \$14.95), a collection which shows Benford at his most erudite in the introductions and at his dazzling, innovative best in the thought-futurist stories. "Doing Lennon" (1975), the last story in the volume, is the most typical and atypical of the stories here. It is about a person from the future who meets Lennon -- it is eerily predictive of Lennon's death -- or the obsession that caused it.

The rest are excellent gems including the magnificent title story which is one of the best attempts -- and most successful -- to portray aliens.

BRIDGEHEAD by David Drake (TOR, 1986, 279 pp., \$3.50), is another in a long line of excellent novels from this overlooked and underrated author. He continually produces novels that are intense, suspenseful and entertaining and yet does not receive any critical attention. He reminds me somewhat of Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson in their early years. They wrote quite a bit -- all of high quality but were mostly ignored. But if Drake continues to write at the level of BRIDGEHEAD he won't be ignored for long.

BRIDGEHEAD concerns a team of humans from the far future trying to help a professor construct a time machine. All is not what it seems. Not the "humans" or the machine. It is an exciting story, but what impressed me the most was the deft, believable way Drake handles his characters, particularly Henry and Sara Layberg. There is one scene where they reconcile that rings so true it reminded me of Kate Wilhelm who does that better than anybody I know. The difference is Drake can tell one hell of a story. BRIDGEHEAD deserves to be nominated for some awards.

THE HUGO WINNERS VOLUME 5 1980-82 Edited by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday, 1986, 372 pp., \$18.95) contains nine very impressive stories. My memories of the Hugos are evidently worse than the reality if these stories are any indication. This is a collection to give to the friend that wants to know why "you read that crazy stuff." Especially memorable are "Sandkings" by George R.R. Martin, "The Saturn Game" by Poul Anderson, "The Cloak and the Staff" by Gordon R. Dickson and John Varley's romantic "The Pusher." These are stories by some of the best writers at their best -- four stars.



OTHER VOICES OTHER VOICES

THREE HOT BOOKS
THREE LATE REVIEWS
BY JOHN SHIRLEY

One of the major disappointments of my youth was realizing there are no such things as Mad Scientists. There are neurotic, even psychotic scientists -- but not slaving, wild-eyed, visionary madmen like Baron Frankenstein. Except for one.

Rudy Rucker. Rudy Rucker is a mathematician and professor in Lynchburg, Virginia. He published an influential nonfiction book about time theory called *THE FOURTH DIMENSION*. Rudy Rucker: Respected scholar of science -- and dangerous madman. If you don't believe me, read his hot second-to-newest science-fiction novel, *MASTER OF SPACE AND TIME* (Bluejay Books). It's dangerous -- exquisitely dangerous -- to have someone monkey with your perception of Reality the way this madman does. Towards the end of chapter one scientist Joseph Fletcher climbs into his car and finds hundreds of bee-sized Harry Gersbers flying around his steering wheel. Harry Gersbers is Joe's ex-partner in Research and Development -- now, Harry has become Master of Space and Time because he's designed and built a blunzer, a device that enables him to reshape the fabric of reality in accordance with his whims. Harry -- a dumpy, greasy sort of guy who cultivates his own bad habits with great deliberation -- uses the blunzer to open doors into four other universes: the Microworld, Infinito, The Future, Hyper-space, and the Looking Glass World. Before the book is over you'll have taken a trip into most of those worlds. You'll also have seen our own world terrifyingly transformed, and cruelly (but accurately) satirized, as Rucker makes fun of our artificial environment of desperate pleasure-distractions and feverishly franchising commerce, with all the toxic grubbiness of their side effects. He does it breezily, readably, and with a madcap humor exhilarating in its sheer perversity.

And the scary thing is Rucker makes his surrealistic transformation of the world believable. He explains the blunzer scientifically and lucidly, in a general way ... The characters sometimes lose verisimilitude sometimes if only because they react to the bizarritiy with improbable casualness. But in every other way, Rucker's new one-world works like a good hit of blotter acid. Phil Dick fans will love *MASTER OF SPACE AND TIME*. So will Frank Zappa fans, and fans of Zap comics. So will anyone who likes to be entertained till you're dizzy.

Anyone, anyone, anyone: Anyone nostalgic about the 60s or, for that matter, anyone who's not nostalgic about that de-

cade and wants to understand what was so special about it, should read *THE SECRET OF LIFE*, the newest book by Rudy Rucker. This semi-autobiographical novel hilariously and tenderly re-creates the revolutionary cultural milieu of the 60s, and does it without a lot of vaporous elegizing or portentousness. The book suffers only from Rucker's rare lapses into cuteness, and, again, this tendency to give us characters who react to miraculous and impossible events with only the mildest astonishment or disorientation. I don't want to give out much of the plot, as in this case it would undercut the effect of the book's surprises, but I will say that because of a bizarre percentage -- which the hero discovers rather late -- Rucker's protagonist learns he has superhuman abilities. (Rucker seems to fantasize a great deal about having superhuman powers.) He employs these powers to live out a sort of rocknroll Grim Fairy Tale which ought to engage even the crustiest of readers. For maximum information-input, elegant brevity, sheer entertainment value, insight and charm, Rucker is nearly unmatched in the field.

Jack Dann's new novel, *THE MAN WHO MELTED* (Bluejay Books), is in a way the culmination of the themes he had the unparalleled courage to tackle in *JUNCTION* and *TIMETIPPING*. But stylistically and in terms of sheer authorial control, this is his best book, and one that may well be influential, not only in the science fiction field, but in the realms of metaphysics, psychology and in mainstream literature.

Dann's existential hero Raymond Mantle is a professional subliminal artist, whose real concern is his personal vision-quest. Superficially, he's searching for his lost lover (incestuous lover, for she's his sister) Josiane, but we realize early on in his nightmarish 21st century odyssey that he's actually searching for his world -- he's in it, yes, but still he's searching for it, its absolutes, its secrets, and his part in it. To get to it, he has to spiral down through the nautilus-shell levels of himself, working through membrane after membrane of subjective truth until he reaches the root of himself, the place where subjective narrows to screw into objective, where self, the internal world, merges with the external world and the cosmos.

Only don't suppose that this is some tedious Hesse-like mystic/psychological fiction -- *THE MAN WHO MELTED* is gripping, harrowing, a fascinating journey through the world as it is becoming.

In the 21st century a scourge has disfigured the face of civilization: a plague of "Screamers." Screamers are a kind of instant riot, where hundreds of people are caught in a great psychic wave of something which carries them screaming and wreaking destruction through the streets. Get caught in it and you get caught up in it. Some explain it as a virus that "facilitates or blocks some neurological action in the brain." But others believe "the cities are torn apart because social reality is a sham. We've blocked over the internal world with a social one, the purpose of which is to keep us from ourselves." The psychological theorist R.D. Laing is quoted more than once in the book at one point as saying, "The Dreadful has happened to us all, that being the collective estrangement of modern man from the unconscious parts of his being." And the Screamers, then, are perhaps the bottled-up unconscious breaking loose, undamning in a great wave of sheer inner Self.

Mantle's Josiane was caught up in a Scream, and now he doesn't know if she's alive or dead. But a religious cult, the Criers, utilize Screamers and a kind of electronically-enhanced telepathy, brain plugged into brain, for a communion with those who have passed on to the next world. They plug into Screamers to speak to the Dead -- and to learn from the Dead about the living. Mantle risks his sanity -- already a fragile thing -- to take part in a Criers ritual, despite his skepticism, in order to reach into the next world. He finds both more and less than he bargained for.

Along the way we see deeply into Mantle's sometime-lover Joan, his peculiar relationship with the right-brain suppressive fax newsmia reporter Pfeiffer, and the neurotic mind of an Onanistic society which permits casinos in which you gamble for body parts; suicide cruises on the refitted RMS Titanic; the fashionable attachment of male and female genitals to the arms, legs and chest; and the menacing arcology of the grid of civilization's material artifacts. Dann orchestrates all of this with the chilling sensuality of a Stravinsky, the schematic accuracy of J.G. Ballard. The onion-skin peeling of psychological reality and sociological conspiracy becomes increasingly intriguing as the book goes on. *THE MAN WHO MELTED* won't bore you and it may make you sore of what John Lennon asked for when he begged, "Just gimme some truth."

OF COURSE ITS CLASSY!
YOU DON'T SEE ANY USFL
LOGOS. DO YOU?



SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY AND WEIRD FICTION
 Ed. by B. Tym & Mike Ashley
 Greenwood Press, 970 pp., including
 appendices, bibliography, index and list of
 contributors; plus preface, acknowledgments,
 introduction by Thomas D. Clareson and
 list of abbreviations
 Hardcover, no dust jacket, \$95.00

REVIEWED BY ROBERT A.W. LOMDIES

This massive volume presents first, individual histories of all science fiction, fantasy and weird fiction magazines published commercially in the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia from ARGOSEY (1882) through LAST WAVE (1983). As that suggests, we find not only magazines entirely devoted to science, fantasy and weird fiction but a large number of marginal publications. Some of those, like ARGOSEY, published a wide variety of fiction, including the weird, fantastic and science fiction; others were specialized, running only one type of fiction, but including some science fiction. Still others were series-character magazines, wherein many of the feature stories included weird or science fiction themes.

Hugo Gernsback's SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY/AMAZING DETECTIVE TALES, is an example of the second type. It was entirely devoted to stories and articles dealing with a scientific approach to solving crimes and identifying criminals, but only a minority of the material could be called science fiction. There was, however, at least one science fiction detective tale in each issue. The bulk of the fiction offered stories about science, presenting nothing that did not already exist at the time -- but often showing how such devices could be used in crime detection.

DOC SAVAGE and G-8 AND HIS BATTLE ACES were examples of the third type. Both were single-character pulp-hero magazines, but contained a small number of tales that could pass as science fiction. THE MYSTERIOUS WU-FANG was a spin-off from Pu Manchu, containing much weird and fantastic material. DIME DETECTIVE, TERROR TALES and HORROR STORIES (Popular Publications) were detective-crime stories with bizarre and erotic tinge, (sadism rather than sex), but now and then we'd find a genuine weird tale -- one wherein there was no "natural" explanation for the macabre events.

The bulk of the book (pages 3-782) deals with those English-Language magazines; Section II covers associational English-Language anthologies; Section III covers academic periodicals and major fanzines, and Section IV deals with non-English magazines by country. Appendix A is an index to major cover artists, and Appendix B offers a chronology, showing when the titles made their debut, year by year.

Two long-standing myths are shattered -- and not at a moment too soon. The BLACK CAT (1895-1923) has been touted as a predecessor of WEIRD TALES, not to mention AMAZING STORIES. Mike Ashley's survey shows that it was nothing of the kind; while the magazine did present some weird and science fiction tales, they were few; other popular magazines of the day had more of such material than TBC. THE THRILL BOOK has also been mis-rated in the same way as the BLACK CAT. It did run some stories by authors who became noted for fantasy and science fiction, such as Grey L. Stange, but favors it in WEIRD TALES; Murray Leinster, who would become one of the biggest names in



science fiction magazines; Francis Stevens, who had several memorable serials in ARGOSEY, and Tod Robbins, who was also featured in the Munsey pulps. (The latter two would be featured in the Munsey reprint titles.) Again Mike Ashley straightens out the record: THE THRILL BOOK did not run any higher proportion of fantasy and science fiction than did ARGOSEY and ALL-STORY.

The histories of these magazines are all well done, and the judgments of the contributors as to the worth of the various titles and their editors are both keen and fair in the instances where I am familiar with the magazines. That does not mean I agree at all times -- if I did, that would show that there was something wrong. (A book of ratings that agrees with me 100% wouldn't be of much value to anybody else -- and not worth much to me, either, come to think of it.)

There are, of course, errors -- no volume this size could be error-free -- and most probably there are some that I did not detect, because I was not familiar enough with the material.

Two examples will suffice: (1) With truly awesome consistency E. Hoffmann Price -- whose name comes up, appropriately, too, much more often than I would have suspected -- is shown of the second "n" in his middle name. It's "Hoffman" throughout. (2) In the otherwise well done history of Gernsback's "Wonder" monthlies by Robert Ewald and Mike Ashley, we jump from WONDER STORIES' first venture into pulp format (Nov. 1930 issue to Oct. 1931 issue) to its large, flat saddle-stitched format, selling for 15 cents (Nov. 1932 issue). Between the pulp issue dated October 1931 and that first flat issue, WONDER STORIES was a large-size magazine again, still priced at 25 cents and for seven issues (Nov. 1931 to May 1932) was printed on a high quality (but not coated) paper, with the June 1932 issue, it returned to pulp paper.

I wish I could stop right here and say that the errors are not damaging on the whole -- but there is another category of error that is damaging, and painful for me to have to elaborate upon, be-

cause my own magazines are described so kindly, without any cover-up of their deficiencies.

Aside from Mike Ashley and me, and a very few others, the contributors on the whole are unaware that all science fiction magazines (and nearly all issues of WEIRD TALES) published in the United States were pre-dated.

What does that mean? Here's an example: Let's look at three issues dated January 1933: STRANGE TALES (Clayton, the final issue), ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE and AMAZING STORIES. STRANGE TALES went on sale in October 1932; ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE went on sale in November 1932; AMAZING STORIES went on sale in December 1932. Not one of those three issues dated 1933 appeared in 1933. Throughout the section of the book, we find reference to magazines appearing in a particular month as if they had gone on sale in the month shown on the cover.

So what? Well, in many instances it really doesn't make all that difference. But there are times when it makes a lot of difference. Let's turn to Appendix B, the Chronology. (We see under 1929 that there is no listing for SCIENCE MONTHLY STORIES, but that is an error of another kind.)

Under 1930, ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE and SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY are listed. Wrong! Both magazines made their debut in 1929, with 1930 dates on their covers.

Under 1939, DYNAMIC SCIENCE STORIES, STARTLING STORIES, and STRANGE STORIES are listed. Wrong. They all came out in 1938 with 1939 cover dates.

Under 1940, ASTONISHING STORIES is listed. Wrong. It came out in 1939 with a cover date of 1940.

Under 1941, STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES is listed. Wrong. It first appeared in 1940, with a 1941 cover date.

That common type of error, which, alas, is perpetuated rather than corrected in this generally excellent book will increase confusion as the years go by. It's not only a matter of the magazines themselves, it's also a matter of authors, whose first stories appeared in an issue dated January or February of a particular year -- but which actually appeared the previous year. In what year did Miles J. Breuer's first story appear? The answer is (December) 1926 -- not 1927 (January) which was the cover date of that issue of AMAZING STORIES. When did John W. Campbell's first story appear? The answer is 1929, not 1930, which was the cover date of that issue of AMAZING STORIES.

And we have such things as the first issue of Ramond Palmer's FANTASTIC ADVENTURES appearing in May 1939, when (you have guessed by now if you remembered that it started out as a bi-monthly) it went on sale in March 1939.

Section II deals with associational English-Language anthologies, such as ANOMEDRA, DESTINIES, INFINITY, NEW DIMENSIONS, NEW WRITINGS IN S.F., WRAB and SCIENCE FICTION. The English translations of Perry Rhodan are also covered. Just how Donald A. Wolheim's anthology THE GIRL WITH THE HUNGRY EYES, fits here is not entirely clear; but, its excellence justifies it, and the claim is made that it is the "first original science fiction anthology." I believe that is correct.

Section III deals with academic periodicals and major fanzines, and of course, is highly selective; there are probably a number that should have been included, but were not -- but I wouldn't quarrel with any of the selections. Those include THE ACOLYTE, ALGOL, AMRA, FANTASY COMMENTATOR, FOUNDATION, LOCUS, OUTWORLD, RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY, SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW and THE WEIRD TALES COLLECTOR.

Section IV deals with non-English-Language magazines by country. Here I must pass comment because I have no idea whether the list is complete or how accurate the descriptions may be. I do of course, remember the Mexican magazine, LOS CUENTOS FANTASTICOS, which published many stories by futurians (including my own) without payment, but we got free copies of the issues.

Appendix A is accurate so far as I've been able to determine, and a valuable source. Appendix B may become a valuable source in the second edition, but is now too much of a mess as detailed above. I can think of better ways of spending time than to check the index for general accuracy; but it's been reliable thus far when I've used it.

All in all, this remains an excellent text, well worth the price. I'd cheerfully buy it, if I hadn't received a complimentary copy as a contributor, even knowing the faults mentioned. Just remember: cover date does not equal calendar date.

JERUSALEM FIRE by R.M. Meluch
NAL/Signet, 1985, 331 pp., \$3.50

REVIEWED BY DEAN R. LAMBE

Two millennia after the collapse of the first historical age, the Na'id Empire of man seeks to reunite the human worlds of the galaxy under the Bel's rule. Resistance to the Empire's anti-alien, anti-religious tyranny of forced human miscegenation seems crushed when Earth's last symbolic city, Jerusalem, falls to General Shad Iliya. Years later, the last of the rebel ships are destroyed by a Na'id fleet near an uncharted planet.

When Captain Aliahad and Captain Harrison White Fox Hall escape the Na'id attack, however, they find the planet not so much unknown as the stuff of myth. The two rival rebels are rescued by Itrii warriors, mysterious humanoid aliens who once carried their deadly double-curved swords throughout human space. Primitive as their society and planet may appear, Aliahad and Hall are shocked to discover that the Itrii still retain starships. The two captains, for reasons locked in their own troubled pasts, strive to understand each other, to coexist with the odd collection of other human refugees on the planet, and to escape to continue their personal missions against the Na'id. Although escape is promised, their wishes are thwarted by Roniva, the Itrii priestess-leader, and the bizarre actions of Jinin-Ben-Tairre, an incredible human Itrii.

Yes, all the stuff of space opera appears on the surface of JERUSALEM FIRE but Meluch does not write mere facile entertainment. None of the richly-detailed characters is quite what he or she appears to be, and the conclusion is very

fine indeed. Read this one; Meluch deserves more attention than her publisher has given her.

MYTHAGO WOOD by Robert Holdstock
Arbor House, 256 pp., \$14.95

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

Steven Huxley has lost his father and brother to Ryhope Wood -- a remnant of ancient post-Ice Age forest that has a far greater accent than its outer borders would appear to allow. Some secret of the forest, combined with human racial subconsciousness, peoples the wood with beings of myth and legend -- the "mythagos" of the book's title. Some of these mythagos take the shapes of familiar figures -- the questing knight, Jack-in-the-Wood and the like -- while others go so far back in time that they are familiar only as archetypes, remembered subconsciously.

Huxley's father and brother have both been seduced by these mythagos, particularly one named Guinevere, a young woman that each of them believe to be their own creation. They are obsessed with her and the forest that borders their land so that when she is taken back into the wood, they follow in search of her, each in his own time. And then it is Huxley's turn to meet her -- his own mythago of this same woman.

Robert Holdstock's newest novel is a tour de force. It takes the poor tattered garments of Teutonic/Celtic myth and breathes new life into their over-used fabric. Huxley's exploration of the forest, first through his father's research journals and then by entering the wood itself, make for a deeply satisfying book, especially in a time such as this when so much fantasy is merely fluff. There are resonances and lyric passages here, strange discoveries and old histories clothed anew, but most importantly, MYTHAGO WOOD explores that "night journey" into the human subconsciousness that we must all undertake at some point if we are to be more than drones in a purely mechanical world.

The book was originally published in 1984 by Victor Gollancz Ltd and shared the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel with Barry Hughart's BRIDGE OF BIRDS, presented at the 1985 World Fantasy Convention in Tucson. Highly recommended.



WITH A TANGLED SKEIN
By Piers Anthony
Ballantine, 1985, 280 pp., \$14.95

REVIEWED BY NEAL MIGUS

Limbo (LEAK) -- For the first time in recorded memory the same person has served as two different Aspects of Fate. Fate, of course, if one of the five incarnations of immortality and is divided into three Aspects -- young Clotho, who spins the threads, middle-aged Lachesis, who measures them and old Atropos, who cuts them. Each Aspect is performed by a different mortal person who becomes "immortal" while in office and the three share the same body, shifting from Clotho to Lachesis to Atropos, as necessary.

Young Niobe Kaftan was recruited to serve as Clotho after her husband was killed by one of Satan's agents in an elaborate plot to tip the cosmic scales in His favor. Niobe, as Clotho, was able to thwart Satan's plan with the help of the other Aspects of Fate and with the other incarnations -- Death, Time, War and Nature. But Satan doesn't give up easy so after Niobe retired from her service as Clotho and resumed aging the wily old Devil once again began his behind-the-scenes manipulation.

Part of Satan's plan involved inducing all three Aspects of Fate to retire from their positions at the same time, so that Fate would be in the hands of three rank amateurs and give Satan the opportunity to have his way with things before they gained enough experience to oppose him. Alas for Satan but luckily for the rest of us, the old Fates approached Niobe, now appropriately middle-aged, and convinced her to become the new Lachesis so that she could provide some continuity and the hope of again blocking Satan's plan. Niobe agreed, seeking to revenge herself on Satan for the death of her husband, and to protect her granddaughter Luma, the target of Satan's Big Plan.

Details of this development can be found in Piers Anthony's WITH A TANGLED SKEIN, but it would be best if the reader is first familiar with Book One, ON A PALE HORSE (1981), and Book Two, BEARING AN HOURGLASS (1984). Further developments will be reported in WEILDING A RED SWORD and BEING A GREEN MOTHER, the final volumes of this excellent and unique fantasy series, to be published in the next couple of years. For the next time for the latest in Piers Anthony's relentless drive for universal domination.

HUMAN ERROR by Paul Preuss
TOR, 351 pp., \$14.95

REVIEWED BY STUART NAPIER

Computers have been a staple of science fiction since before their capabilities were anywhere near what the authors were predicting. Now, computers have advanced dramatically in the past ten years and today's SF novel using computers has to strain to keep ahead of the rapidly expanding technology. Paul Preuss, in his fourth SF novel HUMAN ERROR, has successfully kept ahead. Now, exciting than a glimpse into the far future, the novel skates along the edge of known developments in the field of biological comput-

ers and artificial intelligence, keeping just the right balance between science and the fantastic possibilities to come in a seamless narrative.

The author tells a crisp, clear story about the invention of Picell, a genetically altered virus that functions as the heart of a new wave of computers programmed to learn as they are given new problems and to continue to expand their capabilities as increasingly difficult problems are presented. An interesting counter-point is struck by using as main characters the British-American programmer Toby Bridgeman and his collaborator Adrian Stross, the sloppy, American genius-hacker turned scientist.

What is not realized at first by this "odd couple" is the dramatic impact this new generation of computers will have on the military-industrial complex, now that almost anyone familiar with a Personal Computer can afford access to what we today call "super computer" power. Also, the virus that was thought to be non-contagious to humans....

Better you should read the book yourself and find out. Paul Preuss has fashioned one of the most thought-provoking of the new generation of computer novels. Frightening and inspirational at the same time, HUMAN ERROR should be a must-read for any serious hard science fiction reader and a "user-friendly" novel for those who don't normally enjoy this fare.

THE SKEPTICAL INQUIRER
Published quarterly by the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Subscription: \$18 or \$5 per single copy.

REVIEWED BY ALMA JU WILLIAMS

I had heard of this organization -- CSICOP -- and this journal, at various times but not until I sent for and received a collection of papers of the Pull Moon and Bizarre Behaviour (or lack of it) by James Rotton and I.W. Kelly, including a xerox of their SI article and then received a subscription form for it, did I send for a subscription to see what all the hullabaloo was about. VERY Interesting! The Fellows of CSICOP include such notables as Isaac Asimov, Martin Gardner, Francis Crick (he of "The Double Helix" and Nobel Prize fame), L. Sprague de Camp, Stephen Jay Gould, James "The Amazing Randi," Carl Sagan, Phillip Klass and other notables including academics and professors of physics, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, statistics, linguists, more magicians, etc. The aim of the organization is to investigate paranormal occurrences such as psi power, poltergeists, "miracles," spoon bending, Uri Geller (Randi has thoroughly discredited him), psychics, UFOs, pseudoscience, you name it and they'll look at its occurrences which appear to defy the normal working physical laws of the universe.

The articles are well researched (sometimes in person) and well written, and if you are as curious as I am, it is to what really causes the cattle mutilations or if the Shroud of Turin is real (it's a clever painting which was known and repudiated by the local bishops of the time), or whether the Nazca figures are really an anti-aircraft target as some ignorant astronauts (it's not) and directions on how to draw your own Nazca figure in

your forty-acre back pasture are provided), how the psychics read your mind (magician's tricks), then this is the magazine for you.

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CHALLENGE OF THE CLANS By Kenneth C. Flint
Bantam, 323 pp., \$3.50

REVIEWED BY PAUL MCGUIRE

Can one go wrong with a novel based upon Celtic Myth? After very good novel, A STORM UPON ULSTER, Mr. Flint proved that one can go very wrong with apparent ease with his fantasy/science fiction movie and TV sci-fi combination in the Sidhe trilogy. With CHALLENGE OF THE CLANS it is back on the right track, but still in low gear. First, the myth being retold is one which is a cliché of all bodies of legend and genres of literature. A hero is slain; his infant son escapes to be reared in seclusion, later emerges into the world powerful but naive, becomes a fugitive but with the help of a few loyal companions regains his rightful honor and status.

What is worse, Mr. Flint does nothing original or even particularly interesting with this tired plot. His characters do not have individualism, let alone depth. His prose is functional, but usually flat. The best which may be said of this work, his fifth book about the WARRIORS of the Beautiful Land, is that it does occasionally show some signs that by his seventh or eighth novel of the ancient Irish the material may become worthy of the source.

SO LONG, AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH
By Douglas Adams
Harmony Books, 152 pp., \$12.95
Pocket Books, 208 pp., \$4.50

REVIEWED BY ALAN VARNEY

The fourth book in the Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy series takes its title from a joke in the first book: All dolphins vacated Earth with this exit line just before the planet was destroyed. The reference, like the entire story, will be incomprehensible to those who haven't

read the first book and its sequels, THE RESTAURANT AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE and LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING.

As with most bestsellers, reviewing this book is pointless. Either you've already bought it or you won't; whether it's good is irrelevant. In fact, this book is very bad, which has had no effect on its sales. And that's worth talking about.

The book-buying public, most especially including SF fandom, seems sequel-happy, series-happy. Authors who have done good work in the past -- even one good story -- have a free meal ticket for the rest of their careers. People will line up for all their future work, no matter how banal, boring or bad. They want to recapture that original thrill, or maybe they're lazy-minded and want to return to a familiar fictional background, where they don't have to make the effort to meet new characters or see new places or think about new ideas.

Authors exploit the tendency in varying degrees. Some keep trying to deliver fresh material. Stephen King, whatever you think of him, hasn't always taken the lazy way out -- witness the Bachman pseudonym, which avoided capitalizing on name recognition. But other writers, whether through hardening of the arteries or sheer sloth, are happy to let their names support their work.

Thus the recent work by our aging giants of the field and thus Douglas Adams. Perhaps tucked out by the strain of inventing an entire hilarious cosmos in previous books, Adams stays mainly on a recreated Earth in this book. The hapless Arthur Dent falls in love, wanders around some, tells an anecdote that Adams has told on talk shows, and basically treads water for 150 pages (200 in paperback). There are two or three good lines, but the inventiveness is gone.

No novel provokes universal agreement, but I honestly can't see much in this lame isometric exercise that would appeal to readers who liked the previous books in this series. I've reviewed them all for SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, but I'm bowing out with this one. Still, it's a bestseller; I dare say Adams' future books will be as well. People keep lining up...

There's nothing we can do about this. Authors are either willing to give good weight or they aren't, and negative feedback seems to have no effect. All we can do is vote with our pocketbooks and not buying the new novels. But there always seem to be new readers to take our places -- so many new readers, in fact, that there must be one born every minute.

MAGICIAN: MASTER By Raymond E. Feist
Bantam, 1986, 303 pp., \$3.50

REVIEWED BY MARK W. ANTONOFF

MAGICIAN: MASTER is the second installment in the exciting fantasy series by Raymond E. Feist. This volume picks up where MAGICIAN: APPRENTICE left off, in the tale of Pug and Tomas and their involvement in the Riftwar saga. The saga spans two worlds, the first of which is the second volume that we are introduced to the world of Kelewan, the world of the Tsurani. As

Pug, the orphaned apprentice magician, is captured and passes through the spiraling, the reader experiences this incredible alien world. Kelewan is one of extremely complex politics and of a powerful order of magic.

It is through this new order of magic, the greater path of magic, that Pug, now called Milamber, finally succeeds in commanding his powers. With his high position as a Great Mage, a position outside the Kelewan law, Milamber is afforded tremendous privileges, which he uses to aid him in forging the destiny of both Midkemia and Kelewan.

Still on Midkemia, Tomas has changed as well. A gift from a dying dragon he befriended, links Tomas with a dead Dragon Lord. It is this dual personality, coupled with the weapons which once belonged to the Dragon Lord, that allows Tomas to tip the balance of the Riftwar in favor of the men, dwarves and elves of Midkemia.

MAGICIAN: MASTER is stocked full of warm characters that the reader is enchanted with and feels a vested interest in. Raymond E. Feist has truly woven a masterful conclusion to the story which began with MAGICIAN: APPRENTICE. Again, his fresh style is wholeheartedly welcomed and urges one to compare Feist's craft to that of Tolkien. MAGICIAN: MASTER is a fitting complement and companion to MAGICIAN: APPRENTICE and belongs on the bookshelves of all fantasy literature enthusiasts. The next mass paperback, SILVERTHORN, is due out in the fall. The concluding novel however, DARKNESS AT SETHANON, is due out in March 1986 in hard cover.

SILVERTHORN By Raymond E. Feist
Bantam, Sept. 1986, \$3.50

REVIEWED BY MARK W. ANTONOFF

SILVERTHORN, the next volume in the Midkemia series by Raymond E. Feist, begins one year after the conclusion of MAGICIAN: MASTER. This time, it is the beginning of the gripping tale of Arutha, now the Prince of Krondor. SILVERTHORN chronicles the adventures of Arutha and a small band of his close friends, as they venture into treacherous lands protected by the evil Murmandamus and his followers. The quest takes the band on a search for the silverthorn plant, the only antidote to a poison which has been introduced into Arutha's betrothed, Anita, by an assassin's arrow meant for Arutha himself.

One of the most endearing characters in this novel is one we have been introduced to in MAGICIAN: THE HUNT. This young monk (thief) adds an interesting dimension to the book. Jimmy displays maturity, and the street life he has lived has made him advanced for his age, yet the boyish qualities of his youthful age have not been lost from him and come through. Jimmy's talent as a former monk (he becomes the ward of Arutha) made him a valued, as well as a welcomed addition to the quest and to the predominantly adult cast of characters.

Although SILVERTHORN is much narrower in scope, in comparison to the previous work, it is well written and presents an adversary worthy of any heroic figure in epic fantasy literature. The fulfillment of Murmandamus represents the fulfillment of

an ancient prophecy as well as the embodiment of ultimate evil. Murmandamus's series, a group referred to as the Night Hawks (Black Slayers), prove to be an almost impossible foe. When one of the Night Hawks is killed, he immediately comes back to life, now an even more fearsome foe. To destroy one, it requires that the being's heart be cut from it. It is then very wise to burn the remains to insure that the Night Hawk does not trouble you further.

A DARKNESS AT SETHANON By Raymond E. Feist
Doubleday, March 1986, 425 pp., \$17.95

REVIEWED BY MARK W. ANTONOFF

A DARKNESS AT SETHANON is the concluding novel in the highly acclaimed Midkemia series by Raymond E. Feist. This novel is a continuation of the novel SILVERTHORN. The Prince of Krondor, Arutha, and his cohorts, are still encountering Night Hawks, while the forces of Murmandamus are gathering and building in preparation for a full scale attack on the land. The story culminates in a massive confrontation of all the forces of both Midkemia and Kelewan pitted against the army of Murmandamus.

Pug and Tomas are reunited in this volume when they embark on an exciting escape into another dimension, via a magical dragon, in search of the mysterious magician, Macros the Black, and the nature of something called "The Enemy." This quest leads them deep into the past; to an oracle, to the place of the dead and back to the very beginning of time itself.

The classic separation of battle and quest is present in this new novel. While Pug and Tomas search for Macros, Arutha and company prepare to confront Murmandamus and his forces of evil. The prophecy calls for the Prince of the West to be the only one who is capable of defeating Murmandamus. The Prince of the West is obviously Arutha, and Murmandamus has been trying (unsuccessfully) to kill Arutha. Murmandamus is unaware that he is facing Arutha until it is too late. The story moves to a sensational conclusion with all the forces converging on the city of Sethanon, in a classic battle between good and evil.

With the publication of A DARKNESS AT SETHANON, the Midkemia trilogy has come to a suitable conclusion. All of the main characters have grown, developed and matured. This volume is an extremely satisfying read. Feist writes in a compassionate and sensitive style while fulfilling the readers' expectations, and successfully satisfying the romantic inclinations of his readers.



ALAN COO - WZ

HEART OF THE COMET
By Gregory Benford & David Brin
Bantam, 1986, 468 pp., \$17.95

THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS By Kim Stanley
Robinson, TOR, 1985, 351 pp., \$15.95

REVIEWED BY KEITH SOLTYS

Kim Stanley Robinson is one of the best new SF writers. His novella, "Green Mars" published in Asimov's, was one of the best novellas of 1985. THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS, his third novel, is a good one if not quite as good as "Green Mars."

It's set more than a thousand years in the future, after humanity has expanded to all the planets and moons of the solar system. Johannes Wright, a musician and conductor, embarks on a grand tour of the solar system, playing the Orchestra, a fabulous musical instrument that can mimic a whole orchestra. The Orchestra had been created by Holyweilkin, who was also the greatest prehistorist since Einstein and gave humanity the means of expanding into the solar system. As the novel progresses it becomes clear that the Orchestra is far more than just a musical instrument.

This is a marvelous evocation of a strange and wonderful far future. It also one of the best science fiction novels based on the art of music and what might become. At the same time it's a solid hard SF novel. If it falls down anywhere it's in the plotting. The Grand Tour idea lets drama so Robinson has surrounded it with a cosmic conspiracy/secrete society subplot that doesn't really work.

According to Algis Budrys, writing in F&SF, THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS is actually a re-written version of Robinson's first novel, heretofore unpublished, which may explain the unevenness of the plot. Even then it's a fine book to read, and reading, if not the masterpiece that Robinson will surely yet write.

When I first heard that Greg Benford and David Brin were collaborating on a novel called HEART OF THE COMET, my first thought was "fashioning in on Haley's Comet, eh." Well, I hereby apologize to the authors. HEART OF THE COMET is one of the best SF novels of the last few years.

The story is set around a mission to establish a base on the nucleus of Haley's comet, during its next return in 2062. The expedition contains a microcosm of the troubled world of the period, normal humans, perverts who have been genetically altered and various political and ideological factions. The colonists must not only battle against the strange environment they have chosen to make their home but against the divisions that they bring with them from Earth, divisions that are more threatening than anything the comet can muster.

Benford and Brin haven't neglected the human element in their story. The central love triangle between Carl Osborn, and American astronaut and percell, Virginia Kaninamau Herbert, a Hawaiian computer programmer and Saul Lintz, an Israeli biologist, is one of the most moving in recent science fiction. There's a deeper level at work here too. Heinlein's Compent Man, the Wandering Jew and Koestler's Ghost in the Machine all come to mind as archetypes that add another level of depth to the characterization.

HEART OF THE COMET is science fic-

tion at it's best, a powerful story that both stretches the mind with its ideas and examines the limits of the human spirit. If Benford and Brin continue to collaborate, and if they improve, they will likely be regarded as the best collaborative team in the history of the genre.

ERUS DESCENDING By Mike Resnick
NAL/Signet, 1985, 250 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY DEAN R. LAMBE

With his third volume in the Tales of the Velvet Comet, Resnick adds further to his theory of the general relativity of good and evil. This time the Steel Butterfly, current Madam of the galaxy's most elegant orbital brothel, plays with the odds on two horse races. On the one hand, the Comet is host to an actual race between cloned re-creations of secretaries at the Leisure Slew, for gambling is one of the many vices offered in the great pleasure palace. On the other hand, and more to the point of the story, the Steel Butterfly must battle for the survival of the Comet itself, as fundamentalist Reverend Dr. Thomas Gold challenges the bottom-line fixations of the executives whose parent Vainmill Corporation owns the Velvet Comet.

As leader of the Jesus Pures, Gold is appalled by what he sees as corruption and sin aboard the Comet, and he rallies his followers to boycott all Vainmill enterprises. When he uses the Comet's two popular faerie prostitutes -- childlike aliens from Besmarth II -- as ultimate examples of Vainmill exploitation, however, it becomes clear that all is not pure in the heart of Gold. Simon, Gold's truly more-holier-than-thou son, worries about his father's obsession, while the Steel Butterfly worries about the future of her job.

Can religious fanatics really bring an end to the 87-year history of the Velvet Comet? It might seem so, yet we must await the final book in the series to see how Resnick will end these enjoyable morality tales.

PRIVATEERS By Ben Bova
TOR, 1985, 383 pp., \$15.95

REVIEWED BY NEAL WILGUS

I picked up this book at the library on the day the shuttle exploded and was surprised when the first sentence read "The explosion was utterly silent." But PRIVATEERS is not about disaster in the space program, it's about triumph -- in space and in spirit. Not, of course, without a struggle.

A century from now the United States has lost its world leadership and the Soviet Union is dominant both on earth and in space. There are space stations operated by Japan, China, Venezuela and other countries, but the Russians control the moon and thus the source of raw material that other nations depend on. The Soviets also have the orbiting laser system presently nicknamed "Star Wars" that gives them the muscle to enforce their wishes.

Such a depressing scenario calls for a macho American hero and sure enough it's Yanqui billionaire Dan Randolph who almost singlehandedly defeats the Soviets. Randolph, who renounced his American citizenship when the US caved in to Russia, is the head of Astro Manufacturing Corporation, a private company which operates space station Nueva Venezuela for the Venezuelan government. When the Soviets begin raising their prices for raw materials in order to squeeze out the competition, Randolph and company round up a nearby asteroid to set up a little competition of their own.

There's also some hot competition between Randolph and Vasily Malik, Commissar of Space, for the hand (and body) of Lucita Hernandez, a Venezuelan beauty whose father happens to be the Minister of Technology and a contender for the Venezuelan presidency. Lucita is engaged to Malik but of course she's also involved with Randolph in an uninspired subplot. And Rafael Hernandez is the opportunistic politician willing to push his daughter into a loveless marriage for the sake of his own ambitions -- you have probably met him before.

The trouble is you've met all these stereotypes before -- and this plot, too. You've got to give Ben Bova high marks for spirit and for devotion to the idea of space colonization and private initiative. Alas, the fiction within which this idealism is found is so formula and predictable as to be -- well -- less than exciting.

But PRIVATEERS is no disaster, either. What it is is middle-of-the-road storytelling with a great Uplifting Message, which is an entirely safe combination, right? But then the shuttle was considered pretty safe too, right up to the explosion.

Maybe there's more to PRIVATEERS than I'm letting on.

*****TRANSUE*****



ENTERING SPACE: AN ASTRONAUT'S ODYSSEY
By Joseph P. Allen with Russell Martin
New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1985
240 pp., \$24.95 ISBN: 0-941434-76-1

LIFE IN SPACE: Alexandria: Time-Life Bks
1983, 304 pp., \$30.00

SIGHTSEEING: A SPACE PANORAMA
By Barbara Hitchcock & Peter Riva
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985, \$24.95

REVIEWED BY CLIFFORD R. MCMURRAY

By the time this review is published Christmas 1985 will be a fading memory, but as I write these words it is the

season of the coffee table book once again, and the crop of such books for the space enthusiast is indeed lush. The first thing to be said about these books is that they are exquisitely beautiful; I would have mortgaged my home to own them. The second thing to be said is that they are expensive; the mortgage was only narrowly avoided. But if you love the view from the high ground as much as I do, you'll cheerfully eat macaroni and cheese for a few weeks while you save your nickles and dimes for a specific treat. ENTERING SPACE and LIFE IN SPACE are available in soft-cover editions, but it goes without saying that they are a poor economy measure. The difference in price is not that great, and given their size (big enough to make good weapons) the paperbacks would be falling apart before the first reader was finished.

The best buy of the three is unquestionably Joe Allen's book. The text of ENTERING SPACE is not particularly inspired and will not tell the enthusiast much that he didn't already know, but neither is it particularly objectionable. The color reproduction of the hundreds of NASA pictures is -- well, call it outstanding is to insult it with faint praise. Most of the pictures are from the Shuttle era, particularly those flights in which Allen was a participant, but there are many from the Apollo and earlier flights. There is a small "I'll wager you haven't seen before." The photography is heavily artifact-oriented, but one chapter is devoted to views of the earth and planets without any intrusive evidence of the works of man. Me, I like the spaceships. ENTERING SPACE was published last year, but those who waited until this year to buy it will be glad they did: for the same price tag, this year's edition was expanded to include a new chapter on the satellite retrieval missions. This chapter includes pictures even more spectacular than the rest, if that were possible.

LIFE IN SPACE is a trip down memory lane. From the earliest days of the space race when most of the photographs were in black-and-white, through the early Shuttle missions. The color reproduction is just the way you remember it in the magazine -- even the captions on the pictures are the same, although a lot of new text has been added. This book enables you to see the space experience as it was originally seen by the American people, and to smile as you remember.

SIGHTSEEING is a somewhat curious item. Barbara Hitchcock supposedly sifted through every photo taken by our astronauts (over 150,000 images) to come up with the eighty-four best pictures. Granted that a professional photographer has somewhat different criteria for picking a photograph than I do, it is still difficult to justify some of her choices. But once again, this book has some pictures you've probably never seen before, and I think you'll find it worth the money. The photos are better on a fine book, less glossy than the pages of ENTERING SPACE and much better than LIFE IN SPACE, and the book has a thoughtful foreword by Arthur C. Clarke.

Yes, Christmas is over, but these books are too nice to buy for someone else, anyway. You owe them to yourself.

CHAMPIONS OF THE SIDHE
Bantam, 277 pp., \$2.95
MASTER OF THE SIDHE
Bantam, 248 pp., \$3.50
By Kenneth C. Flint

REVIEWED BY ALMA JO WILLIAMS

These are sequels to *RIDERS OF THE SIDHE* and after reading these, I'm sure that George Lucas must have read the Irish mythology of Lugh of the Long Arm, before he made *STAR WARS*. The Irish legends are the original, at least in the form that Kenneth Flint tells of it. The writing is not the greatest prose the world has ever seen, but it carries the reader along at breakneck speed through the many adventures that Lugh and his companions encounter in the effort to free Eire from "The Dark Force" of Balor and his minions!

Just read Luke for Lugh (!), Leia for Aine, Chewbacca for the Pooka, Obi-Wan for Samanstan Mac Lir (Gillie the Clown), Darth Vader for Balor, the evil Emperor for the rebellious Druid who rules Balor in the Glass Tower, etc. etc., and you have got the whole story. The plots are more complex than the movie, but then, what can you expect from legends. This is the original *STAR WARS*, so get it!!



DEVIL ON MY BACK By Monica Hughes
Bantam, 196 pp., \$2.75, (Juvenile)

REVIEWED BY PAUL MCGUIRE

The plot of this juvenile novel is not blazingly original. A boy from an underground post-holocaust city is forced out into the wilderness where he undergoes rites of passage. Ms. Hughes does some fascinating things with this set-up, however.

Tom manages simultaneously to be an arrogant prig and a sympathetic protagonist. A slave revolt brings about his unwitting exodus. After some interesting struggles against nature, an endeavor for which he is singularly unequipped, Tom encounters a primitive society of runaway slaves. His changing perceptions of them, lessons learned, change and growth are excellently portrayed. Ms. Hughes does a quite fine job of showing how a good person can accept an evil system as natural. Tom is made to understand the despicability of his world, the city founded upon the misery and enslavement of its majority. Eventually, he volunteers to return in an effort to help the cause of freedom -- and some of the biggest and best surprises in the novel remain to be discovered after that.

In an entertaining manner, young readers will learn about human values, morals, obligations and sacrifices, as well as not to accept institutions and people at face value. The book is a good, although quick, read for adults as well.

REVIEWS BY CHARLES DE LINT

THE CRUSSI-TIME ENGINEER By Leo Frankowski
Del Rey, 259 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

When hiker Conrad Schwartz passes out in the basement of an alpine inn only to wake up in thirteenth century Poland, he joins an SF tradition that goes back to Mark Twain's A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT. Since Twain's classic first appeared, many writers have tried their hands at various aspects of time travel -- so many in fact, that the idea has grown fairly stale.

To freshen it up, Frankowski has eschewed the popular American Celtic backgrounds, giving his novel a Slavic background instead. He also gives his hero a definite goal immediately. Schwartz has ten years to make good in the area where he's been stranded (educate and travel the people, industrialize, etc.), for at the end of those ten years the Mongols are slated to invade that part of Poland, destroying everyone and everything in it.

Needless to say, this being only the first volume of a projected tetralogy, Schwartz doesn't achieve his goals by the end of the book. But THE CRUSSI-TIME ENGINEER stands quite well on its own. It is an enjoyable romp through a tried-and-true SF tradition. I only hope we won't have to wait too long for the remaining volumes in the series to appear.

DRAGONSBANE By Barbara Hambly
Del Rey, 341 pp., \$3.50

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

Barbara Hambly continues to be a fresh voice in the fantasy field, taking tried and true -- and by this time, quite hoary -- plots and traditions and standing them on their ears. Her new novel *DRAGONSBANE* is no exception.

A dragon has appeared in the Realm of the King, nesting in a gnome keep called the Deep of Yiferdun and destroying all of the knights the King has sent against it. In the Court itself, the King has been ensnared by his mistress Zerne, a powerful sorceress. The only hope for the kingdom is the Dragonsbane of the Winterlands, John Aversin, the only living man to have killed a dragon, and his own mistress Jenny Waynest, a sorceress as well, albeit not a very powerful one.

Ah, yes. Ho-hum.

But a simple run-down of *DRAGONSBANE*'s plot does it absolutely no justice. Hambly is a masterful hand at her craft and has a warm sense of humor to her writing that depends not at all on slapstick or clever puns, but grows rather from the droll personalities of her characters -- especially that of John Aversin. John is a very mighty-themed nor a great knight, just a scholar with a dry wit, who happens to have had to kill a dragon because it was threatening the people whose safety depended on him.

Many of the other characters are as much off-the-wall, from the courtly Gareth who is deeply disappointed that Dragonsbanes and guests bear no resemblance

to the ballads that he is so fond of, to the main viewpoint character Jenny, who while torn between her simple life with John and a desire for greater magery, delivers a running commentary on the events around her that is as humorous as it is insightful.

That Hambly can deliver the warm humor in her prose, while maintaining the tension of the storyline, is much to her credit. That she can combine them both with some serious considerations into the human condition, is more so. And that she can turn the staid conventions of the fantasy genre topsy-turvy while working from within its limitations -- this books well for the field as a whole.

The sense of wonder that brought many readers to fantasy in the first place has found a reliable chronicler in Hambly's skills. Even if you don't like quests or dragons, don't pass this one up.

DARK OF THE MOON By P.C. Hodgell
Argo/Athenum, Nov 1985, 386 pp., \$19.95

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

It's been three years since P.C. Hodgell's first novel *GOD STALK* introduced us to the young dancer/thief Jame. The end of that novel left Jame, her companion Marc and a blind hillcat fleeing the burning of the city of Tsi-tastigon. *DARK OF THE MOON* takes up their story just a few days later as they escape the area. Pursued by shape-changers and bandits, they head south where Jame means to be reunited with her long-lost twin, Torisen, and to give him his heritage, a broken sword and their father's ring.

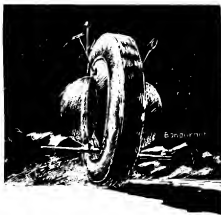
But *DARK OF THE MOON* is Torisen's story as well and the novel follows two separate storylines, alternating chapters with each character. Torisen is now the Highlord of the Kencyr, a precarious position at best, as the various Kencyr lords are forever plotting on how to get rid of him, each hoping for personal gain. In the midst of this, Torisen leads the Kencyr Host to war in the south, against the invasion of a numberless Horde.

Behind these two plot threads runs a third -- the ancient war between Kencyr and their enemy Perimal Darkling -- and it is this thread that eventually pulls the book together into a unified whole.

A brief plot analysis cannot do justice to Hodgell's work. Her plotting is good, Dickens-like in its complexity, though also following Dickens and other 19th century writers like Dumas in favoring a certain amount of coincidence to tie events and characters together.

This is not to fault Hodgell, though. The plot still works admirably, the pacing is just right, the world she has created seems to lie beyond the page, and her characters are varied and very believable -- especially Jame, who is easily one of the more likeable characters in current fantasy fiction.

While *DARK OF THE MOON* is the second book in a trilogy, like its predecessor, it stands very well on its own, with the



current plotlines all wrapped up. Were it not for the wonderfully depicted city introduced in *GOD STALK* -- which would be hard for anyone to surpass -- this would easily be one of those rare cases of the sequel being better than the original.

Don't wait for the paperback.

WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS By Megan Lindholm
Ace, 214 pp., \$2.95

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

What if some of the men and women on a city's streets, some of the scavengers, the bag ladies, the tramps... what if they were more than they seemed? What if some of these homeless people were in fact wizards and the well-being of the city was entrusted to their care?

Since the release of her first novel *HARRY'S FLIGHT* (Ace, 1983), Megan Lindholm has proved to be a bright new talent in the fantasy field. She has a clean prose style, a gift for characterization and an ability to draw more out of a story than one would expect to be there. Now, after a trio of fairly traditional yet well-crafted fantasies, she has turned her hand to the burgeoning sub-genre of contemporary high fantasy, with highly satisfying results.

There is something about the juxtapositioning of the fantastic against the real world that creates a singular resonance when well executed. It works for the same reason that successful horror fiction does. The real world must be presented as realistically as possible; the characters must be so well portrayed that the reader can't help but care for them. The fantastic element, when laid against such a backdrop, becomes not only believable in the context of the story but often serves to reflect back a portrait of the real world that is far more discerning than that offered up in a mainstream novel. For some reason, the human condition is more easily laid bare.

Not many writers manage to pull this off, but when it does work, the result is a book that one can return to time and again, finding new pleasure with each rereading.

Lindholm's newest novel, *WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS*, is one such book. Set in Seattle, she gives us not only a gritty and realistic portrayal of the day-to-

day life of her vagrant wizards, but also brings the city itself to life. From back alleys to dump bins and abandoned tenements, we follow the characters as they wander the city, eking out a meagre existence, while fulfilling the responsibilities of their wizardry. The high fantasy elements, neatly tied into the real world, come as an extra bonus.

The central plot turns around one vagrant, known only as Wizard, whose specialty, like Thomas the Hymer, is telling the truth. The city's pigeons are also his responsibility. He is a fledgling at his new trade and, in counterpoint to him, we are given the wonderfully mysterious character of Cassie, an established wizard who rarely appears more than once as the same person and lives in a Seattle that isn't quite the one we know in this world.

Wizard knows little of his past, and only half believes in wizardry in the first place. His small magics work, but when the city is menaced by a danger that only he can confront, his belief is put to the test.

Romance is present, in the old sense of the word, and mystery. The spectre of Vietnam and its after-effects rears its head, but handled in a fresh manner. And although the *WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS* is a January release, I don't doubt that it will still prove to be one of the year's best books, one that will endure well after the current crop of interchangeable fantasy offerings have long since faded from our memories.

FACES OF FEAR By Douglas E. Winter
Berkley, 277 pp., \$6.95

REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

As a writer, I know the feeling that anyone working on a creative endeavor has let me be invisible -- the work speaks for itself. But as a reader, I have to admit to falling victim to wanting to know the men and women responsible behind his creation.

Because of that curiosity, I approached Doug Winter's recent *FACES OF FEAR* with a certain amount of anticipation that was only slightly disappointed by the "never-before-published" copywriter's blurb on the back. These are not all new interviews. Some have appeared in *FANTASY REVIEW*, the Grant interview appeared in last issue of *SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW*, and I've been told that the King interview appeared in one of the men's magazines. But that's a minor carp, and one that we can't blame Winter for.

Set up along the same lines as Charles Platt's two volumes of *DREAM MAKERS* (Berkley, 1980/1983), *FACES OF FEAR* is a fascinating collection of interview/profiles, covering the top guns in the horror field. King and Straub are included, of course, but more interesting are the sections dealing with those writers who aren't interviewed at the drop of a hat. In any magazine. Robert Bloch and Richard Matheson, who between the two of them really shaped the horror genre as it is today. David Morrell, better known as the creator of Rambo, but as an author of some excellent horror fiction. John

Coyne, who straight-forwardly expresses more interest in "product" and marketing. English writers such as James Herbert, Ramsey Campbell, and the new darling of the field, Clive Barker.

Winter is to be complimented on this book. He obviously did his homework before setting out, cassette recorder in hand. Like Platt, he has a knack for drawing the best out of each of his subjects, making *FACES OF FEAR* essential reading for anyone interested in going beyond the fiction itself to discover just what, if anything, the creators had in mind when they put the words on paper in the first place.

THE HOUNDS OF GOD By Judith Tarr
Bluejay Books, 344 pp., \$15.95

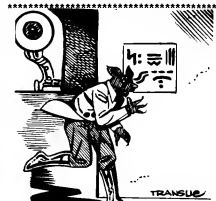
REVIEWED BY CHARLES DE LINT

Judith Tarr's latest novel completes her *The Hound* and the *Falcon* trilogy. Like the previous volumes, *THE ISLE OF GLASS* and *THE GOLDEN HORN*, the new book works well on its own, but taken as a whole, the three novels form a cohesive portrait of early European history that is admirably enriched by its infusion of elves and magic against a more realistic backdrop.

Alfred, the elven monk who was the protagonist of the first two books, returns along with a large number of the earlier supporting cast. The plot is two-fold. On one hand Alf's elven kin face death at the hands of the Order of Saint Paul of the Damascus Road, the Church of Rome's infamous Hounds of God. On the other, Alf's lover Thea and his newborn children are kidnapped by a renegade sorcerer and spirited away to Rome. Alf follows in pursuit, torn between a need to protect his family and kin, and his own religious beliefs that the Church claims are invalid because of its doctrine that his kind have no soul.

Tarr's characters are well-rounded and believable -- equally so on both sides of the struggle. Her plotting is strong and her language a delight to read in its lean simplicity that still maintains a rich depth. And she is to be commended for her portrayal of the dissonance between Church and the elves, allowing equal time to either side without drifting into sensationalism or sentimentality.

This whole series is highly recommended.



REVIEWS BY ANDREW ANDREWS

COUNT ZERO By William Gibson
Arbor House, 1986, 278 pp., \$15.95

The word "technopunk" is bandied about nowadays, since it is so fashionable to think of many of the newest stars of science fiction with guaranteed awe and respect, and because it's just a fad, "with-it" phrase. What does it mean? What is "techno"? What is "punk"?

Technopunk is supposedly a brand of "New Wave" attempts to set new trends in the SF field. (Where've we heard this before?) It supposedly singles out those computer-age authors fully indoctrinated into the vestibule of the age's axioms, idioms, jargon and beliefs. You are supposedly with it if you read technopunk.

Readers are tired of reading heavy-handed stories of Big Computers Plotting to Take Over the World. Let's be more sophisticated, folks: Let's make a huge computer so vast that it is sentient (call it the Cyberspace Matrix, a "synergistic," linked computer database that reaches through all of Earth) and introduce a computer "hacker" named Count Zero -- sort of a cyberspace "cowboy" in the urban complex called Sprawl (covering every populated area from Boston to Houston), and what you have is cyberpunk. You have COUNT ZERO.

Based loosely on his award-winning NEURONMANCER, COUNT ZERO takes much of the same from the former -- the ideas and concepts are gorged with imagination. Most people don't realize the matrix is sentient. Except for one Arizona child, the result of a secret experiment to link a normal human with the matrix. The child, the daughter of a mega-corporate scientist, is not aware she has such capabilities -- all this while her father is the target of a conspiracy to be abducted by a corporate mercenary soldier. These events entwine; the result is a mixed emotion. It is hedgepodge; spastic; incomprehensible in spots, somehow just too much. On one level it is noisy, brash; almost as if Gibson were at the scene, time trying for an effect and just pulling words from the sky. This novel is, for lack of a better word, a trip.

What makes this novel dark to the reader is that, as a reader, you must oftentimes sit back and analyze what is going on. Although a novelist should allow the character and plotting to flow unencumbered, like ice cream on a hot day, Gibson's work demands analytical statements to explain why some characters react so strangely. How has this bizarre future come about? Why is the logic so flawed; and why are the ideas flashed out, indecipherable from context?

Sure, COUNT ZERO can be judged a success from the concepts alone; it is experimental; it is challenging. But why is it so heavy with inexactitudes, and why is it so choppy? There is literally no flow in spots; it is almost as if the author were struggling to be original, and the work came up clumsy.

To some, COUNT ZERO may be an original, eventful novel; to this reader, it has its moments, but for the most part, it is noisy, borderline hackwork. (In style and execution alone; if ideas and

concepts are your thing, be my guest. I prefer a novel that is concise, with fleshy, human characters, and that has continuity, logical progression. I can't find those qualities here, sad to say.)

GODBODY By Theodore Sturgeon
Donald I. Fine, 1986, 159 pp., \$14.95

For as long as Theodore Sturgeon was known in the science fiction community, and as much as he was respected outside, one theme dominated all his honored works: Love. Contained in a microscopic world, or out among the planets, or in the heart of a lonely woman, love was a dominating force. It consumed Sturgeon -- knowing it, learning it, his writing was devoted to it.

At times, reading Sturgeon, the reader was along on that journey and Sturgeon came perilously close -- and often seemed so far away.

Love as a motivating, liberating force -- that's the theme of GODBODY. Whatever the liberating force of love might manifest itself as, whatever shape it assumed -- redeemer, messiah, savior, godbody -- it was a force that saw right to the source of our being, dispelling the fears along the way. Love as transcendent force, love as epiphany.

Godbody -- a "transformation" that appears as a charismatic, Christ-like figure in a rural American town -- occupies the lives of various characters. A few lives are touched and forever transformed. Godbody makes life for them what life is, and what it should be.

In this, Sturgeon's last word (the author died in May, 1985, at the age of 67), Sturgeon details the lives of his fleshy, human characters in a series of what can only be called "person logs," as each recount the experience of encountering the elusive Godbody. Early on, Godbody appears -- hastily, each character tries to make account of Godbody in their experience -- and this is the channel by way of which Sturgeon's heart comes to us.

Sturgeon puts the capstone to all his lifelong themes in this novel -- how difficult, almost impossible language can be to contain even the smallest, most sincere feelings. Sturgeon comes to us in the form of poetry, revealing his and inevitably our, condition. It is therapy. It is recreation. We try so hard, though we don't really know what it is, still we try.

NEBULA AWARDS 20 Edited by George Zebrowski, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985 372 pp., \$8.95

A collection such as the Nebula Awards series saves you a lot of time. In NEBULA AWARDS 20 what may amount to thousands of hours reading and researching the finest stories of the year come to you from the hands of a short story writer and editor who spends time reading all the short fiction SF and Fantasy magazines -- so you don't have to.



The Nebula Awards come by way of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and are voted on once each year from a wide variety of magazines, including the genre publications such as the MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, ISLAND MAGAZINE, SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, OMNI, ANNOUS, etc. The selection includes anthologies and related genre publications from a diversity of sources.

NEBULA AWARDS 20 includes the following: "Bloodchild" by Octavia E. Butler; "The Man Who Painted the Dragon Griaule" by Lucius Shepard; "Press Enter" by John Varley; "New Rose Hotel" by William Gibson; "The Greening of Red Stuy" by Frederik Pohl; "The Lucky Strike" by Kim Stanley Robinson; "Morning Child" by Gardner Dozois; "The Aliens Who Knew, I Mean, Everything" by George Alec Effinger; "A Cabin on the Coast" by Gene Wolfe; "Dogs' Lives" by Michael Bishop; "The Eichmann Variations" by George Zebrowski; and "Poems" by Helen Ehrlich and Joe Haldeman. While a favorite, "Press Enter" by Varley appeared in the infamous ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, another, "Dogs' Lives" by Bishop appeared in the little-known MISSOURI REVIEW MAGAZINE. This volume is certainly diverse. ("Poems" includes "Love Song to Lucy" and "Lucy Answers" by Helen Ehrlich, both of which appeared in SCIENCE 83 magazine, and "Soul's Death" by Joe Haldeman, from OMNI.)

Of the nineteen previous editions, NEBULA AWARDS 20 is the finest. The series has come to fruition; clearly, the aesthetics are fully defined. Included is a mind-opening essay about the very heart of SF in "1984 or Against" by Algis Budrys; a comprehensive description of what you've always wanted to know about the Science Fiction Writers of America in "SFMA, the Guild" by Norman Spinrad; a heady, deeply-informed review of every SF and SF-related film during this period, "Science Fiction Films of 1984" by Bill Warren; and a host of stories, including the Nebula Award winners themselves and runners-up. They compose and define this, the finest Nebula Award collection yet. Pick it up.

FIRST EDITIONS: A GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION
Ed. by Edward N. Zempel & Linda A. Verkier
Spoon River Press, 1985, 231 pp., \$20.00
ISBN: 0-930358-07-4

How about that? We have guides to reviews, guides to novels, short stories, criticism, biographies -- why not one to first editions, considering the worth of any collection of the devoted SF/Fantasy fan?

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Order from Spoon River Press, Box 3635, Peoria, IL 61614.

SCHISMATRIX By Bruce Sterling
Arbor House, 1985, \$15.95

Try to figure this one out, from context:

"Shaper-trained Abelard Lindsay, of the Mare Serenitas Circumlar Corporate Republic, a failed and exiled revolution-ary against Mech domination, becomes a pawn in the interstellar intrigue of a human and alien power struggle. The stakes: control of humanity's future."

So much can be gleaned on a cursory reading of the cover blurb, or in this case, Arbor House's enclosed slick press releases (reviewers are guided by these kinds of things, more often than not). To be honest, I read to page 35 -- making an attempt to absorb these fruitful ideas, this terse, stringent way of narrating this epic tale, filled with epic ideas, more than most other SF novels of today -- and I felt lost.

Somewhat, however, the author has taken this backdrop all for granted. It is a struggle on the reader's part to get behind, and understand this society full of Shapers and Mechs, and ask the question, "What does it all mean?"

I should have, and probably would have, been goggle-eyed with wonder from page 1. If somehow Sterling, or his editor, could have assembled a narrative that offered some insight into many burning questions. From there on, SCHISMATRIX may have been a joy. As it is, it is only a first draft.

TUTENTANZ By Al Sarrantonio
TOR, 1985, 285 pp., \$3.50

The author relishes the lyrical words of fantasist Ray Bradbury. But where

Bradbury tightens your chest and, off screen, steals your breath away with penetrations of the hideous and macabre, Sarrantonio, in a kind of modernized Bradburyan homage, blatantly places you directly at the foot of your fears, and has them confront you.

TUTENTANZ is a "dark carnival" novel about the invasion of a sleepy town called Montvale by the denizens of the Mirror Maze, Tunnel of Love, the evil, steady eyes -- and about Reggie Carson, who must stand up against the danger of certain death, when no one else can.

There is a touch, albeit small, of Tom Robbins' graceful BLIND VOICES here. It is on a high level involved, intense, schmaltzy -- reminiscent of Bradbury's SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES, yet like the show on the side, ladies and gentlemen, a whole lot more. Come watch, be horrified.

THE WRITER'S ADVISOR By Leland G. Alkire, Jr., Gale Research, 1985, 452 pp., \$60.00
ISBN: 0-8103-2093-2

"Imagination is the eye of the soul."
-- Joseph Joubert

I don't know who Joseph Joubert is, but he has an abiding love for science fiction and fantasy.

There are many rooms in the SF palace, many things a new entrant must learn. The aspiring can enter here.

THE WRITER'S ADVISOR is a good cause for the inspiration and advice any new SF writer should seek. In the science fiction and fantasy section alone is a wealth of background material about SF writing collected to give any initiate glee. For SF Compleatists can also take note: There is a comprehensive list of books and articles related to every corner of the SF house.

Also scrutinized in this collection: Fiction Technique; Story, Short and Otherwise; Freelancing; Including Magazine Article Writing; even Editor-Author and Publisher-Author Relationships, with chapters devoted to these and other aspects of writing. Go to it.

INSIDE OUTER SPACE, Science Fiction Professionals Look at Their Craft
Ed. by Sharon Jarvis; Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1985, 148 pp., \$7.95
ISBN: 0-8044-6310-7

An honest, wet-wash approach to how to write science fiction, or more accurately, how the professionals live and die by it, is acutely contained in INSIDE OUTER SPACE.

There is more emotion, more elaboration, often on an honest, no-holds-barred level here than you may find in the most personal diaries of most famous writers. Editor Sharon Jarvis, herself a professional science fiction editor, anthropologist, agent, and writer has called upon some of our most professional professionals to look deep into their souls

-- and from the pain of experience in dealing with the SF genre, tell about it.

Do they tell.

The aspiring SF writer or reader must pay attention to these words of experience, must turn to analyze what lives in space would really be like (witness C.J. Cherry's "Goodbye Star Wars, Hello Alley-Oop!"; must take a look at what frames and confines far too much SF to the ghetto past and future in Carter Scholz's "Inside the Ghetto, and Out!"; must indeed look into the soul of a struggling, harrowed editor clawing up the ranks in the face of brass sexism as described to us by the editor herself, in "What Does a Woman Know About Science Fiction, Anyway?"; this and more of SF history and the writers' personal and professional lives and loves are explored.

If you were to buy this book for no other reason, and in your modest moments you wanted to contain all of what editor Jarvis was seeking from the contributors in a nutshell, read the last item, "Writing Through Adversity" by George Alec Effinger. It explains the horrors -- and the joys -- of SF writing. You may be enlightened. You may be transformed.

BYTE BEAUTIFUL By James Tiptree, Jr.
Doubleday, 1985, 177 pp., \$12.95

Far too many "best ofs" have been published; the market itself has become trite; little-known authors have had their share along with the Big Names. The reader is prompted to remark: So what?

The editor and author were no doubt prompted to change the direction of this, trapped with the best of the "best ofs," if there is such a thing, and herewith we are granted the finest science fiction of James Tiptree, Jr. (male non de plume of the female Alice Sheldon, a standard only the in-folk know, on the equivalent scale of the Isaac Asimov/Paul French variety). The stories are from previous collections, and one or two never before published, but they are concise representations of the author at her best.

Direct yourself to the following stories, in haste: "Beam Us Home," about the alienated Hobie, and how something called Star Trek saved his life; at "Excursion Fare," about two downed balloonists up against certain death at sea, and are rescued, only to face another kind of horror; and (a story I've not seen anywhere before) "I'll Be Waiting for You When the Swimming Pool is Empty" about the darker side of interplanetary diplomacy. The remaining stories are diverse; don't let this reviewer spoil their fun. For "Beam Us Home," a story rescued intact, the book is worth the purchase.



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