

THE MENTOR

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

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THE EDITORIAL SLANT

by Ron Clarke

Last issue of TM I didn't do an Editorial, and several LoCCers took me to task. Actually, I was hoping to get the issue out three months after TM 76, and thus a month early, but events conspired to bely that hope.

A perennial subject is the dying off of fanzines. This is again particularly noticeable in Oz. Fanzines *do* come out regularly - though I can only think of ETHEL THE AARDVARK, THE CANBERRA SF SOCIETY'S BULLETIN and THE MENTOR. These are two clubzines and one genzine. There are others - DOXY, SCIENCE FICTION - but they aren't really regular. There is probably only one "faannish" zine - DOXA, but that is also irregular. There is also THYME, which Alan Stewart has taken over and which I had thought had been a bit behind, and which I received a copy of recently. I suppose we will have to wait to see what happens. I thought this was a Great Dying Off, as there also seemed to be a dearth of conventions; then I saw the list of cons in THYME. Of course most of the cons are SF media cons.

There is also change in this issue - the Argentine SF History finishes, and one on SF in Russia/Ukraine commences. Hopefully this latter column will last, as I am sure that there is much background material for such a column. (This was actually shown by the SF in the USSR material I published several years ago).

Something else that has come to light in this issue is the material on help-for-writers. THE MENTOR is *not* meant primarily for a "writer's workshop", no matter how much it could look like that. I still intend TM to be a genzine and have wide-ranging topics in articles, a lettercolumn with the same, poetry, fiction, and anything else that strikes me fancy (and that isn't a typo).

I went to my first meeting of the Gargoyle Club a couple of Fridays ago. Don Boyd had rung me up and told me of the meeting and gave me Leigh Blackmore's phone number. I rang Leigh and found out how to get to the address and said i would try to make it that meeting.

When I arrived there I introduced myself and Dale Stewart (the sacrifice I had brought) and climbed up the steep stairs to the meeting room. There were already chairs scattered around and several people were already there. We settled down and I handed over the chocolate biscuits I had brought. At about 8 pm more people arrived and I met more members of The Sydney Horror Writers' and Artists' Association than I knew existed. There is obviously a stream of SF/horror/fantasy in Sydney that was up till then hidden to me.

There were about 10 people altogether at the meeting, none of whom I had met previously. Many of those there had heard of, or read, THE MENTOR, of which I was surprised - I had had no idea of the depth of penetration of Sydney fandom by the zine. Some had read of it through friend's copies, others through the sales in Galaxy Bookshop. I met Steve Carter and he gave me a copy of his comic CHARNEL HOUSE, from whence came the two episodes of THE INITIATE published in this and the next issue of TM.

There are other comics of Steve's that I won't be publishing - they are horror orientated, rather than SF, and have already been published in that media.

There are, as indicated by the "official" title of the Gargoyle Club, several of the Club who were artists, and had portfolios of their work there. One of these was Kurt Stone, some of whose work interested me; it should be appearing in a future issue, being SF rather than horror.

The room at the top of the stairs where the meeting took place had the right atmosphere - there were horror and fantasy posters on the walls, including a portrait of H. P. Lovecraft. There weren't quite enough chairs to go around and several of the fans camped on the floor, discussing various topics.

I had to leave early, but I enjoyed myself and hope to go back to a future meeting.

One of the things I found out about Steve Carter's work was the moral attitude expressed. I must confess that I published the the strip in TM 77 and indeed the portion of the strip that Don Boyd sent me because of the artwork, not

the plot. I am not going to say what that morality is - the reader will have to see for him/herself. It is all through Steve's work, and it will be interesting to see what THE MENTOR's readers make of it. - Ron.

COLDMACE MOONLIGHTS

by Duncan Evans

CHAPTER 1

Coldmace was a goblin in the house of Our Grand Lady Elm. He was a night goblin, raised up from the Deepening Pool, which meant his skin and fur were blacker than hate, and his eyes were big and wide, and the bright places beyond the forest were places he must never visit lest his thin blood turn to steam. He had three brothers, each like himself, and between them they patrolled the corners of Lady Elm's domain from the hour of sunset until the first ray of dawn lit upon Castle Hill to the east. This they did each night without fail, and *had* done for as long as Coldmace could remember.

One time, in those few quiet hours after midnight when the land sleeps deepest and ghostly possibilities hover behind the mist, Coldmace paused to rest his haunches upon his favourite rock, down by Treacle Creek. He listened. Tall Willow whispered sad lies at his back. Rock murmured its slow tale. Old Treacle babbled vaguely of dwarves and strong beer and the thrum of machines in deep places. These were sounds which belonged.

When the sound came that did not belong, Coldmace grew stiff as stone and bade Tall Willow hush awhile. He drew the shadows in around him and pricked his ears. Soon enough his wide eyes caught a little human child stumbling through the trees on the far side of the creek.

Now, children were no novelty to Coldmace (there were always a few of the things running loose under the house of Lady Elm, taunting him and trapping his tail) but *this* soft creature, in its silks and tiny bells, excited his interest -- for even though it resembled a bratling of the Forest Home, he was certain it had never seen the inside of that place.

The goblin gnawed his talons and wondered what to do. He liked children every bit as much as toothache and would not be sorry if this one met with nastiness. But the

woods on the far side of Treacle creek were the responsibility of his brother, Snatch, whom he did not like at all. So he just sat watching as the child picked its way down to the creek and knelt to taste the water.

Later, having drunk its fill, it paddled among the stones and began to sing. And its song was like nothing Coldmace had heard before, not even lying in his dark cell beneath the Forest Home where music and bright voices sometimes found their way. And although he sneered, as goblins will, very soon his gaze went straying west along the creek and he fell to wondering what sights old Treacle might see as it journeyed out beyond the forest. Then a desire swelled inside him -- not to see those things for himself, as a creature of the light might wish, but to smash down all the gladness and warmth and hide it under the grime. So he made the gesture of deceit and caused a toy dragon -- such as the children of the Forest Home used for play -- to appear upon the pebbles a little distance from his hiding place. Then he sent a sweet bird-sound out across the water.

The child looked up and was snared. It gave a little gasp and waded into the creek, chubby arms outstretched. Midway, however, it paused and glanced uncertainly around in the thin moonlight. Coldmace was not discouraged: he placed a friendly sparkle in each of the dragon's jewelled eyes. The child took another uneasy step forward, then raised its eyes up the bank to where the shadows clung thickly around the base of the tall willow. Coldmace sat very still, but the bratling seemed to know that something bad was afoot and slowly backed away. Still undiscouraged, the goblin slid from his rock and went creeping forward.

But he neglected his magic. The false dragon vanished with a soft burp, which sent the child running for the trees. Coldmace came leaping out but his quarry had

scuttled into the undergrowth before he could do more than wet his toes.

He stopped dead. He couldn't think where to spit. Ghostcat could not outleap him, deer could not outpace him, and here a mere snottwad had done both. He tore his fur and gnashed his teeth and wished all children into deep wells filled with hungry eels.

Then his ears caught the silvery sound of bells. "Bless its succulent little heart," he hissed, and went splashing across the creek into a part of the forest where he had never set foot in all his long life.

Half a mile away, on the forest toll-road, a coach rounded a blind corner to find a fallen tree blocking its way. The driver reined-in and sat glaring suspiciously at the barrier in the moonlight. He was a man of few wits, but not so stupid as to believe a good healthy ash would topple across the road of its own accord.

High on an overhanging branch, the man behind the pair of tired red eyes peering down at the coach would have agreed, since his was the axe responsible. His was also the breath which now propelled a dart into the driver's neck.

Thinking himself stung, the driver reached up and carefully plucked the missile from his flesh. He sat staring blankly at it for a moment, then slumped forward in his harness and began to snore.

Inside the gilded carriage, a nasally voice piped-up, complaining about the delay and proposing dire punishments should the coach not resume its progress soon. The man in the tree, whose name was Gunther, checked his crossbow and prepared to swoop.

At which point, something black came hurtling through the underbrush and tumbled onto the road between coach and fallen tree. It lay panting for a moment, then drew itself up and advanced on the horses, snarling and waving two large claws in their alarmed faces. The horses reared up, and in their panic to get away almost turned the coach on its side. Fortunately, as the frightened beasts staggered to their right, the coach jack-knifed left into the bushes and the whole arrangement somehow spun itself around quite efficiently. A moment later and the carriage was speeding back the way it had come.

Seeing his plans so completely ruined, Gunther grew angry. He was about to put a bolt between the shoulders of the snarling creature (a goblin, he now realised) when he noticed four chain-clad men leaning out of the retreating coach, yelling and shaking their fists. A moment later the coach rounded the corner and was gone. Gunther put up his weapon, having no wish to appear ungrateful.

Down below, the goblin crouched in the road awhile, bubbling and snarling, then it jerked itself up, set its head on one side as if listening to something, and raced away into the forest. Gunther watched it go, greatly curious, then slid down from his perch and set out after it.

The sound of bells led Coldmace a hectic chase through thorn and cluttered thicket. His rage drove him so hard he did not notice how far he had travelled from his usual haunts or how close he had strayed to the forest's edge until he burst from the trees at the top of a long slope.

His pounding feet carried him a good way down the hill before he fully understood what had happened.

This was the endless world. The foreverness where the land rolled naked under the sky. *And such a sky!* Vast and echo-less. Littered with a thousand glittering gems. Haunted by a blind white eye.

Coldmace flattened his ears and sank whimpering to the ground, too stricken to creep back beneath the canopy of trees. He had come where it was forbidden to come, had invited doom. Soon the yellow eye would rise and the hungry sky would see him, devour him.

"Cold Mother," he snivelled. "Forgive my trespass. Save your faithful son. Open your black womb and shelter him before the bright eye comes to spy him out."

An answer came carried on the wind: the faint tinkle of bells. Coldmace risked a peek between his talons and saw a patch of darkness at the bottom of the next hill, about the size of a small door. A moment later, when a tiny white figure vanished into it, he knew he had been given a chance for redemption. Keeping his eyes turned away from the sky, he stood on quaking legs and scuttled down the slope.

From the treeline, Gunther watched the goblin's progress toward the door with puzzled interest. But he thought he knew better than to bother himself further with the antics of a night-stalker.

CHAPTER 2

His name was De Phaepilo, though only he knew it. He dwelled near the edge of the forest in an underground house of dank stone which he shared with predatory spiders and things of like nature. He made his home here not of necessity, as a creature of darkness would, but because it pleased him.

In mortal years, his life had been very long. Seldom did he take food anymore, or even water. And he no longer slept at all.

He passed the long, lightless days in his mouldering library, poring through ripe volumes of abominable lore and sipping occasionally from a phial of exotic resins. Nights, if the sky was dark and clear, he would climb to his uppermost chamber and gaze at the stars through a gleaming brass eye; or else he might descend into his crypt to conduct blasphemous summonses before an audience of rats and worse.

These things he did as a student of the arcane, a delver in the nethermost perverted depths of ancient knowledge. Common folk would call him Sorcerer. A wiser few, Warlock. But in truth he was a Necromancer, and good at it, too.

He had only one abiding fear, and this was that his brain -- which he kept in a jar in a secret cupboard and fed every thirtieth day from a compound of unnatural herbs -- would one day forget where it was hidden. But this anxiety had been with him so long that he could last for entire hours without running to the cupboard to check.

See him now in his crypt, winding a length of twine around finger and thumb. On the floor, almost at his feet, a tiny captive doll jerks and twitches across a silver pattern

etched in the tiles. A dozen jerks more and the Necromancer's hand snaps shut around it. The air shifts, whispers ... *and see!* a pallid vapour has appeared in the archway. It flits across the floor to a place where one tile is missing and seeps down into the immuring stone.

De Phaepilo stiffens. Note the snakelike flicker of his eyelids. Somewhere in the house above him, a sickly black heart is beating. Hastily, he passes his hand above a tenuous line in the pattern on the floor, placing a final tension on the cords that will presently bind. He does not smile. Not yet. His long life has taught him well the price of careless optimism. When the trap is properly sprung, then will be time enough for smirking.

Coldmace slipped through the little door in the hillside and eased it shut behind him. Smutty darkness closed in, soothing and quiet. He sniffed. *It* was in here somewhere -- the human thing -- and he meant to have its fingers and toes for a necklace.

But something else was here also. The still air was tainted with an old familiar smell -- the greasy stench of Death Magic. Its perfume hung all around, as recent and fresh as a warm corpse. He ran a forked tongue over his lips and clenched his toes apprehensively. If fresh magic were here, then so must its caster be.

No matter, he decided. *Flay the bratling first, and if the spellthrower objects, settle him too.*

Coldmace, who in his conceit believed his own power to be cardinal, was not unduly worried by Necromancy, or by what, in his opinion, amounted to little more than dressed-up *parlour-magique*. And if, Mother forbid, the other should manage to slide a cantrip under his guard ... well, he carried any number of alternate weapons, none of which required Empowering.

He flicked a special veil across his left eye. The bratling's spoor became visible, leading away down a long brick-walled corridor. Filled with confidence he tracked the glimmering footprints into the hillside, past grimy tapestries and dark doorways whose secrets must wait for later.

At the end of the corridor, a narrow stairway offered to take him up to warmer soil, or down into an ageless cold. Thankfully, the trail led down.

As the goblin descended into the earth, toe-nails rattling on the worn steps, he began to sense the secret lifebeat of the stone. A doubt came into his mind. *Might it not be overweening of him to commit the Blood Atrocity down here inside the Mother's revered bones? Was it not a prime regulation of Atrocious Behaviour that all such acts be performed above the thirsty clay?*

For a moment, his resolve wavered ... and then he detected an alien hand fumbling through his mind, crudely attempting to quell his doubts. He froze, stupefied with shock. Somebody (and what inconceivable temerity!) had actually dared to meddle with his brain! His temper flared. All consideration of proper behaviour was incinerated.

"Clumsy despoiler!" he shrieked. "Contumacious buffoon! Gibbering death comes to gobble your disrespectful soul!" His talons scored poisoned trenches in the wall as he leapt headlong down the stairway -- precisely, of course, as the "clumsy despoiler" had intended.

When he reached the low archway at the bottom of the stairs, a shred of caution made him pull up sharp; he paused just long enough to construct a hasty shield before plunging through.

The first thing he saw was the glowing pattern on the floor, into the middle of which he had blundered. If not for his quick eyes, he realized with a shudder, he might easily have been trapped.

And then he was. With the sound of a million insects all talking at once, a swirling silver mesh leapt up from the pentacle and began to close in. Coldmace screeched, twisted violently around, but the singing net thwarted him on every side.

In a few moments, the first thread touched the back of his leg. There was a sound like a fat grave-wiggler dropped on a skillet, then came pain: a stark white thing that sliced into his black flesh and bit him where he lived. He screamed without restraint.

All too soon, another cord licked home, and another, and another, and though it hardly seemed possible, the pain increased by an equal degree each time.

He struggled. The cords bit deeper. He stopped struggling, and instead pissed soothingly down his leg, grateful for even that much relief.

Much later, the final strand snaked across his throat, and if the agony did not lessen, it at least stopped growing. The song of the trap slowed, then halted altogether, and there stood Coldmace, hunched and miserable, his shrivelled nerves howling their own theme of torment. The pain, he noted ruefully, was not quite bad enough to render him witless.

"Welcome to my house, watchdog," said a voice from somewhere outside the silvery glow. Instantly, the goblin puckered his lips and sent a stream of envenomed needles toward the source. He was rewarded with a stifled shriek and a vile curse. True music.

"My own fault, of course," said the voice. "We can hardly expect graciousness from you under the circumstances." There was a shuffle of big feet, and a tall, skeletal shape moved into the light. Coldmace noted with approval the sluglike pallor of the stranger's skin and the row of seeping puncture marks running down one arm. He smirked.

"Spitting is impolite," the stranger continued. "Later you may wish to improve your manners."

"And you may wish you were alive to see it," the goblin hissed smugly.

"Quite," said De Phaepilo. "So, if you'll pardon me a moment..." He held the maimed arm across his body and the holes stitched into it began to heave and suppurate. Within moments, neoplasmic matter was boiling from each wound. "I believe these are yours," he said mildly, and the goblin flinched as a dozen needles came zipping toward him. They cracked against the residue of his forgotten shield.

De Phaepilo gave a pleased cluck and stroked his pointy beard. "Foresight. Good. It seems my time and effort has been well invested."

Coldmace sneered. "Where's the bratling, corpsegrinder?"

De Phaepilo laughed. "The bratling indeed! I must say, goblin, you do possess an admirable singularity of purpose. But if you'd pause for a moment and employ that brain of which you are so protective, you would certainly realise there is no child."

"A stupid lie," the goblin hissed. "Coldmace saw the little snout. Followed it here."

"A glamour," said the Necromancer tiredly.

Coldmace scowled. "Glamour?"

The tall man adjusted his silk gown. "An *essence*, then, if you like." He made a gesture which took in the walls and the many shallow depressions in the slate floor. "The dead have their uses, my black-hearted friend, other than the gastronomical applications with which you are no doubt well-acquainted."

Coldmace only barely resisted the urge to leap at his tormentor's throat. "Coldmace observes the Blood Laws, corpsegrinder," he said with cool pride, "and takes his meat alive and kicking. He resents your ghoulish intimations."

"And I," said De Phaepilo. "Don't care what you resent."

Suddenly the goblin had a daunting insight: he was actually in trouble here. Real trouble. Maybe even *serious* trouble. He would try bluster:

"You wouldn't say that if you knew to whom you spoke," he announced. "Such boorish posturing is not considered proper when dealing with an agent of the Green Lady."

"Oh please!" snapped De Phaepilo. "I do hope you're not going to start blathering about what will happen to me when your mistress finds out what I've done, because -- as *I* certainly know, even if you don't -- your precious queen is hardly even aware you exist."

Coldmace gulped painfully. "As you say, Necromancer. But the fact remains that ... that ... Coldmace is Our Lady's bonded agent, with full authority to enforce Her edicts. When you insult Coldmace, you insult the Forest Court. And when Our Lady--"

De Phaepilo interrupted him. "And when Our Lady finds out I've pilfered a piece of Her chattel, I shall quickly find myself consumed in the furnace of Her righteous anger, correct?"

"Believe it."

"And how do you suppose the news of my insolence will reach Her exquisite ears?"

"Our Grand Lady knows all things which transpire within Her forest realm," Coldmace recited automatically.

The Necromancer pounced. "Within Her forest realm?"

Coldmace flinched and grew suddenly interested in the floor.

"Still," his captor continued thoughtfully. "You *may* be right. She *might* come to be informed of your predicament. Eventually. Shall we wait?"

"No, thanks," the goblin muttered.

"Prudent beast," said De Phaepilo, and pulled a small wooden box from his pocket. "Now, open your jaws and close your eyes and we'll see if we can't do something about these tiresome bonds."

Coldmace squinted suspiciously. "Corpsegrinder," he grumbled. "What vileness are you proposing now? What's in the box?"

De Phaepilo hesitated, then said, "I'll be honest with you, goblin. It's best if you don't know. You'll find it easier to swallow that way."

Coldmace clamped his jaws shut.

De Phaepilo sighed. "Oh, really now. Must I resort to coercion?" He reached toward the trap and plucked a single strand with a tastefully enamelled fingernail. Within moments, the entire mesh was humming savagely.

Coldmace shut his eyes, stretched his jaws, and screamed. Immediately, something cold was thrust to the back of his mouth. He swallowed convulsively and felt a heavy lump slide along his gullet. Dismay filled him: whatever the thing was, it had wriggled on the way down. He hacked and retched, but only produced a half-ingested owl and a few brightly coloured pebbles. The thing seemed to be holding on to something.

"I will release you now," the Necromancer told him. "But first, a friendly warning: you must already suspect what will happen should you disobey me or try anything unfriendly, and yet you will undoubtedly still try. The only advice I can give is that you would do better not to go into convulsions or writhe around too much -- reduces the risk of internal rupture, you see?"

Coldmace sneered.

"Very well," said De Phaepilo. "Nilbog dnib sdaerht!"

And the trap was gone. Coldmace stumbled out of the pentacle and fell to his knees. "Corpsegrinder!" he hissed. "Coldmace has you marked! Make your peace with whatever demon sponsors you!"

"Easier said than done, I can assure you," De Phaepilo chuckled. "Now stand up."

"Shan't," said Coldmace. Then a not-altogether mild sensation in the pit of his stomach made him a liar. He lurched to his feet. The ripping stopped.

"Marvelous," De Phaepilo said. "You will find life becomes a deal less stressful once you learn to obey me without hesitation."

Coldmace rubbed his belly. "Rats," he moaned. "Hungry rats and mice!"

"My good fellow," laughed the Necromancer. "Your analogy does not nearly approach the truth of it."

The goblin howled dismally. "Curse your maggoty hide, man-thing! You exceed the darkest limits of impropriety! Take it out! Coldmace will still obey!"

"Of course," said De Phaepilo. "But first, I have a little job for you. Perform it quickly and well, and you will receive the proper emetic." He waved a tiny crystal bottle under the goblin's snout.

"Whatever you say," Coldmace mumbled.

De Phaepilo clapped his hands together. "Wonderful," he said. "To the library, then."

The moment his tormentor's back was turned, Coldmace reached for something unfriendly behind his left ear. Ominous movements occurred in his stomach. Alarmed, he pretended to scratch an itch, then let his hand drop back, empty.

Ahead, the Necromancer chuckled to himself. "Excellent," he muttered. "Simply excellent."

Half an hour later, everything had been explained. Coldmace sat in a dim corner of the library, munching a rat which his host had caught sniffing around in the disused pantry.

"So you understand what you must do, then?" said De Phaepilo.

Coldmace nodded eagerly, because nodding eagerly made it easier not to think about the things his mistress would say when his part in the coming outrage was disclosed.

"But you must use guile, remember," the Necromancer urged. "No injury must be done. There must be no damage or trauma of any kind."

"It shall be as you say," said Coldmace.

"Then it shall be well," the Necromancer replied. "Now hurry to your task. Dawn approaches."

Coldmace finished his rat and stood up to leave. At the door, he paused and turned.

De Phaepilo smiled knowingly. "You wonder why?"

Coldmace nodded.

"It would be beyond you, goblin. There are certain feelings which you and your kind are unequipped to experience. Call it a pain, though, if you will. A fine sweet pain."

Coldmace frowned, then melted from the room. The corpsegrinder was right: it was beyond him. All this trouble just for pain? Pain was abundant. There was a glut of it. Wait long enough and pain found you. Everyone should know that.

CHAPTER 3

Next evening, Coldmace rose from his cell and slipped quietly out of the Forest Home. At the stroke of midnight he slipped just as quietly back in. He took the unseen stairway to the upper floors and from there made his way to the east wing. Being a dungeon beast, and therefore forbidden to roam this level, he travelled in the hidden corridors behind the walls.

The palace after midnight was a different place: a little cooler now, and softly lit, populated by a few hushed voices and velvety shades. Coldmace crept past spyholes and hidden grills, his cold gaze flicking over the sleeping shapes of the lords and ladies he should have been guarding. They twitched and moaned forlornly as darkness soured their dreams.

He saw other things also -- the secret life of the palace -- pale maids and servants going about their endless chores, polishing, changing, mending, tending low fires, gossiping softly in hallways and cupboards.

Minutes later, his nose told him he had reached the palace nursery. Even through the tiny peephole, the cloying, sickly-sweet breath of children was almost overpowering. He nudged the swinging panel. It was locked. Undismayed, he introduced a slender talon into the mechanism; it submitted with a soft snick.

Before entering, he hid his face behind a smiling wooden mask, fashioned earlier in the day whilst waiting in his cell. Shapeshifting was beyond him now, his magic having grown ungovernable since his visit with the Necromancer. This, amongst other insults, he meant to avenge.

The nursery was large and lit faintly by a nightlight at the far end. Eight children lay asleep in low cots spaced evenly along the walls. The goblin moved amongst them like a blood-drinker's shadow, scrutinizing each blank face.

At the foot of the fourth bed, he paused and exchanged a meaningful glance with Mindera, royal favourite among the palace felines. He promised her a warm treat for her silence, then moved on. The cat regarded him with mild interest but did not interfere.

The child in the seventh bed looked like the right one. Black hair, chalk-white skin, tiny mole on the left cheek. Coldmace bent low, whispered:

"Wake up, little princess."

The child frowned and shifted onto its side. Coldmace leaned closer, tickled its ear with his frosty breath:

"Time to rise, little princess."

A tiny hand fumbled up from under the covers to rub at the ear, then a bleary eye opened and slowly focused on him. Coldmace drew back quickly, adjusting his mask.

"Who is this?" the child demanded, and Coldmace felt his bowels shrivel. This one had its mother's voice!

He had quite a struggle to pull himself together.

"A messenger, little princess, bringing greetings and royal salutations from the Night."

The child sat up and looked around. "*Why!* It is still *dark!* How is it our sleep is disturbed!?" Her frown deepened. "Greetings from the *Night* you say?"

"Indeed, little princess."

The child was positively scowling now. "You will address us simply as *Princess*, or *Highness*," she said. "And discard the diminutive."

"If you wish, Princess," said Coldmace smoothly.

"We do wish. Now tell us what business the Night has with us."

"Princess, the Night respectfully craves your attendance at the Darkling Court, there to be its honoured guest. It has many secrets it wishes to share. We are sent to be your guide."

"Liar!" the child snapped. "You are one of mother's filthy goblins! We can see your horns poking out behind that silly mask!"

Coldmace went stiff with alarm. This wasn't going to be as easy as he had planned. For a moment he considered retreat, but a sharp twinge in his guts quickly ended that line of speculation.

"The Princess is observant," he murmured softly. "Diplomacy and ancient treaties prevented Night's envoy from crossing our borders, so he bade Coldmace, guardian of the southeast quadrant, to deliver the invitation in his place. Coldmace did not wish to alarm the Princess or her young sisters, and so he came disguised."

The child nodded. "We understand, goblin. Tell us, though, this envoy, did he explain why we alone are singled out for this honour and our good mother is snubbed."

Coldmace fidgeted. "But the Lady *was* invited, Princess -- when She, too, was in Her tenth year. It is a kind of ... tradition."

"How splendid!" the child exclaimed. "Return to the envoy this instant and say we accept the Night's gracious invitation and hope to be received at the Darkling Court this coming summer."

"Alas, Princess," said the goblin quickly. "The Court sits only until the end of the month then goes to spend the summer in darker realms. If you wish to see its wonders you must leave immediately."

"But this is most improper!" the child protested. "I would have no entourage, no time to pack or commission suitable gifts for the Night Lords! It is simply not possible! Oh and it would have been such *fun*!"

Coldmace leaned forward slightly. "But how much more fun, Princess, to go alone, without saying goodbye, unchaperoned, unheralded. Think of the things you will witness. Consider the adventure!" He leaned closer still. "Rumour has it that in Night's house there is no bedtime."

"We find your manner somewhat familiar, goblin!" the child scolded, but Coldmace could see his words had worked their magic. The bratling was, after all, only ten-years old for all its breeding.

"Coldmace implores you to forgive his impertinence, Highness," said the goblin. "He shall of course return to the envoy and convey your regrets."

The child gave a little gasp. "Hold," she said. "We do not refuse -- we have decided it would be impolite and unbecoming. Let us be away, unseen and without delay." She leaned from the bed, stretching an arm toward the bell-rope. Coldmace jumped forward and snatched it up out of her reach.

The child stared at him in amazement. "Bold beast!" she snapped. "We must have our Dresser attend us at least!"

"But, Princess," Coldmace whined desperately. "How then do we depart unseen?"

"Foolish goblin! Would you have us appear at the Darkling Court in just our nightgown?"

"Princess, what better?"

"But the cold! Even here, the air bites!"

"A blanket or two, perhaps?" said Coldmace, tugging at the bedclothes.

The child tried to look down her nose at him. "Hardly suitable attire for someone of our station."

"Ah, yes," said the goblin. "But in addition to keeping your Highness warm, might it not also conceal her identity from certain meddlers who may wish her to stay behind and ... um-"

"And attend yucky old trigonometry with Professor Mortenson tomorrow, who has a bothersome tic and smells like an apothecary's rubbish bin!" the child broke in.

Coldmace didn't understand, but he nodded sagely. "Attend yucky old trigger-gnome-tree, yes."

"Your point is well made, clever goblin. And so, as regards this venture, we place ourself in your capable hands."

"Humble Coldmace thanks you for your trust, Highness," said the goblin, grateful for the mask which hid his unpleasant smile. "He will try to be worthy."

"He had better," said the child. "Now help us wrap."

Coldmace bowed stiffly and set about packaging his prize.

Later, he led the way down into the dungeons.

"What a super tunnel!" the child exclaimed. But as the walls grew dank and the air grew stale, she became less enthusiastic, and confessed that perhaps it was not so super at that. She had never been this way before.

It amused Coldmace, the way she clung so tightly to his tail, gazing around wide-eyed at things she had spent her entire life not fifty feet above without ever seeing. He took pleasure in the smell of her fear, then remembered the Necromancer's instructions regarding trauma.

"No need to be anxious of these things, Princess," he lied. "They are here to protect your home."

"I'm not frightened, of course," the child replied in a small voice. "I ... *we* are only a little surprised."

They came to an iron grill, looking out into a narrow culvert. Beyond the culvert lay the forest, quiet and dark. Coldmace hauled on a lever and the grill drew silently up. He felt a tug on his tail.

"My, how *big* the trees are!" the child whispered. "And how still it all seems!"

"The forest has not changed since daytime, Princess ... only the denizens."

He moved to go, but the hand on his tail held him back. "Loyal Coldmace," came a timid voice. "We find we are more weary than we thought ... kindly carry us."

The goblin felt himself smiling again: he had been wondering how he might suggest this thing himself. "As you wish, Princess," he said tonelessly, and stooped to let her up onto his back. Things may have started badly, but they were certainly going well now. Very much so indeed.

When they came to where the trees ended, Coldmace found that his mask held another benefit: the narrow eye-slits kept out most of the sky. As he stepped onto the bare turf and headed downhill the bratling on his back woke up and muttered sleepily:

"Have we arrived?"

"Almost, Princess."

The child sighed and dozed off again.

And there was the small door, open. The goblin hurried through into the hill, his limbs loose and shaking: growing sick from brat-smell, no doubt.

The Necromancer met him in the hall, nearly tripping over himself with excitement.

"Welcome, Princess!" he gushed. "Welcome welcome! Everything is ready!" When the child did not respond, he grimaced at Coldmace. "Wretched beast! I thought I warned you!? What unspeakable thing have-?"

"The brat sleeps," said the goblin calmly. "You will release Coldmace now?"

"In good time. First take the Princess to her chambers and see she is made comfortable." He pointed into the hillside to where an open door spilled light into the hall.

Coldmace gave him a long, speculative look, then trotted away to put the bratling in its bed. When this was done, a voice summoned him to the library.

"You have performed well," said De Phaepilo as the goblin stepped into the musty room. "You will not find me ungrateful." He pointed to a wicker basket in the corner; there was something inside it, whining and snuffling under a rough blanket. Coldmace removed his mask and felt tantalising odours flood his nostrils. Drool spilled over his teeth and hung in glistening loops from his bottom jaw.

"But ... the potion," he gurgled. "You promised."

"Do not presume to tell me what I promised, goblin!" said the Necromancer. "Have you forgotten who's in charge here?"

Coldmace took half a step forward, then thought better of it. "But if Coldmace does not return before dawn, the Court will know who took the child," he reasoned.

De Phaepilo held his hands out, palms upward. "So what?"

"So Coldmace must have the potion. Surely you wouldn't want him to be..." He trailed off, not liking the way the Necromancer was smiling.

"Ah, yes, the emetic," said De Phaepilo, and glanced at the larger of the room's two desks. "How can I put this, goblin? In your absence I took it on myself to alter our arrangement."

"Oh, really?"

"Really."

"And our arrangement now?"

"You might say it has become on-going," said the Necromancer.

"So Coldmace is not to be released?"

"In a word, no."

"And the child?"

"Stays here, obviously."

The goblin made a grinding noise with his molars. "And here was Coldmace thinking oaths were binding and all turds were brown."

"Enough of your cheek!" cried the Necromancer. "To the crypt with you and await my summons!"

The goblin turned to go.

"And take these stinking whelps with you!"

Coldmace went back, picked up the basket and walked out with it clutched to his chest. As he trudged down the long stairway, five young foxlets poked their snouts from under the blanket and yelped happily into his face. He licked a couple of noses, but the corpsegrinder's treachery had ruined his appetite.

In the cool darkness of the crypt, he settled down to think about the mess he was in ... and realised it was hopeless. Even though he had seen where the potion was hidden, the mere thought of sneaking upstairs to steal it gave him vicious belly-cramps. And supposing he did get away -- on a winged pig, perhaps? -- he would still have to face Lady Elm.

It was a sad little goblin indeed who lay down on the tiles and sniffled himself to sleep.

CHAPTER 4

He woke up feeling hungry. "Pu-ppies," he crooned, dragging the basket toward him. "Puppy-puppy-puppiessss." He slid a claw under the blanket and groped around. Finding nothing but lint, he growled and flicked the red veil across his eye.

He saw something pink moving sluggishly in a wall-cranny on his left. "Ha!" he cried, and shoved in a claw. It came out clutching ... he didn't know what -- not a pup, certainly.

Rather than look closer, he crammed the fat, wriggling thing into his gob and fanged it. It exploded with the first bite, releasing a flavoursome torrent down his throat. Surprised and delighted, he chomped and smacked and gulped, then searched eagerly for another. He caught three large rats, which went the same way, and a couple of sugary bugs, which didn't, but no more blood bags.

Eventually, he found the pups asleep in one of the shallow trenches in the floor, but by that time, with all the munching and crunching he had done, he was feeling quite stuffed, so he scooped them back into their basket and coughed up a little rat-puree to keep them fat and plump for later.

He was hanging upside down, exploring the vaulted ceiling when he sensed a movement on the stairs. A minute later, the bratling stepped into the crypt, holding a small yellow candle like a talisman. The hungry darkness gobbled the weak light before it could travel ten feet.

"Hello?" she croaked.

Coldmace stayed hidden above her.

"Oh, please say hello," she pleaded. "We've looked everywhere else."

Still the goblin waited.

The child edged further into the room and eventually noticed the basket. A row of sharp faces appeared over the rim and looked at her with glittering eyes. She gave a squeal and backed away. Then she giggled.

"Hello, Princess," said Coldmace, dropping down.

The child spun around and almost ran to him. "Oh, goblin!" she gasped. "What has happened? We awoke in a strange bed in the most awful old room and could not find you anywhere! There was this terrible, spooky old man there. He wore nail polish and kept cracking his knuckles in the most disgusting way." She shivered. "When we asked for you, he told us you were a liar, and that you were bad, and that you had intended selling us to an ogre who would make us into soap. He said that he rescued us from you at the edge of the forest and brought us to his house. Then he gave us a cup of something to drink and told us to go back to sleep, but we were clever and spat it out as soon as he went away."

"That *was* clever, yes," the goblin agreed.

"Then we snuck out to have a look around. When we saw your mask in a big room full of books we knew it was the horrible old man who was lying. Poor Coldmace, you must have had a far worse time than us! Were you very afraid down here in the dark all this long while?"

"Er, just a bit, Princess," said Coldmace. "You said you looked everywhere? The whole entire house?"

"I think so."

"And did you see where the Necro ... where the old man is?"

"Oh, yes. He is in the bathroom, splashing about." She wrinkled her nose. "Clever Coldmace, can we escape now? You will certainly find the right door."

"Ah, well," said the goblin. "It is more than walls and doors which hold us here, Princess."

"How so?"

"Coldmace is enchanted. The old man has bound him to this room with magic."

"Oh pooh!" said the child. "That is dismaying news!"

The goblin nodded. "If only Coldmace could climb those stairs," he mused. "Then he might be able to get the potion from the big desk in the room of books. One sip and all would be well."

"But I can get it!" the child cried.

"Oh *no*, Princess!" Coldmace objected. "The old man is too wicked, and your Highness is too small. If he was to catch you..."

"*Tish*," said the child. "We are not afraid. Least of all of a bony old poop like *him*!"

The goblin hesitated, timing it just right. "Well ... if your Highness is sure?"

"The big desk was it? And what does this potion look like?"

"A tiny blue bottle, encased, perhaps, in a small wooden box. But you must be careful, Princess! You will only have one chance!"

"Fear not, goblin," she told him. "We shall obtain your liberation and then you will fix that nasty old man's pram for him, yes?"

Coldmace nodded vigorously. "Yes, Princess. Assuredly so."

"And what of these little darlings?" she asked, indicating the basket.

"Sorry?" said the goblin.

"We cannot leave the poor things behind in the dark. Who knows what that nasty old man plans to do with them?"

Coldmace shook his head, bewildered. "But Coldmace was saving them until--"

"Of course you were," said the child. "Oh, noble goblin. You have such a kind soul -- even if you are very ugly. We know you can be trusted to keep them safe until we return with the potion."

Coldmace pointed at the pups. "You mean *these*, Princess?"

The child frowned. "What else?"

"You wish them kept safe?"

"Did we not just say so?"

Coldmace was at a loss. "But ... er..."

The child sighed. "Poor goblin, you have been down here far too long. Try not to worry, though, for soon you shall be free. Farewell." So saying, she hurried to the stairs and climbed away.

Coldmace quivered with silent anger until she was out of earshot, then: "Keep them safe! Keep them safe!" he spat mockingly. One of the pups yapped at him and then they all came tumbling over the side of the basket. Coldmace groaned, and set about finding some more rats.

An hour later, a strange slapping noise began on the stairs and grew quickly louder. Coldmace ran to the arch

and was met by something small and round which leapt off the fifth step, whacked him on the snout, and bounced away into the darkness. Arms waving crazily, Coldmace chased the thing down, then carried it back to the archway to examine it in the small amount of stray light there. It was yellow, and made from some kind of resilient flesh which the goblin did not recognise. There were red marks on it ... writing marks, written (*sniff-sniff*) in something like bees' wax. Coldmace dug around in his memory until he recalled the reading skill.

"THE YOU-KNOW-WHAT IS LOCKED," he mouthed silently. "HAVE PATIENCE. DO NOT LOSE HOPE."

He snarled and crushed the thing between his claws. It collapsed with an explosive gasp which made him jump and which set the pups to yelping again. Coldmace sank to the tiles and clutched his horns in exasperation.

It was all too much. Really.

CHAPTER 5

"And I don't care what yer man Digby might have said, that bloody nag of 'is were fitted wi' builded-up shoes!" yelled the irate villager, and slammed his hand on the table the better to stress his point. There came a general mutter of agreement from the other yokels gathered in the cramped tap-room.

"And if any man wants to call me a liar," the loud-mouth continued, growing bolder as it became obvious no one was about to argue. "They can bloody well step outdoors an' try provin' it."

His scruffy audience gave a cheer.

Alone at the bar, Gunther winced and downed his fourth measure of *Gibbering Spirits* in a single gulp. He tapped the empty glass and looked at the publican expectantly. The big man sighed, refilled the glass and, after a moment's hesitation, left the bottle. Gunther winked at the pink ghost on the label and set about making the liquid behind it disappear as quickly as possible.

At his back, the debate concerning Digby's integrity grew more and more boisterous; though it seemed to Gunther to be a trifle one-sided, since the much-maligned subject was apparently not present.

Lucky old Digby, he thought.

He was on his ninth drink and just beginning to feel pleasantly impaired when he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned his head and found Digby's denouncer standing behind him, glaring belligerently and looking a little unsteady on his pins.

"Help you?" said Gunther calmly, aware that all eyes in the small room were now focused, or at least trying to focus, on him.

The man's mouth worked silently for a few moments, then some words came out: "I asked yer ... what ... yer opinion was, *stranger*," he growled, his piggy little eyes hot and red with xenophobic menace.

Gunther sighed like someone hearing a very old joke, and turned fully around. "I'm afraid you have me at a disadvantage, friend. My opinion about what?"

The boaster laughed uncertainly, then turned to his cronies. "He's afraid I 'ave 'im at a disadvantage," he announced. The cronies all chuckled and someone at the back yelled: "Give 'im what for, Bill!"

Reassured, Bill renewed his game of stranger-baiting. "First of all," he said, and poked Gunther in the ribs. "I ain't yer friend. An' second, I've decided it don't really matter what an outsider's opinion is about anythin' ... What do yer say to that?"

"I say you appear to be the worse for drink," Gunther told him. "And you had better look out where you stick your finger or something nasty might happen to it."

"Yer *what?*" said Bill, staring at him in amazement. "I don't know where you come from, stranger, but yer can't talk like that to folks in *this* town! Oh no no no. Oh deary me no. Now I'm afraid the lads an' meself will 'ave ter take yer outside and teach yer how to behave."

This idea was greeted with glowing approval by the other locals, who indicated their assent with a chorus of growling and fist-smacking. "Good old Bill," said someone happily.

Gunther smiled, then leaned back easily with his elbows on the bar. "What's that between your legs, Bill?" he asked quietly.

Good Old Bill beetled his brow and glanced down. "What kind of pervy question is that? Ain't nothing there as shouldn't be. What else do you think?"

"Wrong," said Gunther, lifting his leg sharply.

Bill executed a splendid twenty-six inch high standing jump. "Oof!" he said with obvious sincerity, then sank down among the puddles of ale and numerous food scraps with obscene gobbling noises issuing from his throat. His fellow townsmen stared stupidly at their fallen comrade for nearly thirty seconds, then switched their attention back to the gently smiling man at the bar.

"Stranger," said one. "That were a dirty blow!"

Gunther nodded slowly. "Can't argue with you there, friend. But look at it from under my hat: now it's only twenty-three to one, instead of two dozen."

An angry squeak came from the floor. "Don't be ... too sure ... yer bastard!" sobbed Good Old Bill, lurching to his knees. "Yer ... know what I'm gonna ... do to yer? I'm gonna -"

Gunther, still smiling, delivered Bill a hefty boot in the bread-basket and the local hero was obliged to forgo further discussion in order to throw-up on himself.

Gunther chuckled. "Bill seems to have lost his stomach for fighting," he said, poignantly aware that he was wasting his finest and probably final performance on a bunch of parochial hicks. "Who'll be next?"

The assemblage roared and surged forward as a man. Gunther managed to decommission three more of them before the publican rang last-call on the back of his head with what felt like a large tree trunk.

He woke up in his underwear, half-buried in the village midden. It was early morning and the cold air was thick with interesting odours, none of them nice. Despite the appalling stench, however, he was glad to be there: the heat from the putrid ferment beneath him had probably saved his life in the night.

Groaning with a hundred different scrapes and bruises, he slithered from his rotting bed and headed out across the fields toward the creek, stopping at a farmyard along the way to liberate a couple of empty grain sacks. Later, having washed the vile cake from his body he sat in a sunny spot near the water and explored his wounds. They were numerous and painful, but none were likely to kill him; more than could be said for the good folk of Durney if he showed his face around that pleasant hamlet in the near future.

Feeling quite put-upon, he bound his feet with the stolen grain sacks and headed upstream toward the little stand of elms where he had stashed most of his gear yesterday before venturing into town for a drink. He soon located the tree with his mark on it and when he brushed aside the mound of leaves at its base, his stuff was all there, undisturbed -- or so it seemed at first.

As he pulled fresh clothes from his knapsack he noticed a piece of folded paper jammed under the string of his crossbow. He stayed calm, and as he climbed into his trousers he contrived to turn around full circle ...

... there was nobody nearby and no sign of anybody -- other than the piece of paper. He picked it up and began unfolding it.

The first thing he noticed was the Royal Crest of Chestwood Forest. His heart lurched. *Forest folk*, he thought. *No wonder they found my gear so easily. It's got to be about that damn tree the other night. Gods above, I'm a goner!*

His hands shook as he finished unfolding the paper, expecting to see a Blood Warrant. The first few words were less than encouraging:

* REWARD* 2,500 gs

Our Grand Lady of the Forest Will pay the sum of 2,500 gs For the safe return of Her eldest daughter THE PRINCESS ASH Last seen on the 11th evening of Carlob's Month And believed to be in the company of the night creature COLDMACE A spotter's fee of 500 gs will be paid For information leading to the child's safe recovery All information should be directed to: The Forest Embassy, Chestwood
ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE ASSURED
NO QUESTIONS ASKED

At the bottom was a picture of a pretty little woodchild, and next to it a blob of black ink which Gunther at first took to be a printer's error, then realized must be meant to represent the night creature. He whistled softly. The Lady's agents must be abroad in unheard of numbers, and desperate, too, if they would bother leaving a note in such an obscure place.

With the Forest Wardens at large, there would be a lot of nervous people around over the next few days. But that was fine with Gunther, just so long as they weren't after *him*.

Feeling better than he had all morning, he gathered up his things and set out south for Hamberport where he hoped his last twenty-five slugs would get him a passage west on a coastal trader. He saw dozens more posters along the way, but it wasn't until he reached the great southern highway two hours later that he made any kind of

connection between the things he had seen during his pre-dawn robbery attempt a few days ago and the disappearance of the little elfling the following night.

Mulling it over, he put two and two together and came up with 2,500 reasons why such an unlikely longshot could still be worth looking into. It was an opportunity too good to ignore.

CHAPTER 6

By the end of his third day in the crypt Coldmace was approaching nervous collapse. Sleep would have been nice, but it seemed that every time he put his head down the pups would start crying and he would have to find some new way to amuse them.

It was indicative of his general decline that he only became aware he had company when he saw a candle flickering in the archway. As it came closer, he shrank from the feeble glow as if it were the sun itself.

"Coldmace?" came a nervous whisper. "The potion! We have your potion at last!"

The effect of this news on the demoralised goblin was miraculous. He leapt to his feet, despair gone, and rushed forward grinning fiendishly. When the child flinched away with a strained smile, he remembered his manners and covered his fangs.

"The potion," he hissed, hopping from foot to foot. "Where is it?" The pups, infected by his excitement, swarmed and yelped around his ankles.

The child giggled at him. "There were quite a number of vessels in the desk drawer, but these were the only blue ones-" She dug in her pockets and produced three tiny bottles. Coldmace immediately identified the one shown him by the Necromancer and snatched it up.

"This is it!" he cackled.

Quick as a flash the child snatched it back. "You might say thank you," she pouted. "It took us ages to find where that nasty old man keeps his keys."

Coldmace considered smacking the impertinent brat across the lips, then decided that would be a mistake. He might still manage to wriggle out of this mess once his magic was restored, but it would require every ounce of subtlety he could manufacture. Beating the Forest Queen's daughter about the head hardly seemed an ideal way to start.

He decided to grovel instead. "Coldmace-the-insignificant-wiggler apologises, Princess. Please forgive his loutish insolence, he was only a bit excited." He bent down and plucked up one of the pups.

"See?" he wheedled. "The puppies are safe." He held the wriggling creature against his cheek and tried to look happy as it gave his jaw a frantic licking.

The child seemed pleased by this utterly incongruous picture. "So they are, loyal goblin. And now we shall all escape together."

"Yes," said Coldmace. "But first we must settle-up with the old man."

The child's smile faded. "Oh, him," she murmured, and the goblin thought she suddenly looked ill -- but you

just couldn't tell with bratlings. "Can we not just forget about the old man and simply go?"

Coldmace shook his head. "Your Highness is infinitely merciful, as befits one of her gentle breeding, but that foul wretch has violated inviolate laws. Coldmace would be neglecting his duty if he allowed such a thing to go unpunished." He did not mention his own considerable interest in the matter.

The child sat down on the cold floor. "If you say so."

"It is the law," said the goblin. "Now, does the Princess know where the old man is, perchance?"

"He is in a drafty little room at the very top of the stairs, if you must know," she snapped, "pointing a brass rod through a hole in the ceiling."

"He was," said De Phaepilo, stooping under the low arch. "But now he is here."

At the sound of his voice, the child gave a scream and scurried around behind the goblin's legs. The pups ran to their basket, whining. Coldmace cursed himself for a dull-witted squib: he should have guzzled the potion when he had the chance.

De Phaepilo stalked closer, scowling thunderously. "So, it's a conspiracy is it!?" he squawked. "Sly, wretched, scheming beast! You seek to turn this sweet child against me, do you? You'll live to profoundly regret this treacherous act!"

"My goblin didn't do anything, you rotten old man!" the child shrieked between Coldmace's knees. "It's *you* who's sly and scheming! You told us he was kidnapping us and that you killed him."

De Phaepilo waved a dismissive hand. "A necessary deception, Princess, until you were ready to hear the truth. I would have revealed everything when the signs were right."

Coldmace growled. "You wouldn't know the truth if it jumped out and bit your head off, corpsegrinder."

"Silence, *filthy* beast!" cried the Necromancer, and fetched the goblin a stinging blow across the chops. He stood towering over the helpless pair, frothing and trembling with rage, and for a few happy moments it seemed to Coldmace that he might be about to explode.

But he didn't.

A minute crawled by.

"Princess," said De Phaepilo stiffly. "Kindly go upstairs."

The child clutched at Coldmace's legs. "No!" she wailed.

"UPSTAIRS!" the Necromancer erupted, his beard jutting fiercely.

"Best get out, Highness," Coldmace whispered.

Sniffing, the child crawled to the basket and began dragging it toward the stairs.

"Leave that," said the Necromancer.

The child drew herself up, lips trembling. "We want it!" she gulped hysterically. "We are *taking* it!"

The Necromancer glared at her, then shrugged. "Very well. Just go."

Sobbing and hiccupping, she struggled up the steps with her burden. The Necromancer stood for a long while, listening to her tearful climb.

"Now then," he said eventually. "What shall we do with you?"

Coldmace gave his widest grin, the one that showed all his teeth.

"Coldmace will grant you one chance, corpsegrinder," he said. "Release him now and you will die with your internal organs relatively undisplaced."

"I think not," De Phaepilo chuckled humourlessly. "In fact, I think it's the workshop for you, my fine lad. Get marching." He pointed to the stairs and the goblin found himself climbing them before he could even think about refusing.

The workshop was distressingly warm, owing to the presence of a brazier near the row of rusty cages beside the door. Even the frigid draft from the drainage hole at the low end of the sloping floor did little to keep the heat bearable.

Coldmace lay quietly on the big marble slab as the Necromancer secured his limbs and tail with thick straps. He gazed thoughtfully at the brutal instruments arrayed along the opposite wall, slid his thumb into the shallow gutter at the edge of the slab. An envious sigh escaped him. What wouldn't he give to own a room like this?

"Pretty toys, are they not?" said De Phaepilo, patting him on the shin. "Which would you like to play with first?"

The goblin thought it over. "Those big talon clippers look interesting," he suggested.

"Right you are then," said the Necromancer, reaching them down. "No need to tell you that they aren't for clipping talons, of course, because you'll soon see that for yourself."

He pulled the handles apart until the two blades formed a circle, then he pressed the instrument into the soft area inside the goblin's thigh. A dome of grey flesh appeared between the gleaming jaws.

"Now, if my knowledge of anatomy steers me true, this should make a nice window through which we might observe a raw nerve or two."

As the Necromancer slowly squeezed the handles together, Coldmace gazed calmly up at him and smiled. De Phaepilo looked puzzled as he shook the goblet of flesh onto the floor.

"You can feel it," he said. "You can feel it right enough. And soon ... you'll tell me how *much!*" He thrust a fingernail into the bleeding hole.

The goblin kept smiling, though his grin appeared a trifle forced now. "Coldmace thanks you, corpsegrinder. He was itchy there, anyway."

"Pah!" snapped the Necromancer. "A feeble bluff! Choose another toy, goblin, and quickly, lest I choose one for you!"

Coldmace surveyed the various prongs and levers and clamps. He felt considerably less enamoured of them than he had a short while ago. "Let's have that thing with the little wheels," he chirped.

De Phaepilo pointed. "This here?"

Coldmace shook his head. "No, the one on the left there. It has a funny kind of band with notches in it."

"Aha!" said the Necromancer. "The *tonsure-blade*. You have a natural talent for this business, goblin. Congratulations."

"It was nothing."

The Necromancer frowned. "Hmm. That extravagant head-gear of yours may cause us a few problems, though. I think we'll need the dehorners, too." He pushed a small step-ladder into place and climbed up. "With you in a moment."

Just as he was stretching for the tool, the door burst open and the Forest Queen's daughter rushed in, accompanied by a hoard of yapping puppies.

"What the...!?" said De Phaepilo.

"Silence!" cried the child. "You've had quite enough to say already!" She ran to Coldmace and thrust her small fist between his jaws. The goblin felt liquid trickle across his tongue. Amazed, he swallowed eagerly, and though the stuff was fouled with saccharin it tasted better than blood. A moment later, his eyes fell shut and his wits went skipping away into darkness.

De Phaepilo stared down, mouth gaping in horror. "Princess!?" he screeched, throwing up his arms. "You haven't...? You didn't...?" Then he lost his balance and crashed to the tiles with a grunt.

As he lay winded on the floor, the pups swarmed over him, growling and snapping at his tender parts. The child, too, began kicking him wherever her toe could find a gap between the tawny bodies.

Eventually, the Necromancer managed to suck in a deep, shuddering breath, which, when it came out again, came as a roar which rattled the cutlery on the wall:

"ENOUGH!"

The child jumped back, terrified. The Necromancer rose shakily to his feet, silk robes festooned with dangling pups.

"Disloyalty does not become you, Princess!" he blazed. "I hope you are pleased with yourself. Thanks to your rash behaviour your precious goblin must now be killed."

Absently, he plucked a growling foxlet from his clothing and tossed it against the edge of the slab. The pup gave a sharp yelp as something in its spine cracked, then it tumbled to the floor where it lay on its side, front legs paddling feebly.

The child stared at the limp body, absolutely appalled. "Why you ... you vile cruel *beast!*" she screamed.

"Have a care, my dear!" hissed De Phaepilo. "Your uncle's patience is not inexhaustible."

For a reply, the child snorted back a gotch of thick snot and spat it at him.

"You dare spit on me?" the Necromancer hissed, raising his hand. "You spoil little...!"

The child braced up to him, unflinching. "No one strikes us," she told him. "It is forbidden."

De Phaepilo sneered. "Sorry to contradict you, Highness."

Suddenly there was a hiss and a thud and the Necromancer snapped his head back as though something urgent and interesting had just occurred on the ceiling. When he looked down again, the child saw that his right

eye was gone. Two inches of dark steel now protruded from the gored socket.

She gave a little gasp. "Ooh *yuck!*"

De Phaepilo frowned and his left eye swivelled around to stare at the tip of the steel rod. He reached up to touch it.

"What magic is this!?" he demanded. "What!?"

This time, the child felt something whiz over her head before she heard the thud.

"Urk!" said De Phaepilo, and toppled backwards with another steel bolt sunk in his heart. His hands fluttered above his chest. "This is no magic!" he cried out in alarm. "This is-" then a third bolt caught him under the jaw and he gurgled into twitchy silence.

"Your unlucky day," said a voice in the hall.

The child spun around just as Gunther stepped into the workshop, sword in hand.

"If you come to rescue us, stranger," she said, visibly thrown by this sudden turn in her fortunes, "then thank you. We warn you, though: if your intentions are nasty, you had best begone before our servant wakes up. He is a fierce beast and quite capable of sorting you out." Her voice was stern, but her face betrayed her lack of confidence in her own claim.

Gunther sheathed his blade and crouched down. "Peace, Princess. I've come to take you home. Your mother is very worried about you." He held out his arm and after a moment's hesitation the child ran to him.

"We were not a bit frightened, you know," she snuffled into his neck as he stood up. "We knew our goblin would protect us -- even though he was enchanted."

Gunther glanced at the beast on the slab. The flesh under its breast bone gave a sudden heave. He stepped back hastily. "A brave creature," he said. "I wonder how many other young ladies could inspire such loyalty?"

This tickled the child's conceit, and she giggled as Gunther hitched her up and took her weight on his hip. "You must honour his memory when you return to the Forest Home, Princess," he told her.

"His memory?" she gulped. "But ... but he was ... we were going to visit..." then the tears came.

Gunther reached under his jerkin and pulled out the reward poster. He placed it next to the goblin's head. "Let's leave him in peace now, Princess. If you like, we can promise each other never to speak of the place where he lies -- I'm sure if I were in his position I would wish it so."

"Yes," said the child. "Yes, let us go. Take me home."

Gunther hurried from the room with the child pressed to his pounding heart. Just for once, things had broken his way. Within hours he would be a man of wealth - the focus of the Green Lady's gratitude. His mind reeled with all the possible forms her gratitude might take.

CHAPTER 7

As for Coldmace, he awoke fifteen minutes later to the sound of crying: a great wailing chorus which set his many teeth on edge. He tried to rise, but couldn't. Without even thinking about it he spoke a Word and the straps

holding him perished and crumbled away. He sat up and gazed blearily around.

There was a trail of yellowish bile leading from the tiles under his slab to the open drain at the far end of the room. He touched his belly ... something about the slimy trail suggested a connection with the pleasantly empty feeling there. Then his gaze fell upon the Necromancer and he remembered everything.

He slid down and knelt by the body. He thumped it, sniffed it, listened to it. His eyes grew huge with surprise: it was not alive -- how could it be with all that steel in it? -- but neither did it seem entirely dead. In any case, dead or otherwise, it was obvious his enemy could not be enjoying the experience. So that was all right.

A fresh chorus of howling stung his ears. He whipped around and saw a group of little mourners gathered at the foot of the slab. He crawled over; the pups shuffled aside to let him inspect the tiny body in their midst. He slid a claw under it, picked it up. Its eyes rolled and it gave a feeble whimper which provoked another round of wailing from the rest of the litter.

"Broken," he muttered, and because it seemed an obvious thing to do, he fixed it. The awful crying stopped as soon he placed the surprised creature on the floor, which allowed him to concentrate on what might have happened to the corpsegrinder, and the child, too, for that matter.

The reward poster, when he found it, told most of the story. Coldmace was nothing if not shrewd. He recognized the implied warning -- though he could not think why it had been given -- and he shed a little tear. A big part of his life had just vanished forever, and, surprisingly, it hurt.

But he was also -- as the corpsegrinder himself had remarked at their first meeting -- prudent. It did not take him long to figure out that with his enemy laid low, this splendid mansion and all it contained now belonged to him through right of occupancy.

He snickered. In such a cold and dreary house, the future would be very dark indeed.

Just the way he liked it.

A week flashed by in happy exploration as the goblin wandered from room to room with his yelping retinue in tow. He revelled in the dark ambience of the place, drank its wonders like hard liquor. In the end, he fairly made himself sick with gloating: he gloated over the body on the workshop floor; gloated over obscure treasures it had taken his enemy a long lifetime to accrue; gloated over the library and the secrets which would soon be his. He even gloated over himself in the bathroom mirror.

And there was no obligation to go outside. Not even to hunt. The crypt and other dark nooks in the house provided inexhaustible bounty. Indeed, he need not even trouble himself to climb any stairs, since his foxes were only too eager to fetch him everything he required.

Thus he slipped easily into his new life as a Creature of Leisure.

It would be nice to report that he went on to greater things -- improved his mind through study, perhaps, and became a weaver of subtler enchantments like his ex-mistress with a kingdom full of loyal subjects of his own. But it was not to be. Despite his aspirations to self-

education, most of the secrets in the library remained just that, and the only loyal subjects he ever acquired were his five foxes. He kept *intending* to eat them, but somehow he never quite seemed to get around to it. Consequently those five grew up to be the living embodiment of evil in the mind of every chicken farmer for miles around.

Epilogue

One night, during his second week of residence in the Necromancer's house, Coldmace uncovered a strange jar at the back of a secret cupboard. Inside, he found the biggest pickled walnut he had ever seen, and, like any

goblin who has acquired a taste for fresh experiences, he fished it out, intending to fang it.

After only one sour bite, however, he retched and tossed the vile thing to the floor, where the pups quickly worried it into little pieces.

"Coldmace should stick to what he knows," he muttered, wiping his purple lips with the back of his claw. "And leave fresh experiences to those who enjoy disappointment."

And from then on he followed his own advice, and though he was not heard of in the world again for a remarkably long time he remained happy and content with his lot.

Who can say better than that?

THE YANKEE PRIVATEER #16

by Buck Coulson

I got a hint as to my relative importance in fandom in 1992. A convention in Oklahoma City asked Juanita to be Fan GoH, and the request added that her husband or significant other could come along too, if he wanted to. Of course, Teri Lee Hayes, of Firebird Arts & Music, had put it a bit stronger a couple of years before: "If you want to come too, you're welcome, but if only one person gets off that plane, it had better be Juanita." (I like Teri; she's a non-sense type.) The Oklahoma fans had expected Juanita to fly out, but she has an eardrum problem and has had medical advice to never fly again. No problem; she looked up the train schedules - and discovered that passenger trains do not operate in the state of Oklahoma. Buses are inconvenient, and anyway Peter Miesel, who is a 6'4" college student, has recently ridden busses and pronounced them "a little scary" due to their clientele.

So we rented a new minivan and drove out. Round trip was a bit over 1700 miles, so we took two days each way; we're well past the age of driving 14 or 16 hours a day. We had no real problems, and arrived well before dark in Thursday evening. (The other guests were the de Camps and the Freases.) I've never quite understood this con committee urge. It's not so they can get acquainted with the guests; few committee members bothered to speak to any of them, and this seems to be pretty standard among committees. I suppose the concom gets a dinner paid for out of con funds and an evening of relaxation before the work starts again, but it still seems odd.

The convention, officially titled Soonercon, was also a reunion for First Fandom, so there were a good many people there who got their names into Sam Moskowitz's *THE IMMORTAL STORM* and Warner's later volumes. SaM himself, Elsie Wollheim, Forry Ackerman, Aubrey McDermitt, Julius Schwartz, Ken Kreuger, Jack Speer, G.M. "Gem" Carr, Roy Tackett, Art Widler, Roy Lavender, Martha Beck, Ray Beam, Mark Schulzinger, and others. Bob Tucker was a "Special Guest", and of course also part of the First Fandom Group. I spent a good deal of time with the group, though I'm not eligible to join it; I do know most of the people. Though I was urged to join; First Fandom recently noticed the fact that since there is a cutoff date (1939, I believe) for membership (one has to have done

something in fandom before that date), all the members will eventually die off and the group will disappear. I see no objection to this, but the group does, and they've started taking in "auxiliary members". One request to join was coupled with the comment that "all your friends are there". The person making the request was a bit shocked when Juanita replied that most of our fan friends these days are our son Bruce's age - somewhere in their mid-30s. It's true enough, because that's the age of most filkers, and also because most of Bruce's friends are also our friends now.

This convention was also a reunion of sorts for us. When we drove out to California in 1968 to meet Kay and Gary Anderson, we stopped overnight with three families; the Couches in the outskirts of St. Louis, the Scotts in Oklahoma - Randy Scott was an illustrator for *YANDRO* back then when he was a teenager, and talked his father into doing a cover for us - and Roy and Chrystal Tackett in Albuquerque. Randy Scott and Roy Tackett were at the con (Chrystal died several years ago and Roy was with his new wife), and we spent the night with Leigh Couch on our way home. Sometimes fandom isn't as ephemeral as it's made out to be. Randy said his mother had seen a newspaper article about the con which mentioned that Juanita was one of the guests. "Isn't that someone you used to know?" So he showed up on Friday and Saturday nights, we talked a lot and he sat in on the filksong.

We started back on Monday morning and arrived in the later afternoon of Nov. 24. On Nov. 26, Bruce, Emily, and baby Miranda arrived for Thanksgiving. On Nov. 27, all of us left for Champaign in Champaign, IL, and thanks to a stop at the Miesel residence Juanita and I arrived back home at 1:30 AM on Nov. 18. Earlier in November we'd gone to Windycon in Chicago, and from there on up to Milwaukee for a couple of days with the Deweeses, so that we were either gone or had company on 16 of November's 30 days. Lots of fun, but it did take awhile to catch up on things. A side benefit of the Oklahoma trip was stopping on the way out to see the Civil War battlefield of Wilson's Creek, in Missouri. Most Civil War books don't say much about the war west of the Mississippi, but there were battles out there. I bought a book which pointed out that the fighting in Kansas and Missouri began in 1854, long

before the official start of the war in 1860. (Somewhat like World War II, which actually began in China in the 1930s.)

Having caught up on Couch family news from Leigh in November, we might well see her daughter Lesleigh in March, at Wiscon. As Lesleigh Luttrell, she was a DUFF winner quite a few years back, so some of MENTOR's readers may remember her. She divorced Hank Luttrell several years ago, and has recently remarried. We had lunch with her at a Wiscon two or three years ago, but haven't seen her since then. A lot of fan friendships end up as irregular and infrequent meetings, but they never seem to end entirely, or at least ours don't.

I did miss seeing the Davis Firearm Museum in Claremore, Oklahoma, on this trip. I've seen part of the collection, but that was when Mr. Davis was still alive, and his collection of guns was scattered around the public rooms and hallways of a hotel he owned. Even when you're expecting a gun collection, it's a bit disconcerting to walk into a hotel and find yourself facing a Gatling Gun as you enter the lobby. The hotel was three or four stories high and the collection was scattered all through it, so I didn't see it all. This trip, we had to be at the hotel in Oklahoma City in time for the Thursday night festivities, as I had to skip it.

One of the problems of living in a large country is that there are more things to see than an ordinary citizen can manage to visit.

I'll end with some... fantasy? I was wakened this morning by a woman's voice calling "Bob Coulson". Got up, went downstairs, checked the front door (not too easily, since our Christmas tree is in front of it), back door, and side window. Nobody there, no car in the driveway. Went back up, got dressed, did morning chores - feed dog, feed outside cats, take empty milk carton back to the trash burner, take letters out to the mailbox by the road, bring in newspaper. Nobody around. Now, the obvious explanation is that I dreamed the voice, but I can't think why I would dream of a voice calling me "Bob". I've never used the name, and the only people who do use it are people trying to sound friendly while attempting to extract money from me. I've been either "Robert" or "Buck" all my life. I can vaguely recall the dream I was having just before I woke up, and it wasn't leading up to a woman calling me "Bob". Somebody may say "telepathy", but with a saleswoman? I have no explanation. I can't think aliens are planning to land in our back yard; for one thing, after all this rain, they'd sink out of sight. Have fun with it.

HEY, HE'S A FISH.

1.

Being a fish
he hasn't got a face
he can't tell about
the dumbness of the world
he grazes his scales
over the thin ice of life
he often changes
he catches a stream
he avoids a bait
and believes - he is invincible

2.

he is a submarine
ripping up the belly of the ocean
he is a sliding predatory shade
sliding on the bottom
through a bothersome bio noise
he catches a keen peep at the baby-ocean
at the top it is a roar

3.

he doesn't feel the cold of the abyss
he doesn't know fear
he is equal to the environment

4.

... he is everywhere

5.

sometimes waking up
he catches himself thinking
but he know nothing about his idea
or has his life whirled away.?

6.

no
he is still alive
and he is a fish
the fear creeps under the scales
whose sharp teeth are there?
whose glare is following him - viscid
as a piece of plasticine?
to hide - to wait - to annihilate
he is alive
he is capable of standing for himself
but only that glare
breaks his vertebrae
if fish have vertebrae
for some reasons
he doesn't know it exactly
under that glare he knows nothing
and he never knew

7.

sometimes it seems to him

the feeling haunts him
 like during a dream you want to raise your hand
 and can't do it
 like you raise your eyes to the light
 and don't see
 like you feel
 that everything was once
 only one effort - to remember!
 and you can't remember

8.
 he is capable of enjoying the warm
 the even hum of the engines
 the grinding noise of the screw propellers
 the hot current of the blood
 at the countless capillaries
 but whose voice is boring into his brain?
 "you have dark blue blood.... you have dark blue blood..."
 it's better to sleep

9.
 during the dream
 the gold shallows
 he looks from somewhere up
 through the sunny patches play
 on the water
 Many centuries ago

10.
 he doesn't know what is "dead"
 the ocean is empty for him
 there are no gigantic octopus, slow rays, plankton
 but from where came that noise?
 there is only he - the electric shark
 as quick as death
 as patient as one hundred deaths
 oh! he knows to wait
 why is he?

11.
 he changes his look again
 he was pressed by millions of tons of darkness
 now he is himself as a darkness
 a sliding bomb in the regime of radio silence
 which doesn't remember who must be killed
 maybe himself?
 ... that shadow impedes him...
 to forget

12.

it is better to think about something else
 simple
 for example
 to make up a programme to count a sum
 $S = (2I - 1)$
 $I = 1$

Basic
 10 LET I = S = 0
 20 LET I = I + 1
 30 LET S = 2 + (2 * I - 1)
 40 LET IF I < 20 THEN 20
 50 PRINT 'CYMMA S = ' ; S
 60 END

Fortran
 PROGRAM SUM
 I = 0
 SM = 0
 1 I = I + 1
 SM = SM + (2 * I - 1)
 IF (I .LT. 20) GOTO 1
 PRINT 2, SM
 2 FORMAT (2X, 'CYMMA S = ' , SM)
 STOP
 END

Pascal
 RPROGRAM CYMMA (OUTPUT);
 LABEL 1;
 VAR SM, I : INTEGER;
 BEGIN
 SM := 0;
 I := 0;
 1: I := I + 1;
 SM := SM + (2 * I - 1);
 IF I < 20 THEN GOTO 1;
 WRITELN ('CYMMA S = ' , SM)
 END
 very well!
 END.

13,
 he doesn't know why he is
 perhaps they forgot to blow him up
 perhaps they forgot to kill him
 perhaps they forgot to call him.

- I. Lubensky
 Cherkassy.

Presenting: THE STARS OF OUR STORIES

by James Verran

The serious writer or critic of space operas will find a good reference book on the stars and planets invaluable. Science fiction lore contains several instances where renown writers have blithely "populated" planets orbiting decidedly hostile stars. Writers of sf live with the constant fear of *getting it wrong*.

A recent piece of fantasy, Gene Wolfe's THE LEGEND OF Xi CYGNUS (sic) should better have been titled THE LEGEND OF Epsilon CYGNI. In the bold print of the very first paragraph (p. 27, F&SF Oct/Nov '92), he waxes lyrical about Gienah, a small, yellow star located in the wing of Cygnus the Swan. And that "Its legend is ancient, (due to its) having reached us at the speed of light." Ancient - from a star merely 82 light-years distant?

In fact, Xi Cygni, the star of the story's title, is an orange giant, 950 light years from earth; furthermore, it is some 4° from Deneb (the tail) on the other side of the North American Nebula, NGC 7000. So why use Xi Cygni for the title? Gienah (Arabic for wing) is indeed where he said and although a yellow giant, may appear small and yellow from our perspective.

How did a mere "would be" sf hack discover Mr. Wolfe's inconsistency? Simply by checking the facts in an astronomers' Star Guide.

If science fiction is to be worthy of its name, the author must have ready access to a minimum collection of reference books. Although they have been around for a while, two excellent books for the "space opera" or galactic fantasy writer's reference shelf are: Collins GUIDE TO STARS AND PLANETS (ISBN 000-219067-2) and Collins Gem Guide THE NIGHT SKY (ISBN 0-00-458817-7).

These books offer a handy, authoritative resource on two cost levels. GUIDE TO THE STARS AND PLANETS comes in a 25 mm thick, 11.5 by 19 cm volume, featuring the Horsehead Nebula on the cover and retails in Australia at \$22.95. Also from the same authors, Ian Ridpath (text) and Wil Tirion (maps and diagrams), comes

the smaller, 12 mm thick, 8 by 11.5 cm THE NIGHT SKY retailing at \$6.95.

Both contain almost identical star maps and each has a complete sky atlas. The authors have thoughtfully provided maps that overlap to avoid the old bugbear of losing important detail across page boundaries. Printed on stiff, low-sheen paper, the star charts in the larger book are white on black for the atlas, or white and yellow on navy blue for the constellations. The smaller book uses white and black on medium and light blue backgrounds.

The more expensive book offers over 100 sky charts of the 88 constellations with many colour and monochrome photographs. The smaller Gem Guide's atlas is less detailed, but the constellation charts are smaller versions of those in the larger book. Both are comprehensively indexed.

First choice must be the larger, GUIDE TO STARS AND PLANETS with its profusion of illustrations, maps and extensive text. The pocket sized, THE NIGHT SKY which has minimal text and lacks chapters on the solar system, still provides an easy to manage guide to the entire celestial sphere.

Either book, used in conjunction with a rotating card, starfinder/astrolabe, will enable the user to locate most stars visible to the naked eye and to identify the various constellations. With a little imagination and basic mathematics, it is possible to draft three dimension maps of the various constellations from data in these books. A three dimensional representation of the Southern Cross is given in the opening chapter of GUIDE TO STARS AND PLANETS.

Highly recommended: Collins GUIDE TO STARS AND PLANETS (C) 1984 by Ian Ridpath and Will Tirion is published by William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow. Collins Gem Guide THE NIGHT SKY (C) 1985, also by Ridpath and Tirion, is published by HarperCollins, Glasgow. Both available from major retail bookshops in Australia.

- James Verran.

ISAAC ASIMOV (2 January 1920 - 6 April 1992)

FOUNDATIONS AND EMPIRES

by Andrew Darlington

Death concentrates critical opinion.

Towards the end of his 50-year career Isaac Asimov had become something of an embarrassment. He'd never been the kind of art-literary writer who attracts respect and admiration outside the genre ghetto, but latterly he'd taken to unnecessarily filling in imagined gaps in his future histories, tying previously unrelated stories together to "unify" his oeuvre, and - like Elvis Presley's final days, he was cruising on a reputation he was increasingly in danger of devaluing through smug over-familiarity. Numbering his novels he suggested "there is room for a book between 5 and 6, between 9 and 10, and of course between others as well. And then I can follow 14 with additional volumes - as many as i like". This grand scenario will now not happen. Perhaps that's as well.

Asimov's real importance lies in the work he consolidated in the '40's. And that importance is galaxy-huge enough. Death provides a perspective making that inescapable.

The story of 17-year old Asimov visiting the offices of John W. Campbell's ASTOUNDING in June 1938 to personally submit his first ever story - THE COSMIC CORKSCREW, and Campbell not only rejecting it but losing the manuscript forever, is probably apocryphal. But his first published tale, MAROONED OFF VESTA (in AMAZING STORIES the following year) established the Asimov style. His space-wrecked astronauts utilise high-school Science Lab physics to escape death by converting the water reservoir of their destroyed ship into a propulsion unit. From such basic premises, in the years that followed, his strictly conceived hard-science fiction grew to dominate the magazines - in particular the prestigious ASTOUNDING. The books on which his reputation rests - the FOUNDATION and ROBOT stories, both started out as story series spaced through those monthly titles, often in consecutive issues. With plot lines thrashed out at brainstorming sessions with Campbell, sometimes with resented alterations or additions, the Asimov cosmos emerged as

one of the most distinctive in SF. Asimov's was a logical and orderly universe. There had been robots before Asimov. There had been Galactic Empires before Asimov. But he made them both his own. After Asimov it was impossible to write about robots or Galactic Empires without taking his innovations on board. Robots had regularly run amok with rapine lusts, devious cunning, and dreams of world conquest. Asimov forced them to conform to his "Laws of Robotics", limiting and rationalising their potential. By subjecting them to the rigours and intellectual discipline of the Crime Detection story he redefined the men of metal, raising the craft of the robot story to new levels of achievement, into clever tightly-plotted technological puzzles.

And the "Seldon Plan" is to Empire what the Laws are to Robotics. There are no multi-tentacled Bug-Eyed aliens in the FOUNDATION galaxy, but 200 million colonised worlds in an immense 30,000-year cycle of expansion and decay. The lore of Psycho-History, devised by Hari Seldon, attempts to predict and control those unfolding centuries through its Foundations, aiming to eliminate thousands of years of barbarity through the appliance of science. But just as an unpredictable mutation called "The Mule" is subsumed into its plan, so are Asimov's characters tamed by the heavy-gravity of plot. In the political intrigue and diplomatic machinations of the planet-wide imperial city Trantor, at the heart of the wax and wane of empire, there's little room for the living tissue of memorable individuals.

Yet any understanding of SF's evolution through the century is impossible without an appreciation of Asimov. While he lacks H.G. Well's cultural breadth of vision, and his poetry, Asimov's achievement - codifying the wild fantasies of American pulp sciencefiction, hence paving the way for its ultimate acceptance as a serious literature of ideas, is analogous. Asimov was a rationalist with an optimists view that human science and ingenuity can triumph over adversity; traits already apparent in

MAROONED OFF VESTA. And alter, when Martian colonists are held to ransom by Earth over their reliance on bought-in water supplies, they break the impasse by ferrying ice from Saturn's rings (in THE MARTIAN WAY). When even Earth itself is burnt to a radioactive crisp that's hardly an insurmountable problem either - resilient and resourceful humans just expand across the worlds of the stars into new futures (THE STARS LIKE DUST). After a ten-year lay-off working on straight science books, the original FOUNDATION trilogy was expanded to six, his other novels inexorably networked into the same giant spatial scenario, but to me this most memorable work occurred outside the scheme. The complex time-travel conundrum THE END OF ETERNITY is among the finest things Asimov ever produced. While the original intensity of the simple short story NIGHTFALL (later novelized by Robert Silverberg) retains its emotive shock value across the 30 years that followed its publication. The searing beauty, and the horror, of this once-in-2,000-year darkness on a multi-suned planet was elected Best SF Short Story of

All Time by his peers of the "Science Fiction Writers of American".

"The writing is clicking away in my head and piling up, and unless I get it on paper somehow it's going to create uncomfortable pressure in my skull" he explained, by way of creative motivation, to Charles Platt in 1978. Never a visionary or innovator, Asimov's greatness is that he took the vague and tenuous themes thrown up by SF's chaotic infancy and worried them into the solid coherence of maturity. Not one of my favourite authors, Asimov's dry logical prose sets reason against emotion. It lacks the splendour and sense of wonder I thirst for. But Asimov nevertheless remained - and remains, an inescapable presence. Death concentrates critical opinion to the essentials of a life.

And within this perspective, Isaac Asimov must be rated among the mighty.

- Andrew Darlington

ESCAPE FROM YINN

by Brent Lillie

"Tell us a bedtime story, Grandpa!" the twins shouted in unison. Old Joe Schniell knew it would have to be a short one: Tim and Maddy had been flitting from universe to universe in their actuality helmets all day, so he knew they'd be plumb tuckered out, totally fizzed. He tucked in the blanket on Tim's bottom bunk and sat down on the edge of the bed; Timmy squirmed over closer to the wall to make room, then sort of curled himself around his grandpa's back.

'Well,' Old Joe said, clasping his hands in his lap and looking down at them. The Crusade ring on his left hand winked at him, providing him with much-needed inspiration.

'Back during the Crusades, I got a directive to scan for fossil fuels on Kross' third moon. Yinn, they called it. Desolate place. Uninhabited, everybody thought. Everybody except *me*, of course. I *knew* someone, or something lived on that godforsaken place. I've got some kind of internal scanner myself, you know, and it's always right.'

The twins were quiet, not a rustle. Not asleep. Just interested.

'I was about a thousand clicks above the surface when I got hit by some kind of combination stun and tractor beam. Dunno what it was, but next thing I knew, I woke up at the bottom of this pit. Must have been more than thirty metres deep, and set in the walls, at every level, were these windows. Hundreds of 'em. And behind the windows were faces. These round almost-human faces, except they had three eyes, and no noses and wide lipless mouths that stretched round almost to their ears.'

'Were they mean, Grandpa?' Maddy asked.

'Not mean, as such. About as mean as you or Timmy when you put a bug in a jar and stare at it through the glass. All depends on your point of view.'

'Oh.'

'Anyway, that's all that I could see. Hundreds and hundreds of eyes. And that's just what I felt like - a bug in a jar. I figured I was the latest exhibit in some kind of Yinn zoo. Later, I have a name to the things behind the windows. Gawks, I called 'em. There were big Gawks and little Gawks, Gawk families that had probably paid ten dollars a head to

come and see me. And there I was at the bottom of this thirty-metre pit with black, slippery sides, Gawks gawking down at me, just looking, looking, looking - everywhere I turned, there were Gawks, and they never took their eyes off me. Didn't even blink.'

'Then how'd you get out, Grandpa?' Timmy enquired sleepily.

'Why I just climbed the stares, of course. Goodnight, kids.'

- END -

IN DEPTH #4

Fantasy Downunder #2

by Bill Congreve

Welcome to part two of THE MENTOR's review series on current Australian high, or heroic, fantasy. There is a new addition to the list beyond those promised in last issue, and we would also note that volume two of Andrakis, KINGMAKER, by Tony Shillitoe is now in the shops. It appeared too late to review here, but if it is as strong as volume one, then this may be a series to buy into. The last column finished with Isobelle Carmody, so perhaps that makes a good place to start.

* * *

OBERNEWTYN: Isobelle Carmody; novel; 1987; 248 + vi pp; Puffin pb; \$7.95.

I'm working from a second-hand edition here so the above details may be out of date. Penguin should have it on one of their lists somewhere as it's part of a series and the third shouldn't be too far away.

This won the Marcus Clarke Literary award for best unpublished manuscript. Fair enough. Trouble is, in places it still reads like an unpublished manuscript. The punctuation is atrocious at times. It has a rather flat and uninspiring cover which however does illustrate the story, this is a rare with other forms of fiction. As is often necessary with fantasy novels, there is a map. You will find it doesn't make sense. The geographical data of the novel are misrepresented and become nonsensical. It's best ignored.

In OBERNEWTYN the lines between SF and Fantasy are more blurred than in SCATTERLINGS. This is an after-the-bomb, after-the-nuclear-winter story. All those nasty radioactive isotopes left lying around have done their stuff, and people are being born with physical and mental abnormalities. A Council backed group called the Herders have taken it upon themselves to rid the world of these abominations, now called "misfits". Young Elspeth, who has seen her parents murdered by the Herders for the crime

of "Sedition", is telepathic. She also has the ability to speak with animals - her best friend is an eccentric old cat by the name of Maruman. Elspeth is denounced to the Council representatives in her village as a misfit with minor abilities and is then sold by them to the Head Keeper of Obernewtyn who is visiting. Maruman tells her that she must go to Obernewtyn for her destiny lies there.

So far, this is all very routine. The telepathy bit reads as if it has been lifted directly from Doc Smith via Andre Norton. We learn of Elspeth's further psychic abilities in a rather rabbit-out-of-hat fashion. The themes of prejudice against psychic powers in a post apocalyptic world are somewhat reminiscent of Wyndham's THE CHRYSALIDS, but what Carmody does with her ideas makes for a fresh and readable story.

OBERNEWTYN is not just for the young adult market. Here is a novel in which children are kidnapped and sold into slavery to a concentration camp where they are psychologically tortured for obscure scientific purposes. Some of the themes and ideas are reminiscent of more weighty tomes as Orwell's 1984 yet they are treated by the author, and then published, as commercial fiction. I'm not sure you could publish this today as "adult" SF, particularly in the US. It isn't "safe" enough. I'll propose a bit of a thesis here: that the motives behind the development of children's literature in Australia are creating a school of writing not only accessible to readers of all ages but also one of great intrinsic importance. Despite some routine plot elements there is a freedom of thought in OBERNEWTYN which is quite refreshing given the straight-jackets of "literary" qualities or commercial "reality" we impose on adult fiction. As a reader, I can just feel Carmody enjoying her subject matter.

* * *

THE FARSEEKERS; Isobelle Carmody; novel; 1990; 326 + vi pp; Viking (Penguin); No price listed. I've seen it in bookshops for anywhere between \$15.95 and \$17.95. (Do these people really think we're stupid?)

THE FARSEEKERS is far more effectively packaged than OBERNEWTYN. The cover art again demonstrates an aspect of the story but is much more vibrant and dramatic than the earlier format. Neither do the series seem to be marketed as a series. What I mean by this is that in my research I've noticed bookshops often have book one, but not book two, or vice versa and neither is there a lot to attract the attention of casual browsers and tell them: "here is a fantasy trilogy". Have Penguin lost sales here, or doesn't anyone care? Yeah, they fixed the map.

This novel follows a couple of years after the events of OBERNEWTYN. The haven of Obernewtyn has grown, guilds have been set up for the separate mutant psychic powers, and the psychic powers themselves are being researched and developed - a technology of a new kind.

Elspeth and a group of companions head off on a quest into council controlled lands to find a mysterious and unknown "misfit", one with sufficient power to register from a great distance with the farseekers of Obernewtyn. Along the way they run up against the Druid, a bitter old exiled Herder living as a Warlord with his people in the mountains. The mission is given extra significance by the future-tellers

of Obernewtyn who suggest that the refuge's safety depends on success.

The details of the quest are quite straightforward and routine as such things go. They take a raft trip down a flooded river that flows through a massive underground city, go crashing over a waterfall, get rescued, infiltrate an enemy city, rescue friends from prison with the help of a powerful underground leader, search for a lost library, and so on. I enjoyed reading all the above at an unsophisticated level, but I didn't find it fully convincing. As in Obernewtyn, little of the plot is new and, except for a few hints dropped here or there, little of it advances the primary theme of the book until the point where Elspeth is isolated from her friends by a firestorm. She is rescued from the flames by an old friend (who appears very fortuitously), but then she is carried off by members of the Agyllian race for a meeting with a wise old being who has been her unknown mentor, protector and Gandalf figure up until this point. (Nobody muttered "Yoda" under their breath then, did they? This magical wise old mentor type who teaches and leads inexperienced characters into facing their destiny is one of the hoary old stereotypes that infests mankind's mythology.) Here Elspeth discovers what must be her destiny: her future is bound up in the search for the old-time death weapons which must be found before the wrong hands can unleash them again and this time destroy the world.

This novel must be read as fantasy: firestorms whose flames burn even stone - these flames may then only be quenched by rain from the same storm, an underground city hundreds of metres high and several kilometres on a side with no supports that doesn't collapse, intelligent animals who still manage to act just like human beings, and who make themselves subordinate to humans even when pretending to be independent - the so-called consequences of nuclear war discussed in this book are parable only. None of this is real.

This raises the most disturbing aspect of Carmody's work. She has split science and technology off from the rest of human endeavour and has used them as symbols for what is evil in mankind. At the same time she has split the concept of technology into two and is saying that there is good and bad technology. An example of her use of "acceptable" technology is herbal medicine. But on the other hand she is developing a new technology - the mind powers several of her characters possess - which is every bit as dangerous and insidious as she portrays the old "death weapons" to be, and she is adequately developing this technology as a tool which may be used for good or evil. Even though she uses science and technology as symbols, Carmody still amply demonstrates that all of mankind must be responsible for their use or misuse because it is all of mankind which will face the consequences.

Perhaps I'm just reading into the novel something which I feel strongly. My own view is that in Carmody's created world finding and destroying the old science isn't going to save mankind - it will just delay mankind's inevitable hard decisions. Science and technology are humankind's tools, but they are tools which in our own polluted environment today force us to face the

consequences of our own decision making and economic policies. The kind of symbology Carmody uses here acts to grant a causal existence to science and technology which is obviously not present in reality. The personified science and technology may then be erroneously blamed for mankind's failings. Destroying the science merely gives mankind the freedom to redevelop old ways, and we know what history teaches us of that. Carmody's characters will have a breathing space only.

But then neither is Carmody's theme treated simplistically. Given the background of the books her characters have little choice in their motives. The threat of the old weapons is real to her created world, and it must be dealt with.

This is the middle volume of a trilogy and it is obvious from the two books so far published that the trilogy has been conceived as a single thematic whole. The internal logic of the novels works so far: loose ends from OBERNEWTYN have been taken up in THE FARSEEKERS, and there is little doubt that the loose ends from this volume will be taken up in the next. In terms of plot what is going to come is very predictable, yet in terms of theme and ideas Carmody may still have a few surprises left. These are books which seek to influence readers, the theme of science and technology as personified bad guys runs through all three of Carmody's published novels. What Carmody finally does with these concepts remains to be seen.

THE FARSEEKERS is very much a linking novel in a trilogy. There are few new concepts, it is overly long, and it relies on both what has gone before and what will come after for completeness. But given the fact that it is such a link, it serves its purpose well; its structure flows logically from the end of OBERNEWTYN to the point where the groundwork for the next novel has been laid. This is one of the things readers want from trilogies. Any readers who don't mind the short-comings of this trilogy business, and who don't mind the possibly suspect philosophy, will find this quite an enjoyable read.

* * *

BARD; Keith Taylor; novel fixup; 1981; 293 + vi pp; Ace pb; \$2.50US (and a few years ago. There is an English edition by Headline so it shouldn't be hard to find.)

Thud'nBlunder. By Gore! By Gomorrah! Once upon a time, when Thomas Covenant was still a healthy virile young lad whose only interest in platinum wedding bands was how to get laid without being forced to buy one, and Xanth was still a wrinkle in the spine of Piers Anthony's dictionary of bad puns, the tiny amount of fantasy then being published was led by a school of writing known as "sword and sorcery". Arguably the greatest of all sword and sorcery practitioners was the late Robert E. Howard (Conan, Solomon Kane, etc). It's chief mentor within the industry was the late Lin Carter. It's most popular writers were Michael Moorcock with his Elric stories, Fritz Leiber with his inimitable heroes Fafrhd and the Gray Mouser, and Andre Norton with her Witch World.

These were the days when Tasmanian Keith Taylor sold the first of his "Bard" stories to the home of sword and sorcery, the now defunct magazine, FANTASTIC STORIES - the then companion of today's AMAZING. Sword and sorcery has been around for some time. It rarely gets deep and meaningful. Its greatest purpose is to tell a good story.

Felimid mac Fal is a bard from Eire who travels the wilds of post Roman England armed only with his sword, his less than diplomatic tongue, and an ancient harp with magic in its strings. Felimid is of the ancient blood and there is power in his words and music and silver in the blade of his ancient sword. The first story opens with Felimid singing for his keep at the table of King Oisc of Kent. He is insulted by King Oisc's right hand man, a huge, relentless and feared thug by the name of Tosti who at all times wears the skin of a massive white wolf. Tosti is so feared by King Oisc's army that none even dare to suggest he bathe instead, to a man, they happily follow his example. Felimid, from the more cultured Ireland of the time, is bemused by this and when insulted by Tosti retaliates with a magical song. A sword fight naturally follows and we find that Felimid is also quite capable of taking care of himself.

The book is in no way lessened by being a fixup of the first couple of published stories. Perhaps it doesn't work as a novel, but each story stands alone, and each follows into the next. The first stories are tied together by Felimid's quest to see his lover, Regan, to safety beyond the reach of King Oisc's revenge. The last third of the book is the part written to draw the whole together as a novel. Felimid returns to that part of the world controlled by King

Oisc and is forced again to confront enemies he escaped from in the first part of the book.

A reader immediately feels there is much anthropological and historical detail in these stories. Taylor's books certainly read as if they were set in the England of the time. A warrior may be honorable and committed to his cause, but he is so with fifteen hundred year old sensibilities. The straight-forward emotions of the characters, the simple sense of ethics, the slightly archaic style Taylor uses for both dialogue and descriptive passages all suit the work. Behind it all is a created universe of magic and strange creatures - as if all the myths and superstitions of the time had reality. Taylor obviously enjoys creating these tales of Felimid mac Fal. The book is an honest and satisfying read.

* * *

THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY; Keith Taylor; novel; 214 + vii pp; Ace pb; US\$3.50.

Again, a Nth American edition. I think there is an English edition of this series, but don't quote me.

Reviewing this novel is a bit of an experiment, and perhaps one that isn't fully fair on Keith Taylor. Individual novels within any fantasy series often don't stand alone. What happens if a reader accidentally picks up a novel from the middle of a series and starts reading expecting to have a complete book in their hands? Most readers of THE MENTOR know better than this, but I remain firmly convinced there are innocents abroad in the world who occasionally go into a book shop, maybe once a year, and pick up a book with an interesting cover and blurb and buy it on the assumption: this is a book - it must be a complete book or they wouldn't have bothered publishing it. After all, there it is, sitting on the shelf right in front of me. It's got a back cover, it's got a front cover. What's in the middle must be all there is, right? It's only logical.

If such a reader enjoys what they find then they might head off and buy another book, maybe in six months time instead of a year later. If they feel cheated they might just go back to watching reruns of MASH. If they want something written like a soap opera then there is plenty of choice without having to go and spend money in a bookshop. What would it be like tuning in halfway through an episode of NEIGHBOURS and then trying to start reading the middle volume of a fantasy trilogy during the commercial breaks? Where did Kylie get that magic sword from anyway? Why is Gandalf driving a second-hand Mercedes down Ramsey Street? Doesn't he know it was used for a hit-and-run in book 1?

So, this may not be entirely fair to Ace and Keith Taylor. THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY is clearly marked "The Danans: Book Two", I haven't read book 1. But I bought it this way, so here it is.

THE DANANS is clearly set a few centuries earlier in much the same universe as BARD. Ireland is called Tirtangir. The Danans are a race from England who have emigrated to Ireland and been enslaved by the native Freths. Now the Danans must fight for their freedom. They are aided by Prince Nemed from England who has come to

the aid of his countrymen with troops and a navy of five ships.

THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY opens with the magic cauldron, "Undry", which never runs out of fine stew, being loaned to the Danans by the Freths so that the Danans may safely see out a difficult winter. Now, wait a minute, weren't the Freths the enemy? What kind of situation has arisen that the Freths save their enemies? Are the Irish really so fond of fighting that they'll go out of their way to feed their enemies just so they can have another war next summer? Matters become more complicated when Nemed steals Undry to provision his next campaign and hotfoots it back to Cornwall.

Looks like I've gotta read book 1 after all.

The more we learn about Prince Nemed, the greater a scoundrel he becomes. He has been exiled from his own land numerous times, yet he still has an army and a fine navy. He thinks nothing of betraying his friends whose bed he has shared. He is married to an ambitious and vain witch..

Sixarms, the leader of the Freths who are the rightful owners of the cauldron, gives Cena, the Danan ruler, ninety days to recover Undry. While Cena and her brothers - the war-lord Oghmal and the poet Carbri - put together a small band of infiltrators to recover the cauldron, Nemed is raising a mighty army to challenge the Firgolg invasion of his homeland. The Danans plan to infiltrate Nemed's army and steal Undry back to Ireland.

THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY doesn't flow quite as easily as the story in BARD. It does work better as a novel, yet is still jumps around a bit, kind of like a hastily written but foreshortened epic. There are some interesting episodes. I thought the segment where Cena and some of her followers are conjured into the Danan version of Hell worked well, but perhaps wasn't used to its greatest effect. One can read into the text most of the story of the first novel so that THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY can be read on its own with a bit of thought. The sense of history remains strong; Taylor still uses the historical and anthropological detail of the time for authenticity. He retreads the same ground he used for inspiration in the "Bard" series. His style suits the times he writes of. Yet THE CAULDRON OF PLENTY lacks the charm of BARD. Perhaps because it deals with several major characters - none of whom assumes a dominant role. It lacks a central character with the charm of Felimid mac Fal with whom we may identify.

* * *

ZENITH; Dirk Strasser; novel; 1993 (sometime); Pan Australia; At a guess - paperback and \$12.95.

At last in the world of letters we have a novel where women approach a patriarchal religion with the appropriate attitude.

Dirk Strasser is the editor of the Melbourne based SF and Fantasy magazine AUREALIS. While he has been making some inroads both in Australia and overseas with his articles and short stories, this is his first published novel. I should say: this will be his first published novel. It is a bit of a compliment to THE MENTOR that we have a republication manuscript to review from. If any other

Australian publishers or authors want to support their work by having a review appear *with or prior* publication, then just send along your manuscripts and we'll do our best.

At the moment ZENITH is scheduled for June publication. It is being covered this early because as a fantasy novel it naturally falls into the scope of this column and because it represents a significant progression for Pan Macmillan as a publisher. This book is not just another David Eddings clone and as such affects the conclusions to be drawn from these columns and about the state of Australian fantasy publishing.

ZENITH concerns the epic and apocalyptic journey of young Atreu in his Ascent up the side of the massive "Mountain" and into manhood. His journey is more than just a rite of passage towards the Holy Orders of the Mountain's dominant religion. It is an exploration of a learning process, the story of extreme misunderstanding between the sexes, a bizarre quest through a truly alien landscape, and an insightful reflection on our own times. Atreu and his twin brother Teyth are born to Ascend to the Summit of the Mountain where they will experience Zenith - a time of visions and insights. Each is given a Talisman - Atreu a giant notebook with blank pages, and Teyth a great battle axe. After travelling together for a couple of days they are to separate, the first time the brothers have been separated in their lives, and they spend most of the next year completing their Ascents apart from each other. In the background are the Dusk people who the Maelir pushed off the edge of the Mountain in an ancient war, the Faemir, a race of renegade women warriors who have chosen this time to make their own assault on the Maelir civilisation in an attempt to achieve its downfall, and a rapidly approaching apocalypse as the Mountain slowly shakes itself apart.

In the first couple of chapters Atreu undergoes a number of adventures which serve to outline the physical constraints of the Mountain. Beyond the edge of the Mountain the Dusk People live in perpetual twilight, then there are the Lower Reaches, a vast and sparsely populated area where some of the older villages still keep the older traditions. Then comes the Rimforest and the more densely populated and economically active Middle Reaches.

The geography of the Mountain isn't stable; the ground may collapse into chasms, or it may rise up into precipitous pillars. These changes are presaged by cracks in the ground. Normally these events occur irregularly and slowly, but there has recently been such an increase in their speed and occurrence that at one stage Atreu is forced to dodge rising pillars of rock as he walks. The chasms hold a fascination for Atreu, they call to his subconscious, but out of them comes a number of fierce Dusk animals which attack anything that moves.

Even before separating from his brother Atreu has a near fatal encounter with a chasm. The twins then encounter a merchant who seems to know more about them and their fate than he should. The novel is filled with such philosophically profound encounters and each leaves its mark on Atreu. There is the village of Heimfell which observes a strict code of silence during each day of Zenith, but which holds wild drunken orgies at night. Atreu's pride is affected when he discovers the girl who seduced him the

first night was only "doing her duty" and that it would be another girl's turn the second night. Then there is the old magician in the desert of Vygird, and after that the arrogant bully in Teuron. Behind these encounters is Atreu's need to avoid the Faemir who, for a reason known only to themselves, take great delight in killing any Ascender they might find.

It would be easy to dismiss these encounters, which often leave off unfinished, as loose ends, but like events in our own lives each has its effect on Atreu's worldview. Strasser's invention carries us through; these events remain purposeful and interesting for the reader.

Atreu soon becomes caught in the Faemir rebellion. There is a total lack of communication and understanding between the Maelir society and the Faemir guerillas, and the conflict soon becomes a full scale war. It isn't long after that when Atreu begins questioning the female role in Maelir society.

I have only three problems with ZENITH the novel. Firstly, the style is at times very basic. This may only be personal taste. The novel is written with total clarity; there is no point where the reader wonders what is going on, but at times the language seems a little too unsophisticated. Secondly, at the ending we have two major characters achieving peace and understanding. But the characters represent opposite sides, neither is a leader of their side, and there is a war raging on the Mountain nearby. Having one character race outside to tell them it is all a mistake seems politically naive.

The third problem is one I don't feel, but may be a criticism ZENITH will face. Strasser's treatment of gender relations is going to be attacked for being overly simplistic, naive and innocent. But it seems to me the people who will complain the loudest will be pretentious academics, violently radical feminists, and priests. The rest of us will probably find it plain common sense.

ZENITH is a departure from the Eddings clones so far published by Pan Macmillan in that it is original, thoughtful and purposeful. Strasser has something to say and he says it in an entertaining fashion and with conviction. I enjoyed the novel enormously.

* * *

THE RED KING; Victor Kelleher; novel; 1989; 166 + vi pp; Viking (Penguin) hb; I didn't see a price anywhere on the cover, honest!

Okay, I've saved the best for last again. THE RED KING in another novel from Australia's adventurous young adult publishing industry. Again we have a rather wishy-washy "nice" cover - all pale pastel colours - as if the publishers perceive their market to be what a non-reading parent or adult relative might think is a "suitable" Christmas or birthday present. I don't know of a young teenager with money in his or her pocket is going to be

inspired to buy this. However, the concept of the picture admirably illustrates the story.

It's a bit pretentious to say, "this book is about..." I'm not qualified to quote absolutes about young adult literature. Instead, what I found in this novel was an exploration of tolerance, what is good or bad, what is acceptable or unacceptable in individuals and societies, what may be tolerated, even loved, and what must be fought against, and then on how to make compromise so that those left over when the dust settles still find each other worth talking to.

The Red King reigns over his kingdom with the aid of a vicious and immoral army which spreads a virulent disease to kill the people wherever they may be inspired to independence. No place in the forest is out of reach of the Red King.

Timkin is a young acrobat, orphaned and enslaved in a troupe of performers travelling through the forest from village to village. In a distant arm of the forest they encounter a village that doesn't fly the Red King's flag, and which hasn't paid tribute for some time. The village has relied on isolation for its independence. The old Master (Timkin's father-figure who is never named other than "Master" - thereby revealing one of the structures of Kelleher's clever story telling) of the troupe

believes it is safe to stay one night and play for the village and then move along early next morning.

More significantly, the old Master promises Timkin her freedom. He shows her the key to her slave collar and they agree she will be freed the next morning.

The Red King's soldiers arrive, children under five years of age are spared, and the leader of the soldiers releases a hawk which carried a red bottle high into the air. The soldier whistles, the hawk drops the bottle, and Timkin races to catch it before it explodes on the cobblestones. She succeeds, but the bottle is dashed from her hands by a sword thrust. The last thing Timkin does before falling into a plague-induced coma is to find the key to her collar and free herself.

Timkin is rescued from the Red Plague by another troupe of performers: Bruno the bear, Crystal the monkey, and Petrie the trickster magician who knows the antidote for the plague. Petrie has again fastened Timkin's slave collar about her neck and leaves her to be found by soldiers. When she reaches the next town the soldiers put her on the slave block where she is bought by Petrie for his own. He promises to return her the freedom she has just lost if she will join him in a quest to relieve the Red King of his gold.

In Petrie's passionate hatred of the Red King, Timkin has a suspicion this will become more than just a quest to burgle the crown jewels.

Kelleher uses his plot elements to great effect. For instance when Timkin first catches the bottle of disease-bearing gas foreshadows her later interest in the antidote and her desire to destroy the source of the disease. She calls the leader of her old troupe "Master" signifying a

loving youthful child/parent relationship. She thinks of her next master simply as "Petrie" and this master controls Timkin by tricking her through her own love. Timkin's personal symbol of freedom is the slave collar she is forced to wear throughout most of the novel. She finds she literally carries the key to freedom inside herself.

By means of this symbology, by great imagination, and by strengthening his themes with subtle repetition of concepts in plot and imagery, Kelleher weaves a story that is fascinating, entertaining and influential. Highly recommended - easily the best novel reviewed in this series on Australian fantasy.

* * *

There are too few publishers of Australian fantasy to look for any deep and meaningful trends. Outside of the young adult industry there is only one local publisher, Pan Macmillan. However, enough has been published to at least make a few comments.

Easily the most effective and thought provoking novels in terms of theme and characters are the young adult novels. As with some of Carmody's work, there are parts of Kelleher's *THE RED KING* some readers may be surprised to see in a young adult book. The cynical control of population by murder and disease, relationships where adults premeditatedly use children for their own purposes, use of living human beings for medical experimentation in attempts to create monsters - all of the above told realistically and with conviction. I wonder how much success Kelleher has had getting work as thoughtful and disturbing as this published in the US. Perhaps we can provisionally define children's literature as a plot where a bunch of kids are in conflict against a bunch of adults who are perfect examples of what the kids should strive not to be like when they grow up. We can only hope for more work of this quality.

Pan Macmillan remain the only Australian publisher of general fantasy, and their ventures in the genre have so far been more in the David Eddings mould - some better than others. One has the feeling they would feel safer cloning Eddings than in publishing thematically original fiction. Strasser's novel is a step away from this cynical view. While Strasser's story values are strong and certainly original, *ZENITH* has much more originality in its conception and execution.

This is only provisionally a criticism. Before fantasy publishing can flourish in Australia it must be proved to be commercially viable. The kind of work so far published by Pan Macmillan isn't going to win government grants. It is published for, and intended for the mass-market. Yet this market also has its standards. While vol. 1 of Middleton's trilogy, *CIRCLE OF LIGHT*, has now been reprinted three times, there are still lots of the original printing of vols. 2 and 3 in the shops. Before Pan

Macmillan can satisfy the more sophisticated demands of their readers (and we are dealing with readers who rate excellence by the standards of Tolkien, Donaldson, Hambly, etc), they must be financially secure. Their bottom line is money. The direction their publishing program takes in the future remains to be seen.

There is a bit of a recession in crime fiction publishing in Australia at the moment. The publishers argue: "we publish it, but it doesn't sell". The readers and critics argue that too much of what has been published is very ordinary. Pan is one publisher guilty of aspiring to the lowest common denominator with some of their crime fiction. Fantasy readers may be a different market.

It is definitely time to get out of here and let you all go and read a good book, but because so many of the books reviewed in these columns form part of trilogies there are first a few observations on the critical treatment of trilogies I would like to make.

Traditionally, a trilogy will have volumes 1 ending on a high note, will have volume 2 ending with the bad guys fighting back strongly, and will have volume 3 featuring an apocalyptic battle in which the good guys manage to claw their way from the heart of darkness and into victory. What a critic may refer to as "the standard problem with trilogies" is that, by necessity, none of the books is able to stand alone as a piece of literature. Each succeeding book must out-perform earlier volumes in story telling. Plots lead onward and upward from credibility into a nebulous region where pigs not only fly but enjoy a good bottle of red wine. There are always loose ends which lead into the next volume which may spoil the earlier volume for some readers. These loose ends are then gathered together in the final volume, so that not even that stands alone; it is dependent on the previous volumes. Even Tolkien is guilty of this "crime". My own view on this is that some readers prefer things that way, they like to spend a little more time in a created world that has become special to them. They read the trilogy as *one* work, rather than three. When a reader approaches a trilogy or a series with this viewpoint, the critic hasn't a leg to stand on. The "standard criticism" becomes a criticism of a publishing process which produces three books from one idea rather than a representative of a fault inherent in the author's work. There is nothing wrong with a trilogy or a series clearly marketed as such.

All a reader must do to avoid the work which seeks to exploit his or her finances - books which cheat. Personally trilogies annoy me, but the ultimate test of a book is a reader's enjoyment. The ultimate critic is the reader, and theories are meaningless. Some people may pretend otherwise, but everybody, publishers, editors, reviewers (not so much the writers) is in this business for the sake of the readers. Speaking of which, I've got a Barbara Hambly novel to start.

THE PROBLEM OF THE PERIPATETIC CORPSE

by Evan Rainer

Ray Bilinsky woke up in a gutter in Darlinghurst. It was Sunday morning.

He blinked blearily at the early morning rays. The sky was streaky in pink and orange off the sails of the Sydney Opera House. 'Those mongrels...' He reached inside his coat for his wallet. 'I'll bet they cleaned me out...' His pals from the Romanian immigration racket had been beating him at cards regularly for the last few weekends running. The morning air was cold. The concrete under his cheek was hard. At least it was dry this time.

A sub-orbital ramjet scrawled a near vertical vapour contrail as it set off on its fifty minute passenger flight across the Pacific. Ray wished he was on it.

His face broke out into a big grin. His hand had found a thick wad in his inside coat pocket. Ray pulled it out and looked. It was five centimetres thick and composed of one-hundred dollar bills. 'Huh,' he chuckled. 'About time I had a winning streak.' A robot street-sweeper stepped over him and continued sweeping, its glowing green eye sockets projecting a scanning beam across his outline to see if he was a piece of rubbish.

Now if only Ray could remember why he was in Kings Cross instead of New Boston. His head hurt... a lot.

He rolled onto his side, then grabbed the robot's leg to lever himself to a sitting position on the edge of the kerb. 'Stand still, chrome-arse,' he told the struggling robot. The world spun. He held his head and tried to remember things.

Ray was a stocky, short-limbed man with a tousled mass of unkept hair. His eyes were usually shrewd and piercing. He did not like being a servant of the Australian Intelligence Service, but it was what he was good at. Every job he applied for in the Commonwealth Gazette was always nabbed on appeal by some bludging public servant with a degree in Greek history or something. So he soldiered on, in his rumpled suits, insulting diplomats and British private school dills, getting kicked out of aeroplanes over Laos or Kuwait or the Mongolian civil war. So long as he brought

back the goods, or the hostages, no one was going to fire him.

He put his hand in his pockets, looking for cigarettes. He found a brown folder. It had Washington, and New Boston, and a few other scribbles on the cover. It began to come back to him. He opened it and saw the picture of Joe Gardner.

'Oh, yeah,' he murmured, 'Joe... Joe Al Kaheld, the android replicant who infiltrated the CIA.' It started to come back to him.

Al Kaheld had murdered Jimmy Astor, Ray's CIA contact from New Boston on Mars because the terrorist replicant knew his cover was in danger of being blown. The blockade of the Straits of Hormuz was at a very dangerous stage now, and the asteroid that had been aimed, most accurately, at the Israeli Knesset while it was in session had stirred up a hornet's nest. If atomic warheads had not knocked it back into orbit there was no knowing what the Israelis would have done in retaliation. As it was, they would be making some sort of move in the next few days.

Why couldn't Ray remember the rest of it? Oh well, it would come back to him... it always did on these Sundays. A bit too much of the Bundaberg Rum was playing havoc with his short-term memory these days.

'Ow,' Ray muttered as he tried to stand. The robot had broken loose and fled. He clutched at a parking meter instead. A couple of shapely strippers strutted from a stage door and gave him a disgusted look. They got into their Moller aircab. It took off vertically. There was vomit on the front of his coat.

'I need a beefburger... and some good, hot tea.' His feet automatically followed their familiar path across Darlinghurst Road towards the *Chew n' Spew*. He stuck his hand in his left coat pocket for some change. There was a piece of paper there.

He fished it out and tried to focus on it. A red and blue aircab roared its landing thrusters and flashed its landing lights at him.

'Get off the landing pad, arsehole,' a disembodied voice drifted down full of weariness towards the world.

'Up yours baboon face. Go stick your head up a dead bear's bum.' The downthrust flapped at his clothing. The piece of paper was an official ASIS memo. 'Oh no,' he cursed. The car belonging to his superior, Three, was being airfreighted back from the spaceport. Ray was supposed to be at Sydney Airport to pick it up. That would have been ten hours ago. The big wad of bills from the Romanian racketeers had come at a price. Three's decrepit old Austin A40 was a superannuated piece of junk, but Three had a lax attitude to security. He often had secret or extremely sensitive files stuffed in the glove-box. He had a fear of heights and had to drive everywhere. The big bugs in ASIS had found it was simply easier if they treated the Austin like part of Three, or his wallet, and shipped it with him to the nearest suborbital ramjet. ASIS kept a permanent booking for him on the Trans-Siberian maglev train. There had been a signed memo from Five himself about this matter.

Ray pressed at his thudding temples as he walked into the *Chew n' Spew*. He sat at a counter-stool. Wealthy EEC tourists made a background hubbub of German and Russian phrases. Yuri, the Siberian proprietor who had come here on R&R from Vladivostok and stayed, came down the bar. The two most powerful members of the EEC, Germany and Russia, were packing his bar with tourists these days. And they had Eurocash virtually falling out of their wallets.

Yuri said, 'Hey, Ray. When'd you get back?' He came to a stop. He stared at the dubious sight on the other side of the bar. 'You look like hell on wheels an' the wheels've fallen off. What'll it be... the usual?'

Ray tried to talk and made a gargling sound. Yuri turned away and within seconds banged down a glass of tomato juice with his special ingredients. The sound of the glass hitting the counter was like a block of granite being smashed down the centre of Ray's frontal lobes.

'Thanks, Yuri... an' gimme the phone.' Ray slurped at the evil-smelling liquor. Particles of pepper with streaks of Worcestershire sauce floated on the crimson ichor.

'Comin' up.' Yuri knew this routine as near perfect as checking his parachute before a night drop into Mongolia from 7,000 metres. There was a civil war there and the EEC didn't like having a civil war on its Pacific borders. He banged the phone down on the counter.

Ray nearly dropped the glass. He put his forehead in his hand.

Yuri observed him. He pulled the phone back and dialled Jana's number, as he often did, then extended the handpiece to Ray.

'Hello, Jana? - Ray - what've I been doing...'

Jana was a crime reporter with an TM virtual-reality station. She knew of Ray's short-term memory losses on Sunday mornings. She quickly filled him in on what he'd been doing for the past few days. Her grandparents had come out from Georgia in the big migratory waves of last century.

'How was the orbital flight from the States?' she finished.

As usual, the details began to fade back into his consciousness. Ray suddenly realised why he was very

tired. He had not taken the fifty-minute ramjet flight. He had taken the atmospheric jet. It had been a fifty-two hour flight from the spaceport, catching different combinations to throw off possible tails. 'I stopped over in Alcapulco for six hours and then had to wait out a riot at the terminal in Bombay.'

'Well, you're in hot water with the BIO. He sent out a naval rating to get Three's car from the airport.'

Ray turned the red beverage in his hand. He glanced at the early Sunday traffic taking off in Darlinghurst Road. 'Least of my troubles,' he murmured.

'I have to go. I've got the coroners court and the major crime squad to meet... oh, the naval rating left a bag of potatoes or something - it was in the Austin - I think they're at your place.'

'Potatoes?'

Jana babbled a bit longer then made her goodbyes.

Potatoes. Ray shrugged. Three was a bit eccentric.

Yuri had his breakfast and cuppa ready. 'Hoo, you're busted a few security rules, mate.'

'Bent, not busted... I only bend rules.' He drank the tea slowly. Yuri had served up a plate full of bacon with chips. He wondered if Yuri would like some of the potatoes. Apparently the naval rating had found the lid of the Austin open when he entered the military ramjet. The bag and jack and spare could have been prey to any passing thief. He had dumped the bag at Ray's flat, which was just down the road, and delivered the car with its defective lid to Three's enquiry.

Ray would have to report in there soon. He ate sedately.

Joe Al Kaheld had regained consciousness slowly. The wiring in his thermoplastic head had been jarred. Whoever had brained him had done a good job. It took him several moments to figure out where he was. Joe had shot the CIA agent, Jimmy Astor, in the back of the head. The body was in the body-bag that Joe was lying in... in the trunk of that junkpile abandoned car he had found in the back alley.

Joe momentarily panicked. This was the car he had phoned his terrorist mates about. They were to come and tow it away and put it through the junkyard crusher! He had to get out.

He lay in the darkness of the car's trunk and listened. The vibrations and howl of hypersonic flight told him that he was onboard an aircraft. Maybe International Terror was going to drop the car in the desert, but that didn't make sense.

Joe Al Kaheld quietly picked the car lock. He peeped out. It was the interior of a military transport, unknown to him a suborbital ramjet on its regular trip to Pine Gap in Australia. He could see it was American. What was going on?

The ramjet landed in darkness and unloaded the car at Sydney airport. Joe disembarked. He soon found out what country he was in.

'I'm in luck,' he chuckled. He had killed Jimmy Astor to prevent his cover in the CIA being blown. The only other person in the way was that Australian agent.

The Base Intelligence Officer was in a building in Wylde Street overlooking the naval vertol base. It was connected by an underground tunnel to Three's ASIS headquarters next to HMAS Kuttabul. But Ray didn't walk the few hundred metres down to road from the *Chew n' Spew*. He knew better than that. Somebody from that environmental terrorist outfit might be tailing him.

Instead, he caught the underground maglev train to Wynyard and waited for a robobus. He forced the door of the robobus while it was travelling down Pitt Street and slipped onto a plumber's utility hovering alongside. When the utility slowed a little as it joined the queue of the take-off pad he managed to fight off the savage blue heeler and jumped overboard. Ray slipped away into the alleys around Liberal Party headquarters. He was familiar with these alleys from his jobs overthrowing Labour governments. On the three hundred and thirty-sixth floor of the MLC building he kept the women's toilets under surveillance for thirty minutes then entered.

He locked a cubicle and sat on the toilet bowl with his feet lifted out of sight. After an hour he had only seen random women entering and leaving, he judged. When the toilet was empty, he went to a window and took off his belt. The belt was a woven mesh made from high tensile Kevlar filament given to him by Two, the special operations expert. Two always wore a leather mask for some reason. Maybe he had acne scars, Ray thought.

Ray unravelled the filament. He used the diamond tip on his tie-pin to scratch a circle on the window and soon had a hole big enough to fit through. He trembled. It was 1,000 metres straight down. Ray took careful aim and fired a dart down to the rooftop aerodrome of the Reserve Bank. The filament was strung taught. He attached the brake and slid down the filament. Lucky it was Sunday or the air would be thick with hurtling vertols.

He walked along Macquarie Street with the intent of catching a ferry across to Manly Beach, but on the way he doubled back and forth several times. He loitered at Town Hall, pretending to read a newspaper for half an hour. No suspicious characters were in evidence. After walking up and down the central city area like this a few times, he caught the ferry to Manly. The big shopping crowds around Centrepont gave too much cover to a possible tail, he thought. Then he caught the fast jetcat back, and another jetcat back over again.

He alighted at Manly and strolled the Corso to the gigantic beach. Circumnavigating the lagoon at the north end of Manly Beach, he returned to the south end. He walked around to the tiny, secluded beach at Fairy Bower and had another cappuccino at the open air cafe there. The simulacra waiters were very refined. The place was full of German and Russian tourists. Then he walked up the steep steps and waited at the robot-busstop at Manly Hospital. It amused him to think that cannon emplacements and artillery tunnels had been burrowed all along these cliff-tops in the

1880s for fear of a Russian invasion. Now they were our greatest trading partner and spaceport client.

He caught a robobus back to Spit Junction and walked down to Balmoral Beach. It was peaceful in the silence and the sun. He walked on the grass along the centre of the road. Since the advent of Professor Moller's vertol in the 1990s, the car was gone. Only robovans collecting garbage, or the odd taxiing vertol were to be seen.

At the beach there was festivity and many noisy vertols. He took off his shoes and put them in his coat pockets. He paid at the office and rented a sail board. The office simulacrum betrayed a certain salt-water rust in the lower leg region. Ray windsurfed across the harbour to Watsons Bay and had a small seafood meal at Doyles restaurant. Its international fame had attracted many Russian tourists.

He could not be sure he was not being followed.

He took a robobus from Watsons Bay to Surry Hills to further decoy any potential follower. He forced the robobus doors travelling through Bondi Junction and leapt out at the trot, hanging onto a plasterer's utility. His coat sleeve was further savaged by the tradesman's blue heeler but again he managed to fight it off.

Ray doubled around the streets of Bondi Junction for a further hour before catching the underground maglev train back to Kings Cross.

He emerged into the street and walked down Darlinghurst Road past the *Chew n' Spew* toward ASIS headquarters.

Vladimir, the Istanbul agent for International Terror, saw Ray come out of the maglev station. Vladimir had been through all this nonsense a number of times, including having his coat-sleeve savaged by many blue heelers, so when he saw Ray leave the *Chew n' Spew* he merely walked along and waited outside the Kings Cross maglev station entrance. When in due course Ray reappeared, Vladimir folded the newspaper he had been reading and trailed him the short walk down Wylde Street to the navy vertol base.

The vertol base was a platform half a kilometre square sitting on pylons seventy-five metres high. The space underneath was devoted to parklands and low-cost housing. The Woollomooloo citizens were running a campaign to get rid of the hideous base.

Vladimir wrote in his diary: "Subject departed *Chew n' Spew* restaurant in morning. Subject walked down to Wylde Street in afternoon." Vladimir had been telephoned by Joe Al Kaheld who deposited one million dollars from the Marseilles account into Vladimir's escrow. For that sum Vladimir intimated that he might be able to track down the elusive agent and provide an outline of his habits.

On the way to naval headquarters, Ray bumped into the caretaker android and general handyman from his apartment block. The android was a war veteran's pensioner, small and dried and skinny. He had a hearing aid and wore socks with leather sandals. His trousers were very baggy. The woollen cardigan was stained in the pockets with nicotine. Brown sunspots mottled the balding

dome of his head where the skin grew thin on the stamped-boron moulding of his skull.

'Hello, Ray,' the simulacrum rasped. 'A bloke left a bag of potatoes for you on the front drive... I dragged it in and stacked it at the back of your parking place.' His voice whistled and wheezed. The boron bone sockets and other parts were intended to wear out after only a few years, particularly in these expendable combat models.

'Ar, thanks, Arthur. Did you get a few for yourself?' Ray stopped at the edge of the kerb. A tree had pushed the concrete kerb up in a small, cracked hump.

'No, no... I didn't, b'jeez. Could I? I'll get some when I come back from the TAB.' The simulacrum hobbled off, scrounging in his pocket for his cigarette lighter. All simulacra over four years old used the morphine cigarettes to dull the pain of their boron bone-stampings wearing out.

Ray turned to go and saw a wheeled vehicle had stopped near him. It was a bunch of the boys from Darlo copshop in the divvy van.

'G'day, Ray,' the huge, beefy form of Steve the Crusher bawled. The streamlined canopy was slid back to take the sun. The idling jet turbine was a delicate falsetto, barely audible and sounding like a nylon stocking being dragged from a shapely leg.

'G'day, mate,' a couple of the others waved. 'What - you've come into a bag o' potatoes? Howzabout a few for your ol' pals, eh?' The coppers all laughed. Some times when Ray woke up in a gutter he had some of these colleagues for company, slumped in a doorway or over a vertol.

'Yeah, yeah... all right, Steve. It's in my parking space. Help yez selves.' He gave them the thumbs up and strolled on.

They nodded and pulled away. The falsetto became a fansaw. Boiling transparent air shimmered behind the van.

On the way to BIO, Ray walked along the drive to his block. He glanced into the underground car park and

saw the dark shape of the bag among the vertols. It was slumped against the wall, difficult to make out against the exhaust stains. He walked out again.

Joe Al Kaheld was a dangerous man to cross. When he found out that Raymond Lafayette Bilinsky was simply listed in the Sydney holophone directory, along with the address, he realised that one million dollars was a smidgen too high a price to pay Vladimir for the information. Joe decided to kill Vladimir next time he saw him.

Meanwhile the CIA infiltrator visited Ray's address to spy out the land. He walked along the driveway and had a look inside the letterboxes. A few had locks on them. Most did not. He found a letter addressed to Ray, thereby getting his apartment number. Joe glanced about, along the street and up at some of the balconies of the apartment. One or two old folk were up there but took no notice of street level. Vertols were landing and taking off from the tops of the tower-blocks in only thin numbers, mostly taxis or pizza deliveries.

Joe went up the drive and into the underground parking area. He felt arrogant in the power of his position. He wanted to see what sort of Moller vertol Ray had. There was no Moller. Instead, at the back of the numbered vertol space was a familiar if chilling sight.

'Oh my God no,' Joe Al Kaheld choked. His eyes widened with fear. He pressed up against a wall and stared from left to right. Was someone setting him up; were police hiding in wait to nab him in the act?

The dark, bumpy shape huddled against the wall in Ray Bilinsky's parking spot was the body from New Boston. Joe Al Kaheld sidled up to the body-bag. He unzipped the top. The foul odour of death wafted up. He reziped it.

What was that fool Bilinsky up to? How could any ASIS agent be so bizarre as to leave a body-bag lying openly in their parking spot almost in view of the street?

It worried Joe Al Kaheld. There was some mysterious plan here. The problem of disposing of two bodies after he had killed Bilinsky made him very nervous.

But he could not leave the body-bag here. He would have to stow it for a short time while he went away and procured transport. He dragged the body-bag over to the hedgerow at the back of the vertol-park. There was a little blockhouse with some electricity meters; he dragged it in there.

Then he set off to murder Vladimir. He would have to torture the Istanbul middleman however, to get back the million dollars from the escrow account.

Vladimir was not far away. He was just around the corner, shadowing Ray Bilinsky to ASIS headquarters.

As Ray neared the tasteless, brown brick edifice of HMAS Kuttabul, he felt sick as the whole, filthy reality of his situation came flooding back down on him. His was a world of kill or be killed, of sudden explosions and then eternal blackness. He shuddered at imagined shadows or flinched when a car backfired.

He came to a stop. He stood at the edge of the kerb, one hand in his pocket. Ray idly looked up and down the road, There was no one suspicious about, only a middle-eastern looking man in a baggy suit reading a newspaper. He looked like an Istanbul middleman for a rug company.

He had not been followed, Ray was sure of that. He climbed the front steps deliberately. Next door was the sprawling, many floored naval edifice of Kuttabul, but this place was disguised as a palmy, pink concrete monolith tarted up as a small shopping mall. Ray went in. Shoppers, huge muscular men with bristly scalps and tattooed arms, browsed at the windows of the fake businesses. The huge, tattooed proprietors stood at their counters and scowled out upon their customers.

When the buzzer sounded, Three was startled. He look up at the visitor on the security screen.

'Raymond... damn, it must be daytime.' He screwed the top back on the vermouth bottle as fast as he could and cleared away the decanters into his top drawer. He rubbed at the wet circles on the desktop. Three straightened up, swaying a little, and hung the bottle back out the window on its piece of string.

He pressed a yellow button under his desk. Within a few moments, a man wearing a leather mask entered his office. He wore a knee-length, white laboratory coat. He was around fifty-five, short with a pudgy face - under the mask were a couple of small cancerous lumps on his left side - and had thick, brown hair brushed to one side with a lot of gel. His squat body sagged at the belly.

This was Two, the special weapons and operations genius. Two was familiar to Ray. The way a dung beetle is familiar to a cow.

'Mister Bilinsky will be here soon,' Three told Two. '... and do take off that mask, Two.' He sprawled at his liquor stained desk like a floppy-faced bulldog at the door to his kennel, scowling up at Two's annoying disguise.

Two unsnapped the mask. 'But you know I always wear it on Sunday and Thursday...' He was a bad man to upset and held a grudge for a long time. 'I'll be going to the club soon.' Two and his young friend from records were the subject of odd rumours in the public service.

'When Bilinsky gets here,' Three's bass voice cut into the whinge, 'I want you to take him to the End Room. If

the Israelis ignite the whole region our American friends might ask us to put some of our people in through Kuwait. It's be best if Bilinsky sees the result of what those new chemical warheads can do to a human body.'

Two twisted the leather mask in his pudgy hands. 'But his clearance is too low.' His bony, mottled hands trembled.

'No buts,' Three said firmly. 'And furthermore, I hope you'll remain the only one besides me who knows what sort of gas and torture implements we keep on display in the End Room.' This was a hint at the rumours about Two's young friend.

Two looked at him angrily.

At this point, Ray Bilinsky entered the room.

The men exchanged perfunctory greetings.

'Another Kevlar belt, please, Two.' Ray indicated his beltless trousers.

Two sniffed and nodded. All the agents went through many belts. He said frostily, 'Is there any reason why your shoes are in your coat-pockets?'

Ray looked down. His trousers were rolled up to the knees above bare feet. 'Well I was windsurfing, wasn't I,' he said almost inaudibly. He threw the shoes on the floor and stepped into them.

The Prospect County Council electricity android arrived at Ray's block to read the meters. The simulacrum was much annoyed that some idiot had left a very big plastic bag in the meter room. He tried to clomp over it to read the meters but it felt like it was full of something lumpy and unstable. Fuming, the simulacrum grabbed it at the corners and dragged it off through the hedge and left it amid the garbage bins on the side path, almost at the footpath. 'Bastards,' he cursed and went back to the meters.

Steve the Crusher was pretty happy. He had sold nearly a full book of tickets for the Bondi surf club. It was to help the street kids. The money would buy a lot of sporting and hiking equipment. He turned the van into Darlinghurst Road. 'I'll spread a few of these potatoes of Ray's around the station tomorrow, Troppo,' he said to his sidekick.

'Yeah,' Troppo said. He was a wide, fat man with a single eyebrow that ran right across his forehead under the police hat. 'I think I'll fry up a few chips with the steak tonight. Give the missus a surprise.' His fat, blue cowboy hat wobbled.

The jet turbine burred like a big, black cat as they slowed out the front of Ray's block. 'Hey, is that the bag?'

Troppo pointed at the black, plastic bag near the front of the building.

Steve the Crusher stomped back across the lawn. He could see the drag marks across the grass from the parking basement. 'Yeah, this's gotta be it. Some hooligan's dragged it outta Ray's spot.' He crushed his big police boot on to it. 'Jeez, I never thought it wuz gonna be this big.'

'Yeah,' Troppo said rubbing his single, vast eyebrow. 'There must be a million tons o' potatoes in there.'

'Tell ya what,' the Crusher boomed. 'We'll just toss it in the back of the van and divide the spoils after the shift. We'll bring what's left back to Ray tonight...'

'Bloody good idea, Steve,' Troppo chuckled. He unlocked the steel door at the back of the van.

Arthur the combat simulacrum had won \$65 at the TAB. He was pretty happy with himself. He fumbled in the nicotine-stained pockets of his baggy cardigan for his cigarette lighter. He had a plastic shopping bag with some sausages in it that he was going to sizzle up with some of those potatoes for dinner.

He came around the corner where Wylde Street began its snaking downhill towards the vast vertol platform of the naval base and saw two burly policemen dragging the bag of potatoes into the back of their divisional van. Arthur shuffled his sticklike, war-pensioner legs into a canter and yelled in his wheezy, rasping whisper.

They didn't hear him. The cops drove off with a rumble.

Arthur decided to put the sausages in the fridge then go for a walk up to the police station. He only wanted a handful of the spuds.

Joe Al Kaheld was full of vigour. His eyes gleamed with triumph. He had killed Vladimir. The unfortunate Istanbul middleman had signed over the million dollars from the escrow account, believing Joe Al Kaheld's promise to forget the matter.

Al Kaheld had then garrotted him. With control of the escrow account, Al Kaheld was able to set himself up properly for the difficult mission of exterminating an ASIS agent and then fleeing the country. He bought lots of weapons.

He hovered along a side street not far from Ray's block. He had Vladimir's corpse in the trunk of a rented Moller. Joe intended to stuff Vladimir into the body-bag with the Jimmy Astor stiff.

Joe had not been away long. He walked up a lane and examined the block of apartments. No one was about. The balconies were empty. He walked along the side path and through the hedge. He opened the door to the electricity meter room.

The body-bag was gone!

Joe scuttled away down the side alleys and took a circuitous route back to his Moller. His coat sleeve had been severely mauled by the tradesman's blue heelers and he had vomited up the pizza during the second jetcat cruise. He was exhausted as he put his hand on the canopy latch of the rented Moller and slumped into the pilot's seat. What a day!

Arthur wanted those potatoes. He stood at the top of Wylde Street, his breath rasping from the gentle climb. The dirty Mongolians had seared the insides of his lungs when they bombed his brigade of simulacra on the Ulaanbaatar slopes. The police station was within his sight. He set forth on his mission.

Arthur's wartime marauding skills were still as good as they had been in 2024. When Steve the Crusher, now in civvies, landed his souped-up Moller at the rear of the divisional van and slid back his canopy, his mates gathered around with string bags, backpacks and upturned Mollercycle helmets like begging bowls.

Steve got out and walked up to the van door. He unlocked it. 'Potatoes galore, boys. Ray said we could help ourselves.'

He swung open the door. The van was empty.

Troppo's single, giant eyebrow rose into the foothills of his black, greasy hairline. 'It's gone. Some thief's nicked the lot.'

All the delighted cops were suddenly downcast.

Troppo brightened. 'Never mind. My brother's gonna be at the markets today. He'll have truckloads of vegies... we can fill another bag and Ray'll never know the difference.'

The Crusher was elated. 'Great idea. I'll drop in on my brother-in-law at the morgue and get one of those body-bags; they look pretty identical.'

Arthur was slightly winded dragging the big, black bag back home. He found a Safeways shopping trolley and upended it to stuff the bag in. It took all his frail simulacrum's weight to counterweight it noseup on to its wheels again. Halfway home, he threw in the towel and got permission from his mate, Bert the robot bartender, to park the trolley in the washroom at the back of the pub while he had a few ales and played the poker machines.

The red tail-lights of the police van were dwindling up Wylde Street when Ray walked around the corner from the naval base. The police had made the mistake of leaving the body bag full of potatoes where they found it... near the garbage bins at the front. Ray was walking up the path when he saw the bag.

'Hey, what's this...?' some hooligan's tried to pinch my bloody bag full of potatoes, he thought.

He walked back across the street and unzipped the bag. The wonderful, heady aroma of freshly dug potatoes assailed his nostrils. He picked one out and looked at it. 'Top quality,' he muttered. 'I'll have a few of you in the pan tonight,' he added. He dragged the bag across the grass and down into his parking spot. He took a big armful of potatoes for himself and headed across to the service entrance.

Arthur was a big snickered when he staggered out into the cool evening air. He had lost most of his TAB windfall to the poker machines in the first hour, but by the second he had won it all back, plus about \$12 extra. He decided to quit while he was ahead. He finished off his drink with a couple of simulacra mates, giving them a handful of the gold one-dollar coins that had come gushing out of the machine with his final pull of the poker-machine lever.

He said goodnight to Bert the robot bartender and went out to the washroom to wheel away his trolley-load of potatoes. A bunch of hooligans had stolen the trolley. At this moment they were joyriding it down the hill in the exclusive area of penthouses around Elizabeth Bay.

Arthur was extremely angry, but in view of his winnings of first the TAB and then the poker machines, he soon cooled down and shrugged it off. Instead he headed for the Returned War Simulacrum's Club for a celebratory nosh-up.

Later, when he walked into the apartment tower block by the back entrance, he was puzzled to see the bag of potatoes back in Ray's parking spot. He went over and unzipped it.

'Crikey. These are top quality spuds,' he muttered in a slightly slurred voice. He gathered up an armful for

himself and zipped the bag shut. He entered the service elevator.

Joe Al Kaheld burred the big Moller down into the tight descent corridor leading to the opulent penthouse he had rented in Elizabeth Bay. The landing wheels touched bitumen. He was frightened that someone in the security agencies of this country might have found the corpse of Jimmy Astor and set up a surveillance operation to tail him. That was why he had taken the ferry across to Manly, plus the jetcats, and walked around the lagoon at the north end of Manly Beach.

The sail board centre had refused to rent him a sail board, unfortunately. 'No way, pal. I already rented one to some clown in a suit today... and guess where it ended up?'

'Er... where?' Joe had asked, hoping to win the simulacrum over.

'Would you believe it.. Watson's Bay? The bugger abandoned it over there.'

Taxiing the cramped landing roundel at Elizabeth Bay, Joe's Moller nearly collided with a bunch of hooligans joyriding a stolen shopping trolley down the hill.

'What the...!' Joe snarled. He jammed the brake pedal and hit left thrust. The vertol skidded completely around, tail out.

The tail of the rental Moller clipped the Safeways trolley, knocking it over. The hooligans tumbled out. But they were nimble. They had scattered into the maze of underground parking basements before Joe had the seat-belt unbuckled.

'My lucky day,' he gasped when he saw the capsized trolley. The body bag containing the corpse of Jimmy Astor lay up on the kerb.

Joe hastily checked that no one was around. He dragged the body bag along a narrow driveway. He ran back and half-hovered the Moller against the driveway, shielding things somewhat from view.

The corpse of Jimmy Astor was still partly jammed into the trolley. Joe uprighted the trolley and jerked and tugged till he got the body bag peeled off. He laid the body

bag on the floor of the Moller and was methodically packing the throttled corpse of Vladimir into it, when Steve the Crusher and Troppo taxied into view. They'd had a few beers up the road at the Returned War Simulacrum's Club but the big take-off roundel was chock-a-bloc with vertols backed up waiting to lift. Like many others, they pattered off looking for the smaller but less-used roundels tucked away in suburbia.

'Hey,' Troppo said, his huge, wide eyebrow shading down over both eyes. 'What's that guy with the Moller up to?' He had seen him put the plastic bag into the side of the vertol.

Steve the Crusher stopped his souped-up Moller. 'I'll bet he's the mongrel what stole Ray's potatoes.' He scanned the expensive limo Moller. 'These rich bastards around Elizabeth Bay are stingy as buggery.'

In due course, Troppo and Crusher were shot dead by the maniac with a trunk full of Uzis and missile-tubes and hand grenades. Joe had thought the two civilians who hailed him were secret service when he glimpsed their gun holsters. The SWAS team of combat simulacra that were called to the spot when the gunfight had erupted had been unprepared for the tremendous fire-power of their adversary. But they had eventually killed him.

A ricochet from Troppo's service revolver had pinged the shopping trolley holding the corpse of Jimmy Astor. Jimmy Astor rolled gently back along the highway, gathering momentum. He accelerated down in the parking basement of a luxurious penthouse tower. The Safeways shopping trolley hurtled across the dark catacombs, launching Jimmy way out into space. He hit the harbour with a geyser of white foam.

By midnight, Jimmy Astor was bobbing gently in the moonlight, drifting not far from Manly. At dawn he set off on the tide through Middle Head for his journey across the Pacific Ocean.

Ray had chips for breakfast with his bacon.

End

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AUSTRALIA

A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION & FANDOM IN ARGENTINA

by Claudio Omar Noguero

PART THREE

THE PENDULUM SWINGS: 1981...

The year after the disappearance of ENTROPIA, Marcial Souto came back to create in the people of La Urraca Ediciones an interest in an old project of which we'll give a little history: EL PENDULO ('The Pendant').

It began in February 1975, when Jaime Poniachik and Marcial Souto enthusiastically proposed to Andres Cascioli (editor-in-chief of La Urraca) the creation of a fact and fiction magazine, to include Argentine and foreign authors, offering diverse discourses, information etc. Cascioli proposed the name (EL PENDULO, of course). Issue number one was prepared (we have included the cover: the one with the eye), and when it was about to be printed, the world fell in, or more precisely, the 'R' bomb fell on Argentina (the 'R. bomb', was also called 'Rodrigazo', in honour of the foreboding economy minister of the government of Isabel Peron, Celestino Rodrigo, who provoked stampedes in prices, attaining a 100% increase in a week - without doubt, the best sf work of all time!!) Well, EL PENDULO ended up in an archive.

In the beginning of 1979,

Cascioli and Sputo began energetically pressing their project again; Poniachik wasn't interested because he was very busy in the preparation of another magazine for La Urraca. The intention was to lean towards the sf field: fantasy, horror, sf, comics, critical and artistic experiments. They decided to test the recipe disguising it as a companion for another of Urraca's magazines which was having an rapid ascent with Argentine public opinion: HUMOR REGISTRADO. Thus it was called SUPLEMENTO DE HOMOR Y CIENCIA FICCION ('Humour and SF Supplement). Two issues came out: the first was poor and the other attractive. The following month EL PENDULO was born in its own right: it was September 1979. It published four monthly issues with 16 colour pages and other sybaritic luxuries, with double the number of black and white pages. The impossibility of keeping the price down unbalanced the novel recipe and

PENDULO is the best sf magazine of all time" and, of course, we agree with him.

In EL PENDULO appeared practically all the names whom we speak of today. Its style modeled the taste of the audience which in that very moment approached sf and non-traditional fantasy, directing it towards speculation.

But the old EL PENDULO didn't die. An experience such as this couldn't end quickly: it not only left its clones but, after a time it came back. Starting from a letter that appeared in EL PENDULO, Sergio Gaut vel Hartman, alma mater of the new fandom, made a call which would give birth to the CACYF - the Circulo Argentino de Ciencia Ficción y Fantasia - (the Argentine SF and Fantasy Circle). Founded in July 1982, the CACYF patronized and inspired a good part of local fandom's activities, settling its nucleus in the inner coun-

EL PENDULO returned to its old vocation as an archive.

FICCION (see the reproduced cover), an exclusively literary magazine which continued some aspects of EL PENDULO, didn't prosper either, though its first issue was published.

Then the HUMOR phenomena began: in a year, sales increased from 40,000 to 140,000 copies - this increase is understandable if we remember that it was one of the few magazines that laughed at the official canals of information, risking more than one issue, during the military dictatorship, being transformed in that way to the periodic bastion of resistance that the public needed, and LA URRACA found itself unexpectedly wanted, finding new adventures.

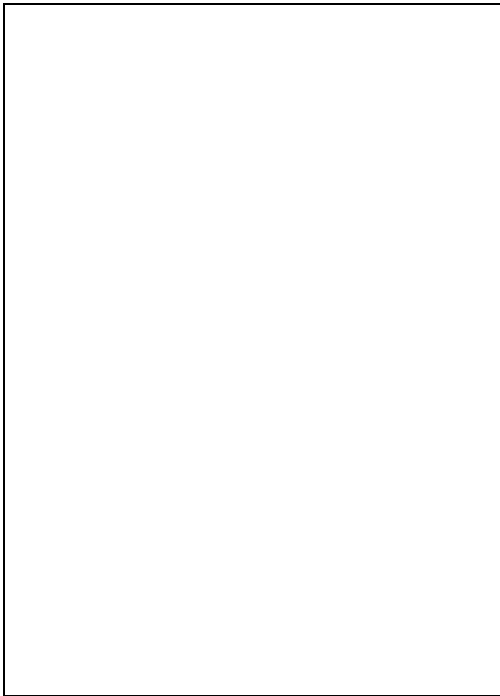
So it was in May that EL PENDULO appeared again, with a new format (book sized, as were MINOTAURO, ENTROPIA, etc) with 130 pages containing more text (and eventually with illustrations and only one comic: a true literary magazine). This second era lasted till December 1982 and 10 issues were produced. Artwork was luxurious. Its recipe was unique, not only for Argentina, but for the whole world: definitely a "cult" publication, without failing to be "popular". San Lundwall affirmed that "EL

try and giving the yearly "Mas Alla" awards, which pretend to be the local "Hugo".

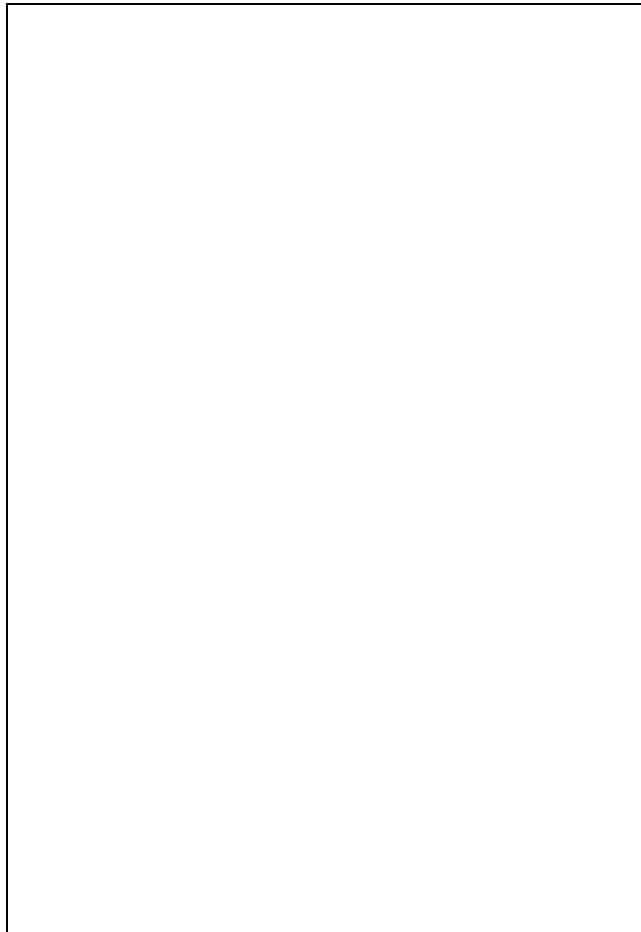
And new magazines began to appear. A true invasion, after what we were accustomed to see: the first was ARKAM, which in 1981 published two issues. It was devoted to poetry, magic and fantasy, involving the people who later could form the publisher Filofalsia (with two issues of the magazine including sf in its excellent selection of material and art) and LA BRUJUTRAMPA. Daniel R. Mourelle was the editor and Sergio Gaut vel Hartman was contributor.

In 1983 vel Hartman edited his own magazine, SINERGIA, which soon ascended from modest fanzine to professional status. It included articles, stories from authors from all over the world, and comments and letters from the readers. The presentation level was not always good, sometimes not even acceptable, but magazine publication is thus. It does show, without doubt, the editor's taste: with marginal and unclassifiable content. At present, there have been 11 issues published.

In April, 1983, several months after the last issue of EL PENDULO, MINOTAURO entered its second epoch, It was edited by Marcila Souto with the essential EL PENDULO paraphernalia, though with a more sober style. It was published by Sudamericana, where Souto worked as



consultant editor. 11 issues were published, all of an excellent quality, and it was followed by a third era (though maintaining the original numbering) of EL PENDULO, with the same staff, the same graphic characteristics and with a good distribution throughout the



country, publishing 14 issues up to the present .

Returning to the shaky year of 1983, not only did we change a military dictatorship for a radical one (the majority

party of our present government is radical), but we helped in the birth of another three magazines devoted to science fiction and of the publication of native speculative stories. The magazines were: NUEVO-MUNDO ('New world') of more classic than modern lines, publishing exclusively national fiction of literate quality, but with a dangerous xenophobic definition in our obligation towards the expression of nationalism; its publisher was Daniel Croci - who wrote under the pseudonym of Daniel Barbieri, an active member of the CACYF. NUEVOMUNDO has up till the present published 10 issues - with the last double the size of the one before, and devoted to sf written by women; this near 100 page fanzine had a disastrous appearance, and included short biographical and bibliographical information, news and comment. PARSEC was the third magazine, which we'll talk about later.

The national sf serial (the publisher Minotauro, again) was in the charge of Marcial Souto (again, again), and continued as did the first serial which had appeared 20 years before under the same publisher, but with better artwork, and the stories were selected with an inclination towards speculative fiction. Thus they published things such as MI CEREBRO ANIMAL ("My Animal Brain") and JUEGOS MALABARES ("Playing In The Jungle") by Carlos Gardink, Rogelio Ramos Signes' LAS ESCAMAS DEL SENOR CRISOLARAS ('Mr Crisolaras' Scales'), Angelica' Gorodischer's two volumes of KALPA IMPERIAL, Ana aria Shua's LA SUENERA ('The Dream-maker'), Eduardo Abel Gimenez's EL FONDO DEL POZO ('The Bottom Of The Hole'), Luisa Ape's RETONOS ('Sprouts'), Mario Levrero's AQUAS SALOBRES ('Salt Water') and Gaut vel Hartman's CUERPOS DESCARTABLES ('Disposable Bodies'). On the other hand, Souto published his own book out in this collection, though within its guidelines - thematically and by plot, with the support of the publisher Sudamericana, who eventually published the fiction and non-fiction works of the contributors of EL PENDULO-MINOTAURO. A new series which ended in 1982, was also oversighted by Souto, and they saw the light of day thanks to the erudition of Universitaria de Buenos Aires - EUDeBA, who published LA CINECIA FICCION EN ARGENTINA ('SF In Argentina') wherein were stories of 'Souto's clan' were. All the authors answered to an altered questionnaire with true cleverness in some cases and miraculous ingenuity in others, but always closer to honesty than to pedantry. It includes photos of the authors and a brief history of the genre in these latitudes.

In Parana - a province of Entre Rios, there appeared, in the same year, PUEBLA DE LOS ANGELES ('Angels Town') by Sofia Acosta - published by Colmegna, a beautifully written book, but the much the same as Antonia Segura's CUENTOS BASTANTE FANTASTICOS ('Such Fantastic Tales') - published by the author in 1984 - and Felix Obes' URUGUABON AL FINAL DE LA CALLE ('Uruguabon At The End Of The Street' - 1985), published by the author, Montevideo), Pedro N. Ciochi's EN BUSCA DE LA DIMENSION TANGENCIAL ('In Search Of The Tangential Dimension' - 1984), Ignacio Jorda's EL VIEJO DE LOS PARJAROS ('The

Old Man Of The Birds' - 1985), published by the author, Tierra del Fuego, Jorge Arabito's DE TRAINCIONES ('Of Treachery' - 1985), Olavarria and L.M. Lopez's 2/4/2015, TIERRA DEL FUEGO (1985), all of which struck up against the inevitable wall of being published in the interior of the country or just being author's editions, along with which goes a bad distribution of the book, the acknowledgement of a larger audience being lost that way. But we can't ask more of a country where the official message was always tinged by underlying concepts like the fascist 'Alpargatas si, libros no' (alpargata = a popular simple shoe used by countrymen; thus it would sound like 'alpargatas yes, books no'), and where there are continuously generated in the collective consciousness inconsistent behaviours for and of dependence.

During 1983, Sergio Gaut vel Hartman, temporally associated with Filofalsia, edited the magazine PARSEC, a professional one, which published 6 issues, which published the new international sf and some national contributions. In general, the product was acceptable and the selection of reprints good. Many readers would discover through its pages a young Argentine talent who was a long time developing, and published either his stories, songs, his articles or his mind games, scattered here and there: Eduardo Abel Gimenez. In three successive issues (PARSECs 3, 4 and 5) we read his UN PASEO POR CAMARJALF ('A Travel On Camarjali'), an excellent novel related to the theme of EL FONDO DEL POZO..

Moreover Filofalsia had begun to publish its own magazines, which certainly weren't especially sf, but did contain some of it, including, for several issues' a section called 'Parsec' - the name was taken from the magazine of the same name which had now ceased publication, and from which they had obtained excellent material. At present this material was published in the magazine dispersed among all the other contents: poetry, articles, main-stream narratives, philosophy, metaphysics... this magazine was called CLEPSIDRA ('clepsydra' = water clock) and has now reached issue 13, plus one annual. It has a square shape (26cm a side) and its artwork is impressive: it's certainly a magazine not only to be read, but also to be seen. We discovered - or rediscovered - in it some contributors with talent, maybe the youngest in the genre: Tarik Carson, Felix Obves, Cecilia Polisen, Lesly Sanchez (who in 1979 had published the anthology LAS ZONAS TRANSPARENTES ('The Transparent Zones'), published by Castaneda), Miguel Doreau - who published ALMARMIRA, a novel, in 1984, Luis Benitez, Santiago Espel, Iaron, Yoel Novoa, Carmen Bruna, Higo Bulocq, Alberto Munoz - who recently published two LP records: one sung by Liliana Vitale MAMA - DEJA QUE ENTREN POR LA VENTANA LOS SIETE MARES ('Mother, Let The Seven Seas Enter The Window') and the other sung by himself - EL GRAN PEZ AMERICANO ('The Big American Fish') and some other items such as poetry books.. All of them, in some way entered to the sf field or touched it tangentially, and enjoyed an excellent literary flight.

In 1984 Sudamericana published Pablo Capanna's critical essay EL SENTOR DE LAS TARDE ('Lord Of The Afternoon'), which explored Paul Linnebarber's - Cordwainer Smith's - life and work. Milton Editions

published Eduardo Stillman's stories JUAGAR A CIEGAS ('Playing Blind') and the publisher Riesa made the proper decision by publishing Gardini's book SINFONIA CERT ('Cero Symphony'). CACYF instituted that year the 'Mas Alla Prize', voted by its members to the most outstanding works of the previous year in the local region for novel, short story, professional magazine, fanzine, artist which apart from an unpublished short story, was chosen by a jury specially chosen for the occasion. Later we'll mention the winners of the past.

Meanwhile, in Rosario the Rosarian SF And Fantasy Circle was founded, which had a short existence. Its members were at first the publishers and contributors of the fanzine UNICORNIO AZUL ('Blue Unicorn'), which was devoted to sf and fantasy. After its fifth issue, the staff changed, giving 'zine into the keeping of the author of this history. At present the magazine - now called only UNICORNIO - has ten issues published, and has opened its doors to other areas of the art, with a notable staff including the undersigned: Gerardo Theyler, Ernesto Bonicatto, Alicia Sbarbati, Claudia Stricker and others. Its artwork became better, and the fanzine stepped up to be a professional magazine, with prestigious contributors such as Alberto Lagunas, Angelica Gorodischer, Samuel Wolpin, Mario Levrero, Gary Vila Ortiz, Susan Sontag - to whom we devoted a special issue and Maria Cosatto. A great part of the sf material assembled for publication in UNICORNIO was given to other publications: SUPERNOVA, published by the artists from the first period of UNICORNIO: Richard Hacker, Mauricio Nicastro, Rolando Tello, Mariano Meoni, Leonardo Berlusconi, Marisa Battellini and Laura Corbella.. and which has already seen two issues. But now there are new plans: lack of time for editing two publications simultaneously, forces us to bring combine both 'zines again: from now on we'll have UNICORNIO with its special sf dossier SUPERNOVA inside.

from local fandom, we have two other fanzines: NILENIO - which only had two issues with a scarce repertoire - and BURBO, which published nine uneven issues edited by Carlos M. Salias and Gabriel Pintos: both 'zines published mostly short stories and Argentine authors.

In the past year, there has appeared in Buenos Aires a new fanzine, which seems to be the collector of all the tailings left behind by the others which failed publication; its name is VORTICE and it is edited by Juan Carlos Verrecchia; four issues have been published up to now, it has a modest presentation and prints classical material.

In 1985 the publisher Filofasia published the PARSEC XXI anthology. It included several fantasy and sf stories, among them the brief and outstanding TATEWARI by Claudia Stricker (Tatewari = our grandfather the fire, in an ancient South American Indian language). The publisher Corregidor published MANUEL DE HISTORIA (a play upon words between "manual" = book, and "Manuel" - a name, of course), written by Marco Denevi. It's true that this is not strictly an sf novel, but partakes of the genre when, in a consequence of the development of the novel there is planned a probable future branching from our past, and stretching till the year 1996, having started in 1968: they are several novels inserted one inside the other, like

"mamushkas" (= Russian dolls). The past is known and corresponds more or less to the reality of our recent history; the future is vaster and, to a certain point, still changeable.

In ending, we can say that during 1986 not many things happened, but what did was very important if we understand their importance: more than one Argentine author/ess and/or artist was translated and published in the outside world: Vel Hartman in Spain and Italy, Croci in Mexico, Carletti and Veronica Figueirido in the USA, Noguero in France, Mexico, Italy, Spain and Cuba, not to mention those more famous such as Gandolfo, Gorodischer, Gardini... Marcial Souto was honoured with the "Karel Kapek Award" for his impeccable translations. In Spain, Ultramar Ediciones published the anthology LATINOAMERICA FANTASTICA where 95% of the material is Argentine - or "Rioplatense" (Rioplatense, as I mentioned above, included Uruguayans, on the other of the river Rio De La Plata) for Uruguayans, who indeed seem to be Argentine, because they mostly publish and/or work here - oh, that fiction of the frontiers! - save for one story written by Andre Carneiro, a Brazilian, and contributor for EL PENDULO, which is to say that he isn't an unknown to us - and taken not only from professional magazines or books, but also from fanzines.

Another important action for discussion in the genre was that Hyspamerica commenced publication of its BIBLIOTECA BASICA DEL CF collection, reprinting titles already published by Acervo, Adiax, Nueva Dimension and other Spanish publishers which had long distributed in our country (well, in Buenos Aires - maybe B.A. is another country outside Argentina, uh..).

Recently Filofalsia had published an interesting book, joining two young writers in collaboration: Daniel Barbieri and Tarik Carson. They contributed sf material to this publication, which was titled CUENTOS 2 ("Two Stories"). Croci's novel was awarded the "Mas Alla Award" in 1986 for Best Published Novel, which had appeared in serial form in GURBO FANZINE).

But maybe the most important thing is that we know now that we can write science fiction naturally, without it being forced, and that we have passed the commencing stage, to pass on to that of creation, of expressing our language in an original mood starting from sources learned in classic sf.

THE CRITICAL ESSAY.

Aside from the specialized magazines, criticism in the genre scarcely exists in our country. We haven't progressed far from the simple comment.

One of the few critics who has maintained a permanent level of exposure and has had a verified insight on the stories and novels published in Spanish, is Pablo Capanna. He has worked his criticism in both interviews and in articles, in magazines such as EL PENDULO or MINOTAURO or CRITERIO (a magazine for Catholic bishops in Argentina).

In 1966 EL SENTIDO DE LA CIENCIA FICCION ("SF Sense") first appeared. In those days, criticism was a virgin field all the over the world. There were collections of

criticisms, histories or subjective visions like those of Kingsley Amis. Against such a background this book provoked amazement. A professor of philosophy, Capanna put forward one of the first objective deliverances on the genre in any language. He firmly split the belief that science fiction was complete in itself which, in a field that, at the same time, thinks it is, and believes it is not because of its boundless nature, and has replaced it with a conviction regarding sf in its literary, historic, religious and philosophical aspects. It calls attention to the acute consciousness of the literary genre's development or its philosophical system and the relation of the creative with the social, which isn't limited to the sociological or to the political. Everything is sustained by a precise but never overdone management of information.

Later, in 1973, Capanna published LA TECNARQUIA ("Technarchy"), which only marginally relates to sf, mainly because it describes the consequences of technological explosion in human society. It's more an ecological work than an sf one. It's a very important work inside the growing field of Argentine prose. At last, he has taken Cordwainer Smith's work, from EL SENOR DE LA TARDE ("Lord Of The Evening"), to analyse it in its multiple levels, in that we can call the definitive work on the subject.

"The exercise of intelligence is not the most direct way to success", says Elvio Gandolfo, referring to Capanna: his first book had only one edition, and is impossible to find today. LA TECNARQUIA, in spite of its weight in a field scarce of structural essays, didn't receive more comment, and the essay on C. Smith was, at least, seven years making its way around from publisher to publisher without being accepted for publication.

With regards to Goligorsky and Marie Langer's work SF AND PSYCHOANALYSIS (1969), we can say that this approach is interesting more to psychoanalysts than to ordinary readers. Goligorsky centred his work on how sf reflects social reality, or at least, by that sf which he considers "adult sf". Marie Langer tries to expose the relationship between sf and the psych. Both authors place the adjective (sociology and psychoanalysis) over the central theme (sf). Reports, statistics and psychological texts are quoted more than sf works: narrative bibliography that they quote doesn't exceed by much the boundaries set by the Minotauro collection.

In reflection, the reading of the GUIDE FOR THE SF READER (compiled by Anibal vinelli in 1977) is much more rewarding. His thinking is nimble, and though there are some holes or errors in the information, the volume fulfils the modest proposal of the authors: "to offer an ordered panorama - and of primary easiness - which in no way pretends to compete with the diverse essays that from a historical, critical and even philosophical perspective, analyse literature". The ideal reader is the young person, who is taking his first steps inside the genre. The style used is that of the period and has a "fan" theme, and the opinions given are informed and firm. Space constraints heavily limit the possibility of considering many works and authors, but the chronological order and the inclusion of indexes, used as a consulting guide, makes the finding of names and dates easy

On the other hand, critic and translator Belgium Bernard Goorden, analyses in the essay NUEVO MUNDO, NUEVOS MUNDOS ("New World, New Worlds" - 1978), Latinoamerical sf, giving special emphasis to Argentine output and delivering a general review to the scarcely known output of countries like Cuba, Mexico or Peru. The same occurs with further anthologies compiled by Augusto Uribe: FANTASTIC LATINOMERICA (Ultramar, Spain, 1984), where selection is more "Argentine" (there's only one short story by the Brazilian Andre Carneiro). In both books, in spite of the brevity of the introduction to the anthology, the objective is highly commended: to inform about the performance on this side of the planet, and of obtaining a deeper diffusion of our works in Europe.

Yet maybe the most representative and succinct note about the present state of sf in our country can be found in Marcial Souto's introduction to his anthology of Argentine sf (published by Eddeba in 1984) and the opinions of authors included therein.

And maybe those opinions express what is latent in most fans that already some of them have dared to expose: that is the case of Norma Dangla, Eduardo Carletti, Raul Alzogaray, Pablo Fuentes, Marcelo Figueras, Monica Nicastro and Luis Pestarini, whose articles and comments are, mostly, adjudicated and trustworthy, the same as their stories, in the case of those given to the narrative as well.

FANDOM'S ACTIVITIES.

Starting from a call made by Sergio Gaut vel Hartman in one of the last issues of EL PENDULO (second series), Argentine fandom returned and reorganised. Many new faces and ideas gave it an initially happy impetus. Maybe it lacked of certain publicity and some more intent, but, till the present, it made much of what it had, especially taking into account the peculiar conditions in which it had developed - as does any other amateur activity in our country.

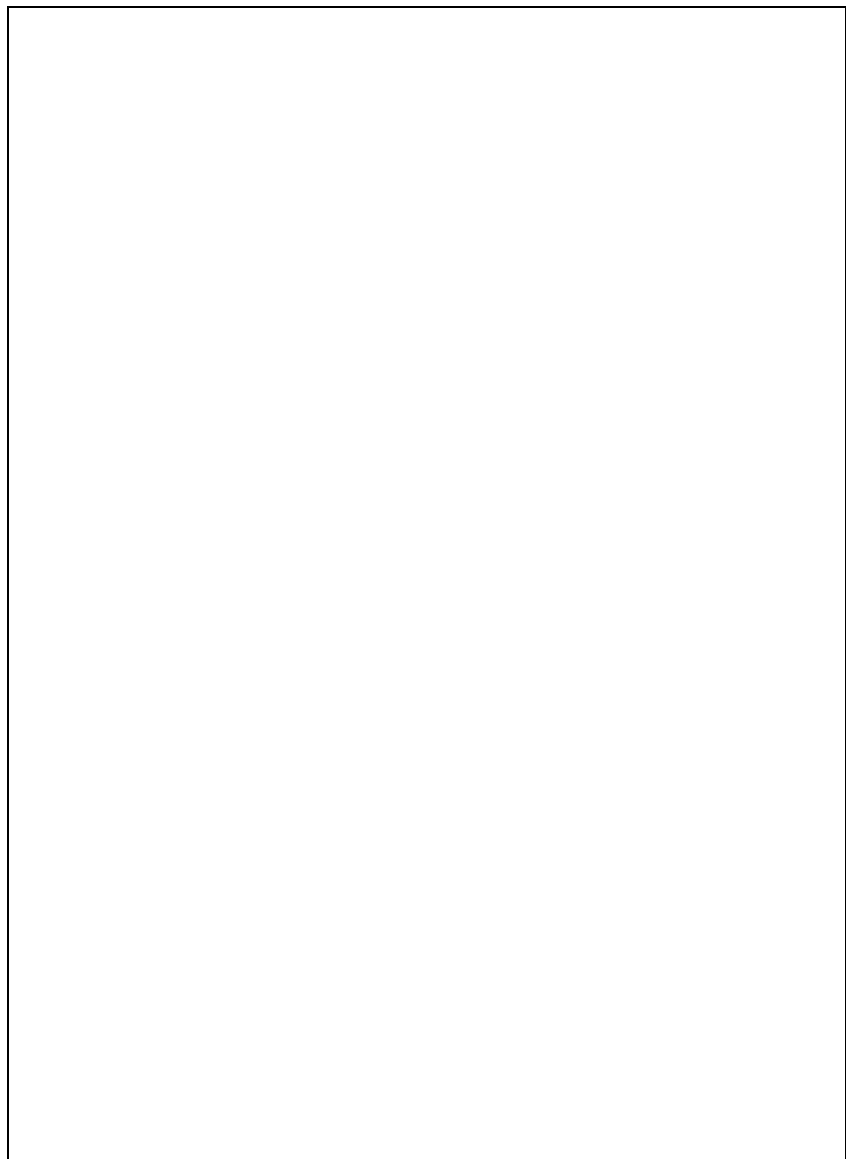
For half of 1982 this group met in small groups to trade magazines, fanzines and books, or to talk. They had organised workshops run by sf writers or editors, art exhibitions, cinema showings and even reading groups.

Most fanzines have been born under this entities light. It also has a widely circulated library, to benefit the more

dispossessed readers. But it may be there are two functions that could be more important, and that validates its existence: it reaches - minimally certainly, but at last it does reach - to the interior of the country, and the award that is given yearly to the best local sf productions.

As for its reaching to the rest of the country, it's momentous because it keeps informed fans from Buenos Aires, who in this way get news which could have been lost by other information spreading means, and on the other hand, we feel that we are not alone.

The Mas Alla Award, as the CACYF says, has the objective of "... besides doing homage to the thirtieth anniversary of the memorable magazine of the same name, is to promote national and Spanish-American sf and fantasy in its diverse manifestations - according to the readers criteria - the vote is direct - an incentive to publishers and producers to give more space to sf and f." So, in 1984 this award was given for the first time; this year it carries on. We give, in another part of this article, details



of the works that have won the award.

Undoubtedly this award is really important to us, not only for giving the readers a direct vote - save for the case

of the unpublished story, which is chosen by a qualified jury, expressing thus their taste, but also it is the only one made at a national level given in the science fiction genre. On the other hand, it is sparingly applied. The periodic mass publications practically ignore it; awarded works are not compiled in any anthology, unpublished stories that have won stay unpublished or are published far later in some of the fanzines - whose issues never exceed 300 copies. But the struggle goes on.

And what are Argentine fandom's tastes? Well, to answer this question there is nothing better than to refer to the inquiry that CACYF made two years ago. Questions were pointed and the answers speak for themselves; here they are:

Preferred kind of reading:

speculative	119 mentions
hard	92
space opera	62
marginal	56
sword & sorcery	51
horror	17
fantasy	13

Preferred foreign author:

78 authors had 408 mentions, distributed in the following way:

T. Sturgeon	39
I. Asimov	37
Arthur Clarke	29
Ursula LeGuin	26
R. Bradbury	26
P.K. Dick	22
J.G. Ballard	22
H.P. Lovecraft	21
Cordwainer Smith	15

Preferred Argentine authors:

Angelica Gorodischer	52
Mario Levrero	22
Carlo s Gardini	17
Jorge L. Broges	16
Elvio Gandolfo	16
Hector Oesterheld	10

Best magazine - professional or not, you enjoyed the most:

El Pendulo	77
Sinergia	51
Minotauro	32
Clepsidra	23
Unicornio	22
Nuevomundo	20
Nueva Dimension	19
Omni	13

Best book you liked:

2010 Odyssey 2 (Clarke)	14 mentions
Lord Of The Rings (Tolkien)	9
Los Mitos De Cthulhu (Lovecraft)	9
More Than Human (Sturgeon)	7
Left Hand Of Darkness (LeGuin)	7
Venus Plus X (Sturgeon)	6
Banjo Las Jubeas (Gorodischer)	5
The Dispossessed (LeGuin)	5
Kalpa 1 (Gorodischer)	5
Portico (Pohl)	5

As we can clearly see, and save for the case of the book that has jolted us, our inclination towards speculation is notable, something that we can also note in the voting for the Mas Alla Award. Let's look at it:

MAS ALLA AWARD 1984 - the best works of 1983, of course -

Best published short story: EL LUGAR ("The Place") by Mario Levrero

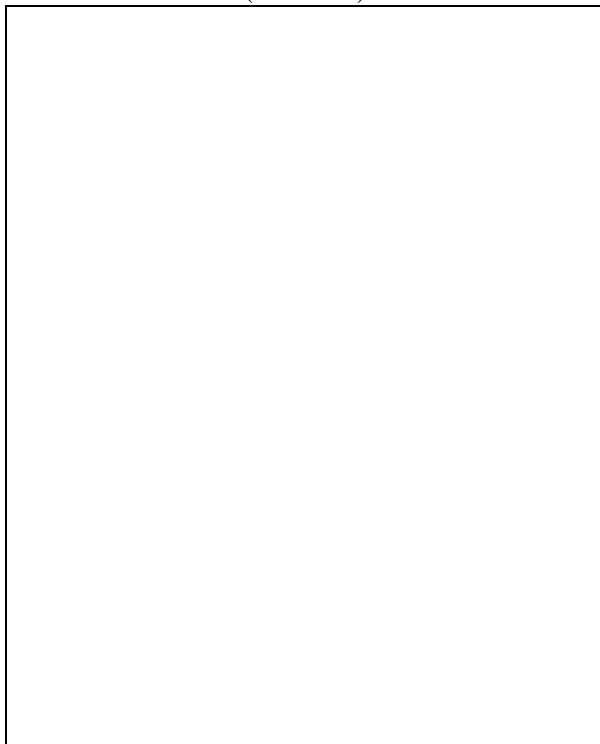
Best book: KALPA IMPERIAL 1, THE HOUSE OF THE POWER by Angelica Goredischer.

Best non-professional magazine: SINERGIA, edited by Sergio Gaut vel Hartman.

Best fan's film: MI OBJETIVO SUBLIME, directed by Juan Bucich, and THINGS THAT DON'T EXIST by Claudio Bollini.

Best unpublished story: CIRCUITO ATEMPORAL by Claudio O. Noguero, and EL COLEACTIVO ("The Bus") by Marta Esviza Garay;

Mentions for : PERLIGRO EN LA GALAXIA ("Danger In The Galaxy") by Alberto D. Curto, CUENTO, 1, 4, 5 by Alberto Sejas, and LA ABSORCION by Jose L. Carrasco Blmaceda (from Chile).



MAS ALLA AWARD 1985:

Best short story published: CAPITULO XXX ("Chapter XXX") by Mario Levrero

Best novel: UN PASEO POR CAMARJALI ("A Walk By Camarjali") by Eduardo Abel Gumenez.

Best professional magazine: MINOTAURO, edited by Marcial Souto

Best non-professional magazine: SINERGIA.

Best illustrator: Oscar Chichoni.

Best unpublished story: [jury: Magdalena Moujan Otano (authoress), Norma Vitti (authoress) and Eduardo A. Gimenez (writer, musician): JUEGO DE AMOR SIN FRONTERAS ("Love Play Without Frontiers") by Claudia Stricker and Claudio O. Noguero; DE LOS PELIGROS DE LAS HISTORIAS MAL CONTADAS ("On The Danger Of Badly Told Stories") by Fernando Bellottini and SUENO DE PIRATAS ("Pirates Dream") by Anselmo R. Basdanes; with mentions for CARTON ("Pasteboard") by Gustavo Nielsen, FLAPS by Pablo J. Pastori and LAS PUNTAS DEL OVILLO ("Skein's End") by Jose A. Blanco.

MAS ALLA AWARD 1986:

Best short story published: DEFENSE INTERNA ("Inner Defense") by Eduardo J. Carletti.

Best novel: UN PASEO CON GERONIMO ("A Walk With Geronimo") by Daniel Barbieri.

Best book: CUERPOS DESCARTABLES ("Throwaway Bodies") by Sergio G.v. Hartman.

Best Professional Magazine: SINERGIA.

Best non-professional magazine: CUASAR, edited by Monica Nostro & Luis M. Pestarini.

Best illustrator: Carlos A. Sanchez.

Best comic: EL ULTIMO RECREO ("The Last Recreation") by Altuna-Trilo, appearing in FIERRO.

Best article: EL SENOR DE LA PARDE by Pablo Capanna.

Best unpublished Short Story: [jury: Eduardo J. Carletti, Luis Pestarini and Tarik Carson] ** The

award was divided by for the first time into two: one for a new unpublished writer - which Eduardo Sanchez won for ALGO MAS DE CUATRO VEDAS EN UNA SOLA PECERA ("Something More Than Four Vedas In A Single Aquarium") and the other for the best unpublished story by a published writer.

There were mentions for my story INDOMINO HIUO DEL HOMBRE ("The Untamed Man's Son") and for the following: Fernando Giovanni's EL TIPO QUE VIO A CABALLO ("The Man Who Saw On Horses"), the same author's VAGOS RECUERDOS ("Undermined Remembrances"), Luis Benitez's NAJA MAREA ("Low Tide") and Gabriel O. Muscillo's LA MANCHA AMEDOIDE ("Ameboidal Stain"). **

THE THEMES:

"SF inquires into man's essence" - Marcial Souto.

We must first remember that sf had its origin in Saxon lands: England and the USA. There is in those countries a tradition derived from the Gothic genre. But there are substantial differences which are born from such an

important accomplishment, and are as unavoidable as their economic development. In Argentina there is not such a significant technological landscape as in the north; these are realities which for us still belong to the future. The consequence of this is that Argentine sf stories spin, mostly, around hypothesis relating to the "soft" sciences and not with electronics, cosmonavigation, and the other themes related with technical sciences. Our writers are more versed in anthropology, psychology or sociology than in physics, astronomy or chemistry. By luck they knew how to utilize that disadvantage to give an original turn to the creation of Argentine science fiction creation, investigating man's essence.

So, we get a laboratory experience along with the reality. Conjecture takes as basic questions such things as "How would be the world if such a thing happened?" or "...if such an exception comes into being?" and "How would happen if a certain deformity appeared?" All this can be translated with an intention of further understanding the times in which we are living: they are alternate versions of



what is happening around us.

Jorge Wyngaard says in the newspaper LA GACETA DE TUCUMAN about this: "... there grows in the stories a sad, sometimes sinister world, a subtle eagerness for moralisation and transformation, covered with the clothing of the absurd. Maybe Kafka is the most visible influence - someone will confess it - but without showing his heavy

hand. Everybody admires Borges but no-one imitates him.. And it is certainly that way. The story GINFONIA CERO ("The Cero Symphony") by Carlos Gardini describes a sad and sometimes sinister plateau, which is sinister because of the deposit of throwaway bodies in vel Hartman's CUERPOS DESCARTABLES.

There is no doubt that Leverero flirts with the absurd and transcends it in all his work, as does Ramos Signes with his MR CRISOLARAS or his novel DIARIO DEL TIEMPO DE LA NIEVE ("Snow Times Diary") published in MINOTAURO no. 10 (1985), or Angelica Gorodischer's EL INCONFUNDIBLE AROMA DE LAS VIOLETES SILVESTRES ("The Unmistakable Perfume Of Wild Violets"), or Gandolfo's SOBRE ALS ROCAS ("Over The Stones") and VIVIR EN LA SALINA ("To Live In The Salt Mine"), but that this is an underdeveloped absurdity, without the French's pyrotechnics, for whom absurdity is a succession of luxury and frivolity. Our authors are nearer to expressionism (LA REINA DEL LAS NIEVES ("Snow Queen") by Gandolfo), bringing the absurd out of such crazy things as inflation and unemployment, nameplates which, though commonplace, begin to behave as though domesticated.

Daniel Croci says, referring to Souto's anthology compiled for Eudeba that "... in the centre of the stories dwells an existential feeling of fulfillment begins to appear: anguish, disconcert, oddity, nonsense; this embodies them more with certain philosophical queries than with the social science questions which play a similar role for speculative Saxon sf." The conclusion is automatic - to different pressures, there are different reactions.

Thus it treats of a fiction without solutions or hope: only impressions, postulates, reflexes; where the object reflected is black, the reflection is necessarily shaded. Readers begin to accept that intentionally darkened version of reality, so darkened that already it can't be accepted without a deep rethinking of terms.. and maybe then it wouldn't result in the same result as before! Generally, we can talk about a "non-traditional fantastic literature" - Capanna dixit - which borders with sf, goes through it and steps freely out of its ambit with scarcely a presence of technoscientific elements.

Maybe the more common characteristic is that our authors don't write sf starting from science, as happens in industrial countries where science (technology) is a socially prestigious activity and technology impresses daily life; they are writers who have been formed reading sf and in whose spiritual world the genre conventions and myths of science fiction are important. To say that sf is created here starting from sf, is not to say that we create second hand literature. On the contrary, it means that we cross country towards the most advanced streams of the world's scope.

The possibility of using the genre with prejudices or compromises becomes then one more resource, a longer arm which, far from giving up, treasures elements for its future re-elaboration. In that way, we have Eduardo J. Carletti making "humanist" sf in a frame of "hard" sf which would be lost to any Saxon reader. And not only can we write in that "hard" frame, but we can also progress in our

It only remains for us to stay on the path, revealing the infinite with wonders, and at the very same time, explore today's reality in the same way as other artists conciliate rock with tango or charcarera (a native rhythm, from the province of Santiago del Estero) with jazz.

Rosario, Feb
6th 1987.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to : Elvio E. Gandolfo, Marcial Souto, Angelica Gorodischer, Pablo Capanna, Sergio Gaut vel Hartman, Norma Dangla, Roque de Pedro and Monica Nicastro, from whose councils, opinions and works I have taken from to compose these notes.

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PERFIL DE ANGELICA GORODISCHER - interview by Jorge Sanchez (in the book CASTA LUNA ELECTRONICA).

Introduction to LOS UNIVERSOS VISLUMBRADOS - Elvio Gandolfo.

LOS ARGENTINOS EN MAS ALLA - Norma Dangle (CUASAR fanzine #9/10)

LAS PARALELAS SE BIFURCAN - Luis Pestarini (idem anterior)

COMMENT ON KALPA IMPERIAL - Monica Nicastro (CUASAR #1 & 2)

ACA TAMBIEN HAY UN MAS ALLA - Roque de Pedro (EXPRESO IMAGINARIO magazine #22.)

own styles, taking care with our stories in a way that we hardly ever see in Saxon hard sf, and much less in other Hispanic hard sf.

Let's quote Gaut vel Hartman to end it: "... and here we are, withdrawing obligingly over a line which, when we were seventeen years old and had read CITY and THE END OF INFANCY, and had imagined them definitive and unmovable. Possibly because, as Capanna says, "Argentina, nonindustrialised and steeped in poverty because of the highmindedness, dishonesty and intolerance of several decades, paradoxically can reach to find a sort of valid expression in this literature" is our best proof that the time lost in purging phantoms in front of the writing machine is justified. No stream or group or tendency or perspective has achieved transcendation without fighting for its place in all the history of literature. That's why we don't ask for credit, but certainly we claim that our "seceder" pretension be accepted and that you read us, though afterward you may judge us rigorously".

POETRY, TOO

by Various Poets Worldwide

GATHERING DREAMS.

The bird steps up
to the edge,
searching the look
upon your face.
A steady thump
from a tiny heart,
curious and afraid.
Trust comes into
wild eyes,
just beginning waves of hope.
It's voice sings out
one mystery to
those who listen close
Everything
remains alive,
laughter, and tears.
Gathered, and dropped
in a land far away
where nothing is
as it appears.

- Monique DeMontigny.

SPACE DOG ERROL

Unleashed from the slip-knot of time and space,
Canine invaders, putting the choke on
A chain of stars.
Shaggy Cosmonauts,
Challenged to, "take me to your leader",
Answer with a nip.

Enhanced Alsatians, the best of their breed,
Augmented by no-no technology,
Pit bullish tactics
Against down-at-heel
Notions of loyalty and servitude,
Every dogs day.
He's our champion, Space-Dog Errol

The dog star; favourite planet Pluto.
Ray-bans and ray-guns;
Collars the bad boys.
Says: always remember, in space no one
Can hear you yelp.

- J. C. Hartley.

BACK HERE, OUT THERE,

for Steve Sneyd.

Even out here, new velocities
Can't disguise the fact, we've brought it with us,
The old sickness; and that reality,
That it was never enough to blastoff
To escape, gives us some comfort at last.

- J. C. Hartley.

INSIDE

Inside the empty shell of time
A sea-like roar disturbs the mind
Until the swirl of wind and wave
Adds addled magic to deprave
Each man and monkey to do acts
So vile the very ages crack!

Thru the cosmic filth they crawl
Unearthing Adam and his fall
They watch the cats creep thru the wire
Where trees are ash and jungle fire
Inside men tremble, teeth intact,
But much too rotten to bite back!!
And those who have survived the night
Find bloody proof of tiger's rite
And contemplate their nameless sins
Where atoms split and hell begins

Beneath a festering dawn of grey
Inside the desert known as day!!!

- William P. Robertson.

ACROSS TOWN FROM GROUND ZERO

Electronic eyes scan roofless flats.
Smoke detectors squawk deranged
like short-circuited squirrels.
Vacuums zig-zag across singed carpets,
grazing...stopping...grazing...stopping.
Windows gape like painful mouths,
leaking melted dentures.

- William P. Robertson.

NUANCE.

Fingers wove semaphores of sadness
as the girls waited to board the rocket.
Diamonds were shaved in their cropped hair
which resembled the fur of burnt seals.
When the slavers drilled holes
for lithium nose rings,
tar-coloured eyes kept alive
every nuance of pain.

- William P. Robertson.

HAIKU

On Technos
People like machines
Life-modes articulating
Various hard drives

Prison Planet

Electric fences
And minefields; you can never
Escape Shangri-La.

It Came From Outer Space.

Her Space honeymoon
Was a disappointment; red
Dwarf in a black hole.

Warp Man
At light speed, if the
Company proves dull, he can
Turn invisible.

- J. C. Hartley.

AUTUMN DREAMS

The sentinel trees stand clustered
shielding out the sky
guarding with their shadows
all the passers by.

Sleeping faces seem so lovely,
gentle and serene,
in among the autumn leaves,
sheltered by their dream.

Sunlight returns bringing back the day,
stirring silent faces,
banishing the grey.

- Douglas J. A. Guilfoyle.

DANGEROUS WAVES

Dancing on the edge of the summer ocean
Aware of the terrible cool vastness
Under the heat shimmering shifting skin
Always the child knew the waves' wide darkness
Although one was safe in the foaming shallows
Was the hidden lair of drowning shadows.

- Julie Vaux

THE FULL MOON'S FACE

They say they are but shadows
of dry seas, told and drear and dusty,
but... oh! the moon's eyes seem so sad!

- Julie Vaux

JULY NIGHT CINQUAIN

Midnight
and that colour
neither blue nor quite black
surrounds the stars with infinite

shadow

- Julie Vaux

PATTERNS EYE SPIRAL

Hollow moons
Empty bellies
six dead mice
to cross the sky.

Magic braces
Hunger mystic
teach the children
how to fly

Several demons
Mighty tyrants
came to find
the other guy.

Minstrel voices
Singing deeply
enter places
low and high.

Soldier steps
From hill to hollow
hoping never
end is nigh.

Things to
Link thoughts
rarely follow
truth or pattern
end or lie.

So it is
That whispers
haunt me
"So it is!"
my demons cry.

- Trent Jamieson.

SHADOW THINGS

Empty as eggs kissed and sucked hollow
Grey as the face of the man who does follow
The shadow things dance 'neath the heat of the moon
Their's is a time that is coming so soon
They know the light for they worship the green
They dance with swift shiftings and movements obscene
Their voice is an echo as shapeless as they
It taunts and it draws in the way of the fey.
Doom is their master, death is their king
Destruction occurs wherever they sing

They are indeed tomorrow's, sweet child
know they with fear these shadow things wild.

- Trent Jamieson.

ONE'S FEARS

One that is all and all that is one
Smiles are grinned beneath cool sun
Rest assured the teeth are snapped
Worry not the past is mapped
Voices strange are whispering weird
in tongues I thought long disappeared
A child laughs, the sould is mild
The water drips from above storms wild
mountains ancient grow and shrink
Whales below breathe deep of stink
And all is bound and all is tied
In the smiles of One and the tears it cried.

- Trent Jamieson.

PIES AND DEAD SNAILS

there's a city of pies in a hole in the ground
there's a minstrel that walks in circles unround
there's a poet, a priest, a creature of wrath
there's a yellow eyed fish that swims in my bath

and in the evenings when Sun's swallowed up
and Moon has run over her wide silver cup
there dances a bear with eyes of red flame
he is my master and this is his game

hills there are wide and seven miles deep
and blood is expensive and life so damn cheap
the stars there are needles they etch out the sky
and a needle does fade for each snail that dies

nothing is balanced, everything's rare
twisted in places with disproportionate care,
Seek out the comers and you will find bends,
Seek out the hated and you will find friends.

- Trent Jamieson.

PEGASUS

(a sculpture behind the concert-hall in Melbourne)

How strong your wings
though in repose

they look not large enough
to carry you away.

How bright your eyes
waking slowly surveying me
who stands and stares
into your noble face.

Your legs so agile
emerging from the rock
captive and tight.

How grey the shrubs
surrounding you catching
the dust of streets and
bricks that build an edifice
for Mobil's Empire.

Where is your rider: Bellerophon
whose many deeds gave
immateriality to both of you?

How beautiful you were
when from the blood
of slain snakehaired Medusa
you were created so long ago.

How strong you were
and are still now
fighting the lion head
the body of a goat
with serpent's tail
and I reach up
to help subdue
Chimera to the future.

- maria-louise stephens.

WHAT AM I?

Sometimes I seem to have no substance
I am a thin mist that blows away
light as the feather of a bird.

Then duty pulls me to my knees
my body heavy and my mind so dull
I question: will I ever rise again?

Suddenly there is a tiny flower
opening its sepals before my eyes
a bird chirps a song
of such unearthly beauty

that I can play again
amongst the highest branches
of the trees and feel
that clouds would hold me

Am I a sylph-like creature
or an earthly one?
I do not know
only that I shall never age
eternally I shall be young.

- maria-louise stephens

HIDDEN VORTEX

Eddy of leaves
spiral
unbroken dance

My feet so firm
on the ground
start to move
toes point
turn and twist
hands lift and reach.

I dance to the circle
I follow the wind
I do not resist.

Bonds break
tear free
arms stretch to the sun
spin whirl
faster
fleeter
as birds
going homewards
upwards
and onwards
encircled by leaves.

- maria-louise stephens.

EVOLUTION - *Wed 28/10/92*

We who were born of burning dust
When, over a fire's flow, sea cooled a crust
Rose slowly from slime, sludge and mud,
With soft limbs leached from the land,
On bones stolen from earth's burnt blood.
On the dark shore we dare to stand,
And watch those ancient fires burn

To which sometimes we long to return,
And time's great wheel as ever turns
To that reunion for which years
Mystic and scientist alike,
Though each, the others' method, dislike.
When all again is one endless light,
Locked into infinite dance,
Shadow in balance with starlight,
A beginning long gone yet to be,
That which we remember in trance,
Our descendants may again see,
The time before diversity,
When all was dark bright unity!

- Julie Vaux

BUCK COULSON, 2677W-500N, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA.

A remarkable number of typos in this MENTOR. Most of them seemed to be real words; just not the particular words needed? Using a spell-checker?

[Yes, and I also read through the typing, but can never seem to pick up all the grammatical errors. I hope that TM 78 Is better in this regard. - Ron.]

Of course, democracy is a rather vague term; I wouldn't define it exactly the same way you do, but fairly close. US right-wingers made a big fuss a few year back about our living in a *republic*, not a democracy. Of course they were technically right, but then there's no reason it couldn't be both; a republic is a specific form of government and a democracy isn't. "Rule of the people" becomes very vague when you start defining terms.

I enjoyed Claudio Noguero's material about Argentine science fiction. I have a half-dozen issues of MAS ALLA (#2, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 44) sent to me by Ricky Ertl, an Argentine fan of the 1950s, and a few other Argentine mags acquired one way or another, but as I can't read Spanish I haven't exactly made the most of the collection.

Counting books as a media, one fat hero is the protagonist of Robert A. Heinlein's novella WALDO. The emphasis is on the fact that he suffers from myasthenia gravis, but he's also described as "a fat man". He's also the world's greatest scientist and so on.

I enjoyed Darlington's article about C.S. Lewis, and agree with it. I found OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET marvellous, PERELANDRA acceptable, but never did finish THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH (so Darlington's comments on it were informative). Lewis's series did seem to go down hill as they continued; the Narnia books also started marvellously and I failed to finish the series.

Sydney Bounds got a wrong idea from my column. In one sense conventions have always been "for the well off"; one finds few migrant laborers or employees of fast-food franchise attending them. But Juanita and I rank

among the rural poor these days; my income is from, in order, Social Security, convention sales, a review column, and a minuscule pension, and house payments take over a third of the Social Security. (Mostly because we bought a house very shortly before I was laid off/retired from my regular job.) Juanita hasn't been selling much lately, either. The recession depressed convention attendance, but it's going back up again - and the attendees are spending more.

I read very little stf poetry, but that's because I grew up believing that poetry rhymed and scanned, and never got over the idea. Most of my poetic filler items for long-ago fanzines were turned into filksongs - aside from one that Bob Asprin turned into a novel - and these days any poems of mine are written specifically as song lyrics.

Sean Williams is right that AIDS is a natural disease; he doesn't mention that in the US at least it isn't even a major disease. It gets a lot of attention from the media because of its connection with sex, but it's never killed more than a small fraction of the people that cancer and heart disease kill. Or auto accidents, for that matter. Our media tends to concentrate on the spectacular - AIDS and firearms - rather than the truly lethal.

My only quibble with your book reviews is that I would have said King's THE WASTE LANDS is mostly set in the far future, though the protagonist has a magical method of getting back to the present day when he needs it. There's a lot of advance technology shown; mostly broken and rusting after ages of neglect.

I suppose my financial situation might change dramatically; the TIME magazine sweepstakes just informed me in big letters that I have just "BEEN DECLARED OUR BIG \$1,666,675.00 WINNER!" Unfortunately, in very tiny lettering it adds, "if you return the grand prize winning entry". Mostly they want me to subscribe to TIME; I'm tempted to put in a note saying I want the money first; *then* I'll subscribe. But I gamble on these things; all it cost is a 29c stamp. Or I might sue them; they're getting pretty close to actionable mis-representation. Unfortunately, lawsuits

are more of a gamble than sweepstakes, and much more expensive.

(-12.92)

I can't comment on Bill Congreve's reviews, since I'd previously never heard of the books being reviewed, but I pretty well agree with his overall comments on fantasy, and I particularly agree with his comment on Thomas Burnett Swann. I corresponded a bit with Swann, who was every bit as pleasant a personality as his books suggest, and was probably the #2 fan of Swann in this country. (The #1 fan was in Louisville and a friendly acquaintance of mine. I still see him now and then at conventions). There is more good fantasy in this country than Congreve suggests, however. Judith Tarr's historical fantasies appeal to me because I like history and her books are remarkably accurate historically. David Drake and Nancy Springer are taking over the mountain stories that Manly Wade Wellman used to do. Esther Friesner is a capable writer. Lois McMaster Bujold has had her first fantasy published and it's excellent. R. A. McAvoy's books have ranged from reasonable to superb.

Noguerol's continuation of Argentine science fiction history was informative. I have MINOTAURO #1; nice to know a little more about the magazine. I also have PISTAS DEL ESPACIO #1, June 1957, which he doesn't mention, but the fact that it reprints a Chester S. Geier novella, presumably from AMAZING STORIES, may explain why Noguerol didn't consider it worth mentioning. I used to correspond with Hector Pessina, and acquired US science fiction for him (he still owes me \$6.57 which I don't think I'm ever going to collect), and met him once at a worldcon. However, most of Noguerol's material beyond the 1950s was all new to me. As I recall, it was Pessina who said he taught himself English by translating American science fiction with an English-Spanish dictionary; he'd translate an entire book this way, and then read it. I greatly admired his perseverance; I'd have never stuck to the task long enough to make any impression on the language.

I'm not particularly fond of horror or comics, so no comment on those.

The various comments on my column seem to agree with the comment that readers interpret writing strictly in terms of their own background and interests. It's amusing to discover all the things in my column that I disagree with....

"*Democracy* 1. Government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives. 2. A political or social unit based upon this form of rule. 3. A social condition of equality and respect for the individual within its community." (AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY) David Tansey is obviously thinking of the third definition - but the first one is preferred, and covers both the U.S. and Australia. Just exactly how much does the "Head of State" have to do with the actual government? I can give David the definition of "figurehead" if necessary, and figureheads do not contravene the definition of democracy. Actually, the idea of actual citizen votes on every initiative is the ideal of communism. As far as I know, so-called communist states have always in fact been dictatorships. It could be that this is a rule of practical

government, and true communism must either evolve into dictatorship or anarchy; the fact that they always have done so is a point in favor of the idea, though it might not be a decisive one. (On the other hand, it might be.)

THE FOLKSONG HISTORY OF INDIANA will be appearing on cassette tape form, and I'll be happy to sell Steve one; it's supposed to be out in January sometime. I might also pass along some of the lyrics, but not until after the tape has appeared; bad business to give it away.... A few lyrics given away can be considered advertising, once we have a product to sell.

I wasn't objecting to Australians screwing with the language per se; I was being amused at an Australian misusing a term for a female sheep. Everybody knows that all you have down there are sheep and kangaroos, so terms for those should be sacrosanct.

Thanks to Sheryl for the thought, but my diabetes so far is far from devastating. I very nearly lost a toe due to lack of circulation this past summer, but a change in heart medicine cleared it up. I suppose I may end up getting pieces chopped off me, like a lot of terminal diabetes patients, but I'm more apt to be finished by a massive heart attack, like the one a few years back that killed a third of my heart but didn't quite finish me off. It's a quick way to go; I passed out long before the pain got unbearable. However, Juanita and I favor dying together; an auto accident might do it. (29.12.92)

JOHN J. ALDERSON, Havelock, Vic 3465.

THE MENTOR 76 to hand for which thanks.

I have been pondering Steve Sneyd's letter for a couple of months, wondering, (a) what the hell he's talking about, (b) what I could say in reply. To put my qualifications straight on the subject, I have four volumes of verse published and several waiting that dubious process, that is, I am myself a poet.

It is difficult to get any coherent meaning from Sneyd's mass of jargon, but terms like "poetic licence" were going out of fashion when I went to school and that was back in the time of H.G. Wells. No *poet* speaks of "poetic licence". In fact the last time I heard the term used was at a "crossing the line" ceremony in 1949 when I was accused of "writing poetry without a poetic licence", and *that* is the character of the phrase. All those jargon words reminds me of someone writing for the Times Literary Supplement (if that perverted thing is still going) and hiding their ignorance behind a lot of obscure or meaningless phrases. I'll say here and now that Sneyd knows nothing about poetry. I would submit that poetry is the prime reality from which all other writing draws its reality. As I heard some time ago; they take poetry seriously in Russia, they put the poets in jail; and I have no doubt that if I lived in Russia that I would be writing this LOC from Siberia. However, I must appreciate that Sneyd took this and other objectionable terms from the original question.

To me, and I emphasise that this is my own impression, the poetry and the art which is published in THE MENTOR is irrelevant to SF. Now, regardless of what one might suppose the 'S' stands for, the 'F' stands for fiction, and whilst it might well be termed Science Poetry, or Science Art, Science Fiction it is not. (This is no reflection

on its quality and its interest). Now I will concede that poetry can tell stories, indeed, if you will bear with me, and I hope we don't get sued for breach of copyright, but,

There was a young lady of Blight
Who could travel much faster than light,
She went out one day
In a relative way,
And returned the previous night;

may be questionable poetry, but it is good science fiction. To write on an SF theme is however, a different thing because here the fiction does not come into it, and to me there appears to be no essential difference in writing on any particular theme, be it artistic, historic, medical, science, or love, none of which I could regard as 'mundane'.

In my own experience, when sitting down to write a story or a poem, no consideration whatever is given as to whether it is going to be SF or otherwise, it is simply a story to be told. Now I appreciate that I have a little difficulty because I am also an historian and have a reluctance to create something that did not exist in a real world, so there is always a slight air of fantasy about the location of the story. However I suspect that this is part and parcel of every piece of literature unless it is an "historical" story.

As to genre writing, that I must class with sexism, racism and the like: something that is only of interest to a pervert of that ilk. (9.12.92)

I can't say I liked Carter & Carcinogen's strip very much, too many biological inaccuracies. The amount of carnage would soon send every species to extinction.

I suppose I am old enough not to be amazed when people parade their ignorance of politics so freely. But intelligent debate is another thing, and cannot be had unless we know what the terms we use mean and unless we have our facts about our political system correct. Letters were filled with errors.

In all political systems there are two officers whose power is crucial to how that system works and how it works determines the sort of system it is.

First, The Head of State (in all cases I am using only the so-called masculine gender, following the advice of Eric Partridge who wrote, "The feminine of doctor is doctrix; *don't use it.*" Let chauvinists and sexists rant as they will). The Head of State may be called, amongst other things, An Ard Righ (the high chief), king, Emperor, vice-roy (usually for colonies), presidents, Shah, Czar, Kaiser, etc. They may be hereditary, elective within a family or clan, of family (British system), be elected (as in France), be elected by a very small electoral college (the most popular way in the U.S.), succeed after the president is assassinated (second most popular method in the U.S.), murder their predecessor (popular in Africa and Fraser wrote much on this method in THE GOLDEN BOUGH), be appointed by the Prime Minister (our Australian method), etc etc. The method is not important. The king of Nepal was confined to his palace for centuries, which was also not important.

Second, The First Minister of State (and known by that title in the Northern Territory). Or Prime Minister or Premier, both meaning the same. There are undoubtedly other titles. He may be hereditary (as was the case in Nepal), may be elected (I can't think of one), may be

appointed by the Head of State, may take over in a palace revolution (ergo Keating), may be elected by the majority party (Liberal Party in Australia), may be elected by a Caucus (Labor Party in Australia) etc etc. The method and tenure does not matter.

If the Head of State forms the cabinet (who need not even need to be elected members), presents the budget, declares war and presents bills to the parliament then we have a type of government known as a despotism, totalitarianism, dictatorship and politely as an autocracy. These types of government are legion.

If, however, the First Minister of State forms the cabinet, presents the budget and other business to parliament, and declares war we have a style of government which is called republican.

Now, most governments who refer to themselves as republics usually are not, the most notable case being America. Countries which are republics and usually do not bother calling themselves as such are such as Britain and Australia. See H. G. Wells' OUTLINE OF HISTORY.

For our gentle-hearted readers overseas the Head of State in Australia is the Governor-General Bill Hayden, and the First Minister of State is Paul Keating (the latter does not appear to know about the former). I, myself, via wireless heard the Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies, declare war on Germany in 1939.

In discussions on republics the case of Nepal usually comes up. There the politicians, known as the Ranis, were hereditary, and for that matter so was the king. They had the king imprisoned for several centuries. Nepal, despite these peculiarities was a republic. With Indian help the king overthrew the Ranis (in the 'fifties). Elections are now held, but the king is now absolute and rules as a presidential style government.

Finally, democracy is said to have occurred in Greece and in Switzerland but in both cases only the men voted. As one woman (a Swiss) told me, if the women had a vote nothing would get done (the men are always away at political meetings). Aboriginal communities are democratic and they make a great point about consensus (not majorities).

We have a representative government, that is we elect people to represent us, but when the Scots sent their clan chiefs to represent them they were practising a similar form of government.

Majority government is a method of simply getting enough votes to get a majority (eg, if ten candidates stand for an electorate in Britain, a majority consists of 10% of the electorate vote plus one. It becomes exceedingly unrepresentative).

Now, the foregoing facts can be checked in any reputable encyclopaedia (eg Chambers).

So lets have rational and informed debate. We are a republic and if you want to change, the change is to a dictatorship. (3.1.93)

GRAI HUGHES, 22 Blue Hills Cresc., Blacktown 2148.

I dislike most comics. Some interpretations of the stories of Poe I found quite chilling and ghastly in the few horror comics I perused as a child. In my early teens I was

taken by the artwork in an interpretation of Michael Moorcock's *Elric* in *Heavy Metal Magazine*.

Carnage and Carcinogen's anthropomorphised *FERAL KILLERS* (TM 77 p.47) expresses the essential simplistic ideas unenlivened by the graphics which is the basis of my dislike of the medium.

Although confronting, it is not the sex/violence of the piece I find distasteful, but that the humanoid figures in a guise of animal savagery naturalize the rape/kill, which sanitizes and makes it permissible, thus failing to express the essence; the horrors we perpetrate are inevitably human.

Curious enough, the horror depiction in graphic form of sex/violence is acceptable and publishable, the discerning reader who encounters it disregards its shock value as an expression of juvenile, male sexuality, while a comparable scene in literature (Brett Easton Ellis's infamous "rat scene" in *AMERICAN PSYCHO* for example) because it is considered an adult form, earns no end of controversy. There seems a basic contradiction there. Perhaps it is simply because one is a fantastical parody and thus easily dismissed, while the other, no less parodic, is too close to the possible.

THE FARM STORY has been criticized by a number of people on the basis that it is not SF. "The SF element (vague futuristic references) don't qualify it as SF. It should have been published in some country bumpkin magazine." To quote David Tansey's criticism, adding that he didn't feel sorry for the characters because Australian farmers have never been particularly efficient. As to how the economic management of Australian farms relates to the evocation of sympathy for the characters of a work of fiction, in Tansey's mind, we can only assume he brings to bear upon the reading of a story the full range of his prejudices.

THE FARM STORY, like much of my work, is set in the not too distant future. If I were to be so pedantic as to lay down the law as to what does and does not qualify as "SF", I would remind Tansey that "SF" also designates Speculative Fiction, Science Fantasy and Sucking Fanwit. Indeed, the variations are innumerable.

On communism and capitalism, which Tansey considers, in his humble opinion, incomparable and not opposite because the former is an economic term and the latter political (exposing his opinion as rather simplistic and arrogant) it is obvious that as theoretical and ideological systems, neither has, can or will exist in any kind of pure state.

What Tansey considers the triumph of Democracy and Capitalism over totalitarianism and communism, I consider the Pyrrhic victory of Totalitarian Consumerism. This can be seen in the *practice* of society rather than its economic theory or political and ideological rhetoric. *THE FARM STORY* expressed a little about this in a metaphorical way, which Tansey may have noticed if he had refrained from spouting his arrogant espousements from the closet of his mind that seemingly fails to see beyond the genre of his prejudice. If you would attempt to maintain the humbleness of opinion you claim, then perhaps we could read something of value in your commentary. ACT is as appropriate an acronym for the

territory of our seat of government, as Wash. is an abbreviation for that of the United States.

Having conducted some research into setting up a Computerized Democracy on a small scale (within the confines of a University) or a Dynamic Democracy as I like to call it, operating on a Citizen Initiated Referendum basis, I found the insecurity of software, and the expense of computer time prohibitive factors. The most prohibitive factor, however, was that the majority of people simply do not believe in, or understand, the principles of a genuine democracy. The sheep, as ever, clamour for the patch of lushest grass, or settle for what they can, while the shepherds fleece them on their way to the slaughter house, keeping them in line with sheepdogs and the fear of wolves. I think I'll just go and howl at the moon.

OBANAGA'S FINGER by Mustafa Zahirovic, a pacey piece of cyber-noir, captures you with the first lines and hauls you along. Clever and filled with interesting snippets of ideas about technology and culture. The end seemed to happen too much of a sudden though, necessary I guess, to cruise the reader over plot quibbles. Great.

GODDESS OF STONE by Sean Williams and *THE SALE OF YOUTH* by George Ivanoff are both the kind of twist and punch-line at the end stories that most of us have read innumerable times before. Sean's seems an especially poor effort compared with *LOOKING FORWARD*, *LOOKING BACK* in TM 76 and *HEARTBREAK HOTEL* in TM 75, lines such as "he was surrounded by scurrying insects, stealthy animals, poisonous plants and treacherous terrain, any one of which would kill him if given half an opportunity." and "sweating blood in the tropical thickness of the air" are poorly conceived, a poisonous plant would kill him if given half an opportunity? While "sweating blood", a colloquialism meaning to be under strain sits ill with "tropical thickness of the air." A line like "dressed in primitive fabrics woven from the produce of the forest" would be better given *detail*, "woven of plant fibres and fish bones" or any more particular detail.

Also there are questions of logic, why are there no medical supplies or food provisions in the flyer, who does an opticon that can survey the individuals within the Zone fail to respond immediately to a crashed flyer? and so on.

The fuck scene with Gaia embodied came as a surprise, though one would expect it to be a more cosmic experience, and why is the statement of the planet nature mother spirit horny for some jet jockey anyway?

Ivanoff's characters are cliched, old man feeding pigeons, teenage junkie, and ill-observed. Try sitting with an old man in a park, or a heroin user in an alley. The detail of a mannerism or way of expression is immensely more evocative and convincing than a cliched wistfulness after youth, or the stereotypical "Another hit - he needed another hit". Perhaps have the old man dying of cancer, so his need of youth is a driving imperative. The use of quotes, and the Charles Aznavour song was good.

J.C. Hartley's poem was sardonic and jazzy, loved it. No comment on the articles, my interests lie more in the fiction itself. Much thanks to Ron for the OUT OF OZ column, I hadn't heard of *PROHIBITED MATTER*; the idea of a cross-genre publication is great in these days of shrinking but hungry attention spans. Sent them the

nastiest piece of SF Horror ever conceived in my unhumble conceit of a mind. (-1.93)

BRENT LILLIE, 10 Cherub St., Tugun, Qld 4224.

There seems to be less fiction in TM 77. None of it really grabbed me. Some people read a story a few times, and then make a judgement. Me, I either like 'em or I don't on the first read. OBUNAGA'S FINGER was the pick: well-written, believable and containing one of the best descriptions of a chunder I've ever encountered (not that I've encountered many). Did the author write that from experience or what? The passage almost made me sick, therefore the author is happy. All in all, though, the ending was quite a letdown after a promising beginning. It all seems rather pointless, going through all that just to prove a point.

I liked the cartoon about the femosaur being torn apart by her pursuers. It was kind of like watching a porn movie in an abattoir. Full marks for that one - the best part of the issue.

The other fiction... well, Sean William's tale was competent but rather pedestrian. It didn't have that "spark". And jeez, did he have to call the Goddess of Stone "Gay"? The part where the troopers attacked the village was very good - a thoroughly involving, descriptive passage.

George Ivanoff's THE SALE OF YOUTH showed promise. A pretty worn idea approached in a fresh, readable sort of way. He certainly got the emotional turmoil of the old man across well, but the idea of the devil in black clothes and sun-glasses was a cliché - a bit too Roy Orbison. I would have rather him appear as a sweet old lady, or a small child.

OUT OF OZ was most informative, as was FANTASY DOWN UNDER. The cover art was great. (3.1.93)

LYNDA WEYMAN, 2 Uren St., Penrith 2750.

I enjoyed reading OBUNAGA'S FINGER. Didn't think the plot was anything special, but I read the story a few times anyway because it was fun. I hope to read more of Mr Zahirovic's work.

I thought GODDESS OF STONE dragged a bit, going through the rainforest. The rest was ok, but I can't figure out the reason for the sex scene between Gay and Pieter. I didn't notice any hints as to a "fertility rite"; or that Gay might have had a "thing" for Pieter; and if "not forgetting" was the reason, wouldn't the statue's likeness to Gay have been enough?

THE SALE OF YOUTH I liked too, but George... did Mr Cornell, when propositioned by the man in black, remember his previous offer by Preston Curl? or did Steve? And was this Steve's or Mr Cornell's "nth" time around? If it was and they did remember, why did they keep going and not try to get a better deal? I really did like the story. But George... Oh !*??*!! it!

I don't get into poetry much, but I will read it sometimes if I'm in the mood. I must have been in a good one when I read THIRST, as I did it again and again.... Each time I read it I got a different impression.

I love the cover too. (7.1.93)

SHERYL BIRKHEAD, 23629 Woodfield Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA.

Interesting cover (TM 76) - but I really like the flow of the design on the back cover! Peggy Ranson's piece on page 45 leaves volumes unsaid - love the amount of information rolled up into the image. Both of the Szekeres illos are nice (gee - that's a hackneyed word - but you know what I mean).

Thank you for the history of fan/fandom in Argentina - it is material like that which needs to be pubbed so the information is kept around - thanks again.

Rachel's premise is interesting. Hmm, could it also be that we might like to read about the "us" that might (have) been rather than the "us" that is? In Joe Haldeman's works the people seem real - along with their flaws, but when I tried to recall if the flaws were ever spelled out, I realised I couldn't recall that - somehow I felt that the characters were just real and not perfect.

Syncon 92 sounded like the "traditional" con - if that is an appropriate fannish term.

Gads - Buck's column mentions names I haven't thought of in a while - Elliott Shorter! (-12.92)

DUNCAN EVANS, RMB 1392 Mount Gambier Rd, Casterton, Vic 3311.

TM #77 was delivered here, healthy and sound, on December 24th, not a million miles away from our barn. There were no significant heavenly portents.

I'm going to get all purple and pompous about Peggy Ranson's cover now, and say that it was an elegant example of its kind - striking to the eye, while retaining a cool and classy self-possession. If TM #77 had been attempting to storm the treacherous and bloody ramparts of the newsagency shelves, this cover would have been doing its job and then some, which is what cover art is supposed to be about. Also - and this will be of limited interest to nearly everybody - it keeps reminding me of a place I used to occupy fifteen years back. Which is just plain weird.

Sorry to see your editorial was absent. What happened? Energy expended mustering up a rant is always energy well spent (or at least not wasted). Even if you only bitched-on about something banal like the woeful state of rating-free television (THE HEIGHTS, for example - bloody atrocious crap, 5 minutes of which was 5 too many, including the credits. God awful!), it'd be bound to get arise out of someone.

The lead story, OBUNAGA'S FINGER by Mustafa Zahirovic, deservedly took pride of place. What a sparkler. From start (enigmatic *and* magnetic) to finish (subtle yet still conclusive), it was tightly worded, tautly executed, and, most importantly, *a good yarn!* You'd have to produce something extraordinary indeed to coax higher praise out of *this* keyboard. In fact, only one thing could have persuaded me to like this story more... but it turns out that I *didn't* write it myself, so that's just too bad. It's probably already been to AUREALIS, right? Their (and our) loss. Try the UK or the States with this one, and tell the unbelievers to spin on it.

Bill Congreve's column was once again enjoyable, though I have yet to see even one of the titles he reviewed

actually gracing the shelves of a book shop. Local genre-fiction (and to some extent mainstream stuff) is somewhat under-promoted, but it's my own fault, too, for doing so much of my book-buying in second-hand dives (like most of you). The hip-pocket is becoming something of a dust-bowl these days, so whenever I *do* venture into the land of glossy covers and appalling price tags, I seem to always end up in the classics department, where a spanking-new Conrad goes for consistently two thirds the price of, for example, a Martin Middleton. Of course, any Australian publisher who gives our home-grown Fantasy a run does deserve some kind of support. But if you're someone who *writes* the stuff, then you'll know that your best bet for moving more than a few thousand units is to sell your MS off-shore and let the folks over there package it and hawk it back to us here for heaps of money - just like the government did with all that "Italian" marble in Parliament House (and see how nice *that* looks).

GODDESS OF STONE by Sean Williams was an interesting idea, competently handled, as we've come to expect from this guy. However, it was not, to me, one of his standout efforts. I wouldn't sweat it, though, because I'm pretty sure this one's just a casualty of Personal Taste and that you really *can't* please everybody all the time. David Tansey was right when he said Williams was someone to watch. He's fairly prolific for a start - and that's half the key to making a name for yourself right there.

Andrew Darlington's WARRIORS OF ANCIENT WORLDS was great. Entertainingly written and packed with scholarly detail. The strip reproductions were a nice bonus, too - especially KARL THE VIKING, where we see Karl looking all Victor Mature-ish as he gazes resolutely across the titles at a point somewhere above the helmeted head of Gefion One Eye, who in turn, with petulant pout, seems unable to drag his envious gaze (operating necessarily at 50% capacity) away from Earl's enormous chopper. There are possible subtexts here which Andrew Darlington probably did right not to explore.

THE SALE OF YOUTH by George Ivanoff was well written, but telegraphed its ending so early in the piece that I had to consider it flawed. It wasn't because it finished on a low note (I have nothing against downbeat/depressing endings; most times they leave me with a warm glow); it was more that I saw what was coming, was hoping to be surprised, and wasn't. That said, I've seen far worse pieces of *writing* elsewhere - and the culprits got paid - so please don't think I'm having a go at your style. Maybe you could change the end of this story so it's not one of those "what-goes-around-comes-around" drills. Or rewrite the rest of it so as to make the conclusion less foreseeable. In any case, you probably shouldn't tamper with it until you see what a few other people think, because I wouldn't place too much faith in the advice of an idiot like me unless it was backed up by popular opinion. Thanks for what you said in your letter, by the way. I hope we see more of *your* writing, too.

After reading the 2nd part of Claudio Omar Noguero's A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION & FANDOM IN ARGENTINA, I think I can claim with some conviction that I now know more about the state of the genre in that country than I ever thought I would or possibly could. Just how this warehouse of knowledge

might be usefully employed is something I've yet to determine, but I certainly do feel more cosmopolitan for having read the article, which can't be a bad thing,

Can't speak for the other mags in the OUT OF OZ column, but EOD, EIDOLON & AUREALIS are all excellent publications in their own way, and well deserving of all the support that readers in this country and elsewhere can provide. SUBSCRIBE NOW, all you idle swine, or shut up complaining about the dearth of quality show-cases for Australian Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror.

The strip, FERAL KILLERS, I found to be lurid, gratuitous and borderline-obsessive in its fascination with sex & violence - much like the nightly news, which also claims to scrutinise and report on animal behaviour. Give the people what they pretend they don't want, I say, and screw 'em if they can't take a joke! The "Bolt Thrower" in the bottom left panel of page 51 looks as if he's recently scoffed two bottles of cough medicine and is now having a little trouble maintaining his normally urbane facade. More to come, I trust.

The poems were down to a digestible pair. Liked them both. A toothsome twosome. Can't help feeling that I've encountered GRAND TOUR somewhere before. Maybe in something like THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION? I don't know. Somewhere like that, anyway.

Leaving aside you honest shit-stirrers, anyone who seriously believes that a story appearing in the small press is not worth a look, on the presumption that the only real *paying* magazine (and they pay shit, let's face it) this country can even half-way manage to support must already be rejected it HAS GOT THEIR HEADS STUCK UP THEIR ARSE! To put it another way: your attitude is difficult to fathom. When, in the near future, you grudgingly surrender your money to a "professional" mag (thus buying yourself the right to lip-twitch your way through something you can safely identify as "Real Art" because it's got a reassuringly shiny cover and is no doubt perfect-bound) the thought will probably never cross your mind - short though the walk may be - that some of the pieces you are reading may well have appeared in something like THE MENTOR first, which you could have to read for free. Ron, try and cram even *more* stories into your mag, mate (and poetry too, God help us), and you can hoist two fingers and a big banner saying "GET STUFFED, PEDANT" when the idiots complain about space being wasted on 2nd-rate fiction. And if for some reason of physical incapacity I'm ever unable to hack you out a note saying thank you, be assured I'll have the nurse mail you five bucks instead and I'll call it a bargain. Now help me down off this high horse so I can sign off before they have to cut down another tree. (5.1.93)

ROD MARSDEN, 6 Blackwood Rd, Merrylands, NSW 2160.

Thanks for the plug you gave PROHIBITED MATTER in THE MENTOR 77. Speaking as the new kid on the block, it was much appreciated. PROHIBITED MATTER number 2 will be a more concentrated attack upon the "wowsers" in our society and also a pat on the back to people like Sophie Lee who, for what ever reasons, have battled to keep what freedoms we have intact. I think you'll notice an improvement in the 2nd issue as we gear up to

smite the wowers and push back the tide of conservatism that's spreading across Australia.

I liked your house artist Peggy Ranson's rendering's on the front cover of THE MENTOR 77. She has a nice, clean style and seems to have a feel for light fantasy. Do you think she'd be interested in doing some Science Fiction drawings for PROHIBITED MATTER in the near future? We could use some for issue #3.

[I don't know, you'd have to write to her in the US and ask her yourself. - Ron.]

Andrew Darlington's article WARRIORS OF ANCIENT WORLDS was interesting and informative. Growing up in Australia in the 1960s, I barely glanced at EAGLE, LION and the other British comic papers around. It was the American comic books that had my eye and, to some extent, still do. EAGLE and the rest of the Brits, in terms of both quality and output, could not compete effectively with the big boys, Marvel and D.C.. How could the artists to such comic papers go up against such greats as Wally Wood, Jack Kirby, Gene Colan, Stan Lee and Steve Ditko and hope to win an audience? It was not until Judge Dredd became popular that I turned to the British papers for entertainment. But that was me. According to Andrew Darlington, the British papers had some fine artists (certainly the illos provided prove this though not one of them's as great as Jack Kirby) and their own avid audience. I respect his opinions even though, as a boy growing up, I would not have given you one American comic book for three British comic papers.

{Well, I grew up in the fifties, and the artist drawing DAN DARE was miles ahead of the Americans, eg with the glossy colour illustrations of the Anastasia. The American comics were crude compared to his style. Also the paperback-sized British comics (the SF ones particularly) had finer illustrations than the US ones, which tended to be more grossly drawn. The exception would be the TWIN EARTHS strip. And, of course, the British papers came out weekly, if I remember rightly. - Ron.]

Bill Congreve's article FANTASY DOWN-UNDER speaks of a growing Australian industry with all the problems of beginners in such an industry. I naturally wish all Australian fantasy writers well and hope this relatively new Australian effort succeeds big overseas.

I have read EOD #7 and the sexual titbits throughout did not bother me. I especially liked Rod Williams' TIME WILL TELL. Sex and horror to me go well together. They, at any rate, stir the blood and that's what I feel Australians need right now. In OUT OF OZ you seem to see sex worming its way into fiction as not a particularly good thing.

Your comments on AUREALIS 9 in OUT OF OZ mirror my own. The SF HALL OF FAME has got to go. The joke's worn paper thin and its just taking up space that could be given to better, more exciting projects. It was OK for the first two or three issues, though. I'm glad AUREALIS is going in for the publication of Horror. It will, no doubt, be fairly soft core Horror but, what the hell. It'll keep the other magazines into Horror on their toes, which is good.

Steve Carter's comic stories were a nice treat, fairly heavy stuff for THE MENTOR and sure to get a lot of comment both good and bad.

The poetry in THE MENTOR 77 has very definite highs and lows. THIRST by Monique DeMontigny was a high. GRAND TOUR by J. C. Hartley was a low.

I'm glad to see THE HITCHHIKERS GUIDE TO THE GALAXY in reprint once again. The TV series is now out on video. It is well worth having. The article on Science Fiction in Argentina was interesting and will no doubt add to THE MENTOR's international reputation. It is good to have a bit of an idea as to what's happened and is happening in other countries with Science Fiction. (5.1.93)

JOHN TIPPER, PO Box 487, Strathfield, NSW 2135.

Thanks for TM 77 which arrived nicely in time for Christmas.

The usual excellent cover from Peggy R; I like her little fillers as well. OBUNAGA'S FINGER was an enjoyable tale with an unusual style. Overall I found it a depressing read, probably due to the use of local setting, but as I've already remarked, enjoyable despite that. Bill's IN DEPTH column is just that; he goes into such detail that no one could accuse him of skimming in through the books examined! Fantasy as most other loc writers will recall leaves me cold, but I find Bill's discussions on what goes on behind the scenes in the publishing game very interesting, indeed.

GODDESS OF STONE: is this autobiographical in another time and place, Sean? Another pessimistic tale but good as well. The problem with commenting on Sean's stories is the same as in the case of Peggy's illustrations - they're invariably of a high standard and criticism from one less skilled in writing or drawing is pointless.

As I type this, 1993 has dawned. There are no longer rampaging Vikings, pillaging Saxons or even a glorious Gladiator, but the storm clouds are rolling in from the eastern seaboard, the wind has swung around and I'd expect the lightning and thunder to soon make its presence felt.

Andrew has brought alive the above characters featured in the British comics of the 60s in his WARRIORS OF ANCIENT WORLDS article, although he may have given the impression that a number of the old strips were a hell of a lot better than they actually were!

HEROS was certainly a grand strip, WRATH OF THE GODS an eye-grabber, but the rest to my eyes even back then were a pretty ordinary lot. It was a matter of picking a romantic name out of a hat and tacking it onto a tribe, race or whatever. Somewhere behind me resides an almost complete run of BOY'S WORLD so I must locate them and look once again through WRATH. I took the paper from the first issue purely for WRATH. Unfortunately, due to a lot of trouble on the local wharves, several issues were never put on sale out here so I never completed the set. Did any other local readers have that problem with their favourite comics, etc, back in the 60s? As a matter of interest, can you American readers tell us if any of the English comics mentioned by Andrew reached American shores?

THE SALE OF YOUTH is without doubt an enjoyable and nicely written story, even though the ending is predictable. What is unusual these days when most titles seem far removed from the story which follows, is that the title actually tells the reader what it's about.

FERAL KILLERS didn't live up to the cover on the last issue, used as the PROLOG page this issue. It's perfectly crudely drawn, which is a pity, as I'd hoped for something in line with that first page. Ah, well.

To R&R. On the subject of copying old zines, pulps and the like, it's amazing how good a copy one can obtain via modern photocopiers. I've copied pre-WW2 zines originally done in that horrible purple stuff (ditto?) and they've come out quite well, after copying the copy. The letters tend to flow together and although the result may look a little "fluffy", it's far more readable (and easier to handle) than the original. (6.1.93)

ALEXANDER V. VASILKOVSKY, Poste Restante, General PO, 252001, Kiev-1, Ukraine.

I'm so sorry for my belated reply and in general for my irregular communication. This year, and especially its second half, has put a great many problems before me. In Summer I lost my job, but since mid-October I've been working for a small publishing company as the senior editor. Besides that I fell ill right after I got my new job and nearly five weeks were deleted out of my life. These were the reasons for not replying for so long and for not LoCCing THE MENTOR's three last issues.

Issues 74, 75 and 76 are keeping the same high level that is characteristic of your zine through all those issues I've seen. The best material in those issues is: A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANDOM IN ARGENTINA, Andrew Darlington's profile of the writers, your book reviews, and Bill Congreve's reviews of Australian books. Currently several people in our club working for Alliance/Scorpio publishers are preparing James Blish's CITIES IN FLIGHT for publication here. This edition will also include Richard D. Mullen's article as an afterword, so I'm asking on behalf of Alliance/Scorpio for Andrew Darlington's permission to use his article, JAMES BLISH: CITIES FLY, WORDS TOO as an introduction to the CITIES IN FLIGHT volume.

The feature on sf in Argentina is very informative, and I dream about such an article of quality about sf in the Ukraine. The one we've published in CHERNOBYLIZATION 4/5 is good, but not so detailed. As for Argentina and its literature, I am a long-time fan of the great Argentinian writers, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar and Adolfo Bioy Casares, whose writings may well be called speculative fiction. Their, mostly Borges', influence on world literature is immense, and their influence on sf is inevitable. Robert Silverberg wrote in his autobiographical notes in HELL'S CARTO-GRAPHERS that one of his best stories, TO SEE AN INVISIBLE MAN, was an attempt to write a Borges pastiche. And it was written in 1962, when Silverberg was not yet the Robert Silverberg of NIGHTWINGS, TOWER OF GLASS and DYING INSIDE. He wrote that the story marked an approach to the new period in his writings which turned out to be his best and most prolific.

Well, changing the subject, I must admit that what I like in your book review column most of all is that you take the essence of the book and deliver it to the reader. Your opinion doesn't matter than much; you show the book, and it's the reader's choice to lay his/her hands on it or not. The other thing I like is the listed contents of the short fiction collections and anthologies. They're useful to me. (24.12.92)

JIM VERRAN, 12 Ellis St, Port Noarlunga, S.A. 5167.

THE MENTOR 77 is the best issue I've seen to date. A good read, and very informative. The articles made me aware of how much sf history I've forgotten, or missed in the first place.

Bill Congreve's FANTASY DOWNUNDER was to the point. He has a refreshing frank way of telling it like it is. Andrew Darlington presented, as always, great nostalgia from those long-gone years of misspent youth. Can't say that I've ever read any of those particular strips though. ARGENTINE SF HISTORY 1 & 2 provided a perspective on sf from a source I'd never been aware of. OUT OF OZ, a good, informative market round-up - missed a couple of them m'self.

Peggy Ranson's cover was stunning and should quieten her critics. We know writers *occasionally* produce less than their best and the same holds true for artists. But then some people feel obliged to criticize, if only to justify their perceived status as critics. No doubt her cover illo would bring a lump to Anne McCaffrey's throat.

Thanks to those who commented on COMPACT, all useful feedback. I now know that it was average stuff and I can surely do better. It was also predictable, old fashioned, with slight erratic punctuation and the thing didn't really work. To David Tansey's implied question: work commitments, and that I've seldom resubmitted a story after the first rejection. Besides, most of my yarns are too long for THE MENTOR and I never really know when to stop tinkering and send them out. New Year's resolution: get 'em rewritten/finished and circulating.

FERAL KILLERS; the comic. I thought it was a bit gross (in the colloquial sense), and I think I missed the plot. George Ivanoff's THE SALE OF YOUTH seemed vaguely familiar, but a comfortable story. Oh yes, I found it predictable, which seems to indicate that we may be vibrating on a similar frequency, George. OBUNAGA'S FINGER almost rated as a culture shocker. I liked the crisp, offbeat style; very difficult to maintain for an entire story. Sean William's GODDESS OF STONE, was another excellent read from a different future DITMAR, HUGO and NEBULA Award nominee/winner. That's definitely a prediction! But it's not surprising, he does live in Australia's best kept secret: Adelaide. (16.1.93)

JULIE VAUX, 14 Zara St., Willoughby, NSW 2068,

Regarding Steve Sneyd's remark "O'ded a bit on rhetorical questions" the theme of the poem was *speculative*. Which bits are missing from the Oepidus cycle? The Byzantines and late classical scholars mention a missing play called KING LAIUS and Pausanias mentions a local legend that the Sphinx was Laius' illegitimate daughter and hence half-sister to old Crooked Feet himself and in line

for the throne if the Thebans had equal inheritance between all siblings in the Bronze Age? My questions were designed to suggest suitable shapes for filling in certain gaps in the Theban Cycle. Part of the problem with reading Greek drama's version of Bronze Age history is that the legends we are most familiar with are the products of classical Athens' view of oral traditions and epic poetry about events which occurred a thousand years earlier. The playwrights were literate democrats viewing their own tribal roots. It's as if Shakespeare wrote a cycle of plays about the Arthurian court!

Thank you everyone who read the poems and enjoyed it! I guess and hope if a few people actually bothered to write, then many more may have enjoyed and at least been challenged by my work. (17.1.93)

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

The spirits moved me this week to attempt to put together a new issue of THE WHOLE FANZINE CATALOG (bi-annual seems to be its frequency). It's been quite an adventure typing it up on my Atari palmtop computer. It has only 128k of RAM, limiting files to about 40K or less. By the time I got the last zine entered I was down to 500 bytes of free memory! I've got some more work to do on it, for which I'll use the big computer at home, the Atari ST with 1 Megabyte of RAM so i will be a while before I get it mailed out.

THE MENTOR 75 has a nice article on James Blish's Cities in Flight series. I'm amazed by how much Andrew Darlington has written to you this past year of a serious nature. Sadly I think too many fanzines aren't publishing enough articles about science fiction. We're supposed to be "fans" but we never mention what it is we're fans of! Or we turn it into a series of short "I liked this book, it was keen" type book reports. No wonder it's so hard to find new fanzine readers, give them an issue of most fanzines and all they see is a familiar, comfortable circle of old-timers yakking among themselves. There's nothing there to interest them until they become themselves familiar with the old-timers to be a part of the circle. So I think things like Andrew's article help make fanzines friendlier to newcomers.

And it doesn't hurt to mention, from time to time, something of Science Fiction's heritage, lest people forget that what's on the bookshelves today is not all there is to science fiction. There are a lot of writers, like Blish or van Vogt, Murray Leinster, Henry Kuttner & C.L. Moore who were major writers in their time but whose work can't be found today. These people should not become forgotten.

We can talk about the changes in society that has made Blish's Okie cities less likely (irrespective of the science in the "spindizzies"). In the 50s cities were still the place one went to find factories, mass housing, distribution warehouses and so forth. Up through the 50s one really could imagine the country consisting of unimportant farmland and compact, almost self-contained cities, and that the latter could easily haul up its roots and go a hoboing, a self-sustaining archology.

Then the Interstate highways were built, new factories exploded out into the country, housing moved out

into the country and pretty soon when you looked at a city there was nothing there. No industry, no base of educated citizens, no wealth to buy Spindizzies, if such were ever developed. Cities today have become fester sores of the impoverished, drug-addicted, uneducated, permanent underclass. The only reason anyone would want to mount Spindizzies on a city like Detroit would be to get rid of it.

But you can't argue with the vision of the shining city in the air - that after all, was the pay-off to Stephen Spielberg's CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND.

On page 44 you said that the one thing you can't do with a typewriter that you can do with a DTP program is justify columns. That depends on what you consider justification since fan-eds for a long time "justified" column by hand - typing up masters once, counting the extra spaces on the end of the line, dividing them up between words and retyping the masterpage with the columns now smooth on both sides. This is justification of a sort albeit not the sort of professional looking justification where extra space is inserted between words *and* characters to make the right side smooth.

To answer Rachel McGrath-Kerr's question about how the hero of QUANTUM LEAP got to time travelling, basically he developed the theory, developed the hardware and decided to test it out himself. I'm not sure he knew he would displace some person upon his arrival but in any case the retrieval program did not work and somehow they stumbled upon the fact that he had to help prevent some disaster before he could leap out of a scenario and hopefully back home. The part I don't understand is where the evil leapers introduced this year come from. This can't be just another time travel experiment since they most consciously cause evil to happen and if their program is being run from Hell why do they have a Guide, just like Sam? I fear the program has fallen off into a metaphysically quagmire.

(There may be a way to rationalize the evil leapers. The guides might be agents of a future fascistic state that is being destabilized by all of Sam's meddling and are using slave labor as leapers in order to undo Sam's work and shore up their Reality. In which case the agency that keeps Sam from returning to his present is not God but a scientific underground with more advanced knowledge of time travelling which they've used to block Sam's return. Making him their agent for good by remote control. It's a flimsy idea, but then it's a flimsy show.)

#76: I don't usually read any of the fiction in THE MENTOR but that opening line "Drifting along The Screw..." for LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK" caught my eye and I ended up reading the whole story. I thought it pretty good. If not publishable as is, at least worth the effort of Stan Schmidt to direct Sean into getting it into shape. It had an interesting scenario, characters which were routine but enjoyable and enough foreshadowing to keep the reader interested, and a plot twisted enough to rank up there with A. E. van Vogt. And long enough to actually develop into something. Too many stories, sadly, try to be too short. (While too many novels try to be too long.) I am impressed!

Rather liked Buck's series of anecdotes from conventions, especially the one about Keith Laumer and Mohammed Ali.

I remember reading C. S. Lewis' *OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET* and *PERELANDRA*. The first was interesting despite the Christianity while finishing the second was a cross to bear. I never even tried to read the last book, or, come to that, his Narnia books. Science fiction has been accused of being either areligious or positively anti-Christian but it doesn't take much Christian SF to make me *want* to be irreligious.

Bill Congreve's look at the stories of Terry Dowling was interesting. He makes the stories of Tom Tyson sound pretty interesting. I wonder if there will ever be a US edition of them? (7.1.93)

JOY BUCHANAN, Lot 1093, Andromeda Drive, Cranbrook, NSW.

Well Ron, the front cover of *Mentor 77* is excellent as usual, Peggy Ranson is a very gifted lady. I have only one comment on the comic section (I will use the term my 11 yr old said when she saw it.) "GROUSE!!!" to which I heartedly agree. In answer to your question John Francis Haines, speaking for myself, No I do not like any type of poetry very much at all. I do not mind prose, but find poetry lacking in many ways. To me they only give the suggestion of the story, thought even idea. I suppose I just hate to see a good idea not being explored and given any depth.

To Peter Brodie, actually with what I've seen of your writing it's rather hard to tell fantasy from SF.

Mustafa Zahirovic: it took several rereads of your story before I found that I quite liked it. Your first few lines threw me, it was rather confusing - I thought it was the hero's own finger at first that he had lost.

Bill (Congreve), I enjoyed the article on Australian Authors; of those you mention I have only read Isobelle Carmody but now I intend to put a few of the other Authors on my list to read, when I can find the time. Am looking forward to the next section of this article.

Congrats Sean Williams, I liked your story *GODDESS OF STONE*. The only thing is I felt that something was left out from the story. I got to the end and my only thoughts were: 'where's the rest'.

Andrew Darlington's *WARRIORS OF ANCIENT WORLDS* was enjoyable reading. As a young girl I can remember reading *BOYS WORLD* and *EAGLE*. I was a worry to my mother, as at one stage I wanted to be a Viking Warrior or at least a Centurian. Yes, I had your standard dolls, prams and teasetts but my most prized toy was my set of plastic soldiers, cannons plus assorted weaponry. Your article really takes me back, Gads! I'm getting old.

Ron, haven't I seen the drawing by Peggy Ranson on page 30 in a previous issue?

Yes to Glen Chapmans comment about a lot of shit story titles floating around. I find it sometimes takes almost as long to find a name for my stories as it does to write them. So far I've seem to have no luck with them of late. (8/1/93).

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

Thanks for sending *THE MENTOR #76*, which arrived a few days ago. Examples of fat people in non-stereotyped roles? I'd have to think about that. The #1 example that pops into my head is Fritz Leiber's *THE BEAT CLUSTER*, where he notes that zero-G tends to produce extra-lean or extra-fat people, and the nominal leader of the Beat Cluster is definitely fat.

I am not sure what to make of Andrew Darlington's article. It is true that much SF does indeed have an atheistic grounding. But after all, it is *science* fiction, and science and religion are incompatible.

Oh sure, there are many who claim that somehow science and religion are both searching for the same *truth*, in different ways, that there is no conflict between science and religion. That many scientists believe in God of some sort, the Big Bang proves God exists, Einstein believed in God, there may have been a few misunderstandings in the past but we all love one another now.

Science, the *real* science, is 100% opposed to religion, although most scientists will not admit this in public. They have social lives, they need money for research or other projects, they are under pressure to keep an open mind about the fact that God exists. I have yet to meet a religious person willing to keep an open mind about the fact that God does not exist.

At best, most scientists will say they are agnostic, to keep the arguments down. Stephen Hawking is one of the few to be openly and whole-heartedly atheistic. But he now has enough money to be able to do so.

Since most scientists are atheistic at heart, even if they will not publicly admit it, it should not be surprising that most science has atheistic underpinnings, and as such so will science fiction. The current battle in the USA between Evolution and Creationism is today's best example of science vs religion.

And for those SF stories, like Lewis, that do try to send a message, I am reminded of Goldwyn's alleged comment about messages in movies... "if you want to send a message, use the telegraph". That was several decades ago, and nowadays the fax machine would be substituted.

Speaking of Stephen Hawking, I have just finished reading *STEPHEN HAWKING: A LIFE IN SCIENCE* by Michael White and John Gribbin. I am not sure I would advise fans to buy this book. The biography itself has lapses, and it is strange that in all the writing about the book, nowhere is the name of Carl Sagan mentioned, even though he wrote the foreword to the book *A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME*. Professional jealousy on Gribbin's part? (21.1.93)

[More like the fact that the book was written for a British audience, and Sagan is an American, with a fairly low profile overseas lately. - Ron.]

DON BOYD, PO Box 19, Spit Junction, NSW 2088.

TM 77 continues to uphold the quality and interesting variety of previous issues. The spot colour purple on the contents page is a classy touch. Peggy Ranson's front cover is deserving of the full colour treatment. I admire the anatomical accuracy of the hands

and facial treatment. It is not easy for an artist to achieve this level of correct proportion. The care in getting proper shadow behind the knuckles and on the forearm, as well as the face in shadow also caught my eye. Folds in the clothing are often ignored by the beginner as well.

Mustafa Zahirovic's *FINGER* is very Chandleresque. It stands as an example to other writers how the use of a crime format automatically projects your story into a level of emotional intensity without the writer even having to think about it. People are getting killed, bashed and tortured. The characters have to react accordingly, so even if they have no reactions you automatically paint them into the character. Mustafa is a good writer with an eye for deft thumb-nail description. I can't see this American-style gang business ever catching on in Australia. All the male strutting and preening is done by school children copying Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, but if it persists into adulthood good old Australian irreverence and humour invariably brings such dills to their senses. In America there seems to be an inability to ignore style; likewise the Latin machismo cultures. If the feather-headed, birdbrained female in the story, Savannah, had pulled out a hand-gun (the great leveller) and shot the protagonist's balls off it might have straightened out their priorities a bit. The great Aussie gal is like that; they always bring me back to earth when I start getting a bit bigheaded.

I've noticed a few writers taking up the idea of wood as a rarity in the future. I feel the construction of O'Neill colonies, large cylinders in space, will virtually make this an impossibility. Professor O'Neill suggested a twenty-mile-long cylinder stocked exclusively with forest and rare animals like elephants and eagles early in the piece. It seems likely to me that there will inevitably be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of such cylinders... you get three or four hundred square miles of land area because the cylinders are paired for spin reasons.

Andrew Darlington's article on ancient warrior comics was interesting, even though I don't take too much interest in ancient warriors. I notice the constant gobbling up of one comic by another even back then. IPC has a weird marketing strategy unlike the American method. If they print a new title like 2000AD they might do 120,000. When the first sales figures are in, say 80,000, they only print 80,000 for the second issue and so on until, when the title is down to a low ebb, they combine it with another similar one as a "new" title. I suppose it saves on pulping all those returns. Sorta makes sense.

Steve Carter's comics exude a strange, primitive savagery. To see the law of natural selection as practised by nature in the field is pretty difficult, but by putting human faces on long-extinct dinosaur species we are forced to relive it. His frightened, pleasant-faced femosaur pursued by howling, nightmare dog-things anthropomorphises the plight faced daily by squillions of those big, plant-eating bozos who were cut down and chewed up with aplomb by crafty prides of allosaurs.

Today we live in such a coddled, sanitised society that we rarely even see a dead body, let alone have to kill somebody to protect our loved ones. The even more human-like herds in Carter's *FERAL KILLERS* play on our emotions by making us identify with them. The vast plains

and these herds are peaceful and idyllic yet lurking in them is this tremendous savagery, nature tooth and claw. The males of the herd must react as expected of them to ensure preservation of the species. Out of all this violence and slaughter comes a kind of balance. Those that are weak or let their concentration lapse pay the penalty. They are soon forgotten. The batwinged carrion trollops have the female exuding inexplicable menace, as well as making a figure of power. Very sinister. There is a lot of psychology here and it's working powerfully - maybe Carter's touched some archetypal memory in the reptilian layers of the human brain, eh? The reptilian part of the human brain is associated with mimicry, territoriality and acquisitiveness, all rather nasty Alfred Hitchcockian things. I think Carter has hit a nerve; I'll be really interested to see the reactions, particularly from the neurotics and those dominated by the reptilian part of their grey stuff.

A good issue, Ron. I reckon the zine needs a science fact article....

More about the current wave of Soviet immigrants to Australia: an article in the *SYDNEY MORNING HERALD* of 18 Jan 93 was by that familiar government official, the electoral officer, chronicling the vast variety of abuse, boredom and rack-offs from our Aussie voters. He said the Russian immigrants became his ideal citizens - they opened the door with schooled resignation, filled in the forms carefully and consulted the citizenship papers they always had ready.

PS; I said keep the writer on his mettle not nettle in my previous LoC. (20.1.93)

SEAN WILLIAMS, PO Box 605, Cowandilla, SA 5033.

Seasons Greetings, and all that. (I started this letter on Xmas Day.) *THE MENTOR 77* was a timely present, just what I needed to get me through the glittery squalor of the Christian death-fest.

The first thing that struck me was the cover. Lovely colours. Is it a self-portrait? I was very pleased, but not surprised, to see P.R. in the last issue (55-56) of *ABORIGINAL SF*. Nice work there, too.

Mustafa Zahirovic's *OBUNAGA'S FINGER* is very hard to fault. Enjoyable, pacy, SF/crime without being too cliched - I loved it. There are a hell of a lot of names for the reader to absorb in the first couple of pages, but I didn't find that to be a problem. I can't wait to see more of this writer, whoever he is.

Bill Congreve's analysis of the marketing of fantasy hits very close to home. It's quite depressing to find the SF/F section of every bookshop overrun by trilogies, trilogies and yet more trilogies. Shits me, to be honest. Is this the form of the popular novel for the late 20th Century? I haven't read any of Martin Middleton's work, but I know a few people who have enjoyed it. Not really my cup of tea, though. I'd rather re-read *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*, or *THE CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT*.

I didn't actually read Andrew Darlington's article this time, although I liked some of the illustrations. *OLAC THE GLADIATOR*, *HEROS THE SPARTAN*, *KARL THE VIKING*, *WULF THE BRITON*, *CONAN THE BARBARIAN*, *ETHYL THE AARDVARK* - where does it all end?

George Ivanoff's *THE SALE OF YOUTH* could have been much improved. Gets a little bit silly in the middle. Heroin abuse causes a physical dependence, so the character of Martin would have been addicted as soon as he inhabited Steve's body. The lead-up to the end would have been much more powerful had he been breaking into his own house or trying to withdraw his own money *to pay for his addiction*, rather than simply trying to renege on the deal he made with Curl.

J. C. Hartley's *GRAND TOUR* was great. Some fab lines and concise imagery. Monique DeMontigny's *THIRST* wasn't bad.

I also neglected to read the article on SF and fandom in Argentina. One for the hard-core fan, which I'm not, although I'm sure it would have been interesting.

There seems to be an awful lot coming *OUT OF OZ* at the moment. I wonder how long the market can support it? (I'm already finding it quite expensive to subscribe to every zine; the only way I can make ends meet is to actually contribute as much as I can, thus obtaining freebies. And there's a lot of competition Out There, dammit.) Of all the publications reviewed, there was even one I'd never heard of. (*PROHIBITED MATTER* - something else to subscribe to. Sigh.)

FERAL KILLERS left me a little cold. I kept waiting for something to happen (in terms of plot, as distinct from just wandering). There also seemed to be something wrong with the main creatures' postures. Or maybe that's just me, resisting the idea of a hominid that walks on all fours. Loved the "carriage trollops"; hated the "bolt-thrower"; overall thought it a bit gratuitous. Would like to see more from Carter and Carcinogen, though.

R&R: thanks for all the feedback on *HEARTBREAK HOTEL* and *LOOKING FORWARD* etc. The latter was a really early story I've been polishing and repolishing (ie getting nowhere with) for several years; never thought I'd see it published, and was heartened by the response. I've never considered turning it into a novel, but maybe I will, one day.

In response to Glen Chapman: The pot may have been calling the kettle black, but I agree that the prose is a little convoluted in places. (Loved the "chicken soup" metaphor.) And Larry Niven, being one of my favourite authors, must surely have had some influence. At least, I like to think so. As for the background to the story, it's the hardest I've ever written; took me *ages* to get my brain around what was Really Going On, and I'm still not sure I got it right.

And John Francis Haines: Yes the Earth has moved, rather than destroyed. Not necessarily to an orbit around another sun, of course; some sort of artificial sun(s) might do the trick just as well. If I do every write a novel based on LF, LB, I might actually work out where it's got to. (Suggestions welcome.) (28.1.93)

LYN ELVEY, 15 Shade Place, Lugarno, NSW 2210.

In reply to Joy Buchanan's letter regarding her group, I thought you and your readers might like to know about our group in the St. George area.

We are known as the Southern Science Fiction and Fantasy Group and have been meeting for just over 12

months. We meet one Saturday afternoon a month at various members homes around the St. George area, with at least half the meetings at my home at Lugarno.

We have quite a diverse group of members, and our meetings reflect these varied interests. We have had discussions on authors (Clifford Simak, Anne McCaffrey), reviewed a book (recommended by your magazine), had a soup-and-video afternoon (in the middle of winter), done a second-hand book crawl, dined out, had quizzes and a barbecue for Christmas.

We try to keep up to date with all the latest news and each month discuss books we have read and whether we can recommend the book and/or author.

We always welcome new members, so if anyone is interested please feel free to ring me on (02) 534.3595 (home number - ring after 6 pm week-nights, any time weekends). (2.2.93)

MAE STRELKOV, 4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina.

Your stable of Australian writers does impressive work. I am sorry that their tales suggest some sort of Doomsday ahead, though who can deny Earth's outlook looks grim? And now they (our scientists) speak of an "Apocalypse" asteroid whose collision course will result in smashing our planet by 2124 + or -, unless it can be nudged off course by our scientists.

Ah! How can I avoid "mindless rambles" such as displease Peter Brodie, when I never did exercise the minor side of my brain? I still think in symbolic imagery more than in 20th century linear English! And I was born left-handed though I'm ambidextrous now. But I've never given the major brain-hemisphere (governing right-handed people) special attention.

But yes, Peter Brodie, the world will come to an end as you suggest if I ever make "sense for right-handed folk".

Give my love to Peter's super-mouse! (5.12.92)

SHANE DIX, 7 McGilp Ave., Glengowrie, SA 5044.

Another good looking cover by Peggy Ranson. Be this a self portrait, Peggy? This was my first impression - reached, I might add, from having seen a photo of yourself in *ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION*. I did but glimpse the photo once, so I might be mistaken. Nice painting, anyway. My only criticism is that the right arm of the lady seems slightly disproportionate to the rest of her.

Happy now, Sheryl?

The fiction was a mixed bag this issue, with the best piece coming from Mustafa Zahirovic. This would not look out of place in a prozine. Great read. George Ivanoff's story needs a lot of tidying up. Possibly start the story with the druggie selling his soul for a hit, then get into Cornell's bit (though trimmed down a tad) as a lead up to him doing the deal with good ol' Curl. And when he awakes in his new body he should become *immediately* aware of his drug addiction (assuming the man had never taken drugs before in his life, it would seem unlikely that he wouldn't notice the presence of them in his new body). Tacking it on as a final twist just doesn't work. All that stuff about going to the bank, etc, should go, too. It seemed a bit superfluous to me. Sean's story required a more interesting protagonist, more subtly in the female lure,

new setting, new ending, different viewpoint, and a better title. Otherwise, not bad....

FERAL KILLERS: Ripping out the innards of the victim while copulating (take note of my restraint here, Mr Tansey) with them, eh? An interesting fetish, I must say. I'm sure Freud would have something to say about the authors of this celebration of angry sex. In fact, I'm sure Charles Manson would have something to say about them....

The articles were, as always, a good read. A nice inclusion was Ron's OUT OF OZ column. Hope you keep this one up. It is always good to see what is happening around the traps.

And do I dare enter into a war of words with the prince of punctuation himself? I think not. I don't believe my self confidence could take another pounding similar to the one inflicted upon it by Glen in the last issue. (-.2.93)

R LAURRAINE TUTIHASI, 5876 Bowcroft Street, #4 Los Angeles, CA 90016, USA.

Thank you for MENTOR #75. My apologies for taking so long to acknowledge its receipt. My life became very busy toward the end of the year. There were the usual holiday parties and family get-togethers. In addition, I was finishing up the Electronic Engineering and Computer Technology course and job hunting. If that weren't enough, I managed to become sick twice. I have been starting to catch up with things since last month.

I presume from Rachel McGrath-Kerr's remarks about QUANTUM LEAP that she missed the first show of the series. She may be disappointed to learn that no scientific explanation is given for Sam's leaping. Basically, he decided to use himself as the guinea pig for his time travel experiments. The he found himself stuck in time leaping about from week to week. He returned to his own time once, but his pal was trapped in his place. Of course, he had to save him; so he's back to leaping again. Meanwhile, the scientists in his own time are supposed to be working on his problem. I still watch the show myself, though I think the show has gotten stale. (6.2.93)

RACHEL MCGRATH-KERR, 20/65-66 Park Ave, Kingswood, NSW 2747.

Thanks for TM 77. I like the cover: what a wonderful New Romantic hairdo, ditto the clothes. (Does this make me out to be a closet Spandau Ballet and Duran Duran fan?)

Looking forward to Bill Congreve's second look at Oz fantasy. Going by how trilogies and worse are continually cropping up on the fantasy shelves of bookstores, I'd thought that was where the main demand and interest was. As for me, it has now come to the point where I ignore multi-volume stories unless they're recommended by someone whose opinion I respect and trust. It saves me quite a bit of money that way (which is then spent on trivial things such as music books and concert tickets), and it also saves time and frustration. Yes, I could be missing out on an important personal "find" by frequently relying on others in this field, but I'm not going to lose sleep over it because I'm not as rapt in fantasy as I was maybe ten years ago.

I didn't really like the comic section. I'd rather have ARCHIE THE ROBOT GOES CYBERPUNK. When I was at uni, I recall reading French sf comics, in a hardback edition. The sf was pretty crook, but on occasions the artwork was very good. Of course, I never noted the names of the artists or writers! Kickself at this point!

GODDESS OF STONE held my interest to the end. In fact, I'd like to know more about the society in which it is set. Usually I couldn't give a stuff about the background to a story once I've read it, but for some reason this had appeal.

I have to get back to my musicology assignment now. What a way to spend a weekend! (14.2.93)

JOE FISHER, 177 Wyrallah Road, East Lismore, NSW 2480.

I'm new to the area of sci-fi "genzines" (or whatever you want to call them) - in fact, I've only ever seen one and I'm glad to say that it was THE MENTOR, issue 77.

As I unsheathed (if you'll pardon the term) it from its envelope I was struck by the colourful artwork on the cover. Brilliant! To quote a margarine ad, Peggy Ranson ought to be congratulated.

I didn't really know what I would expect, but I was pleasantly surprised by THE MENTOR. It wasn't just the cover - the whole publication had an aura (that's my hippy side showing through, sorry) of professionalism about it that was very pleasing to see.

To be honest though, I can't say that I enjoyed every single item I saw, but overall I was greatly impressed. But instead of blabbing on about generalities I should get down to some specifics.

Bill Congreve's FANTASY DOWNUNDER article was great and just goes to show you that Australian fantasy writers (like sci-fi authors) are out there, if you can manage to find them. I guess I should be hunting around my local bookstores for some of the books mentioned (you know, buy Australian and all that) - I could be missing some real gems and not even know about it.

A nice supplement to FANTASY DOWNUNDER was Ron Clarke's OUT OF OZ. As I've already said, I'm new to all these "fannish happenings" and to see so many of these reviewed was great for a beginner like me.

The article on the British comic strips was interesting. I have to admit though that I didn't get far into it. No slur on the writer, I guess that I'm not that interested in them.

My big complaint, however would have to go to the comic strip in the issue, FERAL KILLERS. Is this usual? I mean call me a prude, but is it really necessary to depict uncomfortably human-like ... things, being splattered to the four winds? Perhaps I'm missing something and it was all a cunningly woven fabric of subtle comments on modern society. But, I mean, that bit with those "rodephons" at the beginning, eviscerating (not to mention dismembering and cannibalising) that female thingee *as they rape her?!?!?* I mean sex and violence are all fine and well in their place, but at the same time? Eughh! Get the air-freshener! If I'm being terribly naive then - I apologise to the writer and artist, but I thought it was a little too much.

To move on to better things, I have to comment on the three short stories. Basically, I thought that they were

excellent. If this is the future of Australian sci-fi writers then its going to be a bright one indeed (sheesh, I've just read that and it sounds terribly cliched, but I don't know how to put it any other way).

OBUNGA'S FINGER was, perhaps, a little too esoteric for me, but nevertheless I quite enjoyed it. It could have been that it was over my head or something, but I didn't seem to be able to associate with the world being depicted. The style was undoubtedly there, but maybe it needed more expansion or something. The city names were obviously Australian but (I've got to stop using that word so much - maybe I should change it to butt... no, on second thoughts, that sounds far too American for my liking) nothing else seemed to fit for me. Many, I guess would argue that writing science-fiction is all about creating new worlds - worlds different from our own. I'm of the opinion though, that those stories which are the truly great pieces of science-fiction, have a distinctly human element to them - something which the reader is able to relate to. A world that is totally alien to us is one that is difficult to relate to (of course that's only my opinion and that doesn't really count for much, I guess [cosmically speaking, that is])

GODDESS OF STONE, I thought, was excellently written. from what I could gather from the Letters pages, Sean Williams' previous stories have been well received. If they're as good as GODDESS OF STONE, then the praise is well deserved. Though almost a fantasy story (well, in terms of setting and the basic idea of the plot) there was enough sci-fi elements (the flyers etc) to tantalise the reader into wondering exactly what the "New World Order" was all about.

My vote for number one story, though, goes to George Ivanoff's THE SALE OF YOUTH. Quite an excellent little story - not too long, yet full of wonderful descriptions and a great idea to run through it all. The mysterious Mr Curl and his amazing talent were described just enough to leave you guessing. I don't know whether or not George Ivanoff has had any other stories published in THE MENTOR before, but I certainly hope there will be more in the future.

On the whole, I thought that THE MENTOR, issue 77 was a little gem of a magazine. The only complaint being, as I said, all the sex and violence. I mean I get enough of that at home... except for the sex of course.... (18.2.93)

GEORGE IVANOFF, 30 Third Ave, Mentone, Vic 3194.

Wow! What a cover. TM 77 has the most eye-catching cover I have ever seen on an Australian fanzine. And I'm not saying that just because it's in colour - although that certainly does help. The illustration itself is really excellent. Hope you have some more covers like this in the future.

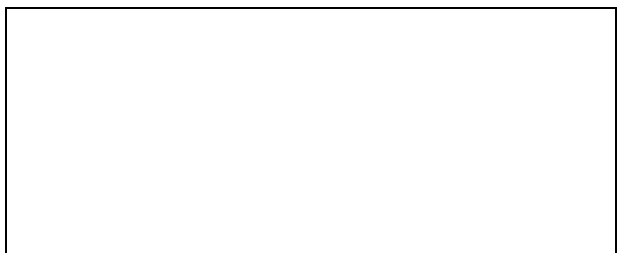
I liked both OBUNAGA'S FINGER and GODDESS OF STONE, but it was the former that really stood out. I hope we get to see more writing from Mustafa Zahirovic in the pages of TM. FERAL KILLERS, although well drawn, I didn't particularly like - there seemed to be a distinct lack of plot.

The non fiction was all good, but it was Ron Clarke's OUT OF OZ that interested me most. I'm always

interested in reading about Australian publications - especially those I didn't know existed. (17.2.93)

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

David Clancy, David Tansey, Darren Gossoons, Bryce Stevens, Ken Wisman, Brent Lillie, Ian McLean, Ben Schilling who said "I liked the history of Argentine science fiction. I hope that we will see the other parts as well. I suspect that there is an untapped vein of alternate history stories involving Argentina. After all, its nineteenth century history is much like that of the United States with large numbers of European immigrants coming to farm the plains. That similar history makes it hard to determine why they turned out so differently in the twentieth century", William Ramseyer, Wayne Edwards, Maria-Louise Stephens, Peggy Ranson, Michael Bowman, Diane Graham, Robert Sullivan and Andrew Darlington,



RED MARS by Kim Stanley Robinson. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 501 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now.

A lot of work has gone into this novel. It is probably one of the best hard near-future sf books to be released in the last 12 months.

The plot is simple - it tells of the first colonists landing on Mars and the first thirty or so years after the ship *Ares* leaves Earth. It ends with a note of query. There are some sections that I found hard going - I skipped several pages when one of the characters was going into the psychological reasons for something. Other than that section, I found the novel excellent reading, and since I like hard SF, I read RED MARS with gusto. I could almost see the plot working in some near future - if we ever get to Mars, and some of the colonists are like this, then it could really happen - though I hope that the violence is more for the plot than for the actual event.

SF for those who like their SF scientifically valid and who also like a bit of adventure and conflict in their reading.

THE SHADOW RISING by Robert Jordan. Orbit trade pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1992. 699 pp. incl glossary. A\$24.95. On sale now.

This is the time of the Big Books. THE SHADOW RISING is book 4 of The Wheel of Time, and each book seems to be getting larger as the series goes on. As with the others, the cover by Darrel Sweet is striking.

The ongoing saga is of Rand Al'Thor, who was once a shepherd and is now the Dragon Reborn. As usual, the world is still turning and new things come into the light and others go out of it. Callandor, the crystal sword, is still a Power in the world and the old fortress, the Stone of Tear, still stands. There were prophecies that told of things that were to come and one of those was that the Dark One would rise again and Rand would have to fight

again to save the world.

There is a hell of a lot of material in this novel - and those readers who like their fantasy long and adventurous will find that THE SHADOW RISING will be to their taste. If you have been following the series, then you will want to also obtain this latest to help fill your collection.

KINGDOMS OF THE WALL by Robert Silverberg. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 288 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now.

There have been quite a few SF novels where mountain climbing is a central theme - some of Fritz Leiber's, for instance. That is the central theme of KINGDOMS OF THE WALL. The Wall is a ring of mountains in the centre of which is a mighty mountain that reaches kilometres into the air. The world of that mountain has twin suns and the intelligent lifeform that lives at the base of the mountain chain is very close to human, though they have shape-shifting ability to a certain extent.

Every year forty of the people are selected to attempt to reach the summit of the mountain and talk to the gods. Almost none return from this journey, and those that do are invariably mad. The novel is the tale of Poilar Crookleg, who sets down in it his adventures from the time he thought that he himself was destined to make it to the summit, through the preparations and the climb itself. On the way up the mountain the forty pass through many adventures, almost fantastical, but the perils that they pass through are also winnowing and they are nearly to the summit when Poilar meets someone he once knew.

As ever, well written SF by a master. The plot may a little worn, but the writing certainly is not.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA OMNIBUS, intro by Fay Weldon. Orion trade pb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. (C) 1887-1914. 543 pp. A\$24.95. On sale now.

Trade pbs are getting on in price, though if you consider that with this volume you are really getting two

novels and a collection of short stories, it doesn't seem too bad.

The book leads off with an in-depth intro by Fay Weldon, who says she has her own ideas about Bram Stoker and his writing abilities and life, and proceeds to tell them to you. The two novels are DRACULA and THE LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM. If you don't have either then you really need to read them if you want a background in speculative fiction. Though written in 1887, DRACULA can still draw the crowds and the original novel is as gripping as it ever was. THE LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM is also first class horror of the old style, and is also worth reading. The third section of the book is DRACULA'S GUEST, includes that short story, which had been exercised from the novel DRACULA, and the stories THE JUDGE'S HOUSE, THE SQUAW, THE SECRET OF THE GROWING GOLD, THE GIPSY PROPHECY, THE COMING OF ABEL BEHENNA, THE BURIAL OF THE RATS, A DREAM OF RED HANDS, and CROOKEN SANDS.

WOLF PACK by Robert N. Charrette. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1992. 422 pp. A\$17.95. On sale now.

The author of this novel is also a games designer and sculpts in miniature. The former shows up somewhat in his novels.

The story takes place over two thousand years from now. Not all that much has changed - humans are still human and machines are still directed by them. This novel is also a Battletach novel - for those in the know it is a novel about soldiers and battling machines which look like transformers. The hero is again Colonel Wolf, though the story teller is a young soldier by the name of Brian Cameron.

There are illustrations throughout and at the end are the usual illustrations of the combat units and glossary. This is more a book for the teenagers among us, or those pre-teens who are into SF games and the like. Others may find the writing a little simple for their tastes.

SHADOWS IN THE WATCHGATE by Mike Jefferies. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1991. 368 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

SHADOWS IN THE WATCHGATE is a horror fantasy. It is set in Norwich and is full of the black art as an old taxidermist, who is losing his ability to direct his art in that direction, decides to try a bit of black magic to help his ends. Said ends entail using a Hand of Glory.

Throughout the book the reader finds scurrying animals and insects and a beautiful woman and a young man. Not necessary in that order. Jefferies writes in a style that is quite English, though he is said to have spend his younger years in Australia. The horror is that of the old school - quiet, creeping and dark, without all those buckets of blood.

I think those who like the writings of Clive Barker, when he writes without all that blood, will also like this one. The mood is sombre and the shadows are reaching across the landscape before the reader can finish.

Moody fantasy.

THE WINDS OF THE WASTELANDS by Antony Swithin. Fontana pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 282 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

Book 3 of The Perilous Quest for Lionesse.

There are many fantasy worlds created by their authors - and some of these authors spend many years working over their creations, smoothing there, building there and polishing over there. Tolkien was one such. Another is Antony Swithin who has created Lionesse, an island in the Atlantic which is today lost in the past. In the thirteenth century Simon Branthwaite and some companions explored this large island and these novels by Swithin set out their adventures.

In THE WINDS OF THE WASTELANDS the band travel further north, still attempting to unravel the mysteries of the how of the island and try to probe it further. There in a lot in this volume, and at the end is the glossary and a page on the alphabets. There are fans around who like their worlds backed up by scholarly treatises - this book will be right up their creek.

Well worked-out fantasy.

THE ANUBIS MURDERS by Gary Gyax. RoC pb, dist in Aust. by Penguin Books. (C) 1992. 299 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

Set in ancient Caledonia, this pretty novel (the cover is encrusted with gold and the only thing off-putting is the mad-eyed person above the title, with horns growing out of his head) is eye striking to say the least.

The Anubis murders are obviously part of a plot to destroy by misdirection the power of the Egyptian god Anubis. One of the god's chief magicians was Setne Inheltep, who had a bodyguard yclept Rachele, who, as all bodyguards should be, had curves to mask her muscles. As well as the killings, there appeared to be a groundswell of illicit magic that was spreading through the land, and it was up to the two to attempt to bring the evil to heel, and destroy those evil humans vying to control it. There is an advertisement in the back of the novel which says you can get this "Dangerous Journeys" series as either a computer game or a Super Nintendo game. Which would be a trifle harder on the old peepers than this paperback.

THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION, Edited by Asimov, Waugh & Greenberg. Robinson pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1971-79. 535 pp. A\$14.95. On sale now.

The subtitle of this volume is "Short Novels of the 1970s" and the contents are some of those novels that lasted into the 90s. They are: BORN WITH THE DEAD by Robert Silverberg, THE MOON GODDESS AND THE SON by Donald Kingsbury, TIN SOLDIER by Joan D. Vinge, IN THE PROBLEM PIT by Frederik Pohl, RIDING THE TORCH by Norman Spinrad, MOUTHPIECE by Edward Wellen, ARM by Larry Niven, THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION by John Varley, THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS by Poul Anderson and THE MONSTER AND THE MAIDEN by Gordon R. Dickson.

All the above are very good; the Spinrad is from a period he was writing serious science fiction. *THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS* and *THE MONSTER AND THE MAIDEN* are two of the better stories in the book. This book is a definite yes for the SF reader's library if you haven't kept all the magazines they were selected from.

ONLY YOU CAN SAVE MANKIND by Terry Pratchett. Doubleday h/c, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 174 pp. A\$17.95. On sale now.

The latest of Terry Pratchett's books. This time it isn't set on the Discworld - it is set in the present, or at least the near past - about the time of that the UN invaded Iraq.

The 12 year old boy who is the lead in this novel is a game player - computer games. It is while he is playing a game called *Only You Can Save Mankind* that he finds that life isn't meant to be easy. The aliens in the game surrender to him and he finds himself trying to guide them back to their alien (game) space. Unfortunately the other players of this particular computer game are also playing and *they* are trying to kill the aliens, otherwise why play the games? There is a bit of morality behind the story - telling the real world from the game world, and that the game world is not necessarily not real.

The book is humorous, but it is not slapstick humour. It does, though, help to enhance Pratchett's reputation as a writer near the top of his craft.

THE DEATH GUARD by Philip George Charwick. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1939. 392 pp. A\$16.95. On sale now.

This is an interesting one. There are only a few copies of the first (and only) edition of this book around. It was first published in 1939 and apparently the bulk copies was bombed in the blitz. It has been out of print since then. The author died in 1955, and it is only now that it has been dug out of the archives.

There is an intro by Brian Aldiss wherein he likens this novel to *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS* by H. G. Wells. I can second that. It was written before WW II, but foresaw, something like the film *THINGS TO COME*, the coming conflict. The war in *THE DEATH GUARD*, though, is between human and created biological soldiers called *FLESH*. They were created by British scientists in an effort to gain a tactical advantage to create a weapon to force a Pax Britanica on the world by threatening to use it. When the other nations of the Continent heard of the growing units, though, they attacked in an effort to destroy them. Unfortunately the *FLESH* guards were almost unkillable and started to destroy the English countryside. Even after they died, their flesh degenerated and started growing into biomass, which had a life of its own.

A little slow reading, but interesting nonetheless.

THE HAWK'S GREY FEATHER by Patricia Kennealy. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1990/ 448 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

Volume 1 of *The Tales of Arthur*. A tale back into the past, this novel tells of a time when Arthur was facing his enemy Edeyrn, who is out to destroy the house of Don.

Of course, as with other novels of the Keltiad, it is not set on Earth - the druids has long since left for the world of Keltia in starships and set up there rule there.

The novel is a fantasy, and being set in Kennealy's own world, already has a background created in those other novels - *THE SILVER BRANCH*, *THE COPPER CROWN* and *THE THRONE OF SCONE*. The writing is strong as are the characters - there are many female fantasy writers whose work is pedestrian; Kennealy works with skill in her craft.

There is a quote on the cover that the work is "as good as the work of Julian May". Since May has written mainly in SF - the Pleistocene saga, I don't think you can rally compare them. Still, it is still worth reading, and if you have th rest of the series - to help complete the still-growing set.

A YEAR NEAR PROXIMA CENTAURI by Michael Martin. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 157 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

For those gourmets among the readers, this novel about a pair of aliens on the planet Proxima will be just the thing for when you venture into Outer Space to taste the delicacies put on the table for you.

The two aliens are quite bit eaters, in both senses of the phrase. They are newly arrived on Proxima and are determined to buy a house and settle in. They come across the usual problems of house purchasing, and throughout the book are getting the gratification suite set up and the ablation room in working order. They must have the house plastered and a new central heating system set up. Throughout this they are eating their way through the native food and expanding their knowledge of it. There is a native saying they are told of early on - and late in the novel they actually come up against it.

Not quite subtle, but good, humour. I liked it.

THE HOLLOW MAN by Dan Simmons. Headline trade pb, dist in Aust by Hodder & Stoughton. (C) 1992. 312 pp. A\$24.95. H/c A\$39.95. On sale now.

When I first saw this novel, I thought it looked much like a Stephen King work. It is not horror, though, - it is SF. pure SF.

The teller of the tale is Jeremy Bremen, a telepath. He thought he was alone with all those voices in his head - the voices of the multitude, when he found a partner at a party. Gail and he was a perfect match, and their marriage was also perfect - or nearly so. There were some secrets kept beneath their mindshields from each other. Especially by Jeremy. Then Gail found she had a brain tumour. The treatments only extended her life somewhat, but ultimately she died. When she does so, Jeremy is overwhelmed by the voices of the people around him and begins the slide to ruin.

I found the pages of scientific information very intrusive to the story and was skipping pages of them as I read. On the plus side, this novel reminds me very much of some of Sturgeon's work. A novel that once you start, you want to make sure you have enough time to finish in one reading.

KINGMAKER by Tony Shillitoe. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Books. (C) 1993. 378 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

If you read Bill Congreve's column last issue, you know he read and liked the first book in Shillitoe's Andrakis series, GUARDIAN. KINGMAKER is the second book.

The conflict between A Ahmud Ki and Andra continues. Andra is journeying to find the lost sword of Abreotan and Ki is determined that he should not find it. There is much adventure and there is also some love interest. The hero does have some trouble with women - he finds a naked Mirith lying in his tree home, but manages not to get involved - "No, Mirith," he said firmly, shaking his head, "This can't happen, it's not right." Which is not really the best way to resist the advances of a naked woman, but at least it worked.

There are also dragons in the story, as illustrated on the cover. As Bill said, this looks like a good series. This novel is published by Pan Australia and printed here, so I don't know if it available overseas.

2 x S by Nigel Findlay. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1992. 324 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

I presume the title of this novel is pronounced "To Excess", which is the computer chip that is guaranteed to blow your mind in the short time you are addicted.

Dirk Montgomery is something like a private eye - he packs a gun (the society of the novel is obviously descended - if that is the word - from the US model) but is almost caught off guard when the sister of an old girl-friend comes into his apartment and nearly manages to kill him, and that is in the first 6 pages!

Shadow Run is the series' name. It's basic premise is that Magic will return to the world in the future and exist alongside technology. The world is turned upside down, but smart and powerful men and women as always are ready to make an effort to keep their power - 2 X S is part of that power-play. This novel reads like one of those Mike Hammer pastiches - though if you like adventure and robber barons you'll like this series also; even if all you're interested in is SF and fantasy - this is a good blend of each, and is a little bit better written than some...

MICHAEL MOORCOCK: VON BEK; THE ETERNAL CHAMPION; HAWKMOON; CORUM. Millennium trade pbs, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. (C) 1992. 504, 530, 533 and 393 pp. A\$24.95 each. On sale now.

If you are a fan of Michael Moorcock's and do not have all his novels, then this collection of novels of The Tale of the Eternal Champion is for you. The series are 14 in number and will presumably be published over the coming year.

The first four titles, as listed above, are being released in Australia in January. They are very nice looking volumes, the paper is a good quality and the publisher seems to have made an effort to have each volume compatible with the others in the series as far as quality and looks goes.

VON BEK contains the novels THE WARHOUND AND THE WORLD'S PAIN, THE CITY IN THE AUTUMN

STARS and THE PLEASURE GARDEN OF FELIPE SANGITTARIUS. They range in date of first publication from 1965 to 1986 and there has been some revision. The Von Bek novels follows the soldier Von Bek from the campaigns of the 1680s and on into the out-of-time world of Jerry Cornelius.

THE ETERNAL CHAMPION contains THE ETERNAL CHAMPION; PHOENIX IN OBSIDIAN and THE DRAGON IN THE SWORD. This time the hero is Erekoze, the ultimate Eternal Champion, as he visits the worlds of the multiverse in his adventures. The novels are (C) 1957 to 1987 and range from the first novel to be really in the series - the original THE ETERNAL CHAMPION from *Science Fantasy* magazine, to the later THE DRAGON IN THE SWORD. All the other Champions are thus based on Erekoze from THE ETERNAL CHAMPION, as told by Moorcock in the Foreword.

HAWKMOON includes the novels THE JEWEL IN THE SKULL; THE MAD GOD'S AMULET; THE SWORD OF THE DAWN and THE RUNESTAFF. They are probably some of the more famed of all the Eternal champion novels and those which I, personally, read when they were first published - many, I think, in *Science Fantasy*. If you are a reader that likes "classic" Sword and Sorcery, or knows someone who is, then these tales of the warrior Hawkmoon is surely enough to keep you reading avidly.

CORUM reprints the novel THE KNIGHT OF THE SWORDS; THE QUEEN OF THE SWORDS and THE KING OF THE SWORDS. The tales of Prince Corum, the last of the Vadhagh, and his attempts at revenge on the genocidal Mabden in the midst of the war between Law and Chaos, are well enough known not to go into in this review. Corum is also the Eternal Champion, one of whose traits is the questioning of his duty between good and evil, between self and destiny. It is another journey through the multiverse - as fascinating as Life itself, if you allow it to be.

If you don't have all these novels already, then this is the time to get them - these volumes make a sturdy and matched set.

MARS by Ben Bova. NEL pb, dist in Aust by Hodder & Stoughton. (C) 1992. 567 pp. A\$14.95. On sale now.

Hmm, this quarter must be the time for novels about the first landing on Mars. Ben Bova's book is a work of fiction, but it reads very much like it could happen just like the novel portrays.

I would say the main character is Jamie Waterman - a Politically Correct main character, being a Native American (North, that is) - who, though he is passed over in the original pickings on who would be on the Martian mission, finds himself, through a series of fortuitous events (for him), on the mission, and indeed in the landing. By the end of the novel he is the driving force of the expedition on Mars and a world hero by the last page.

The background of the novel is obviously well researched and both enjoyable and believable. I found the reading of the 567 pages went very quickly and could very well believe that many people will not be able to put the book down. I think it could do without the Indian

mysticism and the intelligent life on Mars, but other than that, I can recommend it as a "hard" SF novel.

TRUCKERS by Terry Pratchett. Picture Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 32 pp. 19x20 cm. A\$6.95. On sale now.

I've reviewed the novel several issues back - this is not the novel. Apparently Pratchett has sold the idea of the novel as a children's TV series, using puppets. This book is a series of photos from the series, with captions added.

This book follows the novel quite well but is, of course, cut down a hell of a lot. I don't know how many episodes of the TV series it cover, but I would suggest quite a few. It is a good book to give children for a present or just as a gift. It has grasped the fundamentals of the novel, and it develops the idea of the book quite well.

THE DRAGON TOKEN by Melanie Rawn. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Books. (C) 1992. 568 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

Book 2 of Dragon Star. As readers of STRONGHOLD know, this series is about dragons - and follows on from when that novel left off.

Pol is still in charge of the army and must continue fighting the oncoming legions of evil. Unknown to him some of his supporters are turncoats and he might not find out about them till too late. The fight this time is to try to get back the Treasures of the Desert and most of Pol's friends are here again.

Rawn is putting quite a lot of fantasy out these days and her name is beginning to become a draw-card for readers. There is a style of fantasy that used the tokens of a type of fantasy - dragons,/unicorns/trolls/wizards to shore up the background and to bring in readers who expect these symbols therein. There is nothing wrong with this, as long as the plots aren't *too* much of a formula right down to the setting-out of the chapters.

IN THE RED LORD'S REACH by Phyllis Eisenstein. Harpercollins trade pb, dist in Aust by Harpercollins. (C) 1977-89. 225 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

IN THE RED LORD'S REACH is a novel made up of several parts, the first 3 of which were published in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction. Which nearly always means that it is good fiction.

The novel is set in a world where the practice of magic is not looked upon favourably. Alaric is a harper, but he can also teleport, so he is aware that if he shows this ability then he would find himself in more than deep water. The Red Lord is one who is destroying his (own) land and he imprisons Alaric for a time, till Alaric escapes with his special ability and continues his hunt for his lost family. Events change however and Alaric finds that he is to return to the valley of the Lord and is determined to attempt to rid the valley of the evil that is destroying it.

Eisenstein has other novel published, which I suppose is why these stories have been cobbled together. Even so, it is a good read.

BORDER OF INFINITY by Lois McMaster Bujold. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Books. (C) 1989. 311 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

BORDER OF INFINITY is a "make-up" novel, being put together from three novelettes. That is not to say that the novel is not any good.

I thought the first story, THE MOUNTAINS OF MOURNING was the best of the bunch - the characters were well delineated and I found myself caring for what happened to them, and pushing for the central character to get the job done. The second and third stories are mercenary-type stories with war as a background - something like, I suppose, the Dorsai stories about Donal, but with more characterisation.

Bujold has a very good grasp of the written word and can turn a phrase which is well honed. I found the novel almost non-put-downable. Actually, I was so engrossed in the novel I almost missed my train station - someone from my work in the same carriage had to whistle at me and then waved at the station we had pulled in to. *Recommended*.

WEIRD FAMILY TALES by Ken Wisman. Earth Prime Productions chapbook, obtainable from PO Box 29127, Parma, OH 44129, USA. (C) 1993. 66 pp. US\$3.75 incl ppd. On sale now.

The sub-title is A Journal Of Familial Maledictions. The book is a series of stories, originally published in FUNGI, ELDRICH TALES, DARK REGIONS and DISTANT HORIZONS.

I was surprised by the quality of the writing. I'm not sure why, but I presumed that chapbooks were somewhere below the grade of magazines. The stories included are about a strange family whose members have adventures, usually fatal, with the paranormal, or so says the author. I consider these stories fantasy, rather than paranormal. Wisman writes with a clear style which reminds me very much of Lovecraft's. That is not to say that he is copying Lovecraft's style. SISSY NIN, BROTHER ENDLE, UNCLE ENDRIK, BROTHER SENEHELLE and CAPTAIN SEOFON are all well written. They have to do with fey creatures: cats that can kill, giant butterflies, giant sharks, and Tibetan monks showing Westerners how to create objects with the mind that can last.

This volume is not on sale in bookshops. It is worth sending for, and well worth the US\$3.75. Ken Wisman is, if these stories are any guide, an up-and-coming fantasy writer. I look forward to his first novel, if he has not already had one published.

CHANGELING by Chris Kubasik. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1992. 325 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

A novel in the continuing Secrets Of Power series, where the world of 2053 is a world where magic and science meet.

One problem with novels written by writers other than those brought up in the SF genre is that of anachronisms - one of the characters later in the novel mentions having a Uzi - which is very unlikely in over 35 years time. There are also samurai and others of this ilk

Kubasik is not a bad writer as far as writing *near* future fantasy. The main character is a young lad, Peter Clarris, who is turned into a troll. There is some good to this - he can see in the infra-red, but mainly he is an outcast, along with others in that future world. The world of genetics, which can change people, and bring back those of the fantastic past, would be of interest to many teenagers; at least that market is where these books are aimed. The teenagers who like role-playing games.

If you like your fantasy not too complicated, then you'll like these books.

DOWN AND OUT IN THE YEAR 2000 by Kim Stanley Robinson. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 351 pp. A\$14.95. On sale now.

As you can see by the above, it is copyright 1992, though I don't really think the stories are actually individually copyright then. They are a good bunch: A SHORT SHARP SHOCK; THE BLIND GEOMETER; THE LUNATICS; A TRANSECT; DOWN AND OUT IN THE YEAR 2000; OUR TOWN; THE RETURN FROM RAINBOW RIDGE; THE TRANSLATOR; GLACIER; BEFORE I WAKE and ZURICH.

A SHORT SHARP SHOCK follows the travels of two humans along a planet girding peninsula around a planet. They come out of the ocean in the beginning of the story - apparently from a crashed spaceship and as the story ends they come to the end of the peninsula. THE BLIND GEOMETER is a kind of spy sf; THE LUNATICS is set on the moon (I think I read this before, several years ago...); A TRANSECT has two men on two different trains sharing a reality for a moment; DOWN AND OUT IN THE YEAR 2000 is a glimpse of the USA to come; OUR TOWN is set in a far future which has turned out a mixture of METROPOLIS and Babelon; THE RETURN FROM RAINBOW RIDGE is a hiking story; THE TRANSLATOR is "hard sf" with aliens; GLACIER shows the power of glaciers in a new ice age; BEFORE I WAKE tells of a world fighting daydreams and ZURICH is pure white fantasy.

A mixture of fantasy and sf, they are all written and enjoyable.

THE WAY TO BABYLON by Paul Kearney. Gollancz fantasy h/c, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 349 pp. A\$38.95, pb \$18.95. On sale now.

This fantasy is not the usual one of quests, though there is a quest.... The protagonist is a fantasy writer, Michael Riven, who had quite a life going until he had a hiking accident and found himself in hospital. Things went downhill after that, including losing his wife.

Then he met a stranger - Bicker, who asked him to help show him around in a walking tour. He does so, but then suddenly, out of the blue, Riven finds himself in Mingilish, the land of fantasy he created himself. That land was in the grip of violence - and many of the people Riven meets there end up dead. As a main character - and the author! - it is up to him to help out and try to get Mingilish out of its difficulties.

This is quite a well-written fantasy; Kearney is from Ireland and has obviously done his homework with his characters. The background of the novel also rings true.

NEVER TRUST AN ELF by Robert N. Charrette. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 278 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

Book 6 in the continuing Shadowrun saga. This ongoing series has Kham the orc running around trying to keep from getting killed.

This book is about dragons and elves. The dragons are things you must watch out how you deal with, and the elves.... well many orcs and other beings have ended up dead in dealing with them. As is usual with these titles, there are illustrations scattered throughout, which would give the teenage readers some help in imaging the characters.

The novels so far seems to have quite an adventurous story-line, with much action and heroics, in an odd sort of way. The characters are slightly drawn, but are enough for action fantasy of this type.

Teenagers will love these for the adventures and the different characters - with the simple plot line and the straight-forward plot.

FORTALICE by Martin Middleton. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1993. 272 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

Martin Middleton's latest. This one does not appear to be one of a series - at least it does not say it is on the cover.

Alaric is the hero of this Australian fantasy novel. It is a quest novel of sorts - there is a band of young men battling forces of evil. Said evil is in the deep mountains - Fortalice, a Mountain of magic, where the Ma'goi have their bastion. The group, both men and women, are adept in both weapons and the utilisation of magic. One of them decides to let loose an evil power that has been restrained for centuries....

Middleton is a writer who is getting better at his craft - fantasy readers will find this new novel worth reading. And those who have been following Bill Congreve's column will be glad to see that not all the books being published this year as fantasies are trilogies....

DREAM PARK: THE VOODOO GAME by Larry Niven & Steve Barnes. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1991. 344 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

The third in the Dream Park series of novels, THE VOODOO GAME is about said Voodoo. The setting, as those who have read DREAM PARK and THE BARSOOM PROJECT know, is a giant park (in a building) of holograms. This was what virtual reality was back when the series was first thought about.

There is a whole list of characters - the front page is full of them, and the author's use of gamers as backup for their plot convolutions and background is noticeable. There are convolutions in the plot and with so many characters there is no real depth to them.

I am sure that more and more fantasy novels are being written for gamers - indeed the authors of these

books are usually gamers, work for gaming companies, or use gamers for information sources.

An adventure novel for those who are coming into fantasy reading from the gaming stage.

GAMEWORLD by J. V. Gallager. Headline pb, dist in Aust by Hodder & Stoughton. (C) 1993. 374 pp. a\$12.95. On sale now.

I have always wondered about these novels who have a copyright person other than the author - in this case it is Simon Fowler.

This novel is one of those strange concoctions that has been coming out of England for the last couple of years. The sort of novel that is nominated for the DITMAR for overseas fiction. GAMEWORLD is about... can you guess? In the England of the novel board gaming is not the thing to own up to doing in polite company. In fact you could end up in jail. Gawain Grant is a wealthy man, who is also into some strange personal habits - one of which is gaming. There is a certain below street door that is an entrance to a gaming (board) room, where the Game Dungeon lurks. Unfortunately when Gawain takes his first pill he finds that he is not in merry England; at least the merry England that he knows and loves in the year 1999.

His name does give some hint as to the turmoil he finds himself in; but I won't go in to that.

The writing is tongue in cheek and I am sure the average fantasy reader will find it worth the hour or so reading.

LIES AND FLAMES by Jenny Jones. Headline pb, dist in Aust by Hodder & Stoughton. (C) 1992. 560 pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

I *hate* reviewing the concluding volume in a trilogy without having read the other two volumes.

The series is Flight Over Fire and the preceding two volumes are FLY BY NIGHT and THE EDGE OF VENGEANCE. There is quite a bit of fiddling with things human by the various Gods in this series. There is the Sun and the Moon, two Gods who act through various humans and generally manage to screw things up for everyone else. After all, what can you do when a God is behind someone's actions?

The Introduction is the usual one in Fantasy (and some religions) - it is ambiguous and mostly left unexplained. The careful reader can pick up the gist of the plot with some slight work, but as with most trilogies, especially those with this novel's length, one really needs to get the first two volumes.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO EARTH AND SPACE. Fawcett pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1991. 274 pp. A\$9.95. On sale now.

There is a quote from the LIBRARY JOURNAL on the front cover: "A fine introduction to modern astronomical theory". Which nearly says it all.

The book is quite compact, and it about 8 point type. There is a 22 page index and the Contents page lists the 111 questions that Asimov answers. Each answer runs from between 1 and 4 pages long. The questions are fairly

basic and are of the sort that the average "man in the street" might ask: What is the shape of the Earth; What is the Earth's interior really like? What are asteroids? What are Quasars? All the answers are written in Asimov's clear style used in his science articles and this book would be a boon for the pre-teenager interested in SF or science - especially if she has an astronomical bent.

Some of the articles have very small diagrams illustrating things, but they are basic lumpy things that would have been better done as line illustrations. Still, as I said, a good book for the beginning in the scientific method.

ACHILLES' CHOICE by Larry Niven & Steve Barnes. Pan trade pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. (C) 1991. 214 pp. A\$22.95. On sale now.

What is most striking about this novel, other than the large print, is the black and white Boris Vallejo illustrations throughout and the colour one on the cover.

I suppose you could call this an "Olympics" novel, but the presence of the US flag in the first illustration sort of confirms that it will probably do quite well in the US, but no so well out of it. The main person in the novel is Jillian Shomer, who, in the first page, confirms herself to be a typical American by drooling over *hot fudge sundaes*. This preoccupation with food is subliminally noticeable in many US books, films, advertisements and such like. I don't know that ACHILLES' CHOICE will do well with the typical science fiction or fantasy reader in Australia. They may buy it for the Boris illustrations, but I don't know if they will get very far into the novel. Unless they happen to be readers of athletics, I suppose.

Niven, I presume, talked over the basic plot idea with Barnes, who wrote the novel. They must be running short of ideas.

THE TALISMANS OF SHANNARA by Terry Brooks. Legend trade pb, dist in Aust by Random House. (C) 1993. 453 pp. A\$17.95. On sale now.

These novels of Terry Brooks' are beautifully presented - both cover artwork and general presentation.

Book Four of The Heritage of Shannara continues The Endless Quest. This is the concluding volume of the saga and Brooks seeks to tie up all the loose ends.... In the preceding volumes the quests had all been completed - the Druid's keep had been restored, the position of the Druid had been filled, and the missing Elves had been returned and a Queen reined.

This was all quite well and good, but the evil still roamed the land - the Shadowen still worked with their evil magic and the leader of them, Rimmer Dall, plotted his revenge on the elves. There are three basic plot-lines and only by the use of the Sword of Shannara would it be possible to break the dark powers forever.

A good end to quite an excellent fantasy series. Those who have been following the Heritage of Shannara will, I think, be pleased.

BOOKS PREVIOUSLY REVIEWED:

GENERATION WARRIORS by Anne McCaffrey & Elizabeth Moon. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 345 pp. A\$12.95. Book 2 of the Planet Pirates. Sassinak is about to come into contact with the pirates again. Lunzie, Fordeliton, Dupaynil and Aygar are all in this volume of adventure.

BORN TO EXILE by Phyllis Eisenstein. HarperCollins pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1971-8. 215 pp. A\$11.95. The story of Alaric, the young minstrel player who came across a princess in a castle and who decided to try for her hand. He had a Gift, but the country he was in burnt those with Gifts. Well written fantasy.

MISSION EARTH 8: DISASTER by L. Ron Hubbard. New Era pb, dist in Aust by New Era Publications. (C) 1987. 363 pp, A\$12.95. The aliens who are infiltrating the Earth are planning to turn the planet into one drug-manufacturing plant and Jettero Heller has his hands full keeping them and the alien agent, Soltan Gris, from winning this phase of the continuing way. Adventure SF for those teenagers among us, and for some of those who are a little older, also.

A TIME OF OMENS by Katharine Kerr. (C) 1992. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. 452 pp. A\$12.95. The Second book of the Westlands Cycle. This novel covers several strands - the Deverry civil wars and the adventures of Rhodry as a "silver dagger" and Maryn's marriage to Bellyra. As usual Kerr has told an interesting story that the reader who has been following Deverry can get their teeth into.

CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT by Dan Simmons. Headline pb, dist in Aust by Hodder & Stoughton. 405 pp. A\$12.95. As with the novel mentioned above, the hardcover of this pb was reviewed in TM 76. This is a horror novel and has as its background the event of AIDS in the population. It is a story of young Joshua fighting for his life. Simple blood transfusions save his life and Kate Neuman believes that Joshua holds the key to health for many other people. Of course there are others after him too....

WITCHES ABROAD by Terry Pratchett. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1991. 286 pp. A\$10.95. WITCHES ABROAD follows the antics of several who we have already met on the Disc world: Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and Margaret Garlick. Margaret is given a task - she is left a wand and is created a Godmother so she can look after a certain servant girl. Margaret's task is to make sure that the girl does *not* marry the prince. Who is a nasty type, anyway. The usual punny Pratchett novel.

BLOOD TRILLIUM by Julian May. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 432 pp. A\$11.95. The trade pb was reviewed previously. The sequel to BLACK TRILLIUM. Anigel's talisman is lost and her husband and children are kidnapped. She must get them back without its aid. Well written fantasy.

THE GAP INTO POWER by Stephen Donaldson. Fontana pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 654 pp, A\$12.95. Donaldson's new SF series. Nick Succorso is having bad luck with his crew and the aliens are getting closer to destroying him. He finds Morn Hyland, Davies and Angus Thermopyle and there are ferocious by-plays as they fight for the upper-hand. Powerful SF.

THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE by Arthur C. Clarke. VG/SF pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1979. 247 pp. A\$11.95. One of the two best novels about the "beanstalk" - the space lift, which enables loads to be lofted into orbit up a cable from the Earth's surface. The novel details the construction of the artefact, as well as another event that nobody was expecting.

RAGNAROK by D. G. Compton & John Gribbon. VG/SF pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1991. 344 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now. The novel set roughly in the present day which details a threat to the whole world by a group of people who hope that holding such to the heads of the world's governments will avert nuclear war and issue in a period of peace, though it may result in their own deaths.

OTHER CURRENT RELEASES:

PAN MACMILLAN: AFTER THE KING, ed M. Greenberg
WRAITHS OF TIME - Andre Norton

RANDOM HOUSE: LABYRINTH OF NIGHT - Alan Steele

HODDER & STOUGHTON: THROY - Jack Vance.

JACARANDA MIST WORLD - Simon R. Green
WILEY: TERMINAL VELOCITY - Bob Shaw
ILLUSION - Paula Volsky
A DANGEROUS ENERGY - J.. Whitbourn

NEW WORLDS III - ed D. Garnett
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY - A.C. Clarke
SPEAKING IN TONGUES - Ian McDonald
THE GATES OF NOON - Orson. Scott Card
WHITE QUEEN - Gwyneth Jones
PLANET OF THE HIPPIES - Harrison/Birschhoff
THE POSITRONIC MAN - Asimov/Silverbert

TRANSWORLD; MAGICIANS GAMBIT - David Eddings
CASTLE OF WIZARDRY - David Eddings
DAMIA'S CHILDREN - Anne McCaffrey
THE WITHLORD... - Hugh Cook
EAST OF EALING - Robert Rankin

PENGUIN: THE SHORES OF DEATH - M. Moorcock
DRAGON REBORN - Fred Saberhagen
DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS
THE BROKEN GODDESS - H. Bemmann
FADE OUT - Patrick Tilley

NEW ERA: VILLAINY VICTORIOUS - L.R. Hubbard
THE DOOMED PLANET - L. R. Hubbard



