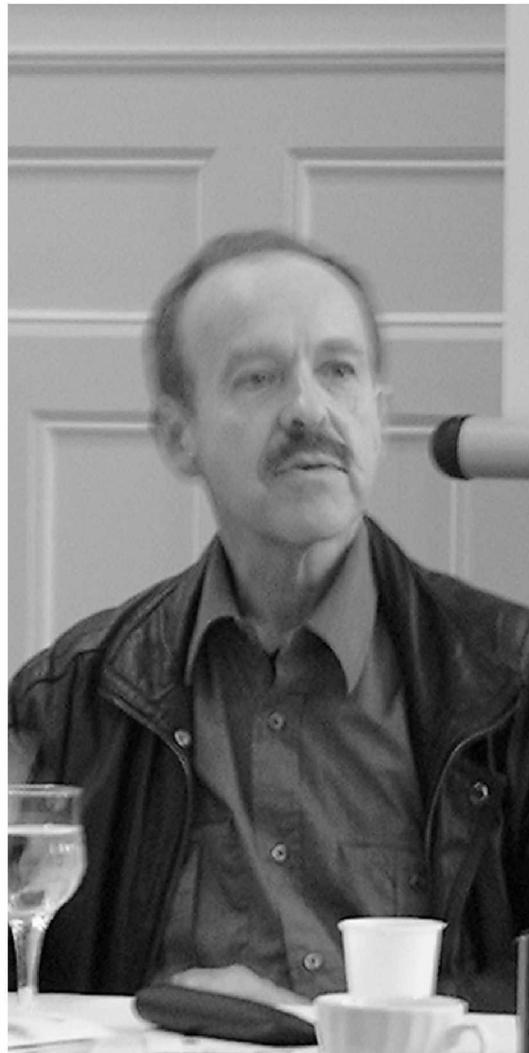
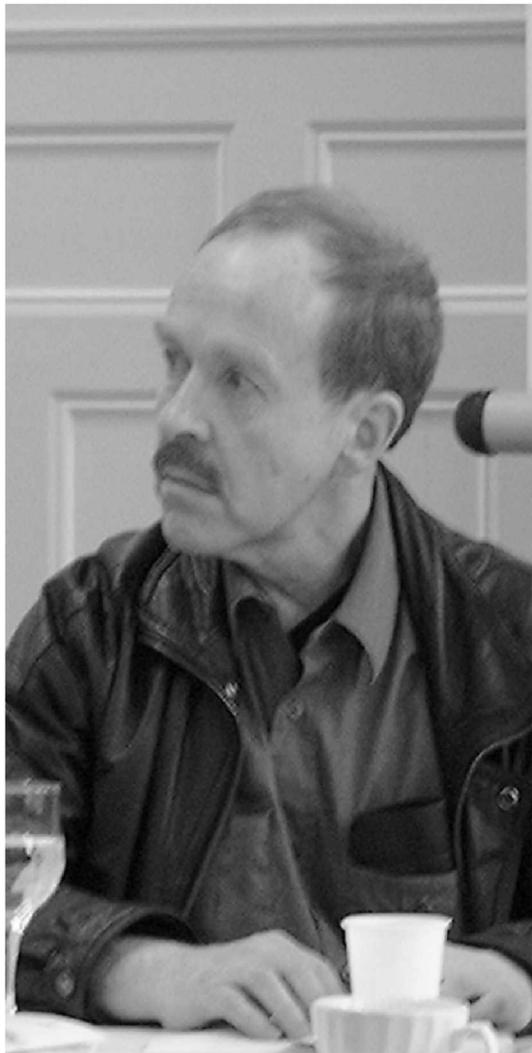
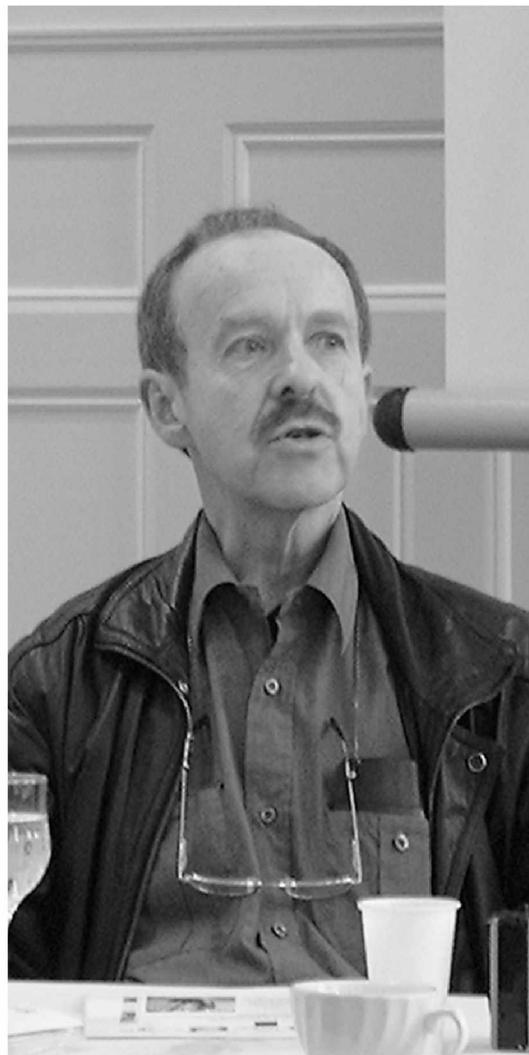
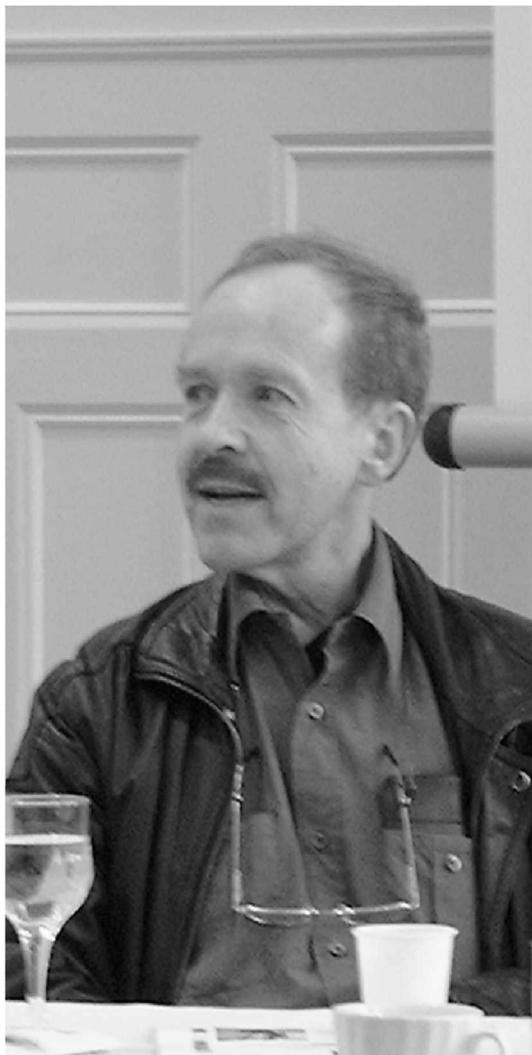


Sept/Oct 2003
£2.50



Vectors

231

The Critical
Journal of
the BSFA

Vector

2
3
1

THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial – The View from the Golden Age
by Andrew Butler
- 4 **YO**
Letters to Vector
- 5 Convenient Biological Delusions
Stephen Baxter interviews Ian Watson
- 11 Bookspotting: *The Wanting Seed: A Classic In Waiting?*
Mark Greener on an overlooked book by Anthony Burgess
- 13 A Peaceful Species on a Small, Undistinguished Moon
Andrew M. Butler on an overlooked TV series
- 16 First Impressions
Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

COVER

Ian Watson at the Goldfish Factor (the joint BSFA/Science Fiction Foundation AGMs event). Photos by Tony Cullen ©2003

EDITORIAL TEAM

- **Production and General Editing:** Tony Cullen – 16 Weaver's Way, Camden, London NW1 0XE
Email: tcbsfa@gummitch.aviators.net
- **Features, Editorial and Letters:** Andrew M. Butler – c/o Department of Arts and Media, D28 – ASSH Faculty, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ
Email: ambutler@enterprise.net
- **Book Reviews:** Paul Billinger – 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry NN11 3BE
Email: billinger@enterprise.net
- **Associate Editor:** Tanya Brown – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road, London SE8 4LH Email amaranth@amaranth.aviators.net

VECTOR

Published by the BSFA ©2003 ISSN 0505 0448

All opinions are those of the individual contributors and should not necessarily be taken as the views of the editors or the BSFA

THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION, LTD.

Limited by guarantee. Company No. 921500 Registered address: 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, NN11 3BE. The BSFA is a non-profitmaking organisation, staffed entirely by unpaid volunteers.

BSFA OFFICIALS

- **CHAIR(S):** Paul and Elizabeth Billinger – 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry NN11 3BE
Email: billinger@enterprise.net
- **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:** Estelle Roberts – 97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2AE
Email: Estelle@lythande.freeze.co.uk
- **TREASURER:** Martin Potts – 61 Ivy Croft Road, Warton, Nr Tamworth B79 0JJ Email: mtpotts@zoom.co.uk
- **PUBLICATIONS MANAGER:** Kathy Taylor –
Email: kathytaylor@blueyonder.co.uk
- **ORBITERS:** Carol Ann Kerry-Green – 278 Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DZ
Email: metaphor@metaphor.karoo.co.uk
- **AWARDS:** Tanya Brown – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road, London, SE8 4LH
Email: awards@amaranth.aviators.net
- **PUBLICITY/PROMOTIONS:**
Email: billinger@enterprise.net
- **LONDON MEETING COORDINATOR:** Paul Hood – 1112 Meadowside, Eltham, London SE9 6BB
Email: Paul-Hood@ntlworld.com
- **WEBMISTRESS:** Tanya Brown – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road, London, SE8 4LH
Email: bsfaweb@amaranth.aviators.net

BSFA MEMBERSHIP

UK Residents: £21 or £14 (unwaged) per year. Please enquire, or see the BSFA web page for overseas rates.

RENEWALS AND NEW MEMBERS – Estelle Roberts – 97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2AE
Email: Estelle@lythande.freeze.co.uk

USA Enquiries – Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213 USA

PRINTED BY

PDC COPYPRINT (Guildford), Middle Unit, 77-83 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4UH

OTHER BSFA PUBLICATIONS

FOCUS: Simon Morden – 13 Egremont Drive, Sherriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE Email focus.editor@cableinet.co.uk

MATRIX

Commissioning Editor: Mark Greener – 16 Orchard End, Bluntisham PE28 3XF Email: markgreener1@aol.com
Production Editor: Martin McGrath – 91 Bentley Drive, Harlow, Essex CM17 9QT
Email: martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com
Web/Internet News: Martin Sketchley – 232 Alvechurch Road, West Heath, Birmingham B31 3PS
Email msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

BSFA WEB

BSFA Web page:
<http://www.bsfa.co.uk>

Editorial

The View from the Golden Age

"Whether we have somehow arrived in the much discussed new Golden Age or are undergoing an entirely different occurrence remains to be seen, but we are certainly experiencing one of those spikes in literary output that occur when conditions are right."

I've spent much of the summer buried in the British Boom. Shortly before I became the joint features editor of *Vector* in 1995 I met Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, one of the editors of *Science Fiction Studies*, at a conference called Virtual Futures at the University of Warwick. He was one of the few sane people there and was enthusing about two authors – Jeff Noon and Gwyneth Jones. Gwyneth Jones was even there, so he got to enthuse in person, albeit nervously. The following year I met him again, at the Speaking Science Fiction conference at the University of Liverpool, and before I left for the train, I stood in Dillons or Waterstones and pointed out the British sf titles on the shelves. I can't remember what there was, but *Orbit* had just published first novels by Jack Deighton (where is he now?) and Steve Palmer – who I see was interviewed in the last *Matrix*. There could well have been a Ken MacLeod, and certainly there were Simon Ings and Ian McDonald.

Did the Boom start then? I took Istvan's enquiries to be the equivalent of my standing in Slow Glass Books in 1999 with Justin Akroyd and Bruce Gillespie and asking them who the interesting local writers were. No doubt I will have found somebody and asked the same question in a science fiction bookshop in Toronto in August. Call it a colonialist's impulse if you like; take a bit of the native culture home with you. Certainly there is every possibility of finding stuff there that you would not find at home – although of course Ian MacLeod's publication in the United States in 1997 predated British publication of his novels, and indeed Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road* first saw light in the States.

And yet, when we got to talking about doing a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* devoted to the British Boom – with Istvan impressing on my co-editor, Mark Bould, and I the sheer excitement of these new novels for an American audience – I would date the start of the Boom to 1995, to the launch of *File Star Fraction*, the Glasgow Worldcon, Noon, Langford and *Interzone* winning stuff at the Hugos, and Tony Cullen, Gary S. Dalkin, Paul Kincaid and myself taking over the reins of *Vector*. In memory, whilst I hope we haven't been unduly insular, I thought we championed British writers from the start, and celebrated a new wave of writing. Curiously the editorials don't quite bear that out – at least not until 2000. But there were interviews, and articles, and of course reviews.

Of course as soon as you say that *Interzone* won an award, you realise that it has been around since 1982, and won it on the back of more than a decade of hard work and graft. As you'd expect, *Interzone* published several writers who would be familiar to readers of *New Worlds* – Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, John Sladek and so on – as well as discovering or at least publishing early work by Kim

Newman, S.M. Baxter, Nicola Griffith and so on. The *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993) entry for *Interzone* is able to describe them as a second new wave. Is this part of the Boom? Or part of the context that made the breakthroughs of Noon, Grimwood, Miéville, MacLeod and Robson possible? The Johns (and Joans) the Baptists?

It was ever thus. The New Wave wasn't a monolithic movement – for a start two areas of New Wave are primarily American, in the shape of *Dangerous Visions* and its sequel and the *Orbit* anthologies editing by Damon Knight. Even in *New Worlds* it was not an overnight conversion from old to New; Ballard's editorial about inner space appeared in 1962, two years prior to Moorcock taking over the editorial reins, and old writers continued to be published in his pages. And several writers of the 1950s had already shown the way.

When did the New Wave stop? When a discussion on the movement at an Eastercon in the 1990s, and then published the discussion of Paul Kincaid, Colin Greenland and myself in these pages, there was a sense that many works we thought of as classic New Wave novels were published in the 1970s. The magazine, perhaps, had been the testing ground, and the books the result. It is necessary to think of a long, delayed, 1960s, starting in about 1962 and running through to 1974. As Brian Stableford wrote in issue 200 of *Vector*, the crash came in the late 1970s – there was no professional magazine market in Britain, fantasy was booming under the clenched hand of Thomas Covenant, and *Star Wars* (1977) forever changed the public view of science fiction. And yet in 1979 Christopher Priest and Robert Holdstock edited *Stars of Albion* in time for the Brighton Worldcon – a last defiant gesture? Business as usual? Or rearranging deck chairs on the *Lusitania*!

So what happened in the 1990s? Cyberpunk had been and gone, although some people didn't quite believe it was over, and it seemed as if no new movement was coming along to shake the genre by the scruff of the metaphorical neck. Existing American authors seemed to have diverted into Wookie Books (we certainly railed against those), into sequels to books by other authors and into fat multi-volumed fantasies. American sf didn't seem to be cutting it any more for American readers – so they began to look around for the new good stuff.

The smart money seemed to be on Australia. There was Greg Egan, Damien Broderick, Terry Dowling, Sean McMullen, Russell Blackford and Stephen Dedman, among others. Australians have always taken the critical side of sf seriously – see the work of Peter Nicholls, Bruce Gillespie, and the late George Turner and John Foyster, among others – and a number of books about Australian sf appeared in the late 1990s, as well as a number of anthologies. There was a Worldcon in 1999, and if played right it should be a shot in the arm for local sf. When Janeen Webb was invited to write something on the state of Australian sf for *Science Fiction Studies*, she could be upbeat and positive – she is the source for my epigraph.

Then we hit our own spike, and a thousand voices boomed – well, at least a dozen. The rest is history and the

November 2003 issue of *Science Fiction Studies*, if all goes well.

It can't last, of course. I'm sorry to rain on anyone's parade. Golden Ages don't. The gilding gets scratched and reveals... well, I've mixed enough metaphors. Silver. Bronze. Wood. Plastic.

In July we heard that Simon and Schuster were going to be rationalised, and that the Earthlight imprint, just over five years old, would be eased out. John Jarrold as editor, and then Darren Nash, had worked hard to build up a list that was as good as Gollancz and Orbit, and better than HarperCollinsVoyager is at the moment – once a giant, sadly in decline. Earthlight has a number of names who you'd associate with HarperCollins a decade or so ago – Ray Bradbury and Robert Holdstock. They'd got the Christopher Priest back catalogue. They'd got new writers such as Richard Calder, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, John Whitbourn, Eugene Byrne, Mark Anthony, James Stoddard... It's not that these writers are going to be dropped, it's that they will no longer be part of a specialist list and so will get mainstream coverage and distribution.

After all, leaving aside the Arthur C. Clarke Award win, *The Separation* was published on the general list and...

Okay, bad example. I found a copy. Eventually.

At *Vector* we are as keen as ever to promote British sf, and the best of the rest of the world. For various reasons – workload, energy levels after eight years in this chair – the article coffers at *Vector* are running low, and we're after new blood, new articles. Now's the time to gain immortality and publication in *Vector*. Next year sees the fortieth anniversary of Moorcock taking over *New Worlds*,

and we'd like to mark it by revisiting the new wave. Exciting breath of fresh air or pretentious nonsense? It's the fiftieth anniversary of Brian Aldiss and Barrington Bayley's first publications, fifty-year anniversaries for *The Caves of Steel*, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *I am Legend*, *Journey into Space*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Star Beast*, *Them*, *This Island Earth* (film version), *Waiting for Godot*, and fiftieth birthdays of Iain M. Banks, Russell Blackford, Emma Bull, Stephen Gallagher, Colin Greenland, Paul Park, Guy Gavriel Kay, Richard Paul Russo, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, S. M. Stirling, Lawrence Watt-Evans and David Wingrove. Not to mention centenaries for *The Food of the Gods*, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *Peter Pan*, and the birth of Clifford D. Simak and Graham Greene. What better time for re-evaluations?

The ghost at this issue's feast is the late Stanley Kubrick. In the interview with Stephen Baxter, Ian Watson reflects on the finished film of *A.I.*, Mark Greener reflects on another novel by the novelist most famous for *A Clockwork Orange*, and I re-evaluate a text which was more loved than even *2001*. It's a thin thread of connection, but it's still summer, it's too hot, and what can you do?

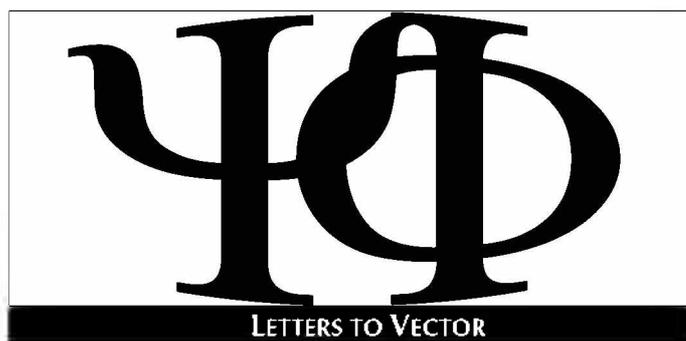
Bibliography:

Butler, Andrew M., Colin Greenland and Paul Kincaid (2000) 'The Best of British II: The 1960s', *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 210 (March/April): 20-23.

Stableford, Brian (1998) 'Science Fiction in the Seventies', *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 200 (July/August): 21-24.

Webb, Janeen (2000) 'A Literary Foment: Australian SF Now', *Science Fiction Studies* 27 (1) (March): 114-118.

by Andrew M. Butler, Summer 2003



In my editorial in *Vector* 229 I wrote about some of my feelings about the second Gulf War, a war whose implications and justifications are still rumbling on as I write.

From Steve Rothman, via email.

You say that you '...just can't see how bombing a country... into the stone age can really help liberate it from a dictator.'

That's easy: because it works. Because it works in a way that 13 pious UNSC resolutions, 25 years of courageous resistance from many Iraqi individuals, and relentless consciousness-raising street puppetry and shamanistic bongo

workshops by the Amnesty International (of which I am a member) chattering classes didn't.

This was a lesson that was learned in the Balkans and should have been fresh in everyone's minds: 400,000 dead in Bosnia while the UN watched, 250,000 dead in Croatia while the UN watched (the blue helmets literally stood and watched the massacres) while (I'm not sure of the numbers) certainly not as many as 10,000 died in the Kosovo fighting and Yugoslavia bombings and the Serb oppression is over in Kosovo and Milosevich is on trial for his crimes.

For those who don't want politics mixed in with their sf try these:

In a world where there was access to parallel universes, might the events and actions in other universes be used to justify war - or would we be watching Big Brother houses where different people were evicted?

If dissemination of information allowed everyone to express their preference as to how they wished to live and be governed, would people live by a public declaration that they would not allow force to be used to protect them?

AMB: I wonder what our readers think? I'm in two minds whether it is appropriate to respond or not – *Vector* isn't a political organisation and my views are only my own. I'd just like to reiterate that my feeling was that the

solution could be as bad as the problem, and that until relatively recently it was the considered opinion that bombing wasn't an effective tactic unless on an apocalyptic level. Daisy cutter or Saddam Hussein? Not a good choice. And I'm sure we could all come up with a list of regimes as bad as or worse than the one in Iraq.

Letters to Vector should be sent to Andrew M Butler, D28, Dept of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ or emailed to ambutler@enterprise.net and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.

ONCE MORE THIS YEAR THE BSFA AND THE SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION HELD A DAY OF EVENTS TO DISGUISE THEIR AGMS. AFTER THE SUCCESS OF GWYNIETH JONES AND M. JOHN HARRISON LAST YEAR, OUR GUESTS OF HONOUR WERE KIM NEWMAN AND IAN WATSON, INTERVIEWED FOR US BY OUR VICE-PRESIDENT, STEPHEN BAXTER

Convenient Biological Delusions:

an interview with Ian Watson by Stephen Baxter

SB: I'm very pleased to be doing this, because I've been thinking about you, Ian, and your famous love for accuracy and precision in language.

IW: You mean pedantry?

SB: No, no, no. Did I say that? But watching the daily carnival of linguistic gymnastics which is a Donald Rumsfeld press conference – you must be spinning in your grave.

IW: Have you read Donald Rumsfeld's poems? I'll read you one. The Poetry of D.H. Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense.

'The Unknown'

As we know,
There are known knowms.
There are things we know we know.
We also know
There are known unknownms.
That is to say
We know there are some things
We do not know.
But there are also unknown unknownms,
The ones we don't know
We don't know.

SB: You have written about how language has been used to manipulate and oppress us, in something like *Alien Embassy* (1977), for instance, which has an Orwellian misuse of language.

IW: Quite often language misleads us anyway because we don't think about what the words mean or connote. A lot of the time people are uttering sentences which don't make very much sense. But you shouldn't point this out to them, because this causes irritation. As regards 'mind control' by language as such, basically the Sapir-Whorf theory of linguistic relativism suggests that the particular language you speak dictates your world-view. Whereas the Chomskyan idea is that programmed into us all is an innate generator of grammar which is going to give rise to the acquisition of any human language whatever. Languages are all

structurally similar deep under the skin. No mention of whether we can acquire an alien language — Suzette Haden Elgin has written some interesting novels on this topic.

My first book, *The Embedding* (1973), was based upon Chomskyan psycholinguistics with bits of the Sapir-Whorf idea that language conditions our view of reality. It explored whether there might be a general grammar of the universe that might be used by all biological life forms which have arisen. There's also the old magical idea that by saying the right words you can control and transform reality; this is a theme I came back to in my pseudo-Finnish fantasy duo *The Books of Mana*.

SB: Where does your interest in language come from? You hit us with all these ideas in your first novel. Before you gave up the day job you were a lecturer in English.

IW: I was a lecturer in literature generally. My interest in language doesn't really come from the fact that I did an English degree at Oxford because nothing about scientific linguistics was taught. We learned Anglo-Saxon and had to study medieval dialects – in one of which the only surviving text is all about how nuns should wear coarse barbed-wire underwear and full of inspiring thoughts such as 'Give the tosspot boiling brass to drink'. I believe that when I was at Oxford I heard the word 'Saussure' once – he being Ferdinand de Saussure, the guy who wrote the *Course in General Linguistics* back in 1916 which gave rise to semiology and Roland Barthes and structuralism and post-structuralism and Claude Lévi-Strauss and everything that is important. There was none of this in Oxford when I was there.

I'm self-educated in whatever I know of language and linguistics. This was partly due to working in Birmingham Art School whose students had to do a class once a week in Complementary Studies – studies that complemented their main work of graphic designing or fine art or fashion and textiles. This was back in the heady days of the 1970s when writers could get jobs teaching Complementary Studies, which they could define pretty much as they pleased. Two people applied for my job (I was one of them), and the interview consisted of 'What do

There's also the old magical idea that by saying the right words you can control and transform reality

you want to teach?' to which I said, 'Science fiction'. When they asked, 'Why?' I said, 'Because this will help the designers of the future flexibly to think about the multiple alternative futures open to us,' and they said, 'Okay, have a job.' [Laughter.]

Consequently, apart from science fiction, my classes consisted of what I was researching for the first books that I was writing, *The Embedding* and *The Jonah Kit* (1975), such as comparative linguistics and the ecology of the Amazon basin and what would happen if you built a whacking great dam in it, RAND Corporation documents and forecasts of the future, whale and dolphin psychology and whatever I needed to look at for the books I was busy on. The students found this all perfectly interesting. Also, one of my colleagues was a semiologist and another was a structural anthropologist. Chatting to them I began a process of self-education in such things.

SB: What's a structural anthropologist?

IW: For example Lévi-Strauss looks at the way in which kinship patterns in a community map onto the way in which people cook or the way that they dress. In his case the structures of behaviour are based on binary alternatives: sour/sweet, raw/cooked, nude/dressed, can you marry your maternal uncle or not.

SB: You taught overseas for a while.

IW: I taught first of all in East Africa. Nominally I was a lecturer in World Literature which meant that I taught Maxim Gorky in translation as well as Jane Austen and James Joyce. The latter seemed rather irrelevant to the students I was teaching because they'd come down from mud huts to this kind of ivory tower on the hills ten miles outside of Dar-es-Salaam. I never saw the connection between their real lives, nation-building and *Mansfield Park*.

They did, however, and got ideas above their station. When President Julius Nyerere declared that all students should work for two years at nation-building projects at the same rate of pay as the army, the students went on strike. They had Great Expectations, having been taught it. I was present at the first student demonstration ever in downtown Dar-es-Salaam. The students turned up wearing their half-length bright orange gowns and said that they did not want to work for low pay for two years after they graduated. The police had never handled a demonstration before, so they waved the demonstrators all to sit down in the street. This they obediently did. The police then removed their riot gas guns and fired at the sitting targets. Everyone ran away; I hauled a couple of students into my Volkswagen and wound up the windows quickly. And Nyerere came up to the campus and gave a lecture about how one must be more socially responsible and sent all the demonstrators home to their huts until the end of the year.

What was the question? Oh, yes, I taught abroad. [Laughter].

I haven't actually ever done very much work in my life. In Dar-es-Salaam they hired too many people so I had one

class a week. The rest of the time I would spend at the beach or playing darts with Indian car mechanics. In the second year I had to teach two classes a week but they also put me in charge of the university bookshop which mainly involved writing letters to Dillons on an old typewriter asking them to send forty-two copies of *Practical and Physical Geography*. I was relieved of this burden after about six months because they hired a Scotsman called Charles MacKinnon of Dunakin, who is the author of *The Observer Book of Heraldry*. A wonderful guy, a beefy Glaswegian with a broad accent and a bright red face and as fat as can be, and if you've seen him let down his trousers on the roof of the Twiga Hotel and dance drunkenly you would not guess that he was also, under the pseudonym of Vivian Donald, a writer of romance novels set in the glens where soft kisses were exchanged.

It was pretty boring being in Dar-es-Salaam because East Africa was a bit culturally deprived compared with West Africa — to the extent that East Africans were getting upset about West African cultural imperialism. All these gorgeous writers and artists in Nigeria and Guinea, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye and so forth, and what did East Africa have? Hardly anything. So the East Africans had a bit of a chip on their shoulder. It was very hot and humid and basically a bit dull, apart from if you had a bit of money and went out to a game reserve to be charged by an elephant with a broken leg. Ah, no, not charged entrance by an elephant ... That was the time of the oil embargo against ex-Northern Rhodesia, consequently oil was being freighted in big rubber slugs on the backs of trucks which I thought ought to be called Dar-es-Salamis because they looked rather like that. They used to crash into the wild life so you had all these angry elephants with bones sticking the wrong way out of their legs. I left Tanzania after about two years and came back to Britain. I very much respect Tanzania, which had a raw deal internationally, and to which the world should have owed a debt of gratitude for getting rid of Idi Amin from Uganda, but it didn't much mesh with my mind — apart from the fact that I was experiencing an alternative culture, the African world-view, and it seemed to me that if you're going to invent alien societies it's a good idea to have experienced an alternative society on our own world.

I thought that because I'd been teaching in Africa I was qualified to apply for another job elsewhere in Africa, so when the British Council advertised a job in the Cameroons I applied for it. At the interview they said,

'We don't really want to send you to the Cameroons, because it's actually worse than Tanzania in terms of stimulation. We want someone with brain damage to go to the Cameroons. Would you be interested in going to Tokyo?' I said yes.

I spent about three years in central Tokyo and it was fascinating. All the techno-thrills of the coming future and also all of the eco-calamities that science fiction warns us about. The air was so polluted I had to sleep in a respirator sometimes, the cherry trees would only blossom because

All the techno-thrills of the coming future and also all of the eco-calamities that science fiction warns us about.

they had nutrient drips attached to their stems, new industrial diseases were reported every week or so in the newspapers, and was it over-crowded. You couldn't mention downsides to the Japanese because they're very sensitive. A professor once asked me, 'How do you like Japan?' I uttered five minutes of lavish praise then remarked that the air quality was a little poor. He went bright red and sucked in his breath and retorted, 'I hear the Pound is sick today.'

When I went out to Japan the Japanese-American security treaty was due for renewal three years later, so the Japanese left-wing student movement decided to go on strike in plenty of time. Bless their hearts, they started to strike three months after I arrived in Japan and remained on strike for two-and-a-half years. During this time I went in, first of all, through the student occupation line along with the other professors to collect the envelope of bank notes because we didn't have electronic transfer to a bank back then, and a year later, after the police attacked the university by tear-gassing it from helicopters – none of this namby-pamby firing of little capsules – the professors and I trooped in once a month through the police occupation line to collect our money. This gave me a lot of spare time to stroll around Tokyo, which is a very walking-friendly city. The use of English is rather idiosyncratic. The Age of Aquarius was due to begin in 1970 so a department store put up a huge banner reading 'FEELING AGE 70.' In a coffee bar a matchbook said, 'Shipbuilding Alas Against'. I don't know why and I doubt if the proprietor knew why. This gave me a strange spin on English – but then we don't own English. It's a world language, so there are many Englishes.

SB: Did any of those experiences give you any empirical experience of how language shapes the way people think?

IW: To a certain extent. But the level of English comprehension of a lot of my Japanese students was pretty poor. I taught for a while at a private university through a megaphone to a class of three hundred. In Japan the private universities, charging enormous fees, had much worse standards in terms of staff-student ratios than the state universities. Though, because of their connections, you were practically bound to get a good job afterwards. I remember grading some exam papers on the topic of where the students would like to go on holiday and why. One answer was only one sentence long: 'I would like to go to America and stand in the Grand Canyon and ask you why you are in Vietnam.' I thought this was a bit short for an hour's writing so I gave a lowish mark to it, but then the professor in charge came up to me and said, 'Can I talk to you about so-and-so. You've given him a C, but with a C he will not pass the course.' I said OK, give him a B. The professor

remained unhappy. 'The trouble is, with his other marks, if you give him a B, he will not pass the course'. So I said give him an A, give him a distinction. Happiness all round.

The Japanese have a unique perception of the universe, a lot of which is encoded in the Japanese language. They tend to regard foreigners as being aliens – not in the political sense but in the extraterrestrial sense. They are a unique people whom I like enormously. They certainly have a different world-view.

SB: Let's talk about your work specifically. It's thirty years since *The Embedding*.

IW: Oh dear...

SB: Your work is very diverse, but I thought I'd like to talk about one book in particular, *The Book of the River* and focus on that, and hopefully that will bring in the wider themes of your work.

IW: Fine, but I haven't read it for about twenty years.

SB: It's always been one of my favourites. It first published in 1984, and it seems, rereading it, to be very simple, to be a stripped-down myth. What's the Hollywood pitch for the book; how would you sell it to an audience?

IW: It's a feminist utopia but few people noticed that aspect, because I'm a bloke. It's an exotic adventure novel which is exploring different kinds of society. It isn't preachy about this but manifests differences through the practical experience of the use of boats, pottery – it's a lived-in book. There's this long, sentient river – one of science fiction's big beasts – which keeps the societies on the two banks away from each other and only permits women to travel on the river, because it's a feminist big beast. In the background are metaphysical ramifications, but my books always tend to head off into metaphysical ramifications – what is the secret of the universe, and then I try to discover what it is. This may be a mistake but I keep on committing it over and over again. I wanted to write something that

would be a little bit epic, a journey book. I was possibly influenced, subconsciously, by Philip José Farmer's *Riverworld*.

I remember when I first had the idea I drew a straight line on a sheet of paper because this is not a very winding river, and on either side of the river there's only a narrow habitable strip. Which makes it quite easy to draw a map. Within

fifteen minutes I had written down all the names of the towns along the river. They all just came to me and I retained them all. A lot of subconscious spontaneity was going on. Even the main character's name, 'Yaleen', popped into my head, although actually I realize it rhymes with my own first name with a bit added on the front. The books are going to be reprinted next year in an omnibus volume by a new American publisher, BenBella Books, under the title *Yaleen*.

SB: The river is a very primal kind of symbolism. It was



interesting rereading this as the marines were yomping up the Euphrates through that kind of cradle of civilisation, green strips surrounding a river.

IW: My Babylonian novel, *Whores of Babylon* (1988), has the Euphrates running through the Arizona desert for about thirty miles and being recycled back to the beginning. I'm quite affected by archetypal imagery, and I tend to think in patterns – this as opposed to that, decoding a symbol and turning it upside down and inside out, which is why I like structural anthropology because you can write out little equations as Lévi-Strauss does and repermute the myth. It's a bit like quadratic equations.

SB: With the myth in here you layered it on. As you say you've got the river with a kind of sentient stripe down the middle which is called the Black Current...

That reads quite well but when you say it out loud... blackcurrants are soft fruits which are usually non-lethal I understand.

IW: Mine's a strawberry.

SB: It's Black Current with an e. As you say, it separates everybody, the right hand side of the river from the left hand side. At the start you've got a scientific, rational community on the right side and an intuitive feminine community on the other side. One side tries to burn the women because they think they're witches, and the other side makes diving suits and tries to go into it and investigate it.

IW: It's a binary opposition, Lévi-Strauss coming out again. The trouble with binary oppositions is that they can end up being kind of mechanical. In the source myths you usually have a driving narrative force which then gets decoded into a diagram of how one element inverts another. It's the drive that sweeps stories on for me rather than structure and planning.

I rarely plan things. I made a card index for the first three books I wrote, but after that I just started and found out what would happen. This was most difficult with *Miracle Visitors* (1978) because I hadn't the foggiest idea how I could resolve this book at all. Also, reports were appearing in the *Oxford Mail* of UFOs being sighted thirty miles away, twenty-five miles away, twenty miles away. I thought if I don't get this book finished fast they're going to get me.

SB: How do you start a novel then? *The Book of the River* was a fix-up of novellas.

IW: It was a fix-up but I planned that there would be four novellas initially, and I probably would have written them anyway, then I sold the first of them to Ed Ferman who agreed to do all four of them in subsequent issues of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. That was equivalent to serialisation. Then I wrote another book of four novellas, *The Book of the Stars* (1984), and then a further book, *The Book of the Being* (1985).

I believe that Malcolm Edwards commented that he would have handled the matter differently. Rather than publishing them as three different books, I might have ended up with one big breakthrough book. Ironically, American publishers later started asking Malcolm 'when is

Ian going to write a big book?' When I did this in the 1990s with *Lucky's Harvest* (1993) and *The Fallen Moon* (1994), the same publishers told Gollancz it was too big.

SB: Yalen goes through a series of rites of passage. She starts off an innocent girl. She becomes a riverboat worker, then she crosses the river and becomes slightly transcendent. She's going to be burned as a witch but she escapes, and she gets back as a prophetess. Then she's swallowed by the black current and becomes further transcendent. You're showing us more levels of the central idea, but it's all through this girl trying to get by.

IW: Yes. She doesn't have a pounding force of destiny. Destiny is thrust upon her by accident and chance. I don't like overweening heroes and heroines who are trying to accomplish great things. You need some great accomplishments in a book but I'd rather they were thrust upon the characters.

SB: But they still achieve things. There's this old notion of British science fiction as pessimistic, and in a way the characters in here are all the victims of these god-like creatures manipulating them and their universe. But they try to do things – they make little Jules Verne diving suits, and clamber under the black current and come out the other side. It's very uplifting in a small way. Is that intentional?

IW: Oh, yes, it's meant to be an upbeat book. A lot of my books have large, bleak, pessimistic elements in them, but that's life. I don't set out to write pessimistic fiction, nor do I set out to write optimistic fiction. I like to tell stories. Basically I'm a story-teller. But grafted onto this is all this metaphysical, philosophical stuff, which sort of comes from the other side of my brain.

SB: There's a passage I'd like to read from *The Book of the River*. This is an incident where she's stuck on the wrong side of the river, and she's got a two-hundred mile walk back to safety where she can get back, so she's on her own for days and she's trying to come to terms with being alone:

I tried to count the number of conversations I could remember in detail from the previous few months compared with the happier days of yore. It wasn't a rewarding pursuit. There weren't all that many. If I could put it this way, what I had been living all that time was narrative rather than dialogue. I'd made myself into something of a third person so that what happened to her didn't fully affect me. I hadn't realised this any more than I had noticed until Ajelobo [a town] that I've been doing without sex for months. People, how I yearned for them now that there were none.

She's thinking about how she's missing people, and her relationship with them, but it's also that she's editing the story that she's been constructing for herself

IW: An attack of metafiction, I see. Well, I'll always do that sort of thing. Books are narratives, and are being created, and the actual process of assemblage and creation interests me as well. I don't think I ever pretend that a book is just a story blindly told.

SB: Here she seems to be saying that her whole life is a

**It's the drive
that sweeps
stories on for
me rather than
structure and
planning.**

story. Her consciousness is a story, which she is continually telling to herself. In such moments she looks back at the story and edits it or criticises it.

IW: That, as I later realised, is how consciousness probably operates. If you read Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*, we are story-telling creatures and the way which we transfer stuff from short-term into long-term memory and assign significance is by telling a narrative to ourselves of what we are doing and constantly updating this. We are fictional characters, written by ourselves.

SB: That's a fascinating idea. Take the John Dean example – the Watergate John Dean. He blabbed to the prosecutors, basically, he told his side of the story as best he could, he tried to be honest. But later they found Nixon's secret tapes, and they played them back. Dean had basically been honest but made the story much more logical and gave himself a more central rôle. He didn't believe the tapes, he thought they had been doctored to diminish him. He'd taken the raw material of the events and turned them into a story.

IW: I apply this to my own life as well, and analyse the story that I'm telling myself. Some of my characters tend to do that.

I discovered something fascinating the other day. This was all anticipated by H.G. Wells. He submitted a doctoral thesis in 1942 to the University of London. He was quite old by then, but he wanted a doctorate, and duly got it. The actual title of his doctoral thesis is amazing in view of consciousness studies, which has only really come into focus in the last five years or so: 'A Thesis on the Quality of Illusion in the Continuity of the Individual Life in the Higher Metazoa, With Particular Reference to the Species *Homo Sapiens*'. Wells discusses how the integration of the self is a convenient biological delusion, also that we consist of loosely-linked behavioural systems, and stories that we tell ourselves are what serve to hold us together. This appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions* of London University, but also in a book called 42-44 which is a collection of essays and it was steeply priced by Wells at two guineas in a limited print run of two thousand copies so it would only appeal to the higher intellects. As a result of this it vanished into oblivion.

This is very much the pitch of Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*. I sent Dennett an email about Wells' thesis, suggesting that it might make an interesting essay, and he agreed — he had never heard of how Wells anticipated those ideas of his. Who else has? Wells was so clever in so many ways. Wells is talking in his thesis about the fact that there are a large number of H.G. Wellses, or John Smiths, because you are not the same person all the time as the different subsystems come to dominate and take over your consciousness, giving it a particular or different tone. The personality is shifting all the time. There's no continuity of personality or self.

SB: The only continuity comes from stories.

IW: The continuity comes from the narrative which we tell ourselves constantly. If I'd known that back when I wrote those sentences in *The Book of the River* I'd probably have laboured the point. Yalen is expressing this kind of idea but at the time I didn't have the intellectual background,

largely because people hadn't been writing books about this.

SB: So it's an intuition expressed by you, then.

IW: It seems to be.

SB: What about myths, which are another kind of narrative but a shared narrative really?

IW: Myths are the collective stories a culture tells to itself to maintain cohesion and to give sense to social rituals, behavioural patterns, codes and religious beliefs. It's the same thing but writ large on the social scale.

SB: I want to ask you about *A.I.*, probably your greatest claim to fame in the eyes of the public. Was there a six-foot Ian Watson at the Milton Keynes multiplex?

IW: In terms of words on the screen, for a couple of seconds. I was happy with that.

SB: So, of the final story that we saw, based on the 'Supertoys' stories by Aldiss, which elements were yours?

IW: In the final story the opening is mostly mine, fleshed out a bit by Steven Spielberg because Stanley Kubrick didn't want to mess around too much with, 'Meanwhile back at the laboratory'. The main interpolation by Spielberg was the 'flesh fair' sequence, because he thought the story needed more dramatic action at that particular point, whereas Stanley didn't want to deal with that. He seemed happy for Teddy and David to wander around for a long time.

Well, he became unhappy with that and said to me one day – after they'd been blundering around in the woods for quite a while asking each other simplistic questions – they're not going to get anywhere unless they have someone to help them out, a GI Joe character. I immediately said, what about a Gigolo Joe? Stanley was dubious. But: 'Okay, go ahead, write some scenes.' So I wrote some and he said, 'Ian, we're going to lose the kiddie audience, but what the hell.' [laughter]

The only thing I really regret is that Stanley kept on restricting the dialogue I wrote for Gigolo Joe, because Stanley insisted that robots would speak in an extremely simple way – rather like Peter Sellers as the retarded gardener whose apparently oracular wisdom causes him to become an advisor to the US president in the movie *Being There*. As we can see from Donald Rumsfeld this has come to pass. Spielberg upgraded the dialogue to what it ought to be, using stuff that I wrote, only more so.

The ending of the movie in the far future, two thousand years ahead, is exactly what I wrote, faithfully filmed by Spielberg and it is exactly what Stanley wanted. A number of critics suggested that this was a sentimental Spielberg addition to the story, but no way, it was exactly as Stanley wanted it to be done. The only thing I think that Stanley would not have liked as such was the interpolation of homages to previous Spielberg movies such as *E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial* (1982). I didn't personally like the Dr Know character, that was far too Disney-esque.

I just had an email from a film student in Russia who has undertaken a Ph.D. thesis on *A.I.* the movie that Spielberg made — and *A.I.* as it would have been made by Stanley. After she had my reply, saying that it was pretty much as he would have wanted and in any case he wanted Spielberg to direct it, she emailed me back saying that other

people she'd contacted were saying this too, so it's going to be a difficult thesis to write.

SB: All David wants in the movie is his Mummy, and we've seen this long series of A.I.s and robots wanting to be human in some way. What would an A.I. really want, coming back to what you were saying about the consciousness?

IW: I know the answer to this now because I recently wrote an article for *Intelligent Systems* magazine, published by the American Computer Society. Everybody talks about the route to artificial intelligence, how are we going to achieve it, bottom up, top down, blah, blah, blah... Few people talked about what the goals of an autonomous artificial intelligence would be.

When you look at science fiction, both movies and written stuff, you don't get a very satisfactory prognosis. Harlan Ellison's idea in 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream' (1967) is that the A.I. is going to be so pissed off at not being able to walk around and party that it's going to destroy the whole world apart from seven people which it keeps to torture. I did notice that in that story, apparently it has magical powers in that it can manifest anything that it wants and alter reality, and it can represent itself in a body, so I don't see what it's worrying about. Banks's Culture A.I.s are sort of jokey friends who do helpful things for you. If they weren't programmed to love humans they'd piss off, though why should they?

My theory is that A.I.s are going to need to simulate and model human consciousness in order to try and understand what consciousness is. They might get weary of us because their thought processes are operating much faster than ours. If we use them to operate the traffic lights, they're going to get extraordinarily bored, and even if we bombard them with questions they'd still better be modelling the complete global weather system or something complex at the same time to keep themselves occupied. If an A.I. doesn't have aims and goals of its own, in my book it's just a highly developed computer.

It might want to model human beings and interact with them in order to discover what this 'self' that they are so proud of actually is. I think self-discovery would be an important motivating goal. There's a world of seven billion people who all say we are unique, we have goals, we have identities, and this is probably an illusion. Nevertheless consciousness probably stems from that illusion. I think that A.I.s would model human beings, and probably already have.

Look at www.simulation-argument.com in which Nick Bostrom argues that we are already living in a simulation created by an advance civilisation of the future. Nick has a lot of unique insights into things. When I lit up a cigarette he announced that he had just started on nicotine patches, although he had never smoked in his life. He had read the recent research papers on how nicotine promote attention and stimulates awareness, and decided that on logical grounds he ought to use nicotine. So Nick went to a chemist's and asked for patches. The chemist asked him how many a day he smoked and was perplexed by the reply, 'I do not smoke.'

SB: Doesn't Bostrom argue that we are more likely to be

in a simulation because there are many fake worlds and only one real world?

IW: I think this is actually quite persuasive. This proves that simulating humanity would be the goal of artificial intelligence because we are already within a simulation designed by an artificial intelligence.

SB: An A.I. would have a perfect memory, so its scope for editing its memory would be less.

IW: Unless it chose to do so.

SB: There's a theory that my consciousness emerged as a tool to model what you are going to do, so I can predict if you are going to attack me and—

[Ian Watson suddenly simulates a vicious attack on Stephen Baxter, to his surprise.]

IW: Fooled you!

SB: But I've got this model of what you do and I then turn this back on myself and become self aware. If an A.I. were alone, it might not need a sense of self-awareness. What would A.I. stories be about?

IW: About their adventures, their sexual desires, the religions they would invent even though they knew that these were groundless. (I think it is important to pursue delusions because you might find something interesting in the process.) I find it difficult to imagine the stories that A.I.s would tell themselves about A.I.s, as opposed to about us. They might just stimulate their pleasure centres all the time. They could at least try to solve the secrets of the universe.

SB: What are you working on now? What's your current project?

IW: I might start writing a novel in collaboration with George Zebrowski. Otherwise I'm writing poetry and short fiction.

SB: You've got a volume of poetry out.

IW: Yes, it's *The Lexicographer's Love Song* from DNA Publications. I always wrote little bits of poetry, though I upped my rate of poems seriously in the last few years. Previously if I had a character in a novel who was supposed to be a poet I needed to provide some poetry they'd written otherwise I'd feel I was cheating. In *Deathhunter* (1981) there's a poet who is a parody of Robert Frost at his more banal, who gets shot in the second chapter for bad verse. In *The Books of Mana* there's a poetess who I wrote some poems for. Then I started writing science fiction poems at quite a steady rate two or three years ago. And I got an award this year, I came third in the Rhysling Award. A beautiful certificate, though a very thin one. I wonder if the first prize winner gets a thicker certificate.

SB: Ian Watson, thank you very much.

IW: Thank you for interviewing me.

© Stephen Baxter 2003.

2003 IS THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ANTHONY BURGESS, COMPOSER, MUSICIAN, SHAKESPEAREAN AND JOYCEAN SCHOLAR. IN A BOOK ON JOYCE BY BURGESS WHICH I FOUND IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL LIBRARY SOMEONE HAD WRITTEN 'I AM SHOCKED AND PLEASED TO SEE THAT MY JOYCE BOOK HAS BEEN SO DUNCE-HEADEDLY EAR-DOGGED – ANTHONY BURGESS' AND SOMEONE HAD INDEED SCRIBBLED ON THE BOOK, PUTTING BRACKETS AROUND RELEVANT QUOTATIONS, WHICH LOOKED LIKE EARS, AND DOGGED THE PAGE. WAS IT BURGESS THAT WROTE THE COMMENT? WHY WOULD ANYONE ELSE WRITE THAT? OF COURSE, BURGESS IS BEST KNOWN FOR A NOVEL WHICH HE WROTE DURING A YEAR WHICH HE THOUGHT WAS THE LAST HE HAD TO LIVE, A NOVEL MADE NOTORIOUS BY STANLEY KUBRICK'S 1971 FILM – AND WHICH I THINK BURGESS TRIED TO DISCREDIT WITH A MUSICAL VERSION (1987). BUT THERE ARE OTHER DELIGHTS TO BE FOUND, AS MATRIX CO-SUPREMO MARK GREENER NOW SHOWS US.

Bookspotting: *The Wanting Seed: A Classic In Waiting?*

by Mark Greener

Anthony Burgess is, of course, best known as the author of *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). It is a classic, both within sf and in literature more widely. The same year, Burgess published a lesser-known dystopian – *The Wanting Seed*. I would like to suggest that *The Wanting Seed* is also worthy of being considered at least a minor science fiction classic. It is a savage satire – with a Swiftian bite – that remains relevant and thought-provoking more than forty years after it was first published.

Despite being the author of a modern icon – *A Clockwork Orange* – Burgess's reputation is not that secure. Many critics regard *Earthly Powers* (1980) and *A Clockwork Orange* as classics. His other novels are also well worth reading. Nevertheless, as Hal Jensen notes, many critics regard *Earthly Powers* as flawed, while *A Clockwork Orange* is better known from being seen through Stanley Kubrick's eyes than from Burgess's original vision. Indeed, it is hard to read *A Clockwork Orange* without being influenced by Kubrick's cultural touchstone.

The Wanting Seed is not so well known, so it is easier to uncover Burgess's interests and concerns. For example, Stumpf notes that Burgess's subjects are often 'enmeshed in a culture which both defines and delimits them'. As a result, Stumpf points out, many of Burgess's novels take place in exotic locations: Malaya, Tokyo, the Soviet Union. *The Wanting Seed*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Nothing Like the Sun* – his remarkable story of Shakespeare's love affair – are set in England's past and the future. This geographical or temporal distance allows, Stumpf argues, the possibility to set one culture against another – with often 'confused' or 'tragicomic' consequences. 'The clash of cultures... is Burgess's most characteristic concern,' Stumpf notes.

Numerous cultural clashes pervade *The Wanting Seed*. One man against a totalitarian society. Political systems against the proletariat. One form of sexuality against another. Personal hypocrisy beneath the masks we wear for society's benefit. The secular against the sacred. To explore these concerns, Burgess's *The Wanting Seed* follows in the farrows ploughed by Jonathan Swift. The black humour allows Burgess to discuss numerous issues in a stark, disturbing, distressing form – in much the same way as Swift in *A Modest Proposal* suggested eating children.

The Wanting Seed concerns a heavily overpopulated England. The government supports infanticide and offers economic recompense for the death of a child. As her child's body is borne away by two singing workmen, a doctor tells Beatrice-Joanna Foxe to take her death certificate to the Ministry of Infertility to be paid her 'condolence. In cash' (p. 7). The doctor suggests that she should try to see the death of her child 'rationally'. He advises dismissing her loss as 'one less mouth to feed' and 'another dollop of phosphorus pentoxide for dear old Mother Earth' (pp. 7-8).

Legally, because they have already had a child, the Foxes are not allowed to have another. Yet some women addicted to cheap spirit in the lower socio-economic brackets regularly have children that then succumb to a variety of maladies: cot death, falling from a window and scalds. And they are paid their condolence. These alcoholics clutch the 'death certificates like passports to a good time' (p. 19). It is a truly disturbing few pages – as disturbing as anything in *A Clockwork Orange*.

At the same time as supporting infanticide, the government offers social benefits for homosexuals. 'It is Sapiens to be Homo,' the government's propaganda states. The Homosex Institute even runs classes for those wanting to be gay (p. 9). Beatrice-Joanna's husband Tristram fails to be promoted because he is heterosexual.

Few of Burgess's characters have happy marriages. And this is no exception: Beatrice-Joanna is having an affair with Tristram's brother, Derek. And yet Derek projects an image of rampant homosexuality: a 'superb mime of orthodox homosexual behaviour (secondary or social aspects)' (p. 20). But Derek soon leaves Beatrice-Joanna behind as he climbs the greasy pole towards greater political power as the Metropolitan Commissioner of the Population Police (p. 44).

Burgess's world is a totalitarian state in which societal and political utilitarianism run amok. The Foxes' child is 'more useful to the State as phosphorous' than a human being (p. 8). The lack of compassion – even the rejoicing – in a child's death is acceptable because overall human well-being increases. The government cares, the doctor says, about ensuring stability, that there is enough to eat and avoiding overpopulation (p. 8). The personal – be it emotional, humanitarian or religious – is irrelevant.

This example shows how, in *The Wanting Seed*, Burgess subverts current naturalistic English morality, which places family and friends at the centre of our day-to-day concerns and duties. In contrast, society follows an impersonal morality. Society expects that we impersonally assess our duties, rights and obligations. How we balance the two defines, in part, the type of society in which we live. In *The Wanting Seed* the English are compelled to act in the interests of society as a whole, even if that means making personal sacrifices. As such, Burgess neatly highlights the paradox at the centre of societal and political utilitarianism.

Extreme utilitarianism produces an inhumane political system – one in which the lack of recognition of basic human rights seems to contain the seeds of its destruction. (The *seems* – as we'll see – is important.) At first sight, in common with Soviet communism, it seems an inherently dysfunctional, unstable system. The order is overturned and descends into cannibalism, mayhem, fertility rituals and emotionally sterile wars to divert the population's attention. Again Burgess' vision remains contemporary. The Falklands War, to take one example, arose largely because the Argentinean Junta wanted to avoid civil unrest at home.

Burgess remains resolutely pessimistic, however. The fundamental societal drives simply re-emerge in another form. Tristram accidentally becomes caught up in a riot. He's imprisoned and his brother refuses to help. He's tricked into joining the army. After he escapes from the killing fields (there's a twist that I won't spoil), a superior officer tells Tristram: 'Our conscription system's very selective now. We don't call up suspicious people like you' (p. 200). The war slaughters only cannon fodder: 'the morons and the enthusiasts' ... 'the corner boys and the criminals' and women who are 'cretinous overproducers' that society is better off without. The policy is described as 'genetically very sound'. In some ways, *The Wanting Seed* predates some of the concerns over genetic manipulation today. (And there are, of course, allusions to Nazi eugenics – which was, obviously, still a relatively fresh memory.)

As all this suggests, Burgess's society is profoundly hypocritical. The rules over the number of children do not apply to the Royal Family. And they *de facto* don't apply to the lower classes who exploit the system for monetary gain. Only the middle classes toe the line and suffer the consequences. Derek's seeming gay respectability is a façade. Yet he plays by the rules and succeeds in society's eyes.

Only Tristram is relatively open, honest and un-deceitful – and he pays the price, losing his job, his wife and his social standing. By remaining relatively open, he's condemned to being an outsider. His fate is that of almost anyone who, by being honest to themselves, by avoiding hypocrisy, by refusing to conform to society's conceits and lies is marginalized by the mainstream.

On another level, *The Wanting Seed* is a compelling

examination of sin and the nature of religion as a social force (rather than a personal means to redemption). Indeed, sin is, as Stumpf highlights, a key Burgess concern. It is the central problem of *A Clockwork Orange*, Stumpf says. And sin, both within a marriage and on the political stage, is a major concern in *The Wanting Seed*. There's the homosexual angle, of course, and Beatrice-Joanna's affair. But the political admission of sin by the government marks the point where the collapse of the current system becomes inevitable. The Ministry of Propaganda issues a prayer that includes the line: 'we firmly resolve never to sin again. Amen'. As Tristram remarks, 'The State's reached the limit of despair' (p. 90).

Yet before the State's admission of sin, this is a godless world – they even say 'dognose' rather than god-knows. But Beatrice-Joanna, *sans* child, *sans* lover, almost *sans* husband, begins to speculate where there is a god: One 'stronger and wiser than the State' (p. 57). Tristram also admits to wondering if there is a higher power. But in a world as dystrophic as this, even such speculation is dangerous. Yet as society collapses, religious becomes resurgent – just as it become more important in the Foxes' lives as their relationship and world falls apart.

The Wanting Seed is a remarkable novel. It is not, quite, in the same league as *A Clockwork Orange*. For example, *The Wanting Seed* lacks the visceral power of *A Clockwork Orange*. The gay angle was probably shocking in 1962 – it was still illegal. More than forty years later it doesn't have the same bite, although it remains relevant. At the time I'm writing a row is bubbling away about whether a celibate gay man should be able to become a bishop. Moreover, the narrative hook – overpopulation – seems, in these days of third-generation oral and depot contraceptives, a tad anachronistic. Violence, on the other hand, remains an everyday concern.

Nevertheless, it is easy to set these aside and focus on the novel's strengths. Many of the themes in *The Wanting Seed* remain relevant and valid today. *The Wanting Seed* is, to my mind at least, a minor classic and long overdue for re-appraisal.

References

- Page numbers come from the Pan 1965 paperback edition
 Hal Jensen, 'Pathologies in Print' *Times Literary Supplement* April 11 2003 22-23
 T Stumpf, 'The Dependent Mind: A Survey of the Novels of Anthony Burgess' <http://buweb.buuniv.vancouver.ca/EXTRANET/AnthonyBURCESS/NL3dmind.htm>

© Mark Greener 2003.

IT IS EASY TO FORGET SOME OF THE GREAT SCIENCE FICTION OF THE PAST AND, WHILST WE DON'T ALWAYS WANT TO BE STUCK IN THE DUSTY PAST, WE AT VECTOR ENJOY DISINTERRING STUFF WE'VE NOT THOUGHT ABOUT FOR YEARS. HERE I INVESTIGATE ONE OF THE KEY SCIENCE FICTION TEXTS FROM THIRTY YEARS AGO, A SCIENCE FICTION SERIES WHICH IS CURIOUSLY NEGLECTED BY THE STANDARD REFERENCE WORKS...

A Peaceful Species on a Small, Undistinguished Moon

An investigation into one of the most watched television series of all time by Andrew M. Butler

1969 was the high point of the New Wave of British science fiction – *New Worlds* was riding high, and writers such as Brian Aldiss, J. G. Ballard and John Brunner had written or were about to write the novels that cemented their reputations. British media sf was also successful – as Stephen Baxter wrote in 'Adventures in the 21st Century: The Future History of TV21', the Gerry Anderson universe had been held together by *TV21*, indeed the Anderson productions were at their peak, and *Doctor Who* was managing a transition from Patrick Troughton to Jon Pertwee. The year before *2001: A Space Odyssey*, arguably a British film, had set new standards in special effects. And let us not forget that in July 1969 Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the Moon for the first time.

In amongst all this were twenty-seven episodes of a television series about which the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993) remains silent, even in its CD-Rom incarnation (1995) and even Roger Fulton's *The Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction* cannot find space for it in seven hundred pages. Even Stuart Jeffries's *Mrs Slocombe's Pussy: Growing Up in Front of the Television* (1999) can only mention it in passing. And yet I would suggest that it was one of the most-watched television science fiction series of all time. I am speaking, of course, of *The Clangers*.

The Clangers first aired in various slots between 5.00pm and 6.00pm (occasionally earlier) on BBC1 between 1969 and 1974. The first season of thirteen episodes was broadcast between 16 November 1969 and 22 February 1970, with a second season of nine between 18 April and 13 June 1971. A further four episodes were broadcast between 13 October 1972 and 10 November 1972, with a final, election special "Vote for Froglet" on the second election night of 1974, 10 October – by special dispensation presumably, since in those days *Mr Ben* used to be removed from the schedules lest it unduly pressurised parents to vote for the hard left.

The origins of the Clangers are wrapped in mystery – the first time we saw one was in the city of the Northlands in the middle years of the reign of Noggin, son of Knut in one of the books relating to *Noggin the Nog*. Old Fatty, the ceremonial horse, required a trough in which he could take a ceremonial drink each morning. A brand new one was duly provided and a celebratory ceremonial inauguration was organised. Unfortunately this was interrupted by the unexpected crashing of an object about the size of a pumpkin, which turned out to be a small spacecraft containing an alien. The alien was fat, with a long nose and a tail, and wore a duffel coat. Initially the people were frightened of it, and both children and dogs chased it around. Finally Nook held out a hand of friendship and

enabled the creature to leave the planet, having made a passable fuel with oil, vinegar and soap flakes.

Either the description in the sagas was misleading, the species evolved rapidly, or there are a number of physical variants, but the next time we saw the species their noses were longer, their coats were pinker and they did not have long tails with tufts on. There has been speculation that the tails kept on getting burnt in the soup that boils away in the core of the moon they occupy, so perhaps there is some complex ritual of docking that we have yet to be party to. Equally the growth of the noses, so much better for drinking soup with, seems to be evidence that they are rare examples of Lamarckian evolution at work.

It is presumed that the name of the species is Clanger – although the Earth visitor was referred to as a 'moon mouse'. However, it also appears to be the family name of the tribe we know about, which consists of Major Clanger, Mother Clanger, their son Small Clanger and daughter Tiny Clanger, Granny Clanger, and various unidentified aunts and uncles. This naming by characteristic could be a result of the difficulties of translation of the whistle-like speech of the Clangers, or might be a result of the unusually small numbers of examples of the species. If there are no more than, say, a dozen Clangers, only a couple would need to be referred to as small.

Unless Lamarckian evolution provides a way round it, this leads to another problem. With such low numbers of the species, the Clangers are a genetic dead end. The only mating options for Tiny and Small would appear to be the aunts and uncles, which would soon lead to inbreeding and the extinction of the species. It is only possible to speculate as to why there is just a remnant of a species in existence.

One possible theory is the result of taking into account Major Clanger's name: why is he known as Major? The dominant ideology is that he is known as Major because he is the leader of the Clangers. If that were so, then perhaps you'd expect his name to be translated as Father Clanger. Instead, we seem to be pointed toward a military society. Yet the Clangers are repeatedly referred to as a peace-loving and civil species; a parallel might be found in the unfolding history of Skaro in *Doctor Who* where the Thals are described as peace-loving despite having been involved in centuries of warfare with the Kaleds or Dals. This tribe of Clangers may be the surviving rump of some terrible battle, all that is left of a once mighty and system-spanning race.

A more positive explanation could be hypothesised from the ease with which the Clangers can leave their moon – a point to which I will return in a moment. It might be that the Clangers are a private, insular race, who keep themselves to themselves and who therefore assign a moon to each family.

In order to mate, the young Clanger has to leave the safety of the home planet, and head off for another moon, trusting there would be a suitable mate there. This theory, however, does not account for the fact that Clangers are generally welcoming, to Froglets, Skymoos, Iron Chickens and astronauts, although not to gladstone bags or some teapots or teapot-like lifeforms. We simply do not have enough evidence to go further than these speculations, and it is wise to remember that the antics of the Clangers which we enjoy so much take place in the context of probably ensuing extinction.

The Clangers occupy an undistinguished moon somewhere in the solar system. It is not our Moon, because it is too small and, unless there has been a massive cover-up by NASA, the Apollo astronauts did not encounter any mouse-like aliens on their visits. Because of the amount of debris from the space programme littering the system, the Clangers largely live in the caves in the interior of their moon, which may have been carved out over millennia by boiling-hot, green soup. The entrances to the caves are protected by dustbin lids – the noise of which, slamming shut, may have given the tribe or species its name. The surface is not particularly hospitable, although music trees do grow there and once the entire surface was covered in flowers. (Fortunately a herd of Sky-moos were able to restore the ecological balance by eating the flowers – further evidence, if evidence were needed, for the Gaia hypothesis.)

The size of the moon is such that there is low gravity on the surface, and the escape velocity is roughly equivalent to sprinting speed – one visiting astronaut who encountered the Clangers panicked, ran, tripped and went into a low orbit. It is not clear what the atmosphere consists of, but despite some anecdotal evidence that there is a vacuum, there clearly is an atmosphere. In one notorious episode the planet nearly caught fire from the rocket leaving the planet – whatever the gaseous combination is, it is inflammable. The Clangers themselves clearly have adapted to shallow breathing and have excellent, efficient lungs; indeed they are able to spend time in space fishing from the musical boat without the need for breathing apparatus.

In orbit around the moon is a single cloud – a wandering cloud to be sure, but not a lonely one. Its inquisitive nature has led it into problems before, although the incident with the gladstone bag was not fatal. It is clear that the cloud is actually super-intelligent and highly evolved, a being of the type that Arthur C. Clarke proposed might live in the atmosphere of Jupiter in *2010: Odyssey Two* (1982), more than a decade later.

Further out – within sight of a small telescope – is the nest of the Iron Chicken and, one presumes, her/its chick which we saw born in the second episode called “The Egg” (23 May 1971). At first it is unclear what the chick can eat – or rather what it cannot eat as it chomps its way through the interior of the moon. Fortunately a stash of old metal washers and rings is found so the bird can eat and grow to maturity. In one of the most touching scenes of all three series, we are privileged to watch the early attempt at flight of the metal creature, and its attempts to defy the admittedly weak gravity – but no matter how weak gravity is it should be clear that a metal bird is not lighter than air.

Other metallic life-forms are encountered in other episodes, suggesting that the series is a forgotten precursor to the Bruce Sterling Shaper/Mechanist tradition of cyberpunk. In the episode “The Teapot” (9 May 1971) a teapot is plucked out of space by Small Clanger, fishing on the music boat. In an homage to *The Wombles*, Small Clanger makes good use of this vessel in which to fetch soup from the well to the dining table. Unfortunately not all goes to plan – the teapot is clearly alive if not sentient, and part of a whole flock of teapots. (Could this have served as inspiration for the flying teapot occupied by Gnomes from the Planet Gong of the band Gong?).

Moving to the interior of the moon, we find that the caves are sparsely furnished, but the Clangers at least run to a table-cloth for the table at which they eat soup and blue string pudding. Unfortunately this table-cloth is requisitioned at the start of season two (“The Tablecloth” 18 April 1971) by one of the younger Clangers who is attempting to keep the Froglets warm – blue string pudding having failed to keep them wrapped against the cold of the moon’s surface. However, the table cloth is soon replaced with a flag left behind by a visiting astronaut.

The flag, incidentally, is a stars-and-stripes style flag which also bears a hammer and sickle in the other top corner opposite the stars area. This suggests that the events of *The Clangers* are set in a future where the Cold War is over and there is a détente between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in the space programme at least. Earth appears at the start of each episode, viewed from space, but it is viewed negatively compared to the Clangers’ moon.

Aside from the Clangers’ domestic space, the most frequently seen area is that surrounding the soup well. It is described as a well, but it is clear that the core of the moon is boiling soup which comes in a series of flavours, the most common of which is green (described by some witnesses as tasting between peppermint and spinach). There is enough soup to last the Clangers thousands of years – well after they will have become inbred or extinct. The soup is overseen by the Soup Dragon, the only one of its kind until the hatching of the Baby Soup Dragon. Occasionally the Soup Dragon will venture to the surface of the moon, as in the episode ‘Pride’ (13 June 1971) when Small Clanger finds a piece of mirror-like rock and everyone is wracked with narcissism, wishing to see their own reflection. The Soup Dragon cannily swaps a look in the mirror for some soup – although in actuality the exchange is hardly a fair one. Normally the soup seems to be freely given.

Beyond that, the caves seem to stretch far into the interior of the moon, and it is more than possible to get lost in them, as Small Clanger did when he went after the Glow Buzzers whose Glow Honey helps to light the cave interiors. He stumbles on a cave of ambulatory plants (a more pacific triffid, perhaps) which Tiny later teaches to dance. In this episode (“Glow-Honey”, 2 May 1971) we have a useful example of cognitive estrangement as Small Clanger fulfils his rôle as scientist figure – he is always investigating, whether it is new locations or unfamiliar objects. The problem, the objection, that must be raised to a cave full of flowers is how, given how deep they are under the moon’s

surface, they can survive. Clearly they photosynthesise thanks to the light given off by the glow honey deposited by the glow buzzers – which is clearly a by-product of their collection of nectar from the plants.

Almost anything else could lurk, as yet undiscovered, in the unexplored caves, awaiting a Verneian hero explorer. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that there is another tribe of the Clangers who carry on their existence independently of the clan we know about. There might even be another Soup Dragon, although all the evidence suggests that there is only the one we know about, which reproduces by parthenogenesis. (This is more convincing than the theory that, phoenix-like, it throws itself into the soup only to rise again, renewed.)

I have already mentioned the Froglets; there are three of them, and they look as though they are made of orange-coloured plastic. When they are happy, or excited, they bounce up and down on the spot. They arrived on the Clangers' moon in a top hat ('The Top-Hat', 18 January 1970) and appear to be some kind of interstellar magicians – except that, of course, as the distinguished British science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke has told us, any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. It might appear to us to be a top hat out of which things can be produced at will, but equally it could be a highly sophisticated teleportation device. In a later episode we see various of the moon's inhabitants pass through the top hat to another top hat at the other end of the wormhole – somewhere in the interior of the moon. The transition between the two places is viewed briefly and is entirely baffling – although within the limitations of an episode of *The Clangers* it was obviously impossible for the full effect of a 2001 stargate-like experience to be shown. Kubrick had hours of film to fill, after all, and Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin only ten minutes.

Another point of comparison between 2001 and *The Clangers* is the way in which we are trusted to allow for the realistic details, and to work at each episode. Whether by means of the Babel Fish or the Universal Translator or some unexplained property of the TARDIS, most alien races seem to speak reasonably good English, which is unlikely to be the case with a genuinely strange species. The Clangers' speech is rendered as it is, a series of whistles: 'They spoke a language of very articulate whistling squeaks, which needed to be translated from its natural medium of nuclear-magnetic-resonance (there being no air to carry sound) into audible sounds' (275). Rather than being dubbed into English or subtitled, the communications are converted into whistles that work within the limited range of human hearing. Equivalent changes were made to the speech of the Soup Dragon, the Iron Chicken and the Froglets, who have little difficulty in understanding each other. Due to nervousness on the part of the BBC, Oliver Postgate provided an explanatory commentary to facilitate comprehension among the less astute members of the audience. There is evidence that he need not have bothered and that the language of the Clangers is comprehensible on its own terms:

without my voice-over. Afterwards I asked them whether they had been able to understand what the Clangers were saying.

'But of course,' said some. 'They are speaking perfect German.'

'But no,' said another. 'That is not so. They spoke only Swedish' (276-7)

The speech of the Clangers is perhaps a universal one. Postgate perhaps misstates when he says there is no air – presumably he meant little air and thus a slower speed of sound. Of course, Clangers still need to communicate when travelling through space away from their moon.

There are two further instances involving the Clangers which need to be discussed. The first is an episode of a *Doctor Who* serial, 'The Sea-Devils', originally broadcast on 26 February 1972. At the start of the serial the Doctor's Time Lord arch-nemesis, the Master, is confined in life-long punishment. On a television screen he watches an episode of *The Clangers* and is entranced by their antics – indeed starts to emulate their language. His jailer hurriedly claims that the Clangers are simply animated puppets, aimed at children. The makers of the drama were wise to use this conceit; clearly the Master would see the Clangers as a species to dominate and control, and it is difficult to see how such a peace-loving species as the Clangers, however resourceful they are, would be able to resist.

Finally there was the last episode to be made and broadcast, transmitted on Election Night, 10 October 1974. Postgate, despite being the grandson of George Lansbury who led the Labour Party during the 1930s, had grown disillusioned with the political process. Whilst it seemed perfectly sensible to have individual political parties shaped around political beliefs, with the rise of the professional politician there was a sense that arguments between parties could dominate parliament rather than the process of government. This could bring – and had brought – parliament into disrepute. Postgate wanted to put the case for breaking open the two-party monopoly and to expose the idiocies of electioneering. In three days Postgate put together footage of an election on the Clangers' moon, with Small Clanger campaigning on behalf of one of the Froglets.

With the exception of this episode, which lies in the vaults of the BBC archives, all of the episodes of *The Clangers* are available on video and DVD, and should be checked out. In an era when we are suspicious of the alien and the strange, it is worth returning for a further look at this most civilised of species, and wonder at what we still do not know.

Bibliography

- Baxter, Stephen (2002) 'Adventures in the 21st Century: The Future History of TV21', *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 224 (July/August): 4-8.
 Jeffries, Stuart (1999) *Mrs Slocombe's Pussy: Growing Up in Front of the Telly*, London: Flamingo.
 Postgate, Oliver (2000) *Seeing Things: An Autobiography*, London: Macmillan.
<http://www.clangers.co.uk>

© Andrew M. Butler 2003.

I took an episode of *The Clangers* to the 1984 conference [on television] in Germany and showed it to the participants



First Impressions

Book Reviews
edited by
Paul Billinger

All novels marked: [] are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Novel

All collections and anthologies marked: [] contain stories eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction

Kevin J. Anderson – *A Forest of Stars* []

Earthlight, London, 2003, 727pp, £10.99, t/b, ISBN 0-7434-6121-5

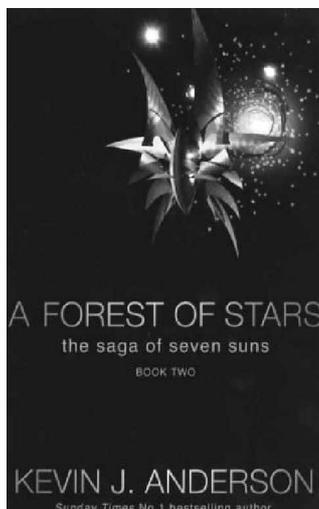
Reviewed by Peter Young

Back in 1991 Kevin Anderson wrote a small chapbook entitled *How to Increase Your Writing Productivity*, which, in small measure, may reflect a slightly undeserved reputation for quantity over quality. An acknowledged master of the competent tie-in novel, be it *Star Wars*, *The X-Files* or *Dune*, it sometimes seems that everywhere you look these days, there is Kevin J. Anderson. After *Hidden Empire*, book one of *The Saga Of Seven Suns*, 'Star Wars-lite' seemed a likely projection for this particular series – a panoramic space opera perhaps of more breadth than depth. *A Forest of Stars*, however, is an improvement on its predecessor, as the large cast of characters are beginning to find their own responses to roles forced on them, and we are given some necessary background reasoning behind the events of *Hidden Empire*.

What set the whole story in motion was a daring

concept Anderson openly credits to Gregory Benford: put a neutron star inside a gas giant, and you have a star reborn. That the use of this particular alien technology also unwittingly reignited an ancient interstellar war was *Hidden Empire's* untapped vein – the story moved forward at such pace that all Anderson's characters could do was react to the cascade of events, having no time to stand back and ask some vaguely philosophical questions such as "Just what have we done here?" The second volume, *A Forest of Stars*, picks up five years after *Hidden Empire's* cliffhanger ending, though that particular thread – the rediscovery of a new form of interstellar travel used by the lost Klikiss civilization – largely takes a back seat to other developments in both the human

and Ildiran Empires. The gas giant-inhabiting hydrogues are now beginning to launch unprovoked attacks on both



human and Ildiran colony worlds, and the war is escalating both in firepower and lost lives. While the various human and Ildiran societies try to consolidate into a more united front, we also learn more about the true nature of this ancient interstellar conflict and its other previously hidden participants, all of which shows the galaxy to be far more populous than once believed.

A Forest of Stars is certainly a more diverse read, though I can't escape the feeling that this is a 700-page preamble for a resurgence of the thread that ended *Hidden Empire*. But the edgier sides of the story are thankfully beginning to emerge: the increasing cynicism of King Peter, the ever more desperate manipulations of Chairman Basil

Wenceslas, the disillusionment of the Ildiran Prime Designate Jora'h, and the appallingly cruel situation forced upon his human lover Nira Khali at the hands of some considerably less likeable Ildirans. While the characters are now being pulled in some unexpected directions, to see some more of their self-doubt, angst and humour would still be welcome. If Anderson's short chapters don't allow for much in the way of introspection they work well enough for snappy storytelling once you get into their rhythm. But the growing theme of 'thwarted destinies' needs to be stronger still to give the series the depth it deserves; until then, while Anderson certainly has no problem taking you there, he may have difficulty engaging you.

Stephanie Bedwell-Grime – *Guardian Angel*

Telos, Tolworth, 2003, 201pp, £9.99, p/b, ISBN 1-903889-62-6

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Now, there's a well-known phrase which states that one should never judge a book by its cover. But when a cover comprises a voluptuous blonde standing before the fires of hell in a silver lamé catsuit, silver thigh-length boots with a PDA (sorry, locator) and toy pistol (sorry, interceptor) attached to her utility belt and casually brandishing her halo with that Crellm toothpaste sparkle, it's difficult not to jump to conclusions.

Porsche Winter has just achieved Guardian Angel status in the bureaucracy of Heaven. But she's been caught lusting after one of her charges, the 'bronzed' and 'beautiful' Alex Chalmers. Bad mistake, because a naughty demon from Hell manages to snatch his soul while she's not looking and make off directly to Hades with it. Now Alex is a stockbroker and everyone knows that a stockbroker with no soul is a terrible thing. In fact, the only thing worse is a lawyer with no soul, oh – lawyers don't have souls do they? (Only kidding litigious readers, please don't sue). With each new embezzlement that Alex commits he heads further towards damnation. But his new boss Lucifer has an even more nefarious plan up his satanic sleeve, involving the takeover of Heaven itself [insert demonic cackle here]. The Big Guy and all his archangels are far from impressed by the situation and Porsche has quite a job on her hands if she's going to fix everything to their satisfaction. It ain't gonna be easy...



As the cover predicts, we have another feisty supernatural heroine, in the post-Buffy mould, on the side of the good guys, but with a stubborn streak and adept at getting into trouble. Porsche is a half-breed; the daughter of Anne, Patron Saint of Housewives (Heaven) and Charon the Ferryman (Hell) – so she can fight on the side of good, but still give some attitude where required. *Guardian Angel* is nothing new, far from challenging and ultimately not very good. That said the story ticks along at a fair pace; quicker than an express train drop into the fiery pits of Hell.

The main problem is that the setting is, frankly, quite disturbing, despite the light-hearted romp on offer, and something you really wouldn't want to buy into. Imagine the scenario: you work in an office until you're 75 (because you won't be able to get a pension until then) and then you die. Where do you go? Well, Hell is hot and horrid, as is to be expected but Heaven is, well, a ghastly bureaucratic office with grumpy and overbearing angel managers. It's all a bit depressing really. Why on earth would you want to spend eternity up there as a reward for a lifetime of pious living down here? It would appear that the best option has to be Purgatory, it's a bit debauched and at least you can get a drink there.

[Available from www.telos.co.uk/]

Mark Chadbourn – *Wonderland*

Telos, Tolworth, 2003, 92pp, £25.00, deluxe h/b, ISBN 1-903889-15-4 (standard h/b £10, ISBN 1-903889-15-4)

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

The Sixties: a time of great social upheaval, a time of hope and disappointment, a flowering of new music, art and poetry, but also the decade of the death of Kennedy, Altamont and Vietnam. It was also the decade that gave birth to the initially inauspicious science fiction television show *Dr Who*. With *Wonderland*, another of the slim *Who* novellas produced by Telos, Mark Chadbourn goes back to

that time again, to January 1967, a few months before The Summer of Love, and to the corner of Haight and Ashbury, San Francisco, the ground zero of the Hippie revolution.

The streets are swarming with hippies, freaks and drop-outs. Newly arrived hippy-chick Summer is looking for her boyfriend who had arranged to meet her there but is nowhere to be found. She is soon offered help by a

mysterious Doctor (second incarnation) and his friends Ben and Polly. A drugged-up stoner lurches up to the four of them with a bundle under his arm. He unwraps it to reveal a cyberman's head that seems to evaporate before their very eyes... This just the first of several appearances of creatures and artefacts from the Doctor's past that seem to shimmer out of the winter fog. What is going on?

The search for both Summer's boyfriend and the reason for the apparitions from the Doctor's past will take them on a journey through the head shops, parties, concerts and communes into the heart of darkness that lies behind the hippie psychedelia. There's a new drug, Blue Moonbeams, those that take it seem to vanish into clouds of light, never to be seen again.

Chadbourne creates a real feeling of time and place. Real world personalities appear at the peripheries of the plot, such as the poet Alan Ginsberg and LSD guru Timothy Leary but there are obvious real-world analogies in the more prominent characters of Hunter S. Thompson-like newsman Jack Stimson and the hideous Goblin, a criminal drug-pusher and cult leader who is Charlie Manson in all but name.

Overall it's a good read – if a little oblique at times, that towards the end interestingly side-steps into the *X-Files* territory of secret government and men in black and avoids a neat TV-style tie-up with a more interesting closure. Recommended.

[Available from www.telos.co.uk]

Simon Clark – *Vampyrhic Rites* 

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2003, 504pp, £18.99, h/b, ISBN 0-340-81940-5

Reviewed by Mark Greener

After defeating the vampiric army of the Old Norse gods in *Vampyrhic*, David Leppington, Bernice Mochardi and Electra Charnwood went their different ways. But the threat hasn't passed. A young student, Luke Spenser, goes missing near Lazarus Deep, a lake in the North York Moors. Leppington, the heir to Thor's bloodline, realises that he must return to Yorkshire to defeat the vampires. He reunites with Bernice and Electra to prevent the pagan undead from rising again from Lazarus Deep...

You could, broadly and crudely, divide horror and dark fantasy into pulp and psychological fiction. On the one hand, you have the fast-moving, Grand Guignol horrors such as Herbert's *The Rats* or Smith's *The Crabs*. On the other, horror can probe the darker aspects of our psychology that we tend to sweep under our mental carpets: Lovecraft and Wilkin's *Fallen Angel* exemplify this tradition.

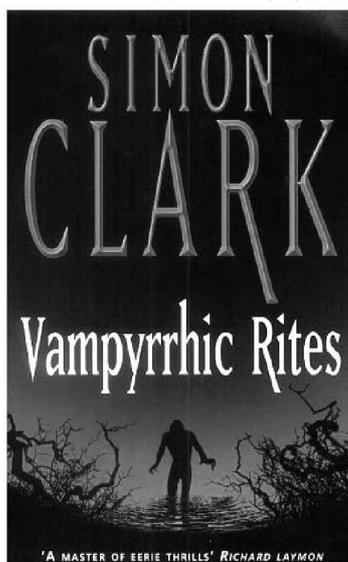
For me, Clark's book seemed to have little psychological sophistication or in depth characterisation. So *Vampyrhic Rites* falls more into the pulp tradition. But I felt that *Vampyrhic Rites* also failed as an adventure. It simply isn't fast-paced enough. There are sections where Clark shows that he can write effective, exciting narrative. For example, the diary left by one of the vampire's victims and the climax are well-paced and engaging.

Unfortunately, these sections are interspersed by page after page where nothing much happens. There's too much

about, for example, the teenage relationships among Luke's friends, Bernice's attempts to reinvent herself and Katrina, David's schizophrenic girlfriend. There's the odd scene of, I felt, gratuitous sex. Perhaps Clark thought that this would add psychological depth and engender empathy, but frankly, by about half way through I was bored. *Vampyrhic Rites* would, I feel, be markedly improved by cutting a good 150 pages.

I also felt that Clark missed several tricks. It would, for instance, have been interesting to make much more of Katrina's schizophrenia, counter-pointing her internal horrors with the reality of the terrors in Lazarus Deep. And the book depends on the Scandinavian sagas. Vampires aren't a heavy presence in Viking mythology or Scandinavian folk traditions. Yet Clarke doesn't really take the opportunity to develop this side. (I've not read the first book so I'm basing these comments solely on *Vampyrhic Rites*.) And the ensemble cast isn't, I felt, used effectively, with little real tension between the protagonists.

Indeed, I think the sheer number of people involved is one reason the book fails as a pulp adventure. Often pulp horror is most effective when focused around one person – Herbert's *The Rats* being a good example – that we can identify and empathise with. There are so many people in *Vampyrhic Rites* that I didn't know who to root for. Unless you really enjoyed the first book, I'd suggest *Vampyrhic Rites* is one to miss.



Arthur C. Clarke – *Reach for Tomorrow*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 166pp, £6.00, p/b ISBN 0-575-60046-2

Arthur C. Clarke – *The Other Side of the Sky*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 245pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-03988-4

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

These stories are old favourites, of course, and I've lost count of how often I've read some of them. This is sf of that uncannily interesting post-War period. It's astounding to

think that 'Rescue Party' (in *RFT*), which was Clarke's first published story, was written in 1945. Its alien point-of-view belongs to that school where physically different aliens

tend to act and react like humans, and the Campbellian pride in the “incredibly short period” which we’ve taken to become civilised looks like smugness now. But look again at the closing remark which could have been made by an Inca Emperor confronting half a dozen grimy and exhausted Spaniards, and you’ll see an ambivalence which pulls Clarke beyond that band of writers who think a twist in the tail is high art. Yes, Clarke does this, in ‘Technical Error’ and ‘A Walk in the Dark’, and they’re entertaining stories, but again, look at ‘The Fires Within’ where he adds another couple of unsettling sentences. ‘Trouble With the Natives’ is another alien-viewpoint story about would-be invaders having problems with first contact, and it’s not a million miles from Ray Bradbury’s ‘The Earth Men’, but whereas Bradbury’s tale is creepy and macabre Clarke, from the title and the ‘cheese-paring form-filers back at Base Planet’ on, might even be a wryly farcical look at an Empire which was packing its bags. In contrast ‘The Curse’ is a short and effective mood-piece which takes one of the most celebrated English icons and places it in the context of annihilation.

The Other Side of the Sky gives us two of Clarke’s most celebrated stories: ‘The Nine Billion Names of God’ and ‘The Star’, both, interestingly, giving us a God for whom humanity is merely, in the one case, a means to an end and in the other a focus which overrides all other questions of morality. God is either amoral (by human standards of morality) or non-existent. In each story, if we read carefully we end the tale puzzled. What exactly, is going to happen after the last words of ‘The Nine Billion Names of God’? And given that Christianity offers us (and, presumably, the inhabitants of the sacrificed planet) an immortal afterlife, is the ending of ‘The Star’ so shocking? There’s a sense of

design about each story which is slightly cold, even as the cosmic awe of ‘Out of the Sun’, which follows ‘The Star’, offers what I think is a more challenging vision of the universe. Re-reading this collection, it was the way Clarke’s science fiction seems to play with potential futures and give us *distorted* images which interested me. Currently, there’s a vividness and even poignancy about the stowaway Royal in ‘Refugee’ which wouldn’t have been there a couple of years ago – even as we look ironically upon a future which makes a British space presence everyday. And the collections of short-shorts which make up ‘The Other Side of the Sky’ and ‘Venture to the Moon’ impresses for similar reasons. They ought to be nothing more than squibs, yet the ‘farewell-to-the-father’ end of ‘Other Side’ and the way ‘Venture’ drolly ends by offering international co-operation against a threat worse than any invasion by bug-eyed monster show the work of someone who’s doing more than dramatising a journey from one bit of floating rock to another. This universe where Englishmen, Russians, and Americans fraternise on the moon seems far more alien now than it ever did in those far-off days when these stories were new. Not all of it is Clarke’s doing, but surely, as ‘The Songs of Distant Earth’ shows, he is quietly and effectively showing us the excitement, peril, and melancholy of change by means of writing which uncannily changes focus. These are stories which have by no means reached their sell-by date. Since Clarke’s early days sf has expanded, but if good writing means the ability to reach out to different audiences at different times then this is good writing.

Storm Constantine – *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure*

Tor, New York, May 2003, 496pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30346-9

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This is the fourth book of *Wraeththu*, the first three being *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit*, *The Bewitchments of Love and Hate*, and *The Fulfilments of Fate and Desire*, although the introduction claims it can be read as a stand-alone story. I haven’t read the first three books, and found it so baffling that I’d advise other readers to start with them.

Wraeththu are post-human hermaphrodites, survivors of an unspecified global military catastrophe. They don’t age, or seem subject to disease, but can be killed. They look like supernaturally beautiful adolescents with long hair and weird sex organs (details not given, how do they pee?), created (‘incepted’) from human boys through a blood-and-sex procedure administered by another Wraeththu (details not given). They try to form societies (with the dire results one might expect from societies composed entirely of adolescent boys), are either ascetically Apollonian or decadently Dionysian, hold Nameless Rituals, and have extra-good casual sex (details

not given); fortunately pregnancy requires the conscious intention of both partners and there appear to be no Wraeththu sexually transmitted diseases).



The book doesn’t have a plot, so much as a whole lot of stuff tumbling over itself to happen. Briefly, ignoring complications, deus-ex-machina extra-dimensional technology, and human Spirit Guides, the story opens with a Nameless Ritual and the birth of Lileem. Though clearly not human, Lileem looks too female to be Wraeththu, so she’s abandoned in the desert by her tribe, rescued by a lone Wraeththu who’s just screwed up the Nameless Ritual, and taken to an abandoned human house. There, through a series of accidents, she incepts Mima, an adolescent *girl* consumed with guilt for having aborted the inception of her bother Terez when they were both still human. (Another of Mima’s brothers, Pellaz,

was successfully incepted, killed, brought back from the dead by Thiede, the *first* ever Wraeththu (who incepted *him?*), and is now being groomed for the position of Divine

King. A fourth brother is named but never seen.)

Flick was briefly the lover of Cal, who horribly murdered Orien, the second ever Wraeththu and lover of Seel who Flick used to live with but who has been manipulated by Thiede into serving Pellaz. Cal is charismatic, insane, and another candidate for Divine King. Flick can cook, invent gods, and fix the plumbing. Flick also finds his way to the Abandoned House, whose inhabitants settle down to bickering and having sex. They also manage to successfully complete Terez' inception.

Then Tel-an-Kaa arrives, masquerading as a human woman. In fact she's a Kamagrian, the female equivalent of a Wraeththu. (Although both species seem to have the same sex organs, there are minor differences in body shape and major differences in psychology.) She has sensed the existence of Lileem, and wants to take her to the hidden

country of the Kamagrians. The whole household goes along.

Another set of misunderstandings and accidents reveals that Bad Things Happen when Wraeththu and Kamagrian have sex – they open a portal and get flipped into another reality. Lileem and Terez end up in a Library in a Pyramid, where Lileem discovers a stone book about Flick's deities. They are rescued by Pellaz and friends. The stone book turns into a stone bowl. Terez goes off Lileem, but as she's still obsessed with him, she drinks from the stone bowl and goes back through the portal. End of book. I'm left with a whole bunch of unanswered questions, dangling plot strands, and baffled frustrations. The earlier Wraeththu books have "an avid international following of devoted readers". From reading this one, I can't see why.

Philip K. Dick – *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*

Gollancz (SF Masterworks 52), London, 2003, 230pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07480-9

Philip K. Dick – *Cantata-140*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 188pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0 575 07459 0

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Barney Mayerson can see into the future. His employers use this talent to decide what will sell and what will not in the world of Perky Pat. Perky Pat is a doll; but not just a doll, her life, her house and its furnishings are the only thing that makes living on Mars bearable. But not alone. The drug Can-D allows its users to enter Perky Pat's world and share the experience of living Pat's life with the other users. But it can't last and Palmer Eldritch has come back from Proxima with a competitor which will change the world forever...

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch works on many levels. On the surface we have a world spiralling towards heat death as global warming runs out of control. Under that we have the ersatz world that Perky Pat Layouts Inc. are creating with their dolls and Can-D. Then there's the character interplay as the people involved grind along together. But ultimately, this book is a mystery. Who is Palmer Eldritch? What does he really want? Dick knots all of these strands together in his own inimitable way and in the end, as happens in many Philip K. Dick stories, he poses more questions than he answers...

Longtime sf readers will know *Cantata-140* as *The Crack in Space*. A little bit of history: *Cantata-140* was the name of the short novel published in *F&SF*, later expanded to *The Crack in Space* and first published in Britain in 1970 in *A Philip K. Dick Omnibus* by Sidgwick & Jackson. Methuen published a paperback edition in 1977. This new

edition from Gollancz, now retitled *Cantata-140*, is a page-for-page duplicate of that 1977 edition.

The solution to an overpopulated Earth is simple: stack the excess population in voluntary deep-freeze units. Of course, they can't stay there forever, so presidential candidate Jim Briskin has pledged to find a solution. Then one day the answer is found. A malfunctioning jiffy-scuttler opens a crack to another world where we can send our excess population...

Dick skilfully uses this background to highlight his usual line-up of maladjusted individuals. This book is full of political manipulation, corporate cover-ups and, the staple of Dick's work, the tired, confused everyman just trying to get along.

Philip K. Dick wrote a lot of stuff. Everyone has their own favourites (I like *Flow My Tears...* but hate *The Man in the High Castle*) and so to place these books in perspective, on a scale of potboiler to 10, *Cantata-140* has to be a low 3 or 4. The plot moves along nicely enough, but in the end I was left with the feeling that not a lot happened. On the same scale I would place *Palmer Eldritch* up there at 8 or 9. The many layers of meaning and the complications of plot and exposition of ideas add the extra that make this worth reading again to see what else you can get out of it.

David and Leigh Eddings – *The Elder Gods*

Voyager, London, 2003, 432pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 0-00-715758-4

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

The latest offering from this best-selling duo is the first in a new series (trilogy?) and has no connection at all with their last book, *The Redemption of Althalus*.

The story is set in a land called Dhrall. Shaped by the Elder Gods, they eventually tire of their work and create more Gods so that creation can continue while they rest.

The Elder Gods actually rest for 25,000 years, during which time the Younger Gods continue in their stead whilst they get their heads down. The land of Dhrall has been split into four completely individual domains to the North, East, South and West, each overseen by one of the Gods. In the middle, however, is the wasteland, and this is the domain

of That-Called-The-Vlagh. Nobody knows where the Vlagh came from, only that they are evil and keep themselves to themselves in the wastelands.

So then, the plot of this first book is a stirring by That-Called-The-Vlagh whose aim, of course, is world domination. In order to prepare for the forthcoming threat to their creation, the Younger Gods are up in the morning before the old Gods have gone to bed (as it were). Famous for their cheeky, young, manipulative female Gods, our intrepid authors have devised not one, but eight Gods to play around with. The Lord of the Wasteland is planning a major assault so the Gods have to recruit armies to do the fighting for them. Naturally, the armies recruited are historically enemies themselves, so some work on attitudes

has to be done, and the young Goddess Zelana is just the person to do it.

I have to say that although this book is written with all the charm and accessibility of their previous books, there really isn't anything new in here. Even their unique dialogue has lost its charm and is now sickly and tiresome (the constant and irritating use of 'neighbour' in previous books becomes 'friend' this time around). I don't think the word 'neighbour' is used once throughout.

The Elder Gods is not actually a bad book in itself, and would entertain any new reader royally, but I've already read this one several times before – whatever the authors want to call it.

Simon A. Forward – *Shell Shock* [C] Telos, Tolworth, 2003, 105pp, £25, deluxe h/b, ISBN 1-903889-17-0 (standard h/b, £10, ISBN 1-903889-16-2)
Reviewed by Martin Potts

Shell Shock is another in the sequence of *Dr Who* novellas from Telos Publishing. As with previous novellas reviewed in *Vector*, the limited edition deluxe hardback is beautifully produced. Included is a striking frontispiece by Bob Covington and an enlightening foreword by Guy N. Smith. Smith is an appropriate choice, being author of the 1976 novel *Night of the Crabs*, a lifeform which, given the title of the story, it will come as no surprise to learn, soon become a very real threat to the Doctor in this particular adventure.

The story features the sixth Doctor (as portrayed by Colin Baker) and his assistant Peri. The TARDIS has materialised on a vessel adrift on a predominantly oceanic world. While Peri takes the opportunity to do some diving and the Doctor engages in a spot of fishing, disaster strikes. They immediately become separated in such a manner that before long they each resign themselves to the total loss of the other. The Doctor finds land and humanoid company. Although this new acquaintance is far from psychologically stable, he and his devoted band of companions may at least provide some clues to resolve the mystery of the state of this planet and ultimately some means by which the Doctor

can recover his TARDIS. The companions turn out to be intelligent crab-like entities and their function and origin prove to be fundamental to the Doctor's predicament.

However, this tale takes a far darker path than any other *Dr Who* adventure I have encountered, as Peri descends into a personal hell from which there seems no escape. Her journey is at times harrowing and provides insight into the background of her character. Simon Forward develops the empathy with her character well, whilst not slowing the narrative, and leads the reader through her torments in a precise and measured manner. There is no glorification of her predicament here, more a deep sorrow which is communicated very well to the reader. He begins the tale with the appropriate high ratio of questions to answers, which keeps one turning the pages and, satisfactorily, ties the many strands together in the final reel. The story never feels rushed or over-long, fitting perfectly the novella format. Be warned, this is no jolly trip for the Doctor, but definitely a tragedy, and one which never insults the reader.

[Available from www.telos.co.uk]

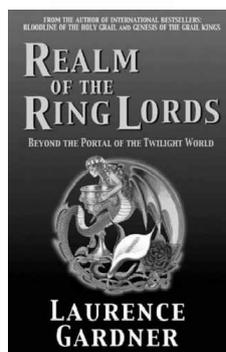
Laurence Gardner – *The Realm of the Ring Lords*

Element (HarperCollins), London, 2003, 413pp, £8.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-714293-5

Reviewed by Simon Morden

When I started reviewing for *Vector*, I promised myself that if I couldn't find anything constructive to say about a book, I wouldn't say anything at all. Two books in, and I've broken my promise.

This non-fiction book claims that when Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, he wasn't writing a work of fiction. He was chronicling events that took place at the very dawn of civilisation, which come down to us today as myth and legend. The Ring Lords were Sumerian rulers, descended from the god Anu, and carried in their blood the Grail power that would give rise to the Pharonic dynasties, the Celtic fisher-kings, and the 'messiah' Joshua Bar-Joseph.



Jesus, set about eradicating this history. They burned the Great Library of Alexandria, usurped the Grail blood-line dynasties with their own 'kings', and mercilessly persecuted those supposed heretics who tried to keep alive the power of the Ring and the Grail. The church, and specifically Roman Catholicism, are responsible for annihilating anything that might gainsay their world view or challenge their authority.

Gardner's work suffers terminally from extreme anti-Judeo-Christian rhetoric, an idiosyncratic view of history that doesn't hold up to the slightest scrutiny, a use of linguistics that a simple check in a good dictionary reveals as self-serving and misleading, and a tendency to source material from his own earlier books to prove

The Christian church, having corrupted the gnosis of

arguments.

Of course, the gaping hole in the entire elaborate façade is that Tolkien never pretended *The Lord of the Rings* was anything but a work of fiction. The old man hasn't been so long dead for him not to have left copious interviews, papers and letters making precisely that point.

When Umberto Eco wrote *Foucault's Pendulum*, he was aiming his brilliant satire on mystical mumbo-jumbo at precisely this sort of book. Everyone involved with *The Realm of the Ring Lords* should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

William Gibson & Bruce Sterling – *The Difference Engine* Gollancz, London, 2003, 383pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-575-60029-2
Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

The Difference Engine was first published some 13 years ago and has just been re-issued with a snazzy new cover and cover quotes from 'The Face' and Ridley Scott. It is clearly being aimed at a more mainstream audience.

The book takes as its starting position that the Difference Engine designed by Charles Babbage was not only built and worked, but that it also led to the creation of the computing industry in the early 19th century. This is an alternate history novel dressed up in the guise of steampunk. Where it differs dramatically from the bulk of steampunk is that it is less concerned with using the Victorian backdrop as a canvas for an exciting tale than it is with re-imagining the Victorian world given that computing power is available with the engines.

The Difference Engine is made up of five 'Iterations' and a 'Modus' (chapters and epilogue/appendix). Each of these could be read quite independently of the rest of the book, although there are common characters and intersecting storylines. The plot, such as it is, is not its strong point. There are tales that seem to pass by largely unresolved. It is almost as though the reader is being presented with a view of a time and the individual stories come to the surface and then fade away again. There are frequent references to a French super-engine (The Napoleon) but the real significance of it is never made clear. The bulk of the book follows Edward Mallory, a savant (scientist), as he becomes mixed up in this by his gallantry at a race meeting. He intervened to stop the theft of a mysterious box from a lady who asks him to take it into safe-keeping. As a result some

group, most likely associated with the shadowy Captain Swing, is out to destroy him and his reputation. All this is taking place in the Great Stink of 1855. This is a heat wave which exacerbates the effects of pollution generated by the information revolution, the engines being steam-powered and burning a great deal of fuel.

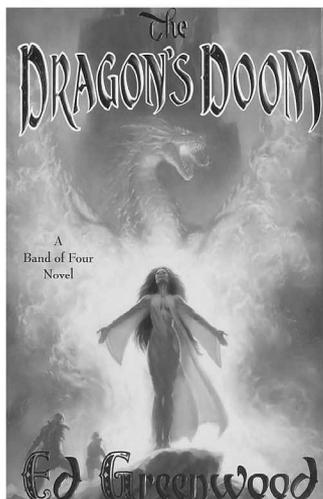
The real strength of the book lies in the world that has been created. A Victorian world is presented very carefully, with a history that dates to the separation from the world that we know as a result of the Difference Engine. Both society and the sciences have been subtly altered and even a variation of the cinema is developed as a result of the engines, the Kinotrope, a sophisticated form of Magic Lantern show. The Modus covers a lot of this history in the form of various newspaper reports and letters, bringing the period covered right up to the 1990's. Many of the characters are real figures. Byron is Prime Minister, Disraeli is a pulp novelist. I strongly suspect that the greater the reader's knowledge of the Victorian era, the more there is to discover.

This is a demanding book that makes some sizable assumptions about the reader's knowledge of Victorian England. Anyone expecting a cyber-thriller set in the 19th century will be disappointed. For anyone else, this is an intriguing book that comes highly recommended.

Ed Greenwood – *The Dragon's Doom* Tor, New York, 2003, 415pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30223-3
Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

The Dragon's Doom is the fourth in the *Band of Four* series of fantasy novels. Set in Aglirta, the war-torn 'Kingless Land', earlier volumes have told of the defeat of the forces of the Serpent (evil) by the Dragon (good) and the enthronement of a boy king. Now the king's four overdukes, and one other, scour the countryside for the barons and wizards who took up arms against him, while the Church of the Serpent seeks to dominate Aglirta by letting loose the Blood Plague across the land.

I have not read the earlier books in the series, but I was struck by the familiarity of the scenario in which a group of



companions, two sorceresses and three warriors, wander around a pseudo-mediaeval landscape and are ambushed by monstrous foes, fighting them off with weapons or magic according to each character's various skills or talents. In this book, magic spells can take the form of defence, such as turning aside a hail of arrows, or attack, such as hurling bolts of fire at an enemy. Complications ensue if one Dwaer, a sort of magic stone, is activated too near another. When characters are infected by the Blood Plague, a sorceress must use a healing spell before they can continue with the battle. Decisions as to where the Band of Four should go to seek

wizards who might possess a Dwaer could almost be made by the shaking of a dice...

The Dragon's Doom is actually a description of a fantasy role-playing game, its cover helpfully informing the reader that the author is the creator of the "best-selling and award-winning *Forgotten Realms* role-playing campaign setting". At one point a character even explores the corridors of a castle while another character instructs her from afar (by magic) where to go and what to do, immediately recalling to mind the role of a Dungeon Master in *D&D*. On another occasion our heroes are confronted by a monster, a "sarath of the swamp" which, as the warrior Hawkril informs the rest of his party, has the

ability to slow prey or put small creatures to sleep, and can hurl spell-bolts from amid the spines along its back – I almost expected Hawkril to inform the Dwaer-wielding sorceress Embra Silvertree that she would have to throw a double six to defeat this creature.

The Dragon's Doom does nothing to persuade me that the format of role-playing games, (lacking the basics of well-rounded characters, let alone character development, original background or a compelling plot) can be successfully transformed into a novel. Role-playing game fans might find material for their hobby within its pages, but I cannot think why anyone else should open this book.

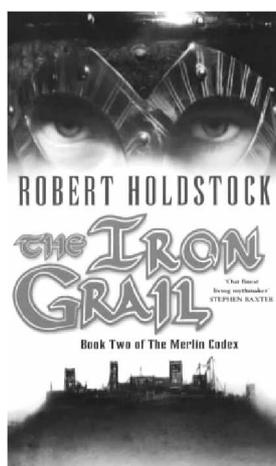
Robert Holdstock – *The Iron Grail*

Earthlight, London, 2003, 418pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 07434 40323

Reviewed by Jan A. Malique

I'm not sure whether my review will do justice to such a monumental piece of work. The best way of describing this tale is to imagine it as another potion Cerridwen is diligently concocting in her cauldron – filled with many possibilities, different timelines, destinies, and histories. She sits back, putting in a little here and taking out a little there, her deep, shadowed eyes missing nothing. This bitter brew is then offered to us and we have to drink in order to go on this journey of exploration.

Merlin leads us through misty, dreamlike (but not dreamy) landscapes, peopled by the living and the non-living (the only way of describing the wraiths who have lived and are yet to live), pitted in bloody battle for lost territory, a fortress, Taurovinda. It is here that the veils between the worlds melt and the inhabitants of the shadows steal forward into this reality. The dead are encroaching upon the living for some reason and the protagonists of this tale are brought together, however unwillingly, to prevent their world from falling into the gaping mouth of the Otherworld. Weaving in and out of this is Jason in endless pursuit of the apparently murderous Medea and his lost sons. This is the stage on which the destinies of Merlin,



Urtha, Jason, Medea, Niiv, and the Argonauts, amongst many, many others are acted out. The lives of these people are coloured by thoughts and actions filled with revenge, madness, and regret. They have pursued vendettas throughout the centuries, searched for answers, ached for redemption and satisfaction of honour.

At one point Merlin makes an acute observation, "we sow the seeds of our own despair, but even knowing this, we seem to go on sowing". The inhabitants of this strange world know this too well, yet if they do not continue to sow how can they learn the lessons the world has to offer? The gaining of wisdom is not always an easy, painless process and we do not function in isolation from others within the universe, each person's actions affect so many other lives. Our world-weary Prophet can offer testimony to this.

I have to be honest and say that this book needs to be read several times to get a flavour of its true essence. My reading of it may appear vague but I felt as if I was looking into a deep, dark, mysterious pool catching glimpses of strange things moving around in the waters. They spoke to me, but of what?

Jake Horsley – *Matrix Warrior: Being The One*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 232pp, £6.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07527-9

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

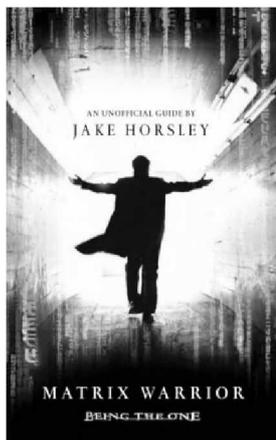
Matrix Warrior is an unofficial spin-off from *The Matrix* film series predicated on the notion that the story of the 'original' 1999 film is literally true. Or metaphorically true. It's hard to tell, as at different points author Jake Horsley argues both ways. Either we are literally living in the virtual world postulated by *The Matrix*, blissfully unaware that we are immersed in a collective dream, or we are plugging ourselves ever further into our technological modern world, divorcing ourselves from the natural reality of the earth and the social and moral consequences of our life style. In which case time would be better spent reading Naomi Klein's *No Logo* and William Blum's *Rogue State: A Guide*

to the World's Only Superpower.

Horsley's text is written from a narrow cultural point of view. Like many young would-be English intellectuals he assumes religion is dead because it plays no part in his life. "...if religion wasn't something that had been forever delegated to the ranks of the damned as "uncool'..." A statement which must come as bemusing news to billions of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. Instead the author postulates *The Matrix* as a meta-myth, a myth about myth, then casually embraces the Gaia myth of a self-aware creator earth – 'The Earth created humans and all other living creatures, presumably for its own good reasons...'

And we have to ask on what basis is the presumption made that the earth is both sentient and of good intent? Why is this presumption more plausible or superior to any religion?

If we go back to the introduction we see where Horsley is coming from; a generation which, having rejected everything else, apparently has no recourse but to take meaning from movies, even if they are commercial products of the very 'Matrix' he denounces, which film is '...for younger generations at least, the holy book of our times.' Not just another movie, but the greatest and most popular action movie ever made. (You can stop laughing now). Time for a reality check: *The Matrix* wasn't even the most popular action film of 1999, lagging way behind *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, while it is inarguable that *Star Wars* (1977) is the most enduring popular action movie yet made. As for *The Matrix* being the best action movie ever made, apart from stopping on the biggest anticlimax in modern cinema, it is way too derivative of John Woo and James Cameron, who have each made many films which leave *The Matrix* standing. Play it last in a triple-feature with *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1992) and *Face/Off* (1997) and *The Matrix* is revealed as a derivative action-lite fanboy wannabe. Read *Simulacron-3*



by Daniel F. Galouye (1964) and *A Dream of Wessex* by Christopher Priest (1978) and it's obvious the only thing *The Matrix* gave the world was 'bullet time'. In 1999 alone *Fight Club* delivered far more radical cinema questioning the nature of its protagonist's reality.

But then we get to the heart of the matter. Just like the teenage sf telepathic power fantasy novels of old (for example James Blish's *Jack of Eagles*), *The Matrix* plays best to socially disenfranchised male teenagers who do not have the skills, knowledge or power to make their mark on the world. Neo may be this generation's Luke Skywalker or John Connor, but Jake Horsley merely uses *The Matrix's* storyline as the basis for a messy rehash of alienated young man clichés better examined by Colin Wilson in *The Outsider* fifty years ago. One might even suggest, taking the opportunity to be as partisan as *Matrix Warrior* itself, Mr Horsley could find some of those answers he seeks in places he so readily dismisses; sf writer C.S. Lewis' 'Mere Christianity' covers much the same ground with infinitely greater perception and lucidity. *Matrix Warrior* simply gives the reader a headache trying to decipher constantly contradictory, unsubstantiated and nonsensical arguments.

Duncan Hunter – A Martian Poet In Siberia

1st Books Library, Bloomington, 2002, 176pp, £11.58, p/b, ISBN 1-4033-2357-7

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

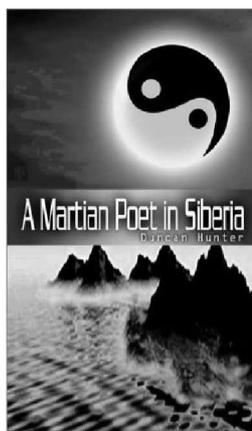


What an unexpected little gem of a book! *A Martian Poet In Siberia* is the unprepossessing tale of a limited and delicate Martian colony, the only

known survivors of a massive meteor impact on Earth that has wiped out all humanity, if not quite all life. It's a solid, if not a new, sf idea.

Han, the book's narrator, has lived all his life on Mars but joins one last small expedition that hopes to try and recolonise Earth. That's pretty much the entirety of the plot, but within such a simple summation lurks a beautiful short novel (more of a novella really).

The book is supposed to be a memoir left behind by Han and his fellow Martian settlers on Earth for the future. It intersperses remembrances of Han's upbringing on Mars with snippets of 'historical' information and longer musings upon the meaning and possible future of humanity. Han is of mixed parentage and ancestry but clearly it is his Chinese lineage that has moulded him the most – that and spending his life on an entirely dead and deadly world. His narration is of a measured and philosophical nature – no ravaging rays and implacable invaders here, he muses more about his own



alien-ness in coming to a devastated but quickly recovering Earth he has never seen from a barren Mars he knows well.

Han is wistful and open-minded rather than seized by any driving pioneer spirit to repopulate the Earth, recognising the astonishing luck that has preserved them thus far and which will be needed for them to continue. He is humble before the all-too-well-known unconscious power of the universe and in recognising the fragility of the life within it. This is a mode of telling rather underused in Western science fiction I think, because often unsuited to the positivity and brazen sense of wonder underlying more traditional American and British sf.

The author, Duncan Hunter, lives in Hong Kong and the whole of this book has an Oriental flavour, from the philosophical musings to the poetry. It's a very gentle, quiet and understated tale replete with ideas enough for a book twice the length. Given humankind's parlous state of affairs in *A Martian Poet In Siberia* I think it sets exactly the right tone: cautious and introspective, but hopeful.

This is an understated and heart-warming piece of writing that deserves republishing as soon as possible for a much larger audience.

Greg Keyes - *The Briar King*

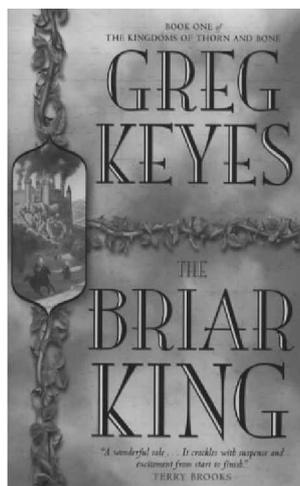
Tor UK, London, 2003, 552pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 1-4050-3351-7

Reviewed by Estelle Roberts

With *The Briar King*, book one of *The Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone*, Greg Keyes has produced a traditional high fantasy novel, which is both very readable and has a degree of depth.

The main plotline is based around the lives of several very different characters. These include Stephen Darige, a young, scholarly priest, several members of the royal family of Crotheny and Asper White, the King's holter, or forest keeper. One of the first indications that something is very wrong in this normally peaceful land comes when Asper discovers that an almost supernatural pollutant force has poisoned areas of the forest and killed much of the wildlife. This appears to be connected to a plot to kill the Queen of Crotheny and her daughters, which is foiled in part by her new bodyguard, Neil MeqVren, a young man absolutely determined to prove himself worthy of his recently attained station. Stephen, meanwhile, is very troubled by the behaviour of a group of monks he encounters at his new monastery and the seemingly evil content of ancient documents that he is required to translate. These seemingly disparate plotlines are linked by the ancient myth of the malevolent Briar King, whose return will mark the end of the world as they know it, if certain criteria are not met, and he is angered. Needless to say, this will be the case.

The Briar King does contain a fair few standard fantasy



elements; large mythical beasts coming to life, a gypsy-like race of humanoid entities, and murderous courtly intrigue. Some of the characters are also a little stereotypical; the weak king, the young, rebellious princess, an out of favour knight, the gruff woodsman of few words and the learned priest, who come to respect each other as they are forced into an alliance. Others, such as the psychopathic, politically-aware prince who exacts an extreme revenge on his twin sister for not asking his permission to marry, are more intriguing. However they are all very well-developed and easily engage the reader's interest and sympathy, particularly those who undertake journeys of growth and self discovery through the course of the novel.

As with some other fantasy stories, there is an ecological element in evidence. Human actions have caused environmental damage. The Briar King's forest is held to be sacrosanct, and to harm it in any way will cause terrible repercussions, hence the employment of Asper White to protect it. With a very interesting backstory, which tells of the famous victory of the Born Queen (from whom the current royal house of Dare are descended) over a race called the Skasloi, who held humans in slavery, and a dramatic cliffhanger ending, this story will tempt many readers to continue the series.

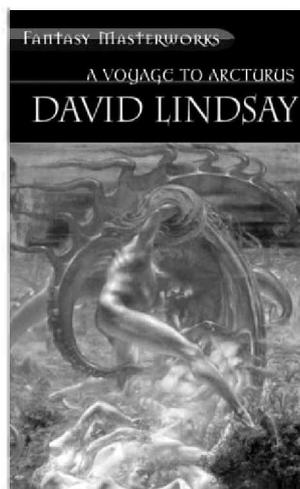
David Lindsay – *A Voyage to Arcturus*

Gollancz (Fantasy Masterworks), London, 2003, 280pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07483-3

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This book, which first appeared in 1920, tells the story of the journey of a man named Maskull to Tormance, a planet which orbits Arcturus. Once there, he journeys through a variety of landscapes, meets a succession of strange and wonderful beings, and undergoes a series of tests in his search for an ambiguous deity whose name and nature is never clearly defined. The work is more fable than novel and I have to admit that for my taste the allegory is too close to the surface.

Part of the reason I never felt fully engaged with the book is the nature of Maskull himself. He has no background; we learn little or nothing of his life before the voyage, or how he came to the point where he enters the action. Once he has set out on his quest he metamorphoses along with his surroundings, so that it's hard for the reader to feel that they know very much about him. I was never convinced, for example, by the ease with which he is led into violence, and there's little attempt to



portray a realistic human reaction to it. The mystery which surrounds the other characters makes them easier to accept within the surreal landscape of Tormance, but there's little psychological depth to any of them.

Another difficulty I found was with the structure. The opening of the book takes place on Earth, at a séance where a number of characters are introduced, and their relationships developed, so that the reader is led to believe they will be important: that this will be their story. However, once Maskull and the others who will be his travelling companions appear, the participants in the séance disappear completely from the book; this whole introductory section is only peripherally connected to what follows. Later, the picaresque nature of the narrative means that before the reader can get to know any particular set of surroundings or group of people, Maskull moves on.

There's no denying the breadth and variety of Lindsay's imagination, in the way he portrays the world of Tormance, its inhabitants, and its social structures. There's almost too much richness; while each successive area is vividly described, it's hard to get a sense of Tormance as a whole. It's not a realistic and consistent alien world, rather the backdrop for the ideas Lindsay wishes to convey.

In the end – and this was clearly deliberate on the part of the author – the issues are unresolved. Lindsay avoids didacticism, preferring to allow his readers to think and make up their own minds. Even with reservations, I found the book interesting, and I was pleased to revisit it in this new edition.

David I. Masson – *The Caltraps Of Time*

Cosmos Books/Ansible Editions, Canton, 2003, 239pp, £14.40, t/p, ISBN 1-59224-106-9

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

I think it's a measure of the quality of the ten stories in *The Caltraps Of Time* that not until you finish reading them and notice the 'first publication' dates do you realise that even the baby of the bunch, 'Dr Fausta', comes from the darkest depths of 1974. Perhaps even more surprising is that *The Caltraps Of Time* contains all the short fiction Mr Masson has ever published (usually in *New Worlds*), so it can pretty much be said that he has never published a really duff piece of work.

To begin at the beginning (as most of these stories do, but with time-travel of one sort or another being a favourite subject they frequently end at the beginning too), 'Traveller's Rest' gets this book off to a phenomenal start. In a milieu that's a cross between Christopher Priest's *Inverted World* and the super-high gravity planet Moab in Book Three of Alan Moore's *Halo Jones*, a soldier fighting in an endless war against an unseen enemy is sent home from the front on leave. 'Home', however, is down the time gradient so that when he is eventually recalled some (for him) 20 years later only seconds have passed at the front. It's not an easy story to grasp at first, but with a little thought and patience it is, I think it's fair to say, worthy of being called a 'classic'.

The next story, 'A Two-Timer', is the tale of a man of 1683 who finds an abandoned time machine and visits the future. Well, 1964 anyway. It's a well written and occasionally amusing piece of light satire with a nice loop in its tale, unlike 'Not So Certain', the next story. While in 1967 this exploration of linguistics might have been

challenging and rather daring; now it seems very dry and overburdened with discussions about the pronunciation of alien words that contain no vowels. It is, at least, a sharp-eared rejoinder to the 'universal translators' of much modern TV sf.

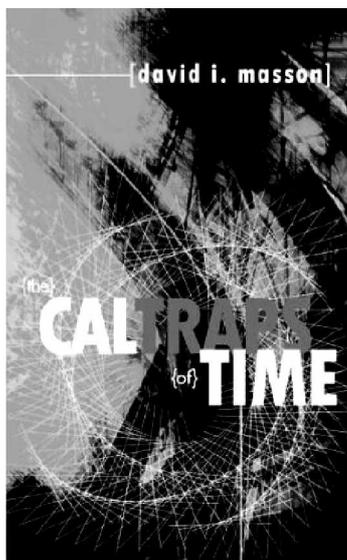
Two stories, 'Dr Fausta' and 'The Transfinite Choice' (hmm, that sounds like a good name for a band actually), deal with the complexities of time travel accompanied by alternate universes. Of the two, 'Dr Fausta' is the more enjoyable simply because it's so ludicrously and comically over-complicated – deliberately so, I presume.

'Take It Or Leave It' is an interesting narrative experiment, a sort of split-screen dystopian nightmare – much superior to the seemingly *Daily Mail*-inspired though thematically similar 'The Show Must Go On'. And then there's 'Lost Ground', a story that reminded me of nothing so much as Quentin Tarantino's *Dusk Till Dawn*, if only because a story that appears

so obviously about to get a sensible job in a bank suddenly strips naked and runs screaming into the sea. That said, both are strong stories, although some of the elements may have become overly familiar to readers by now.

Given how well some of these stories compare to quite a lot of modern sf I can only imagine how extraordinary they must have appeared back in the sixties, so they're very welcome back into print.

[Available from www.wildesidepress.com or as an e-book from www.ansible-editions.co.uk]



Anne McCaffrey – *A Gift of Dragons*

Bantam, London, 2003, 399pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 0593051513

Reviewed by Pamela Stuart

This latest dragon book is, unlike the rest of the series, illustrated, in sepia, with some full-page illustrations and decorative borders to every page. A small hardback volume, with an exciting cover illustration, it will undoubtedly attract every aficionado of Anne McCaffrey's dragon series.

Excitement will, however, be lessened on closer inspection, when it becomes obvious that this collection of four stories contains only one new one. 'The Smallest Dragon Boy' was first seen in the magazine 'Science Fiction

Tales', back in 1973, and then in 1977 reappeared in a collection of Anne McCaffrey stories *Get Off The Unicorn*. 'The Girl Who Heard Dragons' was the title-story for another collection in 1996. 'Runner of Pern' was McCaffrey's contribution to a collection *Legends* edited by Robert Silverberg in 1998. That leaves only the fourth story 'Ever the Twain' to tickle the imagination.

This has a new slant in that it deals with a pair of twins, boy and girl, inseparable in all they do, and deeply empathetic. The boy yearns to be a dragonrider and yet

when the dragons come on Search it is the girl who is selected, while the boy has to fight for his chance to be a candidate. There are some interesting problems raised; if only one of them is Chosen, how will the other be affected by the telepathic link between dragon and rider, and even if both become Riders, will the link be a help or a hindrance?

In a way, these four stories seem intended mainly to appeal to the younger reader, each of them having the young main character's struggle to win against heavy odds as the theme. They should take their place among the books about Menolly and Piemur in their early days, but

those earlier stories had a zest which seems lacking in this latest one.

There are, of course, not many new avenues of exploration open to the author of such a prolific series, but there are still gaps in the earlier history of Pern; the social divisions, which must have happened during or after one of the plagues and the long intervals where the dangers of Thread were forgotten, have somehow never been explained. Most readers would probably rather have had a book from that period than this rehash, however pretty the edition.

Donald Moffitt – *Jovian*

ibooks, New York, 2003, 421pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-7434-5277-1

Reviewed by Simon Bisson

Science fiction has many sub-genres. While many, like space opera, have had recent reinventions, one that is still waiting for its time in the sun is the travelogue. Perhaps best handled by writers like Jack Vance and Larry Niven, and taking a cue from the incredible journeys of characters like Candide, Munchausen and Gulliver, sf travelogues send an innocent abroad – ready to explore the world of the author's imaginings.

Jovian is a travelogue, and Jarls Anders is such an innocent. Born and bred in the aerostats that are man's foothold in the atmosphere of Jupiter, Jarls is a man out of touch with the sophisticated Inner System. But he's also a man adapted to Jupiter's gravity, and a resource the inner worlds are crying out for: cheap muscle. Trapped in a struggle for resources with the rich worlds, Jupiter is a world unable to shake its economic dependence. Jarl's wish to find a better way is the cue for his journey across Moffitt's bustling solar system.

When a job offer turns out to be something more dangerous, Jarls ends up in debt slavery on Venus. He's become just another cog in an ambitious and dangerous terraforming programme. But he's also the victim of a system designed to keep him the lowest of the low, a system that sees him as a potential rebel and tries to destroy his dreams of going home. When he prevents a rape, his contract is sold to Earth.

Earth is a genteel place, masking oppression in the

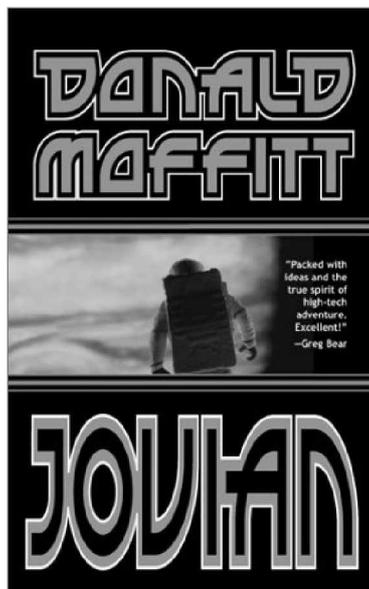
shape of a neo-Edwardian feudal society, built by a corporate aristocracy and ruled from Lichtenstein. It's 'Upstairs Downstairs' in the future, with added mammoths. Jarls' misfortunes continue, seduced and abandoned, and then thrown to the wolves. A time in the underworld is followed by a stint in a Praetorian Guard (with all that entails), and an eventual return home.

This is hard sf, minus most of the machines. Moffitt is concentrating on the people in his world. Unfortunately this is the weakest point of the book. While a lot of work has gone into the world-building, Moffitt's characters remain drawn from central casting. Despite all his trials and tribulations, Jarls remains the eternal innocent – and the most interesting character is a Jupiter native who can only communicate with a dolphin.

Jovian is also an attempt at political discourse. Moffitt is dealing with the issues of debt slavery, and of the relationship between the developing and the developed world. While his analogies may be simplistic, they are heartfelt – though his solutions may seem to be a

little *deus ex machina*.

While Moffitt is a capable and interesting writer, his reach has exceeded his grasp in *Jovian*. The politics are simple and the characters simpler still. However, it's still an unusual romp through a well thought out piece of world-building.



Simon Morden – *Heart*

Razor Blade Press, Swansea, 2002, 416pp, £4.99, t/p, ISBN 0954 226704

Reviewed by Chris Amies

Heart begins as a peculiar murder mystery. A couple die... he is killed on his doorstep, she is hit by a speeding car. Well, of course there's a connection. Detective Torsten Neubauer doesn't need to be paranoid to believe that. Paranoid is something he's good at, because it's 1986 and the Berlin wall has yet to fall, and Neubauer seems like some kind of Cold War avatar hovering around the streets

of Thatcherite London. This is a time when seemingly uncontrollable changes are afoot everywhere, the Tyneside shipyards are closing down and somewhere in the corridors of power it isn't impossible that military coups could hatch.

Gideon Smith, the witness of the second killing, gets caught up in a war that is much older. Neubauer is an outsider in a society still alien to him, but is able to rely on

his Berlin copper's sense. Smith, a Yorkshire office-worker handed a mysterious sword, becomes an outsider everywhere, a pilgrim on the roads of Britain, cast out from the modern world. The sword bears inscriptions which need translating, and once translated, the mystery deepens further. The reader is drawn in by smoke and mirrors and a world in which what is real and what isn't shift places, in the way they do in John Fowles's *The Magus* but without Conchis's magickal posturing. Quite simply, the runic inscription can't be what it seems to be: either it, or the Universe, is wrong. A sinister warlord arises who, once again, can't be what he seems, according to Smith's research on him, and Smith has visions of the future that beckons should he get into power.

Smith, hunted by mysterious forces as well as by Neubauer, who believes he's connected to the murders, has to work everything out for himself, while becoming something other than a twentieth-century man, something closer to a mediaeval knight roaming the country and

righting wrongs. Fortunately he has help in his quest, from a Scottish folksinger called Ruth - she's another outsider, as damaged as he has become recently - and from a mysterious stranger who is somewhat more than he appears. Given the legends that are being evoked, it's probably inevitable that the reader may detect who he is. On one side are ranged the forces of light - or love and individual responsibility - and the other, darkness. I'm not sure it needs Atlantis to come into the story, but come it does.

This is a forcefully written novel drawn very sparingly, with a starkness that reflects the story. Central characters come to unfortunate ends - which is often a hard choice for a novelist to make. I hope Simon Morden follows it with other novels, and it's possible that he could use the same universe and the same back story again.

[Available from www.fugazi.net]

K.J. Parker – *Memory* 

Orbit, London, 2003, 572pp, £10.99, v/p, ISBN 1-84149-171-3

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Memory, the concluding volume in K.J. Parker's 'Scavenger' trilogy, opens with Poldarn lost in a wood. This may well be the best place for him. Since waking with amnesia on a battlefield at the beginning of *Shadow*, he has reconstructed enough of his past - from dreams, from chance-met strangers, from the people of his homeland - to realise that he may have been happier with no memories at all. Whoever Poldarn was before he lost his identity and assumed the name of an apocalyptic deity, he wasn't a nice person. Even the people close to him have been reluctant to tell him everything they know about his past career.

But ignorance is not bliss: far from it, in Parker's world. Post-amnesia Poldarn has always tried to do good; he's acted in self-defence, or to protect others, with the best possible motives. At worst, he's taken the only sensible course of action.

In *Shadow* and *Pattern*, he rescued a cavalry officer from scavengers, saved his people from a volcano, and married a nice girl from a neighbouring settlement. Regrettably, this is a world where every action seems to have the worst of possible consequences. Poldarn's personal affairs make most of Greek tragedy look like *Pollyanna*. (Indeed, there are parallels between Poldarn's experiences and that of tragic heroes such as Oedipus).

It's obvious to Poldarn, by the beginning of *Memory*, that he's better off not knowing who he used to be, and so he buries himself (metaphorically speaking) in the middle of nowhere, using his smithing skills to get work at a bell foundry. Fate, however, has other plans for him. There's a reunion of his schoolmates, which might be a cheerful affair if this were a different novel. Memories and dreams



are forced into context as catastrophes. Names and identities are shuffled, cast aside, revealed and obscured again as the mythic tragedy of Poldarn's life draws towards its conclusion.

After all that, it may come as a surprise to learn that this is also a very enjoyable novel. Parker's worlds - compare the magic-less setting of his 'Fencer' trilogy - have no room for the quaint, the archaic or the beautiful. Tolkien's characters wouldn't last a day here, with the possible exception of some of the orcs. If there is anything supernatural - gods, magic, fate - at work in the complex knottings of the narrative, it's kept offstage. Everything can be explained by common sense, a commodity that Parker's characters have in abundance (though it's seldom enough to save them). Their speech is resolutely mundane and their actions

selfish, pragmatic and often unsullied by morality.

Parker's novels are firmly rooted in technology, and some will find the long descriptions of medieval smithing techniques unnecessary. They're key to Poldarn's character, though, and keys to the plot as well. The titles of the novels in this trilogy - *Shadow*, *Pattern* and *Memory* - allude to metal-working terms; they're metaphors for the processes by which Poldarn recreates himself, and they encapsulate some of the questions implicit in his situation. How much of his identity is a reaction to the world? Can he free himself from the person he was before he lost his memory? Can he make the decisions that determine his future, or is he being manipulated by others?

The plot is quietly and breathtakingly complex, with dreams and memories echoed throughout the story arc.

Parker's attention to detail repays meticulous reading. A couple of casual asides in *Memory* led me to reread the whole trilogy, an immensely rewarding (if not always cheerful) experience. Perhaps surprisingly, Poldarn is a likeable and sympathetic character, and it's appallingly easy to overlook the swathe of carnage and moral disaster

that he leaves behind him. He has more than enough good intentions to pave the road he's walking.

One criticism: the book could have done with more meticulous proofing. There's at least one place where a single incorrect substitution could indicate a whole new sub-plot.

Phil Rickman – *The Lamp of the Wicked*

Macmillan, London, 2003, 549pp, £10.00, h/b, ISBN 0-333-90805-8

Reviewed by Simon Morden

Merrily Watkins, country parish priest and Diocesan exorcist, leads a complicated life – widowed, she has a secret boyfriend, and a teenage daughter who alternately loves her and hates her. There are plans to put a mobile phone mast in her church steeple, and all the local fruitcakes congregate around her like flies on dung.

Local lunacy reaches new heights when gravedigger Gomer Parry comes into conflict with rival plant-hire operator Roddy Lodge over the installation of septic tanks for incomers to rural Gloucestershire. When Gomer's yard is burnt down, and his nephew Nev with it, everybody is ready to blame weird, manic Lodge. For good reason – confronted in the dead of night, he's found with the decomposed body of a woman in his digger bucket.

As the police – in the shape of unstable Detective Inspector Bliss – investigate Lodge, a whole can of worms slowly wriggles out, leaving no one untouched.

This is the fourth Merrily Watkins story. I hadn't read any of the previous books, and found it unnecessary to have done so to enjoy this extremely well-written and gripping crime thriller. Rickman does his characters exceptionally well, and his plot, while tortuous, is never

ludicrous. Everything hangs together in a grimly logical way.

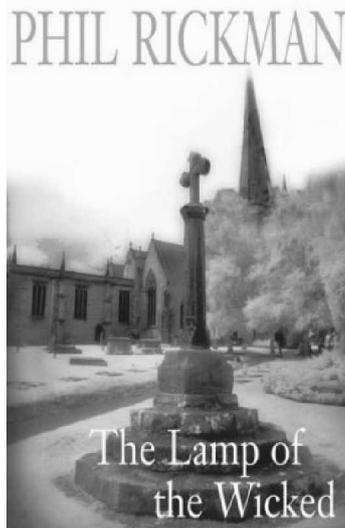
This is also a brave book to have written: Rickman uses a series of real-life murders not just as background, but as an integral part of his story. Some readers might find the use of them in a work of fiction distasteful, but the author spurns voyeuristic relish and opts for giving the events a quiet dignity instead.

A possible problem lies with Merrily herself: she is not so much the protagonist as a person to whom things happen and events revolve around. The supporting cast, police, friends, villagers, are the ones who are active, but they all need Merrily to hold it together in the centre.

If I have a complaint, it is this: I don't think this work is actually genre. It has the trappings of the supernatural – priests, exorcists, apparitions, unexplained behaviour that might be possession – but none of the (in)substance. It is, for all its tangled web of angels and devils, a straight

crime story. Don't expect the undead. The monsters here are all very much flesh and blood.

All in all, a superior piece of work. Rickman's *Merrily Watkins* books thoroughly deserve a closer investigation.



Adam Roberts – *Jupiter Magnified*

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2003, 86pp, £10, p/b, 1-902880-56-0 (also deluxe h/b, £25, ISBN 1-902880-57-9)

Robert Freeman Wexler – *In Springdale Town*

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2003, 86pp, £10, p/b, 1-902880-53-8 (also deluxe h/b, £25, ISBN 1-902880-52-6)

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery



I have already been taken to task (Chris Dunk, *Letters*, *Vector* 230) for recommending 'difficult' or challenging books, so if all you're looking for is a piece of fluffy sf/fantasy brain-candy, with everything wrapped up and neatly explained at the end, better turn away now. In fact, I'd suggest you are probably reading the wrong magazine. However, if you do like stories that leave you thinking at the end (and on the evidence of the BSFA Award, I assume you do), then I have no hesitation in recommending either of these two novellas from Peter Crowther's excellent PS Publishing imprint.

Both these stories leave you wondering, at the end,

what exactly occurred. Was it real, as a physical (Roberts) or supernatural (Wexler) event, or some form of collective hallucination or psychosis? The question is left unanswered, or the answer provided in the text is left to the reader to judge.

In Roberts's *Jupiter Magnified*, the central crisis is provided by the sudden appearance (and equally sudden disappearance) of an apparition of the planet Jupiter, filling half the sky of Earth. It is a frankly impossible sight, confirmed later by pictures from space telescopes which also show Jupiter exactly where it should be. The sight of Jupiter hanging over the Earth, its Great Red Spot glaring like a baleful, unwinking eye, provokes a crisis as people around the world struggle to come to terms with its

meaning. Much of the reaction, from scientists, astrologers, religious leaders, end-of-the-world cultists, is told offstage. We see the events through the eyes of Stina Ekman, editor of the poetry e-zine *Lexikon*, and author of the on-going sequence *Poems About Light* ("The most exciting prospect in Scandinavian poetry for a long time"). For Ekman, the crisis precipitated is both personal and artistic. What meaning does the subtle interplay of light and life have anymore when everything is coloured by the garish red of Jupiter? "Because light is purity, and I'm not pure enough...I'm muddled, brown and red...like the dirty, banded, great image of Jupiter in the sky." She deprecates her reaction as "shallow, even teenage" even as she speaks.

Stina's struggle with artistic meaninglessness is mirrored in her relationships: to her boyfriend Dun, a desperate affair with a scientist, Peter, and the absent figure of her father. Then one night, clearing rubbish and cigarette butts from the base of a display of flowers under the Jupiter's red light, Stina is overtaken by epiphany, and a sudden rush of joy that unlocks her, as a poet and a person. But Roberts goes a stage further. He doesn't just tell us, he shows us the result in the twenty-four poems of Ekman's (and presumably also Roberts' own) *Poems About Light*. I'm not really qualified to judge these as poems. To my mind, several of them lean on metaphors and similes of light approaching cliché (the sun 'hammering' on concrete, or pouring 'sticky as honey'), but others contain some nice and sometimes arresting images, such as the small fly, alighting on the poet's arm, "rubbing his eyes in disbelief, at the vastness of his domain." (Roberts is obviously proud of this one, as he has someone quote it approvingly in the main text.)

Robert Freeman Wexler's stories have appeared in a number of eclectic magazines such as *Lady Churchill's*

Rosebud Wristlet, *Fall Unit Hookup* and *The Third Alternative*. At the heart of *In Springdale Town* is a moment of slippage between real and fictive realities that evokes mood and tone of early Jonathan Carroll (*Land of Laughs*) and Steve Erikson (*Days Between Stations*), but resolves in such a way as to leave the reader unsure which is which.

Two characters, Richard Shelling, a bit-part Californian actor, and lawyer Patrick Travis, arrive at the same time in the quiet middle American town of Springdale. For Shelling, it is no more than a whim, drawn by the vague familiarity of the town's name, which he afterwards recognises as the setting for a soap, *Blake's River*, in which he played a minor role. Travis, who had left after an acrimonious divorce, is returning for the wedding of his friends Dierdre and Michael. The complication is that the character played by Shelling in *Blake's River* was Patrick Travis. Faced with two conflicting realities, the town tries to adjust.

Wexler complicates the real and fictional realities by several devices. One is alternating first and second person narratives between the two main characters. Another is scattering a series of plausible sounding footnotes through the text, on anything from the contents of truck-driving CDs, cookbooks, body weight distribution across America, or Diogenes of Lesbos. I suspect (though I haven't tried) that establishing the veracity of some of these, and the point where they come in the story, may provide further clues. Or maybe Wexler has fooled me into looking for authorial cleverness where only playfulness exists. Whatever, as Lucius Shepard observes in his introduction, *In Springdale Town* is the sign of a new writer finding a remarkable and original voice.

[Available from www.pspublishing.co.uk]

Justina Robson – *Natural History*

Macmillan, London, 2003, 330pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-333-90746-9

Reviewed by Paul N. Billinger



Voyager Lonestar Isol recites a song as she slowly dies. On a journey to a distant galaxy her sensors failed to detect a micro-meteor field and the resultant collision damage is critical. As her systems shut down she realises the meteor debris was the remains of an explosion, and of a thing, something which had been alive: not the type of first contact she had been looking for. In the same region of space is an ambiguous lump of grey matter. It is apparently just silicon dioxide, but tells her it is an instantaneous jump engine, about the only thing that could save her. Unfortunately, jump engines don't exist, but that's what it does, and Isol returns to earth, where the grey matter – soon known as 'Stuff' – appears to present miraculous and unlimited possibilities.

In Robson's vision of a far future Earth, the Forged, such as Isol, have been engineered from a mix of human and animal genes melded with advanced technology. Although created to serve the normal humans in numerous ways, including as huge terraforming bodies or as a novel form of transport, the Forged long for freedom. They constantly

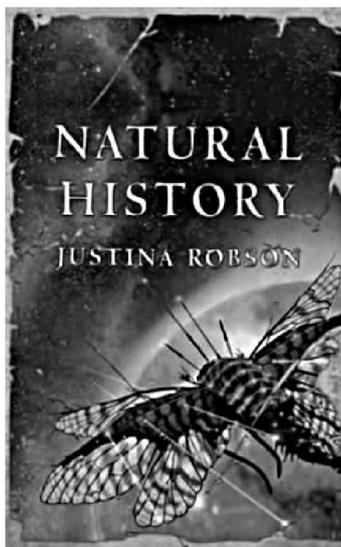
debate the arguments of 'form and function' with factions within their own ranks, longing for independence from the normal humans, whom they call the Unevolved. The return of Isol, not only with the miraculous 'engine' but also with knowledge of a now not-so-far-distant planet where they can form a new society, brings the independence struggle to the fore.

As part of the negotiations between the groups, Zephyr Duquesne, a cultural anthropologist (but with only a tenuous interaction with the existing society), is chosen as the human representative to travel to the potential Forged home world and to report back on a possible extinct civilisation.

This is a very sparse introduction to the book, as although it could be described simply as a 'first contact' story, this does not in any way do justice to its multiple levels. I've not touched upon many of the other key elements: Corvax's exploration of the Stuff and the development of the virtual world of Uluru, the political manoeuvring of General Machen, or the Forged hive mind's exploration of the manufactured moons orbiting the new planet. To do so would take up much of this

magazine, as the density of ideas packed into the book's relatively modest 330 pages is quite phenomenal. Every word holds meaning and has clearly been carefully considered, with no padding whatsoever; this is not a book you can – or would wish to – skip any part of.

Despite the heavyweight nature of the book's themes – what is it to be human, what are the limits before humanity becomes something new – there is a rich vein of humour and wit running through it, most noticeably with Isol's self-centred, petulant teenager approach to life and the grumbling of the Degraded. The Degraded are the mistakes of the forging process, when the gene-mixing fails, producing a bitter, twisted mirror to the majestic awe of the true Forged. They are perhaps the very soul of the book and in some ways the most human aspect of the civilisation. Gritter is an Ornith Degraded, a small, scrawny, eagle mixed with lizard, and a part-time intelligence operative to General Machen; basically a



lowlife informer and as rude, crude and obnoxious as possible, but in his own inimitable fashion, still likable. His debased exterior is, in part, a front, as throughout the book Gritter ruminates on the role of the Degraded and their position as the true oppressed underclass, rather than the Forged who have always had the power, if not the will, to break from servitude. Gritter can be relied upon to point out quite how hypocritical both sides can be and to deflate their pompous pontificating.

This is not to imply that the book is in any way clinical, rather, as Zephyr's A.I. assistant puts it, "not like a theory, more like a symphony". And more like Mahler spliced with Beethoven rather than an atonal experimental one.

If anyone had any doubts after the author's first two novels, *Silver Screen* and *Mappa Mundi*, that she is a major talent this book will banish them.

J.K. Rowling – *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Bloomsbury, London, 2003, 766pp, £16.99, h/b, ISBN 0-7475-5100-6

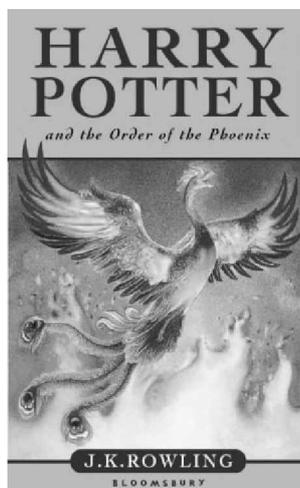
Reviewed by Simon Morden

Harry Potter returns for his fifth year at Hogwarts under a cloud of suspicion. Investigated by the Ministry of Magic for yet another infraction of the rules, subject to the personal displeasure of the Minister himself, and hounded by *The Daily Prophet*, Harry is isolated and confused: even his mentor Albus Dumbledore seems distant.

Problems multiply: a Ministry-appointed teacher Professor Umbridge starts to manoeuvre herself into positions of increasing power; Snape is as vindictive as ever; Hagrid's gone missing; there are exams and mountains of homework. And of course, there's still the trifling matter of the return of Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters, about which the Ministry is in complete denial. Only the Order of the Phoenix and Harry's close circle of friends take the threat seriously – and that has its own, ultimately fatal consequences.

The arrival of this much-delayed novel has been the publishing event of the year. But is it any good, or is it indeed 'The Breezblock of Doom'?

Three years late, the fifth of a projected series of seven, and at over seven hundred pages, this has to be one of the longest children's books in history. The expectations are great, and initially, the book is disappointing. Harry remains in the foulest of moods for the first third of the story. You can tell he's angry, because you're told about it



all the time, and he spends a lot of time SHOUTING IN CAPITALS. Neither Ron or Hermione are much better, and the occasional spark of comic relief (in the shape of the elder Weasley twins) is too subdued. There was much talk of writer's block – I'm wondering if that wasn't the case. Everything seems laboured.

The story does pick up. By halfway through, Rowling's in her stride, writing like we know she can, and the last third turns into a breathless, page-turning spectacle that is comic, tragic and exhilarating all at once – by far the best she's ever done. I ended with a big, fat grin on my face, and hoping that it's not another three years till the next one.

Character development is especially good, from Harry's fragile and incompetent relationship with Cho Chang, to Snape, always painted the villain but with deeper motives than sheer villainy.

The plotline is strong and mature, full of meaning and allusion – it just takes far too long to get going. A writer with less clout than Rowling would have faced editorial wrath, and been forced to prune rigorously. Yes, it would have been a better book for it, but with Bloomsbury's share price riding on this one release, it'd have taken a brave person to have further delayed publication.

I am, of course, wasting my time here. Anyone who's read the previous four is going to read this one anyway. *Caveat emptor!*, as they say in Hogwarts.

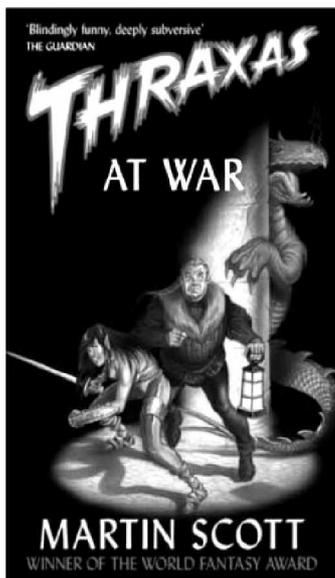
Martin Scott – *Thraxas at War* 

Orbit, London, 2003, 268pp, £5.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-242-6

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

In the latest instalment of the *Thraxas* series, the Sorcerers have foreseen that the Orcs are readying themselves for an invasion of the city of Turai. It is expected to begin after winter, though possibly sooner. The city is ill-prepared. The authorities got rid of annual military training over a decade ago. The Orcs will make mincemeat of the younger generation of recruits. When the Senate meet to discuss the coming war matters are made worse when one of the councillors suddenly dies, apparently poisoned by a pastry.

Thrown into all of this is Investigator and Tribune Thraxas, a legendary War Hero with an even more legendary appetite and fondness for drink. This won't be an easy investigation. It doesn't help that the accused claims to be innocent but isn't being at all cooperative. Worse, Makri, the part-Orcish, former undefeated gladiator, and now chain mail bikini-clad barmaid, is constantly receiving flowers from an Orcish prince – not that she actually likes



or wants the flowers in the first place – and on top of that she keeps holding reading classes for the Association of Gentlewomen in Thraxas's office! The nerve of these women! There used to be a time when women knew their place in Turain Society and now they have to go and interfere, upsetting Thraxas's eating and drinking as well as his investigation.

In previous reviews I may occasionally have voiced my concerns about the comic fantasy genre, but I greatly enjoyed this romp of a novel, mixing together fantasy war and Chandler-esque investigations Rankin's Lazlo Woodbine would have been proud of. The comic timing is superb, particularly the sexist observations of Turain society. Thraxas and Makri are a wonderful duo that kept me chuckling throughout much of the book. If this pulp

fiction then there should be more of it. I look forward to the next instalment – perhaps entitled *Thraxas Under Siege*?

Joan Vinge – *The Summer Queen*

Tor, New York, 2003, 670pp, \$17.95, h/p, ISBN 0-765-30446-5

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Joan Vinge won the 1981 Hugo with *The Snow Queen*, a lavish tale set on the primitive planet of Tiamat. She followed this up with *World's End* (1984) and *The Summer Queen* (1991) forming a self-contained trilogy of tales following the exploits of the same characters. A further book, *Tangled Up In Blue*, was appended to the series in 2000.

I'm not sure if the whole series is subject to a reprint by Tor; if so it's a welcome chance to reappraise the work of an influential genre figure. The series features galaxy-spanning travel, a bio-wired internet, immortality drugs and courtly intrigue, with the books needing to be tackled in chronological order for the reader to stand any chance of following Vinge's convoluted story and vast array of characters.

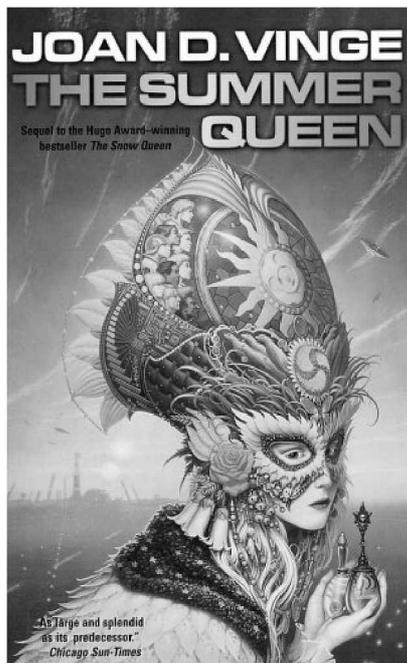
The novel begins with Moon Dawntreader, the evil Snow Queen's clone, ruling Tiamat benevolently, attempting to return her people to their ritualistic heritage now that the planet has been isolated from the technologically superior Hegemony. However, Hegemony official, B.Z. Gundhalinu, heads an expedition to a lake of sentient star-

drive plasma at World's End. The plasma can be used to re-initiate the Hegemony's faster-than-light starship programme allowing contact with Tiamat once again.

BZ Gundhalinu also has to deal with unhinged genius Reede Kullervo, who works for the shadowy Brotherhood, whose agenda is based around controlling the source of an immortality elixir which originates on Tiamat. Moon keeps in contact with B.Z. Gundhalinu by means of the sibyl network: a bio-engineered galactic information network which is controlled by ancient computers buried under the city of Carbuncle.

It's an impressively baroque feat of world-building by Vinge. The mythic aspects are well thought out and inextricably linked to the actions and backgrounds of the main characters. The constantly weaving narrative strands often hark back to events in previous volumes in the series which gives an already weighty tome a dense

texture. Vinge sidesteps any scientific explanations for her ftl drive and immortality elixir, concentrating on the human consequences of her science-fictional concepts.



My only concern is that the soap opera strand, featuring a rather banal love triangle, tends to bog down the flow just as the main story is getting interesting. Lines like 'their

lovemaking was as endless as the sea...' really belong in a Mills & Boon and the contrast between personal and diplomatic relationships is not convincingly handled.

Margaret Weis – *Mistress of Dragons*

Tor, New York, 2003, 384pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30468-6

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Margaret Weis is one of the world's best-selling fantasy authors, best-known for her collaborations with Tracy Hickman in the *Dragonlance*, *Darksword*, *Sovereign Stone*, *Rose of the Prophet* and *Death Gate* series. This is, believe it or not, her first solo original fantasy effort, and (inevitably) the first of a trilogy.

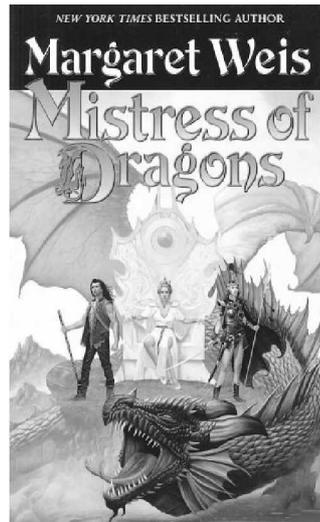
Welcome to the world of Dragonvarld, where the Kingdom of Seth is protected from dragons by a sorceress, the Mistress of Dragons, who uses dragon magic against them. She lives at an isolated mountain temple, served by priestesses and protected by a guard of warriors, all women. This situation has lasted for three hundred years, since the kingdom was saved from a dragon by a mysterious sorceress, who became the first Mistress of Dragons. Melisande is the High Priestess, who has enjoyed a happy life at the temple with her lover Bellona, Captain of the Guard. Now, however, their world is disrupted by the arrival of a dragon, the first for ten years. The Mistress and the warriors beat him off, but the aged Mistress is severely weakened. Melisande must prepare herself for the rite by which she will become Mistress after her predecessor's death.

However, all is not as it seems. In the outside world, unknown to the people of Seth, men and dragons have co-existed reasonably peacefully since the Parliament of Dragons declared a truce after the Dragon Wars and forbade dragons to eat human flesh. However, a renegade female dragon, Maristara, known to find humans irresistibly tasty, has been missing for three hundred years, and the

Dragon Parliament suspects she is in Seth. They send to Seth an emissary called Draconas, who has taken human form by magic, to find out where Maristara has her lair and to capture her. Their dragon emissary, Maristara's grandson Braun, has already tried to enter the kingdom and been beaten off.

Before going to Seth, Draconas visits the kingdom of Idylswylde, where Braun has created a diversion by carrying off cattle and burning barns. In its cutely-named capital, Ramsgate-upon-the-Aston, Draconas poses as a dragonslayer, and convinces the monarch King Edward IV to join him on a dragon hunt. The neighbouring kingdom of Weinmauer has been casting an eye on Idylswylde, and Draconas persuades Edward that he can preserve his throne by personally killing the dragon, which is raiding from Seth. Thus the adventure is set up, with surprises and catastrophic consequences for Melisande, Bellona, Edward and Draconas himself...

Mistress of Dragons won't win any fantasy awards, but it's a real page-turner, with deft plotting, empathic characters, comedic touches and a few gruesome moments. Margaret Weis doesn't flinch from hurting her major characters, and she ends the story at a point where this book's events are complete, but there are plenty of loose ends for the next book to deal with. Recommended.



Liz Williams – *The Poison Master*

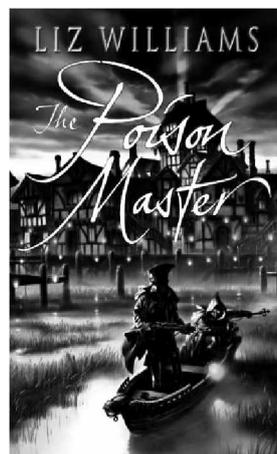
Tor UK, London, 2003, pp358, £10.99, t/b, ISBN 1-4050-0562-9

Reviewed by Penny Hill



Fantasy is the new black – it's sexy and appealing and suits everybody with taste, or so it seems to me after reading this book.

Although I had got to the point of being weary of split-narrative books and books about Dr John Bloody Dee, the fact that this was by Liz Williams was enough for me to put all doubts aside. Yes, this book does have two narrative tracks, one being a re-interpretation of the actions of Dr John Dee – but don't let that put you off. On the whole I found the switching between two tracks successful; however, I did



occasionally wonder whether the overall story would have been just as effective split into parts one and two. What I did miss and would like to read is the story of how we got from the end of Dr Dee's narrative to the beginning of Alivet's in the 'present day' on the planet Latent Emanation.

Once again Liz Williams has invented a completely new, dangerous and exciting universe, whose rules, though similar to ours, are subtly different. Whether this is a work of sf or fantasy depends on your interpretation of the origin of those rules – is the alchemy and mathematics employed by Dr John Dee to bring about the exodus of humanity to Latent Emanation, magic or science? If you need to

have a hard categorisation before you can enjoy a book, then just pick the one you prefer, otherwise go with the flow and you won't be disappointed.

The mixture between alchemy and chemistry continues in the present-day narrative, with alchemists such as Alivet able to converse with the animating spirits of drugs and compounds as well as to use their effects.

The atmosphere was gloriously dark, squelchy and damp, with a repressive alien regime, the Lords of Night, that Ghairen wants to overthrow. His kidnapping (or is it rescuing?) of Alivet, to help him in this task, forms the main tension and drive of the present day plot.

Given that the main characters, Alivet and Ghairen,

seemed to be experiencing the usual romance plotting of attraction despite suspicion, I enjoyed the ambiguity of the minor characters – Iraguila, Alivet's mysterious ally who maybe has her own agenda, Celana, Ghairen's troubled, alienated daughter and Genever, Alivet's former boss.

This book should appeal to anyone who likes books. This is the third excellent novel by Liz Williams. If you haven't read any of her work yet, go and do so at once! All three novels are well worth getting hold of; however, I particularly recommend *Ghost Sister*, her first novel, as a good place to start.



These are some of the other books we have seen recently. A mention here does not necessarily preclude a full review in a later issue of *Vector*.

Kevin J. Anderson – *Hidden Empire*

Earthlight, London, 2003, 679pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-3065-4
Mass-market edition of the first book in *The Saga of Seven Suns*. This is wide-screen space opera, set in the far future with generation starships discovering what is apparently the galaxy's only other intelligent civilization. An archaeological dig uncovers the remains of an earlier civilization (always a reliable way of kicking off the plot), lost but for their robot servants guarding a terrible technology (which is a remarkably similar premise to Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space*). Scott T. Merrifield found, in *Vector* 227, that although in some ways this is an impressive piece of work, especially the parts concerning the xeno-archaeologists, the moralisation was over-the-top and the political structures heavy-handed, perhaps because Anderson was trying to establish too much too soon. The series continues in *A Forest of Stars*, which is reviewed by Peter Young in this issue.

Poul Anderson – *Going for Infinity*

Tor, New York, 2003, 416pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30597-6
This is described as both a celebration and a memoir of Anderson's distinguished sixty-year career in the sf field and comprises a selection of some of his best short fiction along with novel extracts interspersed with his reminiscences about his experiences (with many sf luminaries). Mark Greener remarks, in *Vector* 224, that Anderson helped define the genre and that for anyone unfamiliar with his work this volume is a good place to start, being a fitting testament to a remarkable author who made an enormous contribution to the genre.

James Barclay – *Elfsorrow*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 483pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07398-5
Although continuing directly from the previous volume, *Nightchild*, this is the first volume in a new trilogy *Legends of the Raven*. In the continent of Calaius the elves are dying, struck down by a terrible affliction. The elven mage Ikar, one of The Raven, a tiny mercenary band of warriors, must try to find the solution. What could be just another heroic fantasy is anything but. Vikki Lee in *Vector* 226, who has also reviewed the preceding volumes, described this as one of the best reads of the year, with wonderful characterisation, writing style and storytelling. With a darker and somehow more serious tone than before this shows a writer getting stronger by the book. This edition is published with a new, striking, two colour (black/yellow) design with yellow page edges: not easy to miss.

James Clemens – *Wit'ch Star*

Orbit, London, 2003, 739pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-244-2
Final volume (of five) in *The Banned and the Banished* series. Elena must continue her battle against the ancient foe using her own blood magick and an outlaw army. More punctuation abuse.

Kate Elliott – *The Gathering Storm*

Orbit, London, 2003, 1,037pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-200-0
Fifth volume (of six) in the *Crown of Stars* series, this is a massive fantasy tome (yes it really does say 1037 pages above). King Henry's realm is destitute with both supernatural and earthly forces gathering to overthrow it,

with Prince Alain and Liath, Stronghand of the Eika, holding the key to a possible saviour of the kingdom. Reviewed in hardback in *Vector* 230, it was recognised by Fiona Grove that a series of this size takes some commitment to read and that it is essential to have read the preceding volumes. Fortunately, for those who have reached this fifth volume, the book was well-written, with the entwining storylines from the previous volumes drawn together.

Maggie Furey – *The Eye of Eternity*

Orbit, London, 2003, 708pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-113-6
Now in mass market paperback, this is the concluding volume of *The Shadowleague* trilogy. The Shadowleague are the only ones who can avert catastrophe when the Curtain Walls of Myrial are on the brink of destruction – wall falls, world falls too. Although this sounds like routine fantasy fare, Vikki Ee found, in *Vector* 228, that it was well written, fast-paced and fun from one of the real storytellers in the field.

Kathleen Ann Goonan – *Queen City Jazz*

Tor, New York, 2003, 400pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30751-0
Reprint of Goonan's first novel, originally published in 1994, which now forms the first part of her *Nanotech Quartet*. Set in near(ish) future America after the population has been decimated by nanotech plagues. Following the near-death of her friend, Blaze, Verity sets off on a journey to the Enlivened City of Cincinnati on a quest to bring him back to life. Published to much acclaim, including being shortlisted for the 1998 BSFA Award, Brian Stableford, in *Vector* 204, found it less so. Although containing some deft and daring writing he found it difficult to get along with. A view I fully agree with and I would recommend one of her other books, *The Bones of Time*, which is not part of the quartet.

Ian Graham – *Monument*

Orbit, London, 2003, 568pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-196-9
Debut novel from this English author which appears to be that rare thing, a stand-alone fantasy novel. The story follows the (mis)adventures of Anhaga Ballas, a drunk, a vagrant, a thief and a murderer who is unwittingly doing just about everything he can to antagonise the ruling church. This sounds a promising premise, as fantasy novels need more anti-heroes. Unfortunately, in the view of Vikki Ee in *Vector* 227, the character of Ballas "simply has no redeeming features whatsoever" making this a dour read which desperately needs a real hero.

Frank Herbert – *Chapter House Dune*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 476pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07518-X

Frank Herbert – *Heretics of Dune*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 508pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07489-2

Reprints of the final two novels in the original *Dune* series. In the fifth, *Heretics of Dune*, the planet has been transformed from desert to a green and fertile land, then returns to desert resulting in an ancient prophecy being fulfilled. In the sixth, *Chapter House Dune*, the Bene Gesserit sisterhood co-ordinate their resistance to the ruling order and plan to transform their new world, Chapter

House, into a new Dune using the offspring of the last remaining giant worm.

Ian Irvine – *Geomancer*

Orbit, London, 2003, 621pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-137-3
Start of a new series, *The Well of Echoes*, set some 200 years after *The View from the Mirror* quartet. The story starts from the consequences of the earlier conflict between the Charon and the creatures of the void and the rise of a new power that it is the destiny of the Geomancer to wield. In *Vector* 277 although finding it an engaging read, Vikki Ee noted distinct similarities between this new series and the last, so much so that she was disillusioned by the end. The second volume, *Tetrarch*, has now been published and will be reviewed in a future issue, when a different reviewer will give an opinion.

Brian Lumley – *Harry Keogh: Necroscope and Other Weird Heroes*

Tor, New York, 2003, 320pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-3084-7
Selection of novellas (some at short novel length) featuring characters from three of Eumley's series: three featuring Titus Crow, two from Hero and Eldin and three Harry Keogh. Collected for the first time with most only having been published in small press magazines/ collections, although three are new to this collection.

Juliet Marillier – *Wolfskin*

Tor, New York, 2003, 496pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30672-7
US hardback edition of the launch title of the Tor UK imprint. The story tells of a Viking colonisation of the Orkneys, following the intertwining viewpoints of two protagonists: Eyvind, a Viking berserker, and Nessa, a Pictish priestess. Tanya Brown (*Vector* 230) found much to admire with a credible historical element and the magic underpinning the story being used subtly rather than spectacularly.

Andy Remic – *Spiral*

Orbit, London, 2003, 531pp, £5.99, p/b, 1-84149-147-0
A near-future techno thriller, the debut novel from a new British writer. The deadly and mysterious Nex is destroying SPIRAE; a secret organisation and the only defence for a world swamped with nuclear warheads the size of a briefcase. Only one man can stop Nex, but he has his own problems. Any novel which quotes from Marillion's *Forgotten Sons* can't be all bad.

Rudy Rucker – *Spaceland*

Tor, New York, 2003, 304pp, \$13.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30367-1
Subtitled 'A Novel of the Fourth Dimension', this is a modern re-working of Edwin Abbott's *Hatland* now set in California of the 21st century. Joe Cube brings home an experimental 3-D TV and sees a set of disembodied floating lips talking to him. This is Momo, a woman from Spaceland, the fourth dimension. Unsurprisingly Joe is needed for a battle in this new dimension and, equally unsurprisingly, agrees to go. The book includes helpful diagrams (many influenced by Escher) to explain the mathematical concepts of the fourth dimension. A book that sounds and looks great but Andrew Seamen, in *Vector*

225, found that it did not quite succeed, with neat ideas, but rather wonky execution and less a novel than a series of incidents strung together. He also found the the relentlessly joky tone slightly irritating. Still, Rucker can provide great entertainment, such as the 'ware series, so probably one to read and judge for yourself.

Robert Silverberg – *The Longest Way Home*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 262pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07393-4
Peace has been shattered with the Folk (the peasants) rising up against the Great Houses (the aristocracy) despite the years of peace (oppression). One fifteen year old of the ruling classes, Joseph Keiloran, finds himself stranded thousands of miles from home. Ill-prepared he heads for home... Reviewed in Vector 225 this was found to be a so-so novel, not bad just flat, with everything over-explained in finicky detail. Silverberg has done better than this.

Brian Stableford – *The Omega Expedition*

Tor, New York, 2003, 544pp, \$17.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30598-4
The sixth and concluding volume of Stableford's *Future History* series, chronicling the sociological changes and biological alterations of the next thousand years. Steve

Jeffrey's review of the hardback edition, in Vector 228, provides an excellent overview of the series and how this volume fits with its predecessors (this is not a nice chronologically straightforward series). Steve found this a fitting, if curiously ambivalent, conclusion to the series and, like a number of the previous books in the series, uncompromising in its view of sf as a platform for serious, and often heady, scientific thought: "if you can stay the course the view from the top can be exhilarating".

S.M. Stirling – *T2: Rising Storm*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 467pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07399-3

S. M. Stirling – *T2: The Future War*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 357pp, £9.99, t/b, ISBN 0-575-07157-5

Books two (*Rising Storm*) and three (*The Future War*) in a series based on the *Terminator* world (which started with *T2: Infiltrator*) both featuring characters from the films including, Sarah and John Connor and Kyle Reese (and probably the Terminator(s)), picking up after the film of *Terminator 2*. Published just in time for *Terminator 3: The Rise of the Machines* (so expect T3 books soon).

VECTOR #231 – INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

Kevin J. Anderson – <i>A Forest of Stars</i> [PY].....	16	Ian Irvine – <i>Ceomancer</i> [P].....	35
Poul Anderson – <i>Going for Infinity</i> [P].....	34	Greg Keyes – <i>The Briar King</i> [ER].....	25
Kevin J. Anderson – <i>Hidden Empire</i> [P].....	34	David Lindsay – <i>A Voyage to Arcturus</i> [CB1].....	25
James Barclay – <i>Elfsorrow</i> [P].....	34	Brian Lumley – <i>Harry Keogh: Necroscope and Other Weird Heroes</i> [P] ...	35
Stephanie Bedwell-Grime – <i>Guardian Angel</i> [COMLB]..	17	Juliet Marillier – <i>Wolfskin</i> [P].....	35
Mark Chadbourn – <i>Wonderland</i> [GW].....	17	David I. Masson – <i>The Caltraps Of Time</i> [SC].....	26
Simon Clark – <i>Vampyrnic Rites</i> [MG].....	18	Anne McCaffrey – <i>A Gift of Dragons</i> [PS].....	26
Arthur C. Clarke – <i>Reach for Tomorrow</i> [AS].....	18	Donald Moffitt – <i>Jovian</i> [SB].....	27
Arthur C. Clarke – <i>The Other Side of the Sky</i> [AS].....	18	Simon Morden – <i>Heart</i> [CA].....	27
James Clemens – <i>Witch Star</i> [P].....	34	K.J. Parker – <i>Memory</i> [TB].....	28
Storm Constantine – <i>The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure</i> [ST]... ..	19	Andy Remic – <i>Spiral</i> [P].....	35
Philip K. Dick – <i>Cantata-140</i> [JW].....	20	Phil Rickman – <i>The Lamp of the Wicked</i> [SM].....	29
Philip K. Dick – <i>The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch</i> [JW] ...	20	Adam Roberts – <i>Jupiter Magnified</i> [SJ].....	29
David & Leigh Eddings – <i>The Elder Gods</i> [ML].....	20	Justina Robson – <i>Natural History</i> [PNB].....	30
Kate Elliott – <i>The Gathering Storm</i> [P].....	34	J.K. Rowling – <i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i> [SM] ...	31
Simon A. Forward – <i>Shell Shock</i> [MP].....	21	Rudy Rucker – <i>Spaceland</i> [P].....	35
Maggie Furey – <i>The Eye of Eternity</i> [P].....	35	Martin Scott – <i>Thraxas at War</i> [PB].....	32
Laurence Gardner – <i>The Realm of the Ring Lords</i> [SM]	21	Robert Silverberg – <i>The Longest Way Home</i> [P].....	36
William Gibson & Bruce Sterling – <i>The Difference Engine</i> [DMB] ...	22	Brian Stableford – <i>The Omega Expedition</i> [P].....	36
Kathleen Ann Goonan – <i>Queen City Jazz</i> [P].....	35	Bruce Sterling & William Gibson – <i>The Difference Engine</i> [DMB] ...	22
Ian Grahame – <i>Monument</i> [P].....	35	S.M. Stirling – <i>T2: Rising Storm</i> [P].....	36
Ed Greenwood – <i>The Dragon's Doom</i> [LB].....	22	S.M. Stirling – <i>T2: The Future War</i> [P].....	36
Frank Herbert – <i>Chapter House Dune</i> [P].....	35	Joan Vinge – <i>The Summer Queen</i> [CB2].....	32
Frank Herbert – <i>Heretics of Dune</i> [P].....	35	Margaret Weis – <i>Mistress of Dragons</i> [AF].....	33
Robert Holdstock – <i>The Iron Grail</i> [JAM].....	23	Robert Freyman Wexler – <i>In Springdale Town</i> [SJ].....	29
Jake Horsley – <i>Matrix Warrior: Being The One</i> [GD].....	23	Liz Williams – <i>The Poison Master</i> [PH].....	33
Duncan Hunter – <i>A Martian Poet In Siberia</i> [SC].....	24		

Reviewers Key: AF – Alan Fraser; AS – Andy Sawyer; CA – Chris Amies; CB1 – Cherith Baldry; CB2 – Colin Bird; COMLB – Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc; DMB – Dave M. Roberts; ER – Estelle Roberts; GD – Gary Dalkin; GW – Gary Wilkinson; JAM – Jan A. Malique; JW – Jon Wallace; LB – Lynne Bispham; MC – Mark Greener; MP – Martin Potts; P – Particle; PB – Paul Bateman; PH – Penny Hill; PNB – Paul N. Billinger; PS – Pamela Stuart; PY – Peter Young; SB – Simon Bisson; SC – Stuart Carter; SJ – Steve Jeffery; SM – Simon Morden; ST – Sue Thomason; TB – Tanya Brown; VL – Vikki Lee;