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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

£2.25

September/October 1995

## John Brunner Remembered

'Sci-Fi' on Channel 4

The Centenary of *Interzone*

# Vector 185

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Vector is a bi-monthly publication of the BSFA, which also brings you the news magazine *Matrix*, and the writer's magazine *Focus*. Membership is £18 per year for UK residents, £9 for unwaged. Please enquire for overseas rates.

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The British Science Fiction Association Ltd  
Limited by guarantee — Company No: 921500  
Registered address: 60 Bournemouth Road,  
Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ

**Cover:** John Brunner at a signing at the *Cafe Munchen* in 1987. Photo by, and courtesy of, Roger Robinson.

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## Editorial

Our debut issue as features editor of Vector is overshadowed, as indeed was the Worldcon, by the death of John Brunner. Brunner had collapsed early in the convention and was then taken to hospital. A giant card was pinned up in the fan room for well-wishers to sign, but he never saw this. He died in hospital. Samuel R. Delany prefaced his Guest of Honour speech with a minute's silence and Robert Silverberg led a standing ovation before the Hugo award ceremony.

My only meeting with Brunner was at the 1989 Novacon, where a rather nervous and tongue-tied fan asked him to sign his introduction to The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick Volume 3. It was just a snatched conversation in a corridor, but it was gratefully received. We'd like to thank all those others who were able to share their thoughts about John Brunner. The features within this magazine were put together in less than a month.

This event has led to several of the features which Gary Dalkin and I have planned being held over to next time. Discussing the advertised Channel 4 "Sci-Fi" Weekend in advance of its broadcast had led us to consider the treatment of sf by non-fans, and how some work looks like sf, sounds like sf, but is labelled as anything but sf. In the meantime we would like to hear from anyone who has tried to discuss sf or fantasy in a context outside of fandom. Why is it that the journalists who attend conventions only see the people dressed up as Star Trek security guards? Why do local radio presenters associate sf with UFOs?

Indeed, we would like to hear from you if you have any ideas for features. We are keen to receive feedback, whether it is in the shape of a bouquet or a brickbat. Please send all letters to Gary Dalkin; features or ideas for features may be sent to either of us. In the meantime we would like to thank Catie Cary for the hard work she has put into previous Vectors, often in very trying circumstances, and Tony Cullen for the hard work he has put into producing this issue.

Andrew M. Butler  
Hull, September 1995.

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# Happy Centenary, Interzone

## by Gary Dalkin

**Interzone** is one hundred issues young this month [October 1995], making it by far the most important and long-lasting UK sf magazine published since the last of the regularly published *New Worlds* in the 1970s.

Congratulations are in order to all those who have helped with their dedication to keeping the magazine going - most especially to its editor David Pringle. The recent award of Hugo for Best Semiprozine was both deserved and long overdue.

For reasons which defy all sense, there remains some antipathy toward *Interzone*. Perhaps it is due to the profits from a convention being used to set the magazine up in the first place. Leeds-based Alan Dorey, Graham James, Simon Ounsley and Pringle joined forces with John Clute, Malcolm Edwards, Colin

Greenland and Roz Kaveny, who were thinking of establishing a magazine at the same time. Of the original editorial collective, only Pringle has remained, but the magazine has consistently published bold and imaginative fiction by both established and new names. Rare is the issue which does not contain at least one gem of a story, and some contain several; although it is true that every issue also contains its pretentiously pointless or just plain dull story. That's the price to be paid for taking risks. The non-fiction is also usually excellent.

*David and Ann Pringle with Hugo at Intersection*

True, *Interzone* has settled into a fixed style of presentation, rather than the experiments which characterised, say, the Brian Aldiss issue some years ago, but then: 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. This is a point proven by the nearly disastrous merger with *Nexus* last year and the unannounced *Million* crossover issue some years prior to that (not that *Million* was not an excellent magazine in its own right). Fortunately, *Interzone* is firmly back on track, publishing some fine material, including a J. G. Ballard special issue and a bumper centenary issue. So if you haven't read the magazine for a while, or indeed ever, try it now and give your imagination a treat.

By way of celebration, here is a selection of a dozen stories from the hundreds published since 1992. It is not meant to be a best of list, just a selection of those tales I remember best.

J. G. Ballard, "Memories of the Space Age" 2.  
 Sue Thomason, "Finn" 14.  
 Eric Brown, "The Time-Lapsed Man" 24.  
 Greg Bear, "Heads" 37 & 38.  
 Kim Stanley Robinson, "A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions" 49.  
 Greg Egan, "Appropriate Love", 50.  
 Brian Aldiss, "Horse Meat", 65.  
 Eugene Byrne, "Cyril the Cyberpig", 66.  
 Storm Constantine, "The Green Calling", 73.  
 Robert Holdstock and Garry Kilworth, "The Ragthorn", 74.  
 Brian Stableford, "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires", 91  
 Kathleen Ann Goonan, "Sunflowers", 94.

Charles Platt wrote about his special issue of *Interzone* in *Matrix* 114 and David Pringle described how it all began in *Vector* 152. - AMB

(Photo: Catie Cary)

# Tomorrow May Be Even Worse

John Kilian Houston Brunner (1934-1995)

by Andy Sawyer

I have been a fan of John Brunner's writing since the mid-1960s. I met him only a handful of times, most recently at last year's Eastercon. Like several people I spoke to afterwards at Intersection, I saw John across a room but we were both engaged on separate errands, and so I never got a chance to speak to him again. So it goes.

So I never knew John well as a person, but his writing was important to me in several ways. First, his 1960s fix-up novel *Telepathist* was one of the books which confirmed me as a science-fiction fan rather than someone who read a lot of science fiction. Put crudely, its story of a deformed but gifted individual appealed to my own particular wish-fulfillments at the time, but it was also quite clear that Brunner was not re-writing the stories I had already read in which telepaths were either overt superheroes or coded emblems of social persecution. The science-fictional "given" of the story is simply that the mental powers of telepaths can be used to resolve international conflict, that super-powers are never enough and that the mind has its own prisons and temptations. While I was soon to discover, for example, Alfred Bester's wonderfully baroque explorations of psi-fi, Brunner's near-future realism had room for compassion of character and what is now a rather chilling understatement. I have just re-read the book on a day when explosions thundered again in what was Yugoslavia, and the introductory pages, describing the protagonist's birth in a country recognisably Western, recognisably in crisis, and recognisably kept from complete disintegration by UN peacekeeping forces sound eldritchly familiar.

"Where had it all gone? How? the safe calm world of a few weeks back had split apart, and they said 'crisis' without explaining anything. To most people it meant nothing of itself; it was just that a bus didn't show at your regular stop, and the electricity failed in the middle of cooking dinner, and there was a slogan half-finished, smeared letters of red paint, on the sidewalk, and a monument to a dead hero had tumbled crazily on its shattered plinth, and the prices of food had soared, and the radio groaned old records and said every fifteen minutes that people should be calm."

The void implied by those few sentences seems far closer since they were written. And this leads me to remember just why John is so important as a science-fiction writer, why he, as an exponent of the art, was writing in a mode which demanded its own ways of expression. His later masterpieces, such as *The Sheep Look Up*, *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The Shockwave Rider*, express the late twentieth century in a way no mere realism could ever hope to emulate. They are, I think, among the few *important* works of science fiction. Not "classics of the genre" in the manner of, say, Asimov's "Foundation" series or "undiscovered major literature" in the way that many of Philip K. Dick's novels are apparently becoming. Rather they are novels of ideas which isolate some of the major currents of the time and create futures built upon them. They are our times. The first two are certainly propaganda, but they give the lie to the assumption that propaganda must be bad art, and it is difficult to conceive of any other way than Brunner's focused angry, despairing, alternate-futures science fiction mode in which the issues of environmental damage and over-population could be treated. The third is only "not" the defining novel of cyberpunk and all it has to say about the coming data-overload because at the time it was published we did not know the term (and perhaps it is not quite "punk" enough).

"What was it like," (I fantasise some future inhabitant of Utopia asking) "living in a world which seemed to heading for destruction?" I say nothing, and hand them one of John Brunner's novels. It is not sufficient. Brunner was far more as a writer than those few books, far more as a political activist than those few causes, far more as a person than I am qualified to say. It is not sufficient. We live in the future charted by his writing in which the questions he raised still have to be answered. New questions have arisen since he wrote the books. But he raised the questions he did - the hard ones, the terrifying one, the ones which may not have any comforting resolutions.

For too many reasons, over the past few years John was not as productive as his friends and fans would have wished. You enthuse about his novels, and find them out of print. You

explain this status, and people confess that they have not read him. But his achievement was and is real, and we continue to need his books. His best science fiction was about making people think about the world in which they live and where it may be going: and that sounds an awful lot to me like a definition of the best science fiction.

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## The Nature of Survival in the 21st century: The Survival of Concern in 1995.

**John Brunner's *The Long Result* (1965) and *Stand On Zanzibar* (1968).**

**By Robert Edgar**

### CONTEXT

In considering the majority of novels written in the late 1960s, not many would stand out as timeless. Add to the main preconceptions of that era - the ecological quandaries facing humanity - and it is likely that images of San Francisco, the summer of love, Woodstock, the Isle of Wight festival and hippie culture would automatically spring to mind. Images that seem so completely divorced from our own time as the concept of a global computer network must have seemed to the 1960s. Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* manages to both stay outside the conventions of the era into which it was born, and also to remain pertinent to contemporary issues and society. This is really where Brunner's chosen literary mode comes into its own, that of prophetic, futuristic science fiction. But the science fiction of *Zanzibar* is not the same as the science fiction of Brunner's 'other works', the example in this instance being *The Long Result*. The fact that the 'other works' have never been individually assessed on a large scale, and have never attained the same kind of critical recognition, is in no part due to the content of each; they both focus on social issues, *Zanzibar* overpopulation and *The Long Result* racial problems. The prioritisation of the form that particular novels take over the interests of any kind of extended author study has negated any such endeavour for anyone but the most dedicated researcher.

### CONTINUITY

It is within *Stand on Zanzibar*, more so than any other of Brunner's fiction, that there is a dichotomy between the form and content. Between the fears of eco-disaster, a world out of control due to the machinations of the multinational corporation (the postmodern) and the formal method of narrative construction often associated with Dos Passos and the dystopian imagery of a Kafka (the modernist). But within the formal construction of the novel is a narrative structure that seems more fitting to the mid 1990s than the late 1960s. Brunner employed the media theories of McLuhan and Mills, although these were at the time in a speculative phase. The disjointed narrative, intercut with a cacophony of voices, many of them potentially from the media, is reflective of the MTV culture that now pervades all. As the final page confirms:

CONTEXT (28)

A message from our sponsors.

This non-novel was brought to you by John Brunner using Spicers Plus Fabric Bond and Commercial Bank papers interleaved with Serillo carbons in a Smith Corona 250 electric typewriter fitted with a Kolok black-record ribbon. (SOZ p. 7)

But it is not a non-novel, merely not a conventional novel. In 1968 the very idea of a novel incorporating media technology of this form may have led to this book being what Brunner chose to describe as a non-novel, but now this form, whilst not being dominant, is certainly not unique. Brunner never hides the influence of media theory; by opening with a quotation from *The Gutenberg Galaxy* on the Innis mode the reader is given the form the novel will take, helpfully entitled CONTEXT:

Innis sacrificed point of view and prestige to his sense of the urgent need for insight. A point of view can be a dangerous luxury when substituted for insight and understanding . . . Innis makes no effort to "spell out" the interrelations between the components in his galaxy. He offers no consumer packages . . . only do it yourself kits . . . - Marshall McLuhan (SOZ p.7)

However, these fears still appear in the earlier, less acclaimed *The Long Result*. In this novel, it is the position of comfort that Roald Vincent jeopardises in order to successfully attain his ultimate goal of insight into the problem. The content remains the same; it is only the method of telling which is borrowed from McLuhan. But the idea that it is merely the form that is influenced by this early media theory is to ignore the large part that the form plays in informing the content, at least in the process of interpretation. This becomes clearer in the earlier and less stylised *The Long Result*:

Old fashioned or not, I liked people who had private libraries, and even Patricia - who took the modern attitude that all you needed was access to a good computer memory - couldn't make me change my views. (TLR p.40)

The context in which Brunner used these methods has become not the subject of science fiction, but the

subject of contemporary concern. Yet it seems incongruous that the majority of contemporary fiction that deals with such issues bears the title of science fiction. (Or is this what cyberpunk has been created for?) The details of interstellar travel seem, for the present, confined to futuristic debate, but the undeveloped line about the nature of information has a two-fold effect, it initially locates the civil servant Vincent (again geographically fixed within a Kafkaesque bureaucracy) as a traditionalist, along with his interest in the pre-industrial settlement of Viridis, and at the same time locates the future Brunner presents as a recognisable now. The missing link between contemporary society and the possibility of finding extra-terrestrial life has been found. It is little surprise that three years later Brunner chose to label sections of *Zanzibar* THE HAPPENING WORLD.

## THE HAPPENING WORLD

Beyond the formalistic context into which the book can be placed, there lies the over-riding social message - that of the dangers of over population. However, Brunner is not purely concerned with this one issue. In a world seemingly controlled (for the 1960s) in Maoist fashion, there is a strong concern for the rights of the individual: rights which are to many an irreconcilable luxury when faced with the dangers of overpopulation, and to others a necessary danger that should be upheld above all else. An unresolvable quandary that the polyphonic voices that pervade the novel confirm can not be easily solved. In keeping with the nature of the problem and the supposed apocalyptic nature of the contemporary, postmodern condition, Brunner can offer no solutions - only speculations. The schizophrenic nature of *Zanzibar* imparts the fear of the future to inspire the reader to react. (A schizophrenia that leads to overpopulation, perhaps the ultimate expression of Deleuze and Guattari, as exemplified in the opening paragraph of the seminal *Anti-Oedipus*.)

In 1995, the year 2010 becomes an ever encroaching problem to be faced. Even the intellectualism of Chad Mulligan (a sociologist in *Zanzibar*) is powerless. His response is alcoholism as opposed to the mass marketed psychedelics, an aspect of the novel that roots it in the present of 1968 whilst placing Mulligan firmly in the past with his archaic vice. It is no accident that the government chooses the academic Donald Hogan to 'activate' as a covert agent. Brunner was writing in an age when student revolts seemed the only place for active and forceful rebellion. Once again this aspect of the novel has shades of the 1990s rather than the 1960s. The rise of the educational institution in the mould of corporate entity correlates with the growth of student apathy. However, it is not with Communist China that Brunner is concerned it is with the individual within the state apparatus, controlled by politics or now by business. If we are now in the third stage, or cultural logics of late capitalism (as Fredric Jameson has stipulated), then we are powerless to act as we head ever faster towards the twenty-first century:

" To all study groups from Chad Mulligan:

" You don't yet know! You haven't yet established! You aren't quite sure about!

" How about letting me have something I can take a proper grip on soon?"

(SOZ p.547)

This aspect of hopelessness, or even despair is something that is missing from *The Long Result*; Vincent is part of the system, but still unearths the truth about 'The Stars are for Man League' like a latter-day Woodward or Bernstein, but *pre-Watergate*. Here the message of the rights of the individual, of whatever origin, are upheld. It is hammered home by the lavish characterisation and description of the four species of alien and the truth about the human trait of imagined superiority (in this case relating to technological advancement).

## TRACKING WITH CLOSEUPS

Whilst in *The Long Result* acting as an individual is not impossible, in *Zanzibar* it is not only Hogan and Mulligan who are unable to act, but also Zadheil Obomi, the tribal chief of Beninia. Not acting, but at the same time not being part of the problem; in fact the problem in hand is so far removed from this tribe that they are unable to comprehend the quandary that western society has found itself in. Mulligan is sent to discover how this group remains so peaceful, but it is never adequately disclosed as to whether he is to benignly investigate or disrupt. It is left for us to debate to what extent McLuhan's 'global village' and all the trappings of media technology have affected all the Beninia around the world. The use of the phrase " tracking with closeups" is interesting, but rather than it being film terminology (as suggested by Norman Spinrad, *Science Fiction Review* no. 29, January 1969, pp. 12-14) it is the omnipresent eye of an Orwellian big brother. The closeup the audience is given is of individual characters; we don't see into their psyches, as with the modernist novel, we are only given the surfaces, the visuals. The narrator is replaced not by the movie camera, but by the surveillance camera: the audience become voyeurs into the twenty-first century, into our own shortcomings. The perspective change from the type of novel that *Zanzibar* is, as opposed to the form that *The Long Result* takes, confirms the role of the individual as positive. The nature of the social message is of course different, but it is only speculation to suggest that Brunner perceived that race issues can be affected by one man, whilst the multitude of problems created by an ever expanding population are as simple to contend with.

It is a telling sign that what is arguably Brunner's central concern, overpopulation is no longer the issue that debated, in relation to *Stand on Zanzibar*. In the act of reading the multitude of voices never come to any conclusion - they never could hope to. In true postmodern fashion the process has been perceived as more important for analysis. However, much criticism that hailed *Zanzibar* as a new novelistic form in the 1960s, perhaps more significantly a new form of sf novel in true modernist fashion, is in danger of being

forgotten and replaced by an interest in the text as an early example of what we perhaps over generalise as the postmodern; the need to categorise in itself is ultimately limiting. This is a fate that *The Long Result* will never have to face; the social message the text conveys may seem dated to many, but it still remains at the forefront of debate in relation to this novel. The form is the saviour of the message in terms of reaching satisfactory closure, but the form it takes means it will only have a very limited critical appreciation. Is this good or bad? It is not for me **alone** to say.

Do I believe that I'm working in a valid genre? I do *not*. I hate the idea of working in a genre at all (though I accept the idea as a convenient means of getting it across to people how I make my living) because I enjoy practically every form of contemporary fiction myself, as a reader, and not feeling any need to omit any form of it from my reading I don't feel the need to shy away from it in my writing - except perhaps for westerns, which have never tempted me particularly.

John Brunner, *Vector* 51, October 1968

## On *Days of March*

Bob Ford

London, 1962: a branch of CND is preparing for the Easter protest march to Aldermaston. At first sight this hardly seems the most promising subject for a novel: the everyday story of anti-nuclear protesters, holding meetings, answering phones and stuffing envelopes. No plot at all, to speak of, really. An odd viewpoint which slips from third to first person and back again. Brunner doesn't make this easy to read. And the Cold War is over, right?

Well, hardly were this year's candles blown out for the fiftieth anniversary of the Hiroshima bomb when the vigils began afresh, and the French again began testing nuclear weapons - totally safely they say - in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Apparently the ban on nuclear testing does not apply to military experiments, just domestic ones. No, sorry, you can't test your own atom bomb in your cellar. The French are at the forefront of defence in Europe, they say, the police keepers of the world, and so need the most up to date weapons of war.

It didn't make any sense thirty years ago, even, when the dilapidated Russkie missiles were going to be fired and they would putter and splutter and land in our cornfields. But what are we to do as individuals against the bomb? Brunner shows us the tenseness of working all day and into the night, spreading the word of protest. He shows us the setbacks as thieves steal donations and wreck the protest office, the violence that is waged against peace protesters, and mistreatment from police and the media. We get inside the mind of one protester named Micky Daws: we learn his fears and his sense of guilt.

Early in the novel, a young man called Derek accidentally dies whilst delivering leaflets on a motorbike to another group in Purley. He isn't well liked - he is obsessed with his own problems, oppressed by his domineering mother and repressed by his possible homosexuality. One person but still an unnecessary death: "I can't see I'm any different from any bloody moron polishing his lovely new bomb and longing to see if it'll actually go off" says Micky to a black friend whom he has saved from racists. Micky carries a sense of guilt that he has caused Derek's death, goes to the funeral as a representative of CND to be abused by Derek's mother and uses the death as the subject of an address to the Potter's Bar group. All the individuals campaigning for disarmament or a world government cannot solve the problems of one young man. Perhaps it cannot solve anyone's problems: "[W]e can't handle our own problems by ourselves - can we? I mean here we are. In this mess".

Brunner seems to demand that we take the responsibilities of the world on our shoulders and attempt to make a difference. The demand is the same whether it is to be responsible for a disliked acquaintance or a whole race, perhaps with a different skin colour, certainly with an entirely different culture. And at the end of the novel, with the coming together of branches of CND from across England, across Britain, across even the world, there is the sense that perhaps that responsibility is being taken.

Time plays its own ironies, of course. I grew up not expecting to become a grown up. If the Russians didn't get us, the Americans would. There was the recurring nightmare of fire and fallout, triggered by *Threads* and *When the Wind Blows*. I wore a CND badge. I put up posters. And I was told to go back to Russia, and was accused of being a pansy (actually worse) like Derek. The Left began to tear itself apart over unilateral policies, as it tears itself apart today over socialism. Then the Berlin Wall fell and the protesters began to leave Greenham Common.

Curiously the world is still not safe: what if fanatics got the Bomb - leaders of former Soviet states, Moslems, terrorists, Iraqis... The risk of the Holocaust is still here, the future is still as dark. I fear not making it into middle age; I don't need to start a pension. And here and there, the candles are coming out, the marches are being planned, responsibility to do something is being taken.

### Brunner at the EuroCons

I met John Brunner for the first time during the last EuroCon he was the GoH of, in Timisoara, Romania, May 1994. He has been in this whole business of EuroCons right from the start, the 1972 EuroCon. I wasn't really that much acquainted with Brunner's works, simply because I don't have much opportunity to find them in my country but I *had* read *The Crucible of Time*, which was among the *different* books amongst a sea of stuff within a genre the works of which were beginning to resemble one another with distressing frequency. I said as much to John, and he told me that the *Crucible* was a moderately good one, which he himself did like too, and he said he couldn't help recalling what one

reviewer wrote about "all those charming people in the book." He paused for an eternal five seconds, and hit me with: "Well, the trouble with this is, of course, that there isn't really any people to talk about in that particular book." I was about to object loudly, when it suddenly dawned on me that he was, at least technically, right; the book had no people in it but the alien characters were put so realistically that if it wasn't for their constant referrals to parts of their alien biology and psychology, you'd never remember for a second that they were not people in the conventional sense of the word.

**Neyir Cenk Gokce**

## Further Reading

The following books by John Brunner are (alleged to be) in print:

*Children of the Thunder*, Sphere.  
*Stand on Zanzibar*, Arrow.  
*Traveller in Black*, Magnum.  
*While There's Hope*, Keepsake Press.

About John Brunner:

Helene Auffret-Bouce, "Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, or the art of collection", *Etudes Anglaises*, 1988, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 345-54. (In French).

William P. Browne, "Government and Politics in Selected Works of John Brunner" in Joe DeBolt, editor, pp. 130-44.

John Brunner, "When I was halfway up the stairs who should I bump into but myself coming down - or, We have the eminent and he is us", in Joe DeBolt, editor, pp. 179-94.

Joe DeBolt, "The Development of John Brunner", *Voices For The Future*, edited by Thomas D. Clareson, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979.

Joe DeBolt, editor, *The Happening Worlds of John Brunner*, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1975.

Stephen H. Goldman, "John Brunner's Dystopias: Heroic Man in Un-Heroic Society", *Science-Fiction Studies*, 1978, vol. 5, number 3.

Stephen H. Goldman, "The Polymorphic Worlds of John Brunner: How Do They Happen?", *Science-Fiction Studies*, 1976, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 103-12.

Gerald Jonas, Review of *The Crucible of Time*, *New York Times Book Review*, 1983, vol. 88, no. 45, pp. 38-9.

Patricia Monk, "The Syntax of Future Shock Structure and the Center of Consciousness in John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider*", *Extrapolation*, 1985, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 220-30.

Patrick D. Murphy "Dialogics and Didacticism - John Brunner's Narrative Blending", *Science-Fiction Studies*, 1987, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 21-33

John R. Pfeiffer, "Brunner's Novels: A Posterity for Kipling", in Joe DeBolt, pp. 63-77.

Robert Scholes, "Science Fiction as Conscience: John Brunner and Ursula K. Le Guin", *New Republic*, October 1976, vol. XXX, pp. 38-40.

Carl Shaffer, "Exegeses on *Stand on Zanzibar's* Digressions into Genesis" in Olena H. Saciuk, *The Shape of the Fantastic*, Greenwood Press, 1990, pp. 194-99.

Norman Spinrad, "*Stand on Zanzibar: The Novel as Felon*", in *SF: The Other Side of Realism*, edited by Thomas D. Clareson, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971, pp. 181-5.

Michael Stern, "From Technique to Critique: Knowledge and Human Interests in John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, *The Jagged Orbit*, and *The Sheep Look Up*", *Science-Fiction Studies* vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 112-30.

Ian Watson, "Reaping the Whirlwind", *Foundation*, 1975, no. 7 / 8, pp. 55-9.

But my country can't even do it any more. I mean: provide clean drinking water. And Britain's supposed to be rich! It follows that the whole damned planet must be filthy from the mess we've made! Confronted with this kind of crisis, how can I go on?

No, I don't believe any longer in "our glorious destiny among the stars"! Those whom I earlier described as the cancer-cells in the body of Gaea have won. I'm prepared for our civilisation to go the way of Rome and Jericho and Ur and Mohenjo-Daro. If I write any more far-future fantasies I shall call them just that: fantasies.

*But I can't forgive the bastards who have stolen our beautiful dreams!*

**John Brunner, 1989, Guest of Honour Speech, Fincon, from Vector 156.**

# Some Looking Glass Reflections on the Mainstream Perception of SF Part 1 - The C4 Sci-Fi Weekend

Gary Dalkin

Between 26-28 August [coinciding with Intersection] C4 screened 27 hours and 20 minutes of its Sci-Fi Weekend. The material fell into three parts: feature films, TV shows, and 5 documentaries. For a detailed listing see *Matrix 116*, page 4. The Weekend, by far the most concentrated, extended coverage of sf on UK terrestrial TV to date provides an opportunity to discuss how sf is perceived and presented by the mainstream, a topic of particular current interest as sf has rarely had a higher mainstream profile, with a recent string of blockbuster movies and the continued success of *The X-Files*, *Babylon 5*, and even the revamped *The Outer Limits* regularly rating in the top 5 programmes on BBC2.

So what does C4 think of sf? Not a great deal, judging by the C4 logo-as-spaceship, the tag-line 'May the Four Be With You', spoken by a continuity announcer whose voice was vocoded to provide a retro-futuristic effect, the dreadful 'jokes' told by a robot voiced by either 'Mike Smash' or 'Dave Nice', and bulletins from the Sci-Fi Channel's satellite news service from the year 2145. All the usual cynical trivia we have come to expect between programmes during TV theme weekends.

The first programme featured Craig Charles reporting from Intersection. Stuart Cosgrove, the Commissioning Editor of the Sci-Fi Weekend, promised a look at every aspect of the convention. However, the tone was set by the irrelevant/irreverent title: *Beam Me Up Scotty!* - the first of many examples which suggest that Mr Cosgrove is under the impression 90% of sf revolves around a thirty year old TV show - and our host leering point-blank into the camera while declaiming like an enthusiastic adolescent. The choice of the star of a sitcom as presenter indicates how closely the genre is here being perceived as a visual form.

There were interviews with Iain M. Banks, Ellen Datlow, Samuel R. Delany and Terry Pratchett, but if you knew nothing of their work before, you would know little afterwards; as much time was devoted to comics writers/artists, and film trailers. Again the emphasis on visual media, which in the case of the trailers was utterly irrelevant to Intersection. From this presentation of sf the uninitiated viewer would be astonished to learn that those seriously involved with the genre regard it as very largely a written medium.

Several brief comments from fans were included: "It bothers me that science fiction fans are seen as nerds, basically." "...the media people tend to focus on people wearing fancy dresses and telling some things about UFOs." These comments are telling because the programme, and the rest of the weekend in general, then set out to point its cameras at as many nerds, fancy dresses and UFO cultists as possible. Included was the fashion parade, some 'filk', and an extract from a four hour Klingon play/opera, obviously being performed in the original language.

There was an attempt to prove that sane people are into sci-fi. A QC and an MP were found, but they were both obsessed with *Star Trek*. Nowhere was there any indication of the intellectual breadth and seriousness that the best sf aspires to. No panel debates, no extract from the GoH speech.

Of three further peaktime documentaries, two were about UFOs/aliens, while the third was pseudo-science concerning remote-viewing in the American espionage community. Whatever the merits of *In Advance of the Landing*, *The Real X-Files*, and *Secret History: The Roswell Incident*, the fact that these programmes were screened as part of the Sci-Fi Weekend suggests Stuart Cosgrove has a most muddled conception of what sf is. The only relation to sf is that each will probably provide source material for a writer's imagination.

More disconcertingly *In Advance of the Landing* suggests Cosgrove sees the sf audience as interchangeable with the most deranged of UFO cultists. The programme was certainly amusing, but it left a bitter aftertaste - that which results from being asked by the 'normal' film-makers to laugh in collusion at people who in many instances are mentally ill.

The main function of *Secret History: The Roswell Incident* seemed to be to act as a 'spoiler' for the return of *The X-Files* on BBC2, screened at the same time. This view is given weight by the screening of *The Real X-Files* the previous evening.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding here. C4 erroneously equates an interest in sf with an avid consumption of pseudo-scientific 'fact'. In this the sf audience is seen as lacking in rationality and discernment, uncritically accepting everything on the most literal and superficial level. Cosgrove appears to have no grasp of the sophistication with which sf is 'read', the uses to which the genre is put, the functions it serves. The sf audience may as well be aliens.

The trend to portraying the sf audience as nerds continued with *Takeover TV - the Sci-Fi Experience*. This was 30 minutes of public access video-clips, mainly witless spoofs of films and TV, including a gentleman dressed as a Klingon and reading a Shakespeare sonnet in 'the original Klingon'. Anything more pointless or puerile is difficult to imagine.

There was, finally, one documentary which dealt with sf, but even this was afraid to be serious without the 'entertaining' safety net provided by a dated cyberpunk frame, and then it concerned itself as much with Black music as Black sf. *The Mothership Connection* was too little, literally too late. Black culture ghettoised to a midnight slot by the UFO loonies.

A great opportunity was missed. We could have had, for example, a history of sf cinema to complement the films, a biography of H.G. Wells - this year does mark the centenary of *The Time Machine* - an in-depth interview with Samuel R. Delany or Iain M. Banks, and coverage of some of the serious events at Intersection. Instead we got what C4 thought we deserved, 'contactees' and silly clothes.

The films fared better. Several were over familiar, and several other were not particularly good, but together they did provide a general overview of what sf cinema has achieved, or failed to achieve, from early days to the post-*Star Wars* boom years.

The one major error of judgement, especially coming from a channel which prides itself on its respectful treatment of film, was the showing of *Metropolis* - the undisputed first classic of sf cinema - in the appallingly Moroder remix. That, as Maureen Speller reported in *Matrix 116*, C4 did not seem to be aware of the existence of any other version is incredible, revealing not only an astonishing ignorance of film history, but also what seems to be a 'don't know, don't care, doesn't matter, it's only Sci-Fi' attitude. Commit such horrors to *Citizen Kane* and there would be, rightly, a serious outcry, but only a nerd in fancy dress would get upset about an old sci-fi flick.

Perhaps Stuart Cosgrove does not realise that in presenting sf as in the Sci-Fi Weekend is tantamount to biting the hand that feeds...? Perhaps he does not even realise most sf fans will regard that they have been treated with contempt? Perhaps C4 should repeat the experiment at some future date, making sure they first hire someone who knows something about the genre so that next time they can get it right?

# First Impressions

## Reviews of Hardback and Paperback Originals

Edited by Paul Kincaid

**Brian W. Aldiss**

*The Detached Retina*

*Liverpool University Press, 1995, 224pp, £25.00, £11.75 pb*

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Science fiction seems to offer an elusive something ... a sense of looking at things and finding the familiar strange ... for this it needs the sf writer's gift, a detached viewpoint, a detached retina. Perhaps ordinary readers are not comfortable with detached retinas. As Delany pointed out, you have to train yourself or be trained to appreciate the tropes of sf.

*The Detached Retina* is a collection of essays drawn from Aldiss' critical work over the last fifteen years. Their provenance ranges from book introduction to obituary; their degree of detachment is similarly varied. There's an open letter to Salvador Dali, and essays on futurology and psychology. There is a great deal of incisive criticism, and a recurring defence of his own works – both fiction and non-fiction – which, whether intrusive or not, is seldom bland.

'The past is rich in life ... it's the future that's dead, stuffed with our own mortality' writes Aldiss. His view of current trends in science fiction is not particularly optimistic. He bemoans the trend towards the impersonal and the massive – 'towards humans as machines' – and ties this into the social context of much science fiction – 'our sf culture springs from nations with most power, so power is naturally a prevailing theme'. Cyberpunk offers a renaissance of human individuality, which 'seems to extend to infinity – but within the limits of the machine'. In his introduction to *Decade: The Sixties* (written in 1977), he posits that the Sixties was the decade when science fiction 'began to stand outside itself and look at itself'. The relentless forward march of technological progress was shoved out of the way to make space for experimentation and hedonism. There's a distinct sense that this was a Good Thing, and that things have been in decline ever since. Considering that this essay was written from a vantage point of only eight years, one can't help wondering what changes Aldiss would have made, had he not considered that it should 'stand as it was when first published'.

There are several indications that, on occasion, he despairs of much modern sf. 'The nutritive content has been fixed to suit mass taste,' he writes. 'Nowadays, the world ... has to be saved by a group of four or five people which include a Peter Pan figure, a girl of noble birth, and

a moron ... the prescription thus incorporates an effigy for everyone to identify with. In the old days, we used to destroy the world, and it only took one mad scientist. Sf was an act of defiance, a literature of subversion, not whimsy.' (Old days? Does he mean Good Old Days?) On occasion, one can't help feeling that Aldiss is comparing the worst of the new with the best of the old – a comparison which does no favours to either side of the balance.

At one point he writes, '(sf) should be about the future. And of course about human beings. When it gets involved with telepathic dragons, I'm lost.' This is an example of Aldiss at his most irritatingly dismissive. Quite aside from the slur on McCaffrey (who, at least in her earlier works, was playing the good old sf game of 'what if?', and examining human-alien relationships) it's a horribly anthropocentric viewpoint. Human beings? What about 'people'? Where does this leave the work of writers like Stephen Baxter and Gwyneth Jones, who write intelligent sf with alien protagonists?

Aldiss is often scathing about 'formula fantasy' (and, indeed, formulaic sf) and its practitioners. *The Detached Retina* deals mainly with science fiction, and with non-genre fiction that shares some sf tropes. However, in 'One Hump or Two' (the text of a lecture given at the IAFA Conference of the Fantastic) he makes some salient points about the differences between US and UK fantasy: '(the) spiritual aspect is largely absent in American fantasy and at least flickeringly present in the English stuff ... Did the 1980s yield in the US anything so ... full of ancient power as Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*?' In part, according to Aldiss, this may be attributable to our 'buried past': 'we have Stonehenge, you have Scientology'. But, in the end, the two have largely merged. Aldiss manages to dismiss fantasy, post-Tolkien, as 'a giant step forward for womankind to the Age of Le Guin and Earthsea and Anne McCaffrey and her dragons'. With this aggravating summation, Aldiss dismisses recent fantasy and female writers in one fell swoop. Female writers? I'm sorry; there's half a page on feminist utopias. And an essay on Anna Kavan; not a familiar name, but at least a female name.

And, of course, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley – 'Science Fiction's Mother Figure'. This essay is perhaps the weakest in the book: it starts as a defence of Aldiss' view – first aired in *Billion Year Spree* (1973) – that *Frankenstein* was the first science fiction novel. On the subject of Shelley and her monstrous 'child', Aldiss is informative and entertaining: 'She captured the Irrational, dressing it in rational garb and letting it stalk the land.' He explains the social and political context of Shelley's writing lucidly, drawing comparisons between Shelley and earlier utopian writers, and discussing her little-known novel *The Last Man*. But where the essay falls down is in its second half – 'a more personal view'. This concerns itself less with Aldiss' personal view of Shelley, and more with the critical slamming of *Billion Year Spree*. We already know (from several iterations of the same phrase) that he regards the work as 'an asset to scholars ... carte blanche not to have to study texts a million miles from the real thing'. (The 'real thing', of course, as defined by Aldiss.) While his defence of the book's tenets is scholarly, if occasionally repetitive, he tends to react personally to mention (and non-mention) of his work. Describing del Rey's omission of his fictional works in *The World of Science Fiction*, Aldiss magnanimously remarks that 'this particular instance can perhaps be ascribed to jealousy'. And he is 'grateful' to be mentioned in the Clute-Nicholls *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. He defends *Billion Year Spree* on both the critical and the personal fronts; the first is certainly justifiable, the second perhaps less so. One of the few flaws in this collection is Aldiss' tendency to self-reference: discussing Amis' 'Something Strange' he writes (apropos of nothing) that 'it bears a family resemblance to my story "Outside"'. P.D. James' *The Children of Men* 'bears an astonishing accidental resemblance to my "Greybeard"'. While few would deny that Aldiss is one of the seminal figures of sf, it hardly becomes him to keep reminding us of the fact.

There are proper places for self-reference, and in that respect Aldiss doesn't let us down. His obituaries of James Blish and Theodore Sturgeon are affectionate and revealing. In his discussion of science fictional style, it's only fitting that he writes of what he knows; his own. The autobiographical pieces – 'A Personal Parabola' and 'The Adjectives of Erich Zann' (a painful, and extremely funny, piece on Lovecraft) – have a fascinating intimacy, reminiscent of

his fiction. And there is creativity along with the criticism – the ‘Rough Guide to Utopia’, for example.

*The Detached Retina* is often amusing and, just as often, contentious. Aldiss covers an immense ground, only occasionally stopping to mark out a piece of his own territory. Scholarly, witty and perverse at times; a book which deserves the adjective ‘thought-provoking’.

### A.A. Attanasio

### *Arthor*

*Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 278pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

*Arthor* follows Attanasio’s *The Dragon and the Unicorn*, which ended with the adoption of the baby Arthor by the Celtic chieftain Kyner. This volume picks up the story when Arthor is fifteen, and covers a very short period of time before the gathering of chieftains at which Arthor is destined to pull the sword from the stone.

At the beginning of the book Arthor is a disturbed youth, believing himself to be a bastard, half Celt and half Saxon, and bitterly resentful of his subservient place in Kyner’s household. He is a skilled warrior, outstanding for his savagery; his redeeming feature is his devotion to Mary, Mother of God, whom he accepts as a substitute for his own, unknown mother. Through the novel he changes, matures and becomes reconciled to life as a servant, ironically just before his kingship is revealed.

I suspect that Attanasio owes this scenario – Arthor as disregarded ‘cuckoo in the nest’ – to T. H. White, and who can blame him when White made such a wonderful book of it? But in the medieval sources Arthur is brought up believing himself to be the true son of Antor/Ector, and Kay’s brother. The displaced character is Kay; this may be a more subtle situation for a writer to explore than the one Attanasio chooses. It’s easy enough to create sympathy for a character who is being treated unjustly, especially when we know that he ‘comes good’ in the end.

Because the time covered by the novel is so short there’s little traditional Arthurian material here. The book describes Merlin’s building of Camelot and his attempts to bring Arthor safely there at the proper time, while Morgeu – a combination of Morgan le Fay and Morgause, and for me the most impressive character

in the novel – tries to thwart him, first by finding Arthor to destroy him, then by seducing him so she can conceive his child. Interwoven with these familiar events is the story of the Saxon god Furor’s attempts to retrieve the stolen sword Lightning, identified with Excalibur. Attanasio invents several characters who carry this part of the plot, and although these are interesting – I especially liked the master builder Hannes – they don’t have a lot to do with Arthur.

The background of the novel is a mix of fantasy and history. Fifth century Britain is inhabited by Celts, still with some memory of Rome, and raided by Saxons, but it is also visited by elves and dwarves, and the walls between the real world and the kingdoms of fantasy are thin. There’s a similarly effective combination of religious attitudes: ancient paganism represented by Morgeu, the savage gods of the Saxons, the elves with their own gods and systems of worship, and the new religion of Christianity. For once, Christianity is represented as a positive force not a repressive one. Throughout the story, religious beliefs aren’t just decoration, but a genuine driving force for the characters who hold them.

The style is uneven: sometimes there are phrases of stunning clarity, sometimes Attanasio seems drunk on words, and sometimes a particularly modern or slang expression jars. I admit I don’t like the historic present used at length, and I often felt Attanasio was striving for stylistic effect at the expense of the storyline.

I have to confess to being picky about Arthurian retellings, and I have a preference for Arthurian romance as it developed in the Middle Ages, rather than attempts to recreate an historical Arthur in the 5th century. So *Arthor*, as Arthurian literature, didn’t really give me what I wanted. But it’s an interesting read, and I’ll look for the next in the series, if only to find out what Attanasio is going to do next.

### John Barnes

### *Kaleidoscope Century*

*Millenium, 1995, 252pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

It is Memorial Day 2109, and Joshua Ali Quare has just woken up in a self-contained Sears Marshack on a terraformed Mars. He has no memory of how he got there. It seems he has been ill for some time.

Among his few possessions are seven items which appear to hold significance for him: “a brass key, a Boy Scout knife, a bar napkin with a name and phone number on it, a book of matches from Gwenny’s Diner, a picture of a young girl, an Army dog tag for John Childs, and a plastic white knight from a cheap chess

set.” There is also a “werp” computer, and as he examines its contents, he finds documents he himself wrote to enable him to fill in the blanks in his past. But how reliable are these documents? Many of them seem to contradict the few fragments of memory he has ...

Joshua discovers he is 141 years old, though he doesn’t look or feel anything like that age. Apparently, when “The Organisation” first recruited him as a mercenary back in his teens, he was given an experimental vaccine. It protects him against AIDS, enhances memory ... and causes him to undergo a “transit” every fifteen years. During each transit he comes down with a bad flu-like fever which lasts several months; at the end of that time, his body has partially

renewed itself. For each transit Joshua regains ten years; he is going to live for a long, long time. The major disadvantage is that each transit wipes out most of his memory.

*Kaleidoscope Century* follows Joshua as he tries to piece his life back together, to distinguish false memories from reality. As his memories return, bringing with them the meaning of each of the seven items, we witness with him the end of the twentieth century and beyond – the mutAIDS plague, the Super-Niño which triggered the return of the glaciers, the building of the Quito Geosync Cable. But since Joshua is a mercenary, we also witness his brutal missions during the First and Second Oil Wars, and the War of the Memes ...

We meet the enigmatic Sadi, Joshua's fellow mercenary, who like him gets high on "gressors" and "You-4" and revels in "serbing" (raping) the women victims of their sorties. The two men become bosom pals, but their transits don't quite coincide. Usually they manage to trace each other, to stay in touch, but Sadi hasn't contacted Joshua on Mars yet, and there is no trace of him in any personnel database.

Each section of *Kaleidoscope Century* is

headed with phrases which join together to form "What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" – lines taken from the W. B. Yeats poem "The Second Coming". Barnes' vision of the future mirrors that of other (unquoted) lines from the same poem: "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned ..."

The author has dedicated the book "For Liane Treiman: Because it's dark ..." And dark it certainly is. Its very strength, the unflinching portrayal of a mercenary, is also its greatest weakness, for it is difficult to empathise with so unsympathetic a protagonist who seems to have few concerns above obeying orders and satisfying his own lusts. Joshua Ali Quare does have some doubts and regrets, thank God, even if he quashes them quickly. And he cares, in spite of himself, for two other people – Sadi, of course, and the young street prostitute who acts the part of his daughter, Alice. Without these redeeming qualities, I confess that I would probably have stopped reading this book. *Kaleidoscope Century* is hard SF – so hard it bruises.

## Greg Bear

### *Legacy*

*Legend, 1995, 409pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Andy Mills

*Legacy* marks Greg Bear's return to the universe of *Eon* and *Eternity*, to the Way and the War against the Jarts. It opens on Thistledown and – as with *Eternity* – the reader is plunged straight into the confusing politics of the asteroid, 753 years into its journey towards Van Brugh's Star. At this stage your reviewer was sighing. He had not enjoyed *Eternity*; *Legacy* seemed more of the same.

Your reviewer was wrong. The Way and its history are left swiftly behind when the young Hexamon agent, Olmy, is asked to go on a solo mission. A man called Lenk, leader of a radical sect, has disappeared along with four thousand of his followers. They have illegally entered the Way and accessed a world called Lamarckia to make a fresh start. The Hexamon want back the clavicle used to open up the world in case it falls into the hands of the Jarts; they also want the planet investigated. Olmy is to go to the planet, gather information, make judgements, report to a larger team which will follow some time later. Will Olmy go? He decides within a few seconds: such impetuosity changes his life.

Olmy enters Lamarckia in the middle of a civil war. A faction led by one Brion has rebelled against Lenk. In a village called Moonrise Olmy finds its inhabitants butchered by Brionists. Discovered by Lenk's people, he pretends to have been living in the wilds, whilst trying to learn quickly all he can about the planet to maintain his cover story. He ends up as a sailor/researcher on a voyage of discovery around Lamarckia, a voyage which goes badly wrong but which leads Olmy to play a pivotal role in the final clash between Brion and Lenk and in the metamorphosis of

the planet itself.

From the time that Olmy sets foot on Lamarckia we are no longer considering a work which deals with the universe, as its predecessors did. The Way recedes far into the background: a device to put a few people almost naked into a strange environment. The voyage of the research vessel *Vigilant* is one of true exploration and real dangers, where the crew of the fragile boat know they may not reach the end of their voyage. Olmy becomes acutely aware of his own mortality, which enables him to find love for the first time. He also finds that the humans have brought to Lamarckia a legacy of the mistakes of their past, the atrocities which charismatic men can lead their followers to commit not only on their fellow humans, but also on their environment. They are to change the planet irrevocably.

More than anything else, the planet Lamarckia is the hero of this novel, and a strange creature she is, as Olmy has learnt from his briefing:

There were no plants or animals as such on Lamarckia. The first surveyors, in the single day they had spent on the planet, had determined that within certain zones, all apparently individual organisms, called scions, in fact belonged to a larger organism, which they had called an ecos. No scion could breed by itself; they did not act alone. An ecos was a single genetic organism, creating within itself all the diverse parts of an ecosystem, spread over large areas – in some cases dominating entire continents.

Each ecos was ruled, the surveyors had theorized, by what they called a seed mistress, or queen ...

I have my doubts as to whether Lenk's society would ever have lasted at all on the planet, but this is a mere quibble. Lamarckia the planet is a supreme

invention; Greg Bear's framing device for our learning about it, the voyage of the Vigilant, is a masterly use of one of sf's favourites, the journey of discovery. He shows us Lamarckia's beauty and her strangeness through the eyes of people eager to learn and understand, who have the intelligence and training to do just this but (like explorers of the past) whose lives may

be forfeited whilst doing so.

If, like me, you tried one of the earlier books in this loose 'series' and were unimpressed, I urge you to check this one out. *Legacy* is proof that you can mix hard sf, speculation on society and human interest, and that a sense of wonder can be conveyed in a novel of great maturity.

**M. Keith Booker**      *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*  
Greenwood, 1994, 197pp, £44.95  
*Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*  
Greenwood, 1994, 408pp, £67.50

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

Of these two works of scholarly criticism, the first is one of exemplified theory; the other, though presenting theory in brief as an introduction, is a work of reference. The theory, in essence, is that, in so far as a general function of literature is to open fresh perspectives on reality, dystopian literature is a significant and effective genre, defamiliarising the social and political scene, subverting readers' taken-for-granted historical expectancies (capitalist, socialist, utopian). In doing this it overlaps and shares a distinctive feature of science fiction, that defined by Darko Suvin as 'cognitive estrangement'; it may also, as do some modes of science fiction, move into the area of postmodern literature, where futurological scenarios give place to or embrace anti- or a-historical ones.

*The Dystopian Impulse* opens with an illuminatingly descriptive account of Disneyworld (paradigm of the theme park phenomenon) showing how, in creating a participatory utopia of technologically mediated leisure and enjoyment, it at the same time manifests a dystopian dimension: through their very participation, the park's visitors are caught up in an orgy of consumerism, are propelled into uniformity and herded docilely from one experience to another. Disneyworld can be one person's ideal dream, another's nightmare. Such 'doubleness' is found in the dystopian utopia of low-key, controlling satisfactions of Huxley's *Brave New World*, one of the major novels Booker goes on to discuss in detail. Though first he matches motivations manifested in dystopian literature (oppression, repression, aggression, conformity) with the ideas, political and psychological, of Freud, Nietzsche, Foucault and Adorno.

Zamyatin's *We*, described as dystopia 'anticipating Stalin', is for Booker a founding text of the genre. Much influenced by Wells, it is opposed to the sterile mechanical utopianism of the early Soviet state, though not unequivocally ranged against science or rational ordering, only against the exercising of them in so extreme a form as to constitute a form of oppressive irrationality. Huxley's *Brave New World*, the second of his close studies, is described as representing 'the early bourgeois dystopia'. Perhaps the most important point brought out in this section is Huxley's perceptions that 'a loss of connection with the past and with history in

general is dehumanizing'. A comparable point emerges in the third major study, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where 'Newspeak' is considered as a break with the historicity and sensitive evolution of language, an authoritarian tool for advancing practices based on the Party's 'belief that "reality" itself is a social-linguistic construct'.

In a particularly useful section surveying recent communist dystopias, 'Postmodernism with a Russian Accent', Booker sees in Voinovich's *Moscow 2042* parallels to 'Newspeak' in the manipulation and ideological control of language and in the computerised censorship of literature. He brings out well the parodic nature of this novel, though perhaps underplays its brilliant if savage humour. He observes in the ambiguously/allusively titled work by the Strugatsky Brothers, *The Ugly Swans*, a combination of utopian and dystopian energies, sceptically pointing to the likelihood of randomly rather than rationally ordered societies. Of western dystopias of the same post-World War II period he selects for discussion those by Skinner, Sinclair Lewis, Vonnegut and Bradbury. He dwells at some length on similarities between the presciently conceived ultratechnological dystopia of Vonnegut's *Player Piano* and the nature of that author's own contemporary America.

A Postscript to this volume relates the dystopian genre to a variety of literary streams – modern, postmodern, science-fictional, right through to 'marginal pop' – denying at the same time that literary art (of which the genre is a constituent) can or should be sequestered from the generality of social discourse. Utopian thought can be prone to degenerate into sterility; dystopian thought, as an acerbic and sceptical corrective, 'should be thought of as working *with* rather than against utopian thought' (Booker's emphasis).

Though a longer book, *Dystopian Literature* requires only a shorter notice. It is a reference work of 104 entries, of which 73 are works of fiction. They include a small group of 'historically' influential works (eg those of More, Campanella, Morris) but mostly they are from the past century or so. There is a section of relevant modern cultural criticism – Althusser, Freud, Marx, Bakhtin among the authors. There is a guide to a dozen important dystopian films, including *Alphaville*, *Blade Runner* and *Westworld*; and, exceptionally valuable because so rarely attempted, a select guide to dystopian drama, detailing such comparatively little-known plays as Brecht's *Roundheads and Peakheads* and Jovanovic's *Military Secret*. In addition to the general theoretical Introduction, there is a short introduction to each section. Each entry (they range between 1,000 and 4,000 words) is in effect an essay

summarising content, placing the work in literary and historical context, offering and drawing on critical comment, and providing a select bibliography. It is not possible here to appraise individually such a multitude of entries, as varied as Fay Weldon's *D'Arcy's Utopia*, Anatole France's *Penguin Island*, Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* and Samuel Delany's *Triton*. I will only say

that his analysis of a succession of the works of William Gibson is worth the attention of all interested in the relationship of the phenomenon of cyberpunk both to the whole corpus of dystopian fiction and to the present phase of western history. I would add that if the price is over-steep, do pester your helpful local librarian.

**Lawrence R. Broer**

*Sanity Plea:  
Schizophrenia in the  
Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*

*University of Alabama Press, 1994, 241pp*

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

This book, the revised edition of a work first published in 1989, dedicates a chapter to each of Vonnegut's twelve novels. Its thesis is that 'no characters in contemporary fiction are more traumatised and emotionally damaged than those of Kurt Vonnegut', and it goes on to claim 'Vonnegut forces us into an active dialogue with the characters themselves – challenging us to finish the text by providing new definitions of what is sane or not sane'. According to Broer, Vonnegut's technique for this is 'defamiliarization', and he quotes Robert Scholes and Patricia Waugh to support him. Scholes, of course, is now the author of several books on SF, while Waugh writes on contemporary fiction, particularly metafiction. In fact, as Broer's index shows, her *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* provides the main theoretical source for Broer's work – it is quoted and referred to throughout the text and in the notes.

Early on, Broer says 'Vonnegut gives specific names to the numerous forms of mental collapse that overtake his characters – "combat fatigue," "demonic depression," "echolalia," "sexual mania," "masochism," "catalepsis," "samaritrophia," "dementia praecox," "catatonia," and "Hunter Thompson Disease"' (he places the commas within the quotation marks). But what sort of list is it? At least two of the terms ('samaritrophia' and 'Hunter Thompson Disease') are Vonnegut's coinages, and others have been replaced in the medical vocabulary (Kraepelin's 'dementia praecox' by 'schizophrenia'), 'combat fatigue' has probably been subsumed into Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, while the key word, 'schizophrenia', does not appear in his list, as if Vonnegut had not used it at all. Even so, in the note he appends to a reference to Samuel Becket he gives the scientific references for his understanding of 'Vonnegut's generic schizoid or schizophrenic hero'. And so, from page 3 to the end of the text on page 195, that's just about the last we read of medicine or science. This is a literary study and a close reading of the text, looking for references to split, dual and dulled personalities. Vonnegut's scientific background, or even the relationship of his work to the sf genre (he uses it, if

only to reject it, or to reject some of it like the hack work of Kilgore Trout), receives almost no attention, and when Broer uses the denigratory term 'sci-fi', this omission appears to be intentional. Even the possibilities of science and medicines as a treatment or meliorative at the current time for psychic pain fail to get a mention, let alone the exploration of future cures possible in sf.

Broer's thesis is straitjacketed: one sees this in his decision to base the book on Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction*. First published in 1984 in Methuen's New Accents series, this is one of a series of volumes giving a short, comprehensive overview of recent developments in literary theory. Each is aimed at the general reader, though I'd guess most are bought by undergraduates. In her book Waugh discusses Vonnegut, probably for three reasons: he is one of the best-selling (and therefore most easily available) authors who uses metafiction; he works on the edge of a specific popular genre (sf), and he is unpretentious about it. He has seven references in the index of her book (and Broer probably quotes them all). But another one of the New Accents series refers to Vonnegut just as much: Patrick Parrinder's 1980 *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*, especially in a section headed 'Intertextuality and Parody', yet Broer does not mention this book at all.

Think of some oppositions: play versus mental illness; economic oppression versus sf; Literature (with a capital 'L') versus trashy paperbacks; privilege versus exclusion. Vonnegut's work offers all these subjects for discussion, and Broer manages to sideline them all. In fact, Broer tends to avoid anything in which Vonnegut brings them up. Take Charles Platt's interview with Vonnegut in *Who Writes Science Fiction* (a.k.a. *Dreammakers*). Vonnegut makes some very interesting straightforward statements about everything from sf to the function of the American economy, and then in discussing his war experiences in Dresden, he says 'There was nothing I could do except endure, and try to integrate this sort of catastrophe into my understanding of life ... The human spirit must somehow be prepared to survive enormous catastrophes like this, and not hold ourselves responsible for it'. This seems a clear enough statement rejecting schizophrenia as a response to what is happening, but it is also inimicable to Broer's argument, and he quotes nothing like it.

In a sense I have criticised Broer for a book he did not write. I am, though, still puzzled why he wrote one so restricted as this.

**Terry Brooks**

*Witches' Brew*  
*Legend, 1995, 304pp, £15.99*

**Mercedes Lackey &  
Larry Dixon**

*The White Gryphon*  
*Millenium, 1995, 305pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Martin Brice

*Witches' Brew* is one of the *Magic Kingdom of Landover* series. In an earlier volume, Ben Holiday was transported from present-day Seattle, USA, to a fantastical realm. There he married the sylph Willow and became King in the stronghold named Sterling Silver. Now his realm is being threatened by Rydall, King of Marnhull, a land beyond the fairy mists. The invader is backed by Nightshade, a shape-shifting sorceress, whose ambition is to enthrall Mistaya, daughter of Ben and Willow.

I found Nightshade a sympathetic character. She is not simply interested in power; she wants a willing and talented disciple to whom she can hand on all her magic lore – and who will be a companion in the loneliness which accompanies the possession of secret knowledge. Lighter relief is provided by Abernathy the Court Scribe, changed years ago into a wheaten terrier dog by one of the less effective spells cast by Questor Thews, the eccentric wizard. Thanks to another of the latter's magickal errors, the pair find themselves in modern-day Seattle. Fortunately a by-product of the spell is that Abernathy temporarily regains human form. I found their adventures a lively counterpoint to the atmosphere of menace in Landover.

Mercedes Lackey and her husband and co-author (and creator of the black-and-white illustrations of the novel's characters) Larry Dixon, are conservationists living in Oklahoma, who are building an aviary for the rehabilitation of wild birds, and a stable/mews for horses and hawks. Lackey's personal

knowledge of – and expertise in – falconry, is essential to the series of *Valdemar* novels. This particular volume is Book Two in *The Mage Wars* trilogy, which is but one part of the *Valdemar* saga. A time-line at the beginning of the volume explains how each book fits into the whole scheme of things

These fabulous adventures are set in the magickal land of White Gryphon which derives its name from those mythical creatures with the bodies of lions, the wings and heads of eagles, and human voices. In these novels the gryphons do not simply have a symbiotic relationship with the humans; the gryphons are the dominant – but benevolent – species, the humans sharing their world with them. Indeed, Skandranon (formerly the Black Gryphon) is now THE WHITE GRYPHON, ruling the land; Amberdrake, the man, is merely his adviser. Perhaps I should have studied it more deeply, but I found the various relationships quite complicated. At one time, I thought the gryphons were not corporeal beings, but the imagined realisations of the human beings' consciences; at other times I could not distinguish between the gryphons and the human beings. But perhaps that is the authors' message; that human beings are no different from other creatures in the universe as a whole.

This novel tells how Skandranon and his allies, having restored peace and stability to the war-torn land, now deal with threats to its stability. Within, the danger is from 'one or two miscreants, outsiders with little sense of community'. From without, a more powerful challenge is issued by a distant king who claims the land of *The White Gryphon* as his own.

**Ronald Campbell-Butler**

*Fadar*

*Janus, 1995, 198pp, £14.95*

**William Moy Russell**

*The Barber of Aldebaran*

*Janus, 1995, 190pp, £7.95*

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

Janus Publishing Company has a London address but is new to me; neither author has published sf before and both are in middle life after distinguished careers elsewhere. I state this as neutrally as I can manage, for the two books are otherwise very different from each other in every respect, including quality.

*Fadar* is an sf fantasy rather in the manner of C. S. Lewis, or David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*, but, alas, nothing like as good. In 3052 AD the world is in its death throes from pollution and disease; a scientist, a general, a soldier and a young girl set off on a mysterious journey to save humanity. They crash-land and find themselves in an undersea world where they meet Hydra, the guardian of the planet, who sets in turn the processes by which one of them will eventually take over his function.

During the course of any number of revelations, they meet Jesus immediately before the crucifixion; he knows what is to come three thousand years later and explains that Earth is the only planet given the chance to choose its future. At the book's

conclusion, which involves putting together two parts of the one crystal, the main character, Malise, comes face to face with Fadar, the greater being that controls the universe; and we are all set for the sequel, on which the author is already at work.

*Fadar* reads very much like a first draft and is in urgent need of editorial guidance. At times the punctuation goes haywire and whole sentences are strung together with hardly as much as a comma; this makes the book more difficult to read, especially as the paragraphing is often eccentric and we tend to mistake who is saying what. There are several love scenes, which sit uneasily in context, and the apparent destruction of almost the entire human population gets comparatively brief coverage. The characters know it's happening, and think it's terrible, but it doesn't *feel* terrible. Campbell-Butler was a military man, and there is a fair amount of military-type conversation, convincing enough in an otherwise problematic story. Perhaps the sequel will help it all make better sense, but Janus Publishing would have been well advised to help the author to re-work it from the beginning. (But perhaps they are not that sort of company?)

*The Barber of Aldebaran* is very different. The back cover quotes Brian Stableford calling it a 'sparkling Saturnalia of slapstick science fiction', and that is precisely what it is. On the planet Aldebaran,

robots do all the tricky work like shaving and dressing their owners, but the manufacturers are so incompetent that machines are always breaking down.

Harri Balsam, ideas man for Robotics Inc, attempts to put things right with his own personal shaving-robot, unleashing as bizarre a sequence of farcical events as you could wish for. We meet Harri's boss, J. Daedalus Golem, the Planetarch of Aldebaran and his family, a dastardly psychoanalyst called Acastus Palfrey, and Golem's 'protégé', Cutie-Pie, among many others, and the robot F I g alpha-R-zero (get it?) is an

engaging creation.

*The Barber of Aldebaran* was actually written in the mid-1950s, and the information technology is slightly dated, but if all you seek is a farcical, slightly manic romp with tiny satirical touches then this is for you. What a pity the book's cover is austere plain; the characters almost cry out for illustration. The author is a distinguished biologist with an international award named after him, and also burst into song on *Round Britain Quiz*, but don't be put off by that.

### C.J. Cherryh

### *Invader*

*Legend, 1995, 426pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

Reading the second volume of a series when you haven't read volume one can be daunting in a mainstream novel, where you do at least have the advantage of knowing that the characters are human; in an sf novel it can be impossible, because you never catch up with the alien world and its ramifications. But C.J. Cherryh hasn't done that to us. There are frequent references back to the first volume, *Foreigner*, but the events are clear enough to make this novel perfectly comprehensible even if you haven't read its predecessor.

Where I have doubts about this novel is in the characterisation. Even some of the main characters seem to lack depth and personality, in some cases I remain unclear about gender and I am certainly unimpressed by individuality. If the characters were well-defined in the first volume, they do not continue to be so, and *Invader* must stand or fall on its own merits.

One of Cherryh's favourite themes is how the isolated individual copes in an alien environment. Frequently the individual is a human male alone in a strange society, as in *Brothers of Earth* and *Cuckoo's Egg*, and as it is again in *Invader*. The novel is set on a world shared by humans and atevi: the humans arrived 200 years before in a failing ship, they made planetfall, settled, the atevi resisted, there was a war which concluded with a treaty. By the terms of the treaty the two races remain separated geographically, but trade goes on as the atevi supply raw materials to the humans, and the humans supply technology to the atevi, gradually bringing them to an equal technological level. The only point of contact is the *paidhi*, the translator, who lives with the atevi. By the terms of the treaty there is only one *paidhi* at a time, which puts our hero into isolation among an alien race.

Part of the reason for only having one translator is that the atevi language is very complex. Although the atevi look human (but bigger) their ways of thinking are more alien than their appearance, hence

making their language so difficult that only a few people are able to achieve fluency, and then only after a great deal of study. Bren Cameron is the *paidhi*, and as the book opens he is in hospital with a broken shoulder, then is hurried straight back to the atevi after surgery. The reason for the hurry is that the ship which brought the humans has returned after 200 years. It is this crisis, the questions it raises about the balance of power, and the questions of belief it poses the atevi which form the pivot of the novel.

The main focus of the novel is on the politics of the situation in which Bren finds himself, and his dilemma as he realises that the ignorance about the atevi prevalent among the humans could result in another war. His role is to translate, not mediate, not take independent action, but if he remains passive the results could be catastrophic for both races. The actions he takes, and their consequences on an unstable situation have, by the end of the book, set the scene for volume three.

A number of things are very well done in this book. It is a good story, the political complexities in which both races have shades of opinion and vested interests to protect are very believable, and the societies feel acceptably dense and diverse. The ideas behind the structure of the atevi language and mind set are fascinating and enlightening, without going into such detail that an ignorant reader (ie. me) would get bored. The writing is never less than fluid and fluent, given that Cherryh's style is always somewhat elliptical and the reader needs to concentrate to keep up. Having said all that, this is not one of her best books. The injured, isolated, angst-ridden but entirely altruistic hero is in danger of becoming a formula which she finds too easy to write, with a consequent diminution of originality. Bren Cameron is an attractive hero, but he is too much like other heroes from other books, without sufficient individuality or even depth of characterisation. As for the rest of the characters, they never came to life for me, so the book lost a lot of its interest. I quite enjoyed it because I like her work, but it is too much like a repeat of things she has done better elsewhere.

### Simon Clark

### *Blood Crazy*

*Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 343pp, £16.99*

### S.P. Somtow

### *Vanitas*

*Gollancz, 1995, 352pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Like all good, pulp fiction, *Blood Crazy* has a hook: what if, suddenly, one morning, all the adults in the world started murdering all of the children (up to the age

of twenty) — beginning with their own? It's a thought isn't it? And there's no mucking about here either: Clarke sites the first murder on Chapter One, Page One. From there on in it's like a cross between *Night of The Living Dead* and *Lord of The Flies*, as the teenagers who manage to escape attempt to carry on their own lives while constantly avoiding the roving groups of adults who are out to kill them. But the adults do have a purpose; a purpose that Clarke does not excuse with a flash in the sky or other vague, supernatural causes. In fact, when we do get to the explanation it's all very science fictional, though rather reminiscent of a very famous sf film (which I won't mention here for obvious reasons). Ultimately, of course, the children have to kill their parents or be killed themselves and this is what makes *Blood Crazy* a real horror story. Clarke is preying upon the turmoil of teenage emotions, the conflict that lies between the need to conform to their parents' wishes, society even, and living a life of their own. It's all part of growing up and in Clarke's looking glass we follow the protagonist and narrator, Nick Aten, as he grows up, matures, and finally comes to find his place in the world. I enjoyed *Blood Crazy*. It's a coming-of-age novel with a difference and, unlike so much horror these days, is set in Britain. The characters are recognisably British and the British landscape, played principally by Bolton and the Peak District, give the proceedings an interesting spin.

*Vanitas*, on the other hand, finds Somtow in myth-making mode and after *Blood Crazy* it all seems very conservative. *Vanitas* is the third and final part of the *Vampire Junction* books, which began with *Valentine* and *Vampire Junction*. It's a trilogy that

follows the fortunes of Timmy Valentine, a seemingly twelve-year-old rock star (shades of Michael Jackson) on his comeback tour, who is actually a vampire several hundred years old. In the previous volume he had lost his vampire powers to another, real, twelve-year-old boy and *Vanitas* documents the ensuing battle between the two, which at the end leads to the downfall of both of them. In a sense, then, it's a tragedy. But it's oddly uninvolved. The background is colourful enough, the characters are American or Thai, with much of the action taking place in Bangkok, a location where Somtow uses his knowledge of Eastern religions and culture to great effect, tossed in with that we have plenty of Bangkok street life, a night at the Opera, punkrock groupies, a drunken American painter who paints portraits of Valentine's murdered victims, and Valentine himself, turning up in historical interludes with the likes of Sherlock Holmes and Vlad the Impaler (Dracula). Which all goes to make the plot extremely complex, as it bounces around from one character to the next and jumps from one location to another. Yes, it's all very confusing ...

*Vanitas* is very well-written, very well put together, very clever even. Yet at the end, at the big finale, I felt unsatisfied, as if something were missing. The truth is, I didn't really care. And for a tragedy to work, the reader has to empathise with the characters

Both these novels are labelled as horror, yet they could not be more different. Both are violent in places, both are quite scary, but there the similarities end. It's another case of, 'you pay your money and you take your choice.' I know which one I preferred.

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**Robert A. Collins & Robert Latham (eds)**      ***Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Annual 1991***

*Greenwood, 1994, 880pp, £89.50*

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

This is a book for scholars and those with a serious or professional interest rather than the average fan, who would probably (never mind the price) find a book of reviews five years old somewhat limiting. Many of the books reviewed here would be out of print by now. However, this is more than a collection of book reviews, and covers a large amount of useful territory.

Its main features, in fact, are surveys of the year covered (1990), and extended review articles and author profiles. It covers fantasy, horror, and young adult and children's as well as adult sf and also offers snapshots of the scene as sf and fantasy enter the 90s. Lists of recommended reading provide shortcuts into the review articles, and the book contains useful critical summaries of the work of a number of authors – in this case, Greg Bear, Charles de Lint, H.P. Lovecraft, David J. Schow and Andre Norton. The survey of Young Adult material is particularly useful. Although it (necessarily) overlaps with other categories – so that Ellen Kushner's *Thomas The Rhymer* is also discussed in the 'Fantasy' survey and Greg Bear's *Queen of Angels* is also

discussed in the roundup of sf – it offers a useful map of territory which tends to be overlooked in the UK apart from by librarians and teachers. Charles de Lint, on the basis of an impressionistic sample of three Young Adult horror stories (two of which I have read) suggests that there are good reasons to check the YA shelves in bookshops. He is quite right.

Jill P. May's 'Fantasy for Children' is as much an extended essay on the nature of the subject as it is a survey of 1990s output, covering folktale, legend and nonsense as well as conventional fantasy (and also identifying only two noteworthy *science fiction* books for young readers). We are, in both cases, basically talking about the situation in the USA, but there is enough overlap for British librarians to find these sections useful. Perhaps the most useful section of the book is the critical survey of 'The Year in Research and Criticism' by Neil Barron and Michael Klossner, which I have found remarkably useful in identifying gaps in the Science Fiction Foundation Collection.

Nearly 400 pages of reviews also added more than a few books to my wants list.

It has to be said that the standard of reviewing is variable, and while much British material is included, in some cases coverage is very relative indeed. The editors do not, in any case, pretend to comprehensiveness, acknowledging that they provide

comment upon over 500 of almost 1200 relevant titles published during 1990. However, excluded are shared-world anthologies and sharecropped novels (except for some major series such as *Witch World*) and TV tie-ins as well as roleplaying gamebooks. It could be argued that this provides a false picture of trends in contemporary sf, but it would also probably double the size of the book if these categories were covered at the length their popularity suggests.

My own use of the series is as a resource for locating and answering queries about particular books although the author/genre focus articles are also particularly valuable. The reviews of the non-fiction and critical works, together with Barron and Klossner's non-fiction survey, throw up an incredible amount of attention given to sf&f, and show how difficult it is to keep up with the field. The standard of reviewing seems to be higher in this category, but it might be a function of the fact that it takes *real* professional commitment to tackle the potential quicksand of earnest books by

academics who can barely write or fans who can barely read in the hope of finding someone who has something new and exciting to say about their topics. Some of the reviewers of books about 'minor' authors tend to question the need for the books at all, which leads to arguments too complex to go into here. Personally though, I feel there ought to be a bibliography of Dean Ing even though I have not to the best of my knowledge read a word by him, and while I concur with Neil Barron on the value of the Stephensen-Payne/Benson bibliographies I think he is wrong not to recommend them to 'most libraries' – indeed, more libraries can afford them than they can this particular book.

And that is the problem, of course. At £89.50, only the most specialist academic libraries are going to buy this, but as far as I am concerned, despite its bias to the US market it will be used, and often. If other librarians can get hold of and use the book as a resource tool, so much the better!

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**Brian Daley**

***Star Wars: The Original  
Radio Drama***  
*Titan, 1995, 346pp, £7.99*

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away there came a revolution ...

1977: *Star Wars* was an innovation. A film created after 50s movie serials, but which built on those roots with more credible dialogue, effects and characters to become a film which was real SF. It swept away the ridiculous farces that 50s films and the ponderous self-indulgence that 60s and 70s sf films had become, and combined the sort of special effects which had been the saving grace of *2001, a Space Odyssey* and *Silent Running* with a slam bang action plot which had space opera fans gasping that That is how it should be done.

Given the combination of visual effects and fast-paced action sequences, it seems strange that a film like this should be adapted for the radio. But it was done, and broadcast in 13 episodes on National Public Radio in the USA. It seems even stranger that the scripts for the radio dramatisation should be published in written form. But that was done and this book is the result.

The original film was just over an hour and a half long, the radio adaption comes in at six hours. Brian Daley has padded the length out with extra scenes which extend the bones of the film, a bit more about Luke here, Leia there. The blurb on the back starts off with the

caption 'Have you ever wondered...' and then poses some of the background questions which are answered in this book.

That's what the book does, but how well does it do it? One of the great things about the film was the snappy dialogue. This has suffered badly in this form. Some of my favourite lines have been hacked about or extended, extra lines and sections are stilted and the whole thing just seems a bit forced. Of course, it is a play, perhaps the actors breathed back the life that this needs to make it work.

OK, so what have we got? Originally a tightly constructed screenplay. For the radio, this was expanded to six hours of script. The added scenes weave round and through the story, going further into things like Luke's life before Artoo-Detoo and SeeThreePio fell into it, where Leia obtained the Death Star plans and other story texture. But does it work?

The *Star Wars* movie was, as George Lucas intended, a slice of a Saturday morning serial, taking the action up where the (mythical) previous episode left off. The radio play certainly fills in the gaps, but in doing this some of the immediacy of the original was lost. Even allowing for the fact that the format of a radio play doesn't make for easy reading, the stilted dialogue and extra scenes make this tedious instead of exciting.

Dare I say that this is one for completists only? Yes, I will.

This is one for completists only.

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**Joe Donnelly**

***Havock Junction***  
*Century, 1995, 464pp, £15.99*

**Mark Jones**

***Black Lightning***  
*Gollancz, 1995, 299pp, £9.99*

**Dean Koontz**

***Strange Highways***  
*Headline, 1995, 439pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Three into two won't go, three's a crowd, definitely not third time lucky: three ways of saying that two of the above titles have much in common, being good supernatural horror set upon highways, while the third has none of these characteristics, the most horrific thing about it being that someone considered it worth destroying trees to print it.

As I said, we are on the road. Take a left out of Twin Peaks, a short cut through the October Country,

ahead is the Coal Valley Road, setting for Dean Koontz' superb 152-page novel from which the collection *Strange Highways* takes its title.

After twenty years Joey Shannon, a lapsed Catholic haunted by guilt and both kinds of spirits, returns home for his father's funeral. His life is in ruins, shattered by a horrific discovery he made as a young man, the implications of which he has drowned oceans of whisky denying. After the funeral Joey comes to the Coal Valley Road, which is strange because it was condemned and destroyed shortly after he last left town. It was the road he should have taken in 1975. A loop in time is offering Joey a second chance.

*Strange Highways* is heavily symbolic, strongly plotted and elegantly told; first atmospheric, then feverishly exciting, and ultimately very moving. It is also superbly produced, a volume which has been made to last, sewn, printed on very high quality paper and with a beautifully designed cover.

Besides the title novel, *Strange Highways* includes twelve fine stories, ranging from Koontz's first professional sale, 'Kittens', through the outrageous black humour of 'We Three', and the costly revenge of 'Down in the Darkness'.

If Koontz writes of guilt, belief, hope, dreams and redemption and the restoration of faith; about having the courage to face the blackest truths responsibly; then in *Havock Junction* Joe Donnelly explores the restoration of self-belief through the sheer primal dread of relentless pursuit. So once you've got back on the road head right at *The House on the Borderland* and cruise down the Stephen King Memorial Highway, through *The Mist*, watching out for *Cujo* and *The Dark Tower*. Clutch your *Talisman* tight, and welcome to *Havock Junction*, a fusion of fundamentalist hellfires, Celtic myth, some unfortunate clichés about gypsies and child sacrifice, and several large nods to the aforementioned King of Horror.

There is very little story, but fortunately Pasty Havelin is a well characterised heroine, a woman who has sacrificed her potentially glittering career for a husband (Paul) who has betrayed her in appalling ways. Cursed by his gypsy lover while rescuing her children from Paul – who now runs a pagan sex cult – Pasty finds herself literally on the road to Hell. This simple device sets *Havock Junction* apart, giving rise to a series of increasingly surreal and well-realised set-pieces: a strange roadside diner, a night-siege of half-glimpsed things, an auto-necropolis, a loop in time over a Zombie-infested flyover, a genuinely dread-inducing vision of an infinite road system leading to the very maw of Hell, and a final tremendously exciting battle. The writing is highly effective, often powerful, occasionally hackneyed. Donnelly is very fond of needless use of the

phrase 'for some reason'.

The only way to make any thematic link to what has gone before and Mark Jones' *Black Lightning*, which claims to be a serious thriller exploring the consequences of the development by a nationalistic Russia of an Electro-Magnetic Pulse radiation weapon, is to wax pretentious upon all novels being a journey, symbolic or otherwise. The journey here involves a lot of wandering around the 'New Russia'.

Packaged to give the impression of the latest techno-SF-thriller in the bestselling Crichton/Clancey tradition, *Black Lightning* is actually a poor imitation of early Len Deighton. Ken Russell's deranged film of *Billion Dollar Brain* comes to mind, but at least that was fun, and had the sheer nerve to steal the battle on the ice from *Alexander Nevsky*. In contrast, Jones offers a dry, pseudo-documentary anti-style which is totally uninvolved. Revealing someone's name almost counts for in-depth characterisation.

Meanwhile, between bouts of flat action, Jones' 'characters' spend interminable pages deciphering the muddled plot in dialogue of mind-numbing banality, which eventually becomes science-fictional with a near literal, and unconvincing, *deus ex machina*. However, before that our hero spends six weeks starving in solitary, then is beaten, shot in the head, and buried in a Siberian forest in mid-winter. Surviving, he is taken to hospital suffering only minor frost-bite, only to be quite astonishingly mistaken for another man shot in the same forest at the same time. Quickly recovering from this ordeal, he propositions his beautiful doctor, who takes him home for caviar, champagne and sex!

Come on down, Nick Carter!

Of these three books I would unreservedly recommend purchasing *Strange Highways* in hardback, though purists should note that five of the earlier stories have been revised, so if you want to trace the author's stylistic development you will have to seek out the originals. Everything here shines with the prose of a master. Meanwhile, unless you have a lot of money to spend on your book collection, the eventual paperback of *Havock Junction* will not disgrace your shelves. As for *Black Lightning*, the press release includes a quote from Vladimir Zhirinovsky, presumably on the principle that to be reviled by someone so politically incorrect is a sign of considerable merit. Well, even fascistic racists can (I am loath to admit) be right occasionally, so in a spirit of international co-operation in the field of literary criticism, and courtesy of Gollancz themselves, I leave the last word to Mr. Zhirinovsky: 'We have seen a number of trashy books by so-called experts on the subject of the changes going on in Russia, and this is one of the worst.'

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**Colin Greenland**

Reviewed by Chris Amies

*Seasons of Plenty*  
HarperCollins, 1995, 403pp, £15.99

Colin Greenland's *Take Back Plenty* astonished a lot of people with its vivacious reappraisal of

the Space Opera, featuring a devil-may-care heroine in the memorable form of Tabitha Jute, barge-owner and inadvertent saver of humanity from alien takeover. In the end she took back Plenty, the vast possibly sentient alien spaceship built by the Frasque, that supposedly long-extinct race rumours of whose survival occasionally shook the fragile world of human space.

Now Tabitha's going to fly Plenty to the stars. In one of the strangest interstellar expeditions yet told, she – still Captain, no longer of a Bergen Kobold barge but of a huge world-ship – heads off into the haunted void of hyperspace, not in search of anything so much as just keeping going.

You remember the barge was called the 'Alice Liddell'? If *Take Back Plenty* wasn't particularly Wonderland-like, this chapter of Tabitha's adventures is. In the same way that Lewis Carroll's supposedly nonsense works were full of weird but in some way symbolically charged figures, so the world that Tabitha took over and peopled with people (some human, some – such as the lion-like Thrants – not) she hoped she could live with, is manically charged in a way that can not just be random. But Tabitha is almost losing it. She has been used to being her own woman, plying the spaceways when someone needed a cargo shifted; now the future of a whole world, much of it still unexplored, really relies on her.

Captaincy in hyperspace seems easy; Tabitha just tells the ship's persona (transplanted from the 'Alice Liddell') to keep going, and distracts herself with handsome young men and plenty of beer. For some reason that will become clear when Plenty takes itself online and hopefully becomes sentient, there is a renaming committee that is taking literally the idea that Plenty looks like a brain (and not an orbiting giant sprout, *please*) and giving bits of it names by analogy. The Frasque, according to Alice, had no names for any part of the vessel, so the names change. The Crap Chute, however, carries right on being the Crap Chute as far as most people are concerned. And how do you rename anywhere in a nearly-functioning anarchy like Plenty, where groups of formidable women that could have stepped straight out of Middle England, complete with afternoon tea and lace curtains, carry out strange expeditions? Fortunately the balance is kept intact by a vast crew of grungy good-for-nothings, but there is dissent in the ranks, and characters you thought were good turn out to be less so; the Hell's Angels are all right but the pirates less so. Then again, there are the Perks; nasty little critters like intelligent dogs walking upright.

Tabitha herself is followed around by various groups of wannabees, and becomes the main character of a staged drama in which her part is taken by an over-endowed blonde: a poke at the cover of the US edition of *Take Back Plenty*, which showed Tabitha as similar, when it is made quite clear in the first book and even clearer in this, that Tabitha is Black. (Jim Burns does Colin Greenland every credit with the cover of *Seasons of Plenty*, though, and even borrowed Greenland's favourite leather coat to clothe Tabitha in.)

In the same way that the reader of *Gormenghast* knows that the vast millennial stability of the castle-world can't continue, that it contains the seeds of its own destruction in the sparks of life pushing up through it, so with Plenty. Too much has the potential to destroy it. The signs are there, portents and strangely-appearing holograms, but Tabitha doesn't know what a Boojum is, so how can the signs speak to her? Alice's persona won't tell her because, once installed in the echoing caverns of Plenty where the shadows lie, she changes. Graffiti reading SCRATCH TABBYCAT might mean more to Captain Jute's old street-fighting self, trouble is, she's not that old self now. Trying to keep together a ship, and herself, with just her and her former shipmate Dodger and a handful of others, ain't easy when the world starts to turn odd at the edges, and 'Fears start to sweep through the civilised world like fashions'. Being on Plenty is worse than being on a ship, because there is literally nothing else while they are in hyperspace: the star voyagers are 'living like beetles in a rock'. Meanwhile the whole of Plenty's fervid and varied population is splitting, reemerging, killing one another off, and I'm sure that's Timothy Leary dispensing drugs and wisdom from his hospital bed.

*Seasons of Plenty* is anarchic space opera, and it is strange, unpredictable, and

tremendous fun to read, while all the time a feeling of things starting to fall apart builds up. It's the second volume of what is now called 'The Tabitha Jute Trilogy', so after the initial phase of 'Wrongness', in which a problem is presented, this second volume is the phase of 'Thinning', in which events build up to a point where they have to be redeemed some way in the third volume.

**Tom Holland**

***The Vampyre***

*Little Brown, 1995, 341pp, £9.99*

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

The subtitle gives it all away: 'Being the True Pilgrimage of George Gordon, Sixth Lord Byron'. Byron sits in his easy chair, deep in a London crypt, and relates his mortal and immortal adventures to the hapless Rebecca, his distant descendant. Rebecca is trying to trace Byron's memoirs – she believes that a copy was made before the original was burnt – and is determined to find out what became of her mother, who vanished on the same mission twenty years ago. What she finds instead is more terrifying than her wildest nightmares.

This is true Gothic horror; heavy, sensuous and decadent, as befits a work whose narrator is the infamous Lord Byron. A strong supporting cast – Shelley, Polidori, Lady Caroline Lamb and Countess Cenci – alleviate Byron's occasionally tedious degeneracy. And Byron himself, it must be said, makes a convincing vampire. Wandering Europe, sampling every vice available, he is bored with life and the succession of inferior companions who share his travels or his bed – until he meets the barbaric Vakhel Pasha, whose name (of course) strikes fear into the hearts of ignorant peasants. Byron fancies himself above such superstitious terrors; Pasha's castle offers new pleasures to suit his jaded palate. And when he awakes, unwillingly, as one of the *vardoulacha* – the blood-sucking undead who prey on the villagers – it is the ultimate experience. Never one to apply conventional morality to his own behaviour, he is confronted by a whole new set of ethical dilemmas. Under the dubious guidance of the Restoration vampire Lovelace (can this be the Lovelace who was to marry Byron's daughter Ada?) he returns to the giddy perversions of London, and is shocked to discover that the blood he needs to survive must come from the most appalling source of all.

Yes, Byron makes a good vampire – but he isn't a likeable one. Even before his rebirth as a vampire, he appears an arrogant, self-opinionated dilettante who imagines himself superior to mere mortals. Once he's undead, there's no stopping him. Some of the most poignant scenes in the novel are those between Byron and Shelley, who is more human than Byron has ever been. Byron is more than ready to mock

Shelley's liberal politics, his love for Mary, and his passion for life; but the life of the vampyre is wretched and lonely, and Byron wants a companion. What anyone else might want is, of course, of no interest whatsoever to our dissolute hero.

Tom Holland brings Byron to life (or unlife) with a precision of tone that echoes Byron's own work, and a wealth of historical detail which is seldom less than convincing. Beauty and horror are mixed to an exact formula:

'I remember reading your letter,' Rebecca said ... 'About the Albanians in their gold and crimson, and the two hundred horses, and ... the boys calling the hour from the mosque ... I always thought it was a wonderful description.'

Lord Byron suddenly smiled. 'It was a lie. A sin of omission, rather. I neglected to mention the stakes. Three of them ... Two of the men were dead – shredded hunks of carrion ...'

Byron's own despair is no less convincing; he attains 'the wisdom of those who drink blood', but it only reinforces the blank nihilism that drove him, as a mortal, to seek out ever more shocking excesses. His affairs are many, but they do not touch his heart. Lady Caroline Lamb is driven to madness by the supernatural pleasures he offers her; his wife Annabella flees with their child; Mary Shelley's sister follows him to Italy – but their love bores him, and provokes his scathing mockery. Only one person seems to matter at all to him – Haidee, a slave of Vakhel Pasha's – but she is doomed, and Byron sees his own doom in her.

*The Vampyre* is not a cheerful novel. Byron's despairing decadence, his hopeless realisation that he is doomed to immortality in a less than perfect world, becomes as oppressive as the scent of incense in Vakhel Pasha's labyrinth. Holland's lush prose, while evoking Byron's voice admirably, has a cloying sensuality; separate events seem to ooze together into a mass of rich imagery and grand passion. Rebecca, who might have provided a balancing sensibility, is seldom more than a passive listener, a sort of inverted Scheherazade encouraging Byron to continue his tale and thus delay her own death. *The Vampyre* is a maelstrom of decadence, but has no heart.

**Jenny Jones**

***The Blue Manor***

*Gollancz, 1995, 352pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

*The Blue Manor* is described on its cover as a 'dark romance', but it is really one of those books that defy classification by genre. It could be fantasy or even

horror, but only in the broadest sense.

The Blue Manor itself was built just before the First World War by Rosamund Banniere in the depths of Epping Forest. Only a short distance away cars speed by on the motorway to London, but the house and the various members of the Banniere family that own it have remained cut off from the outside world. Phizackerly

Byrne, a man fleeing from a deeply traumatic event in his own life, comes across the Blue Manor, and accepts the job of gardener from Ruth Banniere, the current owner, who is trying to bring some sort of order to the run-down house and garden. Byrne quickly realises that there is something very wrong at the Blue Manor. He sees people and experiences events that make him determined to leave the house, but when confronted with Ruth's apparent helplessness and her insistence on a rational mundane explanation for the strange happenings he has witnessed, he finds himself compelled to stay. Only Simon, Ruth's cousin and lover, supports Byrne's contention that the Blue Manor is a place of evil, but he is a claustrophobic alcoholic and Ruth dismisses his belief that it is the house itself that prevents his stepping outside its walls.

Tom Crabtree was introduced to Kate, Ruth's daughter, by his university tutor, Alicia, a relative of Kate's. He eagerly accepts Kate's invitation to spend the summer at the Blue Manor, as it will give him the opportunity to work on his novel. He too becomes aware that the Blue Manor harbours something evil. When he begins work on his novel, he finds that he is writing the history of the Banniere family, a history which turns out to be both horrific and tragic, with consequences for each succeeding generation right down to the present. Subsequently it is discovered that Tom, unbeknown to himself, is also a victim of the Bannieres' violent history. Although the novel that Tom writes is his own

work, he feels that somehow the house is revealing its own dark secrets through him, and that whether or not his writing is historically accurate, it is possessed of a poetic truth.

At first *The Blue Manor* seems to inhabit the territory of John Fowles' *The Magus* or Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* with characters' beliefs either being manipulated or the products of their own minds. As the plot progresses and more of the Bannieres' history is revealed, it becomes evident that what can only be described as the supernatural has become tangible, and yet, as the narrative shifts from one character's point of view to another's, enough ambiguity is maintained to prevent the novel turning into a scenario for a horror movie, despite its dramatic final scenes. Different readers may well find different interpretations for the events in the later chapters of the novel, just as each character has their own beliefs about the nature of the house and its power. The atmosphere of the house is strikingly evoked. Byrne becomes 'aware of the weight of the house, of its overbalancing gables and arches suspended like dead-weights over their heads'. In the house any event or manifestation seems possible, however bizarre, and for Byrne, the house itself is a living entity, however nonsensical this may sound when he is outside its confines.

Jenny Jones' debut fantasy, *The Flight Over Fire* trilogy, was much acclaimed. With *The Blue Manor* she is assured of her place as a writer of renown.

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**Guy Gavriel Kay**      *The Lions of Al-Rassan*  
HarperCollins, 1995, 582pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Andrew Adams

Guy Gavriel Kay's latest novel continues the trends apparent in his earlier work, moving further away from 'High Fantasy' and closer to the historical novel. There is still a long way to go, this is not even an alternate history, though he's coming closer with each book.

*The Lions of Al-Rassan* is set in an analogue of Moorish Spain, at a time when the star-worshipping 'Asharites' (Muslim analogue) are losing control over the northern sun-worshipping 'Jaddites' (Christian analogue), with the moon-worshipping 'Kindath' (Jewish analogue) caught in the middle as always (in this world and Kay's).

What little magic appears is very underplayed. One of the main characters is a physician, and her diagnostic methods are either subtly magical or medieval superstition (the latter, I think, though this is never made clear). There is a young boy with some clairvoyance, which allows for useful coincidences which would otherwise have stretched even the most ardent fans suspension of disbelief. Otherwise, the plot centres around political upheavals leading (as ever) to war. Being a character in a Kay novel is a dangerous occupation, war is always just around the corner. Unlike many contemporary fantasists, Kay does not spare his characters from the fortunes and mis-fortunes of war –

characters die, this has always been one of his strongest points. However many narrow escapes there are, there are always those which do not happen, leading to the torture and sometimes the death of major characters.

As in *Tigana* and *A Song for Arbonne*, sex, in many guises, also plays a role, though the sexual scenes in *Lions* seem to be somewhat more overt than previously. This may be a facet of the literature Kay is imitating (the literature of Moorish Spain) or it may just be a development of his own style. I find it occasionally distracting from the plot, but not unduly so.

What is an undue distraction is the persistent cleverness with which he insists on plaguing the book. He deliberately leads the reader to conclusions about who such-and-such an unnamed person is (usually one who has died), then springs upon us another name. After the second or third time this does become irritating.

The language tends towards the purple at times: too many double negatives and overuse of adjectives for easy reading. Again, this may be a facet of the literature of the time, although Kay has always been one for flowery use of English.

On the whole this is an entertaining read, barring occasional irritants, on a par with *A Song for Arbonne*. If you like Kay's work, then this is still a cut above most fantasy being published today, but he has yet to follow *Tigana* with anything approaching such success.

**Anne McCaffrey**                      *Freedom's Landing*

*Bantam Press, 1995, 336pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Helen Gould

This story is set in our own universe in the very near future, with a race of bully-boys, the Catteni, enslaving and abducting the populations of one planet after another. Having evolved on a high-gravity planet they are massively built macho men who conduct twenty-four hour feuds with great ferocity.

The main viewpoint character, Kristin Bjornsen, has been ripped from her college campus along with thousands of other Denverites, and sold as a slave to a brutal Catteni master on Barevi, a Catteni colony planet. When the book opens she has escaped by stealing his flitter and is scratching out a living in the countryside. She rescues another apparent fugitive, only to discover that he himself is from an aristocratic social sector within Catteni society. When he shows a sexual interest in her she decides it's time to dispense with his company, knocks him out (which establishes her neatly as a strong female character) and delivers him unconscious to the outskirts of the settlement. Unfortunately, the slaves are rioting, and Kris is once again gassed and shipped off-planet.

The title sums up the story admirably, and is probably the only piece of subtle layering in the story; members of several enslaved races, including humans, are dumped on what is effectively a prison planet, along with a few basic necessities for survival. When Kris comes round, she finds that not only are the rioters and herself there, but also her erstwhile Catteni admirer. Without his presence it is doubtful whether anyone would survive; Zainal has a limited knowledge of the planet and its dangers, having seen an exploratory report. But it didn't mention that virtually the whole planet is being farmed by machines created by an unknown race. This gave the plot strong overtones of another McCaffrey book, *Restoree*, and there's also an element of *Romeo and Juliet* as a romance develops

between Kris and Zainal, foreshadowed by their initial meeting.

There's a strong whiff of infodump at the start of the book, and a sometimes inappropriate use of reported rather than direct speech. The dialogue is full of modern-day slang, often a source of humour in the novel as McCaffrey uses Zainal's growing understanding of English to poke fun at the idiosyncrasies of the language. Unfortunately it adds nothing new to the genre, and I disliked the way the slang spilled over into the narrative; the style is more than conversational.

Although Kris is the main viewpoint character there are occasional forays into the viewpoint of Chuck Mitford, an ex-forces man who takes charge of the refugees and organises them as more and more are dropped by the Catteni. The characterisation is limited, the alien characters hard to visualise from the descriptions given. McCaffrey could have painted in details of the alien societies through interplay between the characters but didn't; despite minor physical differences they are essentially interchangeable. Zainal is a potentially interesting character, more so than the heroine, he proves a useful addition to the company, but there's little exploration of what would make an alien man turn renegade.

The pacing was pedestrian for much of the novel and the world-building sketchy, though I enjoyed the Barevi thorn-bushes. And on the prison planet, later named 'Botany', the night scavengers should have been visceral but McCaffrey pulls her punches. When I read a book I want to suffer with the characters and I certainly wasn't doing that; the story felt curiously diluted. A novel should be an intense emotional experience for the reader. I enjoyed the opening sequences but felt the book missed opportunities from there on. If you want an uncomplicated read with lots of action, then this may be for you. There are no surprises; though it *will* be a surprise if confirmed McCaffrey fans don't make space for it on their bookshelves.

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**Christopher Priest**

*The Prestige*

*Simon & Schuster, 1995, 404pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Most of our finest writers turn again and again in their fiction to pursue certain themes and ideas. In the case of Christopher Priest you can trace an interest in questions of identity, of the place of a rational man in an irrational world or an irrational man in a rational world (it amounts to the same thing), of the untrustworthiness of memory as an interface between ourselves and our world, in stories at least as far back as *Fugue for a Darkening Island*. These notions first found clear expression in *A Dream of Wessex*, which introduced the double in the characters of David and Paul who compete not only for Julia but also, in a very real sense, for the soul of their reality. The pieces were in place for what would be Priest's finest work, *The Affirmation*, in which Peter Sinclair is the double, reinventing himself and his world through a haze of treacherous memory both here and in the Dream Archipelago. The next novel, *The Glamour*, forms a companion piece to that book, though the double has again split into Grey and Niall who, with Susan, recreate the triangular figure of *A Dream of Wessex*. The 'invisibility' of *The Glamour* echoes the imperfect

self-creation, the empty pages of Sinclair's book, in *The Affirmation*, and in both cases the perceptions of the world are being constructed on the shifting sands of uncertain memory.

Now, in what may be his best book (it's a very close run thing with *The Affirmation*, but I think *The Prestige* just wins out), Priest returns to those themes, echoes again the chilling impressions that arose from *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour*. And here again the double is brought into one person, or into several, for twins and replicants abound throughout the book. The story begins as Andrew Westley, a young journalist in contemporary Britain, remembers a twin he never had: Priest's obsessions could not be more succinctly laid out for us. But Westley's story provides no more than a doorway into the main body of the book, a framework which establishes the mood, the resonances we can expect to discover as we enter into this magic box of trickery and puzzles which all revolve around the same haunting question: who?

Who, for a start, is Alfred Borden? As we read his memoirs we discover him to be a successful stage magician of the late Victorian era. We find out about his childhood, his first interest in magic, the launching of his career and the rise to become one of the most acclaimed magicians of his day. But along the way a darker shadow begins to intrude, starting with the day he exposes a fake medium who turns out to be Rupert Angier, another struggling young magician. Their rivalry lasts a lifetime, consisting mostly in petty sabotage of each other's shows. For a while Borden seems to gain the upper hand with the great triumph of his career, the illusion in which he disappears at one side of the stage and reappears in the same instant at the other side: one of the few illusions, significantly, whose secret is not revealed in this engrossing insight into the history of stage magic. But then Angier unveils his own version of the same trick which leads to Borden's final, tragic act of sabotage.

Such is the story on the surface. A fascinating tale in its own right, full of rivalry and treachery, tragedy and farce. But beneath the surface another tale is unfolding: for if this is Borden's private, secret notebook we are reading, whose is the other voice which occasionally breaks in, disoriented and disorienting? Slowly, subtly, the theme of doubles, of twins, is weaving its repetitive pattern into the narrative.

Of course we must not forget that Borden and Angier are themselves the twin poles around which this novel turns. So Borden's version of events is echoed by Angier's, and here the same events are made to seem very different. Oh the rivalry and petty sabotage is there, but what lies behind it is not the same and the Borden that Angier perceives is very different from the man we've met before. Even more important, Angier's version of the big illusion comes from a very different source, science fiction as opposed to fantasy one might almost say. For Angier's quest to discover the secret behind Borden's trick takes him to the American frontier, and to an eccentric experimenter named Nikola Tesla. Tesla devises a version of the trick for Angier, but it is a trick that is no trick and it has extraordinary consequences for the magician. Consequences that are only fully revealed when the story turns full circle and brings us back to Andrew Westley and the discovery he makes in the Angier family tomb.

Borden and Angier are both, in their way, doubled within the story, and both are diminished by the experience, physically or psychologically. Again and again the story forces us to ask who they are, what is the nature of their identity? Do twins, who echo disturbingly throughout the book, double their identity or halve it? Or is it all, anyway, a trick of illusive memory, an irrationality of the world?

Priest's writing has never been more fluent, his exploration of psychology has never been more complex or more disturbing. Yet the darkness of the soul is shown within the vividly realised setting of dingy turn-of-the-century music halls, and the tatty world of fakery and superficial glamour makes this also one of the most attractive books he has written. A prestige is a conjuring trick, and the finest sleight of hand of all is that performed by Christopher Priest. This novel has been a long time coming, it is well worth the wait.

**Kristine Kathryn Rusch**      *Sins of the Blood*

*Millenium, 1995, 327pp, £8.99*

Reviewed by Carol Anne Green

In a world where Vampirism is a disease, and the 'cure' in one state, Wyoming, is eradication (death by a stake through the heart), Cammie and her younger brother, Ben, are on a collision course with their past.

Cammie, herself an eradicator, is horrified when she finds a child in the apartment where she has just staked a Vampire. She is concerned and angry that no-one had thought to tell her that vampires might have been normal enough once to produce children. Her confusion and horror mask her own childhood memories of when she acted to save herself and Ben from their father.

Separated as children, Ben and Cammie have

not had any contact in years. When Cammie discovers that Ben has gone missing from his adoptive parents, she sets out to find him, unaware that Ben is being seduced into the dark world of Vampirism. As Cammie comes closer to finding her brother, Ben comes closer to fulfilling his potential as a hereditary Vampire. On a collision course that cannot be stopped, Cammie finds herself being trapped by that which she hates the most.

Rusch manages to turn what could have been a foregone conclusion to the story into an investigation of the horrors bequeathed to Cammie and Ben by their father. This is a powerful novel that takes the clichéd trappings of Vampire killing and turns them into a gripping page turner. A very readable Vampire novel for anyone unsure if they'd enjoy the genre as well as hardened connoisseurs.

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**Bob Shaw**

*A Load of Old BoSh*

*Beccon, 1995, 94pp, £4.95*

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

At my first SF convention (Albacon 1, if you're interested) I sat at the BSFA desk, having heard that volunteering for something was a good way to get on in fandom... This bloke with a beard handed me a pile of paper and asked me to pass them to Jim Barker (another bloke with a beard). I glanced at the paper and discovered diagrams of a standard lens, a fresnel lens and a Roman amphitheatre. Serious stuff. The first bloke with the beard was Bob Shaw, the diagrams appear in this book of serious scientific talks.

To someone attending their first convention, the idea of breaking off from all this fun that you're having to attend a serious scientific talk seems a little weird. When you discover that the other attendees are fighting for seats in the hall, and that even the bar is deserted, then it becomes obvious that you have to check this out. When you do, you discover that these serious talks are not quite so serious as all that. In fact they are very non-serious indeed.

To most people, Bob Shaw is an SF novelist, one of that breed of British (or Irish) writers who writes clever, intelligent fiction that always seems a little out of place in an American sf-orientated world. But convention-going sf fans realise that this is only one side of him. Bob Shaw has been giving serious scientific talks at conventions for a long time, and they are

serious. Seriously funny. Printed, they lose the dry delivery that adds to the live experience, but they still have that spark which has made them so popular.

These few pages are packed with off-the-wall scientific theories ranging from incontrovertible evidence of time-travelling SF writers to a new improved space drive which makes good use of tomatoes and very unusual demands on the engine room crew. We also meet such diverse characters as Von Donegan, the German-Irish scientific genius, and the night shift Enterprise crew:

'Don't mention that character to me. He's the dayshift captain, the one who gets all the action. I'm the one who's on at nights and nothing ever happens when I'm on the bridge. The sheer boredom is driving me mad...'

each of these characters is a finely honed study, no wait, that's a different book. Each of these characters has one sole purpose – to act as a foil for Bob Shaw's barrage of puns, jokes, exaggerations and sheer wanton, deliberate misinterpretation. And they do it beautifully.

Along the way we also get to meet Bob Shaw. His talks are peppered with enough anecdotes gleaned from his varied careers in writing and structural engineering to give an insight into the man himself. And anyone who has read his books will find in here the inspiration for those off-beat inventions which form the core of so much of his work.

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**Tricia Sullivan**

*Lethe*

*Gollancz, 1995, 384pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

*Lethe* is set in 2166, eighty years after genetic warfare changed the world forever. The cleanup operation is still in progress; purple algae process the toxins from the seabed and new species have arisen to fill drastically-changed ecological niches. Meanwhile, most of Earth's remaining human population live in reservations, shielded from the poisonous elements and the merciless

sun. Outside the rezzes, One-Eyes – mutated human stock – perform the menial tasks that keep the pure humans alive. And in the high tower of the League of New Alchemists – so-called because they transmuted matter, in this case their own flesh – live the Brains who administer this grim new world. The Brains (or Pickled Heads, as they're known 'behind their backs') are bodiless tissue, connected to the world through a permanent interface – the appalling results of biological experimentation from the days before the Gene Wars. The work of the League, from terraforming the Moon to

developing 'only slightly radioactive' crops, is carried out largely by altermoders who can switch from their human state to an aquatic form in which they communicate with dolphin pods. The dolphin-altermode symbiosis provides massive 'computing' power, which can be applied to almost any problem.

The latest problem is a real teaser: Jenae and her dolphins are asked to interpret a mysterious transmission from Underkohling, an artifact of unknown origin on the outskirts of the solar system. Underkohling's mysteries have already been probed, to no effect. It holds four 'gates'; two lead to uncharted areas of space, one to somewhere that no probe has ever returned from, and the fourth gate appears at unpredictable intervals. Its latest appearance coincided with the presence of software expert Daire Morales, who was searching for the source of the transmission. It swallowed him whole. Whether he found the source is a matter for debate.

The transmission Jenae must decode refers to the ship 'Morpheus', which crashed on Underkohling at the height of the Gene Wars carrying the Board of Ingenix, one of the three companies who, between them, tried to remake the world. Could 'Morpheus' have passed through the fourth gate? Could the gate lead to a new, unsullied world? Daire, of course, knows the answers; getting them back to Earth, however, poses problems. And the answers pose more questions that he cannot answer. What are the ghosts? Is he a ghost himself? Where is he?

Jenae's discoveries put her in an even more dangerous position. Her obsessive quest for justice leads her from the desert wastes of New Zealand to the uncomfortable cosiness of 22nd-century Oxford – and through the oceans between.

*Lethe* shows us a future that's distinctly dystopic: nature is now inimical to human life, and human life knows it only too well. 'Humanity, that once sought to control the world, has succeeded only in changing it, and now ... evolution has taken off like a house on fire ... The world's not (our) playhouse any longer. It's a great big ravenous entropic thing.' That's the ivory tower perspective of an Oxford don; Keila, the One-Eye, might say the same thing but, on the other hand, she has mutated and survived. This is a world where, more than ever, your DNA dictates your chances of survival. The fight to regain a small part of the earth for humans is a grim one, and the human tragedies which result cannot be allowed to interfere with that reclamation. Jenae's twin sister Yi Ling carries the gene for altermode, but is not an altermode herself; Daire also carries the latent gene. Both will come to regret their genotype, for very different reasons.

Tricia Sullivan's first novel deals uncompromisingly, and unpedantically, with one of the recurring themes of science fiction: what it means to be human. Is it in the genes? The brain? The 'soul'? *Lethe* doesn't offer us any real answers; but the questions are posed in new and intriguing ways, inviting us to consider all the implications of genetic manipulation. Sullivan's rigorously constructed future contains little that is fanciful and much that is poetic. As Daire says at one point, 'anything is possible ... you just have to suspend

your belief in reality.' The reality offered in this novel is disturbingly plausible, as convoluted as a naked brain, and brilliantly described. An astonishing debut.

# Paperback Graffiti

## Paperback Reviews edited by Stephen Payne

### EDITORIAL

Well I'm off then. As you may have inferred from *Matrix* #116, I am standing down as paperback reviews editor here at Vector. I've been doing this job for three years now and it's time for me to find something a little more relaxing with which to fill my free time (e.g. beer). I've enjoyed my time here, I've met a lot of people and I've corresponded with a lot of people. I would like to thank all those who have

supported me, all those who have furnished me with reviews and I would particularly like to thank Catie Cary, Chris Amies and Andy Sawyer. Thanks guys. As you may also have inferred, a replacement has been found. Tanya Brown will be your host from next issue and I wish her well.

Over to you, Tanya.

Stephen Payne

## Recommended

### *Little Deaths*

#### Ellen Datlow (Ed.)

"There are images enough to savour here, and weirdness and the familiar becoming strange. There may not be so much variety for the price in any collection published this year."

Chris Amies

### *Beggars in Spain*

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"*Beggars in Spain* deserved all the awards heaped upon it as a novella, and the full novel comes with no less recommendation."

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### *Fairyland*

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### *Brother Termite*

#### Patricia Anthony

"This is Patricia Anthony's second novel. It's a little gem."

Andy Mills

### *Pacific Edge*

#### Kim Stanley Robinson

"*Pacific Edge* overcomes many of these problems very well. This is an inspiring book, a clever book, a book to be reread again, and if this is your first chance to read it, lucky you!"

Pat McMurray

### *Warhost Of Vastmark*

#### Janny Wurts

"The series finishes here, and yet it doesn't (or doesn't have to); I for one would like to see more in the series in future. Highly recommended — a series to be read again and again."

Vikki Lee

Patricia Anthony

*Brother Termite*

NEL, 20/7/95, 250pp, £5.99 money.

Reviewed by Andy Mills

It's the early twenty-first century and the aliens have landed. In fact, they've been here fifty years, and they effectively control the Earth through a puppet President of the United States. Even worse, these hive-society aliens - "the Cousins" - are a doomed race, their matings now producing only the robot-like "Loving Helpers". Their mission? To take the human race with them to the grave, creating instead a successor race, a hybrid of the two species. Hence the abductions of human children — and thus the Cousins' classic appearance, small with oval heads and huge eyes.

With a premise such as this you'd be forgiven for anticipating that Anthony would concentrate on the spunky humans fighting the evil enemy. Not a bit of it. The story unfolds from the key alien character: Reen, Chief of Staff in the White House, First Brother to the alien race. Despite his race's goal, Reen is a sympathetic character with strengths and weakness' and with an overwhelming love for the humans closest to him. Indeed, all of Anthony's aliens are superbly drawn, so much so that it is the humans that (deliberately) are the shadowy, unfathomable species. And it is not the human / Cousins conflict which predominates, but the internal strife between the aliens themselves, as the author skilfully reveals their culture, and the devastating affect of their exposure to humans, to us.

This is Patricia Anthony's second novel. It's a little gem.

**Mike Carlin,**  
**Pablo Marcos,**  
**Carlos Garzon,**  
**Arne Starr & Carl**  
**Gafford**

**Star Trek: The Next  
Generation -  
Beginnings**

*Titan, 1995, 160pp, £9.99*

Reviewed by Andy Mills

A collection of tales which originally appeared as numbers 1 to 6 of the comic **ST: TNG**. Unless you are an avid collector of spin-offs of the series, there is nothing at all about this publication which lends itself to being recommended. The writing is uninspired, the artwork shoddy. Despite what the back cover blurb claims, the stories tell us little about the cast of the Enterprise "as they learn about each other" because, of course, it's in the nature of the beast that such characters don't develop, merely play the same role *ad infinitum*. Despite the title, there is nothing to suggest that the stories form the beginnings of any sequence. Nor - apart from the episodes in which the super-being Q appears - is there much to connect the tales.

I'd call this a juvenile except that to do so would insult young people. However, if your child is spending a tenner on books such as this, it's safe to say you're giving him or her too much pocket

**C. J. Cherryh**

**Foreigner**

*Legend, 20/7/95, 378pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by Chris Amies

They have no word for trust, and fourteen for betrayal. The 'foreigner' is Bren Cameron, who was used to being quite large on his home planet (Earth) but now among eight-foot-tall humanoids is beginning to feel a little small. It's not just that: the atevi, who have allowed humans an island enclave in their world and one 'interpreter' or ambassador, called the 'paidhi' - that's Bren - are a feudal people, given to poisoning and double-dealing. They have no nations as overriding loyalties and fealties are the basis of their world. Cameron can't make head or tail of them even though he does his best, for their worldview is not his and maybe he never tries to appreciate that. If humans expect honesty, the atevi expect treachery. When Bren is fed tea by the dowager grandmother of a feudal lord (I almost say 'shogun', I do, but maybe it would be putting too obvious a spin on the story), he ends up in hospital; but was it attempted poisoning, or just something that nobody told the dowager humans couldn't handle?

Naturally Bren gets into more trouble than he should, and like any Cherryh hero undergoes a phase as punchbag, even if it isn't really his fault. As anyone who had read **The Left Hand of Darkness** could have told him, these big inscrutable aliens have their own feuds and Bren's going to be a pawn in some of them. The trouble he gets into is so little his fault - he does so little to bring it about, so much to try to understand even if he can't - that our bewilderment is his. The story is intricate (even if she never points out that the furniture would be huge by his standards) and the decay of Bren Cameron's world a descent into brutality and strangeness, like being caught by bandits in foreign mountains, who might just kill you because as far as they're concerned, you don't matter. Maybe the most alien are those who we think are closest.

**Chris Curry**

**Panic**

*(NEL, 20/7/95, 370pp, £5.99)*

Reviewed by Andy Mills

1964. Young Ricky Piper is blessed - or rather cursed - with the Piper clan's (occasional) hereditary ability to see greenjacks, shifty creatures of faery which cavort outside the family home. Forewarned by his grandfather who, along with the other living Pipers, is unable to see the creatures, Ricky knows to beware the greenjacks and the visible creature - Big Jack - they form on Hallowe'en and through which one of the greenjacks can swap bodies with a human. Timid Ricky is almost snared by Big Jack; his disabled twin brother Robin is caught instead. From then on

Ricky's life goes downhill at the hands of the evil changeling.

1993. Ricky Piper is a successful columnist, widowed with two kids, for whose sake he decides at last to return from Las Vegas to the family home in California. What happened in the intervening years, what became of the malevolent creature inhabiting Robin's body, and what happens when Ricky returns form the bulk of this novel. And I confess to enjoying it. Forget the typical genre book title and cover, overlook the "Don't open the cellar door! No, don't go down the cellar steps!" scenario of Ricky's return to California, and you've a fast-moving and intelligent horror novel. Curry builds on the solid base of folklore as the basis for the greenjacks and she provides plausible explanations for the events that occur and Ricky's second sight, whilst most of the horror is psychological: a pleasant change from mindless bloodletting. Not great literature, perhaps, but good fun.

**Ellen Datlow (Ed.)** *Little Deaths*  
(*Millennium*, 7/8/95, 454pp, £5.99)  
Reviewed by Chris Amies

*Little Deaths* proclaims itself '24 Tales of Horror and Sex'. Ellen Datlow has previously been the editor of *Alien Sex* and *Alien Sex 2*, as well as of *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* in recent years, and a new anthology from her is an event worth noticing. "Sex and Death - a terrifying combination" says the back cover ... we lose control during love the same way that we will do at death, and at the same time what is the point of love if not to convince ourselves, against all logic, that we will never die? Sex and horror are not supposed to be related things, but when the margins of control break down, horror could leak in so easily. There are 24 stories here which vary from the overtly gory to the infinitely subtle; for an example of the latter, the story which Datlow says gives the keynote to the collection, Stephen Dedman's 'The Lady of Situations.' Nicola Griffith's 'Yaguara', reprinted from *Asimov's*, convinces with its story of characters growing up and facing the need for them to have responsibility for their own lives; Wayne Allen Sallee's 'Lover Doll' takes what could otherwise be a carnival trope and filters it through the marginalised world of the congenitally afflicted. Douglas Clegg, whose stories I mostly remember for violent and bizarre images, is represented here with a strange tale of fraternity hazing and the Ice Palace of the title. An author you might have expected to find in this collection (but don't) is Poppy Z. Brite, but then, she's off doing her own anthologies these days, like *Love In Vein*. Most of the settings are contemporary, though J. Calvin Pierce's 'Sahib' takes place in the England of 1911; if SF is currently exploring the Victorian era, why shouldn't horror follow similarly, retracing the paths of M. R. James? The variety of approaches is refreshing, but at the same time,

reading twenty-four stories all of whose basic premise is similar could lead to overkill, and they're best taken one or a few at a time. There are images enough to savour here, and weirdness and the familiar becoming strange. There may not be so much variety for the price in any collection published this year.

**Tom Deitz** *Ghostcountry's Wrath*  
(*AvoNova*, 7/95, 386pp, \$5.50)  
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

I don't know about you, but it really bugs me when a book doesn't tell you that it's part of a series, especially when it quickly becomes obvious that reading the rest of the series would be an advantage.

And that is a problem with this book. The Prologue is full of inscrutable beings with long unpronounceable names witnessing obscure phenomena. As the story develops it becomes obvious that these people (deities?) have been met and perhaps explained in earlier volumes of the series. OK, so this seems like a picky problem, but throughout the book reference is made to events from earlier times. Fine in a sequel, but only if you know that it is a sequel.

Enough griping about that, what's the book like? To be honest, it's a bit slow. It consists of long patches of talk interspersed by sudden bursts of action. The talk is a mix of hip banter and discussion about which aspects of magic would best serve whatever purpose the characters have in mind. Neither of these topics are best suited to moving along the plot, and so the narrative drags along. The characters are interchangeable, one male being much like another, the teenage boy just a more naive version of the rest. Even the panther woman is a cipher, and underused to boot. A novel like this, full of Cherokee magic, its prequels apparently full of both Cherokee and Irish magic, should either be an action-packed feast of adventure or a densely-packed, but interestingly informative read. This is neither and, sadly, neither does it have that sense of the strange and otherworldliness that all good fantasy books of this type should have. Shame really.

**W. Michael Gear & Kathleen O'Neal Gear** *People of The Sea*  
(*Tor*, 10/94, 560pp, £4.99)  
Reviewed by Norman Beswick

This is the fifth book of the Gears in their North American series, and it is an absorbing example of what happens when two talented authors with considerable archaeological expertise combine in a novel to recreate the far past.

We are at the end of the Pleistocene epoch, the last Ice Age, when the huge glaciers

covering the Sierra Nevada mountains are melting and the climate is changing unpredictably. Human beings contend with dire wolves, sabre-toothed cats, giant short-faced bears and above all the great mammoths, but these ferocious animals are slowly dying out. For the humans it is time of disturbing change.

Sunchaser, revered Dreamer and Healer, practises his art among the tribes and clans of what is now the California desert, but his skills are declining. Kestrel, beautiful wife of the violent Lambkill, a travelling trader, conceives a child in his absence and is forced to flee. When she encounters Sunchaser, he is faced with a harrowing choice.

This is a complex story, packed with characters and their beliefs and passions. It builds up slowly to its exciting conclusion. I cannot speak for the accuracy of the imagined world the gears have created, but there are three pages of references at the end. I found it excellent bed-time reading, my dreams filled with Paleo-Indians healing with infusions of polar buds and willow-bark, and cooking mussels by placing them in waterskins and dropping heated rocks in on top of them.

**Charles Grant**      ***The X-Files: Whirlwind***  
(HarperCollins, 1995, 264pp, £4.99)  
Reviewed by Pat McMurray

This is a novel based on the TV series ***The X-Files***. It follows the usual pattern, with two FBI agents, the weird Fox Mulder and his more normal female partner, Dana Scully, investigating unusual murders, outside the normal FBI filing system. This involves people scoured to death in Arizona, mysterious Indians, an ex-movie star, a local FBI agent and Sheriff who portray themselves as cowboys.

I don't like ***The X-Files*** and rarely watch it. I find the back story, the conspiracy / the relationship, unconvincing and beyond belief. The individual episodes are often very derivative, there's 'The Thing' episode, the 'Carrie' episode and the like. That explains one of my reasons for disliking the book, but if you like ***The X-Files*** that reason's irrelevant.

My other reasons for disliking this are more relevant. This is a short novel, running to maybe 50,000 words. It's too busy for its length with most of the dozen characters introduced and quickly dropped. For example, the local FBI man, an old friend of Mulder's, is described in some detail, used to move the plot on a little, and then vanishes. There are other signs that this book was very rushed, with some terrible proof reading. This might have been quite a good book, if it had been twice as long.

**Sharon Green**      ***Wind Whispers,***

### ***Shadow Shouts***

(AvoNova, 7/95, 325pp, \$4.99)

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Tiran and Alexia are shapeshifters who have risen to become king and queen of a fantastic, mysterious realm. But all is not well; treason and rebellion are rife, and strange things are happening. Alexia falls prey to enemy magic, which transforms her from a strong and decisive woman to a quaking wreck. Tiran, trying to cope with his beloved wife's inexplicable decline, must also fight off challenges to the throne — without the faintest idea of the identity, or nature, of the challenger. Despite the help of their supporters Brandis and Cadry, things begin to look grim. Alexia and Tiran are pawns on a board they can't even see, and no one is going to stop play to explain the rules to them.

***Wind Whispers, Shadow Shouts*** is a strange novel; a blend of standard fantasy tropes and deft characterisation. Both Alexia and Tiran are intelligent people, equally at home with Machiavellian intrigue and bloodthirsty sword fights; they're both magicians and shapeshifters, and the magical elements of the story are handled as capably as the politics and court intrigue. Unusually for a fantasy novel, however, there is a disconcerting lack of description; one finishes the novel with no more than the vaguest idea of what the protagonists look like. Although ***Wind Whispers, Shadow Shouts*** is complete in itself, it's clear that familiarity with previous books in the series would give one a clearer understanding of the events related here, and the world(s) in which they take place. It's well-structured and nicely paced, and leaves a great deal to the reader's imagination; a point, perhaps, in its favour.

**Ann Halam**      ***The Haunting of Jessica Raven***  
(Dolphin, 1994, 124pp, £3.99)

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Jessica Raven, a thirteen-year-old on holiday in France with her family, follows her younger brother Paddy into a strange treasure hunt — only to find herself trapped, with Paddy, in an ancient oubliette. Fortunately help is at hand; but even after the family's return to England, Jessica is haunted by dreams and visions of Jean-Luc, the boy she met on the treasure hunt — who, in turn, is pursued by the vengeful ghosts of children. Jessica's own life is not without problems; her older brother, Adam, is dying of a rare genetic disorder. Is she simply shutting out unpleasant reality and retreating into an elaborate game of make-belief? Or are her visions of Jean-Luc, and the lost Chaplet of Rochers, somehow linked to her brother's fate?

'Ann Halam' is better known as Gwyneth Jones, who has received considerable acclaim for novels such as ***North Wind*** and ***White Queen***.

*The Haunting of Jessica Raven* is pitched at a younger market, but the writing is still elegant, and the author doesn't talk down to her intended audience. Jessica is a thoughtful and sympathetic character, with thoughts and emotions that ring true. A short novel - some scenes are, perhaps, over-terse — but not a slight one.

**Gwyneth Jones** *North Wind*  
(Gollancz, 27/5/95, 281pp, £5.99)  
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

In *White Queen* we were told how the Aleutian world-ship had arrived in orbit round the Earth, and the effect that First Contact had on the turbulent society that the aliens found (and failed to properly understand). This sequel, set almost a hundred years later continues the exploration of the human mind and ideals begun in the earlier novel, this time from the point of view of the 'half-caste', Sidney Carton and his relationship with the invalid Aleutian, Maitri's librarian, called Bella.

On the surface, this is about the desperate attempt by Sidney Carton to return Bella to her people after an Aleutian camp is raided by a band of the wandering soldiers that have become so common in the fragmented society of the late 21st century. But this just acts as a framework over which Jones weaves a rich sociological tapestry taking in the humans fighting in the Gender Wars, the half-castes — humans desperate to be Aleutian, and the Aleutians themselves. As Sidney and Bella move through the disparate social groupings of the time, Gwyneth Jones takes her chance to highlight the fragmentary state of the societies that she has created.

The Aleutians are convincing aliens, and Bella, as an Aleutian who is set apart from his companions by his 'differentness', acts as a lucid observer of his race. Sidney Carton sees himself not as a half-caste (although the rest of the characters feel that he is) and not the same as the other humans and as he interprets his race's idiosyncrasies for Bella he does the same for the reader

Gwyneth Jones writes this book with authority, her characters are both convincing and enigmatic, the action is handled well and the twists and turns in the plot are plausible and surprising. And the backgrounds have all the rich texture that you could ask for.

**Paul Kearney** *Riding The Unicorn*  
(Gollancz, 22/6/95, 254pp, £5.99)  
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

A fantasy novel of the "somebody from here goes there" type. "Somebody from here" is John Willoby, prison officer from Yorkshire, ageing hard-man. "There" is a virgin territory, in the process of being colonised by a semi-nomadic people with roughly Iron age technology. Tallimon, the bastard son of

King Courberall, is looking for a king-killer to further his political ambitions. The king-killer must be a stranger, so that no clan will be tainted by his crime. Tallimon has commanded his mage to evoke a man from another world, and bind him to his purpose with the sexual favours of his woman, Merrin.

Willoby is quickly aware that he is being used, but he is strongly attracted to the otherworld, finding it considerably more appealing than the reality of his dead-end job and loveless marriage. His grasp on the "real world" becomes more and more shakey, and he voluntarily undergoes some kind of psychiatric treatment. There's an uncomfortable, almost incestuous undercurrent in Willoby's otherworld adventures; Merrin, whom he quickly becomes infatuated with, strongly resembles his daughter. Slowly Willoby becomes aware that though in the "real world" he's failure, his analogue in the otherworld is Courberall. He is being set up to kill "himself". The story ends darkly and without hope.

**Stephen King** *Insomnia*  
(NEL, 6/7/95, 760pp, £5.99)  
Reviewed by Graham Andrews

It would be a cheap reviewer's trick for me to tell you that *Insomnia* (Ziesling / Viking / Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) should cure even the most chronic case of insomnia. Oh, what the hell: *Insomnia* should cure even the most chronic case of insomnia. I almost fell asleep writing this review, and it probably... yawn... shows.

This block book is just too damned long — by at least four hundred pages. "Scribble, scribble, scribble Mr King?" *Insomnia + It + The Stand* = the Collected Works of (say) William Tenn. If I hadn't been reviewing this beached whale of a tale, I'd never have read it through to the very end. I wouldn't have bought it, in the first place.

Having written that, I'd now like to praise Stephen King, not prematurely bury him. *Insomnia* has some good things embedded in its unnecessary bulk.

The protagonist is a seventy-year-old retired salesman Ralph Roberts, who must come to terms with his wife's recent death from a brain tumour. Decency personified — but he's no pushover. Ralph suffers from insomnia. Surprise! Surprise! But there's more to it than that. He also starts seeing Kirlian-type auras about both people and things, plus SINISTER BARRIER-type beings invisible under normal lighting conditions. Ed Deepneau - Ralph's research scientist neighbour, recently turned wife-beater - has an especially baleful aura.

But there's even more to it than that. Ed Deepneau turns out to be just the most up front manifestation of a conspiracy pitting mortal against immortal. The Fates are, indeed, to be forfended: "Atropos... is an agent of the Random. We, Lachesis and I, serve that other force, the one

which accounts for most events in both individual lives and in life's wider stream" (p.451).

The pro-abortion activist Susan Day, is also involved — but the how / why of her involvement doesn't become plain until the eleventh hour. For me, the best parts of *Insomnia* are the occasional think-pieces about abortion. King is non-polemical; neither pro nor con. It makes an agreeable change from the hectoring tones adopted by most writers on this emotive issue.

Nevertheless, my central criticism remains: *Insomnia* is just too damned long. The late, great John D. MacDonald (1916-86) once lamented that editors were no longer brave enough to actually edit his work. Stephen King would probably smite those (adjective deleted) people who buy their books on the principle of never-mind-the-quality-feel-the-width. And / or insomniacs...

**Nancy Kress**

***Beggars in Spain***

(Roc, 1995, 438 pp, £5.99)

Review by Steve Jeffery

The term 'fix-up novel' always seems to carry a slightly pejorative ring. *Beggars in Spain* is, though, something more: a logical expansion and extrapolation of the Hugo and Nebula award winning novella of the same name.

The novella, which takes up the first quarter of the novel, is the human story of Leisha Camden, gifted by her father with every advantage than modern genetic engineering can bring, and of her natural, unplanned twin, Alice. But beyond the advantages of looks, intelligence and health, Leisha has another legacy. She is part of an experimental program that does away with the need for sleep. That difference forces a growing rift between her and Alice, and with her friends and fellow students. As the advantages of the Sleepless become known, they become the target of envy, prejudice and discrimination. And when it becomes known that the Sleepless will not age, are potentially immortal, that envy finally turns to murderous hatred.

Twenty years on, as Leisha tries to work towards reconciliation, Jennifer Sharifi is building the town of Sanctuary, a self-sufficient, heavily protected Sleepless refuge. Even this is not enough; Jennifer's growing paranoia and hatred of the Sleeper "beggars" moves Sanctuary off-world into orbit, and then into threatening a potentially disastrous war of political and economic independence from the U.S.

Jennifer's attempts to push the genetic divide even further produce a new generation of Supers: Sleepless children who turn out to be as different from the Sleepless as they are from the normal human "beggars". The novella's question: "what do the rich owe the beggars in Spain, who can offer nothing in return?" returns in the promise of those bright and terrible children, and in the name that they choose for themselves.

*Beggars in Spain* deserved all the awards heaped upon it as a novella, and the full novel comes with no less recommendation.

**Paul J. McCauley**

***Fairyland***

(Gollancz, 21/8/95, 336pp, £8.99)

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

This is Paul J. McCauley's sixth novel, following the success of *Pasquale's Angel* and it shows an author working at the height of his considerable powers. *Fairyland* is award-winning stuff.

Set in the early part of the next century, the tale is split into three parts, the latter two a few years hence from the first. Alex Sharkey is a designer of psychoactive viruses who becomes involved with a weird little girl escaped from the vaults of a gene engineering company; a girl who has the grandest vision of her future. Without spoiling the plot, I can say that, through a maze of double-crossing and intrigue, Alex follows his fate across the scarred face of Europe; from London to Paris to the Albanian border.

Two things mark this book out as being so special; the brilliance of the inventions, and the skill with which the story is set in time.

Paul McCauley is a scientist - a cell biologist - and this gives his future speculations great depth. There are genetically engineered dolls, who in time get "made over" to become the sentient fairies; there are nanotech "fembots" (body-altered bucky ball robots); symbiotic secondary nervous systems; and much, much more. Equally as compelling are the social details; refugees everywhere, criminals, crazy journalists. When the fairies create their own kingdom they site it on the remains of Eurodisney, just outside Paris...

By placing the first third of the tale only a few decades hence, many cultural references can be made (and these are made a plenty), giving a curious, and very real, sense that the genetic and social changes described are only just around the corner. It is as if scenes and ideas from around 2020 have invaded a damp, hot 1995 London. The realism is palpable: the effect is riveting. The author makes much use of Richard Dawkins' concept of memes, which are, simply put, cultural genes that sweep across swathes of society; in *Fairyland*, such memes often have a sinister biochemical basis; you can be hit by love-bombs or religious mania; and because these memes are in your blood, you can't escape unless you are rich enough to buy a shot of universal page.

*Fairyland* is written in the present tense with enormous panache and great sophistication. It is un-put-downable. The last book I read with this sort of glamour was Chris Evans' *Aztec Century*, and that won the BSFA award. This novel deserves at least as much.

**Ian McDonald**

***Necroville***

(Gollancz, 27/7/95, 318pp, £5.99)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

**Necroville's** five protagonists are friends from way back, each in search of the moment of epiphany which will reveal their purpose in life. Their search is conducted against the background of a carnival in the ghetto of the resurrected dead who constitute the twenty-first century's labour force. Two of the protagonists' stories intersect with an attack on Earth by the off-planet dead, who have seized control of the solar system from the living and now wish to extend their vision of the future to everyone else, so that they may be reborn not as serfs but as citizens of the galaxy. Pyrotechnics ensue.

Intriguing though the premise of the resurrection is, however, one never quite believes it. The fictitious "Watson's Postulate" states that nano-technology will make us immortal, presumably through the repair of living tissue; but the extension of that same nano-technology to re-animation of dead tissue is glossed over with jargon and double-talk which detracts from the impressive complexity of McDonald's future vision. In addition, the economics of resurrection seem suspect: if we have (presumably cheap) nano-technology, why would we need such a labour force?

The novel also features an excessive quantity of violence. If we can all be resurrected, we can obviously kill each other many times over, which McDonald takes as an excuse for Night Hunts by gangs of resurrectees; graphically described, but verging on sadism-for-the-sake-of-it. There are also innumerable passages of rather over-descriptive prose presumably intended to help us see better what the author is writing about, but which suggest instead that he's having trouble visualising a scene himself - the first chapter, which introduces the protagonists is particularly awful - and get in the way of the action he's detailing. By the halfway mark, one has learned to skip them.

**Phillip Mann**

***A Land Fit For Heroes  
Vol 2 : Stand Alone Stan***

(Gollancz, 30/3/95, 288pp, £5.99)

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Second volumes of trilogies are tricky things. The beginnings of the story are lost in Volume 1. Resolutions are kept for Volume 3. The author must content himself with expanding the plot lines while tightening the tension in preparation for the final book. Phillip Mann does a workmanlike job of maintaining reader interest in his alternative history story (the main thrust being that the Roman Empire never fell, and continues to rule much of the world to the current day), as he divides the story into four, three segments following the further adventures of the main characters as they flee from the Romans into Darkest Wildwood Britain, the fourth detailing the politics of the Romans.

The trouble is, the basic premise on which

Mann has constructed his whole trilogy seems to be largely rubbish. Two thousand years on, the Romans still behave in a characteristically Neroic manner: the succession is still determined by military overthrow of a previous incumbent, the Romans have the same bacchic tendencies, and their thinking seems to have advanced not one jot from their historic predecessors. This seems an extreme improbability over a two thousand year period of time, as does the continued existence of both the British Wildwood (extending from sea to shining sea) and the Celtic underground existing untouched in the hidden villages of the greenwood. Mann should have taken his cue from Chris Evan's excellent ***Aztec Century***, operating on a not dissimilar premise, but making it work much more successfully — Evans' Aztecs are a modern believable lot, whereas Mann's Romans are merely authorial whims.

**L. E. Modesitt, Jr**

***The Magic Engineer***

(Orbit, 6/7/95, 759pp, £5.99)

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Third in a quartet - collectively ***The Saga of Recluce*** - this continues the history of a divided planet (of which Recluce is an island state) through the adventures of prentice wizard / healer Dorrin who has a bent for engineering rather than the shamanistic disciplines of Recluce. Consequently he is exiled, travels, gathers followers, and is constrained to pursue the task of toy-maker before returning to save his own country. Thus far it is a classic example of the Joseph Campbellian hero myth. But Modesitt's plot has other dimensions which make it particularly interesting. To start with, it introduces steam punk into a quasi-medieval environment. Dorrin, proceeding by way of making saleable models, is feeling his way towards creating, first a mock-up, then a full-size steam-powered navel ironclad.

Experiments, trials, foundry operations are convincingly detailed. In developing a steam technology Darrin is contravening the ethos of the Black Wizards who rule Recluce according to the principles of natural order — that is by sympathetic control of nature's own ordering; though their powers have diminished. Opposing White Wizards, manipulating Chaos, have devastated invading territories, isolating Recluce. In this plight the Black Wizards recognize that Darrin's mechanical inventions could save they do. They do.

The story has everything a steam-and-sorcery should have, including romance, and is pleasurable readable, its relentless present tense once accepted. But over and above steam-and-sorcery, it is a novel with a sustained idea - that of Balance - which is crystallised in chapter CLVIII (a fragment from a Black Wizard holy book) where it is said: "The function of order is to support that life which can order chaos; and without chaos to be ordered there can be no purpose to life." So, an entertaining fantasy is seen also to have

speculative sf'nal and cosmological depth.

**Michael Moorcock**                      **The Eternal Champion**  
(*Millennium*, 2/8/95, 659 pp, £5.99)  
Review by Steve Jeffery

This is Volume 2 of Millennium's handsome revised editions of all Moorcock's linked Tales of the Eternal Champion, which follow Moorcock's often tortured and unwilling hero through his various incarnations as Elric, Erekosë, Hawkmoon, Corum or Cornelius.

'The Eternal Champion', perhaps the earliest of these tales from 1957, forms the first of the three linked tales in this volume, and sets the scene for much of what is to follow.

Erekosë is a flawed Arthurian figure, dragged through the Multiverse to fight to maintain the balance between Law and Chaos. Called from his existence as John Daker by King Rigenos as humanity's champion against the inhuman Eldren, Erekosë becomes caught between his betrothal to Rigenos's daughter, Lolinda, and his love for the Eldren princess Ermizhad, and almost annihilates both races in the ensuing conflict of loyalties.

'Phoenix in Obsidian', written in 1970, seems over-wrought and repetitive by comparison, as if Moorcock was rushing to fill an allotted word count. Which he may have been, given the pressure on him about this time to turn out 3-day Sword and Sorcery novels to keep New Worlds alive. Not everything of Moorcock's legendary prodigious output of that period could be rated as a masterpiece, and Phoenix certainly isn't.

'The Dragon in the Sword' follows another 15 year gap, and certainly seems much more considered and less frenetic. Daker / Erekosë is pulled again to another part of the Multiverse, this time as Prince Flamadin, whose sister Sharadim has allied herself with the realm of Chaos to secure her usurped position as Empress. With the help of von Bek, and Alisaard of the Ghost Women, Erekosë must enter the Chaos Realm in search of the Dragon Sword, and free the Firedrake trapped in its blade. It's all quite stirring epic stuff, as long as you don't pause too long to think about niceties such as why there is a dragon in the sword, and why freeing it will bring down Sharamir's plans and allow the Lost Warriors at the Edge of Time to join in the final battle against Chaos. This is magic, after all, and you make the rules as you go along. Which is, perhaps, part of both the attraction and weakness inherent in this form of heroic fantasy.

But two out of three ain't bad, and this volume is good value for Moorcock collectors and a fun, if undemanding, read.

**Jeff Noon**    **Pollen**  
(*Ringpull*, 6/11/95, 327pp, £6.99)  
Reviewed by Andy Mills

As seemingly the only science fiction fan in the UK

who hadn't read **Vurt**, I was pleased to be sent Pollen to review: it was my chance to see what all the fuss was about.

**Pollen** is about the attempt by the Vurt-world to reach out and take-over our world — or leastways Noon's strange version of a future Manchester, with its curious mix of altered humanity ("Zombies, Dogs, Robos, Shadows, Vurt and Pure") and its addiction to the Vurt feather. The incursion is master-minded by John Barleycorn (read Hades), whose Persephone brings across to the real world a deadly pollen which fuses with the human reproductive system:

"The body is no longer rejecting the pollen grain. It is treating it like a lover. The immune system is trying to fight this impulse, but the reproductive system is fighting against it. And winning. The body is accepting the plant sperm."

So people are dying, the first victim being the rogue black cab dog driver, Coyote. But the cavalry are soon in sight: Sibyl Jones, a Shadowcop, unreceptive to the Vurt and therefore able to fight Barleycorn; her daughter, Xcabber Belinda; the DJ Gumbo YaYa; and one or two allies.

**Pollen** has its moments: Belinda's battle with her passenger, Sibyl's descent with Tom Dove into the Vurt-world, for instance. There's no doubt that Noon can write striking prose but...

...But in the end the novel failed for this reviewer; indeed, it was a struggle to finish it. The problem is, it's just too damned hip, so subsumed in style that in the end you become allergic to it. (And a Mancunian cab driver called Coyote? Come on!) Maybe I missed out by not reading **Vurt**, but on this evidence I'm not tempted to taste it.

**Steve Perry & Stephani Perry / David Bischoff**                      **Aliens vs Predator Omnibus volume 1**

(*Millennium*, 7/8/95, 520pp, £5.99)

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Excellent. A marriage made in heaven. This book collects together two **Aliens vs Predator** novels, **Prey** and **Hunter's Planet**. **Prey** is by far the best of the two, based on the comic strip and the aborted script for the **Aliens vs Predator** movie (now apparently cancelled in favour of **Alien 4**). Predators have been running out of creatures to prey upon, so they deliberately seed the planet of Ryushi with the Alien's eggs. Unfortunately a group of humans are in the process of setting up a mining colony on Ryushi just as the Aliens are hatching. Talk about bad timing. Cue 100 pages of rip-roaring violence and adventure taken at the approximate pace of the **Aliens** movie and you'll have an idea of what follows. There are two heroes of this little affair, 'Broken Tusk', the Predator, and Machiko Noguchi, a Japanese woman - and I kept wondering, if this film had ever been made (and **Prey** does read like a film script — a plot turned by many hands) which particular film star this

character was designed for. We'll probably never know. *Hunter's Planet*, on the other hand, has little merit. It reads like it was knocked together in a couple of days and the plot just avoids rehashing *Prey*. It drags for 200 pages, then the denouement involving an army of bio-engineered Aliens arrives — at which point it falls flat on its face.

And there you have it.

**Terry Pratchett &  
Stephen Briggs**

***The Discworld  
Companion***

*Gollancz, 20/7/95, 288pp, £6.99*

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Paperback edition of the book first issued in 1994, this is a humorous encyclopaedia-type guide to the places, characters, and significant background details of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series, from *The Colour of Magic* to *Soul Music* (and including references to a couple of short stories, for completeness' sake). If you haven't already read several Discworld novels, then don't start here. If you're a Discworld completist, you've probably already got the hardback. If you're an impoverished Discworld completist, rush out and buy the paperback now. If you have a friend or relation whom you know is a Discworld fan, this book would make a good Christmas / birthday present.

**Melanie Rawn**

***Skybowl***

*Pan, 20/8/95, 672pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

There are two ways of epic story-telling — classically plain, romantically decorative. Take this evening incident: "At sunset, Andry called a halt." The *Skybowl* version is: "So when the pale, stubborn glow of the sun was a fingerspan above the western crags, Andry called a halt." It's one reason why the novel has 672 pages. But I'm not knocking its style: for the romantically oriented there are many pleasures of heightened and atmospheric descriptions - the desert, the rambling castles, the soaring dragons - even though the episodic plot-meandering may, however action-packed, prove trying to the impatient.

To appreciate *Skybowl* fully, I think one must have read its five predecessors in the *Dragon Star* and *Dragon Prince* sequences, this volume being so full of allusions and memories. Nevertheless, the central theme is clear and compelling enough. Jealous and feuding Lords and Princes engage in rivalries, but there is an external invading enemy, the Vellant'im, committed to annihilate the magical heart of the several communities of Sunrunners, Sorcerers and ordinary mortals populating the two islands. The wife of leading protagonist the High Prince Pol is held by the High Warlord of the Vallant'im. Pol, eventually experiencing a personal catharsis after being subjected to every kind of ordeal - betrayal, destruction, loss - wins through to command the

trust of all, building on new foundations and replacing worn-out traditions.

To some readers the use of magic in conjunction with realism will be piquant, to others jarring. A critical event is the Battle of Wine-stem Pass. The preceding night in camp, and the bright winter dawn, are described as meticulously as Shakespeare describes the dawn of Agincourt; yet the early morning beverage is heated over Sunrunners' finger-flames rather than camp fires, and when the enemy vanguard advances it is no flight of arrows that destroys it, but an agony inflicted by the spells of strategically placed Sorcerers. Once such paradoxical conjunctions are accepted, the fusing of magic and elemental light, the book's metaphysical ground, calls also for acceptance. Aficionados of these trilogies will long since have complied.

**Kim Stanley Robinson**

***Pacific Edge***

*HarperCollins, 24/7/95, 280pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by Pat McMurray

This is a reprint of a book first published in 1990. It is the third of a trilogy of thematically linked novels set in three alternative futures of Orange County. This is the Utopian version but stands perfectly well alone.

This is a future of small communities, small local companies, townhall democracy, and sustainable development. Development and progress lie at the heart of the conflict that form this novel, the question of how much development is needed now that the worst ravages of the Twentieth Century have been cured.

Utopian novels are rare these days, because they're very problematic. How do you make a Utopia believable without fundamental changes in human character, how do you make it interesting without conflict or make the conflict real within the confines of a Utopia? If you're writing a nearfuture Utopia how do you get from the real present of famines in Africa and wars in Europe to a future of peace and prosperity in a realistic fashion?

*Pacific Edge* overcomes many of these problems very well. This is an inspiring book, a clever book, a book to be reread again, and if this is your first chance to read it, lucky you!

**Robert J. Sawyer**

***The Quintaglio  
Ascension 3: Foreigner***

*NEL, 20/7/95, 285pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

There are a few deities lurking uncomfortably in the machinery of Sawyer's epic of everyday dinosaur folk with an urgent need to get off-planet before their world ends up as a ring around the gas-giant of which it is presently a moon. One is the spaceship which *just happens* to have crash-landed in time to have been discovered in the

previous volume and which releases a nano-technology-constructed space elevator in this.

But if we can leap that hurdle, we find a satisfying story, with focus being, as before, on the development of a scientific paradigm. If the first volume "did" astronomy and the second evolution, the third illustrates a saurian science of psychology. In many ways, this is the most interesting development. While Sawyer takes a standard view of psychological blockage as rooted in fundamental trauma, the difference between the saurian Quintaglios and we mammals results in very different manifestations of these problem. Thus Asfan, blinded for suggesting that the gas-giant is a world rather than the Face of God, finds his eyes regenerating but is still unable to see. Analysing his nightmares, the mind-doctor Mokleb reaches into the heart of Quintaglio psychology to arrive at an insight which elegantly solves the problem Sawyer set up back in the first volume: how a race as intensely territorial as the Quintaglios could possibly exist in the close quarters of space travel.

Part of *our* psychology, of course, is a weakness for dinosaurs, and this is effectively exploited in this series, but the focus upon "real" science gives it an edge over *J\*r\*ss\*c P\*rk* clones. I don't want to stress this too hard — it's fairly basic, after all. But it's still all about intellectual exploration and Sawyer has pulled off a useful combination of "Wow, kids, DINOSAURS!!" and "Wow kids, this is how it all works!" And for that alone it's enjoyable reading.

**Michael Scott**

***The Hallows***

*Creed, 29/6/95, 353pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Irishman Michael Scott has come up with a nice twist on the horror tale in ***The Hallows***, a story based neatly on the 'Jerusalem' idea of Jesus accompanying Joseph of Arimathea to Britain as a boy. The Hallows of the title are thirteen relics from that visit, used by the boy Christ to banish a race of demons from Britain. Set in the modern era, the story begins with the keeper of one of the Hallows realising that someone is horribly murdering other Hallows keepers. She too is murdered, but not before she can give her Hallow (a broken sword) to a young man with instructions to pass it along to her nearest relative, along with the keeper's own research into the origins of the Hallows themselves. The young man and the niece of the old keeper find themselves hunted by people intent on ritual murder, to charge the Hallows with the blood of the Keepers in preparation for breaking the seals that keep the demons out of this world.

Scott's writing is solid, effective and to the point. The plot is nicely contrived, with just enough moments of sudden, gory horror to drive the story along with an increasing tension, until a final climax as satisfying as it is expected. Scott's characters are well-drawn, though the villains are perhaps less well-thought out than the good guys. The whole

feel of the book is of a modern day version of Dennis Wheatley, though without a Richelieu to really liven things up. A good, entertaining effort, even for non-horror fans.

**Robert Thurston**

***Battletech 17: I Am Jade Falcon***

*Roc, 29/6/95, 288pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Until a few weeks ago I was completely ignorant of the whole BattleTech genre! By chance, this book arrived at the same time that I read in a PC magazine of the latest BattleTech computer game from ActiVision, ***MechWarrior 2***. From this book and the game review I realise that there is a whole BattleTech industry starting from the original tabletop wargame from FASA: a magazine, computer games, Tyco robot toys / models, six "Virtual World" gaming centres in the USA, this series of books from Roc / Penguin, and even an animated cartoon series on US TV! Robert Thurston started this series of books, aimed I feel at teenagers, with his trilogy ***Legend of The Jade Phoenix***, and now continues the story after thirteen books from other authors.

For the uninformed, the BattleTech framework is set in the 31st century, where the ruling Clans settle their various power struggles by holding duels between genetically-engineered clan warriors (MechWarriors) inside thirty-meter warrior robots (BattleMechs, several of which are illustrated at the back of the book) on alien planets.

Star Captain Joanna, a veteran MechWarrior of the Jade Falcon Clan, is haunted by the shame of their defeat at a planet called Twycross, where Aidan Pryde, hero of the ***Jade Phoenix*** trilogy, was killed. Young, quickly-promoted, Star Colonel Ravill Pryde, descendant of Aidan, arrives to lead the Falcons in a battle against the Wolf Clan. This fight will give Joanna the chance to redeem herself and perhaps earn a "bloodname", by fighting the legendary Wolf warrior the Black Widow in a rerun of the battle of Twycross.

I found the book difficult to follow and enjoy, probably because I am missing so much BattleTech background and jargon. However, what is most important is the fact that it exists at all, and is part of a long-running series that is obviously popular, despite competing within a very high-tech framework. It might not necessarily be what we'd choose for them to read, but the BattleTech book series offers a way for kids who're into the other BattleTech stuff to discover the enjoyment of reading about something they relate to, and perhaps then move on to work that is more demanding but ultimately more enjoyable.

**Harry Turtledove**

***World War: Tilting The Balance***

*NEL, 29/6/95, 484pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

***Tilting The Balance*** is the second book in a projected series of five by Harry Turtledove, and follows ***World War: In The Balance***. Turtledove specialises in the “alternate history” sub-genre of SF, with stories collected in books like ***Agent of Byzantium*** and ***Departures***. The premise here is that during World War II the Earth was invaded by a race of reptilian aliens, who promptly destroyed Berlin and Washington. With much of the USA and Europe occupied by the Lizards, the WW2 combatants have reluctantly joined together to fight the invasion fleet, which is being followed in forty years by a massive colonial fleet. In this second book the human nations start to fight back against the Lizards, forced to develop technology at breakneck pace in all military fields to match their superior weaponry. The Lizards on the other hand, still shocked at how far humanity has progressed in the six hundred years since their probes reported on us, are starting to suffer materiel shortages, and the pace at which they can take over the Earth is being slowed down. The book ends on a cliff-hanger, as all mid-series books should, and leaves you wondering how Turtledove will progress the story and resolve the fates of his characters.

Personally, I like alternate history stories to depict huge historical, political and social changes from a tiny change to a single historical event, so I was initially not impressed by this giant external change as this story's starting point. However, Turtledove has constructed a huge, likeable, patchwork quilt of a book, more like a novel by Herman Wouk or James A. Michener than an SF book. I admire his energy and attention to 1940s detail in constructing the numerous interlinked plot lines mixing real and fictional characters set all over the world. This includes a variety of Lizard characters, many of whom are depicted sympathetically, unlike some of the humans. Jewish himself, Turtledove empathises most with his Jewish characters, and has used the Lizard invasion as a way of ending the Holocaust.

I look forward to seeing how this series continues — Turtledove **MUST** now continue the story until the colonist fleet arrives, and I'm sure he'll take it in unexpected directions.

**Janny Wurts**

***Warhost Of Vastmark***

*HarperCollins, 24/8/95, 384pp, £8.99*

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

***Warhost of Vastmark*** is the eagerly awaited third volume in Wurts' ***Wars of Light and Shadows***. It picks up the story with Arithon s'Ffalenn (the Lord of Shadows) and Dakar The Mad Prophet returning to the shipyards at Merior only to find Arithon's fleet burned and in ruins.

Meanwhile, Lysaer s'llessid, the Prince of Light, driven by the curse laid on him and Arithon by the Mistwraith, converges on Merior following his own latest humiliation at the hands of Arithon;

but finds the Shadowmaster has already fled into the Kelhorn Mountains en route to win support for his cause from the clans of Vastmark. Lysaer raises a vast warhost to trap Arithon in Vastmark and put an end to him once and for all. There are so many threads, so many twists and turns to this series, that one wonders how to adequately summarise what makes this whole series stand out for me. Arithon, by all accounts, should be the bad guy and Lysaer the good, yet neither are really good nor evil throughout. The evil geas laid on the half-brothers is the motivation for each to destroy the other - yet Arithon is aware of this and tries to prevent it at all costs, whilst Lysaer cannot accept the geas and genuinely believes in what he is doing. Shepherded by the sorcerers of The Fellowship of Seven, and plotted against by the Koriathain circle of sorceresses, the survival of all depends entirely on the two brothers never coming face to face. Throw into the mix, Dakar The Mad Prophet who is forced onto one side whilst believing the other to be right, and things really start to get interesting.

This dense and complex story is one of the grittiest fantasy series around. Wurts, wordy and over-descriptive at times, has placed herself amongst the very best of fantasy writers today. The series finishes here, and yet it doesn't (or doesn't have to); I for one would like to see more in the series in future. Highly recommended — a series to be read again and again.

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## Checklist Of Books Reviewed

Hardbacks and Original Paperbacks  
edited by Paul Kincaid

BRIAN W. ALDISS *The Detached Retina*  
 A.A. ATTANASIO *Arthor*  
 JOHN BARNES *Kaleidoscope Century*  
 GREG BEAR *Legacy*  
 M. KEITH BOOKER *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*  
 M. KEITH BOOKER *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*  
 LAWRENCE R. BROER *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*  
 TERRY BROOKS *Witches' Brew*  
 RONALD CAMPBELL-BUTLER *Fadar*  
 C.J. CHERRYH *Invader*  
 SIMON CLARK *Blood Crazy*  
 ROBERT A. COLLINS & ROBERT LATHAM (EDS) *Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Annual 1991*  
 BRIAN DALEY *Star Wars: The Original Radio Drama*  
 JOE DONNELLY *Havock Junction*  
 COLIN GREENLAND *Seasons of Plenty*  
 TOM HOLLAND *The Vampyre*  
 MARK JONES *Black Lightning*  
 JENNY JONES *The Blue Manor*  
 GUY GAVRIEL KAY *The Lions of Al-Rassan*  
 DEAN KOONTZ *Strange Highways*  
 MERCEDES LACKEY & LARRY DIXON *The White Gryphon*  
 ANNE MCCAFFREY *Freedom's Landing*  
 CHRISTOPHER PRIEST *The Prestige*  
 KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH *Sins of the Blood*  
 WILLIAM MOY RUSSELL *The Barber of Aldebaran*  
 BOB SHAW *A Load of Old BoSh*  
 S.P. SOMTOW *Vanitas*  
 TRICIA SULLIVAN *Lethe*

**Paperbacks**  
edited by Stephen Payne

PATRICIA ANTHONY *Brother Termite*  
 MIKE CARLIN, PABLO MARCOS, CARLOS GARZON, ARNE STARR & CARL GAFFORD *Star Trek: The Next Generation - Beginnings*  
 C. J. CHERRYH *Foreigner*  
 CHRIS CURRY *Panic*  
 ELLEN DATLOW (ED.) *Little Deaths*  
 TOM DEITZ *Ghostcountry's Wrath*  
 W. MICHAEL GEAR & KATHLEEN O'NEAL GEAR *People of The Sea*  
 CHARLES GRANT *The X-Files: Whirlwind*  
 SHARON GREEN *Wind Whispers, Shadow Shouts*  
 ANN HALAM *The Haunting of Jessica Raven*  
 GWYNETH JONES *North Wind*  
 PAUL KEARNEY *Riding The Unicorn*  
 STEPHEN KING *Insomnia*  
 NANCY KRESS *Beggars in Spain*  
 PHILLIP MANN *A Land Fit For Heroes Vol 2 : Stand Alone Stan*  
 PAUL J. MCCAULEY *Fairyland*  
 IAN McDONALD *Necroville*  
 L. E. MODESITT, JR *The Magic Engineer*  
 MICHAEL MOORCOCK *The Eternal Champion*  
 JEFF NOON *Pollen*  
 STEVE PERRY & STEPHANI PERRY / DAVID BISCHOFF *Aliens vs Predator Omnibus volume 1*  
 TERRY PRATCHETT & STEPHEN BRIGGS *The Discworld Companion*  
 MELANIE RAWN *Skybowl*  
 KIM STANLEY ROBINSON *Pacific Edge*  
 ROBERT J. SAWYER *The Quintaglio Ascension 3: Foreigner*  
 MICHAEL SCOTT *The Hallows*  
 ROBERT THURSTON *Battletech 17: I Am Jade Falcon*  
 HARRY TURTLEDOVE *World War: Tilting The Balance*  
 JANNY WURTS *Warhost Of Vastmark*