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# VECTICR

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The Critical  
Journal of  
the BSFA

**Jorge Luis Borges • Keith Brooke**

**Fantasy • SF Film Music • Conformity**

# Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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**COVER:** A spectacular image of Phobos as viewed on August 19 1998 by the Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft, which was approximately 1080 km (671 miles) from Phobos at closest approach. The image as shown here has a scale of 12 m (40 feet) per pixel. Image courtesy of Malin Space Science Systems/NASA.

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## The View from the Front Row

One of the things that Gary and I decided – although I'm not sure if we ever held a vote on it or anything like that – when we took over the editing of *Vector's* articles, was to take media sf seriously. In fact, a fair summation of our average editorial conference might be:

GSD: What do you think of the new Scorsese?

AMB: I think he should've cast De Niro as Buddha.

GSD: Or Joe Pesci.

(*One hour later*)

AMB: Had any submissions for *Vector* yet?

Again, there's no hard and fast rule, but we try and have one article on media sf in each issue of *Vector*; in practice this has meant filmed sf, and we have rather neglected TV, comics and radio (although Gary has written about the Welles' *War of the Worlds*).

We are careful not to tread the ground that the glossy magazines have; we deliberately ignored *The Lost World* (beyond subjecting ourselves to seeing it) which we figured would be a hit without us, and so far we've not really tried to cover the new *Star Wars* film. Give it time though. I suspect we've also had enough of the Alien sequence for a couple of years, having covered it at least three times.

Except, of course, it creeps in courtesy of Jerry Goldsmith's score on *Alien*. Myself, I have a rational prejudice against his work, which I think can be traced to a preference for the Tangerine Dream soundtrack on *Legend* over Goldsmith's (which, rightly, Gary disputes). Tangerine Dream is notable by its absence from Gary's article, but it's still worth reading for what it does cover. (Half the fun of such articles is the cry of 'What about —, how on Earth can you leave that out?')

Gary rightly gives prominence in his article to the classical score of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (which Tanya Brown excluded from her consideration of classical music and sf last time), which forms an unforeseen tribute to Stanley Kubrick, who died in

March. Our tame media groupies, on secondment to *Matrix*, are dealing with the obituary, but here at *Vector* a few words are appropriate.

When the happy ending of *Blade Runner* was assembled, someone remembered that Kubrick had shot some footage of landscapes for *The Shining* and this would be just the ticket. A van turned up with Kubrick's outtakes: some 30,000 feet of footage. Kubrick would never have earned the sobriquet 'one-shot'; he'd shoot scenes anything between fifty and a hundred times until he was happy with it. In an age when overpaid, over-egoed stars can fire directors and re-edit the film to their own advantage, Kubrick was perhaps the last *auteur*, the last tyrant, cushioned by a contract that enabled him to make more or less anything he wished, over whatever period he wished, and still refuse to let the film be released if he wasn't happy with the finished product. He died having just put the finishing touches to *Eyes Wide Shut*, in a spooky parallel to Dennis Potter's survival to complete *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus*.

Events also rather overtook us on two other pieces in this issue. Keith Brooke was to have a collection of his works co-authored with Eric Brown published by Tanjen. Now I read, courtesy of Brooke's excellent website, that the publisher has gone bankrupt, and the project is on hold. And Paul Kincaid delivered his examination of Borges to us on the same day that a new edition of Borges' fiction appeared in the shops. We gritted our editorial teeth at the thought of opening this can of worms, and pondered whether all the page references and quotations ought to be standardised. Given the tenor of many of the reviews, we decided to leave well alone.

Borges name hovers, unmentioned, in the magic realism section of Katherine Roberts's survey of fantasy. But then Paul Kincaid, in his Cognitive Mapping piece on Magic Realism a couple of years ago (January/February 1997), didn't feel that Borges was a magic realist. And as Katherine acknowledges, an article of this kind leaves much out, and invites any number of heckles from the front row. Over to you, then, and the letters page...

by Andrew M. Butler, Spring 1999



Every so often we cock things up at *Vector*. (Gasps of disbelief from assembled readers). The letters page of V204 was one such case, when Gary's response to Pete Lancaster's letter was lost somewhere in the Nottingham region by a certain harassed co-editor who was clearly editing the wrong draft. Pete took "issue with the idea that war was a limited activity etc.", citing "Attila et al" and "Cartago delenda est; the fall of Constantinople; the Hundred Years' War; the Thirty Years War", concluding that he "would say that warfare has almost **always** been carried out in the most appalling manner." He also noted that the Roswell Incident was now thought to be "from a chain of balloons, one chain of many, in Project Mogul."

GSD's reply was: I maintain there is a major difference between

the historic conflicts you cite and total war. I'm not suggesting that war hasn't always been carried out in an appalling manner for those directly involved. Only that modern military technology has resulted in entire populations, which in previous centuries would have only have been indirectly affected by war, being placed at the epicentre of the most horrific carnage. I have many history books on my shelves, and none document prior to this century such relentless slaughter as took place on the Western Front between 1914-18, or during the saturation bombing raids on British and German cities between 1940-1945, or in the Nazi death camps. You might also consider comparing the many published accounts of life on the 'Home Front' during the Second World War, wherein every aspect of normal peacetime civilian life is disrupted, with Jane Austen's fictional accounts of provincial life during the Napoleonic Wars. One can be hard-pressed reading Miss Austen to realise that the country was even at war.

My point regarding the Roswell debris was that it was of earthly, not alien, origin, and that most reasonable people would accept that it probably came from some sort of atmospheric testing balloon. As I understood it, the full military records had not been disclosed. However, if what you say about Project Mogul is correct perhaps the Roswell incident can finally be laid to rest. If I've misled anyone I apologise.

AMB harumphs, publically apologises to GSD, and mutters something about the soldiers who are clearly serving some kind of purpose in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The editorial by Andrew in V203 has already provoked a letter from Colin Greenland (see V204), and two more followed after we'd gone to press.

**From Cy Chauvin, via email:**

Thanks for such a thought provoking editorial. You made me get out and reread the ending to *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* which I'd not looked at since I read it on first publication. I can't say what I thought of that encounter Buckman and Montgomery L. Hopkins and the slip of paper with the arrow pierced heart, I don't remember after all this time, but I'm sure I didn't see homoerotic overtones in it. But that's me, I think, or how I was back then; I never saw those same overtones in the encounter between Genly Ai and Estraven in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* either, during the long journey across the ice, during which Estraven goes into kemmer sex-change. But now yes, it does seem like the passage is charged that way. And the slip of paper with the arrow pieced heart seems a little more poetic than what I remembered or expected from Dick.

But what really provokes me to write is your conclusion: "a place for everyone, and everyone in their place. And if that's the viewpoint we end up endorsing, even if unconsciously, that really puts into question our trust in a genre that supposedly prides itself on different people and different places." I only reread the last few pages of the Dick novel, so maybe I'm missing something, but don't see how his novel endorses this view. Perhaps we now read the encounter as erotically charged, but Dick is certainly sympathetic to it. Montgomery L. Hopkins doesn't seem offended, and in fact invites Buckman to visit him "and his wife and kids". He gives him his card, and says he sells audio headphones, I believe. And even the quote from *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* hardly seems negative toward the 'deviant', since the man initiating this encounter is described as an "aged and beautiful gentleman" while Hyde is the one "for whom she conceived a dislike".

On another topic, I have to agree with Justina Robson that Geoff Ryman is a very good writer and I always take notice of what he does for that reason. But his writing is too dark for me to completely love or wish to reread. I had to give away *The Warrior Who Carried Life* after searching all over during my one trip to the UK to find, simply because I couldn't bear to have such a bloody book in the house!

Thanks for such an interesting issue.

AMB: *The curious thing about the real life, late night, encounter, is that everyone I know immediately assumed that the MP in question was cruising for sex. There wasn't any other explanation entertained: no late night discussion of Welsh devolution, the rôle of the Euro, or how New Labour is performing. As someone who does wander around late at night, precisely in order to think, I felt rather confused about my own assumptions. And even the quality press wrote of "notorious gay haunts", hardly suggesting it's a place any "right" behaving person should wander through. Of course, part of the original account given of the MP's mugging included the suggestion that they were driving back to the mugger's flat for a meal.*

*It's a bit of a double bind though: on the one hand, the Dickian encounter can be seen as homoerotic, and I certainly wouldn't want to label it 'deviant' if it were. On the other hand, I wouldn't want to criticise anyone's sexuality or lifestyle by holding out for the possibility of hugs without any assumptions about the sexuality of such contact.*

**From John D. Rickett, via email:**

Re *Vector* 203: you irked me somewhat in your editorial, I fear. Twice, in fact.

Once was where you were "teaching *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to a group of mature students", once was when you were "teaching *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* . . ."

I truly fail to see how it is possible to teach a story, a book, a corpus of literature, an author or any similar thing to anyone at all.

You might, with luck, show people ways in which they might be able to enrich their own readings or ways in which they can acquire more techniques for applying to the criticism of a book or author.

But where do you obtain the right to apply a news story to your reading of Stevenson and thus convince your students that your reading is the only correct one? Unless I have misprized you – always a possibility, of course – this seems remarkably like arrogance to me.

Keep up the good work, though. I rather enjoy it when *Vector* gets my back up a bit like that! ☹

AMB: *Semantics, schmematics. Life is too short to say "Oh, I'm helping the students to employ a particular reading strategy in their examination of this text this afternoon." Call it technical jargon – but "I'm teaching x" is less of a mouthful.*

*Teaching is arrogant to the extent that, as the man with the big stick, I always reserve the right to be right and I get to mark the essays (FX: Evil cackle), which may or may not be second marked by someone else. It wasn't me who applied the news story as part of the reading (although I'd see nothing wrong with that in itself, as they're both texts, albeit with differing relations to reality), it was the students themselves. They agreed with my earlier suggestion having heard the news story.*

*Saturday: I offer an interpretation of Jekyll and Hyde that one particular scene demonstrates some kind of homosexual panic: a younger man feeling that he is being cruised, an older man who is behaving outside of the norms of time and place. Some students agree, adding details of chocolate fog and back doors, Queer Street, Blackmail House and a don't ask/don't tell anticipation as supporting evidence for a sexual reading of the book (which if we'd had time and the knowledge we could have followed through into Wilde's *The Decay of Lying* and its reference to Hyde, and a letter between Stevenson and John Addington Symonds, a writer on homosexuality who saw too much of his own hidden double life in the novel). Other students, as was their right, see an old man wandering around London in the middle of the night. Tuesday: The MP story breaks and on Wednesday the formerly disbelieving students say to me, "You know we said we didn't believe you... well, we've changed our minds."*

*GSD replies: I really don't understand. I used to be a teacher. I was employed to teach ideas, interpretations, viewpoints. Call them what you will. Some teaching methods are prescribed by the employer, others are left to the imagination and creativity of the teacher. Using that imagination and creativity is what a teacher is paid for, and what a good teacher does best. For anything less arrogant you might as well get a robot.*

**From Gary Wilkinson, South Witham, Grantham**

I very much enjoyed Ian J. Simpson's article on popular music and sf. One thing that mystified me however was the description of the Dead Kennedys' music as post-apocalypse. The Dead Kennedys do use many sf themes, mainly dystopia, such as the 'Zen Fascists' of 'California Uber Alles' or modern death camps in 'Saturday Night Holocaust' or the cod-sf of 'Shrink' or the anti-space race/star wars 'Countdown to Pluto' and even the *Godzilla* pastiche artwork on *Bedtime for Democracy*. If *Give Me Convenience Or Give Me Death* was post-apocalypse then this either some definition of post-apocalypse that I was unaware of, or it's not the same album as I have.

*Muttering about 'it's a popular beat combo m'lud', your editors feel unable to respond.*

**From L J Hurst, via email**

I wonder if there is room in the letter column to add a note to my article 'What If - Or Worse' (V202). In that article I pointed out that all Alternate Histories take the form of other genres (detective stories, histories, fantasies etc), but luckily covered my back by saying that my list was not complete. I have now discovered a

genre I missed: the Romance (or Trashy Novellette as Para Handy called it).

I have not extended my research to reading any of these works, but *The Rock* on-line magazine (15th March 1999 issue) had a long interview with Astrid Cooper, whom it describes as 'coordinator of the Australian Network of Futuristic, Fantasy and Paranormal Romance Writers and editor of Realms Beyond, the bi-monthly newsletter of the network.'

From Ms Cooper's descriptions of her work I get the impression that Robespierre does not lead the Terror, but instead spends too much of his time ripping the bodice of Lady Jacintha Bottibombe, when he should be sending Louis XVII's imperial fleet somewhere to beat the English again.

Do any *Vector* readers know if this genre is found next to the Christian romances in US bookshops?

After the appearance of each *Vector* I re-publish my contributions on my web site. A few weeks ago I received an e-mail request, which asked if I could re-write my review of an H.G. Wells biography for the inquirer as he needed a term paper quickly. There seem to be a lot of American students ready to do this, I found a George Orwell site with a bulletin board containing many requests for complete essays.

In my best Gandhian principles ('Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for life'), I declined to expand my work, but did list some good H G Wells sites for research purposes when I replied. Have other members

had similar experiences, what did they do?

But I wonder if the BSFA shouldn't be expanding the information it offers on-line. A site prompting inquires which are sent out to members, who then reply individually, might win a lot of good will. Alternatively, should I have asked my inquirer for his credit card number and got writing?

*AMB replies: The heart sinks. It's bad enough students plagiarising major chunks of my worksheets or entire pages of speech bubbles from Marx for Beginners but the thought of purchases via the internet is a nightmare. The pressure to get rid of exams must be resisted if only because of this.*

*There was once a BSFA information officer, but your suggestion is in principle a good one, which I've passed onto the committee. In the mean time, I wonder what our members think?*

*GSD replies: What are 'Christian romances'? [I somehow don't think we're talking about the Quest for the Holy Grail or C.S. Lewis here], and why might they be next to alternate world bodice-rippers in US bookshops?*

*Letters to Vector should be sent to Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN or emailed to [ambutler@enterprise.net](mailto:ambutler@enterprise.net) and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.*

IN AUGUST 1986, *VECTOR* PUBLISHED AN OBITUARY OF THE WRITER JORGE LUIS BORGES BY PAUL KINCAID. NOW PAUL OFFERS A LENGTHIER CRITIQUE, TO MARK THE CENTENARY OF BORGES' BIRTH.

## Entering the Labyrinth – An introduction to the *ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges by Paul Kincaid

### 1: The Man

Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges Acevedo was born on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1899 in Buenos Aires. His family called him Georgie. Georgie's father came from a military line – Borges' ancestors played a significant role in the liberation of Argentina – though he also had literary ambitions and published a short novel in Majorca in the 1920s. His mother was of English descent, and inculcated in her son a love of all things British that was to last a lifetime. Throughout his work there are explicit references to a wide range of British writers, notably H.G. Wells, G.K. Chesterton, Bishop Berkeley and David Hume. The family was comfortably off, and in 1914 they came to Europe for Georgie's education. Borges spent the years of the First World War in Geneva, then went on to Spain.

It was in Spain that Borges became involved with the experimental literary movement known as the *Ultraists* and began writing poetry. Back in Argentina in the mid-1920s, he was a leading figure in that country's small literary world, both as a highly acclaimed poet and through his involvement with a succession of small magazines – *Martín Fierro*, *Nosotros*, *Megafino* and most successfully *Sur* – which typically lasted a few issues then folded.

He was not what you might call robust, and it was while convalescing from a severe illness that he started experimenting with fiction instead of poetry. The result was a story called 'Police Tale' which was published pseudonymously in 1927. It was republished several times under several different titles over the next few years before finally appearing under Borges' own name (and under yet another title, 'Hombre de la Esquina Rosada', later translated as 'Streetcorner Man') in 1933. A couple of years later it was included in his first collection of stories, *Historia Universal de la Infamia (A Universal History of Infamy, 1935)*.

Most of the short stories on which his reputation is based were published over the next 15 years, but already he was starting to suffer from the poor vision that was hereditary, and which left him

blind for the last half of his life. Politically he tended to be critical of the various regimes that ruled Argentina throughout most of this century, though his literary fame served as his protection. So he received little public recognition in his own country until 1955, when a change of regime allowed some official recognition of his position and he was appointed to the prestigious position of Director of the National Library, essentially a sinecure that seemed particularly appropriate for a writer who had written so much about libraries. International fame came later still. Although his writing had been reduced to no more than a trickle by then, his stories were first translated into English in the late 1950s, and it wasn't until the early 1960s with the collection *Labyrinths* that his work received both popular and critical renown around the world. His last years were spent largely travelling the world collecting an impressive array of literary honours and awards.

Jorge Luis Borges remained unmarried for most of his life (there was a brief and unhappy marriage in the late 1960s), until he married his former student Maria Kodama in 1986. Eight weeks later, on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1986, he died.

### 2: The Ideas

The first collection, *A Universal History of Infamy*, really gave very little clue as to what was to come. 'Streetcorner Man' was a fairly realist account of the knife fighters who were the legendary figures of the Buenos Aires underworld, and Borges was throughout his life enamoured of the romance that attached to this underworld, though it had largely disappeared even before he was born. This is the predominant mood of the other stories that made up the collection, consisting in the main of romantic accounts of the lives and careers of notable villains from around the world. In another early story, 'The South', collected in *Ficciones*, he writes: "in the discord inherent between his two lines of descent, Juan Dahlmann (perhaps driven to it by his Germanic blood) chose the line represented by his romantic ancestor, his ancestor of the romantic death" (*Ficciones*, p167). The echo of Borges' own

heroic ancestors sounds clearly through such stories.

Nevertheless, even in an early story such as 'The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv' we get lines that reflect the sort of image that obsessed his work: "The world we live in is a mistake, a clumsy parody. Mirrors and fatherhood, because they multiply and confirm the parody, are abominations." (*A Universal History of Infamy*, p83) Only a few years later, in the story that perhaps best defines Borges' style, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', we get an almost identical sentiment ascribed to the idealist other world of the story: "Then Bioy Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men." (*Labyrinths*, p27)

Two things are worth examining about these curious sentiments. In the first place there is the reference to Adolfo Bioy Casares, himself a writer of note in the Argentine literary world of the 1930s and a lifelong friend of Borges (the two would subsequently collaborate on a number of projects, including the comic essays that make up *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq* (*Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, 1967)). This is a device that Borges used frequently throughout his *ficciones*, giving them authority by using real people or quoting from genuine texts by historical writers (or, more often, quoting playfully from spurious texts, whether or not ascribed to real authors, knowing that the vast majority of his readers will have no way of knowing if they exist or not). It is a central characteristic of his work that the stories are, in the main, presented as essays, an analysis of event or of text that we are made to assume is genuine. By this technique he can distil the essence of his stories down to a very short measure, without the usual fictional concomitants of scene building, characterisation and the like. That he does so without losing our trust, our involvement, or our conviction is a measure of his skill.

The second is the multiple image cast by the mirrors, and the distrust they engender. The most frequently used image in all of Borges' fiction is the labyrinth. Mirrors, parallel worlds, logical puzzles, complex buildings, intricate schemes are all, essentially, the same labyrinth which is the nature of human existence. We are in a maze which allows us to glimpse, to comprehend, only a fraction of our surroundings. Our life is regulated by the strict pattern of the labyrinth, yet it is a pattern that necessitates wrong turnings and digressions and an overall lack of understanding. When we work out the puzzle, when we finally realise which turnings to take in order to reach the heart of the maze, it can lead only and inevitably to death. This is what Lönnrot, the detective, realises all too late in 'Death and the Compass' (1942). In the manner of Borges' favourite fictional detectives – Arsene Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown – Lönnrot ignores the obvious explanation for a crime in order to construct an elaborate intellectual puzzle. Slowly, as apparent murder follows apparent murder, he puts together the various 'clues' he has constructed and creates a pattern. He has found his way through the labyrinth and it leads him straight to the isolated, deserted and labyrinthine villa of Triste-le-Roy, only to find that the clues have been laid to flatter him by his arch enemy, the master-criminal Red Scharlach, who waits there in order to kill him.

### 3: The Change

However, even if it is possible to find tracteries of his later *ficciones* in early stories such as 'The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv', it is impossible to over-emphasise the sea change that occurred between the relatively straightforward narrative of 'Streetcorner Man' and the intricate, intellectual essay-stories that followed upon 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1941). This change represents a sudden shift in focus, in narrative technique, in dramatic intent, in literary arsenal, that I have not found satisfactorily explained in any of the biographies or studies I have read. The essay that comes nearest is James E. Irby's introductory essay in *Labyrinths*:

Borges' stories may seem mere formalist games, mathematical experiments devoid of any sense of human responsibility and

unrelated even to the author's own life, but quite the opposite is true. His idealist insistence on knowledge and insight, which means finding order and becoming part of it, has a definite moral significance, though that significance is for him inextricably dual: his traitors are always somehow heroes as well.

(*Labyrinths*, p20)

At the heart of 'Streetcorner Man' we can find that duality of traitor and hero which places that story in the same moral continuum as the later *ficciones*. But Irby doesn't even mention 'Streetcorner Man' in his essay, there is no reference to any of the more realist early stories, so that it seems the curious academic formality of his best work sprang into being fully formed. There is no sense of process, no notion of an acquired or a developed style, but in fact the tone of voice that is instantly recognisable in his work from the 1940s onwards was something that didn't come all at once.

My own theory is that this was linked with the onset of his blindness. In a later story ('The Other', 1977) he writes of it thus:

When you get to my age, you will have lost your eyesight almost completely. You'll still make out the colour yellow and lights and shadows. Don't worry. Gradual blindness is not a tragedy. It's like a slow summer dusk.

(*The Book of Sand*, p10)

This slow dusk probably first began to creep up on him during his thirties, at the time he was beginning to write stories. He had been a voracious reader ever since his rather sickly childhood and in later life visitors were constantly being pressed into service to read to him. He read everything from Anglo-Saxon studies to modern novels, and appears to have had a remarkable memory for everything he did read. As he became gradually less able to make out the world around him, it would have been no hardship for him to enter more fully into the world of books and of memory. And this, quite naturally, would have become an increasing source of inspiration and ideas for his own writing.

He was always, even in the poetry he wrote in Spain, a very intellectual writer, writing to express ideas rather than emotions, and always very conscious of exactly what it was he was doing. He was very well aware of the devices he was using and the effects he was aiming to achieve. As Irby puts it:

Borges once claimed that the basic devices of all fantastic literature are only four in number: the work within the work, the contamination of reality by dream, the voyage in time and the double. These are both his essential themes – the problematical nature of the world, of knowledge, of time, of the self – and his essential techniques of construction.

(*Labyrinths*, p18)

I am not so sure that the whole of fantastic literature does distil quite so neatly into so few categories, but these four divisions do describe most of his great work exactly, and so provide a useful way into looking at his *ficciones*.

### 4: The Work within the Work

It has been established that all works are the creation of one author, who is atemporal and anonymous. The critics often invent authors: they select two dissimilar works – the *Tao Te Ching* and the *1001 Nights*, say – attribute them to the same writer and then determine most scrupulously the psychology of this interesting *homme de lettres*...

(*Labyrinths*, p37)

There seems to be an element of autobiography in all of Borges' stories. This can be deceptive: most are written by a first person narrator who might very well be called Jorge Luis Borges, live in Buenos Aires, teach, write and work in a library, read voraciously and be friends with such people as Adolfo Bioy Casares and Victoria Ocampo. Such at least are the clues that are dropped tantalisingly in various of his *ficciones*. But even though they share so much of their life and character, it isn't necessarily the case that the Borges who narrates the tale is the same as the Borges who writes it. They inhabit parallel worlds which have much in common but one of them – and it is not always easy to

know which – inhabits a world constructed entirely of words. Thus, while the critics of Uqbar imagine the vast and contradictory character of the one person who produced every possible work of literature; the critics examining Borges find themselves imagining a whole array of different authors responsible for a very narrow range of stories. This is only reasonable, for Borges litters his stories with allusions to and direct quotations (real and imagined) from writers as diverse as Poe and Kafka, Pliny and T. E. Lawrence, Lewis Carroll and the Icelandic Eddas. In one sense all these diverse authors (and more) actually did write the stories we ascribe to Borges, or at least his *ficciones* are further and oblique explorations of the literary worlds first created by all these authors either separately or in their collective body of work as it constitutes Borges' library.

A work of fiction is never finished, but goes on endlessly creating its world anew and in slightly different form with every reader. Borges himself is simply one more artisan along the way adding a further brick to the construction. Thus, in one of his most curious essay-stories, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', he adopts the tone of a dry, precious pedant sorting through the literary relics of a late, minor author, Menard, whose greatest yet unfinished and unpublished work is *Don Quixote*. At the beginning of the twentieth century Menard set out not to transcribe the *Quixote* but to create it again from scratch, to imagine himself into the time of Cervantes, into the mind and experiences of Cervantes, and then to create afresh that masterpiece. He concludes: "Cervantes's text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer" (*Labyrinths*, p69). It is a bold claim, a bold idea, but Borges goes on:

This technique, whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aeneid* and the book *Le jardin du Centaure* of Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame Henri Bachelier. This technique fills the most placid works with adventure. To attribute the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce, is this not sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual indications?

(*Labyrinths*, p71)

Borges, in the persona of Pierre Menard, is suggesting yet again what the critics of Uqbar have already proposed.

Borges' *ficciones* are full of books. In 'The Library of Babel' the universe (or at least the universe knowable to the narrator) consists of a library composed of books of identical size and pagination, whose pages are filled with every possible combination of 22 letters, two punctuation marks and a space. It is a matter of faith among the librarians that everything is inscribed somewhere within these books, the past and the future alike, yet only one comprehensible sentence has so far been discovered, everything else is nonsense. Books contain the world – in this instance, books *are* the world – but it is up to us, as readers, to discover and interpret it. Again, in 'The Book of Sand' we are presented with what seems like an ordinary octavo volume, but it contains an infinite number of pages, it is impossible to find the first or the last page, impossible to turn a second time to any page already seen. "I had only a few friends left; I now stopped seeing even them. A prisoner of the book, I almost never went out any more" (*The Book of Sand*, p91). If the book does not contain the world, it absorbs the world. We wander through books as through a labyrinth – in 'The Garden of Forking Paths' an old Chinese novel is revealed to *be* a labyrinth, composed of infinite parallel worlds in which each moment of the characters' lives is a forking in the path and we follow the consequences of both possible decisions.

If entire worlds are found within the pages of a book, of course, there is a logical consequence: that the worlds may flow out of the book and take over our own reality. It is this that Borges explores in his finest story, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', in which we are gradually and playfully led ever further into a labyrinth of realities. It starts straightforwardly enough: Bioy Casares mentions an entry on the curious land of Uqbar that he found in an old encyclopaedia, but when they examine other editions of the same

encyclopaedia they find no reference to Uqbar at all. One of the 'facts' about Uqbar revealed in this article is that the literature of Uqbar never refers to the real world, but only to the imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlön; then, in the effects of a passing acquaintance, Borges discovers one volume of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*. Here more is revealed about this world, in which the language contains no nouns, everything is based on an absolute idealism which denies the concrete reality that we all assume, and metaphysicians "do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding. They judge that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature." (*Labyrinths*, p34) Eventually, the mystery of Tlön is revealed: in the early seventeenth century "a secret and benevolent society ... arose to invent a country. Its vague initial programme included 'hermetic studies', philanthropy and the cabala" (*Labyrinths*, p39). But slowly, as the mood of the story darkens in its final pages, the imaginary world of Tlön begins to intrude upon our own world:

The contact and the habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world. Enchanted by its rigour, humanity forgets over and again that it is a rigour of chess masters, not of angels... Then English and French and mere Spanish will disappear from the globe. The world will be Tlön.

(*Labyrinths*, pp42-3)

### 5: The Contamination of Reality by Dream

There is nothing so contaminated with fiction as the history of the Company. A palaeographic document, exhumed in a temple, can be the result of yesterday's lottery or of an age-old lottery. No book is published without some discrepancy in each one of the copies. Scribes take a secret oath to omit, to interpolate, to change. The indirect lie is also cultivated.

(*Labyrinths*, p60)

Just as the fiction of Tlön starts to take over our reality, so throughout Borges' work we find a hesitation, an uncertainty, about what reality is, what we can trust. As soon as people begin to dream, either literally or in the form of writing fiction, so their dreams acquire a curious solidity, they seep into our consensus reality and start to take it over. We can never know how real our reality is, he tells us, the best we can do is beware of what dreams we allow to infect it. Time after time in his *ficciones* we are warned of the way dreams can affect things for the worst. There is, for instance, that doomed conclusion to 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', and the same message lies behind 'The Lottery in Babylon'. Here the entire society, every aspect of the lives of its citizens, has come to be decided by the Lottery. You might find yourself spending a term as a slave, or with instructions to murder a stranger, or as the ruler of the state, nothing that happens within Babylon does so except by the dictates of the Lottery. But the whole rule is a fiction, for it distorts the history of the Company that runs the lottery as it distorts the history of every citizen, until it has become impossible to know if there even is a Company, if there is in fact a Lottery. The innocent introduction of the Lottery has eventually destroyed the reality of the state and its inhabitants.

In 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*' we have already seen that fiction does dictate its own reality which subsumes the author:

To be, in the twentieth century, a popular novelist of the seventeenth century seemed to him a diminution. To be, in some way, Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him – and, consequently, less interesting – than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard.

(*Labyrinths*, p66)

And elsewhere, in 'The Aleph' (1945), he comments: "as a boy, I used to marvel that the letters in a closed book did not get scrambled and lost overnight" (*The Aleph and Other Stories*, p27), though in fact all his *ficciones* are in some way just such a scrambling. In 'The Aleph' also we get an example of words and reality being scrambled together as a self-important writer (Borges himself cast, as usual, in an unflattering light) meets a would-be

poet whose interminable verses are meant in some way to capture the entire planet. Eventually the poet introduces Borges as the source of his inspiration, the Aleph, a point in his own cellar from which the whole planet, past and present, can be glimpsed at the same instant. It is a moment of glory, but achieved only at a cost: "I was afraid that not a single thing on earth would ever again surprise me; I was afraid I would never again be free of all I had seen" (*The Aleph and Other Stories*, pp28-9).

The most notable example of the way dreams grow into reality, however, is presented by 'The Circular Ruins' (1940). A stranger arrives at night at the ruins of an ancient temple. He has no obvious past but a clear plan for the future: "He wanted to dream a man: he wanted to dream him with minute integrity and insert him into reality" (*Labyrinths*, p73). That is precisely what he then proceeds to do, after a number of false starts: it is a brief recapitulation of the story of Frankenstein, of Jewish tales of the golem, of even earlier stories:

In the Gnostic cosmogonies, the demiurgi knead and mould a red Adam who cannot stand alone; as unskilful and crude and elementary as this Adam of dust was the Adam of dreams fabricated by the magician's nights of effort.

(*Labyrinths*, p75)

But where Mary Shelley's novel, where the Jewish legend, are concerned with the relationship between man and his creation, are an examination of the way we might take on the role of God, Borges takes his brief tale further, for he leaves us tantalised by the question: which is reality, which dream? And, more tantalising, more devastating: is there any difference between them? For, Borges concludes, "With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another" (*Labyrinths*, p77).

## 6: The Voyage in Time

He deduced that the Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages. Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books.

(*Labyrinths*, pp81-2)

There is a corollary to all this, the way that fiction creates worlds, the way that our dreams insinuate themselves into our waking existence, the way that our reality and our knowledge are endlessly open to question. The corollary is not that time is infinite, that there are infinite possibilities available to us. On the contrary, time is limited, it is part of the rigid pattern of the labyrinth whose branching arms we all explore, it is pre-set, prescribed in the shape of the labyrinth itself, and though this might be vast, though it might be unknown, it is neither infinite nor unknowable. "Ignorant people suppose that infinite drawings [of the Lottery] require an infinite time; actually it is sufficient for time to be infinitely subdivisible" (*Labyrinths*, p59) as he puts it in 'The Lottery in Babylon'. If you could see the pattern, you would see, as he says in 'The Library of Babel', the true story of your death. Lönnrot traced the pattern of his own labyrinth, constructed of course from his own imagination, in 'Death and the Compass'; it led to his death.

Time, therefore, when it does appear in Borges' stories, does so as one more instrument of confusion, of duplication, of mystery, one more element of the multifarious labyrinth which winds its intricate way through all his *ficciones*. For all his admiration of H.G. Wells, therefore, Borges could not be the author of *The Time Machine*, such a relatively straightforward voyage through time would not be a part of his pattern. In an

essay called 'A New Refutation of Time' he concludes:

Our destiny (unlike the hell of Swedenborg and the hell of Tibetan mythology) is not horrible because of its unreality; it is horrible because it is irreversible and ironbound. Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river that carries me away, but I am the river; it is a tiger that mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire that consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, alas, is real; I, alas, am Borges.

(*Other Inquisitions*, p187)

The voyages through time of Borges' fantasies, therefore, are rarely physical voyages – though he will frequently explain in patient detail the story over many centuries of how the Lottery of Babylon came to be, or the sequence over decades of what Pierre Menard wrote. These voyages through time are more static, confronting for example the various courses one life might take in 'The Garden of Forking Paths'. During the First World War the Chinese narrator of this tale has been working for the German secret service in Britain. When his contact is captured he knows he has only a short time before he, too, is caught, so he has to find a way of getting a key message to his superiors in Berlin. He goes to a house in a remote village where he encounters a man called Albert. By coincidence, this Albert was once a scholar in China, and has studied a curious, chaotic book written by the narrator's ancestor, a book that no-one previously has understood. Albert has interpreted it: the novel is in fact a labyrinth of alternate histories.

In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them. *He creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork.

(*Labyrinths*, p51)

We understand the nature of this labyrinth, but we are still trapped within it: in our reality we must still choose only one of the forking paths. So our narrator kills Albert, the story appears in the newspapers after his capture and the German High Command learns that a key British emplacement is in the city of Albert.

In Borges' stories it is time, "irreversible and ironbound", that makes the labyrinth into a trap. Another form of the trap is that experienced by 'Funes the Memoriosus' who is afflicted with a perfect and detailed memory:

He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day. He told me: 'I alone have more memories than all mankind has probably had since the world has been the world.' And again: 'My dreams are like you people's waking hours.' And again, towards dawn: 'My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap.'

(*Labyrinths*, p92)

In a way, Ireneo Funes seems to combine within himself the whole of Borges' agenda. The incredible detail of his memories is enough to make us wonder whether our own blurred, generalised and abstracted memories count as any sort of measure of reality. And that linking between his dreams and "you people's waking hours" is one more suggestion that the division between dream and reality is tenuous in the extreme. But, as always, there is a physical price to pay for finding your way so far through the labyrinth of time, as Borges discovers after talking with Funes throughout the long, dark night:

Then I saw the face belonging to the voice that had spoken all night long. Ireneo was nineteen years old; he had been born in 1868: he seemed to me as monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids. I thought that each of my words (that each of my movements) would persist in his implacable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying useless gestures.

(*Labyrinths*, pp94/5)

Funes's memory is like a mirror, as abominable as the mirror of 'The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv' for the way it endlessly duplicates the useless gestures of humankind.

Another trap of time involves a similar duplication – “to extend man’s life is to extend his agony and multiply his deaths” (*Labyrinths*, p136) – as is considered by Borges in two very similarly titled stories, ‘The Immortal’ and ‘The Immortals’. Echoing the image of hell in his ‘New Refutation of Time’, Borges offers this thought:

To be immortal is commonplace; except for man, all creatures are immortal, for they are ignorant of death; what is divine, terrible, incomprehensible, is to know that one is immortal.

(*Labyrinths*, p144)

‘The Immortal’ follows a Roman soldier who follows a rumour of a City of Immortals. After many hardships and adventures he finds himself in a community of troglodytes who don’t even seem to have language. Eventually, however, he realises that these are the Immortals:

No one is anyone, one single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am god, I am hero, I am philosopher, I am demon and I am world, which is a tedious way of saying that I do not exist.

(*Labyrinths*, p145)

Having found immortality, our narrator spends the next several centuries seeking an end to it. The narrator flees at the end of ‘The Immortals’ also, a later and slighter story which begins, as so many of Borges’ stories begin, with an extract from another work, in this case the story of a “don Guillermo Blake” who “concludes that the five senses obstruct or deform the apprehension of reality and that, could we free ourselves of them, we would see the world as it really is – endless and timeless” (*The Aleph and Other Stories*, p170), to which end he ensured his own newborn son was blind, deaf, dumb and “unaware of his own body” (*The Aleph and Other Stories*, p170). This fictional horror is then echoed when the narrator visits his doctor and finds four boxes which are all that remain of people from whom all that is perishable has been removed: “the body can be vulcanized and from time to time recalculated, and so the mind keeps going. Surgery brings immortality to mankind.” (*The Aleph and Other Stories*, p173) In ‘The Immortal’ immortality is achieved at the expense of human language, sympathy, understanding; in ‘The Immortals’ it is at the expense of one’s very physicality. In either case, horror is the only result of seeing the shape of the labyrinth.

## 7: The Double

It would be too much to say that our relations are hostile; I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges may contrive his literature and that literature justifies my existence... Years ago I tried to free myself from him and I passed from lower-middle-class myths to playing games with time and infinity, but those games are Borges’ now, and I will have to conceive something else. Thus my life is running away, and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to the other one.

(*Dreamtigers*, p51)

In a brief fable of 1956, variously translated as ‘Borges and I’ or ‘Borges and myself’, Borges (noting precisely that change in his writing I referred to earlier) presents himself as a doppelgänger, the literary being (either as writer or as character) shadowing the real Borges – though it is notable that he does this in a way in which the ‘real’ Borges exists as a character in a *ficción*, so the mirror reflects the images still further, the borderline between fiction and reality is stretched more thinly yet. He returns to the theme again in a later fable, ‘The Other’ (1977), in which the elderly Borges in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1969 sits down on a bench beside the younger Borges in Geneva in 1915. The meeting frightens them both – “All this is a miracle, and the miraculous is terrifying” (*The Book of Sand*, p9) says the younger Borges – but the elder reflects later:

The meeting was real, but the other man was dreaming when he conversed with me, and this explains how he was able to forget me; I conversed with him while awake, and the memory of it still disturbs me.

The other man dreamed me, but he did not dream me

exactly.

(*The Book of Sand*, p10)

So, the double is a dream that affects reality, an abominable reflection in the mirror of ‘The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv’, and a reflection all the more abominable because it is not precise. As Borges has already concluded in ‘The Circular Ruins’: “With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another” (*Labyrinths*, p77).

Doubles crop up constantly in Borges’ *ficciones*, sometimes literally as in ‘Borges and I’ but more often allusively: the detective Lönnrot (note how the name contains the German for ‘red’, ‘rot’) is the double of his eventual killer Red Scharlach; there is the doubling of ‘The Circular Ruins’ in which one character makes himself in an endless reduplication; there is Pierre Menard, making himself into the double of Cervantes; there are the doubles of his story ‘The Two Kings and their Two Labyrinths’ (1946) in which an ancient king of Babylon humiliates a rival king by leaving him in a labyrinth, the second king then over-runs Babylon and takes the first king, now captive, out into the desert:

‘In Babylon you lured me into a labyrinth of brass cluttered with many stairways, doors and walls; now the Almighty has brought it to pass that I show you mine, which has no stairways to climb, nor doors to force, nor unending galleries to wear one down, nor walls to block one’s way.’

He then loosened the bonds of the first king and left him in the heart of the desert to die of thirst and hunger.

(*The Aleph and Other Stories*, p90)

Doubles are like mirrors, part of the endless labyrinth. Everywhere there are doubles reflecting away to infinity, but to recognise them is part of understanding the pattern of the labyrinth, and that is death.

## 8: The Books

Borges’ stories have been collected in many different books, and the same story will crop up many times. ‘Borges and I’, for instance, is included in *A Personal Anthology*, *Dreamtigers*, *The Aleph and Other Stories* and *Labyrinths*. Because most of his finest stories were written during the 1940s but didn’t become known to an English-speaking audience until the 1960s, most of the collections have additional stories that did not appear in the original Argentine or Spanish editions, and some, such as *Labyrinths*, were intended to introduce his work by bringing together stories that had appeared in a variety of earlier collections. This bibliography, however, is a reasonable introduction to his work.

*A Universal History of Infamy*, 1935, revised and expanded 1954 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1975)

*Ficciones*, 1956, translated into English 1962 (New York: Grove Press, 1977)

*A Personal Anthology*, 1961, translated into English 1967 (New York: Grove Press, 1967)

*Labyrinths*, 1962 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978)

*The Aleph and Other Stories*, 1957, expanded 1970 (London: E.P. Dutton, 1978)

*Dreamtigers*, 1964 (London: E.P. Dutton, 1970)

*The Book of Imaginary Beings*, 1967, translated 1969 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1980)

*Doctor Brodie’s Report*, 1970, translated 1972 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976)

*The Book of Sand*, 1975, translated and incorporating his collection of poems, *The Gold of the Tigers* 1979 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Allen Lane, 1979)

In collaboration with Adolfo Bioy-Casares:

*Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, 1967, translated 1976 (London: E.P. Dutton, 1979)

*Extraordinary Tales*, 1967, translated 1971 (London: Souvenir Press, 1973)

Non-fiction:

*Other Inquisitions*, 1952, translated 1964 (London: Souvenir Press, 1973)  
*Borges on Writing*, 1973 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Allen Lane, 1974)

Books about Borges:

Richard Burgin, *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* 1969 (New York: Avon, 1970)  
Martin S. Stabb, *Jorge Luis Borges* 1970 (New York: St Martin's Press, 1970)  
Emir Rodriguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* 1978 (London: Paragon House, 1988)

James Woodall, *The Man in the Mirror of the Book: A Life of Jorge Luis Borges* 1996 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996)

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A NEW COLLECTED TRANSLATION OF BORGES' WORKS HAS RECENTLY BEEN PUBLISHED, TO MIXED REVIEWS. PAUL KINCAID HAS RECENTLY RETIRED AS REVIEWS EDITOR OF VECTOR.

## Keeper of the Web – Keith Brooke interviewed by David Lee Stone

**David Lee Stone:** We know it's an age-old question, but how did you get into writing, and when was your first break?

**Keith Brooke:** I was close to finishing university, I had a nice safe office job lined up and suddenly I thought, "Do I really want to be doing this...?" With the support of my wife, I took a year out to write full-time. Up to that point I'd only sold a couple of stories to small press magazines, so it was quite a gamble, but I think the discipline of writing full-time, making a public commitment to the writing life, meant I progressed far more rapidly than I would otherwise have managed.

The first short story I wrote in that year out was "Adrenotropic Man", which became my first professional sale (to *Interzone*). A few weeks later I started my first novel, *Keepers of the Peace*, which eventually sold to Gollancz and Transworld. My year out lasted from 1987 to 1995.

**DLS:** You were once regarded as one of the *Interzone* 'brat-pack'. Is this a term you look on affectionately?

**KB:** The term itself means little to me. A lot of us had our break in what I think of as the *Interzone* years, when the magazine went from quarterly to monthly in the late 80s and it's inevitable that some kind of label should be applied to us.

There were some very important people around at that time: *Interzone's* David Pringle, of course, but also his various co- and assistant editors – Simon Ounsley and Lee Montgomerie in particular; Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans, whose *Other Edens* anthologies gave many of us our first book publications; David Garnett, whose *Zenith* and, more recently, *New Worlds* anthologies did a similar job.

So it's the people rather than the term that I look on affectionately. If they hadn't been prepared to make considerable sacrifices for the genre, things would have been very different.

**DLS:** Your first novel *Keepers of the Peace* was published in 1990. The debut of a new sf author is always an event. Were you happy with the book?

**KB:** It was my Angry Young Man novel. Naturally there are things I'd do differently and, I'd like to think, better. But I'm actually very proud of the structure of the thing, and the sentiment, and I'm proud that my first novel was a political one.

**DLS:** This was followed by *Expatria* (1991) and *Expatria Incorporated* (1992). Which of your novels are you most proud of and why?

**KB:** *Expat. Inc.* is the most successful as a novel, and although it's a sequel, it's a complete novel in its own right and can be read alone. The novel I'm actually most proud of is one I still haven't managed to sell: a not-quite-fantasy, not-quite-mainstream story about the death of magic in an increasingly secular world.

**DLS:** Your collaborations with Eric Brown in *Interzone* have been incredibly popular. We also understand that a collection is

forthcoming. Can you confirm this, and give us your thoughts on the reason for this popularity?

**KB:** *Parallax View* is due from Tanjen Books in May 1999. It will include all the *Interzone* stories plus two new ones and, as an added bonus, an Eric Brown novelette and a Keith Brooke novelette (both from *Interzone*). Steve Baxter has written a very flattering introduction, too.

The popularity? I'm a cynic, with very little self-belief, so I tend to think that Eric's work is always popular and I'm just hanging on his shirt-tails with these stories... Less cynically, I might point out that we've worked closely together for years. Eric reads all my solo stories before anyone else, and I read all his. So in a sense, we've been collaborating for years. We have similar views on what makes a good story, similar concerns, and we both sincerely believe that our own contribution to the collaborations has been far less than fifty per cent...

**DLS:** I love what you've done with Infinity Plus. It has to be the most accessible site on the web. Can you describe how the idea for Infinity Plus formed and how difficult the project was to get going?

**KB:** Thanks. I've worked in multimedia for a few years, and I've just taken over the University of Essex web-site, so a lot of the development work that went into Infinity Plus came out of experience with my day job. The design might appear restrained, but that's because people read far less efficiently from a screen, and I want the stories on the site to download as fast as possible and then to be as readable as possible. Also, navigation around web-sites can often be difficult, you can't just flick through the pages as you would with a magazine – so I've tried to make Infinity Plus as easy to get around as I can.

As for the content, I've been amazed at how much top quality material I've been sent. A lot of writers have been attracted to the vaguely hippyish idea of a bunch of us having a place where we can show off some of our work; others are drawn to the idea of using a site like Infinity Plus as a kind of shop window for their work. Whatever their reasons, I now have work from over fifty writers on the site, ranging from bright new stars like Jason Gould and PC Attaway to big names like Ian Watson, Greg Egan, Paul McAuley, and so on. The most recent recruits to the site include James Lovegrove, Mark Chadbourn and Michael Moorcock (who has said he'll send in his next new story).

Difficult? It's been a lot of hard work, sure, but when you get writers like Terry Bisson and Kit Reed asking you out of the blue if they can send you a story, you can hardly complain, can you?

**DLS:** Having now published short stories and novels successfully, who would you say are the most important people in the industry today?

**KB:** It was great in the late '80s, when there were people like David Pringle, David Garnett, Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans

giving us breaks. But in recent years we've only had *Interzone*, and a few new magazines that have never lasted (let's hope *Odyssey* will stay the course). Of course, some new writers are better suited to novels from the start, but for most of us the short fiction market gave us a place to flex our muscles, explore our own voices, make our presence felt. New writers really do benefit from champions like the people I've mentioned, but there aren't too many around at present.

**DLS: Who are your favourite sf/fantasy writers? And what (if any) book are you reading at the moment?**

**KB:** I think Kim Stanley Robinson is one of the finest writers in the field – I'm reading his *Antarctica* at the moment. Ian McDonald is my other favourite: *Desolation Road* and *Chaga* are two of my all-time favourites. And Robert Silverberg's *Dying Inside* is the best sf novel I've read. What does that say about me? I like stylish, often a bit quirky, passionate writers, with a deep empathy for their characters.

**DLS: There are multitudes of budding sf/fantasy writers out there, and the first steps are always the most important. Can you offer any advice you think may have helped you achieve publication?**

**KB:** It's fairly simple (but not, of course...): the ones who make it are the ones who keep writing. Obviously, you have to be able to write well and so on, but a lot of people can do that. There's a lot of luck involved in breaking into writing: the right person in the right mood has to pick your manuscript out of the slush pile at the right time (i.e. not first thing in the morning, not after they've already looked at a hundred other unsoliciteds, when they're actually in a position to take on a new writer, and so on, and so on, and so on). All the writer can do is produce his or her best work, time after time – the more you keep plugging away, the higher your chances that all those ifs will have the right answer.

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SINCE THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED, TANJEN HAS COLLAPSED, PUTTING THE FUTURE OF PARALLAX VIEW IN DOUBT. DAVID LEE STONE WRITES REGULAR REVIEW COLUMNS FOR INTERZONE AND HAS CONTRIBUTED NON-FICTION/REVIEWS TO TTA PRESS, PRISM, TWK AND DARKHAVEN (WHICH HE ALSO EDITS) — EDS.

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## Scientific Swords to Magic Realism – a Journey across the Fantastic Bridge by Katherine Roberts

### Introduction

So what exactly is fantasy? *The Lord of the Rings*? Definitely.

*Xena: Warrior Princess*? Yes. Anything that comes in three brick-sized volumes? Tempting. A rude word? All right, maybe to some... and it is a sad fact that fantasy novels are seldom reviewed

outside the genre press, or at least rarely reviewed with any serious intent. But why is fantasy so easy to make fun of? As the genre approaches the next millennium, it would seem an appropriate time to re-explore the popular definition of fantasy, and ask where the genre might be going in the future.

### The Fantastic Bridge

A few years ago, I was sent a review copy of *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women* (1996). The title immediately intrigued me. *Modern fantasy*? As opposed to what? Ancient fantasy, perhaps? To the hardened fan of swords and sorcery, 'modern fantasy' would seem to be a contradiction in terms.

So I turned to the contents expecting, maybe, a collection of recent stories, only to discover the book included pieces written as long ago as 1941 – hardly very 'modern', I thought. I eventually realised that Penguin had published a companion volume *Classic Fantasy by Women*, which concentrated on much older pieces, but by this time I'd been inspired to grope for my own definition, and came to the fascinating conclusion that none of the tales published in this collection would sit very easily on the Fantasy shelf of a book store. These were not heroic fantasy, in the sense of muscular heroes/heroines wielding swords, and wizards working magic. There were very few elves or dwarves or other Tolkienesque motifs.

Among the stories were some I'd always classified as Science Fiction, for example Anne McCaffrey's 'The Ship Who Sang' (1961) and Ursula Le Guin's 'Sur' (1982). Among the authors, I found Daphne Du Maurier, Muriel Spark, P D James, and Fay Weldon, none of whom are exactly marketed by their publishers as writers of fantasy.

Something important was happening here, something I'd felt for a while in my own reading – that fantasy encompasses a much wider range of fiction than current publishing pigeon-holes would have us believe, and that there are excellent books and stories lurking on the mainstream shelves, the science fiction shelves, the historical shelves, the crime shelves, the serious literature shelves, even the children's shelves, that would appeal to the fan of fantasy as much as, and perhaps more than, the latest sword & sorcery blockbuster trilogy. Fantasy, it seems, provides us with an essential link between genres, acting as a fluid bridge that might, depending upon where you emerge from the mists, lead you to a very different shore.

### Scientific Swords – leaving the sf shore

As Arthur C. Clarke famously remarked, a sufficiently advanced science would seem like magic to those who do not understand how it works. This principle has been used by sf writers to produce some excellent books that are generally thought of as fantasy, but which actually have a strong scientific grounding.

For example, in Anne McCaffrey's series of books set on the planet Pern, her dragons are not simply mythical creatures, but have been specially bred to fly, breathe fire, and carry riders in order to deal with a specific threat to the early colonists (the periodic falls of Thread from the Red Star). The genetic experiments continue with the discovery that the early settlers deliberately 'infected' their land with grubs bred to eat any Thread escaping the dragons' fire. This scientific background gives McCaffrey's books an extra dimension that wouldn't be present if they were straightforward fantasy – one subplot has the characters discovering the grubs, believing them to be evil, and only later realising why they are there. The dragon books have a definite fantasy feel, and can be read as such, yet the background is pure sf.

In a similar manner, Julian May uses the perfectly believable advent of telepathy in human beings as her 'scientific sword', giving rise to such entertaining fantasies as the Galactic Milieu series, where her characters have awesome mental powers that (like any form of power) can be used for either good or evil. A straight fantasy would have an evil sorcerer and a good hero, with

little or no explanation of why they are good or evil – again, it is the scientific background that gives Julian May's books an extra dimension.

Almost any story set on a fictional world, where that world is a different planet from Earth, can be said to use a 'scientific sword' in the shape of the spaceship that stranded the characters there in the first place, or maybe in the alien race that resides there. The extent to which a writer chooses to explain the scientific background seems to determine whether such a book is labelled sf or Fantasy. For example, Orson Scott Card's *Songmaster* (1980) is labelled fantasy, because the scientific elements are background to the plot, whereas Robert Silverberg's *Kingdoms of the Wall* (1992), although it seems at first to be more 'fantastic' than 'Songmaster', is labelled sf – presumably because in this case the scientific element (a crashed spaceship at the top of a mountain) is central to the plot, which sees the alien beings who live at the foot of the mountain embark on a quest to reach the mysterious gods who live at the summit.

### Legend and Myth – The Foundations of the Bridge

In her article published in the Historical Novel Society's magazine *Solander* (May 1997), Dominique Nightingale poses the question of 'Fantastic History or Historical Fantasy?' This article highlights the overlap between fantasy and historical novels, especially those set in pre-history (i.e. the time before history was properly recorded). The further back we go, the more gaps there are in the known facts, and the more writers have to rely upon their imaginations to fill in these gaps. This means there are numerous historical novels that might be enjoyed by fantasy fans – for example, Wilbur Smith's *River God* (1993), which tells the story of a eunuch slave set against the grandeur and fascinating religions of Ancient Egypt.

Where there are little or no historical facts available, legend takes over. Legends have long been fertile ground for fantasy writers, whether they choose to re-tell the story through the eyes of some of the well known characters, or simply use the legend as a basis for their own creations.

Marion Zimmer Bradley is just one author of several who seem to have spent a large part of their careers retelling legends (others include Alan Garner and Parke Godwin). Bradley tackled Atlantis in her book *Web of Darkness* (1983), the Roman persecution of the Druids in *The Forest House* (1983), and the Arthurian legend with *The Mists of Avalon* (1982), which gives the well-known story a refreshingly different slant by telling it through the eyes of the women involved.

In fact, the story of Merlin and Arthur has been retold so many times, it has become virtually a genre in itself. The list of retellings is long, yet such books continue to be popular. Among the more notable examples are T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1958), Vera Chapman's *The Three Damosels* (omni 1978), and Stephen Lawhead's Pendragon Cycle *Taliesin, Merlin, Arthur, Pendragon* and *Grail* (1987-1997).

More recently, however (and perhaps not before time), writers seem to be searching out less well-known legends upon which to base their fantasies. Ian Watson took the Finnish epic, *Kalevala* as inspiration for his Books of Mana (1993-1994), while Garry Kilworth did the same thing for the Polynesian legends with his Navigator Kings trilogy (1996-1998).

Perhaps the most famous fantasies of all are the ancient myths, among them the bloody and often violent tales of the Greek and Roman gods. Atlas holding the world upon his shoulders. Aphrodite, born of sea-foam. A true myth (by which I mean a story invented to explain some aspect of the world) is the exact opposite of a science fiction story. Science fiction begins with facts and extrapolates forwards into the future, whereas myths begin with facts and extrapolate backwards into fantasy. Writers have always had fun inventing myths, though these seem to lend themselves to short stories, rather than novels. Rudyard Kipling's stories for children, such as "How The Camel Got His Hump" and "How the Leopard Got His Spots" are good examples of modern

myths. Today, 'urban myths' can be seen in the weekend supplements of the national papers, carrying on the grand tradition of fantasy fiction. So well known has this sort of anecdotal, or 'folk' myth-making become, that recently there has even been a film inspired by the process: *Urban Myth* (1998).

### Where's Your Wand, Wizard? – shaking the bridge

When scanning the fantasy shelves, it's tempting to think there's a law that says a fantasy novel must contain the creatures Tolkien either used or invented, and nothing else. This seems to make a mockery of the very word 'novel'. But thankfully, even as we approach the centre of the bridge, there are writers who get away with bending the rules of heroic fantasy to produce something fresh and different. After all, when you think about it, a wizard is merely one type of magic user, and a wand is merely one type of magic tool. Similarly, a dragon or an elf are simply two types of magic creature. Why not invent others?

In *The Golden Key* (1996), Melanie Rawn, Jennifer Roberson and Kate Elliot collaborated on the sinister family history of the Grijalvas – artists who have the power to change real life by painting it differently. Here, the 'wizard' is an artist, and his 'wand' a paint brush. It might sound silly, but the whole story is quite chilling. To ensure obedience, every young Grijalva must paint a self-portrait, which is kept safe unless he steps out of line, when horrific punishments are inflicted by making amendments such as painting out the eyes to blind the victim, or twisting the fingers to maim him.

Another fantasy writer not afraid to take risks is Kristine Kathryn Rusch. In *Heart Readers* (1993), her 'wizards' are a pair of girls with the double-edged power to read the true intentions in others' hearts. To achieve this, they must work together, one doing the reading while the other translates this into a drawing of the heart in question. Their 'wands' are common slate and chalk, but again the magic convinces, and what emerges is a story with sinister elements difficult to reproduce in a conventional sword & sorcery novel.

Magic creatures are often based on legends of existing creatures, dragons being the current most popular example. But other creatures can be used to equally good effect. Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* (1968) features a unicorn with the power to change shape, becoming a beautiful and enigmatic girl for much of the story. Clare Bell's *The Jaguar Princess* (1993) also features a shape-changing magic creature as its heroine, this time in the guise of a jaguar deity found in Aztec legend. Better still are those writers who go to the trouble of inventing their own magic creatures. In *Songspinnners* (1996), Sarah Ash gives us the race of Lifhendil, who have human form but do not die. After a period of pupation, they are released by singing and transform into dragonflies.

Such shape-changing fantasies often have a strong metaphoric content, which adds to their depth. In her interview with David Mathew (*Interzone* #129, March 1998), Sarah Ash reveals she was thinking of the Stalinist persecution of artists, and in particular of composers, while she was writing *Songspinnners*. The transformation of the Lifhendil might therefore be seen as a metaphor for true freedom of spirit – the beautiful dragonflies finally escaping earthly constraints following a period of dark imprisonment in the pupa.

On the other hand, Clare Bell's jaguar princess represents the untamed beast within us all. The heroine fights off periodic transformations into a jaguar by immersing herself in art, but when her artist's materials are taken away, she finds she can no longer hold back the beast. Here, the difference between animal and human is portrayed as the human desire to create something not essential to survival – when we lose this ability, Bell seems to be saying, we quickly descend to the level of beasts.

### Children's Fiction – life on the bridge

The challenge with children's fiction is to find something that isn't

fantasy. From *The Hobbit* to *Teletubbies*, children's entertainment has always contained a large dose of magic. This is sometimes explained in terms of children being more ready to believe. Children don't question the fact fairies live at the bottom of the garden – they know it's true. I have another theory. The younger we are, the smaller our world, and the less likely we are to want to leave the fantastic bridge in order to explore more distant shores. But when the time comes to do so, we're in the right place. From fantasy, remember, we can go anywhere.

In the meantime, the children's shelves provide fertile ground for the fantasy fan in search of something a bit different. No-one need fear mockery if they're caught reading J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937), particularly if it's the lavishly illustrated 1997 edition, with artwork by Alan Lee. Other good starting points are Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995), which follows the progress of Lyra and her daemon as they rush to stop an evil experiment to open the path between worlds, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), where young hero Harry attends a school of wizardry accessed from Platform 93/4 at King's Cross Station. These two recent fantasies push the genre at least as far as many adult novels – and because they're written for a young audience, they do their pushing in an entertaining and original way.

More traditionally, of course, children's fiction can lay claim to the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm. Some of these are such old favourites, they've been immortalised in dance, song and pantomime. Fairytales have also been used as a basis for more adult modern re-tellings, notably Angela Carter's 'Company of Wolves' (in *The Bloody Chamber*, 1979). And in recent years, Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling's series of anthologies, beginning with *Snow White, Blood Red* (1993), have helped revive the darker aspects of the fairytale tradition.

### Comic Fantasy – laughing at the bridge

No discussion of fantasy would be complete without mention of Terry Pratchett's best-selling Discworld series. Here, Terry Pratchett has invented his own humorous myth to explain the origin of his world, and peopled it with heroic fantasy figures that break the mould with the deliberate intention of raising laughs. For this type of humour to work, a strong tradition must exist in the first place to poke fun at – i.e. the sword & sorcery genre and Tolkienesque trilogies. Working on this theory, Pratchett has also extended his humour to such targets as the intrigues of Hollywood, the plays of Shakespeare, and Australians.

Ironically, the popularity of such books might have something to do with the fact that heroic fantasy has become such a laughable genre, the only way to be taken seriously is to be deliberately humorous. These days, it seems, even fantasy fans are laughing at themselves.

### Fantasy Meets Mainstream – the accessible bridge

There are any number of fantasies set in the real world with some kind of magical boundary that gives access to a fantasy realm, whether it be the mirror in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), the fantastic carpet in Clive Barker's *Weaveworld* (1987), the alternative London Underground in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (television series and book, both 1996), or the enchanted wood in Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* (1984). Such fantasies have the best of both worlds, in more ways than one. They explore the full freedom of the genre, while at the same time keep the story firmly rooted in reality, thus providing an easy and visible path onto the fantastic bridge for readers who might not be prepared to believe in a fantasy set entirely in an imaginary world.

Then there are those fantasies set firmly in the real world, with the magic discovered in unexplored regions of desert or forest or isolated mountain kingdoms. This type of fantasy must have been much easier to write a hundred years ago, when the world was a

much larger and more mysterious place. In some respects, it could be said that sf series such as *Star Trek* have taken over this style of fantasy, substituting unexplored planets for the mountain kingdoms, and aliens for the monsters. Indeed, one of the classic fantasies of this type, H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) – recently reissued by publisher Pulp Fictions – dates back to those heady days when it was still feasible for explorers to discover the mysterious and beautiful Ayesha with her deadly secret of immortality right here on Earth. Modern writers who have succeeded with Earth-bound fantasies include Elizabeth Hand, whose *Waking the Moon* (1994) centres on a group of secretive scholars at a US college who turn out to be magicians involved in the ritual worship of the moon-goddess, and Storm Constantine, whose 'Grigori' are fallen angels who haunt our world in the series begun with *Stalking Tender Prey* (1995).

Horror fiction, of course, has always drawn on this method to good effect, with vampires, werewolves and other monsters abroad in the real world. In fact, horror seems to rely upon the fantastic bridge being as visible as possible – either using a magical gateway (as in Clive Barker's *Weaveworld*), or a spaceship to reach other planets (as in sf films such as *Alien*, 1979). Presumably, a horror story set in a purely imaginary world with no link to our own, where the monsters cannot ever threaten us personally, simply would not be frightening enough to be labelled horror.

### Magic Realism – the invisible bridge

Finally, we come to those books often labelled 'magic realism', where the fantastic elements are deliberately subtle and ambiguous. The reader can never quite be sure if the strangeness is merely in the characters' heads, or if it might, somewhere, exist in the real world. Since this ambiguity tends to give such books an authenticity missing in other types of fantasies, they frequently hide on the 'literary' shelves, which can tend to make them inaccessible. But there's plenty here for the fantasy fan.

For example, Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1985) tells the story of several generations of a South American family through a civil war. Here, the fantastic elements are secondary to the historical elements, yet integral to the plot. At the end of the book when the heroine is tortured to reveal the name of her lover, a visit from her mother's spirit gives her the strength to resist – owing to her state of mind during her imprisonment, however, the

reader can never be sure if the spirit actually walks, or is simply a product of the heroine's fevered imagination. This technique of putting characters into situations where the boundary between imagination and reality might believably break down is what helps give such books their authenticity.

Other writers use characters who already exist on the edge of reality. For example, Keri Hulme's Booker prize-winning novel *The Bone People* (1983) introduces us to an enigmatic heroine who lives alone on New Zealand's South Island in a fantastic tower by the sea, where she has visits from what she calls 'dream-vampires'. When her peaceful existence is shattered by the arrival of a child who cannot speak and his alcoholic Maori father, the potential for believable fantasy increases three-fold. By the time Hulme steps firmly onto the fantastic bridge with her ancestral canoe sunk in a mountain pool where the water is like "ten thousand bubbles bursting on (the) skin", the reader is quite willing to believe that this Maori myth might be true.

### Conclusion

There are, of course, hundreds of books and stories not mentioned here that are equally valid examples of pushing the fantasy boundaries. It would be impossible to give an exhaustive list in such a short space, and everyone will have their own favourites, so I make no apologies for using mine. Which brings me back to my original question. What is fantasy?

When you really begin to dig around the foundations of the fantastic bridge, it seems so much fiction can be classed as fantasy, the difficulties of defining the genre are quite understandable. Some people like to use the term 'imaginative fiction', but all fiction is imaginative to a certain extent, otherwise it would be fact. My favourite definition of fantasy is any story that contains magic, whether it be a wizard with a wand, or simply a magical way of looking at the world. The magic in this case is fluid, in the same way as the fantastic bridge is fluid, and depends upon the individual reader.

Maybe here lies the real reason for all those book store pigeon holes. Without them, we'd be confronted with one huge, groaning shelf labelled 'Fantasy', and exactly the same problem as before of finding books we might enjoy.

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IN VECTOR 203, IAN J SIMPSON SURVEYED ROCK MUSIC AND SCIENCE-FICTION AND IN VECTOR 204, TANYA BROWN EXAMINED THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SF AND CLASSICAL MUSIC. NOW, IN THE THIRD OF THIS SERIES, GARY S. DALKIN GOES TO THE MOVIES.

## The Music of the Spheres 3: Science Fiction Film Music

by Gary S. Dalkin

This article is about English language sf film and music. Foreign language sf films have been excluded partly for reasons of space, but also because it has proved difficult to obtain information about many of the composers and their music. Given that film composers flit between genres even more frequently than many sf, fantasy and horror writers it has been necessary in places to discuss music from beyond the bounds of science fiction, and on occasion to venture into the mainstream in order to give as full a picture as possible of the development of sf film and music.

**The cultural level of music is certain to be raised if better music is written for films.**

Aaron Copland

**It's because there's no critical attention to movie music that it is left to producers – who are musical ignoramuses.**

Bernard Herrmann

### The Sound of Silents

There never was a 'silent film'. As early as 1895 test screenings of the new entertainment medium were accompanied by piano or harmonium, whether, as Hanns Eisler suggested in *Composing For The Films*, to humanise the 'ghostly effect' of images on a silent screen, or more prosaically, to cover the noise made by the projector.

By 1908 as famous a composer as Camille Saint-Saens had written music for the screen, for the film *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*. Even so, the composed score was a rarity. Most often selections from the established classical repertoire were adapted to fit each new film. In 1912 Max Winkler was the first to catalogue classical pieces for their suitability to accompany different sorts of film scenes. He suggested his idea to the Universal Film Company, and was soon working for studio compiling cue-sheets of music to accompany Universal films in

the theatres. The idea was an immediate success, and apart from the occasional major production, almost all Hollywood, and most European films, were 'scored' this way until the arrival of synchronised sound.

Sound was established with *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, and immediately created such complex technical problems and increased financial overheads that many in the film industry hoped it would prove a passing fad and quickly go away. For five years music was largely limited to the main and end titles, and to featured songs. Gradually more score music was added, and as the technical difficulties involved in recording, balancing and synchronising sound were overcome, Hollywood realised that it had a shortage of composers. Re-arranged classics would no longer do now that sound was indelibly a part of film.

Happily for the Hollywood studios, if for no one else, the rise of the Nazis in Germany and then Europe during the late 1920s and 1930s resulted in a diaspora to America, of many of the most gifted and creative European artists and intellectuals, Jewish and gentile. Among those who fled were writers, actors, directors and composers, and Hollywood was as grateful to have them as they were to have the opportunity to re-establish themselves in a new country.

So it happened that just at the time when American born composers like George Gershwin and Aaron Copland were forging a specifically American sound and taking American concert music away from the still pervasive influence of the European classical establishment, the sound which came to dominate the first two decades of 'the talkies' continued the European tradition.

The leading Hollywood composers of this period were Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Alfred Newman, Max Steiner, Franz Waxman, and from 1940 Bernard Herrmann and Miklos Rozsa, and all except Herrmann and Newman were central Europeans.

### Opera Goes Ape

Max Steiner was born in Vienna in 1888, the godson of Richard Strauss. He studied music at the Imperial Academy of Music, then settled in America with the outbreak of the Great War. Between 1930 and 1965 he composed music for over 200 films, his most important work being in making the definitive statement of the sound of 1930s romantic Hollywood with his music for *Gone With the Wind* (1939), and, six years earlier, in establishing the framework for future epic sf and fantasy scores with the first great orchestral score to be recorded on film. His music for *King Kong* (1933) revolutionised the sound of talking pictures, and is as important in the development of film music, as *King Kong* is in the history of cinema itself:

Full of weird chords, strident background noises, rumblings and heavings, it was one of the most enthusiastically written scores ever to be composed in Hollywood. Indeed, it was always my feeling that it should have been advertised as a concert of Steiner's music with accompanying pictures on the screen. (Oscar Levant)

In seeking an appropriate model for a full-length score the composer turned to late nineteenth century opera. Donald Jay Gould has noted that, "For Wagner, the function of music was to serve the ends of dramatic expression" (*A History of Western Music*). As Roy M. Prendergast points out in *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, the same can as easily be said about "the function of music in a film". In both opera and film, character and story predominate. The musicians are invisible and secondary, hidden in the orchestra pit or recording studio.

Steiner utilised Wagner's use of leitmotifs, a musical signature accompanying each major character, and which could be reworked and developed throughout the film. It was an effective approach, for narrative film has significant parallels with opera: the recitatives of opera are comparable with expository film dialogue, and arias equate to more powerful dramatic scenes

which are given fuller scoring on film. Likewise, major orchestral episodes in opera become comparable with large-scale instrumental sequences composed to accompany action set-pieces such as chases, fights and battles. John Boorman is just one director who, in transplanting several orchestral sections from The Ring cycle of operas to underscore key moments of the Arthurian epic, *Excalibur* (1981), has made the relationship between Wagnerian opera and film music explicit. It was thus entirely appropriate that Westerns and space adventures came to be dubbed respectively Horse and Space Operas.

Steiner uses three main leitmotifs in *King Kong*, three descending chromatic notes to suggest the giant ape himself, a Viennese-flavoured waltz/love theme for heroine Ann Darrow, and a four note 'courage' motive. Dominated by action, much of the score is harsh, barbaric, filled with snarling brass and complex percussive passages, closer to Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* (1913) than the lush melodrama Steiner became more commonly associated with. While the composer developed other motives, but at the heart of the music lies the Kong and Ann motives, which constantly appear and re-appear, often in complex juxtaposition.

So successful was the music that RKO reused the tracks in dozens of subsequent films, and Steiner himself reused sections of the score several times. The effect of this music on the sound of Hollywood film can not be under-estimated. Apart from its re-use, its influence survives in the furious orchestral sounds and the driving rhythms which propel today's sf blockbusters, with John Williams paying deliberate homage in parts of his music for *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), having himself revived the long neglected leitmotiv system for the ultimate cinematic space opera, *Star Wars* (1977).

Another decision Steiner made has had a lasting influence on the way music has been used in sf and fantasy cinema. He chose to leave the realistic sections of the film without a score, only using music to depict the fantastic, and thereby differentiating the objective reality of the everyday from the subjectively fantastical world of Kong and his island. A prime example of this relationship between music and the 'other' is found Jerry Goldsmith's choice of where to begin his deeply unsettling twelve-tone score in Michael Crichton's sf medical thriller *Coma* (1978). For the first fifty minutes, while *Coma* remains a conventional thriller it progresses without music. Only when the sf element is introduced does the music begin, and then plays almost continually, for forty of the remaining fifty minutes.

Thus devices that Steiner established in 1933 have continued to influence the sound of sf cinema into our time. It may have been very different, for prior to *King Kong's* release RKO executives were so convinced the film would flop that the decision was almost taken not to have a new score at all.

### Things to Come

Hollywood would not significantly embrace sf or Fantasy until the 1950s, and following *King Kong* noteworthy genre scores are few and far between. One exception is the epic score Franz Waxman wrote for *The Bride of Frankenstein* in 1936. It is in the same tradition as Steiner's *King Kong*, but inventively adds elements of early electronic music.

*Things to Come* appeared in the same year. This British production, scripted by H.G. Wells, features gigantic sets, an enormous cast, and lavish, state-of-the-art special effects, to tell an ambitious story of world war, the building of a new civilisation and the first voyage to the Moon. At Wells' behest producer Alexander Korda recruited Arthur Bliss (later Sir Arthur Bliss and Master of the Queen's Music), to compose the music. Bliss responded with a jewel of a score, which greatly enhanced what was the first British film epic.

Today the splendid March remains familiar, but there is much more to the music, the film seemingly inspiring Bliss to produce some of his most memorable inventions. Highlights, as titled in later concert suites, include a delicate "Ballet for Children", the

mournful "World in Ruins", and the thrilling "Attack On The Moon Gun". The score is bold, wistful and essentially English, no more so than in the final section which follows the successful launch of the first vessel to the moon. Against a closing eulogy to the destiny of man among the stars Bliss sets an Elgarian coda of extraordinary intensity. It is one of the greatest pieces of music written for the screen.

In 1937 Korda commissioned his fellow Hungarian, Miklos Rozsa, to score *Knight Without Armour*. This led to a series of collaborations, including two exceptionally colourful and inventive scores for the fantasies *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and *The Jungle Book* (1942).

Rozsa later recalled: "I had been trying to get the Theremin (an early electronic instrument invented by Leon Theremin) into pictures since 1939. I wanted to use it in *The Thief of Bagdad*, but I was unable to because the man who was going to play it, Martenot, was unavailable." The onset of the Second World War resulted in *The Thief of Bagdad* production being relocated to Hollywood.

Rozsa stayed, writing the music for Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), in which he finally brought the pure, ethereal and eerie sound of the Theremin to the screen. He reused the instrument to portray the state of mind of an alcoholic writer in *Lost Weekend* (1946). So successful were these scores that during the latter part of the 1940s the unworldly tone of the Theremin became the movie sound of madness. Then the aliens arrived, and the Theremin played their tune.

Rozsa wrote many more film scores and concert works, but rarely ventured into the fantastic again. In the late 1970s, when many young directors were realising how over a decade of 'pop' scoring had dramatically devalued contemporary film, Rozsa wrote scores for then up-and-coming talents as Jonathan Demme, Richard Marquand, Larry Cohen, and for Nicholas Meyer's debut *Time After Time* (1978). This romantic time-travel thriller was given great power by Rozsa's bold and elegant score, and Rozsa clearly thought highly enough of the music to rework elements from it into his *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra*, Op.37 the following year.

## The First Wave

It was inevitable that composers writing for the embryonic science fiction cinema would create a sound different to that heard in conventional films, and they did so in part by using instruments which were themselves almost science-fictional.

In 1951 the aliens began to invade Hollywood in earnest. Bernard Herrmann, who had scored Orson Welles's 1938 radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, provided the cool, almost neo-classical, music for Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. His score created a cold, alien ambience through the total absence of woodwind, but came replete with a large array of tuned percussion and a Theremin played by the young Ray Moog, who would go on to develop the famous Moog synthesisers. While not adverse to melody, Herrmann introduced an element of unresolved tension into his music by the use of short sequences of notes which deliberately fail to achieve any conventionally expected musical resolution. His scores were quite alien to anything Hollywood had previously encountered.

That same year the Russian composer Dimitri Tiomkin electrified the screen with his score for *The Thing (From Another World)*. Using an enormous orchestra, like Herrmann's, augmented by electronics, Tiomkin unleashed an unearthly, savage assault on the senses.

Repeated showings on television have obscured the fact that *Forbidden Planet* (1955) is a genuine artistic and a technological landmark. Apart from its literate, Shakespeare-inspired, screenplay, it was the first sf film to be shot in CinemaScope, the first with a stereo soundtrack, and the first commercial feature film

of any sort to feature an entirely electronic score, officially credited as 'Electronic Tonalities' by Louis and Bebe Barron. The soundtrack fell somewhere between music – in the sense of pitches and rhythms – and sound effects. The result was a groundbreaking film unlike nothing heard or seen before.

The then-new electronic sounds created a genuinely otherworldly vision of space flight and ancient alien technology, and would influence the sound of film to the present day: from the complex, atonal machine noises of Leonard Rosenman's score for *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), through the electronic minimalism of John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* (1981) to Vangelis' haunting blend of synthesisers and acoustic instruments for *Blade Runner* (1982), and Brad Fidel's sample based scores for James Cameron's two *Terminator* films (1984 and 1991).

In the years following *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Bernard Herrmann scored four George Pal fantasy films, and worked with Alfred Hitchcock on a series of eight films, the last of which was the sf-flavoured *The Birds* (1963). For this, in lieu of an orchestral score, Herrmann collaborated with composer Remy Gassman to create the (electronic) sound of the avian aggressors. The recording was made in Germany, because at the time no suitable electronic studio was available in America.

In 1966 Herrmann scored the great French film-maker Francois Truffaut's only English language work as director, a version of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Most of the score is appropriately cold, stark, paranoid. Ironically the only human warmth comes in the final scene set amid falling snow. Set to one of Herrmann's finest creations, a romantic melody of heart-breaking sadness, Truffaut uses music to suggest that any hope for the future resides in the unbroken spirit of human 'living books'.

During the 1950s and early 1960s hundreds of sf films were made, the majority being comparatively cheap 'B' pictures, or Z-grade exploitation movies aimed at the drive-in market. While quality films did appear, major composers rarely, if ever, put their names to them, and scores for sf films tended to the functional and stereotyped. Snarling, hard-bitten orchestral pyrotechnics and electronics predominated. While much of the work was well crafted, and considerably better than the films deserved, there was little inspiration for composers to really give of their best.

## 2001: A Space Odyssey

*2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) was unique for a major studio picture of its era, in that it did not have a specially composed score, but depended for its music upon selections from classical repertoire.

*2001* begins and ends with the alignment of the Earth, the Moon and the Sun to the heroic strains of the opening of Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. So iconic is the image that today this short section is by far the most well known of the composer's music, and has become inseparable in the public mind from the film. More audacious still is Kubrick's appropriation of Johanne Strauss' *The Blue Danube* waltz for the long sequence during which a Pan Am space shuttle approaches and docks with an orbital space station. The use of such warm and romantic music from the time of height of imperial Viennese society should, logically, make an inappropriate accompaniment to the futuristic machine images set against the inhuman dark of space. Yet instantly the combination becomes inevitable. It is as if an extraordinary artistic collaboration has occurred across the centuries. The combined visuals and music works triumphantly, for Kubrick's space vehicles too are engaged in a graceful, elegant, yet careful waltz, a symbolic mating of machines choreographed to the music of a courtship ritual.

Kubrick also used several contemporary, atonal choral pieces by Ligeti: *Lux Aeterna*, *Atmospheres*, and *Requiem for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, 2 Mixed Choirs and Orchestra*. These pieces are used as the 'voice' of the Black Monolith which appears throughout the film, and to heighten the inhuman nature of deep space.

Disorienting and forbidding as pure music, as part of the soundtrack to the film these works make a perfectly alienating counterpoint.

*2001* was originally supposed to use a score by Alex North, who had written a powerful score for Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1961). North started work on Christmas Eve 1967 and all seemed to go well, with Kubrick apparently enthusiastic about the score, despite having expressed a desire to keep some of the 'temp' tracks he had used on a rough-cut of the film. As North explained in an interview with Irwin Bazelon: "I was very, very frustrated by it all. I really knocked myself out. It was the greatest opportunity to write a score for a film – where there are no sound effects, or hardly any sound effects. I wrote fifty minutes of music in three weeks, I was taken to the recording studio in an ambulance, because my whole body was tied up in knots from having to work day and night; but I'm glad I did it, because I have the score, and I did some very fresh things as far as I am concerned."

In another interview, quoted in the notes to a recent recording of North's score made by Jerry Goldsmith, North said: "After eleven tense days of waiting to see more film in order to record in early February, I received word from Kubrick that no more score was necessary, that he was going to use breathing effects for the remainder of the film. It was all very strange, and I thought perhaps I would still be called upon to compose more music... Nothing happened. I went to a screening in New York, and there were most of the 'temporary' tracks."

By all accounts, no one involved in the production of *2001* ever contacted Alex North to tell him his music had been replaced. It has been suggested that Kubrick never intended to use North's score, and only accepted the composer because the production company, MGM, was against his idea of using classical selections. However effective this approach proved, the studio must have seen it as a return to the pre-Great War system of bolting the established repertoire to the latest feature, making a patchwork Frankenstein's monster of a score. It must have seemed a very strange approach to what was in all other respects appeared an entirely forward looking and radically new film. Perhaps though, in retrospect, *2001* actually seemed so new because it was in reality a return to the unfamiliar, to the visually dominated 'pure' cinema of the pre-talkie youth of the movies.

The enormous success of *2001* meant that for the next the next few years most major sf movies laid claims to seriousness, the most telling sign of such aspiration being a famous piece of classical music on the soundtrack. Thus *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Zardoz* (1973) both borrowed from Beethoven, while *Rollerball* (1975) settled for the opening of Bach's *D minor Toccata and Fugue*. The joyful humanism of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* resonated ironically against the institutionalised euthanasia sequence it 'supported' (in a montage with other classical extracts) in *Soylent Green*, while Bach's spiritual grandeur provided a sardonic commentary on the preparations for commercialised carnage in the modern church of the Rollerball sports arena. *Zardoz* ended with part of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, affirming a unity of opposites and life continuing out of death, as male (Zed – Sean Connery) and female (Consuella – Charlotte Rampling) triumph over death, have a son, grow old and die.

### The Rise of Pop and the Return of the Score

The old studio system, with its rosters of actors and technical staff on seven year contracts and permanent departments in place to cover every aspect of a film's production, including music, ended in the 1960s. Each film became a separate entity, often the only connection with the Studio was that it provided the finance. Films were no longer shot on the backlot, but on location, and in studios rented as required. The studio old music departments closed and the studio orchestras were disbanded. At the same time films such as *The Graduate* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) proved not only that a film could work dramatically with a pop/rock soundtrack, but that the resulting singles and albums

could both promote the film and make potentially huge additional profits.

Unfortunately the situation arose, which continues today, that the marketing departments began taking 'artistic' decisions regarding the use of music, and pop music began to be used regardless of whether it benefited a film, or even if it detracted from it.

Nicholas Meyer notes, "film financiers weakened the impact of a great many films by seeing to it that they were scored with largely irrelevant pop sounds, insisting that all film music follow the mould of *The Graduate*, these men very nearly rendered obsolete the art of film music... new generations of film directors, dissatisfied or incurious about films of the immediate past, turned to watch earlier works... Directors like Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Brian de Palma, and Martin Scorsese revived the art of film music, returning in *their* films to scores which – symphonic or not – attempted to highlight or complement the action on screen."

### Jerry Goldsmith

Besides *2001* there was a second landmark sf film released in 1968 with a radical approach to music. Jerry Goldsmith had already been composing for film and TV for a decade and had written for the original *Twilight Zone*, and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* series, and the John Frankenheimer sf thriller, *Seconds*. With Franklin Shaffner's *Planet of the Apes*, Goldsmith discarded melody almost entirely, creating a percussive sound-world like no film score before it. So strange are some of the sounds that many people have become convinced that Goldsmith must have used electronic instruments. The composer has said: "There was a great deal of thought on my part about how to approach it, and the obvious way would be to use electronics and all sorts of synthetic means of reproducing the music, and I feel, without trying to sound pretentious, that the resources of the orchestra had just barely begun to be tapped..." In his music for *Planet of the Apes* he pushed film into the cacophonous region of contemporary concert music, effectively capturing the fear and alienation of Charlton Heston's astronaut hero.

In the three decades since, Goldsmith has composed for many sf and fantasy films, from providing a Viennese/Wagnerian inspired score for Shaffner's *The Boys From Brazil* (1977), an impressionistic/serial score for the Ray Bradbury adaptation *The Illustrated Man* (1969) to pre-figuring contemporary ambient electronic music for *Logan's Run* (1976). Along the way Goldsmith again collaborated with Ray Bradbury on the cantata *Christus Apollo*. In an interview with Derek Elley in *Films and Filming* in 1979 Goldsmith said: "Ray Bradbury wrote the text, and we had two performances in Los Angeles, which was enough... It was his way of trying to associate space with God – all a bit too esoteric. It wasn't very good."

Goldsmith has continued to work in the genre with scores for, among many more, *Capricorn One* (1978), *Alien* (1979), *Star Trek The Motion Picture* (1979), *Outland* (1981), *The Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983), *Innerspace* (1985), *Legend* (1985), *Leviathan* (1989), *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1990), *Total Recall* (1990), *Congo* (1995), *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996), *Deep Rising* (1997), *Small Soldiers* (1998) and *Star Trek: Insurrection* (1998).

For *Star Trek The Motion Picture* Goldsmith composed a lavishly romantic score which remains among the most imaginative and well realised fusions of traditional and electronic instruments yet recorded. For *Star Trek: First Contact* Goldsmith composed a five note lietmotiv for the Borg, a collective race which subsume individuals into a conformist totality. As Kubrick used Strauss' ascending three note figure from *Also Sprach Zarathustra* to imply the 'ascent of man', so the first three notes of Goldsmith's Borg theme echo Strauss, before the final two notes descend again. The implication is that the races which comprise the Borg have 'ascended' only to descend again once they have had their individuality sublimated into the mass. It is musical ideas such as this, as well as Goldsmith's flair for melody, orchestral

colour and powerful action writing that make him such an interesting and varied composer.

### John Carpenter

In 1974 the then unknown John Carpenter made his first feature film. Apart from directing, editing, co-writing and producing, Carpenter also wrote the music. Although he had no formal musical training, his father was the head of the music department at Kentucky University, and music was clearly in the family. Carpenter would go on to write, or sometimes co-write, the music to many of his sf and horror films.

Carpenter's scores are electronic, minimal and repetitive. He favours short cells of thematic material, which he often loops or sequences to create a fatalistic atmosphere of relentless threat. His music does not resolve itself or develop in any conventional way, and his approach might be said to follow in the Herrmann tradition, both in the generation of unease and through the favouring of small musical structures repeated to the limits of endurance. Carpenter's approach to film music worked best in his early horror films, *Halloween* (1978) and *The Fog* (1980), the main 'theme' to the former being an unforgettable electric piano driven statement of immanent dread. For films in which human warmth has been required Carpenter has hired other composers, while at Universal Studio's behest, Ennio Morricone supplied an orchestral score of ice cold menace for the director's big budget version of *The Thing* (1982).

### John Williams

George Lucas originally planned to follow Kubrick's lead and have *Star Wars* (1977) scored with selections from the nineteenth century classical repertoire. Executives at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, not seeing that the film was essentially a 1930s style swashbuckler, considered that a futuristic sf film should be scored with electronic, *musique concrete*. It was only when Lucas saw *Jaws* (1975), scored by John Williams, that he realised that he had found a composer capable of providing the sort of romantically old fashioned score he required.

As Lucas suggested, Williams looked back to the established European repertoire. He wrote leitmotifs for each of the central characters, developing them throughout the score. He went further, an anglophile, he incorporated elements of twentieth-century British orchestral music, evoking at times the spirit of Elgar, Vaughan-Williams, and other less well known English composers such as John Ireland, William Alwyn, Sir Arthur Bliss.

Given that *Star Wars* had its roots in the *Flash Gordon* serials of the 1930s, Williams referred to the swashbuckling sound established by Steiner and Korngold. In particular, to the vibrant, richly orchestrated sound world of Korngold's *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940). Finally, he also looked to the American concert composers of the same era, drawing inspiration from the Americana of Aaron Copland's 1930s and 1940s ballet and film scores, works such as *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Music for Movies* (1942) and *Appalachian Spring* (1945), and from the sound established by Howard Hanson, particularly in his *Symphony No.2 'Romantic'*.

The result was a rich tapestry of a score, the finest to have graced an American film in more than a decade. It is no exaggeration to say that Williams' music made *Star Wars*, bringing out all the adventure, romance, danger and excitement implicit in the film, and that in returning so successfully to a full-blooded orchestral sound Williams completely altered the face of film music. The double orchestral soundtrack album was a massive hit, and soon Williams's sound was being imitated, at the orders of various Studios, by up and coming talents.

Williams went on to write one classic sf or fantasy score after another, in the space of eighteen months writing brilliant music for Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), Brian De Palma's *The Fury* (1978), Richard Donner's *Superman – The Movie* (1978) and Hollywood's best attempt at *Dracula* (1979)

to date. His *Superman* score has tended to be overlooked, perhaps for appearing in the midst of such a prolific period of exceptional work, but it is a fine, majestic work, the equal of his work on *Star Wars*. *The Fury* and *Dracula* are darker works, full bloodedly Wagnerian, the former being especially fine.

*Close Encounters* is a splendid mess, as evidenced by even the director not being able to work the film into a definitive shape, despite Columbia Pictures allowing him the luxury of re-editing it once a decade. The virtues it has are those of audio-visual spectacle, and these are considerable. Such is the importance of the fusion of sound and image that for the 'lightshow' finale Williams wrote his music first and Spielberg shot and then edited to the score. The result that was that Williams was able to achieve a much closer integration of score and image, and a more thoroughly through-composed development, than is usually possible in commercial cinema.

The range of the music is amazing, from the disturbing atonalities of the early sections, to the wild experimental passages for the communication between the scientists and the aliens, scored for synthesiser and tuba. Utilising the idea that without a shared language humans and aliens might communicate through music, Williams used a repeated five-note motif to be bounced back and forth across the species barrier. This simple, and now very famous theme, proved difficult to get right. Talking to Laurent Bouzereau in 1998, Williams recalled:

I remember writing maybe 250, 300 of these things, and I had a few meetings with Steven to play him all of these little themes, and we could never figure it out. We never were able to say "Eureka! This is exactly the one we want..." I thought we'd exhausted everything...and Steven said, "Oh, there must be more. We'll call this friend of mine who is a mathematician to ask him how many five-note combinations within the twelve-note scale can be created." So then Steven's friend rang us back an hour or so later, and he said, "Approximately 134 000". So we realised that we had barely begun to explore what could be done with five notes. So finally, in exasperation, we circled one of them. The next day we came back and I tried some more notes, and Steven said, "Play the one we circled yesterday." And we kept going back to that one. So finally he said, "Well, I guess that's it. It must be the best we can have."

Without doubt it was worth the effort, for stripped of Williams's music *Close Encounters* would be little more than a screen-full of pretty lights. With his music an incoherent and contradictory film is transformed into what is at times a moving experience, particularly in the finale, which, almost entirely through the score, achieves a sense of near religious awe and wonder at the beauty of the universe.

Over the following years Williams supplied the scores to the second and third *Star Wars* films, his work on *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) surpassing his score for the original in terms of diversity and invention. He also wrote the music for the Lucas/Spielberg Indiana Jones fantasy trilogy (1981-89). Indeed, he has scored all of Spielberg's cinema films except *The Color Purple* (1985).

John Williams has recently finished the score for the fourth *Star Wars* film.

### The Present

So successful has John Williams been in redefining the sound of the sf film away from electronic music or classical extracts that he has been widely imitated. Composers how have fitted their own distinct musical voices into the Williams template have included Basil Poldoris, *Robocop* (1987), *Starship Troopers* (1997), Alan Silvestri's *Back to the Future* trilogy (1985-1990), *Predator* (1987), *The Abyss* (1989) and *Contact* (1997), David Arnold, *Stargate* (1994) and *Independence Day* (1996). James Horner appeared to build his early career out of Williams imitations for a film festival of sf scores including *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980), *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn* (1982), *Brainstorm* (1983), *Krull* (1983) and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984). Having now found a

distinctive voice of his own, he has recently eclipsed Williams' success with his score for James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997).

## The Future

There are several trends in film music, all of which will influence the sound of sf movies to come. The traditional full orchestral score remains strong in the still inventive hands of Williams, Goldsmith and a host of younger composers such as Bruce Broughton – *Lost in Space* (1998) – Eliot Goldenthal – *Alien<sup>3</sup>* (1992), *Demolition Man* (1994) – and James Newton Howard – *Waterworld* (1995).

Other composers such as John Carpenter, Brad Fidel and Vangelis have popularised electronic scores. However, the main advantage of such scores appears to be that they do not require an orchestra to record, and thus can be comparatively cheap. Such scores have thus found favour with the producers of low budget straight-to-video sf exploitation films, and as a means of providing a unified sound to long running TV shows such as *The X-Files* and *Babylon 5*.

Meanwhile, the 'product placing' of pop songs on soundtracks for purely commercial reasons has continued to grow until it has reached almost surreal levels, with ten second fragments of songs appearing in films for no other reason than to justify the inclusion an album bearing the title *Music from and inspired by...*

It is to be hoped that the soon-to-be released John Williams score for the new *Star Wars* film will once again tilt in the favour of music, of whatever type, being included only if it benefits the film. The signs are various. While *Gattaca* (1998) gained

considerably from having a detached, minimal and resolutely uncommercial score from Michael Nyman, *Armageddon* (1998) mixed mindless rock music with a totally inappropriate imitation of Horner's pseudo-Celtic *Titanic* sound.

It may seem ironic that a genre which supposedly looks to the future must repeatedly turn to the past to find the musical support it needs. Yet almost all cinema is at heart human drama, about human conflicts, needs and desires. It may therefore be no surprise that however effective the occasional electronic score may be, directors will inevitably return to the warmth and emotion of human beings playing real instruments.

The further away in time from the nineteenth-century operas which provided the template for so much film composition we get, the stranger some may find it that the cinema clings to techniques developed during that period. That it is particularly odd given that cinema, and society, is becoming ever more technologically orientated, ever more distanced from the values of the nineteenth century, and as popular music is becoming increasingly electronic, artificial, nihilistic and contentless. Yet the opera model continues to work, because both opera and film deal in the big dramas of love and life and death, of great events on the grandest of scales. It may be inherently backward-looking, or it may suggest that we have left something behind which is worth looking back towards. Whatever it says about the nature of filmed science fiction, and of cinema itself, perhaps for their music filmmakers will always have to go back to the future.

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## Cognitive Mapping 16: Conformity

by Paul Kincaid

It was Thomas Jefferson, America's polymath third president, who laid out the grid pattern that became the city plan of Pittsburgh and New York and countless other American cities. It was neat and ordered and regular – a 'Mondrian arrangement' as Harlan Ellison terms it in "Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman' – and it became the pattern not just for the present but also for the future of America. Shopping malls that grew to the five-mile square blocks of Michael Marshall Smith's *Spares* (1996), domed arcologies that grew into domed cities such as Bruce Sterling's future Chattanooga in 'Bicycle Repairman' (1996), tower blocks that grew ever higher as in Robert Silverberg's *The World Inside* (1971), even the world cities that have been a regular part of science fiction at least since Trantor in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* (1942-44) – all are laid out on some refinement of the regular grid. Levels arose, criss-crossed by walkways and roadways and flight paths, everything was ordered and precise – as we saw as long ago as H.G. Wells' 'A Story of the Days to Come' (1897) where the future underclass literally work under the city's elevated street level, clearly doomed to become the subterranean Morlocks of the even more distant future in *The Time Machine* (1895). In the 1950s, when the American present promised a world of glitter and glass and chrome, the future seemed to be already here and all that sf might offer would be a few minor tweaks to what was already going on in the world outside.

In a way, they were right. That wonderfully optimistic vision of growth and wealth and plenty, of glass and steel and plastic, has

largely come about. The future that William Gibson satirised in 'The Gernsback Continuum' (1981) is actually visible in shopping malls and airports, at Canary Wharf and in the streets of New York. But things are never as pristine as they are painted by our imagination. As is the way of these things, having achieved something of that future we're no longer sure that we want it.

The trouble is that when our environment becomes a giant chessboard, we might become as dehumanised as the pawns in John Brunner's *The Squares of the City* (1965) or Ian Watson's *Kingmagic, Queenmagic* (1986). To Jefferson and others of the Enlightenment, such conformity, such lack of individuality, would have been no bad thing. Human progress was a continual upward march, a striving to turn the greater good for the greatest number into the greater good for all. There was a goal which would encompass all of humanity, and if such a goal could be achieved then all would be happily the same and what could be wrong with that?

We are no longer so certain. Even at the beginning of the century, E.M. Forster equated conformity with the destruction of humanity. His future people live isolated lives in a gigantic underground beehive, everyone alone in their cell, fed with all they could desire by way of food and music and conversation, but rarely venturing outside, rarely making any human contact with another person. The less they question this existence, the more they surrender to the dictatorship of the Machine.

Since then, we have seen such uniformity imposed by the state, and we have seen the consequences of this totalitarianism. The breaking of Winston Smith's will to conform with the wishes of Big Brother was looked on with dread by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) just as the breaking of a woman's will to conform with the wishes of men was regarded with dread by Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). As Woody Allen showed in *Zelig* (1983), anyone whose personality is reduced to chameleon-like conformity is no longer a person.

There has been a host of books, plays and films since World War II that convey essentially the same message as these three: that individuality is to be prized as our primary defence against the dictator, whatever form that dictator might take. The predominant post-war intellectual position recognises that the vital people are – to employ the striking image from Ursula K. Le Guin's 1973 story – 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas', those who eschew conformity, no matter how utopian it might appear.

Early futuristic fiction might laud the necessity of keeping the machinery of the well-regulated city in order, as Robert Heinlein did in 'The Roads Must Roll' (1940). And the world city might be seen as symbolising the power and prosperity of the future. But increasingly those who write about such locations (as opposed to those who simply use them as a background for their story) have found it difficult to sustain such a view. The world city in R.A. Lafferty's elegant satire, 'The World as Will and Wallpaper' (1973), is a trap, a closed world incapable of any advance or development, just a pattern endlessly repeated as in wallpaper. Here the ordered and regulated city is a metaphor for the lack of free will under totalitarianism. Harlan Ellison makes the same point in his story, producing a hero diametrically opposed to any Robert Heinlein might have celebrated since the Harlequin achieves his victory by ensuring that the roads do not roll, at least for a few precious anarchic moments. In the end, like Winston Smith before him, the Harlequin is caught and turned, but may have achieved the greater victory by subverting the Ticktockman himself.

Nature, with its untrammelled sense of wildness and disorder, is something that essentially urban science fiction has tended to shy away from. But a too ordered city has become equally as fearsome. So when the urban clearances of the 1960s replaced the disordered slums with the order of high rise blocks, this enforced conformity created a social and psychological disorder such as that explored by J.G. Ballard in *High Rise* (1975). And the higher the block, the more regulated life inside needs to be, so the

greater the breakdown, which Robert Silverberg reflected in his chill, bleak account of *The World Inside*.

The trouble is that such conformity does not arise, as the Jeffersonians might have anticipated, from equality. The rigidity of planning, rather, reflects a rigidity of social structure. Whether it is Silverberg's high rise blocks or the multi-layered cities found in such various novels as Elizabeth Hand's *Aestival Tide* (1992) or *Spares* by Michael Marshall Smith, the levels delineate class as much as height. The penthouse layers, as ever, are the abode of the rich and powerful, but the lower one descends the more one enters a disordered underworld of the poor and the powerless. Even on space stations, from 'Down and Out on Ellfive Prime' by Dean Ing (1979) to *Babylon 5* (1993-1998), where conformity has at least some practical justification, there is an underclass, a realm of the underprivileged, a place for the individual to exist within the walls of the world. The future, it would appear, is no longer as clean and smart and perfect as we once used to think.

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To attribute these two great developments to the Central Committee is to take a very narrow view of civilisation. The Central Committee announced the developments, it is true, but they were no more the cause of them than were the kings of the imperialistic period the cause of war. Rather did they yield to some invincible pressure, which came no one knew whither, and which, when gratified, was succeeded by some new pressure equally invincible. To such a state of affairs it is convenient to give the name of progress. No one confessed the Machine was out of hand. Year by year it was served with increased efficiency and decreased intelligence. The better a man knew his own duties upon it, the less he understood the duties of his neighbour, and in all the world there was not one who understood the monster as a whole. Those master brains had perished. They had left full directions, it is true, and their successors had each of them mastered a portion of those directions. But Humanity, in its desire for comfort, had overreached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine.

E.M. Forster, 'The Machine Stops' (1928)

And then the slidewalks all stopped and everyone was dumped thisawayandthataway in a jackstraw tumble, and still laughing and popping little jelly-bean eggs of childish colour into their mouths. It was a holiday, and a jollity, an absolute insanity, a giggle. But ...

The shift was delayed seven minutes.

They did not get home for seven minutes.

The master schedule was thrown off by seven minutes.

Quotas were delayed by inoperative slidewalks for seven minutes.

He had tapped the first domino in the line, and one after another, the others had fallen

The System had been seven minutes' worth of disrupted. It was a tiny matter, hardly worthy of note. But in a society where the single driving force was order and unity and promptness and clocklike precision and attention to the clock, reverence of the gods of the passage of time, it was a disaster of major importance.

Harlan Ellison, "Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman' (1965)

# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

**Mark Anthony – *Beyond The Pale***

Earthlight, 1999, 527pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-684-85167-9

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Somewhere there must be a Delia Smith recipe book for fantasy sagas. Take a couple of loners from contemporary Earth, fling them through a dimensional gate into a mediaeval world where magic works, add in a few sub-Tolkienian monsters every hundred pages, and begin with the obligatory map.

In *Beyond The Pale*, Travis, a bar owner from nowhere'sville, and Grace, an ER doctor from Denver, find themselves translocated to different parts of the icy world of Eldh. Travis hooks up with a bunch of wandering travellers who aim to ultimately visit the Council of Kings. Grace is rescued from the barren wilderness by an improbably chivalrous knight who takes her to the... Council of Kings. While Travis learns the art of rune-speaking, Grace chooses what dress to wear and fishes for compliments about her regal beauty. Halfway through the book's discursive narrative the two characters meet and begin to realise they have been brought here for a purpose.

A leisurely pace is fine when the author is weaving a description of a uniquely imagined world, but Eldh strikes me as the result of fantasy world-building by numbers. Anthony's prose is capable but the author has no idea how to marshal plot lines, leaving his characters to wander aimlessly or indulge in endless conversations about court etiquette. As for the malignant Dark Lord (sorry, Pale King), he fails to make an entrance – satisfying himself by sending his minions after a magical stone which will give him ultimate power (another original idea). Some unremitting evil would have gone down a treat and given a sense that the protagonists were in danger, but Anthony seems to be carefully holding back the large-scale engagements, giving himself material to drive future volumes.

Anthony subtitles his novel 'Book One Of The Last Rune' heralding a massive saga to come. Why anyone would be interested in such predictable fiction is beyond me.

**Neal L. Asher – *The Engineer***

Tanjen Ltd, 1999, 214pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-901530-08-6

Reviewed by LJ Hurst

Clarke's Law is to the effect that any sufficiently advanced science becomes indistinguishable from magic. The corollary of this for sf is that to write of advanced science is to risk the appearance of fantasy, since it becomes increasingly difficult to rationalise what is being done, as scientific explanations must become less and less comprehensible. And the dark side of this corollary is that fantasy is explained away as science so advanced that it is not explicable.

*The Engineer* is a novella (though the cover calls the title story a novel) and series of short stories set in the same universe, in which humans come into contact with features of such advanced science.

'The Engineer' describes how an FTL ship with a two person

crew and android and AI back-up rescue an egg-like object in space and discover it to be a five million year old escape pod. Placed in a tank of water, the crustacean-like creature inside, a 'Jain', starts to build nano-technology machines, machines so advanced that when they come out of the water they look like human children.

Abaron and Chapra, the humans, have a library of ancient video entertainment. In the second paragraph they wonder if they are going to re-live (or re-die) *Alien*. They do not.

After the battles, we discover that Chapra and Abaron have not seen enough films: if the story begins with *Alien*, it ends with Rex Harrison's *Dr Doolittle*, and they emerge from a water-snail shell which proves to be a true cornucopia of vital potential. Pretty good for a giant shrimp's engineering.

There is no simple chronology to Neal Asher's universe: the humans of 'The Engineer' cannot be the first wave to have passed through. In other stories which describe life on some of its planets, such as 'Proctors' and 'The Owner', we discover there have been several waves, and that in at least one earlier pass humans achieved God-like powers through robot-technology, owning planets now populated by millions of later emigrants.

Meanwhile, the universal panspermia means that humans discover all things are living and many living things are inimical. On a sort of Elizabethan fishing boat, in 'Jable Sharks', humans struggle to fish against creatures that would

eat the fishermen alive in their mating rituals, while in 'The Thrake' a Christian missionary discovers that the purpose of some humanoids is only to act as a host in the transmission of an unattractive parasite. I can't remember what it did to his faith, but I remember what the revelation did to my tea.

The titles themselves give some idea of the word-play and implicit reference in Asher's work, but there is no space to investigate it. What *The Engineer* does do is raise again the questions asked in Brian Aldiss's *Helliconia* trilogy: are scientific facts (such as the life cycle of parasites) extensible to this degree? Are we likely to discover such creatures? And should the moral neutrality of the technology be perceived as moral neutrality by the author?

Or is the author fantasising worlds in which he can abandon moral responsibility, inventing technologies by which we might be tortured? In *The Engineer I* was unable to tell.



<b>K.V. Bailey – <i>The Vortices of Time</i></b>	Triffid Books, 1998, 32pp, £3.00 ISBN 0-9510574-4-48
<b>Lilith Lorraine – <i>Ape into Pleiades</i></b>	Hilltop Press, 1998, 20pp, £2.75 ISBN 0-905262-17-4
<b>Steve Sneyd – <i>Kin to the Far Beyond</i></b>	Hilltop Press, 1998, 12pp, £1.50 ISBN 0-905262-18-2
<b>Steve Sneyd – <i>Entropies and Alignments</i></b>	Hilltop Press, 1998, 8pp, £1.25 ISBN 0-905262-20-4

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

'Science fiction poetry' seems to make as much sense as 'detective poetry' or 'historical poetry'; science fiction is a form of prose fiction in which, like historical fiction, the setting is integral to the character of the story, and in which, like detective fiction, intellectual puzzlement tends to be a central driving force for the plot. Neither of these characteristics suit poetry. Furthermore, one of the strongest weapons in the sf writer's arsenal is to render the metaphorical as concrete: in sf a 'blue moon' is liable to be precisely that. Thus the metaphor, the basic building block of most poems, is nullified: one cannot build a metaphor when the foundation has already been washed away.

Yet the imagery of science fiction – those very metaphors – has attracted poets for generations. Or perhaps it might be better to say that the same images that have excited and inspired science fiction writers – the awesome vastness of space, the wonders of the future – have also excited and inspired poets. Certainly, the more closely a poem ties itself to the prosaic character of science fiction, the less it seems to work as a poem. And the poems of Lilith Lorraine collected here provide strong evidence for that.

Lorraine, born Mary Maude Dunn in Texas in 1894, was a curious character. A socialist and feminist (at a time when such ideas were very unpopular in the United States – the FBI kept a file on her, which helped to inspire her pseudonym, Lilith, the devil's consort) she was also a pioneer in American science fiction, writing stories for Hugo Gernsback in the late '20s before her markets dried up. Lorraine had been writing poetry since the age of ten, and combined these two interests by starting to write science fiction poetry some time in the early 1940s and continuing to do so until her death in 1967. This chapbook brings together a meagre ten poems, undated so there is no way of knowing where they belong within her fairly long career. Her influences are easy to see, however. 'Mutation' is rather too

obvious an homage to W.B. Yeats – "Walked shambling where the great wheels noiseless droned, / Serving the dimming mind, the beast enthroned, / Until the soul shall waken to its power" (and should we maybe pause over the carelessness of that "noiseless drone"?) – while I find echoes of Tennyson in 'The Lady with the Ivory Hands': "Clouds across the mirror passed, / Leaving not a wave-washed crest, / Leaving but the empty air, / And the lady smiling there." This last would be one of the weaker poems were it not for one awkward line, which breaks the rhythm of the rest but still gives the whole poem an extra spark of originality: "As the axioms turned to lies".

Lorraine's poems are weakest where they try to be a science fiction story – as in the dull 'Treasure of Mars' – but strongest where they simply capture a single image which might also have inspired a science fiction story but don't try to emulate that story, as in 'If It Must Be' or her glimpse of rebirth, 'Dark Science': "But it was Hell to see each well-loved form, / And know its soul was distant as a star".

K.V. Bailey has no such problem, mainly because he is avowedly writing light verse. His poems require a fairly broad knowledge of the genre, but they are designed to evoke a smile of recognition and a rueful grin at an obliquely different perspective on a familiar subject, rather than generate independently the same sorts of emotions that science fiction is expected to create. Thus, the Eloi and the Morlocks separately and together bemoaning the interference of Wells's time traveller, 'Future-world Protest', works more as a commentary on a well-known story than as an attempt to evoke the sensation of time travel. Most of this light verse is also humorous – the time traveller in 'One-way Traffic' concludes: "But found the past was little fun: / A Hole or Death – and both are Black. / How do I get the future back?" – but by no means all of it. There are, for instance, sensitive and effective tributes to

Arthur C. Clarke ('The Key') and William Blake ('Skull City'). Nor should it be forgotten that though the verse be light, Bailey uses quite formidable technical skills in its execution. He is particularly fond of the triolet, an eight-line verse in which line one is repeated at lines four and seven, while line two is repeated at line eight. To make this work at all takes considerable skill, to carry it off as frequently and with as much seeming ease as Bailey does is quite breathtaking.

Finally and briefly I should mention Steve Sneyd's two booklets. They are part of an ongoing series in which he has recorded poetry in fanzines. *Entropies and Alignments* covers UK fanzines of the 1960s (a time when the hippy ethos made the writing and publishing of poetry far more common than it is today) and *Kin to the Far Beyond* covers US fanzines of the '70s, '80s and '90s. These are perhaps useful bibliographically, though the ephemeral nature and small circulation of most fanzines

means that I don't imagine either survey could ever pretend to completeness. They are less useful critically, there is little or no critical discussion in the US volume, and while there is more discussion in the UK volume there is no attempt at comparison between poems or themes, and there is absolutely nothing to say that some of these poems were just not very good. Furthermore, the two volumes are handwritten, with extra matter crammed in sideways between the columns, so they are not exactly easy to read.

'Triffid Books' are available from: Triffids, Val de Mer, Alderney, GY9 3YR (cheques to 'K.V. Bailey'). Hilltop Press books are available from Steve Sneyd, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorks HD5 8PB (cheques to 'S. Sneyd')

## Stephen Baxter – *Mammoth*

Millennium, 1999, 277pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-75281-410-9

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Stephen Baxter, of course, needs no introduction, his reputation as a writer of hard sf is well-established and secure, with *The Time Ships* standing as a permanent addition to the genre. *Mammoth*, however, is not what we have come to expect, either in subject matter or in the quality of the writing: Baxter has succumbed to the temptation to write an 'animal book'. He is not alone in this, and Gary Kilworth, in particular, has acquitted himself brilliantly in this field. How good is Baxter's effort?

He has chosen a creature previously thought extinct, but now we learn that mammoths have miraculously survived down to the present day on a remote Siberian island. The novel tells of Silverhair and her companions tragic encounter with 'the Lost', with humans who come to kill, torture and mutilate for pleasure and profit. The narrative is embellished with a thin decoration of Mammoth folklore (the Cycle) and Mammoth everyday life (they spend a lot of time defecating). Unfortunately the whole exercise is a failure. It just doesn't work and certainly won't add to Baxter's reputation.

For a start, the basic premise of mammoths, of all animals, surviving into the modern world without anyone noticing is just too implausible. Mammoths crossing a snow field would stick out



like, well, mammoths crossing a snow field. The suspension of disbelief is too great and Baxter does not do enough to help us make the leap required.

As for the story itself, it is too predictable, fails to excite any real interest or excitement. The only dramatic success is Silverhair's encounter with the sea cow which is authentic Baxter. Moreover this narrative weakness is compounded by serious deficiencies as regards characterisation. The novel is inhabited by stock characters that are not given any real depth or personality and with whom it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify. Dialogue is, too often, of the "By Kilupuk's snot-encrusted nostril" variety.

So many other writers do this stuff better that it is a shame that Baxter felt the need to have a go himself. Worse, there is more to come. Unless I am mistaken, and I pray to the shade of Edgar Rice Burroughs that I am, we are promised Mammoths on Mars in the near future!

On the front cover of this book, Baxter is celebrated as "the best SF writer in Britain". Now, this is not a judgement I would agree with anyway, but many more novels like this and this claim will be too risible to make.

## Jorge Luís Borges (Trans: Andrew Hurley) – *Collected Fictions*

Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999, 565pp, £20.00 ISBN 0-713-99269-7

Reviewed by John D. Rickett

Elizabeth Billinger wrote in *Vector 204* that "Borges' stories masquerade as small, contained things, until it slowly dawns that there is an enormous idea lurking in there." How very right she is.

Here is an excellent collection of some of the very finest writing of this century. Borges is a master craftsman and this astounding fiction shows again and again his vast erudition and wonderful probing mind at work. His work was slow in coming to the notice of the Western world at large, long after he was a giant figure in his native Argentina. The first known English translation of any of his fiction appeared in the United States as late as 1948; his first collection of fiction appeared in Argentina in 1935.

Your reviewer was lucky enough to stumble across Borges in the late 1950s and is lucky enough to be able to read him in the original. Yes, his Spanish is superb, precisely chiselled with precisely chosen words to convey exactly but exactly what he wants to say. Yet he translates wonderfully well into English, a language with which he was enormously familiar to a level of fluency and with a vocabulary that would put many of us to

shame. He himself offers us "a mob of moon-coloured hounds" for "una chusma de perros color de luna": your reviewer has agonised in his unsuccessful efforts to find a better way of putting it.

Andrew Hurley has made a splendid fist of this new translation. Those already familiar with Borges in English will note some departures from the expected titles of some of the better-known pieces. Some of the innovative and always illuminating changes are explained in the useful Note to the Translation. The Notes to the Fictions occupy the last 40 pages of the book and provide an intensely rewarding guide to Borges' Argentinian and literary references

Borges is a postmodernist; he is a magic realist; he is a fabulist; he is a teller of tales; he creates worlds. He starts with a 'what if?' and finds new universes to explore. He writes science fiction and fantasy; he writes detective stories, criminal and academic; he writes of humans and aliens; he draws on history and fable and literature of all kinds; he writes wonders. He plays with your mind, and he does it with consummate skill. For the sake of your

immortal souls, rush out and buy this most wonder-full book now!

### G. Garfield Crimmins – *The Republic of Dreams*

Norton 1998, 95pp, £14.99 ISBN 0-393-04633-8

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

To anyone who has encountered Nick Bantock's charming 'Griffin and Sabine' trilogy, published by San Francisco's Chronicle Books, G. Garfield Crimmins's *The Republic of Dreams: A Reverie* will look instantly familiar. Crimmins uses the same format of a highly illustrated mixture of letters, journal entries, letters, pull-out postcards and telegrams in envelopes, as well as fold-out map and removable 'passport' and 'poetic licence', to tell a strange traveller's tale of the author's journey to the utopian Republic of Dreams. Crimmins's art is a mixture of mildly erotic surrealism, with recurrent motifs of nude figures with the heads of birds, breasts (he appears to have something of a mild breast fixation), airships and flying fish, and a quaintly nostalgic appeal to a pre-war age of more leisurely elegance.

G. Garfield Crimmins falls asleep on the Midnight Express from Washington to Chicago, after sharing a drink with an attractive woman who leaves him with a copy of a small guidebook, *A Visitor's Guide to the République des Rêves*. He awakes to find himself entering the capital city of a strange country, governed by poets and populated by artists, eccentrics and dreamers. Here he reads, in a local paper (dated May 1935), of a dead tourist found in the park, wearing two sets of clothes and carrying two sets of identification, one for a G. Garfield Crimmins. Checking his coat, he opens his passport, which identifies him as Victor La Nuage, citizen of la République des Rêves.

Gradually, through his journal, a meeting with the enigmatic Dr. Prometheus, and the woman from the train, who turns out to be Victor's lover, Nadja, two sets of memories disentangle. Victor La Nuage/G. Garfield Crimmins learns he is both doppelgänger and double agent, moving across time, between the Republic and the 'real world' to infiltrate the League of Common Sense, enemies of poets and dreamers, who have despatched their own agents to abduct Crimmins.

However, the story is really a hook on which Crimmins hangs a fantasy of escape from the humdrum present-day world into an 'elsewhere' which is a celebration of poetry, the surreal and the exotic and erotic; where there are 361 festivals a year (the Reverians have a lunar calendar, based on a 30 day month), the streets are filled with markets and magicians, and the currency of the Republic is counted in dreams.

As a travelogue to an imaginary land in which it is still the heyday of 1930s European surrealism, where life and art are indistinguishable in the pursuit of novelty and sensual pleasure, *The Republic of Dreams* is a charming conceit, but unfortunately not much more. Beyond the artifice and nostalgia there is rather too little to engage with, as there is with Bantock's enigmatic story of two lovers who never meet, and your reaction will probably depend on whether Crimmins's fantasies ultimately charm or annoy.

### Michael Deville – *J. G. Ballard*

Northcote House in association with the British Council, 1998, 102pp £8.99 ISBN 0-7463-0867-1

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

This is part of a series, 'Writers and Their Work', published for the British Council. The aim, presumably, is to showcase British writing. Ballard is a difficult author to write about well and in depth, and within the context of around about a hundred pages Deville carries his task off, though with some difficulty. He begins his survey with the extraordinary feat of managing to get wrong both title and publication date of John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, which doesn't augur well. His bibliography, which includes Roger Luckhurst's recent *The Angle Between Two Walls*, is select rather than full; even so, there is far more from *Foundation* than he cites and he seems not to have consulted *Science-Fiction Studies* which highlighted some of the most interesting connections between Ballard and Baudrillard.

However, he examines the range of Ballard's work from the early short stories to *Cocaine Nights*, and his insights into the

pseudo-autobiographical elements of *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women* are interesting, as are the references to the visual rather than literary sources of Ballard's art. The writing occasionally clogs with academese and, like many academics writing on Ballard, I suspect Deville takes too many off-the-cuff provocative squibs by him at face value. This would be a useful introduction to Ballard for someone about to take a course of study on him, for it covers the relevant information in a brief compass, but it falls between two stools. For the 'general reader' it seems to assume too much of a theoretically-based knowledge of literary and cultural commentary, while for someone with a deep interest in investing time and mental energy in exploring precisely this avant-garde collision which many people find so fascinating in Ballard's work, Luckhurst's book fills in the details and is ultimately more rewarding.

### Sara Douglass – *Enchanter*

HarperCollins, 1999, 706pp, £6.99 ISBN: 0-00-651107-4

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

*Enchanter* is second in The Axis Trilogy, the sequel to *Battleaxe*. At over 700 pages for this middle section alone, there's a lot of reading here! One back cover quote praised *Battleaxe* as "the best Australian fantasy novel I've experienced to date" but I couldn't discover anything Antipodean about *Enchanter* - it's even set on a Northern Hemisphere continent. It's a classic swords 'n' sorcery trilogy book, with a map at the front and a glossary of people and places at the back. The glossary is sadly not entirely in sync - one woman listed as MoonWalker is actually called GoldFeather in the story. Since almost everyone has names like BattleAxe, StarDrifter or EvenSong, I was surprised HarperCollins didn't insist the author change her name to SaraDouglass! There's no recap of the first book, so I struggled for the first 200 pages to work out what was going on. Basically it's the story of an ancient Prophecy in the course of coming true, with three half-brothers battling for control of the continent of Achar. Axis, the former war leader or BattleAxe of the religion of the Plough, wants to unite the three

races of the continent and re-establish the ancient realm of Tencendor. Against him in the South is his half-brother Borneheld, now King of Achar, while his other half-brother Gorgrael the Destroyer is leading an army of monstrous creatures called Skraelings down from the Northern Ice to conquer the continent for himself. Axis' lifelong sweetheart Faraday is now married to Borneheld, and although Axis still loves her, he is drawn inexorably to the beautiful and mysterious Azhure. During the course of the narrative both women gain enormous power, and Axis is truly torn between them.

Getting into the story was hard work, the tale was long time building, but I eventually started to care about what was happening to the characters. The climax is pretty gruesome and solves a couple of the book's puzzles, although there is obviously plenty still to be resolved at the end. I don't think *Enchanter* is distinctive or compelling enough to make it a must-buy for fantasy fans, but it does have its moments.

**Gardner Dozois (Ed) – *The Mammoth Book of Best New SF 11***

Robinson, 1998, 668pp, £8.99 ISBN 1-854877-599-X

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Yet another Dozois round-up of the best short sf. In this, the eleventh volume, we are offered twenty-eight stories, and while none of them are what I would describe as great, nevertheless, they are all with one exception, fine efforts and well worth reading. The authors include Paul McAuley, Nancy Kress, Greg Egan (twice), Peter Hamilton, Gwyneth Jones, Harold Waldrop, Walter Jon Williams, Simon Ings, Ian McDonald, Michael Swanwick, Brian Stableford, Robert Silverberg and more. On top of that you get Dozois's own summation of the sf scene in 1997. Astonishing value for £8.99 and an essential purchase.

First Dozois's summation. Of particular interest are his remarks with regard to recent sf films. He makes an excellent observation about the technological dumbing-down evident in the appalling *Starship Troopers*. Why, he asks, are the heroic Earth troopers "fighting the Bugs mostly with small arms, the equivalent of today's M-16 rifle? As one combat veteran of my acquaintance put it, 'We had weapons on the squad level in Vietnam that could have made Bug-flavoured mincemeat of those critters, and a squadron of Cobra helicopters could have swept the entire planet clean.'" Absolutely right. *Starship Troopers* substituted special effects (and very good they are too!) for plot, characterisation, indeed just about everything else. On top of that it must be accounted one of the most politically dishonest films in recent years, contriving, as Dozois puts it, to hunt with the hounds and run with the hares. He looks forward to the day when the special effects are so routine that "you'll have to start putting things like a great story and great characters and great dialogue and actually intriguing ideas in it in order to lure an audience into the theatre". Certainly in Dozois's opinionated summation there is much to

agree/disagree with and to think about.

What of the actual stories? For my money, the only failure is Ian Macleod's 'Nevermore', although, of course, this is just personal taste. The story completely failed to engage this reader. Of the rest, I particularly enjoyed Paul McAuley's 'Second Skin', Nancy Kress's 'Steamship Soldier On The Information Front', William Sanders's 'The Undiscovered', David Marusek's 'Getting To Know You', Harold Waldrop's 'Heart of Whitenesse', Greg Egan's 'Yeyuka', Carolyn Ives Gilman's 'Frost Painting', Simon Ings's 'Open Veins', Ian McDonald's 'After Kerry', and lastly Gregory Benford and Elisabeth Malartre's 'A Cold, Dry Cradle'.

The range is remarkable. From Waldrop's outstanding story of Christopher Marlowe engaged in secret work in sixteenth century England and confronting the real Doctor Faustus ("Down these mean cobbled lanes a man must go, methinks ...") through to McDonald's moving tale of erasing old identities and creating new to escape family hurt. From Marusek's tale of human redundancy through to Ings's story of escape into the matrix by suicide. From Sanders's alternative biography of William Shakespeare to Egan's story of poverty, injustice and disease in an advanced world and of helping out in a small way.

Many of the stories are small-scale, low-key sf, more concerned with exploring the human implications of scientific and technological change which I must admit is particularly to my taste. But the volume is magnificently rounded off with an excellent hard science contribution from Benford and Malartre. This is a story of Mars exploration and the search for life, superbly crafted with a finely judged mixture of satire, adventure, personal relationship and enthusiasm for science and for the future.

**David Drake – *Lord of the Isles***

Millennium, 1999, 625pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-591-5

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

*Lord of the Isles* is another heroic epic fantasy. It's well written and some of the earlier sections are excellent. The obvious comparison in style and overall structure is with Robert Jordan's *The Eye of the World*. In both novels a group of adolescents from a small village become involved in the magic and politics of the wider world, split into groups, have separate but ultimately intertwining adventures, and discover their unusual ancestries and magical abilities. Both novels have strong characterisation, with the protagonists being three dimensional characters, with families, backgrounds, and in some cases realistically complex motivations. There are however some major differences, the most interesting one being the relative complexity of magic. Tenoctris describes herself as having a high understanding of the magical forces she uses, but very little strength to control them. Meder wields more power but has little understanding of what he does and thus his results are unreliable.

Another major strength of the book is that moral danger, and

in particular the cost of power and the cost of killing, is taken seriously and dealt with as a major issue. In this respect the exploration of the motivations and behaviour of Nonnus and Ilna and Benlo is excellent. It is when dealing with these that the book produces echoes of Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry*, although ultimately it lacks the power of that novel.

There are some aspects of the book that I found less satisfactory. The characterisation of the sprite Mellie is rather shallow, and at times towards the end the adventures of Garric against the Hooded One seem rather comic-book like.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the novel is that in these days of ever-longer series the book stands on its own. Although the introduction and end-piece suggest a wider setting, and allow the possibility of further books, the end is satisfying and you are not left with that 'but what happens next' feeling that the rest of the book had been somehow missed off.

**Steven Erikson – *Gardens of the Moon***

Bantam, 1999, 536pp, £9.99 ISBN 0593 044703

Reviewed By Vikki Lee

"Into the realms of high fantasy strides a new writer destined to rank alongside the giants of the genre..." states the publicity blurb on the back of this latest offering from Bantam Press, and new author Steven Erikson.

The Malazan Empire is locked in a siege for the city of Pale, over which hangs Moons Spawn – a floating city peopled by the Tiste Andii (a non-human Elder race). Pale is the penultimate target for the Malazan Empire, before its Empress turns her attention to Darujhistan, the last of the free cities of Genabackis.

On the face of it, that simple plotline would appear to make this a standard 'evil conquering empire' novel, but in reality, it is far more than just that. The story follows several disparate groups

from both sides of the good/evil divide, and truth to tell, it is very hard to decide which side one should be in favour of. This one has it all: Sorcerers, meddling Gods, Elder races, Assassins and Demons, all stirred into a huge pot of political intrigue, love found, lost, and found again. There are so many characters, so many plots within plots, that as a reviewer I can't begin to mention any of them without mentioning their links to others, and thus practically writing a book about the book.

This book is incredibly dense, and, at first, very difficult to get into at all. Far too many things go with minimal explanation, and understanding of the make-up of the various groups is a slog at best. However, it is one of those books that has political intrigue

enough to keep the reader turning the pages of the first difficult quarter of the book. As the bigger picture unfolds, the reader begins to be rewarded for their perseverance.

*Gardens of the Moon* is one of those rare fantasy books that not only attempts to be huge in scope, but actually succeeds in being so. So much is going on all the time, with so many characters, that one rarely feels that the author is in complete control, or has quite gotten his head round it all, never mind the reader. Erikson does however, manage a semblance of control, and ties the many strands together nicely at the end with just

enough left dangling to tie the next book in the series to this one should he wish. I note also, that this is "a tale of..." the Malazan Book of the Fallen – so like this one at your peril, there may be many more to follow.

I personally like a challenging and intricate story with plenty of depth, twists and surprises, and, having finished the book at last, I'm left with a pleasant feeling of having survived it relatively unscathed myself. I shall look out for more in this series, if only to see if the author likewise survives.

**Peter Haining (ed) – *The Flying Sorcerers***

Orbit, 1997, 369pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-725-0

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

"More Comic Tales of Fantasy" – or so the subtitle tells us. This purports to be a themed collection, with the theme being that "...a number of the stories feature characters who can fly...". Hm, tenuous link. Still, there are a lot of flying things in these pages. And this is a value for money collection, given that there are 24 stories over 369 pages from a wide range of authors, from P.G. Wodehouse through Robert Bloch to Terry Pratchett. Well-respected names all. Maybe too well-respected. But...

One of the drawbacks of being acknowledged as a literary giant is that you also tend to be dead, usually a long time, and your stories are maybe not as fresh as they once were. And popular tastes have a habit of changing on you. Terrible, I know, but that's how it is. What was hilarious in 1930 is actually a bit dull in 1999.

So, there's the problem with this anthology. Readers raised on Pratchett, Rankin and Holt will find the slower pace of the majority of these stories a bit tame. The other snag is that Haining has done a great job of selecting titles that have not been anthologised to death, but of course, the reason for that is that these are not the sort of showcase titles that the authors might have chosen to have collected. Add that to the fact that the link of "flying things" is a bit too vague and, to be honest, inaccurate, and you have a collection that won't appeal to aircraft enthusiasts, modern fantasy readers or collectors of the classic greats. I suppose that what I am trying to say about this well-meaning collection is that it is one for completists only, but that sounds like a cliché to me...

**Simon Ings – *Headlong***

Voyager, 1999, 325pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-647725-9

Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

The plot of *Headlong* follows Christopher Yale, part of a team of augmented "post-humans" who controlled nanotech construction armies on the moon. Some time after being returned to Earth, his fellow post-human and estranged wife Joanne dies in suspicious circumstances. Whilst dealing with his loss Yale investigates and, as the mystery deepens, also has to cope with the devastating effects of being returned to his regular senses, a condition coined as Epistemic Appetite Imbalance.

Any thoughts about similarities to, say, Rudy Rucker that this set-up might call to mind are quickly dispelled as the book unfolds. Ings leaves the workings of the post-human augmentation nebulous, choosing instead to focus on its philosophical implications and real human cost. Ings, through Yale, suggests a refreshingly conservative account of what it is to be human. We are defined by our use of language, our emotional responses and the limits of our natural senses. Yale's yearning to be returned to 'normal' humanity, coupled with his despair at the death of his wife, drives the story and leads us to a surprising, moving and properly tragic conclusion. The atmosphere of the book, in turn claustrophobic or expansive, is

well maintained by the fluid prose and the odd arresting simile ("I felt greasy and delicate, like a shed skin"). The cast of characters, whilst standing in for the various possible oppositions to Ings's conclusion, are made real through their own conflicts and natural, unpretentious dialogue.

I only have one misgiving. Ings is at his best when with his main protagonists, and his too-hurried description of the wider political and economic situation does not convince. That said though, it does afford him the opportunity to extrapolate the most interesting London since McAuley's *Fairyland* and I can't help but be pleased to find out that my adopted home, Leeds, has become the administrative centre of the new republic.

Simon Ings seems to know what is important. He knows where science is at and how to extrapolate the seemingly magical convincingly. He understands and confronts some of the non-trivial questions in metaphysics. He also knows how to construct a taut and exciting sfnal murder mystery and, most importantly, he realises that what draws you into such a book is carefully drawn characters struggling believably with their situation, each other and, crucially, themselves.



**Tom Holt – *Only Human***

Orbit, 1999, 343pp. £15.99 ISBN 1-85723-693-9

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Tom Holt's inaugural romp, *Expecting Someone Taller* (1987), made great play with Wagner's Ring Cycle. *Overtime* (1993) told us things about Blondel that Gore Vidal neglected to mention in

his otherwise excellent *A Search For the King*. So far, so good.

"I tend to write between midnight and 3 a.m.," Holt once confided (in the *St. James Guide to Fantasy Writers*), "and keen

students of the genre should be able to tell which bits were written when I've fallen asleep and the machine goes on typing on its own."

With *Only Human*, I'm tempted to say that he must have nodded off at 12.35 a.m. or page 25 – whichever came first. But I won't be so petty. Readers are hereby instructed to disregard this paragraph.

*Only Human* – not one of your best titles, Tom – starts off well enough, with what could be a jesting by-blow at Hemingway's *Nick Adams Stories*. "Two men in the early dawn, with fishing rods over their shoulders and tackle boxes in their hands; one late middle-aged ... the other younger (but) still an imposing figure. As you guessed, father and son, off on a fishing trip."

But these two anglers are really God and his angler son, Jay. The family business will be run in their absence by Dad's younger begotten sprog – Kevin Christ. Big mistake. Kev soon mucks about with the almighty celestial Mainframe ("There's computers, and there's the Kawaguchiya integrated circuits 986"). Enter an Earthly

welding machine and its operator, Neville. DON'T ASK!

Concatenating circumstances see Prime Minister Tony Blair – no, Dermot Fraud – metamorphosed into a lemming. (Again, DON'T ASK!) Holt downloads a 13-line definition of LEMMING. Just one of far too many infodumplings; Artofel ("Duke of Hell and a member of the Infernal Council, with his own parking space with his name on it and his own key to the executive toilet") is the book's most likeable character.

Holt has peppered the book with one-liner truisms à la "When in Rome, drive too fast and ignore traffic signals". Also puns, classical/contemporary allusions, hyperbole, comic inversion, wee thinky bits, and the odd dollop of litotes. But he never knows when to tone the buffoonery, like the relentlessly jolly office worker in *The Fast Show*.

I liked *Only Human* – not a lot – but I liked it. If this were Tom Holt's school report card, however, I'd have to write "CAN DO BETTER".

### K.W. Jeter – *Noir*

Millennium/Orion, 1999, 388pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-596-6

Reviewed by Gary S. Dalkin

"He'd paid to see a world that was to his liking. Not beautiful – it was based, after all, on cultural artefacts of more than a century ago, the bleak and brooding crime and thriller movies of the 1930's and forties..." (page 43)

The film *Blade Runner* [1982] superimposed 1940s film noir onto near-future sf. Belatedly it has spawned two sequel novels attempting to continue both the film and the original book on which it was loosely based: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick. The sequels were by K.W. Jeter, a friend of Dick who has become an sf novelist in his own right.

Now Jeter has gone full circle. If *Blade Runner* was straight-faced pastiche, the generically titled *Noir* is a pastiche of a pastiche. Thus our pseudo-detective futuristic hero reluctantly becomes involved in a messy death, then encounters a beautiful and mysterious woman who looks like Ida Lupino. McNihil (yes,

the symbolism is that obvious) experiences the world filtered through a virtual reality overlay which makes everything resemble a film noir. His investigation becomes complex, with many ingenious details describing the hellish extremes of a Godless society motivated only by money and power.

The unforgivable problem with this supposed thriller it is monumentally dull. The best pulp fiction grabs hold and won't let go. You don't put a Cain or Chandler novel down unless the house is on fire. I had to repeatedly force myself to pick *Noir* up. Which is a shame, because there's real imagination buried here, dragged out to inordinate length because modern publishing prizes quantity more than quality. In the end I was left with the feeling that the whole thing is really more about selling the film rights for a slice of post-*Blade Runner* Hollywood pie than entertaining the reader. Wait for the movie.

### J. V. Jones – *A Cavern Of Black Ice*

Orbit, 1999, 804 pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-85723-694-7

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

*A Cavern of Black Ice*, Book One of the 'Sword of Shadows' fantasy series, introduces two main characters, Raif Sevrance, and Asarhia March, or Ash. At the beginning of the book they are living very different lives, for Raif is a hunter and warrior of the Blackhail Clan, while Ash is a city dweller. It is not giving away too much of the intricate plot of this highly-readable novel to reveal that their paths are destined to cross, although the interweaving of their stories is more subtle than might be anticipated.

To Raif, clan is everything: memories, home, kin. Then the brutal and manipulative Mace Blackhail becomes clanchief, and Raif, unable to conceal his abhorrence of a man who would order the massacre of women and children, finds his position in the clan becoming untenable as Mace manages to convince the rest of the clan, including Raif's own brother, that Raif is nothing but a troublemaker. When his uncle, the enigmatic Angus Lok, suggests that Raif accompany him to his own home outside the clan lands, Raif knows that he has no option but to agree. Gradually Raif becomes convinced that Angus Lok is working towards some

hidden agenda of his own, and that he has remarkable powers.

Ash is a foundling, the foster daughter of Penthero Iss, Surlord of the City of Spire Vanis. For some time she has been troubled by nightmares, and she is increasingly frightened of her foster-father, becoming convinced that he intends to imprison her for some sinister purpose. Attempting to flee Spire Vanis, she is captured by Iss's henchmen, but rescued by Angus and Raif. Angus discovers that she is a 'Reach', with powers within her that could not only kill her, but destroy the whole world if she does not go to a place – the Cavern of Black Ice – where such powers can safely be discharged. Raif determines to see Ash safely to this place, and as they journey together it becomes clear that recent events in the clanholds are linked to Penthero Iss's ambitions.

As the first novel in a series *A Cavern of Black Ice* succeeds admirably, for it manages to reach a satisfying conclusion while leaving enough strands of its fast-paced plot still in need of resolution to ensure that the reader looks forward to the next volume.

### Paul Kearney – *The Iron Wars*

Gollancz, 1999, 255pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06313 0

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

*The Iron Wars* is the latest instalment in Paul Kearney's 'The Monarchies of God' series – a series indeed; when this reviewer thought originally that it was a trilogy.

Following on from the previous two volumes, the Merduk

army is pressing, and threatening to overwhelm the Torunnan fortress at Ormann Dyke. If the Dyke falls, the way is open for the numerically vastly superior Merduks to sweep all before them. Colonel Corfe and his motley army of ex-convicts and misfits

make for the Dyke, but realise on the way that it has already fallen. His task is to rescue as many men as possible and withdraw them to the city of Torunn to make a last desperate defense. Hampered by politics and court intrigue, and the enmity of the nobles who disdain Corfe's low station in life, the Dowager Queen Odelia continues to support Corfe for the good of Torunna. She schemes for Corfe's elevation to General and total command of the defense of Torunn.

One of the main, and most enjoyable threads from the first book in this series, *Hawkwood's Voyage*, was completely absent in the second book, *The Heretic Kings*. You can begin to imagine this reader's disappointment when Richard Hawkwood, who sailed off at the end of the first book to discover a 'New World', fails to return from his voyage before the end of the second book, and even this third, that is, unless you read the jacket blurb inside the front cover, and the epilogue at the end of this book.

In the jacket notes, it says "In the midst of this political and military maelstrom a battered carrack makes landfall in Hebrion. The explorer Richard Hawkwood has finally returned to the Monarchies of God, bearing tidings of a new continent in the uttermost west – and there is something terrible lurking in the

ship's hold...". One might be forgiven at this point for assuming that Hawkwood finally makes his re-appearance in this volume of the series. Imagine this reader's disappointment then, when the final half-page epilogue of this slim volume finishes with "The faded letters on her bow labelled her the *Gabrian Osprey*, and at her tiller there stood a gaunt man with a salt-grey beard, his clothes in rags, his skin burnt brown as mahogany by a foreign sun. Richard Hawkwood had come home at last".

The publishers appear to be involved in something peculiar with this series, and I fear some sort of skulduggery! It appears that this third book, which is much slimmer than its two predecessors, has been clumsily 'chopped' short, and possibly made into two books rather than one. I would hope that the integrity of a publisher with the track record of Gollancz would not allow wholesale changes to a series purely for the sake of milking fans of the series of a further £16.99/£6.99, depending on how long they can wait for their next instalment. This *appears* to be the case, maybe we'll never know, but I for one feel cheated at this point in the series, and disinclined to see it through to its (un)natural conclusion.

### Garry Kilworth – *Land of Mists*

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Orbit 1999, 380pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-762-5

*Land of Mists* is the third and final part of Garry Kilworth's epic Navigator Kings series. The series is set in Oceania, which corresponds to the islands of the Pacific, inhabited by the peoples, gods and monsters of Polynesian mythology, except that the British Isles of the Celts, Picts and Angles has been swapped with New Zealand of the Maori.

At the beginning of the series the Land of Mists is discovered by the great navigator Kupe. He prophesies that Kieto, only a boy at the time, will return and conquer the Land of Mist for the Oceanians. In this book he raises a mighty fleet from all the peoples of Oceania to do just that. And not only do the peoples of Oceania and the Land of Mists come into conflict but so do the gods of their respective pantheons. There is also a clash between magic and reality, between man (or a man) and his destiny, and the petty interfering squabbles of the Polynesian gods. Also the Pict, Seumus, captured on Kupe's mission and now a naturalised Oceanian must return to the land of his people and confront his own destiny.

The complex Oceanian society is well realised. Their

mythology, and indeed the whole series, is reminiscent of ancient Greek legends and mythology, with long sea voyages encountering monsters and magicians on remote island locations under the influence of a multitude of feuding gods.

The book combines the questing structure of the previous two volumes with some exciting violent and gory battle sequences. Kilworth play fast and loose with the tropes of fantasy to produce a entertaining read and you can even forgive him a literal *deus ex machina*. The action is interspersed with some well placed earthy humour at the expense of the culture differences between the two peoples. The Celts, horrified by the biting tactics of some of the cannibalistic Oceanians, are at a loss until a 'Western brawler' unleashes the deadly tactic of head butting.

*Land of Mists* is the best book in an excellent series; it can be read as a standalone but don't bother. Those who have been following so far will need little persuasion to continue, but for those that have not, treat yourself and read all three. You will not be disappointed.

### Brad Linaweaver & Edward E. Kramer (Eds.) – *Free Space*

Reviewed by Janet Barron

Tor, 1998, 352pp, \$16.95 ISBN 0-312-86720-4

An anthology of 'politically engaged' libertarian sf adventure stories. Is this really what the sf reader has been waiting for? I didn't think so.

Commission an anthology to explore a subsection of a section of a genre, whether that is feminist ethics, child abuse (illustrated successfully in the fine fantasy/fairy-tale anthology *The Armless Maiden*) or, as in *Free Space*, libertarian politics and, while you certainly have a challenge, you also have a problem.

It is hard to avoid the overall effect of 'preaching to the converted'. Only extraordinary variability in the content and/or an exploratory, sensitive handling of the subject can pre-empt a distaste for an anthology with an overt agenda, or expunge the sour aftertaste of being told what to think.

By and large, this anthology appears to be pandering to its readers' expectations, rather than pushing to the boundaries of speculation and jumping off.

However, in this mix of seventeen stories and three poems, there are stories which would stand out in any anthology, even if these do seem to be transcending or ignoring the constraints of the Free Space Federation universe where the frontiersmen of the habitats outwit power-baron groundhogs. They make this a worthwhile buy, to be dipped into to avoid agenda saturation.

Peter Crowther's 'The Killing of Davis-Davis' is a powerful

time-travel tale assembled in glittering fragments, as elliptical and labyrinthine as its politics and machinations. A most satisfying end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it story. 'Madame Butterfly' by James P. Hogan is wonderful in its characterisation (rather pointing up this as a deficiency in other contributions, but more of this later), deft in its plotting and cheerful in its resolution. 'Early Bird' is a Greg Benford gripping yarn of victory (in the form of a priceless wormhole) wrenched by plucky female pilot from the searing plasma of a solar flare. Robert J. Sawyer produces a pacy detective tale hooked around genetic determinism, flawed only by being rather predictable.

In general, many of the contributions try to make up in wit what they lose by predictability (and some of them succeed.)

And then just when you think this anthology has settled itself into a groove, it ends with John Barnes's 'Shepherds and Kings' and all is forgiven. This story does for libertarian sf what *Independence Day* thought it was doing for SFX movies. It celebrates the clichés even as it parodies them. This is great fun at the end of this anthology since you can play 'spot the UMWAM' (usual muscular white American man), spot the UMWAM with a vagina (Greg Benford's pilot Claire, please stand up, and resist the impulse to deck me, please), spot the UMWAM of a different colour, etc.

But this story works in a way that a dumbed-down script never could. Barnes' seedy writer-protagonist, wrestling with his draft and struggling with the emotional detritus of his life, gives more

insight into the terrors of unlimited freedom, the void that is free choice, than the rest of this volume put together. Provoking. Haunting. Funny. More like this.

### Holly Lisle – *Diplomacy of Wolves*

Millenium 1999, 332 pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-85798-584-2

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

On her first diplomatic mission to accompany her cousin to a ball, Kait Galweigh overhears a plot to destroy her family on the wedding day. She manages to deliver the news of the planned attack and information that confirms her story in time for the Galweighs to plan a counterattack. However, magic is considered a forbidden art as are shapeshifters, Kait's great secret, and so she must try to hide her true nature from everybody else. During the wedding ceremony, the Galweigh family and their enemies attack each other, using all means at their disposal. Kait and her immediate companions escape only to find themselves under attack in their home. However, her keenest pursuer is also a shapeshifter, and manages to follow her wherever she goes. On her voyage, she starts hearing voices guiding her, as she becomes part of a far larger plot with more sinister characters. Behind each family is a company of shapeshifters who practice magic, and in the aftermath of their attacks upon each other, they reawaken amoral deity-like characters who use people as pawns. Isolated, Kait is left waiting.

Lisle's characters are well developed through the novel and often filled with a depth that brings them off the page. However, she never explains all of their actions, which creates a dark

atmosphere. She manages to introduce new characters at intervals, which gives the story added layers but without making a mess of her previous plot lines, and manages to use epic fantasy conventions but imbue them with a new depth, interweaving them into a close-knit novel of expectation and mystery.

Holly Lisle creates a novel which is labyrinthine in its twists and mirrors. Very little remains as it seems. Each layer mirrors another, building upon previous plot threads. Lisle manages to create an air of uncertainty, aided by her layered story, which allows her to develop her new characters and to bring them straight into the story. She spins a web of links between the various groups which develops her plot lines and opens them up for the next novel.

Whilst this book is very much the opening part of a series, it has its own sense of closure. Holly Lisle has managed to create a world which has depth, and her characters add to this roundedness. Whilst it contains a mix of styles, she never lets these get out of hand and in fact they marry quite comfortably. *Diplomacy of Wolves* is a well-crafted book, full of well-channelled imagination.

### Anne McCaffrey – *The MasterHarper of Pern*

Bantam Press 1999. 396 pp. £5.99 ISBN 0-552-142-743

### Anne McCaffrey – *Nimisha's Ship*

Bantam Press 1999. 328 pp. £16.99 ISBN 0593-043219

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Anne McCaffrey needs no introduction from me, and so I'll pause only to say that Robinton's story has been eagerly awaited by this reviewer and fan.

The story begins with Robinton's birth, and introduces us to his parents, Merelan and Petiron; the latter is Master Composer, and the former Master Singer at the Harper Hall. Given this background, it is inevitable that Robinton should be musically gifted, and he turns out to be a child prodigy. Unfortunately for Robinton, his father is not interested in his son, and it is left to the Harper Hall as a whole to see that Robinton gets the training to become MasterHarper of Pern.

But it's not just Robinton's story – although we are told of his life and loves, and his adventures during his training, we are given an insight into how the Harper Hall works internally. Also incorporated are the events in *Dragonflight*, told from his viewpoint.

With this fast-paced, eventful novel, McCaffrey has produced an excellent addition to her Pern series. She has left this particular reader more than satisfied with the life story of arguably the most influential man on Pern.

Nimisha Boynton-Rondymense lives in a world light years away from Pern in terms of civilization, where women make birth-contracts with carefully chosen men to provide themselves with body-heirs. Her home is Acclarke City on Vega III.

The aptitude for engineering she inherits from her father leads to her become heir to the Rondymense Shipyards, where she designs the ultimate in long-distance space vessels. Having produced her own body-heir, she embarks on a test flight of her latest design, and it's at this point that her story really begins, as she gets sucked into a wormhole and finds herself four light years away from home.

Not that she is short of things to do; being a resourceful young woman, she sets about exploring the three Class M planets in her vicinity, and discovers on one of them the survivors of two previous shipwrecks: one human, one alien.

Back home, there are attempts on the life of Cuiva, Nimisha's daughter, and it is decided that she should travel on the ship searching for her mother as a means to safeguard her life. The resolution of the story was unexpected by me, and I would highly recommend this enjoyable novel.

### Richard Matheson – *I Am Legend*

Millennium, 1999, 160 pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-809-4

### Joe Haldeman – *The Forever War*

Millennium, 1999, 254 pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-808-6

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Millennium are re-claiming the shelves – two volumes per month will put classic sf back in the bookshops and the first two are Richard Matheson's tale of the one man left in 1950s Los Angeles as the vampire spawn of a nuclear accident take over the world,

and Joe Haldeman's extension of his own experience in Vietnam into a war lasting, literally, millennia. Looking at a list of future titles I am afraid that they will disappear from the shelves so quickly that they won't be able to keep their vantage points.

*I Am Legend* is a tale of paranoia, like *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, but it also provides an explanation of vampirism, and the significance of the stakes etc., meaning that it is sf rather than fantasy. It is also, of course, a portrait of America – the question is what sort of American man is Robert Neville; what sort of woman was his wife, who came back from her tomb to him; what could he do to honour his daughter after her death? And what sort of people were his neighbours, who, after their deaths, find him so terrible who was once just an ordinary citizen?

Joe Haldeman had difficulty in finding a publisher for *The Forever War*, and the edition that circulated for years was not the finished work. In his introduction, Haldeman explains that this edition contains his final text, though a quick check shows just a few changes.



For a book which begins in 1997 and ends in 3143, this one reads fast. It is also brutal. It is a book about expediency. A war

has begun with a species in a distant constellation soon after long distance space travel has become possible. Thereafter everything must be dedicated to the war. The soldiers are conscripts given weapons and armour as high-tech as possible. Since the best weapon a future soldier could have is its brain, that armour will sacrifice any other part of the soldier's body to keep the brain. There are a lot of prosthetics in the future war.

Oddly, there is less time. Time dilates for the soldier going to the battle zone. Ten years can seem like two. In rare periods of R & R back on Earth things are less and less familiar, and worse (because everything is going into the war effort) less and less desirable.

These SF Masterworks deserve their place on the shelves, only

when they are not being read.

**Lance Olsen – Rebel Yell: A Short Guide To Fiction Writing** Cambrian Publications, 1998 239pp £14.95 ISBN 1 878914 50 2

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

If you're interested in buying this book, don't be put off by the dollar price tag. It's distributed in the UK by BBR, P.O. Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY, at a cost of £14.95 (including UK p&p). For those who know BBR (and you should), its *imprimatur* is sufficient cause either to rush out and buy this book, or run away screaming.

So what can I tell the rest of you about this book? It's aimed at young(ish), beginning(ish), American writers of alternative fiction. It gives plenty of hints about what to write and how to write it, discusses the uses and abuses of writing programs and workshops, and tells you that you won't make much money from writing. It contains about 40 mini-interviews with authors and publishers on topics of interest to aspiring writers, and plenty of "exercises to jump start your creativity" and suggested reading. There's also information about the small press publishing scene, self-publishing, and the publishing and promotional possibilities of

new media like the Internet.

I find this book a better than average member of its class – but it's a class I'm suspicious of. How-to-write books live with the diet books, transform-your-home/garden/lifestyle-in-a-weekend books, and all those popular therapy paperbacks, next to the shelf of stuff on star signs. Buying the book will not make you a writer. *Reading* the book will not make you a writer. I can't even promise that doing the exercises will help. You already *know* how to be a writer; you *write* stuff already, okay? Paying £14.95 to have a nice alternative authority figure tell you so won't make it any easier. Neither will putting it off by reading reviews. If you're a writer, *get on with it*. If you're not a writer, forget this book. If, however, you're a teacher of Creative Writing, you may want to buy it to size up the competition for your own forthcoming how-to-write book. There's a lucrative market for these things, you know...

**David Pringle (Ed.) – The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy** Carlton, 1998, 256pp, £19.99 ISBN 1-85868-373-4

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

I must get a new dictionary. Definitions have obviously moved on of late, since according to my old reference books what I have here is neither *Ultimate* nor even an *Encyclopedia*. The book also carries the subtitle: 'The Definitive Illustrated Guide'; I agree that it is, indeed, illustrated.

I'm sorry, I really don't see what purpose this book is meant to serve, nor who it is aimed at. It consists of a series of very short entries (all of them too short, many of them no more than a single sentence) on, in turn, types of fantasy, fantasy films, fantasy on television, fantasy authors, fantasy characters, fantasy games, fantasy worlds and fantasy magazines. Of which, only the entries on characters and games provides anything that isn't better served by *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* edited by John Clute and John Grant, even though that work is now three years out of date.

The sections on film and television at least stand out as better than those in the companion volume on Science Fiction. Most of the entries, though short, do give a flavour of the work and recognise resonances with other films and with other types of

fantasy (though Thorne Smith's type of humorous fantasy is described in almost exactly the same words in the entry on the film *Topper*, the entry on the television series *Topper*, and the entry on Smith himself, which seems rather redundant). Even here, though, there are troubling inconsistencies (some entries give character names next to the actors in the cast list, some don't); there are failures of interpretation (perhaps inevitable when the plot has to be summed up in no more than a sentence, though the summary of *Truly Madly Deeply* gets the plot dynamic totally wrong); and there are egregious asides which are out of place when words are clearly at such a premium (to conclude the entry on *Yellow Submarine* "'Happiness is a Warm Gun" had, alas, yet to be written' is a good way of showing we have a knowledgeable Beatles fan here, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the film in question).

But it is the section on authors where the failings in this book really become obvious. Although film and television have produced important works of fantasy, and although other media

like role-playing games have become important to the non-literate generations that one assumes are the target for this book (as if they would be interested), fantasy is still primarily a literary field, and this should be the heart of any work of this nature. So it is distressing to find how many ways the editor and his contributors can get it wrong. In the entry on Gene Wolfe, two-thirds of the space is given over to *The Book of the New Sun*, with a passing reference to his two Greek novels about Latro. No mention at all is made of *Peace*, *The Devil in the Forest*, *Castleview*, *Free Live Free*, *There Are Doors*, *Pandora* by Holly Hollander or any of a feast of short stories, all of which have more claim to be in a reference work on fantasy than *The Book of the New Sun*. In the entry on Lisa Goldstein, which is longer than the entries on many more prolific or significant authors, practically the entire entry is given over to an account of her novel *The Dream Years*. All her other books (and with the exception of *A Mask for the General* all

are fantasy) are ignored. The entry on Alan Garner, one of the most important fantasists to have emerged in Britain in the last 40 years, is so short it amounts to little more than a list of titles and reads as if the contributor had read nothing by him. There are no entries on Russell Hoban, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, or any of a host of other vitally important writers in the history of twentieth century fantasy. All the entries on writers who have emerged since the publication of the Clute and Grant Encyclopedia are headed: 'Born: ?', which suggests that a basic level of research essential for any book that terms itself an encyclopedia has been omitted.

I could go on, but I shan't. There are lots of pretty pictures. There are wibbly entries that tell you nothing you might want to know. There is information which is so far from being definitive that you'd probably better check it in another reference book. That's all.

### Mary Doria Russell – *Children Of God*

Black Swan, 508pp, £6.99 ISBN 0552998117

Reviewed by Mat Coward

I haven't read *The Sparrow*, to which this book is the sequel, but I don't think it matters: a concise catch-up is provided early on. Following first contact with an alien civilization, a disastrous Jesuit mission visited the planet Rakhat. Returned to Earth, that mission's sole survivor, Father Emilio Sandoz, is slowly recovering from his terrible mental and physical wounds, but he has lost his faith. He's therefore not keen when the Vatican orders him to return to Rakhat.

When Sandoz does return, as part of a joint Mafia-Society of Jesus crew, he finds the planet has undergone a bloody revolution. There are two sentient species on Rakhat, and the vegetarian Runa have risen up against the carnivores who farmed them for their labour, and their meat.

There are, though, several irritating faults in this novel's ideological structure – which matters, because this is a book largely about ideology. The revolutionary impetus on Rakhat comes, not from below, but from a power struggle amongst the carnivores and from the influence of the human explorers. A serious sf writer should be aware of scientific method in history as much as in astrophysics, and if she decides to overthrow everything we know about the history of struggle between classes,

she should be prepared to "stand up" her new theory.

The big problem of course is religion – to treat irrational faith seriously and sympathetically in a work of sf is to risk alienating what might be assumed to be a largely rationalistic audience. Worse, to have as your principal human characters liberal, humanistic, self-aware scientists who are also priests, and not to fully resolve this fundamental contradiction, is downright dishonest, not to mention soppy.

I have concentrated on what is wrong with this book, because to detail what is right with it would take too long. Despite its faults, and very much against my expectations, I found it to be one of those rare sf stories that conquered me entirely, like an irresistible invading army. Or do I mean "mission"?

Whatever you're looking for in science fiction, you will almost certainly find it here: adventure, tension, sense of wonder, alienness, world-building, space travel, time travel (or, at least, some fun and games with relativity), sublime writing, big characters (though I could have done without the obligatory stage Irishman), great humour, ideas, heartbreak... *Children of God* is – there's no getting around it – a major work, certain to take its permanent place on the genre's required reading list.

### Robert J Sawyer – *Factoring Humanity*

HarperCollins Voyager, 1998, 348pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-651186-4

Reviewed By Chris Amies

This is a very millennial book. Set shortly enough into the 21<sup>st</sup> century that its characters' back-stories are firmly rooted in the 1980s and 1990s, it explores the idea of human communication with aliens and with each other. As in the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, much is made of the paradox that we want to communicate with aliens but can hardly do so with other humans. As the novel opens, messages – or what seem to be messages, as they cannot be interpreted – have been coming from Alpha Centauri for ten years. Meanwhile the family of psychologist Heather Davis is about to be damaged by allegations that the father has been sexually abusing the daughter. Davis manages also – while trying to establish the truth of the allegations – to crack the aliens' code and build a device that will change humans' relations with one another irrevocably.

With this near-divine revelation – and a bit of overtly religious imagery towards the end – the millennial/New Age theme of

throwing away the old confrontational society for a new cooperative one is established. It is a little too good-natured with it, though; why should one person's ability to know what another is feeling eradicate all crime and bad behaviour? The thesis is a little simplistic, to put it mildly. And if all were capable of feeling what *all* others felt, what becomes of individuality? How do you distinguish between *your* feeling and someone else's? Davis sees no problem with being able to dip into anyone else's mind at will; from her backyard space/time craft – built from plans decoded from the alien messages – she wanders into a galaxy of souls (represented as hexagons) and eavesdrops upon them, which is not conducive to personal freedom once the technique becomes widely available. This, and the rather worrying presence of a patriarchal Overmind *forcing* a sense of community on Earth's humans, leave the novel's happy ending debatable.

### Robert Silverberg – *Lord Prestimion*

Voyager, 1999, 434pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-224678-3

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

"Another book in the ongoing Majipoor saga," and, yes, there's an air of a sequel in the opening chapters, although, as far as I can tell, this isn't.

Majipoor has just seen a long and messy civil war. The usurper Korsibar has been defeated and killed, and Prestimion, the rightful

Coronal, is about to be crowned. Most authors would have written about the civil war itself, made the most of the drama, and glossed over the multitude of loose ends, but if this is a sequel, there's no mention on the cover, dammit...

Setting a novel in the aftermath of an epic struggle poses some

interesting challenges. The fact that Prestimion's approach to all the irritating loose ends – all the 'who was on whose side' and 'who betrayed who' stuff that usually tags along with any half-decent civil war – is to have a spell of forgetfulness cast on the entire world doesn't help. OK, the spell's a bit frayed at the edges; here and there people are going mad, and there are some loose ends that even magic like that can't brush under the carpet. Fascinating as it is to piece together what Prestimion's spell has done, there's no buzz, no adrenaline. Everything – people, places, story, is expertly crafted, yet somehow there's something missing. Urgency, I think. I get the impression of a truly gifted writer stuck in second gear. One of those books that's not too hard to put down, and not too hard to pick up again either. A thinking,

provocative sort of read.

And then there's the world itself. A lot of *Lord Prestimion* revolves around Prestimion or one of the other significant characters travelling around the world. Somehow, it doesn't matter what they're looking for, or whether they find it; the journey is enough in itself. I don't know how he does it – exploring a new world just for the sake of it really isn't my thing – but Silverberg manages to weave a tapestry that seems capable of sustaining anything. Comparisons with Tolkien are endemic in the fantasy world; most of them have about as much relevance as a tadpole in a toilet bowl, but on this occasion maybe it works. If Middle Earth is Tolkien's real hero, Majipoor is Silverberg's.

### James Stoddard – *The High House* Reviewed by Maureen Kincaid Speller

Earthlight, 1998, 321pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-684-851-67-9

It's rare now that I have the chance to recapture the sense of discovery I experienced when I first began reading science fiction and fantasy. After reading Tolkien, I was hungry for more of this new diet and set off down the primrose path of 'in the tradition of *Lord of the Rings*'. In the mid-seventies, this phrase actually meant something, and I was happily placed to take full advantage of the appearance in the UK of Lin Carter's 'Sign of the Unicorn' series, which he edited from 1969 to 1974. Carter brought many long-unpublished fantasies to readers' attention, including novels from William Morris, E.R. Eddison (who actually met Tolkien), George MacDonald, Lord Dunsany, Mervyn Peake and the incomparable Hope Mirrlees, and while Carter's introductions were outrageously egregious, they listed still more books to seek out. It was a rich and varied diet which undoubtedly shaped my taste in fantasy reading forever after. James Stoddard seems to have been similarly affected, for his first novel, *The High House*, unashamedly acknowledges his debt to Lin Carter, and he offers this book as an homage to those exciting times.

subtle and elusive as those old-style fantasies, a name or country here, a character or building there, a half-remembered... but no, it's gone. Stoddard recreates that sense of atmosphere, of 'otherness', that so few modern fantasies evoke, while his heroes are unconventional and old-fashioned, imbued with a numinosity that modern divinely-inspired heroes seem to lack. The High House itself, in which the adventure is set, stretches on forever, spanning worlds and times, its function only dimly hinted at, and within its all-embracing walls, Carter Anderson enacts a quest to find his father and the Master Key, to restore equilibrium to Evenmere.

This novel is perhaps not to everyone's taste. Those who like their fantasy sprawling across continents, peopled by races engaged in enormous wars and heroes who lack introspection, may find it tame, but for anyone who ever read Eddison or Peake or John Crowley with any pleasure, reading *The High House* will bring a sense of recognition, a feeling of 'you too?' to accompany an absorbing story.

There is, though, nothing blatant about this homage. It's as

### Martin Wilson – *The Homunculus* Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Christoffel Press 1998, 169 pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-9527723-3-7

This is the second volume of three. *Britomartis* is in preparation. In the first volume, *The Castle of Oblivion* (reviewed in *Vector* 198) the protagonist-character, Prince Almeric has fathered the Homunculus. Now, Almeric is mysteriously translated to a land called Affine, his name arbitrarily changed to Rhosyn, and his status to that of Knight-Candidate, a rank bestowed by the Lady Gloriana in allotting him the Errand of eliminating the Homunculus. He sets out accompanied by a female Knight-Candidate, Britomartis, and two Esquires, Elfinn and Swayne. On their way to the fabled land of Sheldu they encounter the Parapolitans, inhabitants of ruins which they believe still to be a great empire. The Knights are enthroned, but royalty turns out to entail imprisonment, from which Rhosyn effects escape by exercising his teleporting magic.

there are the 'artificially dead' thanatoids. ("A thanatoid has the same relation to a zombie as an android to a human being.") There is a rigid custom/decency system regulating social behaviour, which includes sleeping with the thanatoids. Rhosyn is paired off with one, Unica, and progresses towards a full sexual relationship. Does he find and eliminate the Homunculus? What further 'rough beast' does he engender? And what happens to Britomartis – who will obviously be central to the third volume? I don't want to reveal all the denouements, but we do leave Britomartis in an ambiguous state of metamorphosis, while Rhosyn seeks healing for her from a Shrine-priest, whose religion, a species of planetary animism, is an improvement on the weirdly plutonic morality pervading most of Sheldu. I haven't fathomed what dimensions of allegory reside in this novel, but I was held by its well-made prose and quasi-Spenserian narrative

Sheldu, when reached, is very strange. There are humans and

### Jack Vance – *Ports Of Call* Reviewed by Steve Palmer

Voyager HarperCollins, 300pp, £6-99 ISBN 0-00648212-0

I began this novel optimistically, hoping for the usual Jack Vance style, wit and panache, but finished it a little disappointed. It is by no mean a bad novel, just a rather flat one, that, when set against such classics as the Lyonesse series, appears somewhat uninspired. Perhaps we expect too much of our geniuses. The novel concerns the adventures of one Maloof, forced into service as the captain of a spaceship by his eccentric relation Dame Hester Lajoie, whose most earnest wish is to find the fabled Fountains of Youth. This leads into a series of episodes covering fraud, deceit, dashing adventure and beautiful young women – in other words, the usual things. But with this novel the style grates a

little, lacking the inspired levity of earlier creations. There are a few nice set pieces, notably a bizarre betting game involving three women and three gems, and later a game of gambling. These lighten the novel, which is otherwise somewhat tedious.

A curious feeling that struck me as I read was how all the names seemed to remind me of other names; Wingo, Maloof, Schwatzenale, Dauncy, all seem to have appeared in other novels. This is a book of the Gaeen Reach, Jack Vance's main canvas, and so one would expect a few familiar monickers, but still the *deja vu* persists. Perhaps it is a sign of failing inspiration. However, our author seems to be keeping up with events in

modern music, since there is a Lalapalooza (compare Lolapalooza) and even a Bjorkland (say no more). To be fair, with a landscape as vast as Jack Vance's, repetition in names must be an inevitable problem. It is the characters who let this one down.

Without a Cugel or a Kirth Gersen or a Princess Madouc, the standard Vance types seem a bit too whimsical. Even for Jack Vance aficionados like myself, this book is a bit of a damp squib.

**Margaret Weis & Don Perrin – *Hung Out***  
Reviewed by John D. Owen

Vista, 1999, 384pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-60069-1

Margaret Weis is an author I have studiously avoided over the years, despite her huge sales success. The nature of her earlier works, the long series of fantasies based on role-playing games, simply didn't appeal. So when this new volume, co-authored with Don Perrin, came my way, I was interested to see if there was more to Weis than big sales figures.

Sad to say, the short answer is No! *Hung Out*, third in a series (the earlier volumes being *The Knights of the Black Earth* and *Robot Blues*) is dreadful. Poorly written, with characters fashioned from a cardboard so flimsy even Kellogg's couldn't make a good box out of it, *Hung Out* seems to take the old fannish saying "the golden age of science fiction is fourteen years old", and downgrade it to eleven (with learning difficulties).

I don't know who is responsible for the major share of the writing here, but they have a tin ear for language. Why else

lumber your hero with an absurd name like Xris Tampambulous, unless for comic effect (and there are very few laughs in this book, and most are unintentional)? The storyline is pedestrian *in extremis*, moving along with the fluidity of a hippo in drying concrete. The settings are so Middle-American as to be stiflingly familiar to anyone watching *Friends* reruns, yet this is supposed to be the future, well beyond the day after tomorrow.

This is a lazy book, something tossed off a production line. Are Weis and Perrin for real, or are they the cover names for a mix'n'match storywriting computer in the basement of some big American publishing corporation? One thing's for certain – this book can't have gone near a real live editor. Even a decent copy-editing job would have improved this steaming pile of publishing by-product. Avoid at all costs.

**Jane Welch – *The Bard of Castaguard: Volume Two of the Book of Ond***

Earthlight, 1999, 527pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-671-03391-3

Reviewed by Penny Hill

The title and bland cover illustration make it clear that this is generic fantasy. Oh dear. Time to start bribing the Reviews Editor ...then the blurb announced, "Both magic and the sword must come into play if all Torra Alta and Belbidia is not to subside in a welter of blood and treachery". Can't we just have one of them? Please? For good behaviour?

I was therefore harshly critical of every fault. Was it really necessary to explain how Dog Tooth Mountain and Rainbow Falls got their names? (One of them looks like ...oh you're way ahead of me here). I was annoyed when our party, after a long day, was rescued from underground, went hunting, ran away from some wolves, kept walking through the night and the next day and the next night, and only the slave girl needed any help.

I suppose one bonus was having two maps! I always enjoy a good map. Sadly, the main map seemed to contradict some of the politics. "You forget that if King Dagonet marches on Belbidia it is Torra Alta that stands in his way" announces Branwolf (our hero's father) on page 165. "Well only if they go via Vaalaka," I murmured to myself. "Why don't they just get in boats and... oh never mind".

It wasn't all bad. The blurb claimed that the series "...continues to deny her characters easy answers..", which is true. The best example was playing 'Chase the Lady' to work out who

will be the new Maiden. The Crone is dying and therefore the Maiden and Mother need to move up one place. This event is eagerly awaited by the Maiden's fiancé who is having trouble restraining himself. The previous volume presumably ended with finding the new Maiden. In a genre-breaking twist she turns out to be ineligible and I spent the rest of the book reviewing available characters. Ursula, the slave girl, doesn't come across as virginal and May, the heroine, is clearly destined to marry the hero. There's Lana, the terrified orphan, but she lacks characterisation. Bother. This should be easier – shouldn't it?

Despite being a second volume, I easily picked up the plot coupons, but I failed to sympathise with the characters. Because the mountain-dwelling Torra Altans (the goodies) like straw on the floor and protect wolves, I found I was sympathising with the lowland Belbidians who have invented carpets and been suffering from wolf attacks. It turns out these are *the wrong sort of wolves!*

I hated pages 95-96 in which our hero disembowels the putrefying corpse of his friend, the Crone, to find out where the magic object is. It was unnecessary and gratuitously nasty. I read it with my fingers in my ears and singing to myself.

I will not read the third volume, but I am mildly curious as to the identity of the new Maiden. If anyone reads it, please let me know.

**Gary Westfahl – *The Mechanics of Wonder***  
Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Liverpool University Press, 1998, 344pp, £14.99 ISBN 0-85323-573-2

Subtitled 'The Creation of the Idea of Science Fiction', this is a summary of Westfahl's extended and provocative argument about the origin of sf as a genre, collected and expanded from a number of articles previously published in the pages of journals such as *Foundation* and *Science Fiction Studies*.

Westfahl's basic premise is that the science fiction genre, as we now recognise it, was born (or at least achieved a self-aware consciousness) in the pages, editorials and letter columns of Hugo

Gernsback's magazines of the 1920s, and, moreover, was the result of a definite agenda on Gernsback's part to both bring it into being and promote it as both entertainment and a method of instruction. In this, Westfahl argues against others, like Brian Aldiss, who seek to establish a more literary (and less embarrassing?) origin of science fiction with Shelley's *Frankenstein*, or with the Scientific Romances of Wells and Verne, or even further back.

Westfahl argues his case effectively, if occasionally somewhat pedantically, and others will want to take up his arguments in more detail. Personally, I have no great problem with Westfahl's thesis here, since science fiction as we now recognise it in the late 1990s has arguably moved a long way from its 'literary' Gothic, Romance, or pulp antecedents. And Gernsback's own writers were not above quickly fudging, subverting, or ignoring outright, their editor's insistent emphasis on the didactic scientific plausibility and credibility of their 'science adventure stories'.

Indeed, as a model of sf as "a charming romance interwoven with scientific fact and prophetic vision", Gernsback's own abilities proved stunningly inadequate in his story *Ralph 124C 41+* (Chapter 3: 'This Unique Document'), a stylistic turkey incorporating impressive-sounding gibberish and hokum, and a stunning naïveté that inventions can be dashed off in the lab at a rate of two before breakfast (not to mention a complete disregard, even ignorance, of the real process of scientific invention and discovery)

Hackles will start to rise, I suspect, when Westfahl gets on to the legacy of John W. Campbell in a far more contentious argument that Campbell's real importance to the genre was as a critic and a theorist than as an editor. But Campbell, at least, was a scientist, with a degree in physics, before he became editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* (a name he apparently disliked as overly sensationalist, gradually reducing the prominence of the first word on the cover).

Received wisdom is that Campbell single-handedly created the Golden Age of science fiction in the 40s. Westfahl argues otherwise, pointing out that the writers who appeared in Campbell's magazines were probably those who grew up on the

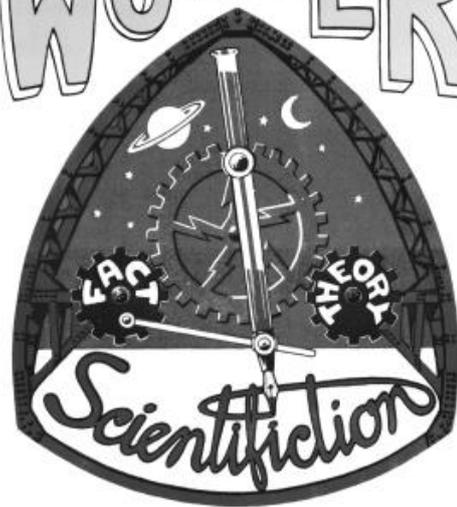
stories and editorials of Gernsback's *Amazing* and *Science Wonder Stories*, and now, in their twenties or thirties, were starting to flex their own literary muscles.

Campbell, then, inherited the first generation of writers aware of a history and genre of science fiction, and guided, cajoled and, at times, bullied it in the direction he wanted it to take. Away from inventions and gadgets for their own sake and towards the effects on scientific advance (and with a wider definition of science, to include the 'soft' sciences – and later the pseudo-sciences of things like 'psionics') on people and society. A difficult and argumentative man, Campbell managed, as a critic and theorist, to champion writers like Heinlein (whose *Beyond this Horizon* is treated in depth in Chapter 8: 'A Full-View Picture of the World that Would Result') for their method of seamlessly working scientific material of the text, while simultaneously, by his editorial practices and overbearing personality, alienating many of them and finally driving them away to find other markets.

There is far more here than can possibly be touched on in this review, such as Westfahl's isolation of three basic tensions between Campbell's and Gernsback's (and, indeed, any) history of sf: (1) that science fiction is both new and special, a literary reaction to technological change and its effects; (2) the conflict over the origins of sf in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gernsback) or late 19<sup>th</sup>, or even earlier; and (3) the dichotomy between sf as High or Popular literature, a question not unrelated to its perceived origins and antecedents.

The *Mechanics of Wonder* is undoubtedly both an important and provocative contribution to the debate over the origins of science fiction that will be received with delight or horror by science fiction scholars and readers with a real interest in the history and origins of the genre. For those, it must count as an essential purchase.

# THE MECHANICS OF WONDER



The Creation of the Idea of Science Fiction  
GARY WESTFAHL

# Particles

THESE ARE SOME OF THE OTHER BOOKS WE HAVE SEEN RECENTLY. A MENTION HERE DOES NOT NECESSARILY PRECLUDE A REVIEW IN A LATER ISSUE OF VECTOR.

**Piers Anthony and Julie Brady**  
– *Dream a Little Dream*

Tor, 1999, 301pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86466-3  
Described on the cover as "a tale of myth and moonshine", Anthony teams up with first-time novelist Brady for this fantasy fairy tale about escape into the world of dreams, to find that the dreamworld itself is being threatened by creatures seeking to dam the River of Thought. Human dreamer Nola, aided by Prince Michael and the black winged unicorn, Esprit (who artist Tristan Elwell somehow paints as white on the cover) must venture back into the human world to enlist the help of the dreaming Creators who sustain the dreamworld.

**Chris Bunch – *The Demon King***  
Orbit, 1999, 551pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-761-7  
**Chris Bunch – *The Warrior King***

Orbit 1999, 366pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-85723-757-9  
Volumes two and three of the trilogy that started with *The Seer King*. Having pledged loyalty to the wizard Tenedos and his vision of a unified Numantia, General Damastes finds his loyalties divided when Tenedos sets out on a disastrous and bloody reign of conquest that ends with Numantia overthrown, under a puppet government, and Damastes in jail. Now there are rumours that Tenedos is not dead, but amassing another army, and both sides want Damastes to lead their forces against the other.

**Vera Chapman – *The Enchantresses***  
Vista, 1999, 223pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-575-60325-9  
Cherith Baldry, reviewing this in hardback in V199, commented that this 'prequel' to Chapman's Arthurian *The Three Damosels* was

discovered in manuscript after the author's death in 1996 and that it might be "wrong to judge it as a completely finished work". The three sections focus on the childhood of Vivian, Morgan and Morgause, the birth of Arthur, and his reign. Nevertheless, Cherith concludes "I wouldn't have missed it for anything, because I admire Vera Chapman's earlier work so much... It's still a fascinating book, but not the right place to start exploring the Arthurian world."

**Sarah Douglas – *Starman***  
Voyager, 1999, 733pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-651108-2  
Described as "An epic fantasy in the tradition of Janny Wurts, David Eddings and Robert Jordan", this is the concluding volume, after *Battleaxe* and *Enchanter*, of 'The Axis Trilogy' from this Australian author who now teaches

medieval history.

**Charles De Lint – *Someplace to be Flying***

Pan, 1999, £6.99 ISBN 0-330-36870-2  
Cherith Baldry, reviewing three De Lint novels in V198 commented on the thematic link of the 'outsider'. The outsiders in *Someplace to be Flying* are the 'animal people', the first inhabitants of the world, Raven, Coyote, the foxes and the crow girls, who are now being summoned back because something has stirred up their mortal enemies, the cuckoos.

**Raymond E. Feist – *Shards of a Broken Crown***

Voyager, 1999, 498pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00648348-8  
Fourth and concluding volume of the Serpentwar Saga. Midkemia lies in ruins, and a new threat to the Kingdom arises when Fadawah takes control of the armies of the Emerald Queen for his own ends. In V200, Alan Fraser commented that it "will be an essential read for those who have come this far, and leaves a few openings for the start of Feist's next series!", although Janet Barron, in V195, was less impressed by the previous volume, *Rage of a Demon King*.

**Jane Lindskold – *Changer***

Avon Eos, 1998, 498pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0-380-78849-7  
Contemporary Southwestern fantasy of a conflict amongst the Athanor, immortal shapechangers, which is precipitated by the murder of the family of one of the oldest Athanor, Changer, who takes the aspect of the trickster-coyote. Among the Athanor on both sides of the conflict are Arthur Pendragon, Elvis/Dionysius, Circe, Loki, Lilith, Confucius, Merlin and St. Francis, as well as a whole slew of mythical and legendary beings.

**K.J. Parker – *Colours in the Steel***

Orbit, 1999, 503pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-619-6

**K.J. Parker – *The Belly of the Bow***

Orbit, 1999, 442pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-85723-752-0

*The Belly of the Bow*, the second part of Parker's 'Fencer Trilogy', continues the story of Bardas Loredan, fencer-at-law, reluctant defender of the famed Triple City of Perimadeia, which has now fallen to barbarian hordes. Reviewing the first volume, *Colours in the Steel*, in V204, Vikki Lee found that while "the characters are all well-drawn and likable, and the several different plot threads add

enough variety to keep the reader turning the pages" it was, however, "overlong and, at times, downright tedious."

**Joel Rosenberg – *The Crimson Sky***

Avon Eos, 1998, 341pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-380-78932-9  
Book Three of the Keepers of the Hidden Ways, following *The Fire Duke* and *The Silver Stone*, in cosmic portals provide the Hidden Ways between universes engaged in a battle between gods and champions to control seven magical jewels.

**Margaret Weis and Tracey Hickman**

**– *Nightsword***

Orbit, 1999, 468pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-728-5  
Second, after *The Mantle of Kendis-Dai*, of the Starshield space opera. "Thousands of years ago the mad Emperor Lokan controlled the Nightsword, imposing his twisted desires on all that lived. Then Lokan mysteriously vanished into the quantum chaos of the galactic core. But legend says that somewhere, lost amidst the ghost ship of Lokan's doomed fleet, The Nightsword is hidden, its awesome energies waiting to be used again."

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