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# Vectors

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The Critical  
Journal of  
the BSFA

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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## VECTOR

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## The View from the Fleapit

You may have noticed that there's a new Star Wars movie out

You may have noted that we at *Vector* have been ignoring it. Loudly. Across the mailing at *Matrix*, my esteemed co-editor Gary Dalkin has been defending the original *Star Wars*, which is to say *Episode IV: A New Hope*, from the condemnations of John Ashbrook. And in the previous *Vector* editorial Gary outlined how much joy he has received from watching the film.

*No disputum tastum*, as the Latins no doubt don't say, but I do have to confess that with the right people, and a few six packs, a goodly deal of fun can be got out of watching *Star Wars* and the rest of the holy trilogy, in particular in spotting logical flaws in the plot, and cheering the wrong side.

Gary offers the startling suggestion that *Star Wars* saved cinema for us, and whilst we shouldn't pile *Armageddon*, *Godzilla* and other summer blockbuster dreck at his door, the thought that cinema was saved so that we could see a big screen version of *Lost in Space* does pose the question as to whether it was worth saving. Perhaps *Star Wars* was simply one in a line of blockbusters – *The Godfather*, *Jaws*, *American Graffiti* spring to mind – which in turn had been event movies to pack in the masses. Who knows if Joe Dante and Robert Zemeckis wouldn't have come through anyway, or British technicians have cornered the market in special effects.

Allowing for inflation, *Star Wars* is still a long way behind *Gone With the Wind* for box office takings, a record which *Titanic* hasn't eclipsed either. And *Titanic* was itself a mixed blessing, given multiple viewings by much of its audience (perhaps in the hope that the ship *wouldn't* sink this time or in some desire to see Leonardo diCaprio die yet again), but eclipsing anything else; perhaps people who wanted to see anything else that year stayed away because of fears of queues.

But anyway, I wanted to see the new *Star Wars* because I try to see everything (with the understandable exception of anything featuring Hugh Grant), and because a few weeks before I'd been commissioned by BBC Online to write about *Star Wars* for their book pages. Suitably disguised I slipped into W.H. Smiths and purchased (gak!) a wookiee book, Terry Brooks's novelisation.

From the start, I had a sense of déjà vu: Anakin's pod-racing seemed to have echoes of *American Graffiti* and *Return of the Jedi*, and had computer game written all over it. Then the first droid we come across happens to be R2D2 and C3PO isn't far behind. An encounter with scavengers out in the desert. A Jedi Knight killed by a black-clad bad guy. And at the climax (hey, by now everyone who's interested will have seen it) Anakin's lucky shot sets off a chain reaction that blows up a space station, just like the Death Star...

Lots of questions form as a result. The first is who else is yet to come – Han Solo's potty training? – and the second is a general feeling that Darth Vader should have really noticed that flaw in the blue-print when the Death Star was on the drawing board. For that matter, how come R2D2 and C3PO don't say, "It's good to be home?" and "Where have I heard the name 'Skywalker' before?" on their return to Tatooine in *A New Hope*. And how sensible, given that Anakin is to become the second most evil being in the universe, is it to hide young Luke on the planet he grew up on?

A conspiracy theory is clearly necessary. We learn that Anakin is the virgin birth of his mother and the Force (well, she could hardly tell Qui-Gon that she'd had too much gin at the

local hostelry), and we know that he is going to fall. How awfully messianic. Could it be that this is a necessary Fall, that he has turned to the dark side in order that his son can save the universe? And so, surreptitiously, he alters the blue prints to *add* an obvious weak point? Perhaps he even tips them off? Without this Secret Plan, the incompetence of the Jedis is astounding: having (rightly it seems) worried about taking on Anakin at the ancient age of nine, surely Obi-Wan should have learned from the mistake and ignored the teenager Luke.

Still, by the end of the film, the only indication of Anakin's fall is his conversion from having a mopet hair cut to something even worse, which is enough to tip anyone over the edge. And the other characters calling him Annie can't help.

Remarkably, the kiddie cute factor in the film doesn't destroy it. The comic relief of Jar Jar Binks comes pretty close though. Flaired and jive talking, Binks wouldn't be out of place in an early 1970s blaxploitation picture. (A *Gunga?* Puhlease). Anakin's master is hook-nosed, and in accent and behaviour seems to be the very image of the Jewish stereotype. And if the Uncle-Tomism and the anti-Semitism isn't enough, the two invaders of Naboo struck me as oily and inscrutable Orientals. Oh, but it is weighed against a black Jedi (little more than a cameo from Samuel L. Jackson) and a black soldier in the employ of the Queen. So that's okay then. No racism.

Ah, a Queen. The background of the film is that the Republic is under threat from a federation of traders (which will presumably eventually metamorphose into an upstart Empire), and the planet Naboo is under a blockade (which metamorphoses into an illegal invasion). The resistance from Naboo is led by a queen, you know, someone who has been elected... Oh, and the Queen is helped by Senator Palpatine, the future evil emperor, using the invasion to further his political ends. The camera shots linger on him at the end of the film – as Yoda ponders whether the Sith (read: evil dude Jedis) Qui-Gon has killed was master or apprentice – almost to suggesting that he was behind the invasion. Except that in the book the prime mover in the invasion is Darth Sidious, who in the film continually keeps his face cloaked (why? because it looks cool?), just as Emperor Palpatine does in the earlier (later – keep up) film, and who has a voice credited but no body.

Perhaps the most damning thing I can say about the film is that the *Daily Mail* critic Christopher Tookey, a man of impeccable and trustworthy taste, gave it four stars and is now quoted with Nick *Virtual Sexuality* (don't ask) Fisher of *The Sun*. But then Tookey also gave the excellent *Happiness* five stars, so he does have his off days.

Yes, the film is beautifully and excitingly shot, with nearly all of the sets being computer generated (and Natalie Portman plays both the Queen and her handmaiden, thanks to such technology), yes, it is spectacular. But the usually dependable Ewan MacGregor *isn't* a young Alec Guinness, and Terence Stamp is wasted in a two minute cameo.

Still, can't wait for the next one, eh?

And speaking of glossy packages, you may have noticed that the last *Vector* came with a haggard Christopher Priest on the cover rather than the bright and glossy one you might have expected. When we introduced the glossy covers with issue 200, it was to mark a double anniversary. However, we liked it so much that we continued the practice and they made an impressive display on the BSFA stall at Eastercon. Our publications manager did order one for 206, but somewhere along the line, much to our printer's embarrassment, this didn't happen. Clive at PDC Copyprint has been very apologetic, and hopefully this issue sees a return to normal service.



Andy Mills emails us about the Christopher Priest special:

**From Andy Mills, Leeds, via email**

Many thanks indeed for the Christopher Priest special; particular plaudits to Paul Kincaid for the excellent interview, whilst Chris's article on the genesis of *The Extremes* was fascinating. (It's not mentioned in the article, but I believe Chris campaigned for W.H. Smith to remove gun magazines from its shelves following Hungerford.)

*Fugue...* when published in paperback was my introduction to the Priest oeuvre, and soon thereafter I was able to cite him as my favourite British author, and he's retained that place ever since. In (I think) 1984 I attended my first convention in Brighton as he was Guest of Honour. I haven't been to many conventions since, possibly because (and I do hope I've remembered this right – there again, an unreliable memory cannot be condemned too much given the subject matter!) – of Chris's speech, in which he

told of the problems he had encountered in trying to get *The Affirmation* published. What hope, thought I, for science fiction, if this was the state of affairs. Priest's novels since then have consistently exemplified the best traditions of speculative fiction, regardless of packaging. It's our loss that his contributions to English literature have been so limited in number, whilst the sf shelves are packed (as per Sturgeon's dictum) with so much dross.

*Christopher Priest tells us that he was campaigning prior to the Hungerford massacre, but the local W.H. Smith was happy to sell to the local gun club at Devizes, which included one Michael Ryan among its members...*

*Norman Finlay writes in response to Jennifer Swift's defence of Mary Doria Russell (V206):*

**From Norman Finlay, Edinburgh:**

Re the letter from Jennifer Swift: "No one can know for sure in this life who is right, and so it behoves us to listen carefully to thoughtful people on the other side."

Now that is what I call an interesting choice of language! I guess it means there might just be a life after this one, and that it matters what side we choose to be on.

A book I'm sure Ms Swift would find fascinating is *Unholy Spirits* by Gary North ('88, re-issued and updated '94). It is about humanism and other 'isms'.

*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.*

## All the Time in the World, and All That Jazz

An Email Interview with Kathleen Ann Goonan by Gary S. Dalkin

*Kathleen Ann Goonan was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, the setting for her first novel, the BSFA Award nominated Queen City Jazz. Her second novel, The Bones of Time, has recently been published in the UK, while her third book, Mississippi Blues, is currently only published in America. Crescent City Rhapsody is due to be published in the US by Avon in February 2000, and in Britain by Orion at around the same time. Kathleen's stories have appeared Interzone, Asimov's, F&SF, Amazing, SF Age, Tomorrow, Omni, and other major magazines and anthologies.*

*This interview was conducted as a series of emails, and this version is an edited and revised compilation from those messages. Because of the nature of email, questions and answers bounced back and forth, sometimes passing each other on the way. In editing the various messages together we have tried to make the finished piece flow as naturally as possible, sometimes by reordering material or adding linking questions.*

**GSD:** To ask the obvious question, how did it all begin?

**KAG:** Although I always intended to be a writer, as I reached the end of getting my English degree I realized that I had no idea of how to go about it and that it might take a while before I would be able to make a living at it. I liked the idea of teaching preschoolers but wanted to do something with structure, and something that would enable me to function outside the public schools (where people would be telling me what to do. I am rather independent-minded and was much more so then). For some reason I thought of Montessori. There is an AMI training center in downtown Washington DC to which I could commute from my parent's house, and I took the primary course and became certified. I thought that I could have my own business, teach until perhaps two each afternoon, and have evenings and summers to write.

This never actually happened. I married after teaching for two years and my husband did a family practice residency in Knoxville TN, where I began my third year of Montessori teaching. I met a fellow teacher, Maria, who was very vibrant and visionary, and had a masters degree in Early Childhood. We opened our own school and were immediately full. Within two years we had bought a house and remodelled it, added a toddler and elementary program, had a hundred children, two locations, and many employees.

I loved teaching very much and loved my school. It's very nice being a part of the community like that. But the Spring I turned 33 I suddenly sat down and began writing my trunk novel in my free time, which I finished in a year. It is a strange blend of fantasy and sf. At that time I wasn't aware that they didn't blend. I just thought of everything as literature. I then began shorter work and began sending stories out. Some were mainstream, some were fantasy, some were sf.

In 1987, Joseph had a job offer in Hawaii, where I lived for about two years as a child. I decided to leave, although he'd had plenty of job offers before and I refused to leave my school. It seemed that the time was right for a change.

**GSD:** You wrote mainstream stories, do you see a time when you may want to write a mainstream novel? Is there any temptation?

**KAG:** I do have one in mind, and it has a title: Atomic Satori in the Land of American Sushi. It has to do with being in Hawaii fifteen years after the end of WWII, and being there now. I've done a bit of work on it. I'm not sure if it will be a 'memoir' (their popularity is waning) or a work of fiction. I am still experimenting with voice. Don't know when I'll get back to it, though. I placed one mainstream story in a college journal a few years ago. It is just a matter of material presenting itself. Of course, there are an

infinite number of ways to treat the same story core. Gardner rejected more than one story of mine on the grounds that it was 'too mainstream'; the science-fictional elements being too subtle.

**GSD:** You were sending stories out. How many stories did you have to send out before one was accepted? The first time most UK readers encountered your writing was probably with the story 'Sunflowers', in *Interzone* in April 1995, but by then you already had your first novel, *Queen City Jazz* published in America. How did you make the transition from 'trunk novel' to stories, to published novel?

**KAG:** After writing for about six months in Hawaii, I was very discouraged. I had been getting personal notes from Ellen Datlow when I lived in Tennessee, and was beginning to get personal rejections from Gardner Dozois. A friend of mine told me to subscribe to *Locus*; before that I had no idea that a science fiction community or culture existed. I saw writing as being a very hermetic activity – which is a mode that I've always enjoyed. I had sold a travel article to the Hawaiian Airlines travel magazine, and a children's story to *Read Magazine*. I even tried writing confession stories and got a personal rejection letter from one of the black confession magazines; the editor scolded me for misspelling her name, said she knew I was not black but that the story was good, and invited me to submit again. It was difficult for me to go from being 'the boss' and making money to being isolated and making no money. I saw an ad for Clarion West and applied. Had I seen an ad for a mainstream writer's workshop, I may have been writing mainstream fiction now; who knows. But for some reason I was convinced that my heart lay in the direction of speculative fiction.

After Clarion (during which we moved back to the mainland and the Washington DC area, which is where my husband and I grew up and where our families live), my first sale was to *Strange Plasma*. It was a story I had written in high school. Steve Pachesnik had me change the ending. I then sold two more to *Strange Plasma*. About a year after Clarion, Gardner bought a story for *Asimov's*. That was my first professional SF sale.

I must interject here that after Clarion I understood the need for a writer's group. The friend who referred me to *Locus*, Mike Nally, a bookseller, put me in touch with Ted White's group, widely referred to as The Vicious Circle. Liz Hand and Richard Grant had just left, and besides Ted, former editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* as well as a novelist and short story writer, Steve Brown (who had just published the first issue of *SF Eye*) and Dave Bischoff came every week, along with other published writers. They were very generous with their time and gave everything I brought in their standard vicious treatment. We spent the rest of the time playing hearts and spades. Writer's Group kept me going during the years when I was making only sporadic sales, and was a critical force in my development as a writer.

I'm glad 'Sunflowers' stood out – Gardner and Jack Dann reprinted it in a recent Nanotech anthology – but it was not my first *Interzone* sale. I think that I sold 'Daydots, Inc.' to David Pringle in '92 or '93. 'Daydots' was a story that I had written while in Tennessee and later rewrote and put through Writer's Group. Pringle asked for a few changes, then accepted it. Jeschke reprinted it in a German anthology.

I don't remember this with crystalline clarity, but I think I then sold 'The Parrot Man' and another story to Gardner, and then 'The String', which was a Nebula finalist, to Kris Rusch at *F&SF*. I also sold Gardner 'Kamehameha's Bones', and did a novel proposal based on that which was rejected by quite a few editors.

Around that time, '92, I believe, I began work on what I thought was a short story. It was based on a kind of vision I had

when running, which was not uncommon for me at that time (the magic of endorphins), since I often sorted stories out while I ran, or began to think of them in visual terms. I envisioned a city with flowers atop the buildings.

**GSD:** Your writing is very visually orientated. When reading your books it is very easy to see the places you describe. I know that you also paint. Are you strongly influenced by other visual media?

**KAG:** Not long before I wrote *QCJ* my husband and I went to a lot of museums. Of course, the National Gallery of Art is very convenient if you live in the DC area and we went often, but we also saw the centennial Van Gogh exhibits in Amsterdam and at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. I was also reading a lot about High and Low art at the time. You might recall a reference to Krazy Kat, one of my particular favorites; I have a nice collection foreworded by e.e. cummings and have a nice letter from King Syndicates allowing my brief use of Ignatz and Krazy.

At the time I was also reading a lot of postmodern and deconstruction literary theory and subscribed to about four different science magazines. The story began in a Shaker community overlooking Cincinnati, and was not working out very well.

Then I got word that my cousin had committed suicide in the house that my grandparents had built and of which I had many fond memories. Setting the story there changed the entire tenor and helped me work through this death. I sent the first section to Gardner as a novella, but he suggested that it might be part of a longer piece. It continued to grow.

**GSD:** Both *QCJ* and *The Bones of Time* feature young men faced with feeling responsible for their mother's death. There are also young women determined to save a young man at almost any cost. In Verity's case in *QCJ* the young man is already dead. There are other painful deaths in the books as well. There is a real sense of what it is like to have to confront the nature of death.

**KAG:** So far, and happily, the only really painful death I've had to come to grips with

was the sudden death of my maternal grandmother in 1963. It was only a few weeks before Kennedy was shot, so the national mourning seemed in a strange sense the echo of my own feelings. All of my other grandparents have since died, but there was a sense of them having lived full lives – and I was not as emotionally close to them.

When I was finished with *Queen City Jazz*, Virginia Kidd, who was then my agent, sent it to David Hartwell, who eventually purchased it. (Virginia sold the ten stories or so that I had not already sold. They appeared in some Crowther anthologies and, eventually, *Omni*, though 'Solitaire', the story Ellen Datlow bought for the print magazine, had to appear online after the magazine folded. I have only one or two unsold short stories and have not written any in about four years.) I was very worried because it was longer than the contract called for, and I gave a lot of thought about what I would be comfortable cutting. I was quite glad when it came back with notes saying 'expand, expand' (a writer's dream!) and a request to make the ending stronger somehow.

**GSD:** *QCJ* is a long book. It is also extremely complex and ambitious for a first novel. The territory it deals with, nanotechnology, is still so new and potentially limitless, that I was wondering if you ever sometimes felt as lost as Verity gets, and questioned whether you would ever find your way to the end?

**KAG:** Actually, it was not my first novel (besides my trunk novel I almost finished two others). And, being 42 when the book was published, I put a lot into it that would probably not have been



possible had I attempted it when I was 22 or even 32. I actually had a very strong sense of the momentum of *QCJ*, though it probably doesn't read that way. I was working toward the final image. I knew that she would go into Cincinnati, but I was not entirely sure what she would find in the end. Since I spent my first eight years in Cincinnati, it was kind of a surreal echo of what life seems like to a child – new discoveries, strange juxtapositions.

I then began working on the proposal for *Mississippi Blues* (my work on *QCJ* being finished by December of 1993). A few months before *QCJ* came out, Tor purchased *Mississippi Blues*. David remembered the 'Kamehameha's Bones' proposal, and bought that at the same time.

**GSD:** And that became *The Bones of Time*. Before we talk about that, and some more about *QCJ*, could you say something about *Mississippi Blues*, which hasn't been published in the UK yet?

**KAG:** As far as I know, *Mississippi Blues* has not sold to any publisher in the UK. My agent strongly recommended that I cede to Tor the right to sell UK rights for my first three novels and I did, against my better judgement. So I am not in control of or kept informed of this process.

*Mississippi Blues*, though a stand-alone novel, follows the journey of Verity downriver to a Norleans that may or may not be there. While *QCJ* was jazz/improvisational in style, *Mississippi Blues* is much more linear, like a river, and is divided into twelve sections, like a twelve-bar blues. I wanted to get a sense of the United States' other country into this book – the country and history of African Americans. Although it is of course pretentious of me to think that I could understand this experience, I did my best. I drew from a lot of sources; one of the best was *Worse Than Slavery*, a book about Parchman Farm, the infamous Mississippi Prison Farm. I also used a lot of Mark Twain, in particular his darker, later writings. In *Bad Faith*, a book of criticism that deals with Twain's rage with the hypocrisy of individuals and of his own country in particular, was also important. The slave narratives and countless books about the blues, blues singers, race records, and the African American experience in general, fed into the book but are not necessarily apparent. Of course, I also listened to a lot of blues during this period. The chapters are carelessly and quickly titled (but deliberately so, if you know what I mean) like actual blues songs, rather than being intellectually titled in the style of, say, Thelonious Monk or Duke Ellington, as was the case in *QCJ*. I wanted, in *MB*, to draw some parallels between slavery and our own control or lack of control of the technologies we have developed.

**GSD:** The titles of your books include the words Jazz, Blues, Rhapsody. *QCJ* is filled with music. In *The Bones of Time* Lynn writes music on her computer. How important is music to you, and how important do you think it is to your writing?

**KAG:** Music drives me. I actually believe that my brain was imprinted with jazz when I was an infant. When he was in Germany after the surrender, my father played alto sax in a jazz band that provided a bit of entertainment (his real job in the Army was making sure technical things, like the German telephone system he resurrected for the use of the Americans, worked). I learned early on that no song had to stick to the notes on the page, that, indeed, it was much more fun to go off the track but still refer to the framework from time to time, if briefly. I was always in the church choir, played that same alto sax in the school band for a year, and signed up for all the music courses I could. I was in a madrigal group in high school, which was very demanding and great fun, and did a lot of singing in coffeehouses, with my guitar, when I was in college. I learned that I did everything better, from running to painting and writing, if I was listening to music. In an early version of Lynn, I wrote a rather complex musical career for her – but left it out in the end. I still knew it was there, though, and it informed her character.

**GSD:** Part of *QCJ* is about the quest for originality, rather than just reproducing familiar formulae. The improvised nature of jazz is

obviously an ideal vehicle for this quest, and there is a large degree of irony in the way the transformed Cincinnati of the future, which could become anything its inhabitants desire, yet through human failings has become a prison, locked in imitating the great jazz performers of the past. It's as if given potentially unlimited freedom, most people will still chose the comfortable and familiar.

**KAG:** The point of Cincinnati was that the people were not free; they were, as you point out, living in a prison of the American Arts – not by their own choice, but because of someone else's power.

**GSD:** I didn't make myself as clear as I should have done. What I was suggesting, I think, was that metaphorically it might be the case that people would generally chose the familiar...

**KAG:** I really do think that's true – at a certain stage of life. I think that in the late teens and early twenties – maybe even later – it is the task of the individual to rebel and to form their own point of view and their own way of life. After that is done, though, and particularly if a family is formed and there are children to consider, the familiar becomes more important, at least for most people.

**GSD:** I also feel that in a way *QCJ* is like a jazz novel, as if you were perhaps improvising Verity's adventures in the city, like different riffs on the theme of what could happen there? Verity is almost like a modern Alice in a nanotechnological wonderland.

**KAG:** I have found that I have a very difficult time writing when I know what is going to happen. I write to find out what happens. I try to make the framework character rather than plot. If it is the other way around, trying to fit the characters to a plot is often like stretching them on the rack. I believe that plot springs from character, if the characters are strong and real. While Verity does moon around a bit too much for some readers, she is still on a voyage of discovery, and I think that that sense keeps readers on till the end.

**GSD:** Well, I was happy to follow her around for as long as it took. Perhaps because one of the things that is so interesting about the novel is the human dimension.

In so many SF novels we have wonderfully imagined technology, and dull people. In *QCJ* the predicament that the city finds itself in is a result not of technology alone, but of how particular human beings used the technology that they had control over.

**KAG:** Yes! I think this is the point: we are the same old humans, with the same old emotions and intellectual abilities that we have been for thousands of years. Yet we are on the verge of beginning to use technologies that have the capacity to change us. I find this very exciting, and consider it a major breakpoint in human history. It is this verge that I like to examine.

**GSD:** The other thing, and this goes back to visual art again, is how striking the imagery of the book is. The giant flowers and bees really bind the book together visually, providing a structure around which all the other surreal marvels happen.

**KAG:** I'm glad it worked out that way.

**GSD:** In part both *QCJ* and *TBOT* are about young women who, after an act of violence, are forced to leave their communities and go on a journey to save, or protect, a young man. Obviously the details are very different, and there is a reversal of the traditional sex rôles, but it's the same mythological structure which underlies so many classic tales, and even modern 'pop' mythology such as *Star Wars*. Are you conscious of these archetypal aspects when you are writing, or are these stories so deeply ingrained somewhere in the human psyche, that they somehow need to keep being retold through us, like the bees in *QCJ* need the inhabitants of the city to constantly re-enact certain stories?

**KAG:** Again, I think that these are our stories and in order to

understand them, and thus ourselves, we must try to bring them to consciousness again and again. I'm not particularly conscious of them when I write, however. I read a lot of Jung years ago, and one of the things I eventually wished to own was the entire Bollingen series. I eventually ended up actually owning about two of them, but during that stage of my life they were of the utmost importance. I discovered independent studies rather late in my college career, but I got a lot of credits for simply proposing to write and then writing a forty page paper entitled 'Aspects of the Anima'.

Had I been exposed to the writing culture in college, my life might have been different. Now it seems there are college programs everywhere aimed at helping students understand the world of publishing and writing, but that was not the case at my university. I mainly wrote poetry at that time, and most of my studies were in English literature. My favorite was Chaucer, but I would have to say with the exception of English poets and Shakespeare (also a poet, of course) most of the English 'literature' I read was in the form of philosophy, particularly nineteenth century philosophy... I also studied Dante, Virgil, Blake, Homer, the Surrealists, Don Quixote... and in fact seemed determined to avoid much American literature, which seemed too grim and real to me – except for, of course, the poets. Dickinson and Whitman seem perpetually interesting, and I made it a point whenever I was in San Francisco to go to City Lights Bookstore and stock up on chapbooks. There I discovered Denise Levertov, Anselm Hollo, and many other striking poets of the day.

I made two endeavors to get my poetry published. I entered a Hollins College poetry contest. I never heard from them directly, probably because I was a student and moved a lot. I was astonished when the dean of the college of English at Virginia Tech sent my parents a letter commending me on my status as a runner-up in this prestigious contest. At the same time, I sent a packet of five poems to *Northwest Review*. I was then asked how old K. Goonan was, as well as what sex and age. When I turned out to be a nineteen year old female with no apparent mentor, my poems were rejected in a three to two vote by the board. (One of those factors seems to have had a bearing, since they couldn't make a decision without them.) That's that, I thought; I have failed as a writer and as a poet. If I had been able to speak to a seasoned writer at that point, I would have learned that rejection is the core of the process of learning to sell what one writes.

I also studied children's literature in college, and was exposed to Nesbit, Alan Garner, Tove Jansson, and even Tolkien (which I had not read when the books were first released in America for the simple snobbish reason that everyone was reading them – I worked in a bookstore and that seemed to indicate lack of quality in most cases). I decided that perhaps my career lay in the area of children's literature, and wrote and illustrated several children's books (one of which was accepted a few years ago by a Hawaiian publisher, but we could not agree on the contract and I withdrew it). I strongly considered getting a degree in children's literature, but realized that my second degree ought to have some monetary value and that the most likely employment with that background would be the job of librarian. I spent my entire college career in a haze of books, reading, and writing. I chose my classes by going to the college bookstore and deciding which books I wanted to read that quarter. I attended few classes, save to get the syllabus, turn in papers, and take the tests – unless the professor impressed me as a good lecturer, which was rare. For this reason, I did not know a single English major. I decided that I needed to get out in the world and relate to people. That was actually one aspect of my decision to be a teacher.

My university was so large that I slipped through unnoticed for the first two years, but then left school for the fall and returned for the winter, when they had an opportunity to look at my record. I was told I had to declare a major, and I told them that I didn't want to; that I was just there 'to learn.' I told them that it was my money and I ought to be able to use the resources there as I pleased. This seemed to amuse them. I was told that there had been a degree for people like me but that it had recently been

abolished. I also finished up my college career, eventually, in a big hurry, taking huge classloads of science and math that had to be especially approved, after I was told that I was in danger of not being able to get a degree in English because I was almost over the limit of literature classes I was allowed to take. It seems that they didn't want students hanging around, year after year, just 'learning.'

**GSD:** At one level or another all this material must inform the sort of writer you have become? I can see that it could add to a much greater richness of the way you develop characters and themes together, in that there is always a mythological, or archetypal level to your stories.

**KAG:** I suppose this is true. All that is in the far dim past for me, and I cannot quote reams of Milton as can others my age with a more rigorous education. But in a way I took the marrow and threw away the bones. All that has become a part of who I am and the ways in which I write and the scope of what I attempt.

**GSD:** Your books so far have all be set in places you have lived, or know well. Except possibly for the Far East parts of *The Bones of Time*. Have you been to Hong Kong, Tibet, Nepal, etc. or was this research and writer's imagination?

**KAG:** While we lived in Hawaii we went on a trip of several weeks and visited Japan, Hong Kong (and on a later trip alone my husband found it quite easy to get a visa for a bus tour in China and brought back wonderful tales and slides), Thailand, and Nepal. Of course, it would be rather difficult to get into Tibet, so I contented myself with reading a musty old book I found in the library, *Seven Years in Tibet*, which later was released as a movie. I have studied various forms of Buddhism, and have also read many interviews and speeches of the Dalai Lama, so I put this all together with other research and came up with the Tibet scenes in *TBOT*.

**GSD:** It's certainly convincing.

**KAG:** Oh, good!

**GSD:** *The Bones of Time* is a powerful story of love across time, but you leave the resolution to this part of the novel very much to the reader's imagination. Did you ever consider saying more, or was there pressure from your publisher to write a chapter saying exactly what happened next? Have you considered a sequel?

**KAG:** This is another case of subtlety; I have often been accused of not punching up important points enough. In this case, I believe that if you read closely, you will know what happened. No, there was no pressure from David Hartwell to make this more clear, but what I did include was at his suggestion – before, it was even more ambiguous.

*The Bones of Time* was actually a two-book proposal, with the Cen/Kaiulani story taking place in one, and the Lynn/Akamu/Interspace story taking place in the second book. It was David Hartwell's idea to include both storylines in one book, and I think that it worked out well. Involved as I am with a four-book project, I think that this was a wise course. In the future, I hope I'll have the sense to write only stand-alone novels.

**GSD:** A strong theme in the novel is colonialism and the take over of one culture by another. You rooted this in the histories of Hawaii and Tibet. I can see something of a parallel between the 'Homelanders' in *The Bones of Time* and the way many people feel in the UK. Hawaii and Britain are both groups of islands. One was an island Kingdom, Britain still is. Hawaii came under American control, and today in Britain every high street has a McDonalds, a KFC, a Burger King... Our tv news gives equal prominence to US as to UK news, and is full of US shows. Our cinemas are mostly US owned and show 90% Hollywood movies. Culturally we are becoming American ... yet we are far more likely to actually visit countries in Europe. What is even stranger is that while all this is happening, the individual countries of Europe are increasingly surrendering political authority to an emerging

federal European superstate. Thus we are surrendering different parts of our identity in different directions...

**KAG:** Cultural takeovers are quite powerful. People in the US were saying the same thing about Japan (especially in Hawaii!) about ten years ago, when Japan was much more prosperous and buying a lot of American real estate and corporations. The Hawaiians, in fact, modeled their monarchy on Britain's; even their flag was similar. And one of Kaiulani's many names was Victoria, so-named because her mother, along with the royal Hawaiian entourage, visited Queen Victoria at one point.

Racism in its many forms (including the slightly more sophisticated form of nationalism) fascinates me as one of the most obvious facets of being human. Of course, those who were not racist (having a strong sense of us-and-them and willing to fight for Us) would have been conquered and wiped out or absorbed into the conquering race a long time ago, so we are left with a planet of conquerors.

**GSD:** Do you like the film *Somewhere in Time*?

**KAG:** Oh, sure. In fact, my grandfather, a fire protection engineer was the first to inspect the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, and had sprinklers installed. (It was the largest wooden structure in the world at that time, although I think that there are many such claims.) My sisters and I are taking our mother, along with their children, up there this summer; I've been there many times. It is prohibitively expensive to stay in the Grand Hotel, however, and I never have – though my mother and grandmother did once. I know that you are asking about the time-travel aspect of the movie, though, and I like that too. I like anything that fools with the tyranny of time. All art does that, of course (except perhaps music, which is subject to time). Visual art is generally a held moment that we can study at our leisure, a thought, complete in itself, from another time. Writing, of course, constantly fools with time. And books like *Hopscotch* invite one to shuffle time; it has been a favorite of mine since it came out in its Pantheon edition around 1968 or so.

**GSD:** I'm not familiar with *Hopscotch*. Who wrote it, and what is it about?

**KAG:** It was written by Julio Cortazar, and he proposes several orders in which the chapters might be read. So the vast grammar of a novel, its causes and effects, become fluid. When I was sixteen, it was for me a window showing how a novelist might work, how one weights event and sequence and character and plot when putting together a novel. Although this is not true of my other novels, many of the Cincinnati chapters in *QCJ* were not written in the order in which they appear in the book. The final arrangement was done toward the end, when I sat in the center of a large circle of chapters laid out on the floor, trying to think of how best to get my point across through how I arranged the timing in the mind of the potential reader.

**GSD:** You say that you are interested in anything that defies the tyranny of time. In the sequence in which Cen goes to the hotel in San Francisco in *The Bones of Time* am I reading too much to think this might be a homage to the film *Vertigo*? There the James Stewart character falls in love with a woman who is also in a sense dead, and he tries to save her.

**KAG:** Wonderful film! But no, there is no connection. I followed the historical record of Kaiulani and of Hawaii very closely, and

this is the hotel she actually stayed at. I must add, regarding historical factuality, that there is no proof that Kaiulani was pregnant, or that she died giving birth. When I first read her biographies, it seemed odd that she would die for no particular reason – or, as is popularly interpreted, die of a broken heart because of the loss of her kingdom. I went to the Bishop Museum in Honolulu and read all of her original correspondence (wearing white gloves) and also went to the Parker Ranch on the Big Island, where she spent her last months. Some Hawaiians are not pleased that I used this possible pregnancy in my fiction, and I can understand why. But when one hears the story of Kaiulani, one wants to at least try to save her. And the fact that she did have documented kidney problems, and the same disease of which Theodore Roosevelt's first wife died of when giving birth (not to mention countless other women), makes that possibility plausible. I must say that film doesn't really influence what I write.



Princess Kaiulani

**GSD:** There is actually quite a lot about religion in one way or another in your books – the New Shakers in *QCJ*, the Buddhists and the Hawaiian beliefs in *TBOT*. Once SF writers seemed to take the view that religion would just not be around in the future, but increasingly we are seeing books which address much more complex futures. Religion has been around for as long as there have been people, and it makes sense to assume it will still be around in the future alongside whatever science and technology we develop.

**KAG:** In the past ten years I have finally caught up with the scientific revolution in my own non-technical way. This has been fascinating. For some reason science didn't interest me at all in high school or college, and I think that it must have been presented in a very dull way for that to have happened. My point of view concerning religion has definitely

changed because of this.

Although my characters may say this or that concerning religion, they don't really speak for me. For the most part I believe that everyone should be free to have their own beliefs without being hassled about them.

When I was a judge for the P.K. Dick award a few years ago there seemed to be book after book set in space with your standard Moslem, Jew, Christian, Buddhist, etc. This irritated me. It truly did seem to me that a civilization that uses science to travel through space would also have learned so much that many qualities and abilities we now attribute to God would be explained and understood. I guess it all depends on your definition of God – perhaps my quibbles lie with 'organized religion.' Certainly they do not lie with the religious experience or in attempting to live one's life in a particular way.

**GSD:** You said that you consider we are at a major breakpoint in human history. That this verge is what you are interested in examining. A lot of SF, certainly the media incarnation of the genre, is still stuck in virtual reality, which seems very limited and instantly old fashioned once we start thinking in terms of nanotechnology. I think if SF is to remain relevant it must keep pushing on, looking over the edge of that verge. Only this particular verge is such a big one to write about, with such vast implications not just for being able to create a 'virtual' reality, but for being able to actually radically alter 'real' reality, that people seem to be shying away. There was Greg Bear, who I have to say probably wrote the first great nanotechnology novel with *Blood Music*, and that started life as a novella back in the early 1980s.

There has been Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, some of Greg Egan's writing, and some books and stories that have used nanotechnology, but often as an underpinning for fantasy adventure. But unless I've missed something very little else that has seriously attempted to really explore the potentials now opening up. You mentioned a nanotechnology anthology. Do you see other writers really starting to explore this area?

**KAG:** In his generous quote for *Queen City Jazz*, Gibson compares it to *Blood Music* ["An unforgettable vision of America transfigured by a new and utterly apocalyptic technology. Greg Bear's *Blood Music* is perhaps the only other novel to have dealt so unflinchingly with the paradigm-shattering possibilities of a functioning nanotech. If a science fiction writer's job is to conceive the inconceivable, Goonan has arrived with an immaculate version of the traditional tool-kit – and the nerve to use it hard."] Some other books that spring quickly to mind are Linda Nagata's – *The Bohr Maker*, *Deception Well*, and *Vast*. Wil McCarthy's recent novel *Bloom* also deals with a planetwide nanotech meltdown and its aftermath.

**GSD:** Did you read much SF when you were growing up? Do you get the opportunity now to read what other writers are doing, and if so is there anyone whose work you particularly recommend?

**KAG:** Once I learned to read, I don't remember doing much of anything else. The summer we moved to Hawaii, 1960, I spent the entire summer reading only fairy tales and similar books from the nearby library. I also accumulated several vast and complete comic book collections. The first 'real' novel I read, that same summer (I don't count the series books, like the Hardy Boys or Bobbsey Twins, which I devoured earlier) was *The Wizard of Oz*; we were driving across Kansas at that time, so it had additional resonance for me. I then read Tom Sawyer and after that was a great river of classics mixed with utterly plebian stuff. During the early sixties I preferred large books like *Catch-22*, *The Sand Pebbles*, *Hawaii*, *Exodus*, Pynchon's hallucinatory *V* – the bigger the better. And I liked fantasy. It's kind of funny, but SF was the literature of 'the establishment' for me. My father is a tremendously catholic and omnivorous reader, so our house was filled with books – classics, and also the latest paperbacks, mysteries, and science fiction. I remember seeing titles like *The Sheep Look Up*, and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* on our bookshelves. But when I was a teenager, their POV male grown-up characters did not appeal to me. Since there are a lot more women writing SF now, and including believable female characters, I think that perhaps more teenage girls might be drawn into the field as readers and as writers. But it seemed to me at that time that SF was written by engineers for engineers. Since I started writing SF, I have made a great effort to try and catch up and to understand the field, but I still have a lot to learn. Combined with all the regular fiction I read – I am now reading Ondaatje's slight oeuvre – and my science readings, it is all I can do to keep up with the highlights of the field. One of the tragic realizations the bibliomaniac eventually arrives at is that they will never be able to read all that they desire to read, or even a small percentage of what seems utterly necessary and basic if one is to consider oneself a truly literate person.

So why was I drawn to write science fiction? I like the literature of the strange. I did not wish to write pedestrian fiction, which is what mainstream fiction often seems like. Now, with the advent of magic realism, which manages to fall under the

umbrella of mainstream fiction, this is not necessarily the case, but as I said before, I perceived American literature as being much too grim. Too much Theodore Dreiser at an impressionable age, perhaps. In the past ten years I have caught up with classic American fiction, re-reading much of it, and I appreciate it more. And by immersing myself in the history of scientific thought I have also come to appreciate hard sf a lot more, and have gone back and read many of the classics of the field with a new eye. But there is always more to read. Always more. Which is wonderful.

Who do I read in the field? I read everything Liz Hand writes. And everything Greg Egan writes. And everything Karen Joy Fowler writes, and everything Pat Cadigan writes. I've read most of Greg Bear's work (his latest two, *Dinosaur Summer* and *Darwin's Radio*, are in my to-read pile). I enjoyed Benford's *Cosm*. Geoff Ryman, Bruce Sterling, Connie Willis, Stan Robinson, Jeff Noon – I could go on for quite a while. *The Troika*, by Stephen Chapman, won the 1997 Philip K. Dick award and is quite worth looking for.

**GSD:** We're coming to the end now, but we have *Crescent City Rhapsody* to look forward to early next year. Can you say anything about it yet?

**KAG:** *CCR* takes place before *QCJ*, and tells how that world came about. Marie Laveau, a distantly related namesake of the original voodoo queen, shares billing with a radio astronomer who knows why radio failed, a Japanese nanobiologist, a Tibetan terrorist, and many other characters. Marie, who is very wealthy, decides to build a refuge from the madness that is enveloping the world. From her home in New Orleans she tries to orchestrate the events that will lead to the creation of a floating city in the Caribbean. I loosely equate her with Duke Ellington, who held his orchestra together for decades so that he could hear the music he wrote. He wrote all kinds of music, including a few rhapsodies. Ellington, or someone just like him, appears in the book. Coincidentally, this year is the centennial of Ellington's birth, so we have been hearing a lot about his genius the last few weeks. I wanted a book with the feel of many voices blended together, and the chapters have titles like *Hard Bop Rip*, *Slow Spill*; *Diminuendo in D.C.* – plays on jazz-based phrases. The book already has some wonderful quotes from Greg Bear and Gregory Benford.

**GSD:** And finally, you talked about being involved in a four book project, so presumably there is still more to come in your particular nanotech universe after *Crescent City Rhapsody*?

**KAG:** The final book in what I am calling a quartet is the one I am working on right now. The working title is *Light Music*, and I think that it will have something to do with superstring theory.

**GSD:** Kathleen Ann Goonan, thank you very much.

**KAG:** It's been a pleasure.

*Kathleen Ann Goonan's web page is at [www.goonan.com](http://www.goonan.com) The site contains details about Kathleen's books, tours, signings, etc. It is also possible to read some of Kathleen's short stories, articles and book reviews, and access previous interviews and transcripts of on-line chats. Kathleen Ann Goonan is also part of The Edge group of writers, who can be found on the world wide web at [http://members.tripod.com/~Maureen\\_McQ/index.html](http://members.tripod.com/~Maureen_McQ/index.html)*

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THIRTY YEARS AGO NEIL ARMSTRONG TOOK THAT FAMOUS **FIRST STEP** ON BEHALF OF ALL MANKIND. THAT MEANS ME AND YOU. BUT WAIT A MINUTE... WASN'T IT ALSO SUPPOSED TO BE A **GIANT LEAP**... ? SO WHAT HAPPENED NEXT ? AND WHAT WENT WRONG... ?  
**ANDY DARLINGTON** ATTEMPTS TO FIND OUT...

**"If You Believe, They Put A Man On The Moon...?"**

**Neil Armstrong – First Step... Last Step?**

By Andrew Darlington

**LEGENDS IN THEIR OWN LAUNCH-TIMES**

It's precisely 09:18 pm, 20th July 1969.

And Neil Armstrong is up there, right now, stomping an indelible human footprint into moon-dust. As first steps and giant leaps go, it's a pretty spectacular stunt. Global audiences goggle at blurry black-and-white TV imagery, indistinct shadows beamed direct through 250,000 miles of dead space, via NASA. I certainly am... I certainly was. Monday, July 21st 1969. The weather is warm and dry. And the *Daily Sketch* (a now long-extinct tabloid) costs just fivepence. Old money. It boasts a **"FIRST MEN ON THE MOON"** Souvenir Pull-Out headlining **"MOON WALK: THE FIRST PICTURE"**. I've still got my copy. The same-day's *Daily Mirror* announces "Man has landed on the Moon. A new era in history began when the lunar module 'EAGLE' settled gently onto the dusty surface of the Sea of Tranquillity". It continues with appropriate gravity, "America, the land of frontiers, has opened up a new frontier", its astronauts "destined now for a permanent place in history". For those who don't read history, Apollo 11 took an eight-day round-trip lunar excursion. Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin EVA'd for two hours, moon-walking far enough to collect 21.75kgs of moon-rock while the less fortunate Michael Collins remained 80-miles-high above them in lunar parking orbit.

Meanwhile, closer to the real world – but not quite, novelist J.

G. Ballard's reaction to the moon-plaque wording *"We Came In Peace For All Mankind"* was a predictably downbeat "if I were a Martian I'd start running *now*".

That all occurred thirty years ago. That is – three-oh, as in a triple-decade later. And we are still here. While the alleged Martians are still there. Still largely untroubled by terrestrial tourism. Of course, there were further moon landings in the years that followed. Apollo 12 – carrying astronauts Pete Conrad and Alan Bean, touched down in Oceanus Procellarum just months later, on 19th November. Conrad even took time out to rendezvous with the remains of *Surveyor* – an earlier robotic probe, to discover that Earth-based life-forms had actually preceded Armstrong to the Moon. Microbes – "spicules in the styrofoam" from a careless technician's sneeze during assembly, had got there first, and survived, dormant but alive, in the total lunar vacuum. Then came Apollo 14, launched from Cape Kennedy in January 1971. It made lunar touch-down on 5th February – splashing home into the Pacific just four days later. It was followed by Apollo 15 (26th July) from which Dave Scott and Jim Irwin took a 30km drive in a Lunar Roving Vehicle around the Hadley Rill, and Apollo 16 (16th April 1972). Until the *last* men on the moon – geologist Dr Harrison Schmitt and Eugene Evans, lifted off from an area known as Taurus-Littrow in the 14th December 1972 with the words "let's get this Mother out of here".

They splash-down in the South Pacific just five days later. And that's it. Since then, in terms of human travel to other worlds, there's been only silence. Nothing. Nada.

Now it's 1999. In TV's recently re-screened Sci-Fi romp *Space 1999* there is an extensive complex of permanently inhabited lunar bases used as waste-dumps for Earth's hazardous spent nuclear fuel. Sure, they got other stuff wrong too. The Zapata moustaches and the flares. But in the long-lost 1970s when the series was first made it seemed not only reasonable, but entirely inevitable that by the turn of the century – that is, *HERE* and *NOW* – there would be humans living on the moon. Further back, in the 1950s, grubby schoolboys were enthralled by the exploits of comic-strip hero *Dan Dare: Pilot Of The Future*. His "Red Moon" adventure (serialised through 1951/2) opens precisely at 22:00 hrs, 29th September 1999, when Earth has colonies – not only on the Moon, but on Mars and Venus too. And here we are now, living in their future. The "new era in history" that Neil Armstrong was supposedly opening. And all that hasn't happened. Yet...

Instead I find myself talking in the foyer of a late-night multiplex cinema awash with luminous *Phantom Menace* hype. And we wind up discussing the Tom Hanks movie *Apollo 13* – the dramatisation of the aborted moon-mission, the lunar-landing that so spectacularly failed, and Tony – this friend-of-a-friend says "I never watched it. I'm not into Sci-Fi". "Sci-Fi? *Sci-Fi?!?!?*" explodes wild-eyed Trekkie Neil, "the events portrayed in that movie are *not* Sci-Fi. They happened. They are real. They are actual events from actual history. Just because the action is all about rockets, spacesuits and other worlds, just because it all takes place in outer space, that don't make it Sci-Fi." Scruffing his fingers through his untidy spray of hair, but more rationally now, he adds "*Apollo 13* must be considered historical costume-drama. More so even than, say, *Saving Private Ryan* or Oliver Stone's *JFK*..."

But think about that brief exchange, and what's happening now – thirty years after Neil Armstrong took that first step and that giant leap for all mankind. What's happening is that not only is the manned space programme to other worlds long-dead, but its already in the process of being shunted off sideways into the never-never fabrications of Science Fiction. As though it never happened. Unless you're one of those Conspiracy Theory ex(Files)centrics who still persist in believing that the whole thing actually never *did* happen. That the angles of light and shadow on the supposed lunar surface are wrong – "*freeze-frame the footage, LOOK-AT-IT, LOOK-AT-IT!!!!*". That the entire thing was a monumental fake staged in some secret American TV studio buried deep beneath Area 51, like in the lunar mock-up James Bond stumbles onto in *Diamonds Are Forever*. Or the phoney Mars mission mounted in the 1978 Elliott Gould/O.J. Simpson movie *Capricorn One*...?

## DESTINATION MOON

Of course, it was JFK – President John F. Kennedy, just prior to the events portrayed in Oliver Stone's movie, who started it all, sort-of. He promised his eager electorate – if not the stars, then at least a slice of lunar real-estate. In a speech he gave on the 25th May 1961 he pledged "that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth. No space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind or more

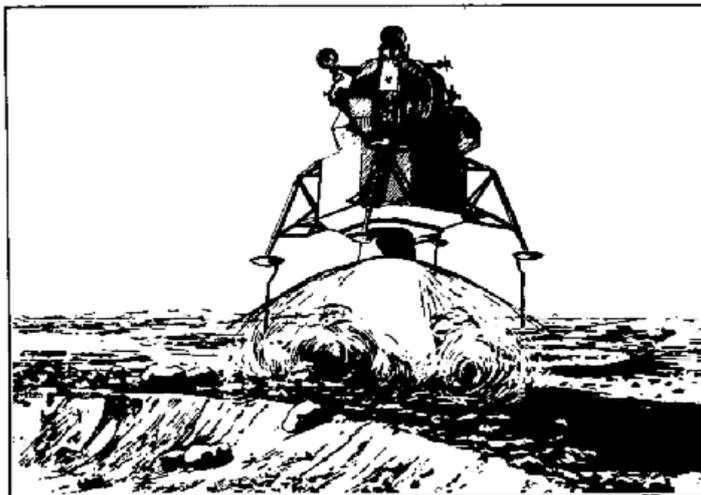
important for the long-range exploration of space". He set the target. He set the schedule. Both were achieved.

But he was working within a couple of unique preconditions. The first was the Cold War. The Soviet Union had just soundly trashed the USA in the Space Race to launch the first unmanned satellite. Then they'd shot Yuri Gagarin into orbit, and into history as the first living breathing human to blast free of Earth. So what happens if the Soviets get to the Moon first? The nation that controls the Moon rules the Earth, doesn't it? Them Evil Commie Bastards can zap nuclear death down on the Free World Democracies from lunar-based rocket-launch sites, can't they? Actually no. It's a highly unlikely and technically unfeasible scenario. But back then at the peak of Dr Strangelove Atomic

Paranoia it seemed reason enough to make sure that America got there first. And the might of the military-industrial complex was more than ready to benefit from the near-limitless financial largesse such a political strategy offered...

While the relentless talk-up propaganda of the Science Fiction industry must also accept its share of blame. The editorial of *Astounding Stories* No.1 (January 1930) tantalises its eager readers with the lure that "tomorrow, more astounding things are going to happen. Your children, or their children, are going to take a

trip to the Moon". A prediction, according to Arthur C. Clarke, "triumphantly fulfilled. The children of 1930 did indeed walk on the Moon". A process that Clarke could justifiably claim a hands-on part in. He was still in his early twenties in Winter 1944, at the close of World War 2 "when only a few aircraft had flown at the staggering speed of 300mph". But already he was addicted to crude rocketry and to what was, with ludicrously naive optimism called the British Interplanetary Society. He relates with undiminished joy how the Nazi V2 rockets, Hitler's last and most lethal secret weapons, rained death on England from their European bases. Because, hey look – the V2 is a *rocket*. An unmanned rocket-powered projectile launched in Northern Europe, crossing an expanse of sea and hostile terrain, before falling to Earth many miles from its point of origin. Blowing it all to hell in the process. But hey! – it even *looks* like a spaceship from the garish covers of *Amazing Stories* or *Astounding SF*. Young Arthur C. promptly declared the then-unknown inventor of the V2 an honorary member of the BIS. It's all there in his autobiographical *Astounding Days*. But the most bizarre aspect of the entire anecdote is what happened next. The guy who invented the V2 is Dr Wernher Von Braun, allegedly used as a model for Peter Sellers' movie portrayal of the Dr Strangelove character. But beyond that, as Nazi Germany fell apart, the good Doctor got himself snatched by encroaching Americans – in fact he was made a priority target. And he subsequently used his rocketry expertise to become the architect of the American Space Programme. Just as the Russians, who arrived at the V2 launch-sites a little later, took Von Braun's co-workers and schematics back to the USSR to initiate *their* Space project. And when it all culminated in 1969 with Neil Armstrong stepping onto the dusty surface of the Sea of Tranquillity, a little-older Arthur C. Clarke was there at NASA headquarters in Houston to watch the history he'd so fervently anticipated and propagandised unfolding.



Landing On Moon

The proto-astronauts of H.G. Wells' *The First Men In The Moon* precede Neil Armstrong by a good sixty years. But across that span of time – between a succession of hugely inventive and maniacally inspired writers – including Clarke, had constructed a consensual future-scenario, learning and copying from each other, inspired by and adding to each other's visions. What began as freaky-wild speculation gradually assumed a conformity of more-or-less accepted contours. Human beings *would* achieve space flight. This would logically lead to a first landing on the moon, and then to semi-permanent colonies there. Pressurised domes. Perhaps roofed-over craters. They would become a jump-off point for longer-range expeditions to Mars and Venus, where self-sustaining colonies would be established, ultimately terraforming the inhospitable bleakness of those world through vast planetary engineering, into near-Earth facsimiles. There would be mining-ships prospecting into the asteroid belt. Then to the frigid methane-moons of Saturn and Jupiter. Eventually – just as the American colonies had broken free of British domination, so would the new Martian nations declare their independence from Mother Earth... while just around this point in time, through the benevolent intervention of a convenient alien species, or the invention of some kind of hyper-warp-drive jump-gate, ships would break free of the Solar System and reach out for the distant points of the stars. This became the accepted trajectory of future history. Time-scales vary from writer to writer. Details are obviously different with each story. But by the time JFK came along these expectations were already subliminally programmed in.

Arthur C. Clarke/Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* slapped that vision onto the big-screen, intellectually legitimising it. Gene Roddenberry dragged it out of the sf closet and universalised it through *Star Trek* and its spin-off series. *Space 1999* buys into the same scam. So does Dan Dare. But Martian colonies? Patrick Moore – yes, *that* Patrick Moore, wrote a book in 1957 called *Science and Fiction* in which he explains that the only justifiable excuse for the sf genre is as an educational tool to teach people, and to teach children in particular, about the basics of astronomy, and to school them in the potential for human exploration of space, and to do it in a fictional but fact-based form. His own attempts – including a novel called *The Domes of Mars* describe Martian colonies within the strictures of what was then assumed to be realistically science-based speculation – yet it includes oxygenating plant-life and small native mammals. Martian Life? Current conjectures hope to just-possibly find smudgy discolourations inside rocks that might – just might have been some kind of crude microbes that just might have briefly survived there before lethal extinctions several billion years ago. And it would be logistically easier and infinitely cheaper to create new cities in Antarctica, or in the middle of the bleakest expanse of the Sahara Desert – more hospitable zones by far, than anything that we now know for a fact that Mars has to offer. Patrick Moore's sf turns out, with time, to be just as impractical and factually inaccurate as the wildest horror-sf comic-strips he condemns.

"In a century that will otherwise be remembered for its conflicts and slaughter" according to *Observer* writer Robin McKie, "the US-manned lunar landing stands out as a rare human achievement, a worthy use of technology that demonstrates our species' greatest attributes – intellect, and a startlingly co-

operative nature. [Apollo 11...] was a triumph of ingenuity, and the handiwork of thousands of dedicated technicians, scientists and administrators." But was it any more than just that? Is manned space flight to other worlds *still* the future... or just the outmoded dream of fanatical but deluded obsessives and the fading fantasies of vacuum-headed Trekkies?

## BEYOND THE HIGH FRONTIER

They came in Peace for all mankind.

That means me and you.

And during those brief Apollo years a dozen Americans stomped around the Moon. All those crop-headed Right Stuff NASA heroes doing ludicrous leaps and ungainly gravity-less lurches across black-and-white emptiness. Posing for photos that would be temporarily immortalised as T-shirts and student wall-posters for a month or so. Playing golf between craters. Trying to express inexpressible sensations of awe and wonder between bursts of static and bleeping radio interference. And what a fantastic adventure it all was. But what was it all about? What did it *mean*? The *Eagle's* journey transfixed the world. But within a year, the public lost interest in Apollo missions. Mankind's greatest adventure became tedious.



Ascent Stage Launch

Television ratings plummeted and missions were curtailed. Even now the lunar astronauts are receding further into history, and into irrelevance. They turn up as curios on TV Chat-Shows, awkward and out-of-place wedged in between Pop Divas and Soap Posers, they do the Betty Ford rehab clinics, co-author bad sf novels, become Born-Again Christians, do the lecture circuit, or guest on *Blue Peter*. Solid, humourless and slightly dull men. Men who once crossed space and trod an alien world.

Even the cutting edge of sf has long-since lost interest in hard-core space exploration. Moving instead into the cyber-dimensions of inner-space. Perhaps Apollo 11 made that development inevitable? Yet the Starship Enterprise continues to encounter a relentlessly tedious number of Earth-type planets on a weekly televisual schedule. Perhaps the dream is so seductively alluring we actually *want* to believe it approximates something of what the future will really be like? But even though the Moon Landing was fictionally rehearsed a million times, no-one got it right. Not one. Neil Armstrong is *not* Captain Kirk. Flight to a neighbouring star takes the Enterprise a matter of hours complicated by nothing more serious than a furrowed astrogational brow. The reality is more on par with a flea on a dog in Dublin contemplating a hop to the back of a dog in Buenos Aires. Times a thousand. And then some. And those enthusiasts who suggest short-cuts through stable Wormholes, Black Hole Singularities or Fractal Cores simply don't understand the real science involved.

Now I find myself talking in the late-night foyer of a multiplex cinema awash with luminous *Phantom Menace* hype. And we wind up discussing the future destiny of humans in space. "But I believe" protests Trekkie Neil, adjusting his glasses further up the bridge of his nose, "that relentless human ingenuity, resourcefulness and invention can resolve whatever obstacles it encounters". "Yeah sure" snorts Tony derisively, "you mean like when Geordi and Data look quizzically at each other, and tentatively suggest 'what if we reconfigure the Dilithium matrix... ?'" With a cool air of scientific superiority he adds "physics could impose insurmountable restrictions that are absolute and

incapable of resolution. Perhaps 'you *canna* change the laws of physics'? What futurology *should* be demonstrating is that there's *no* inevitability about tomorrow. One hundred years ago the idea that human destiny lay in an inexorable expansion into – and beyond, the solar system would have been considered patently absurd. One hundred years from now it could again seem equally absurd. The entire manned Space Programme could be seen as an eccentric and rather quaintly excessive by-product of Twentieth-Century technophilia. A massive indecipherable cultural folly on par with building the pyramids or constructing the geometrical Nazca Lines scratched into the plains of Peru. Magnificently mind-boggling, but pointless."

Me? I'd guess I'm somewhere between the two extremes. Long after the late twentieth century bad guys Milosevic, Hussein and Pol Pot are forgotten, the concurrent advances in sub-atomic particle physics, genetic research, and astrophysics *will* continue to shape human self-awareness of our place in creation. And the Moon landing was part of it. The Greatest Story Ever Sold. But it was not – in the final analysis, the most significant part of it. The orbiting Hubble Space Telescope with its view back to the very dawn of creation, the Viking soft-lander on Mars, Voyagers 1 and 2 sweeping past Jupiter and Saturn's strange moons and out beyond the heliopause rim, all add more to the human database than the Apollo missions ever did. This is science. Not fiction.

But what about the manifest destiny of the race? Neil excitedly quotes the eggs-and-basket scenario. "What if the extinction-event *Armageddon*-asteroid arrives, as statistically it must? With humankind confined to just one world, *this is the end, beautiful friend*. Then there's the Malthus-projection which shows with chill mathematical precision that a single planet will be incapable of supporting continued population growth into the middle of the next century..." And of course, the technology exists *now* to mount an expedition to Mars. It has existed since the last Apollo mission when they were using slide-rules and computers not nearly as sophisticated as the home-PC's everyone now buys from Dixons. It could be done, providing the political will gives it the necessary shove. It could happen tomorrow. Some starry-eyed dreamers could be sealed up in a telephone-kiosk drinking their own urine for months on end to reach a lifeless airless chunk of rock millions of miles into a nothingness bleaker and more empty than anything we can envisage. It could be done today. If they asked for volunteers they'd be inundated with more offers than they could deal with. I might even be one of them. And hey – people sailed around the world in the 16th century under roughly similar levels of deprivation with even less of an idea as to where on earth they'd wind up.

In part, the Space Shuttles that followed the last of the Apollo missions were NASA's face-saving operation, but they were also

attempts to make a human presence in space demonstratively and sustainably cost-effective. Along such lines, advances in computer micro-circuitry and lighter cheaper designer-alloys could yet make the moon re-accessible without the old techno-giganticism of the late sixties. Kim Stanley Robinson's epic *Red Mars* even suggests that a new set of political urgencies could grow out of the

conditions now replacing the old Cold War. His protagonists went to Mars "because Russia and our USA were desperate, that's why. Decrepit, outmoded industrial dinosaurs, that's what we were, about to get eaten up by Japan and Europe and all the little tigers popping up in Asia. And we had all this Space expertise going to waste, and a couple of huge and unnecessary aerospace industries, and so we pooled them and came here (to Mars) on the chance that we'd find something worthwhile, and it paid off!" Or then again, instead of political powerblocks it could fall to competing

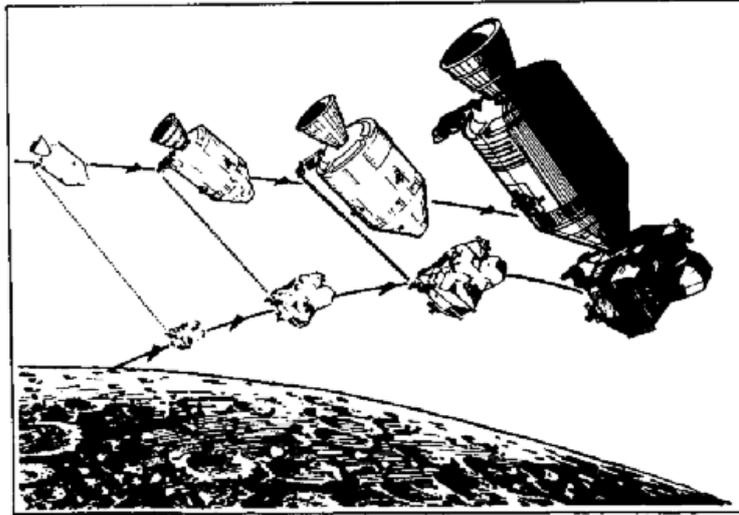
multinationals to make lunar exploitation economically viable. Perhaps through one of Kim Stanley's Euro-Japanese or Asian tigers, maybe a Nissan, Toyota or Hyundai lunar module? And while in *2001: A Space Odyssey* the stunning visual waltz of docking with the International Space Station remains part of a great movie, we *have* an International Space Station now in construction to replace the decommissioned Mir. It will have little to match the splendour of Kubrick's original, and it won't come on-line until 2004. But at least it's happening. So while J. G. Ballard's alleged Martians are still there, still largely untroubled by terrestrial tourism, they should still be more that a little concerned about their rowdy upstart near-neighbour. Against all the odds I'd like to see human beings land on Mars. And I hope I'm alive long enough to see it happen.

It's precisely 09:18 pm, 20th July 1969. And Neil Armstrong is up there stomping an indelible human footprint into moon-dust, opening up "a new era in history". Thirty years later, that is three-oh, as in a triple-decade later, as I write this, here and now, that footprint is still there at lunar 0.7N, 23.AE. Still pristine. Still undisturbed in that spectacularly windless erosion-free lunar vacuum. As first steps and giant leaps go, it remains a pretty spectacular stunt. First Step... Last Step? Don't be too sure.

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Poet Andrew Darlington previously appeared in Vector around 1977 and 1978, contributing articles on William S. Burroughs, Philip E. High, Michael Moorcock, interviewing M. John Harrison in 1984 and then disappearing from our magazines until he started contributing to Focus in the late 1990s — Eds.

The illustrations accompanying this article are taken from the NASA on-line archive of Apollo mission press-kits (at <http://www-lib.ksc.nasa.gov/lib/archives/presskits.html>) — TC.



Rendezvous And Docking

IN THE FINAL PART OF OUR SEQUENCE ON THE INTERSECTION OF MUSIC AND SCIENCE FICTION, ANDREW M. BUTLER FOCUSES IN ON A MISSISSIPPI BLUESMAN, ROBERT JOHNSON

## The Music of the Spheres Part 5: Standin' at the Crossroads: Sf and Robert Johnson's Blues

by Andrew M. Butler

His life is in itself a horror story. They say he sold his soul to the Devil at a cross-roads in order to learn how to play guitar and to play the Blues. His life is in itself a story of what might have been. They say he was going to play at Carnegie Hall. His life is a murder mystery. They say he was murdered: at Three Forks, Greenwood, Mississippi he was having an affair with the owner of the club he was playing in, and the cuckolded husband seems to have poisoned him.

Curiously his two songs about Satan or cross-roads – 'Me and the Devil' and 'Cross Road Blues' – fail to capitalise on his Satanic reputation, and it is the sort of tale that could be told about any number of guitar players, as updates of the fiddle competition with the Devil. Nor do the stories I've chosen to focus on – T. Coraghessan Boyle's 'Stones in My Passway, Hellhound on my Trail', Paul McAuley's 'Crossroads' and Jack Womack's *Terraplane* – pay particular attention to it, although the McAuley offers an alternative, albeit science fictional, possibility. But that Carnegie Hall concert rankles as a missed possibility, and the death becomes of world-wide consequence.

The Blues have their origin in Spirituals sung in late nineteenth-century America, and are characterised by a sense of loss, or on many occasions, by sexual suggestiveness and innuendo. The dominant instrument is the guitar, whether it is played with fingers or a plectrum, with or without a slide moved up and down the fret board. In addition harmonicas and pianos feature heavily, but a solo singer/guitarist, perhaps with his own harmonica, could be sufficient to play the Blues. In the 1920s and early 1930s Blues was centred on the Mississippi Delta, the province of poverty-stricken African Americans, in places like New Orleans and Atlanta. However, musicians were often to travel hundreds of miles to play. Record companies, realising they had a large market to tap into with the new, cutting edge technology of the 78rpm shellac record, sent agents around the Deep South to look for potential stars. And the Library of Congress had long been recording folk music in the field, as it were, and included Blues amongst their remit. They preserved many musicians who may have otherwise gone unremarked.

Robert Spencer – later Robert Johnson – could have so easily have drifted into obscurity. He was born in 1911 in Hazlehurst, Mississippi and in his teens started playing the harmonica with a local group of Blues musicians in Robinsonville. He was a fumbling guitar player, and seemed at that point unlikely ever to impress or excel. Following the death of his first wife in childbirth he left town; on his return his guitar playing was improved beyond recognition, having been tutored by one Ike Zinneman or Zimmerman, a Blues guitarist who never recorded. In addition to the standard tuning of his guitar in the keys of A and E, he also

used the open tuning in G or D, allowing a much more complex series of chords to be made with the left hand. In addition he would play a boogie style bass line on the bottom strings of the guitar.

For a few years he toured Mississippi and Arkansas. In 1935 the American Record Company was searching for new talent and one of their agents, H. C. Speir, auditioned Johnson. As a result Johnson spent the end of November 1936 in a San Antonio hotel room, recording sixteen tracks. One track, "Terraplane Blues", became a hit and so the following year he recorded another thirteen songs in Dallas, in all likelihood at the record company's warehouse.

The records reached the ears of a producer, John Hammond, who in 1938 was putting together a concert called "Spirituals to Swing" for Carnegie Hall, New York. He sent representatives out in search of Johnson, but by then, of course, Johnson was lying in an unmarked grave.

T. Coraghessan Boyle is the mainstream's answer to Howard Waldrop: the person who sees the outré possibilities: the real reason for the Cold War (Eisenhower's affair with Nina Kruschew), a PR makeover for the Ayatollah, and Lassie reaching the end of her tether. "Stones in My Passway, Hellhound on my Trail" is his Robert Johnson story, although it has to be confessed that it's not the encounter with the Devil which I'd have expected from this author. Instead, it is an account of Johnson's last hours, intercut with an account of the rest of his life.

Here his musical education is offstage, the record company is Victrix, the recording in New Orleans: poor research on my or his part, or alternate history? Here we get the sense of Robert Johnson the man: always a few cents short for a whore, loved by all the women, admired for his guitar technique by all the men. The catalogue of places he played – "Lubbock, Natchez, Pascagoula, Dallas, Eudora, Rosedale, Baton Rouge, Memphis, Friars Point, Vicksburg, Jonesboro, Mooringsport, Edwards, Chattanooga, Rolling Fork, Commerce, Itta Bena" (pp. 330-1) – is juxtaposed with those of his sexual conquests – "Thelma, Betty Mae, Adeline, Harriet, Bernice, Ida Bell, Bertha Lee, Winifred, Maggie, Willie Mae" (p. 331).

Around him world events are unfolding, Hitler has come to power in Germany, Franco is fighting a civil war in Spain, a World Fair is held in Chicago. But just as America at this point in its history had withdrawn from world affairs into a non-interventionist position, so Johnson knows nothing of world affairs. Johnson is just a guitarist, with no impact on the world aside from jealous husbands and spurned ex-lovers. He becomes a tragic hero, described as "Agamemnon" (p. 332), after the general murdered by his wife Clytemnestra upon returning home from the Trojan Wars with his lover, Cassandra.

Johnson's current conquest is Beatrice and the club owner's



daughter Ida Mae Ross is jealous. Johnson hasn't eaten in two days and the rat poison is to hand and –

And then suddenly the voice chokes off, gags, the guitar slips to the floor with a percussive shock. His bowels are on fire. He stands, clutches his abdomen, drops to hands and knees... He looks like a sword run through him, panting, the shock waves pounding through his frame, looks up at the pine plank, the barrels, the cold, hard features of the girl with the silver necklace in her hand. Looks up and snarls (p. 333).

Traditionally it was poisoned whiskey that did for Johnson, but here it seems to be eggs and ham. Here he turns into a mad dog, something possessed, like the hound Boyle describes him as seeing at the age of fifteen, like the hellhound on his trail in the lyrics of his song.

The truth is more likely to be that Johnson carried on playing as best he could, before going on to a boarding house in Greenwood, where he sweated the poison out of his system. Alas he caught pneumonia and died on August 16 1938. But then in the battle between truth and legend, we go for the legend every time.

Paul McAuley's Johnson wasn't poisoned, or least, wasn't poisoned at first. Not only has he gone on to play the Carnegie Hall concert, but he's survived into the 1940s, only to be felled by an assassin's bullet six months after the United States has become desegregated. In fact, the impression is given that this Robert Johnson is a sort of Nelson Mandela figure, the figurehead of a battle against America's apartheid. So, following the assassination of President (presumably Robert?) Kennedy in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel, America has its first black president, Adam Clayton Powell, who is replaced after his second turn with President Ronald Reagan, star of the film *Casablanca*. This is a non-interventionist America, more concerned with its own internal problems, and so it is Russia who has fulfilled its aim of getting a man to the moon by 1970.

But America does have time travel, the Loop, and Ike Turner has gone back to the 1940s to record Johnson's concerts for posterity. An amateur guitarist himself, Turner decides to try to travel back in time and teach Johnson rock and roll; in fact he ends up spending a month teaching him to play the guitar. Ike thus becomes the devil, and is arrested and imprisoned for his attempt to change history, his attempt to bring desegregation forward a decade.

Whilst this attempt has failed, he comes to the notice of a certain Captain North, who offers Turner another chance to change history:

"Like you, we think that something in Robert Johnson's life may be a critical branch point. Go down one road and you reach here. Go down another, and maybe desegregation occurs later, gives us space to enter the war on the side of the British, before the Yalta Treaty. *We'll* beat the Nazis, *we'll* be the world power, big as the Brits or Russians" (p. 14).

In order for this to happen, Johnson has to be stopped from becoming famous. Turner tours with Johnson around the south, but it is clear that his love of music may win out over the mission, even though he is being shadowed by one of North's faction.

In the end, Johnson is poisoned after all, possibly by someone's jealous lover or a jealous woman, presumably by someone from the future:

Robert Johnson suddenly sat down on his stool, holding his stomach... Johnson plucked at his guitar, started in on *Stones in My Passway*, which by rights belonged near the end of the set... Johnson collapsed, his guitar slamming down in a howl of feedback that merged into weird howls as if the pit of hell had been opened. (p. 16)

Johnson dies, segregation lasts another twenty years and Nixon becomes President, a Nixon who clearly hadn't even been vice president of the FBI in the other time line.

It's perhaps a bit much to have Johnson as this significant to world affairs, but he stands as a symbol of felled ambition and

what might have been. The story is also a very typical *Interzone* story, in a style of name dropping and in-jokes that seems more typical of Eugene Byrne and Kim Newman's collaborations. Curiously it remains uncollected in either of McAuley's two short story collections.

There is a moment in a perceptive review of Jack Womack's *Elvissey* where the reviewer Simon Ings is more accurate than he apparently realises: "[The novel describes] the most credible Nazi alternate [world]... since Dick's *Man in the High Castle* (to which the first half of *Elvissey* acts as, but is probably not, an homage)" (Ings p. 122). Ings is right to be cautious about the extent of Womack's reading in sf; in fact Womack has confessed to me that: "I'd read next to no science fiction". On the other hand, Womack went immediately on to admit: "At that point I had read, er, only Philip K. Dick, I'd read his *The Man in the High Castle*". It was partially the alternate history aspect of the novel which attracted him: "I've always liked alternate histories – history being one of my fields of interest. I'm always thinking, you know, 'For want of the nail, the shoe be lost' sort of thing. And then when I read that one, that would have been, not that long before I began writing *Ambient*".

*Elvissey* and *Ambient* are two novels in a projected six-book sequence which describes the fortunes of Dryco or the Dryden Corporation, a big business with tentacles across the world whose fortune has clearly been built upon drug trafficking and tactically applied violence. Being potentially big enough to be a country (rather like the gangs in *The Sopranos*, Dryco is a metaphor for the state of the US), Dryco takes an interest in world and domestic affairs, whether it be engineering a messiah or taking out competing businesses in Japan or Soviet Russia. In *Elvissey* Dryco sends a mission to kidnap Elvis Presley from the environment, either an alternate history or parallel world, which had first been discovered in *Terraplane*. In the world of the novel *Terraplane*, Johnson has survived, allowing Womack to depict:

Johnson coming to New York, again, and, as he certainly seems to have done at one point during the thirties, but never had the chance to again, when he came back for the Carnegie Hall concert, the "Spirituals to Swing" in '38, since he had died beforehand.

This alternate 1930s is encountered by accident. On a mission in Soviet Russia, a group of Dryco employees make their escape by engaging a stolen experimental drive, which either takes them in time to an alternate history or shoots them into a parallel world lagging some sixty years behind them. There they encounter Robert Johnson, whose song "Terraplane Blues" clearly gives the novel its title. The appearance of Robert Johnson here, and Elvis later – two musicians, one black who sang African American music, one white who in another world sang black music – allows Womack to explore the theme of racism.

It is tempting to suggest that Womack absorbed this thematic concern in part from his reading of Dick – who voted for Martin Luther King in 1960 and had major and minor black characters throughout his 1950s sf and mainstream fiction. Dick's classic alternate history, *The Man in the High Castle*, set in an Axis-dominated world, is clearly set in a racist environment. But there is a further parallel world which may or may not be the world which constitutes 'reality', which is both alternate to the Nazi occupied one, and the Allies-ruled one of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, a book within the book. Having meditated on a piece of jewellery, Tagomi passes across to an alternate San Francisco, which is racist in a different way to the anti-Semitic and anti-African way of the environment he is familiar with:

[Tagomi] winced and made his way to the counter. All stools taken by whites. Mr. Tagomi exclaimed. Several whites looked up. But none departed their places. None yielded their stools to him. They merely resumed supping.

'I insist!' Mr. Tagomi said loudly to the first white; he shouted in the man's ear.

The man put down his coffee mug and said, 'Watch it, Tojo.' (p. 199)

Although the Nazis of the Axis-dominated world may be gearing up to wipe out the Japanese, there is little anti-Nipponese feeling in the novel. And if the world Tagomi slips through to is our world, it demonstrates the racism which is part of it.

When I interviewed Womack, I suggested to him that the way he used his parallel world reminded me of the relation that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* plays to the world of *The Man in the High Castle*:

I rather liked that notion of there being like just several [worlds], and I just sort of like played with that a bit with this book [*Elvissey*]. Basically with the parallel world in my universe, I just want to posit a world which is not only different from the one which we share, but is in many ways, even worse. And it's just sort of like, you get your choice of dystopias... The parallel world allows me to make that world, to bring, to make that world somehow a little more homier, in a bizarre kind of way, just that you can say, 'Phew, we're back', where you can just, you know, figure that, you know, everyone's killing each other but at least we know why.

When the characters in *Terraplane* and *Elvissey* pass over to the parallel world, it demonstrates that their world, violent as it is, does lack any obvious racism. For Womack this is perhaps the only plus point for his created world:

[T]he one semi-positive aspect the world in which most of these characters happen, which is purely illusory on my part because it's, as we know, probably one of the least expected things to happen, is that by the time things are taking place in this world things are so horrible and awful that the, er, obviously terrible race problem of the US has to a large degree abated, because... everyone has realized that they're in the same boat.

This is perhaps to move a fair way from Robert Johnson: the man himself is lost in this sketching out of the themes.

To return to Johnson then, he is idolised by Jake the Dryco bodyguard who is along on the trip. Jake could just be another thug, as likely to break arms and skulls as shake hands, but his musical side humanises him. Womack sees him as the archetypal Dryco employee:

Jake is the one who is most representative in terms of a human being, most representative of Dryco, a personification of Dryco as being essentially just, you know "We're here to do this, and this is what I'll do, and it's not very pleasant, but I do it very well". Jake has essentially had to circumscribe his emotionally life in so many ways, that this was just like the one outlet that he found, of a kindred spirit, and it's more than just a personality thing, Jake identifies with Johnson's belief that "I'm going to be doing this, but I'm cursed, but I have to do it because essentially my soul was essentially sold for me many years ago, or if it wasn't then it should've have been".

Jake was more able to attune into a certain aspect of black experience, than [his boss] Luther specifically apparently was able to, having proceeded to have gone through the process of essentially deracinating himself, which of course is the main part of *Terraplane*, where he is forced to confront the fact that "Gee, I

am black, after all".

Even more than Turner, then, Jake finds out his own identity through his engagement with the music of Robert Johnson.

All three of the writers who produced the stories I've discussed are white males, active in the 1980s or 1990s, a far cry from the 1930s Mississippi Delta. The rock god status of bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and guitarists such as Eric Clapton, all of whom drew on Johnson and other Blues legends for their music, is a long way from the protest of an oppressed culture. And the phenomenon of the wigger, the increasing tendency of some white British teens to speak with a Caribbean accent demonstrates that appropriation of other cultures can be awkward at best, and the concept of white, male, urban middle class angst is not entirely convincing.

Yet music does cross cultures. In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* music is used as the first communication with the aliens. In *The Sparrow* it is music that inspires the Jesuits to cross the light years. Whilst it is clearly impossible for us to share Johnson's experiences, his music speaks across the generations and races, allow us to empathise with his emotions.

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### Discography

*The Blues Collection* 6, one of a 90 part work published by Orbis, is devoted to Robert Johnson, from which part of my information was taken. This CD shows up secondhand and includes 18 tracks and liner notes. Alternatively the vinyl *King of the Delta Blues* offers a selection with liner notes, apparently of dubious accuracy. In 1990 the complete range of 29 tracks plus alternate takes were released as *The Complete Recordings* (CBS467246), more recently re-released as *The Gold Collection* (R2CD 40-41) on the Retro label in 1995. Other versions are no doubt available.

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## Cognitive Mapping 17: Backwards

by Paul Kincaid

We have always moved through time in two directions at once: in experience we go forwards, but in memory we go back. It was Søren Kierkegaard who said: "Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward." Science-fiction writers would appear to be well-placed to explore that understanding.

In a sense, H. G. Wells gave them the chance to do so with

his scientific, technological formulation of time travel in *The Time Machine* (1895). But although most science-fiction writers have at one time or another explored the possibility of sudden dislocation to another time, few have gone for the glimpse of understanding that Kierkegaard suggested might be found in a life lived backwards.

There are two possible reasons for this. One is that travelling backwards in time reverses the flow of causality that has been a staple of Western intellectual life since David Hume. Going backward, the effect will precede the cause. Visually this can be fun, and film makers from the earliest silent comedies onwards have delighted in the opportunities presented by running the film in reverse, but for writers going beyond the visual joke creates genuine problems. Lewis Carroll explored this in passing in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), but it was one of his games with logic, much like the filmmaker playing a scene in reverse it was an effect without real affect. It wasn't really until T. H. White

produced an echo of Kierkegaard's aphorism in the character of Merlin who lives his life backwards that the consequences of such an experience began to be explored. Merlin's wisdom gained at the expense of remembering the future, and hence the fate that awaits everyone including himself, is one of the few shadows to hang over the otherwise almost unfailingly sunny first three books of *The Once and Future King* (1938-58). In the dark and brooding final volume, *The Candle in the Wind* (1958), the whole tragedy is seen to hinge upon the related problems of age, memory and nostalgia.

For though White made no attempt to address the logic or the mechanics of living backwards, he did recognise one overwhelming truth, and the second reason why so few authors have touched on the theme: it is a tragedy which, despite Kierkegaard, doesn't really bring understanding. Rather, it dislocates the character totally from human experience – if the relationship between cause and effect is turned totally upon its head, then so is everything underpinned by causality, including our moral sense. As the protagonist of *The Man Who Lived Backward* suggests, it has turned him into a monster, not because of any evil act – on the contrary, he spends the book trying to do good (as the story opens he laments his inability to prevent the assassination of Lincoln, and throughout the book he makes repeated attempts to alter the course of history with, inevitably, no success) – but as he knows the effect has already happened, he cannot change the cause. Determinism makes monsters of us all. And determinism is unavoidable in stories of people living backwards in time, it is the only story to tell – a third reason why it is so uncommon in the literature.

The two most significant works of science fiction which explore this theme – *An Age* (1967) by Brian Aldiss and *Counter-Clock World* (1967) by Philip K. Dick – both expend most of their ingenuity in trying to sidestep determinism.

Although Aldiss and Dick approach the subject in different ways – in *An Age* our protagonist is an assassin sent back in time, in *Counter-Clock World* we are in an entire community suffering the after-effects of what is called the "Hobart Phase"

– they both use the image of a world gone awry to explore what was, for them, familiar territory. For Aldiss, time out of step is a symbol of the totalitarianism for which is protagonist is an agent, and the haunting figure of the Dark Woman is a symbol of rightness. For Dick, the dead rising from their graves, the reverse of social custom over matters of eating and excretion, are ways of expressing once more the unreliability of our consensus reality, the need to doubt what we see. Though Aldiss's story is rather better than Dick's, neither represents the writer at his best, and in neither case is the consequence of backwards time, the way it overthrows our normal moral considerations,

"You mean there may be other folk living like you?"  
 "Perhaps. I don't know. I have searched hundreds of faces looking for a sign."  
 "Find any?"  
 "Not for sure. Anyone in my case would be clever to hide it. God made men into families and tribes moving on the same trek. Anyone going the opposite way would appear monstrous. No one, not even I, likes to be thought a monster."

Malcolm Ross – *The Man Who Lived Backward* (1950)

explored with any conviction or determination.

It was left to Gordon Eklund, in his little-known story 'The Retro Man', to tackle the whole question of determinism head-on. After an encounter with enigmatic aliens, the 112-year-old entrepreneur finds himself slipping backwards through his life. In a Kierkegaardian sense this journey actually does bring understanding, but more than that the protagonist uses his understanding – his memory made flesh – to try and effect changes. He cannot see the result of his efforts, for the effect of

each cause will always lie in his past (and, indeed, in a different past from the one he has experienced if there is any effect at all), but at the moment of his birth he is catapulted back to his 112-year-old present and finds that in a small but significant way he has been able to make a difference. He has, in other words, created what amounts to a parallel universe for himself.

The most recent book to take this theme, however,

Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991), positively embraces determinism. The narrator rides inside the head of a man who goes from breaking whole bodies in the operating theatre and sending mangled remains out to the site of accidents, to working in a German concentration camp where he conjures a whole race out of corpses. We are meant to consider the way one good act can compensate for an evil act, then to ponder the question in the mirror of our familiar experience. But Amis's mirror world is too neatly balanced, too perfect a reflection, to really carry the moral weight he expects of it. Maybe moral questions really do lose their point when cause follows effect.

If I've changed the future, he thought, how can I ever know for sure? Since I exist in an endless past, it can make no difference in how I live. The universe he inhabited was a prefabricated place. The events of 112 years stretched ahead of him, a script composed, written, inscribed in granite. But I will be young again, he realised abruptly. His eyes fluttered open, bright with anticipation. My body will revive. I'll live again, walk, talk, dance.

I will be born anew.

Gordon Eklund – 'The Retro Man' (1977)



# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

Note: All novels marked:  are eligible for the 1999 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked:  contain stories that are eligible for the 1999 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

**Peter Ackroyd – *The Plato Papers*** 

Chatto & Windus, 1999, 139pp, £12.99 ISBN 1 85619 701 8

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

For too long, I suspect, Peter Ackroyd's talent for pastiche, his ability to get under the skin of a variety of literary figures from the past, in both novels and biographies, has tended to obscure his true subject. Though the characters may come across so vividly, forget them, they are not important. Ackroyd is writing primarily about London. Novels such as *Hawksmoor* or *English Music* or *The House of Doctor Dee* and biographies such as *Dickens* or *Blake* or *The Life of Thomas More* are really hymns to London in its various guises and at different times in its life. Those novels, such as *First Light* or *Milton in America*, which take him furthest from the metropolis are also his weakest.

This slight book, really no more than a novella, is also about London, but at too much of a remove. What we have, in fact, is a story set some 2,000 years in the future. Society has undergone some massive though unspecified collapse and after an extended Dark Age has slowly re-established itself, though on very different lines. This book tells the story of Plato, an orator in this far future in a world that seems to have modelled itself upon ancient Greek lines, and to represent an idealist rather than a materialist take on the world. This Plato's beat is London, and his subject is the Age of Mouldwarp, the name given to the period from around 1500 to 2300 which precipitated the crash. Very little is known about Mouldwarp (and because of their anti-materialism, few people other than Plato have any interest in investigating their past), so Plato tries to put together a coherent picture from minute scraps of knowledge. Parts of a book entitled *The Origin of Species* have

survived, and the torn title page reveals it was written by Charles D—; this is obviously a work of fiction, quite likely a comedy, by Charles Dickens. Some lines by (T.S.) Eliot must be the work of George Eliot who, other clues suggest, was a black minstrel.

It is obvious that Ackroyd is satirising our world, and Plato's 'Glossary of Ancient Terms' is occasionally very funny ('*economics*: an ancient science devoted to reducing all phenomena to their smallest and most niggardly point. Hence "to practise economy" was synonymous with "miserliness".'), but the targets are too easy, the jokes too weak, the structure of the book with its persistent dialogues between extraneous but not clearly delineated characters acting as a sort of Greek Chorus too insubstantial. The city itself never appears, and so somehow the characters never seem to have any life because they have no context.

Only once does the book come alive, when Plato mysteriously visits his past, our present. Here, briefly, Ackroyd gets to grips with giving us an outsiders perception of the world we see today, and one can't help feeling that this was his real intent with this whole book, but it is over too quickly and we are back in an unvisualised future. There is a figment of plot – this Plato, like his namesake, is tried for corrupting the youth of the city – but since we have never been made to care for any of the characters, we cannot care about the outcome of the trial. Somehow, I don't think Ackroyd really cared either.

**Gill Alderman – *Lilith's Castle* ☞**

Voyager, 1999, 389pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-648272-4

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

"Alderman is perverse, bizarre and charming" says the *Locus* puff on the cover, and *Lilith's Castle*, a long awaited sequel to Alderman's *The Memory Palace*, is nothing if not almost determinedly perverse.

A word or two of warning. If you haven't yet read *The Memory Palace* [reviewed in *Vector* 188], stop here now. What follows will almost inevitably contain a few spoilers (although the two main endings of *The Memory Palace* are revealed on the back cover of *Lilith's Castle*), and Alderman is spare to the point of parsimony in parcelling out information from the previous volume, suggesting, along with the (near literal) cliff-hanger ending of the first volume, that this is not so much as sequel as the second half of one long book.

Guy Kester Parados, a successful fantasy writer, suffers a horrific maiming accident and, in pain and delirium, enters the world of his creation, Malthassa, and into conflict with his alter-ego, the magician Koschei. At the end, Koschei steals Parados's body, leaving him trapped in that of the Red Horse, leader of the herd of the nomadic Ima tribe.

Alderman abandons the previous story-line to concentrate on that of Gry, an Ima girl, and her quest to the Shadow Realm to return the sacred knife and bridle to her dead Ima chieftain, her father.

Gry is a magnificent creation, a pagan shaman princess

resplendent in rags and tatters, who might almost have ridden out of one of Holdstock's mythago tales. Pursued by Ima shaman, Axa, for her theft of the Red Horse, and falling in with the gypsy, Darkliss Faa, her story drives the first half of the book.

It's when Alderman shifts focus from Gry's quest back to Koschei, and then starts to intersect the two tales as they both arrive at the Shadow Realm that things get strange. Koschei, after being humiliated, is abandoned in Yama's huge library, and the metafictional nature of the story (remember, Malthassa is a created world, a story in the 'real' world) reasserts itself, not entirely successfully. Koschei tries to rewrite the ending of the book but finds it's a different sort of magic, that he has no skill for, and the characters continue to frustrate him. Then, remembering *he* is also in a book, he escapes from the Underworld library by literally ripping through the pages into the world outside, and then tries again, unsuccessfully, to wrest control via a computer game of the Malthassa world. "Too much" your reviewer exclaimed, as the thus-far delicately poised metafiction of the Malthassa world crashed abruptly into the mundane. It's a shame, and I can only admire Alderman for attempting to do something new – often startlingly so – in the fantasy genre, but it feels unbalanced, and slightly panicky, as if the resolution of one half of the story was being rushed to catch up with the other before the sundered twin souls of Koschei and Parados can finally confront each other.

**John Gregory Betancourt – *Star Trek TNG: Double Helix 1: Infection* ☞**

Pocket Books, 1999, 239pp, £6.50 ISBN 0-671-03255-0

**Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch – *Star Trek TNG: Double Helix 2: Vectors* ☞**

Pocket Books, 1999, 283pp, £6.50 ISBN 0-671-03256-9

**Diane Carey – *Star Trek DSN: What You Leave Behind* ☞**

Pocket Books, 1999, 212pp, £6.50 ISBN 0-671-03476-

6

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Based on a televised episode, *What You Leave Behind* begins with a vast fleet of ships taking on the Dominion to defeat them once and for all; the *Defiant* is included. Kira Nerys and Garak are on Cardassia Prime working against the Dominion. And on Bajor, Kai Winn has made an alliance with Gul Dukat to overthrow the Dominion and defeat the Prophets, using Dukat as a sacrifice to appease and release the legendary Pah-Wraiths.

But things do not go according to plan for everyone: on Cardassia Prime, the Dominion is defeated when the Cardassian ships join the Federation as a result of the Dominion destroying their cities in retaliation for the resistance's activity. Kai Winn becomes the sacrifice, and Gul Dukat becomes host for the Pah-Wraiths. They are in turn destroyed by Benjamin Sisko, who makes the ultimate sacrifice and joins the Prophets to protect all he holds dear.

Despite this, and the departures of O'Brien, Odo and Worf, the novel ends on an upbeat note, and Kira takes command of Deep Space Nine. It's very much business as usual, and I can recommend this to Star Trek fans and non-fans alike.

The two Next Generation novels open a series of six based on a concept developed by John J. Ordovery and Michael Jan Friedman, and it's an intriguing idea. Both novels deal with a plague being released in locations where there are alien races: on Archaria III, where people live a life similar to that of the Amish

communities, and only people of mixed genetic origin are affected, and on Terok Nor, where the Cardassians and Bajorans become victims. Behind these experiments is the Orion Syndicate, a criminal outfit operating in the Alpha Quadrant.

*Infection* involves Picard's *Enterprise*, and in particular Beverley Crusher's attempts to cure the illness, while Riker, Data and Tashar Yar go planetside to find the perpetrator of the infection. At the end of *Infection*, the General of the Orion Syndicate reflects on the speed with which the Federation acted – it's all over in two days – and that his people will have to modify the disease further.

In *Vectors*, it's Kate Pulaski's turn, who is asked to help by her ex-husband, a Bajoran doctor. By the time *Vectors* concludes, the time period for the disease's defeat has gone up to two weeks; the General realises that he can't underestimate the Federation.

Taking all three novels, I thoroughly enjoyed all of them, but my personal preference is for the two Next Generation novels. All the authors have their characters behaving correctly, and I especially enjoyed the light relief provided by Quark, Nog and Rom in *Vectors*, and to a lesser extent by Data in *Infection*. I think, as I said about *What You Leave Behind*, that non-fans will enjoy these as much as Star Trek fans will. These two novels are a promising start to a new series, and I look forward to the next four instalments.

**Brian Aldiss – *When the Feast is Finished***

Little, Brown, 1999, 230pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-316-64835-3

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

In November 1997 Margaret Aldiss died of pancreatic cancer. Brian Aldiss's memoir of their last weeks together is in some ways an extraordinary coda to his autobiography of last year, *The*

*Twinkling of an Eye*. Moving and self-revealing, it is one of the few books which this reviewer has finished with the desperate sense that he does not quite know what to say. It is a book which

makes you wonder about your own relationship to it. Knowing both Aldiss and his wife – not well at all, but nevertheless still knowing them as people rather than simply as author and subject of a book – makes it more difficult to respond to a book which is revealing of both than if I had never met either. Then, I could read objectively. Now, I am at times moved almost to tears, at times embarrassed at the nakedness of it. Embarrassed? I knew Margaret Aldiss slightly and liked her. Brian Aldiss knew her intimately and loved her. There are emotions and events he reveals in this book to me, the unknown reader, which I, the guy he chats to occasionally at conventions and conferences would not need to know about. But let Andy Sawyer, who in any case distrusts self-revelatory reviews, withdraw, and the reviewer take over.

Aldiss narrates the events as an account, illustrated by extracts from both his and his wife's journals. At first, there is hope that death will not come quickly, but soon it becomes quite clear that this illness is terminal, and the struggle to come to terms, to avoid self-deception, begins. What makes it memorable is the way Aldiss cannot stop from being a writer, from examining his own motives and reactions (he describes himself at one point as being "sustained by the drama" of events) and from self-revelation. The book is carefully shaped and structured. Ironic forebodings of ageing underly the descriptions of their move to a smaller house. We read differing interpretations (in their journals) of a 1996 holiday in Greece to which Aldiss later looks back with shame: "this account stands as an example of male insensitivity". This is a

love-offering: a celebration of two people who have lived joyously together for thirty years, yet the focus is often upon the basic domestic nature of this relationship. The shaper and observer at work on the narrative is revealing a simple truth; an uncomfortable set of questions about the nature of love. Love often involves creating its own mythology. How far *do* we know each other? To illustrate this, later in the book, Aldiss introduces extracts from Margaret's diaries which are sharply critical of him, which threaten to overturn the image which has been set up, and records his concern at reading them. The awful truth that a loved one has been taken from you does not hide the fact that they have moments of pique at your behaviour. They may, you realise, be right.

It is moments like this – where the rawness of real life, real relationships, break into the emotional drama that the impact of the book is at its greatest. In the end, *When the Feast is Finished* is a number of things. It's a remarkable tribute to a marriage and to a partner. It's a haunting exercise in autobiography. It's even – and this is perhaps what it might be bought as – a book which could be of *real* help to others in similar circumstances. It moves skilfully between the emotions and the minutiae of day to day, the contradictions of human behaviour in the face of the darkest of mysteries. The final paradox of the book is that it needs no interpretation. It is a living memoir of its subjects and it works as such whether we know them or not.

### Alice Borchardt – *The Silver Wolf*

Voyager, 1999, 451pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-00-224715-1

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Alice Borchardt's *The Silver Wolf* is a werewolf story set in post Imperial Rome. A mix of tribes lives there, each vying for power. Western Christianity, still in its formative stage, has begun to grow, adding to the instability within the former pagan state.

Regeane, distant cousin of Charlemagne, is kept captive in squalor by her uncle, Gundabald. Even while he abuses her, he betroths her to a barbarian lord for political reasons. When buying her wedding dress, Regeane is forced to flee from members of an opposing political faction, helping a slave girl, Elfgifa, to escape. She comes to realise her role as a key player in Rome's political games, although her shape shifting exiles her from fully joining high society. Using both animal and human forms, Regeane moves on the edges of society.

Borchardt manages to capture the dual atmosphere of splendour and decay, creating her landscape through human and animal perspectives. Her observational grasp of the ruined city provides a wonderfully broad landscape, and the social nuances are well teased out. However, the historical and literary sources

are sometimes stronger than her imagination, particularly in the underworld and pagan scenes.

Borchardt's characters are often underused. Whilst she tries to create two strong feminist leads, she often fails to fully interact with the issues that she has raised. Even when she employs characters designed to question actions, she descends into comedy rather than allowing them to fully open the situation around Regeane. Her characters often become cast in this cursory mould, particularly her male characters, even when important to the narrative. This lack of development begins to undermine Regeane when she is dependent on the supporting cast.

The vision of the novel is certainly impressive, but Borchardt's apparent lack of empathy means that she fails to develop her scenario as fully as she might have done. Characters begin to lose their immediacy as she relies more heavily upon research. Part of this novel feels like it is the beginning of a series but concludes rather hurriedly. *The Silver Wolf* is in the vein of early Anne Rice, but lacks the patience that her sister had.

### David Brin – *Heaven's Reach*

Orbit, 1999, 571pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-793-0

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

*Heaven's Reach* is the third novel of the second Uplift trilogy. Unlike the first 'trilogy' which, although set in the same universe against the background of a loose story arc, were essential three different stories, the second trilogy covers the events of one long tale conveniently chopped into three.

The universe teems with many alien races connected by the evolutionary chains of Uplift. Each race has been uplifted to sentience by a 'patron' clan, the chains extending all the way back to the semi-mythical Progenitors. Mankind has emerged as a rare 'wolfing' race without any obvious patrons. The seeds to the events of the second trilogy are sown in the first when a space ship crewed by humans and uplifted dolphins find an ancient artefact, a McGuffin, that virtually everyone within five galaxies wants.

The second trilogy starts a long way from the intergalactic conflict initiates. In a quiet backwater of an abandoned galaxy, on the planet Jijo, six races have voluntarily exiled themselves. They are either hiding or trying to devolve down to pre-sentience for

various reasons. This peace is shattered by the arrival of several unexpected visitors. Whilst the first two novels of the trilogy were firmly planet-bound this episode blasts off into space and is more concerned with galactic (and intergalactic) implications.

Yet again Brin uses the technique of a multi-character narrative to tell his story. Although this time he does not quite have the cast of thousands of previous books and you are less likely to find yourself flipping to the cast of characters. One of the best things about the Uplift series is that it has, well, really 'alien' aliens. No 'humans' in funny costumes or obvious Japanese empire variants or whatever. One of the major characters consists of a conical pile of semi-independent sapient sap rings and it is a testament to Brin's skill that it/they are/is one of the most interesting characters in the novel.

As readers of the series will realise each of the two previous volumes ended on massive cliff-hangers and throughout *Heaven's Reach* Brin keeps up the tension. This time virtually every switch of character ends with a cliff-hanger. However we do finally get

some sort of closure at the end.

In this one Brin thinks big and the sensawunda gets turned up to eleven. For instance instead of puny ordinary Dyson spheres, Brin gives us fractal Dyson spheres to maximise the surface area for their trillions of inhabitants. He goes beyond the previous multitude of exotic oxygen breathers into further orders of life including the gas giant inhabiting hydrogen breathers, machine intelligences, and the Retired and Transcended orders who are not as benign as they first seem. Mighty energies rent the very structure of the universe and beyond. Spaceships can travel faster than light not only via the 'threads' of transfer points but also travel through A, B, C, D and the surreal E space. In fact in his

afterword Brin virtually admits to throwing in everything but the kitchen sink and we certainly go way beyond conventional cosmology. But this all adds to the fun.

Brin pays his dues to previous sf writers with post-modern references to Verne and others. It must be one the few sf novels where characters are influenced by reading sf (One of the characters who renames himself Alvin seems a deliberate homage to Clark's *The City and the Stars*). In fact there is more than a hint that Brin is examining the whole nature of story telling.

Epic in size, scope and subject the Uplift series is destined to become one of the classics of the genre. Oh, and guess what? There's still more to come...

### Cliff Burns – *The Reality Machine*

Black Dog Press, 1997, 121pp, £16.95/ \$18.95 (Canadian) ISBN 0-9694853-2-8

Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

Squeezing fifteen stories plus interludes into barely more than 120 pages, Cliff Burns illustrates the virtues and vices of experimental speculative fiction. Adapting the techniques and themes of his influences frees his imagination, producing stories that reveal haunting observations and startling twists, yet the accompanying indulgence and loose editing make the book as infuriating as it is rewarding.

Of the sketches and vignettes, 'The Goblins' is I think the best: clever, disturbing and with a nasty twist, it succeeds, as the best horror must, in staying with you after you have put the book down. Similarly uncomfortable is contemplating the havoc played by 'The Woman Who Gave Good Phone'. Some of the short pieces, however, are disappointing in that the ideas they contain are not pursued fully or are not really worth pursuing in the first place. The party description of 'RSVP', reminiscent of a Bester set-piece, and the dull 'While You Were Away' fall into this category. This lack of editorial rigor is a shame because Burns' writing style is impressive, economical and occasionally arresting.

The most interesting fully fleshed-out stories are the two that exhibit their influences most prominently. The Dickian 'New World Man' inverts the empathic religion of *Do Androids Dream*

of *Electric Sheep?* making the central figure not the Christ-like Mercer but rather the obnoxious whinging teenager Harold Tyler. On this conceit is hung a taught and apocalyptic tale of generation-gap alienation that calls to mind terrors both fictional (Midwich) and actual (Cambodia). Secondly, 'In Dreams, Awake' is a nicely realised homage to Ballard that concerns an entropic epidemic that leads to the end of the world. Unfortunately, loose editing allows it to end twice, thereby lessening its impact.

William Burroughs is mentioned as an influence on the book jacket, in the introduction by Kim Newman, is thanked in the author's acknowledgements and is quoted before the text proper begins. This emphasis, presumably at least partially accidental, is not without warrant. Whilst Burns doesn't have the stratospheric imagination of his mentor (who does?) he does have a similarly precise turn of phrase and a skilful way of up-turning stones to reveal what is underneath. With more editorial restraint and less reliance on influences his stories could be almost as compelling.

[Black Dog Press: 1143 105<sup>th</sup> St. North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada S91 1S6]

### Isabelle Carmody – *Obernewtyn*

TOR Books, 1999, 253pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-86958-4

Reviewed by Penny Hill

When I opened this book and discovered it had previously been published as a Puffin Plus, I felt I had received a recommendation from a trusted friend. I suspected that this book would not be too innovative, but it would be of good quality and reasonably enjoyable.

The set-up is very familiar – a heroine with 'enhanced mental powers' is isolated in a post-holocaust world; one which is so scared of the resulting mutations that any form of deviancy from the norm is segregated. All those who grew up with John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* will find themselves on home ground here.

Isabelle Carmody's skilful treatment of this familiar trope, focuses on the almost paranoid wariness of Elspeth, who has learned as a habit of survival to trust no-one and to draw no attention to herself. This character trait does serve to spin out the action as it takes Elspeth several chapters to realise who her natural allies are – something which this adult reader at least,

spotted a long time before. I suspect the intended juvenile audience would be equally as quick and may therefore lose sympathy with the character, even though other characters confirm how necessary this behaviour is.

This novel is described as "Book One of the Obernewtyn Chronicles" and by the end of it, I felt that I was at the beginning of the story's action rather than the end. I may have been influenced by the plot summary on the cover, which does cover all the salient points, although not the manner in which they transpire. Certainly many of the mysteries within the story remain unsolved by the end of the novel.

I found the novel to be unusually well-written in a pleasantly unobtrusive style. There were none of the jarring faults I have come to expect in modern fantasy for children. Overall the novel, though pleasant, failed to excite me and already, only three days after I finished it, I am finding it hard to recall details of plot and character.

### Orson Scott Card – *Ender's Shadow*

TOR Books, 1999, 352pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-86860-X

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Given his Mormon faith it's not surprising that the work of Orson Scott Card has always displayed a powerful (if often controversial) didactic streak. To date this has perhaps found its most perfect expression in his 1985 novel, *Ender's Game*. That tale, of boy genius Andrew 'Ender' Wiggin's command of a group of virtual reality-trained child soldiers, tricked into fighting a xenocidal war against the infelicitously-named alien Buggers, generated strongly

polarised reactions within, and beyond, the SF community. The novel's sometimes heavy-handed exploration of children's capacity for violence and the corruption of innocence by brutal martial experience no doubt sealed its subsequent fame (and notoriety).

Many people, like me, found Card's explication of the moral dilemmas at the heart of that book contrived and manipulative.

The prospect of not just another sequel, but a 'parallel novel' retelling the same story from another point of view, may therefore seem less than enticing. With *Ender's Shadow*, the task that he has set himself is arguably more difficult than simply writing direct sequels. Using essentially the same material, what new insights can possibly be gleaned?

Since most fans are probably familiar with the plot of *Ender's Game*, much of the interest here lies in the fresh perspectives to be gained from an exploration of the development and growth of another member of Ender's retinue. Here it is Bean, the feral child from the slums of Rotterdam who survives against all odds to become the key tactician in the final battle with the Buggers. Though potentially the greatest student of all, in the original story he is, like the other pupils in the Battle School, a figure dominated by the powerful presence of Ender. In *Ender's Shadow* Card's aim to develop Bean as a character in his own right is pursued primarily by means of a subplot concerning the mystery of the unusually talented boy's origins. His efforts are, on the whole, successful, but the novel is not without its faults. Fifteen years on Card still hasn't completely overcome the pitfalls inherent in writing a narrative told mainly from the perspective of gifted

children and, to adult readers, his fictional offspring can seem irritatingly precious and precocious. Equally, his authorial presence continues to be overly intrusive, too often using the novel's milieu and dialogue as crude vehicles for contentious ethical and religious debate.

These criticisms aside, Card's prose has, over the years, undoubtedly improved, displaying both a greater depth and facility with language. He continues to be accomplished at conveying the petty vindictiveness and cruelty of the young, as well as the psychological motivations underlying his characters' actions. Employing a new narrative voice gives Card the chance to re-examine the rivalries, burgeoning friendships and dynamics of the relationships between Bean, his alter ego, Ender, and their contemporaries. In doing so he offers revealing, and unexpected, insights into the events of *Ender's Game*. Whatever your personal reservations about Card's moral philosophy, by providing a novel spin on familiar material *Ender's Shadow* does ultimately justify its own existence. That said, promised future volumes featuring other members of the Battle School will be lucky to avoid the inevitable law of diminishing returns.

### Jonathan Carroll – *The Marriage of Sticks*

Gollancz, 1999, 282pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06615-6

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Late for a dinner party, Miranda Romanac finds that Manhattan speeds her journey, all the lights are on green for her.

"When I got to her block, I said a little 'thank you'. Seconds later, a madman pushing a baby carriage heaped with junk wobbled by. Without saying a word, the man smiled and tipped an imaginary hat at me, as if he were the city's spokesman acknowledging my thanks."

That is what Carroll is so good at doing, capturing the magic of place that may not be magic at all but it feels a little wonderful. As long as the mystery is low-key, everyday, hovering tentatively, teasingly on the edge of what may or may not be real magic, Carroll is masterful.

When the supernatural crashes into the everyday, he can lose that mastery, as he does here for one wild chapter three quarters of the way into this novel. Then the demonic menace and weird experiences seem no more than the stock in trade of a hundred competent horror writers. Fortunately he recovers, the special effects are swept imperiously aside, and *The Marriage of Sticks* reasserts itself as a novel that does not need excess, the grand gesture or the over-ripe paragraph to slip under the skin.

This is a sad story about joy, or perhaps a joyous story about sorrow. It is about loss, and how we cope with it, how life can be good even if it is not the life we wanted. It is the story of Miranda Romanac, who has a good business dealing in rare books, even if it is not quite what she imagined herself doing. Her major regret is that she lost touch with her high school sweetheart, James Stillman. Then, at her high school reunion – a wonderful set piece contrasting dreams and achievements – she learns that James was recently killed in a car crash. This poignant reminder of all she had once planned for her life hardly upsets her apple-cart; life continues, happy and successful. She is introduced to Frances

Hatch, a lively 90-year old, once the mistress of a string of famous writers and artists in Europe during the 1920s and '30s. She also meets Hugh Oakley, a wealthy art dealer and, despite the fact that Hugh is happily married, the two fall in love. Emotions are the basic tools of all novelists, but, given how few writers manage it with any conviction, joy would appear to be one of the hardest. Jonathan Carroll portrays joy better than anyone since Jack Finney, and Miranda, through her friendship with Frances and her burgeoning relationship with Hugh, is a wonderfully vivid character.

But there is a shadow over this happiness. At the same time as these two portentous meetings, Miranda sees James Stillman again. Though she cannot interpret the message, clearly something is being said to her from beyond the grave. It can hardly matter, for Hugh leaves his wife and he and Miranda set up home in a large house given to them by Frances. On their very first visit, Miranda sees a little boy enjoying a birthday party there, and is convinced it is the child she and Hugh will have. Then, without warning, Hugh dies. Just as Miranda has to cope with a sudden rush of grief, James returns once more, and the boy, and curious glimpses of Hugh in a life he never had. Now, as the supernatural intrudes with routine horrors while Miranda battles for her soul, the novel briefly loses its grip. It is clearly a mistake, for the moment Miranda recognises the truth about herself in a glimpse of something vampiric stretching back through previous lives, the quiet voice reasserts itself. Her resolution to the situation is both subtle and devastating, and the book becomes once more, in its beautifully controlled final pages, a truly affecting study of loss and memory. Forget the knee-jerk outburst of grand-guignol and this could be one of the finest novels you'll read this year.

### Peter Chippendale – *Laptop of the Gods*

Pocket Books, 1999, 420pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-85568-9

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

It's December 1999 and, as the millennium approaches, all is not well in the Land of the Gods. Once mighty deities, bored out of their tiny minds with nineties mankind, have become locked in their own petty struggles, or lost in the virtual reality of Retroland.

"This will appeal to Pratchett and Monty Python fans alike," says the *Guardian*. 'Oh goody', thinks I. 'Looking forward to this, ho yus...'

What we actually get is more like across between Tom Holt and Robert Rankin, with a little more bite than either. I can see

the Monty Python too, here and there. Chippendale doesn't set out to create a magical new world, a twisting web of plot, or a deep unfolding insight into divine character. What we have here is a satire on technologically switched-on pre-millennial middle England; Side-splitting it ain't, but sharp? In places, yes. Here we have an author who clearly has some things he wants to say, thinly veiled with dry humour, and fortunately he has enough style and wit to carry it off. Most of the time. Well, if you live in Surrey, you're probably going to squirm, anyway...

What else to say? It's pretty short on sympathetic gods and goddesses, the land of the gods struggles for depth, if the phrases "I hate this paradox stuff" and "you bloody time teaser" have you backing away, well then, you're probably right. But it isn't about that. It's about giving an acid bath to moron-level advertising and game shows for pets. It's about pouring scorn on artificial lives, artificial emotions, about looking for something real. It's about assertiveness training for gods...

It doesn't always come off; patches are brilliant, patches are... less brilliant. But the prose has an easy fluid feel to it to keep you going through the lows. And it's intelligent and impassioned and different. I haven't torn through a review book this quickly in a long time.

Oh – one last aside – if you want to have some fun with this one, look for the numbers...

## I.F. Clarke (ed.) – *The Great War with Germany 1890-1914*

Liverpool University Press, 1999, 440pp, £32.00 ISBN 0-85323-632-1

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

This is the second volume of what will become a five volume series, that began with *The Tale Of The Next Great War, 1871-1914* (reviewed in *Vector* 187), and now deals with the change in the genre as the traditional enemy swapped from France to Germany. Historians will remember that under Kaiser Wilhelm II Germany had begun an expansionist foreign policy, enlarging its navy, and later stirring things up for the French in north Africa, and for the British in South Africa and in the Pacific. On little more basis than a German gunboat sent to Agadir, British fantasists were able to populate every restaurant in Britain with German waiters keeping a Mauser rifle in their bedrooms, and keep enormous fleets of invasion barges waiting on the Friesian coast.

However, as Professor Clarke shows things were little different in Germany, and he includes many German stories from the same period. Titles give some idea of their author's opinions: 'The Reckoning With England' (1900), 'The Offensive Against and Invasion of England' (1907), even 'Hindenberg's March into London' as late as 1915, indicate a considerably greater invasive intent than any of the British authors, who were much more concerned with warning and preparation.

The name associated with all this is William Le Queux, who got up his fictions for Lord Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*. Le Queux planned massive German attacks, pincer actions and assaults on the coast of Britain, only to see Northcliffe cross them out and re-route to towns where he was making a circulation drive. Then, in one of the ironies of history, *The Invasion Of 1910* (1906) was translated and became a best-seller in Germany. However, if Le Queux enjoyed his royalties he did so without realising that his

translator had changed the ending of his book, making the Germans the winners, as a book of warning on one side became a morale boost for the other.

Although military theorists of the time contributed to these works, promoting their drives for Dreadnoughts, bigger navies and places in the sun, these stories had their critics, too. It is interesting to see how the quotations from MPs complaining about German spies sketching the roads of Epping Forest were taken apart by responsible journalists, or even sent up by cartoonists such as Heath Robinson (later to draw fantastic machines, but not before he was an anti-war activist in WWI). And Professor Clarke also includes part of P.G. Wodehouse's *The Swoop*, in which boy scout, Clarence, saves England from nine invading armies. Oddly enough, in chapters XXV and XXVI of Conan Doyle's autobiography, *Memories And Adventures*, which deals with the run up to WWI, Doyle describes how he defended Britain's preparedness on a trip to Canada: "I told the Canadians of our magnificent Boy Scout movement, and also of the movement of old soldiers to form a national guard." Which is a sad reflection on the doctor's ability to make a true diagnosis of the problem.

Ultimately, Professor Clarke says, the true analysis lay in another sphere: almost all these authors correctly predicted the participants of the war, but they could not see its transformation. That required not a tale of invasion, but of super-invasion, as H.G. Wells did in *The War Of The Worlds*: "With prophetic insight he foresaw that all humankind would be the victim", but as with many prophets Wells was a near lone voice and he had to speak in parables.

## Glen Cook – *Water Sleeps*

TOR Books, 1999, 412pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-85909-0

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

*Water Sleeps* is Book Three of Glittering Stone, the Eighth Chronicle of the Black Company. If that means anything to you, then you'll welcome this volume. Even if it doesn't, you can still pick this up. But let me explain...

Series works falls into two categories. There are those books that follow the Starsky and Hutch principle. A different thing happens every week, and nothing is permanent (or referred to ever again), so the books (episodes) can be shown (read) in any order. Or there are the books that rigidly follow, one after the other, each volume building on the cliff-hanger ending of the one before, until the reader is hopelessly enmeshed in the plotline (like *Coronation Street*), and no-one who isn't can possibly be expected to catch up, not eight books into the series. OK, there is a third option. Books that are part of a continuing series, but that give enough details so that the new reader can pick them up and get stuck in. The good ones do this without info-dumping. This is one of the good ones.

As I said, *Water Sleeps* is the third book of the third bit of a big series. The whole thing is the annals of the Black Company, as

recorded by the Annalist. In this volume the Annalist is Sleepy, apprentice Standard Bearer to Murgan, who sleeps with his friends beneath the Plain of Glittering Stone (see *She is the Darkness* [reviewed by Colin Bird in V197]). The book revolves around the efforts of the remnants of the Company to escape Taglios and the Protector and to free their lost comrades from their long imprisonment.

Cook skilfully reveals the rules that govern this world a piece at a time and presents them so that we are hardly aware that we are actually being reminded what these rules are. This is a fantasy, certain things are expected, and here they are. The system of magic is practical, but that is not all that Sleepy and her companions rely on. The tactics of the Company in using their skills to upset the ruling forces of Taglios are well worked out and their application is plausible. As is expected of this sort of series, there are enough loose ends dangling for the next one, but also enough tied up to make this book satisfying. And you can pick it up and read it on its own. What more can you ask for?

**Storm Constantine – *Thin Air* □**

Warner Books, 1999, 313pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-7515-2435-2

Reviewed by Maureen Kincaid Speller

Although Dex vanished mysteriously, inexplicably, several years ago, his lover Jay has never believed that he died. She has survived incapacitating grief and rebuilt her life, perhaps not entirely satisfactorily, but she has never lost hope that Dex might reappear.

And now he has been seen again, not by over-excited fans but by people who knew him well, who want to find him, to recoup their investment, and when Jay won't play ball, they destroy her life all over again, until her only recourse is to find Dex for herself. All this takes place in the first part of the book, when Storm Constantine describes the twin worlds of the rock musician and the rock journalist, a place of uncomfortable symbiosis in which Dex the musician and Jay the writer somehow seemed to achieve a miracle of accommodation. Constantine depicts this world as a cold, sterile place, echoed by Jay's gradual discovery, confirmed by his former colleagues, that she really didn't know Dex as well as she'd thought.

One might expect things to change in the novel's second part, when Jay discovers that she has, seemingly, driven out of her former, terrible existence into a strange, comforting, perfect place, Lestholme, peopled by victims of media whim, and where Dex, if

alive, remains tantalisingly out of sight. And yet, Jay carries with her the journalist's hard, fact-driven vision, and is able, only with difficulty, to accept that her former employers, Dex's former employers, are embroiled in a business which is as much about manipulating people's emotions for occult ends as it is about record sales and balance sheets. And perhaps because we only reach Lestholme when the book is already half gone, it's difficult to accept its *raison d'être* as unquestioningly as we seem to be expected to, exploring it, as we do, through the eyes of someone who shouldn't be there and is not expecting to stay long. Similarly, it's unfortunate that we have, for the most part, to rely on Dex's account of his initiation into the darker mysteries behind the bosses of the Sakrilege record label rather than having the time to examine it for ourselves. It's not that I don't believe what's happening in this book, so much as I feel I'm not being given a proper opportunity to test each event before I'm whirled on to the next, and that Jay stands firmly, perhaps too protectively, between me and the action. The result is that a story which promises to be deeply absorbing, in the end becomes as dry and factual as a newspaper report, a situation surely to be regretted.

**Maggie Furey – *The Heart of Myrial* □**

Orbit 1999, 438pp, £16.99, ISBN: 1-85723-751-X

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

First book of 'The Shadowleague' series, *The Heart of Myrial* is Maggie Furey's latest fantasy offering.

Myrial is a world set up by 'the ancients' and divided up into various lands by 'magical curtain walls'. Various species have been set up in their own domains by the unknown 'ancients' so that they can survive and prosper without fear of annihilation by other predatory species. Each world is therefore self-sufficient and self-contained, and completely unaware of the worlds and inhabitants beyond their own protected boundaries. The Shadowleague are a select group of creatures who oversee the status quo, and are represented by Loremasters from each realm in Myrial.

Unfortunately, as there would need to be in order to get the story going, the curtain walls are beginning to fail and a gradual but accelerating 'bleeding' of species from one realm to another is occurring. The Shadowleague are meeting to see what can be done, but the representative of the dragons has met with disaster on its way and things are beginning to get beyond the control of even the Shadowleague. Veldan, a human Loremaster, and her Firedrake partner Kazairl are escorting the dragon Aethon to the Shadowleague meeting. Straight off the back of a mission that went horribly wrong, leaving Veldan physically and mentally

scarred, her already battered confidence is about to receive an almost fatal blow.

Meanwhile, in the human city of Callisiora, the Hierarch Zavahl is besieged from all quarters. He has apparently lost the ear of the God, Myrial, and as a result the land is deteriorating rapidly because of months of incessant rain. The people are looking to replace the Hierarch for one who can intercede with the God on their behalf. What Zavahl does not realise is that it is not the God's favour he has lost, but that of the commander of the Godswords, his own elite personal guard.

As with many fantasies today, there are so many strands to this plot it would be impossible to give the flavour of them all in this brief review. True to the form Furey displayed in the four books of her previous 'Artefacts of Power' series, she has again crafted a well-told tale peopled with characters one really does care about. After what I thought was a bit of a slow start, this novel just gathers pace like the proverbial snowball on a snow-covered mountainside. It very quickly becomes an action-packed, suspense-filled, page-turner, and for those who are not already aware of Furey's remarkable storytelling talent, this book is the perfect vehicle for them to discover her.

**David Gemmell – *Midnight Falcon* □**

Bantam 1999, 404pp, £16.99, ISBN: 0-593-03722-7

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

*Midnight Falcon* is billed as "a novel of the Rigante" and follows on some years after events in *Sword In The Storm*. In that novel Gemmell introduced us to the Rigante tribe and their undefeated warlord, Connovar. This second book in the series deals with the life of Connovar's bastard son, Bane.

Having grown up alone with his mother, ignored by Connovar since his birth because of the circumstances of his conception, Bane has learned to hate the warlord of the Rigante, his father, the so-called Demonblade. His



mother's death of a broken heart seals Bane's hatred and kindles his desire for revenge. As a renegade Rigante living outside their laws, Bane travels to the fabled city of Stone to learn the ways of the people whose total military supremacy has only ever known one defeat – at the hands of the Demonblade.

It is in Stone that Bane finds the love of his life, but quickly loses her again to Voltan, an ex-gliadiator, general of the army controlled by the Crimson Priests, whose religious

fervour against the Tree Cultists is snowballing. Bane embarks on gladiatorial training in an effort to one day face Voltan in the arena and kill him.

Meanwhile the Emperor Jasaray of Stone is still smarting from his first ever defeat at the hands of Connovar and is plotting his revenge and conquest of the lands of the Rigante. The invasion is imminent as Bane hones his fighting skills, and as the days of blood approach, he is going to have to make a decision that will affect the future existence of the Rigante and their king.

## Terry Goodkind – *Soul of the Fire*

TOR Books, 1999, 508pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-89054

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This fantasy novel is the fifth in the 'Sword of Truth' series, following on from *Wizard's First Rule*, *Stone Of Truth*, *Blood Of The Fold* and *Temple Of The Winds*. It's perfectly intelligible without having read the previous books; indeed, readers who have may find the large chunks of here's-what-happened-earlier information scattered throughout the novel rather annoying.

The book opens on the wedding night of young Richard, once a simple woods-guide but now Wielder of the Sword of Truth, mightiest war wizard of the Known Wherever-this-is-set, bastard son of the tyrant Darken Rahl (vowed to Evil; how did you guess?), etc., etc., to Kahlan, Mother Confessor of the Midlands (= she has magic powers too). Their simple joyful wedding celebration is disrupted by an evil chicken (no, seriously) which turns out to have been possessed by one of the Chimes, demons whose function is to suck all magic from the world. Everyone is a bit puzzled by this, as the Chimes could only have been called into the world via a really improbable series of events, including Kahlan actually being Richard's third wife not his first. The next few chapters reveal to the astounded couple that by a truly amazing series of incredible coincidences the conditions for calling up the Chimes have all been fulfilled. Only Richard can get rid of them, which is a nuisance, because he'd been rather hoping to do something about the immense and powerful army led by Jagang the Dream Walker (Bad Guy) currently bearing

down on the kingdom of Anderith...

The rest of the book is devoted to sending the Chimes back to where they came from, and involves a good deal of travelling around, mostly due to enormous quantities of incomprehension and/or misdirection by people who, as far as I can see, are simply being wilfully thick. A wide variety of interesting minor characters are introduced and killed. By page 508 the Chimes have been dealt with, and Our Hero decides to leave Anderith to be occupied by the Bad Guys (the population of Anderith voted against him, you see, and Good Guys Must Respect Democracy...) Pausing only to take a couple of cheap swipes at the peace movement, the author leaves us... pretty much where we started, actually.

I love good fantasies, really I do. I love to be overcome with wonder at the power and beauty of magical ideas, and the deep insights they give me into the human condition. I don't like being given the run-around. I find the middle books of open-ended series, where no true plot resolution or character development is possible, annoying and frustrating. I hate books in which most of the characters are one-dimensional (presumably in order to show up the complex two-dimensionality of the protagonists) and stupid to boot (so the author doesn't have to think up any very complex, individual motivation for them).

I didn't love this book.

## Kathleen Ann Goonan – *The Bones of Time* 📖

Voyager, 1999, 382pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-648318

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Kathleen Ann Goonan's *Queen City Jazz* was the most important debut novel by an American sf writer this decade. *The Bones of Time* has many elements in common, but is wider ranging, has more characters, more science, a greater time span and more geography.

The book is rooted the history of Hawaii, and while parts focus on a 'homeland' movement in the first half of the next century, Kaiulani, the last princess of the royal family of Hawaii, is also central character. As Hawaii struggles to remain independent of US interests, Kaiulani slips through time, meeting Cen, a brilliant young scientist in 2007, working on the 'proofs' that might allow the transcendence of space and time.

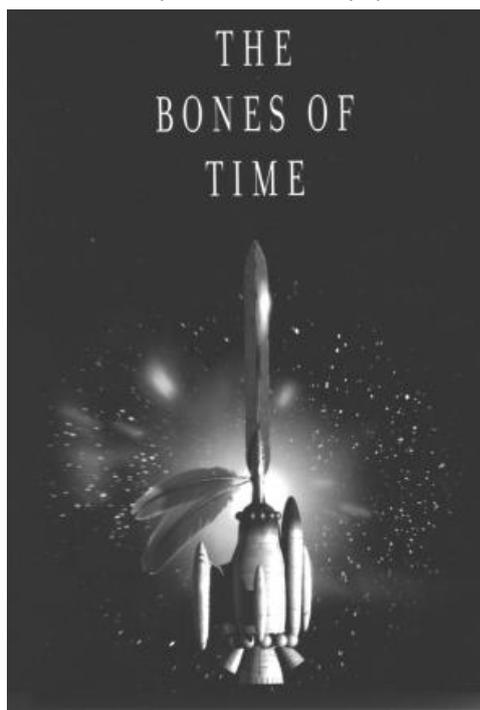
Hawaii is dominated by Interspace, which is using islands as the centre of operations for the construction of a generation starship. The organisation is also involved in human cloning and illegal nanotechnology, so that in 2034, Lynn, composer, geneticist, estranged daughter of the head of IS, finds herself fleeing assassins with Akamu, a teenage clone of the founding King of Hawaii, Kamehameha. They travel to Hong Kong in search of Mao's DNA, before in Tibet meeting

Sattva, physicist and first female Dali Lama. While in their past Cen is growing up and retracing the steps of Kaiulani across the world.

Goonan writes about complex characters convincingly engaged with a complex world. She addresses issues of racism and colonialism, scientific ethics, the conflict between the old paradigm of global capitalism and a new vision of a more harmoniously interconnected information age, unresolved family conflicts and bitter past memories, together with explorations of virtual reality, biotechnology, quantum computers and the manipulation of space-time.

It is an enormously intelligent, accomplished and daring book, containing at its heart a mystery which is never resolved, and which may disappoint some readers left standing on the edge of time. Yet the lack of resolution adds an extra, and tellingly resonant, dimension. One obvious parallel is with *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, against which Goonan has crafted an equally cerebral yet haunting enigma.

Strands spiral in on each other in surprising ways, a convoluted structure weaving a tapestry in defiance of the tyranny of time: Akamu is a biological recreation



of a man who has been dead for 200 years, Cen seeks to cross time itself, inspired by a romantic as much as scientific spirit. There is such clarity to the prose that Hawaii and Tibet come vividly alive, and the settings, unfamiliar to most British readers, add greatly to the freshness of the novel.

The plot is more complex than it initially appears to be, with revelations, plots and counter-plots gushing forth with dizzying speed in the final chapters. The effect is of an urgent race against

time, yet risks feeling hurried, that for once this is a book too short, and that more could have been said and the narrative taken further. Nevertheless, there is a layered complexity here which I suspect will only reveal its more subtle levels and in re-readings. *The Bones of Time* is a work to stand beside Bear, Egan, and Zindell as the best in modern sf, and while it is not quite as satisfying a story as *Queen City Jazz*, it is without doubt the best new sf to be published in the UK so far this year.

### H. Rider Haggard – *Allan and the Ice Gods*

### Jules Verne – *Dropped From the Clouds*

### Edgar Wallace – *The Green Rust*

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Pulp Fiction, 1999, 287pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-982058-11-9

Pulp Fiction, 1999, 240pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-902058-13-5

Pulp Fiction, 1999, 255pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-982058-10-0

A bonus to these editions is that each volume carries a specific introduction by David Pringle providing literary and historical background. This makes for reading on two levels: for entertainment – plenty of that – but also with appreciation of the novel's role within a developing or declining sub-genre. *Dropped From the Clouds*, the earliest of the three in publication date (1874), exemplifies a European, and in particular a Verneian, fascination with island romances and the 'Robinsonade'. Here, five Federalist men (and a dog), prisoners in besieged Richmond, escape by balloon and are storm-driven southwards to be wrecked on the uninhabited Lincoln (as they eventually name it) Island. Survival depends on use of its natural resources: tools improvised, shelters secured, minerals and metals shaped, plants gathered, animals hunted – all the activities of a (necessarily) all-male pioneering economy. Two volumes followed to constitute *The Mysterious Island*, its mystery presaged by a dramatic find (cf. Friday's footprint) at the end of this first volume. Verne's graphic descriptions of his castaways' heroic physical endeavours are, most happily, accompanied by C.H. Barbant's illustrations, dramatic and imaginative. An example is the primitive forge and bellows: "Doubtless, it was the proceeding employed by Tubal Cain, and the first metallurgists of the inhabited world." The plethora of scientific and practical data paraded sometimes wearies, but can be intriguing, e.g., the nutritive content of oysters, the reproductive potential of one grain of corn.

The 'green rust' of Edgar Wallace's title is a biological weapon aimed globally at grains of corn and manufactured by the Hun, a race which will stop at no frightfulness when seeking a revengeful domination. First serialised in *Popular Magazine* in 1919, the book's attitudes and invective are those of the Great War and its aftermath. It envisages an industrially recovered Germany, and in its future-looking and bio-technology is crude science fiction. In other respects it is the pulp magazine's "ripping yarn" type of thriller, complete with dastardly murder, abducted heroine, ruthless villain, quixotic hero, last minute suspense and an admixture of the methods of detection popularised by Sherlock

Holmes. Naively melodramatic throughout (and Wallace at points slyly acknowledges this), *The Green Rust* is still quite a page-turner, and is also enjoyable as representative of the popular fiction of its period – you take a time-trip backwards as you read it.

The same is true of *Allan and the Ice Gods* (1927) though I wouldn't call it a page-turner. The scenario itself comprises a backward time-trip, its means (inhaling the smoke of an exotic herb), while not very convincing, does evoke the occult flavour of much Sax Rhomer-ish fantasy and quasi-sf of the early twentieth century. The device enables the ageing but ever adventurous Quatermain to observe, or (a deliberate ambiguity) to occupy, the body of Wi, an ice-age hunter. That double status permits Allan to monitor Wi, "reading him like a book and weighing everything in the scales of my modern judgement". It is a stance which so infiltrates the narrative that you never feel the people of his Palaeolithic tribe to be more than the puppets of self-consciously constructed fiction, or all the episodes – leadership rivalry, tiger hunt, supposed curse of the beautiful witch woman, or flight from the advancing ice – to be more than staged performances. Haggard devised the plot in collaboration with Rudyard Kipling, to whose imagination I suspect the man-eating tiger and Pag the Wolf-Man must owe something. The last chapter, 'The Sum of the Matter', is a conversation between Allan and his blimpish companion after their return. Allan interprets, in terms of geophysical and ethnographic theory, the phase of prehistory they have experienced/witnessed, and speculates on whether it had all been illusion, "a lightning flash showing a page from the past.", a form of ancestral memory or a phenomenon involving correspondences between individual lives throughout (or independently of) time. However shaky the archaeology, or extravagant the theorising, there are ideas in this chapter of such perennial import as to make this flawed Quatermain adventure of greater relevance to some of today's speculative fiction than are the other two works reviewed here.

### Marcus Herniman – *The Siege of Arrandin*

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Earthlight, 1999, 519pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-671-02189-3

*The Siege of Arrandin* is the first book of the Arrandin Trilogy; from the indigestible amount of information dumping that occurs it may also be a sequel to a previous trilogy. The initial section is a very tedious introduction to characters and a build-up to the start of the invasion by the Easterners. For the first couple of dozen pages it was a real battle to persuade myself to reopen the book, and rather than look for reasons to read it I found myself trying to find reasons not to. If it is not a sequel to a previous trilogy then I suppose Marcus Herniman has made a praiseworthy attempt to provide a history and background for his characters, but in some cases it fails dismally. For example, we are told within one paragraph that Kellarn has passed out from service in the city guard, scaled mountains, visited the Fay far to the south and east, battled goblinfolk "and other terrors beyond the dreams of most of his sheltered peers amongst the Court Noble". An astonishing

catalogue of achievements indeed for someone just turned twenty and yet a few pages later he falls for a trick most novices would avoid and spends most of the rest of the book either captured or behaving with little military sense.

When the book moves on to the actual invasion and siege it improves considerably. There is a real sense of achievement when the mages finally work out how to raise the city's magical defences, and the battle scenes are for the most part well-written. Even here, though, there are occasional notes which jar the reader out of their suspension of disbelief. One is the occasional use of clichéd or cartoon-like images of the violence; people are poisoned but raise themselves long enough to hear the last dying message, they have their arms ripped off but make full recoveries. Pain, terror, grief, loss and a sense of betrayal are ignored or passed over with a few noble thoughts. The Easterners remain

uncharacterised, save for descriptions of their clothing and a reference to which power they serve. So far, despite being a collection of independent clans mixed in with priest groups, their behaviour appears uniform and their combined motive mere conquest. It may be that later books in the trilogy will expand upon this and upon the inevitable, 'good versus evil' war of the

gods/demons.

This could have been a better book. Some sections are well written and Herniman tries hard to provide his large cast of characters with a complex history and set of inter-relationships. For me though it just does not work.

### Edward Heron-Allen – *The Collected Strange Papers Of Christopher Blayre*

Tartarus Press 1998, 257pp, £25.00 ISBN 1-87262135-X

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

While Millennium are re-publishing SF classics from the fifties and sixties, the small Tartarus Press are re-publishing authors from the early part of the century. Arthur Machen is another of the authors to whom they are giving life in their well-bound, hard-backs (some of them in limited editions).

Edward Heron-Allen you may remember by coming across his nom-de-plume, Christopher Blayre, and coming across it not on the shelves of new or second-hand bookshops, but in reference works. When I saw this book advertised in the Cold Tonnage catalogue I thanked the Old Ones for specialist dealers and telephoned in my order. For Christopher Blayre is better known as a name than an author – best-known perhaps because he was banned, and now Tartarus have brought him back to life, given us a chance to see why. Specifically, this collection includes 'The Cheetah-Girl', suppressed shortly after the First World War.

'Christopher Blayre' is the keeper of the records of the University of Cosmopoli (an alternate Oxbridge), and the papers he collects are deposited by the university fellows. Some of the

these stories are fantasies, super-natural or otherwise; others move in other ways. 'The House on the Way to Hell' could have been written by Jorge Luis Borges, describing a road paved with all the works that have never been written. But others such as 'Purpura Lapillis' (about crustaceans), 'Another Squaw' (how can we study deep sub-marine animals in the normal atmospheric pressures in which we live?) and 'The Cheetah-Girl' are science-fictional.

'The Cheetah-Girl' describes an experiment in implanting feline genes in a human foetus, and the social problems that the resulting child causes and experiences. It is one of the longest stories in the collection, partly because the narrator, a Professor of Physiology, describes the then-current status of genetics at the end of the first quarter of this century. H.G. Wells used to avoid a lot of hard science in his short fiction – Heron-Allen in some of his stories showed that it was possible to write science and fiction. As *New Scientist* has just reported again the problems reported in 'Another Squaw' I found I was coming across many contemporary echoes as I read on. And echoes, of course, only come with depth.

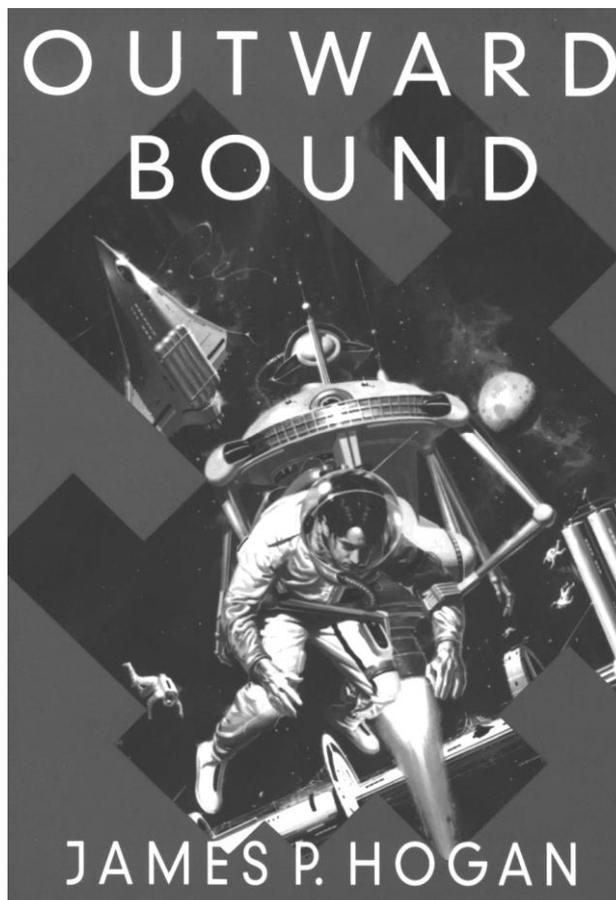
### James P. Hogan – *Outward Bound*

TOR Books, 1999, 220pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-86243-1

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

Let's get one thing clear – this is very obviously a 'Young Adult' novel. Or, to be more accurate in this case, an 'Immature Reader' novel. The characters are simple and obvious, the plot is simple and twee, and the background is simple and... well, quite reasonable actually. The society Hogan describes is mostly an extrapolation of the darker side of society today; selfish, short-sighted and greedy. Our hero, Linc, is a product of that society. He's a teenage street kid. He acts as hired muscle, while his friends are prostitutes or drug-runners. Not surprisingly, before the first few chapters are out, he's rotting in a labour camp.

Of course, he gets offered a second chance. In the words of the mysterious Dr. Grober, "What I'm offering is a rare opportunity to learn how to give instead of take. A chance to discover service and obligation, and break free from the tyranny of expecting rights." Naturally, Linc takes his chance, does OK, learns to be a better person, and they all live happily ever after... It really is this obvious, even from a dozen pages in. The moralising is as subtle as a sledgehammer to the forebrain – there isn't such a thing as a 'bad person', it's all society's fault, the only evil is ignorance, if you try your best and treat your peers with respect, everything will turn out just fine. Yet somehow Hogan manages to avoid sounding



preachy. Identification with any character who enters the story is quick and easy, and then disappointing as you realise how little is in there. The skiffy part, when it arrives, is dealt with superficially, but is plausible, coherent and (horror of horrors!) even a little educational.

'Young Adult' is a terrible term. *Outward Bound* is probably aimed at the 9-12 age group (the ones who aren't being precocious and reading Tolkien and Clarke already). For them, the message should be that they can be themselves, they can be nice about it, and they can expect some respect for it. Strip away the cynicism that comes with age, and *Outward Bound* quite probably works.

**Adam Lee – *Octoberland***

Avon Eos, 1999, 0pp, \$13.50 ISBN 0-380-79072-6

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

*Octoberland*, Book Three of 'The Dominions of Earth' trilogy, is an unusual blend of fantasy and science fiction, in which the distinction between science and magic is blurred. Volume Three is never the ideal place to begin reading a trilogy, but Adam Lee's extraordinary vivid, evocative and sensual prose ensures that the reader is well and truly immersed in the book within the first few pages. Not having read *The Dark Shore* and *The Shadow Eater* did not detract from my enjoyment of this novel – although I did wonder how I had managed to miss the first two volumes of such a remarkable series.

The story unfolds against an exotic background of different worlds and levels of creation, all a part of a goddesses' dream. On Earth – the cold 'Dark Shore' – a seven thousand year old wizard who "learned his magic from steppe wanderers who had mapped the celestial byways and first trapped heaven in a circle" (the book is full of such stylish phrases) summons his coven and begins the ritual by which he seeks to regain his lost youth – although his ambitions endanger the entire world.. Across the Gulf, amongst the Bright Worlds, The Dominions of Irth are also in peril, under

attack by goblins, creatures fallen from a higher, hotter reality.

The margravine Jyoti, ruler of the jungle city of New Arwar, is ousted from power by her weak-minded brother who has succumbed to the influence of his wife, herself in thrall to the goblin's telepathic power. Meanwhile, Jyoti's consort, Reece Morgan, once a magus but now without Charm, is attempting to return to the Dark Shore of his birthplace, to rescue his friend Dogbrick stranded on this distant world without any memory of who or what he is, Reece's arrival on Irth and the loss of Dogbrick on Earth being events in the earlier two volumes of the trilogy.

Altogether, *Octoberland* is a splendid achievement. Adam Lee has written a first rate work of fantasy/science fiction that displays a uniqueness of vision and power of storytelling that is rarely found in any genre.

[*The Dark Shore* (as by A.A. Attanasio) was reviewed by Steve Jeffery in *Vector* 189, while both *The Dark Shore* and *The Shadow Eater* (as by Adam Lee) were jointly reviewed by Jon Wallace in *Vector* 200]

**Anne McCaffrey – *The Tower and the Hive* ☐**

Bantam, 1999, 296pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-593-04324-3

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

I have a theory that Anne McCaffrey is going through a phase of filling in the gaps in the various universes she has created over the years, and *The Tower And The Hive* is a good example of this, though in this case it's a conclusion of a series, not an expansion of hitherto unexplored aspects of this universe.

As it's been several years since the fourth volume in this series (*Lyon's Pride*) the summary of events at the beginning provided a useful reminder of what had happened, for which I was grateful. Having said that, however, I have to say that *The Tower And The Hive* (the novel, rather than the series) is a bit of a disappointment. At first, I was interested in the search for the Hivers and the attempts made to combat their invasions, as well as the observations of the Hiver Queens in situ (think of the giant ants in *Them!* and you'll get the idea) and their various servants, ranging from those who care for their eggs to those who cultivate the planets. When, however, the reason for this counter-activity –

the need to find additional living space for Humans and Mrdinis alike – is revealed, the story started to drag a little.

But, that aside, there were some intriguing aspects – some of which could have done with a bit more development, and some with a bit less emphasis. A good example of the former is the anti-Mrdini faction who stage an abortive assassination attempt. As for the latter, about halfway through the novel, the characters become preoccupied with sex, whether it's having babies, or thinking of ways in which to prevent conception to solve the problem of the Mrdini over-population and lessening the aggressive nature of the Hiver Queens when war breaks out on a Hiver-occupied planet.

I think that the bed-hopping, and the repeated descriptions of the Tower Talents at work, could have been dispensed with, making for a fast-paced, more exciting novel, and one up to Anne's usual standards. I'm sorry, but I can't recommend it, unless you're a McCaffrey fan.

**Anthony McCarten – *Spinners***

Morrow, 1999, 263pp, \$24.00 ISBN 0-688-16303-3

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

A science fiction novel about alien abduction is likely to feature a real alien abduction; the label on the cover can give you an expectation about the contents. But when sixteen-year-old Delia Chapman is abducted – and impregnated – by spacemen in silver suits here in Anthony McCarten's debut novel, the book's mainstream packaging leads us to wonder just how 'real' the event really was. Is this science fiction masquerading as mainstream? Or just a novel about an attention seeker, trying for hip and glamour through an outrageous tale? For this is a small-town story, where the extravagant claims of a teenage girl spread like wildfire as friends and neighbours rush to believe or disbelieve her claims. And moreover, this is small-town New Zealand, not Minnesota or Nebraska. As Delia's friend Deborah says, "We see ghosts, we don't see *E fuckin' T, okay?*"

The weirdness spreads, with more abductions and impregnations, and even cattle mutilation, here in a small community where the meat packing plant provides the main source of employment. Add in the mayor's nephew, recruited to resurrect the towns long abandoned library; Gilbert, the incompetent garage assistant lusting after Delia at a distance; the

honest cop and his gossip-prone wife; and you seen a town in turmoil. Reporters arrive from the city to cover the story and everyone awaits the birth of the 'alien' child.

Has Delia really seen an alien? Or a ghost? In a sense it doesn't matter, as this is essentially about the impact of the *idea* upon the community which, as the cover blurb notes, changes lives perhaps more than any real flying saucer could. As noted, this is a first novel but McCarten has a track record as playwright; he's also worked in films and has written short stories. Here he assembles a wonderful cast of characters to watch and wonder about the truth of Delia's outlandish claims; and as the alleged abduction transforms the community, so too does librarian Philip – or at least he tries – with grandiose plans to broaden and refine the tastes of the townspeople through a selection of improving books for his new and improved library whilst the mayor has his own ideas about how to make the town great.

And is Delia carrying an alien's lovechild? Is it really a science fiction story? Well...

[A UK edition is also available: Picador, 1999, 263pp, £7.99 ☐].

**Wil McCarthy – *Bloom* □**

Millennium, 1999, 310pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-85798-593-1

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Most of the hardback sf published in the UK is from genre heavyweights like Banks and Brin and so it makes a nice change to find a book from a lesser known author published in this more prestigious format. *Bloom* is McCarthy's fifth novel and, as you would expect from a man who works in the aerospace industry, is of the hard sf variety.

In the late 21<sup>st</sup> Century mankind has fled the Earth (and the inner solar system) in response to a deadly plague of mycora – man-made self-replicating microorganisms. The remnants of humanity cling to existence in the asteroids and moons of Jupiter. Emergency response teams deal with occasional catastrophic blooms of mycora which dissolve organic tissue and replicate at astonishing rates.

Our narrator, John Strasheim, a laconic shoemaker and part-time reporter on Ganymede, is drafted into a desperate mission into the inner system to investigate fears that the Mycosystem may expand and encroach into the outer system. Further complications ensue when the crew hear rumours that humans are alive on the

mycora-infested Earth. The voyage leads to a conceptual breakthrough and a quasi-mystical climax reminiscent of early Arthur C. Clarke.

McCarthy has a fine talent for blending info dumps into his prose, and *Bloom* is an enthralling tale set in a well-imagined universe. Apart from during some weak spaceship-borne soap opera, the characters are believable. It's particularly encouraging to find an author unafraid to break away from the action and to develop themes and ideas, which emerge naturally from his central concept. However, the analogous use of a computer simulated version of Conway's Game of Life as a means of addressing the question of whether mycora is a legitimate form of life leads to some stodgy passages.

Judging by *Bloom* McCarthy is clearly capable of highly readable Space Opera, rich in thought-provoking content, and I look forward to tracking down some of the author's previous works.

**L.E. Modesitt – *The White Order* □**

Orbit, 1999, 566pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-843-5

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

*The White Order* tells another story in the 'Saga of Recluce' series of sf/fantasy cross-over novels, part of the same future history as Modesitt's sf novels such as *Adiamante*, and where magic is a branch of engineering. Set throughout the history of Recluce's world, the books have been compared to Marion Zimmer Bradley's 'Darkover' series. Here the normal colours of magic are reversed, with White serving Chaos and Bad, and Black serving Order and Good. Therefore *The White Order* are the bad guys and "the Dark Side" is the good side!

This episode of the Saga is set on the continent of Candar (off whose Eastern coast is the large island of Recluce), around the time of *The Magic Engineer*, some 250 years after the founding of Recluce in *The Towers Of The Sunset*, but well before the events of *The Magic Of Recluce*. Ceryll is a boy whose "hedge-wizard" father was murdered by White mages, and is now apprenticed to a miller. When his own magical powers start to waken, he realises he is putting the miller and his family in danger, and leaves for the city of Fairhaven (headquarters of the White Guild). He is apprenticed to a scribe, but his developing skills are detected by the Whites, and he is press-ganged as a student mage. These skills save him on his first night, when he detects a poisoned cup of cider – is this a 'normal' test or something more sinister? Ceryll soon discovers his fellow White mages are, in the main, unprincipled, jealous, and quick to remove any perceived threat

to their ambitions; someone with as much potential as Ceryll is a constant target. He will need to achieve that potential very quickly indeed to stay alive!

Fairhaven is probably the only city left on Candar with running water and sanitation, and for some reason the student mages have to spend a lot of their time cleaning the sewers. A nasty job, so the students are strongly motivated to teach themselves to use magic to burn away the slime! (Who else would think of this?) The section of the book with Ceryll in the sewers discovering his powers seemed far too long, but apart from that *The White Order* is recommended to fans of the series. Ceryll's story is continued in *Colors Of Chaos*, available now in the USA in hardback. As Ceryll is obviously a 'good guy' amongst the bad, maybe the story will see him turning to the "Dark Side" too!

Grumble: the map from *The Magic Of Recluce* showing the world of Recluce in the 'present day' is reprinted in all the books. Therefore, places important to the stories that are no longer around are not shown, such as the White realm of Cyador in the first two books. The White City of Fairhaven, where *The White Order* is mainly set, is not shown either, but there is a "Frven" on the map in the spot where clues from the story place it. If you are going to provide maps, ones showing the world at the time of each story would be more useful.

**Elizabeth Moon – *Hunting Party* □**

Orbit, 1999, 364pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-881-8

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Heris Serrano has resigned her commission in the Regular Space Service and signs on as captain of a luxury yacht owned by Lady Cecelia de Marktos. Cecelia is on the way to the planet Sirialis for the hunting season and during the trip Cecelia and Heris develop a mutual respect. But when they arrive they find that there is more than one type of hunting going on and Heris is forced to confront her past.

*Hunting Party* is a bit of a curate's egg. The earlier shipboard scenes are well done; Moon has obviously given some thought to how a starship might function from day to day. The first half of the novel sets up the situation and the relationships, and the main plot is fairly exciting and well-written.

There are problems, however. Cecelia is on Sirialis for the fox-hunting season and no debate is entered into about the morality of this activity. Indeed the only character who makes even a token protest is treated with contempt and so also, by inference, is any

like-minded reader. To make matters worse real foxes are extinct and the pseudofoxes have been bioengineered especially to give the gentry something to hunt. I also have reservations about the background milieu. I would like to think that the social evolution of mankind would have got beyond the feudalistic hierarchy depicted here. Indeed, one character is protected from the consequences of his actions because he is the son of someone important, while the 'ordinary' people involved are shown no mercy. This seems to be a strange approach to justice.

Overall, an enjoyable book, and I will probably read the follow-up volumes. But it does make the socialist space operas of Iain Banks, etc., seem like a real breath of fresh air.

**Walter Mosley – *Blue Light* ☞**

Serpent's Tail, 1999, 296pp, £9.99, ISBN: 1-852-42611-X

Reviewed by Paul Billinger

Walter Mosley is not a author that you would normally find reviewed in *Vector* but his new novel, *Blue Light*, has been described, by Mosley and others, as science fiction. Mosley is more commonly known as a mystery writer with the series of six novels featuring the private eye Easy Rawlins, of which *Devil in a Blue Dress* has been filmed. At face value *Blue Light* appears a significant change of direction, into Philip K. Dick territory (*Valis* especially), but still contains many of the themes of his earlier novels.

*Blue Light* tells the story of Lester Chance, a mixed race drop-out who has just about given up on life in San Francisco of the mid '60s. His life is transformed when a strange blue light, coming from somewhere outside the solar system, strikes a number of people and those it does not destroy are transformed. Chance is not one of those directly affected but his contact with what are called the "Blues" changes his life.

The book is split into 3 parts, plus a prologue which tells, in short, sharp bursts, of the arrival of the blue light. In the first section the story of the "Close Congregation" is told, a community (cult?) of the transformed lead by Ordé, which is menaced by the demonic presence of the Grey Man, who has also been changed by the blue light but in a very different way. Circling around Ordé are Chance and the homicide detective Miles Barber, who is investigating the suspicious deaths of some of the Congregation. The second part follows the wandering of Ordé's followers after the Congregation's violent break-up with most of them trying to avoid being found by the Grey Man although Miles now has a very personal reason for finding him. The final part tells of the regrouping of those that are left, including our narrator Chance and his adopted family, in the forests of Northern California under

another charismatic leader, Juan Thrombone, and their final struggle, not only to come to terms with the consequences of the *Blue Light* but for survival itself.

I very much wanted to like this book, an author I admire coming to sf for the first time, but somehow it never really came together – sentences, paragraphs even, worked well, were lyrical, meaningful, but as a whole it just does not convince.

Two of the strongest parts of Mosley's writing, character and place, both seemed to be missing here. The characters here are almost all unsympathetic, even Chance appears vague and uninteresting. The plot, which comes over as very loose and unstructured, with much New Age rambling (especially noticeable with the "Iron John" male bonding of the third section) does not help the characters as they fade in and out, often disappearing for considerable time. The sf elements are similarly thin and do not enhance what could easily have been a mainstream novel. The parts that work best are those involving the detective Miles and the novel might have been stronger by concentrating on this element, using a crime genre backbone for what he is trying to say here about the place of the other, the outsiders and the disenfranchised in our society.

Mosley must be congratulated for trying to stretch and reach a wider audience but I cannot wholeheartedly recommend this book as I can his other crime genre novels.

A final point: it is reported that *Blue Light* is the prelude to a projected trilogy (for details see p.4 *Matrix* 137). I cannot imagine where he can go from here – if it is true then I will certainly give it a try. Let us hope that any future books are as convincing and enjoyable as his Easy Rawlins novels.

**Darren O'Shaughnessy – *Ayuamarca* ☞**

Millennium, 1999, 404pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-75281-639-X

Reviewed by John Newsinger

The blurb tells readers that *Ayuamarca* "marks the debut of a prodigious talent" and is "reminiscent of the best of Clive Barker and Iain Banks". I'm afraid not.

The story is set in a South American city ruled over by a ruthless, murderous gangster known as the Cardinal. He maintains an army of enforcers and his will is law. Into this world steps the young ambitious Capac Raimi, come to join his uncle, himself a minor villain on the periphery of the Cardinal's criminal empire. Raimi seems far too scrupulous for a life of violent crime, but nevertheless finds himself taken up as one of the Cardinal's proteges, indeed a possible successor. He has no idea why, and neither do we.

Not a particularly inspiring plot, but in fact the slow pace of the novel, its poor characterisation and the unlikeness of the gangster world all compound the problem. What we have here is an exercise in magic realism that is neither magical nor realistic.

The pace does pick up in the second half of the book when Capac Raimi goes in search of his origins. He is prompted by the way some of his acquaintances seem to disappear without trace, indeed as if they never existed. This is a neat idea, but poorly executed. For the first time, though, Raimi begins to display some ruthlessness, some capacity for murder. He still does not convince as somebody deeply involved in organised crime, let alone as a potential boss of bosses. At last his origin is revealed, but far from being a startling or exciting revelation it is very much a 'so what' damp squib.

*Ayuamarca*, the first volume in a series, was never going to be a great book. It could have been much better, however. The story is too strung out, it should have been substantially cut, tightened up and the pace quickened. Instead O'Shaughnessy and his publisher have opted for a multi-volume debut. Very disappointing.

**Diana L. Paxson – *The Book of the Spear***

Avon Eos, 1999, 200pp, \$10.00 ISBN 0-380-80546-4

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is an Arthurian novel, the second in a series, 'The Hallowed Isles', which began with *The Book of the Sword*. Paxson presents a historical version of the Arthur story, in which the magical elements could arise from the characters' perceptions rather than from objective sorcery, so the book sits somewhere on the boundary between a historical novel and fantasy.

The spear of the title eventually belongs to Oesc, a historical Saxon who became ruler of Kent and in this novel dies in battle against Arthur. The books deals with his childhood and growth to

manhood against the background of historical events, notably the period of his life which he spent as hostage to the Britons and companion to Arthur.

This is a short book, and I think it's in the length that the problems lie. Paxson has to move fast to accommodate the scope of her story, and she simply doesn't have enough space. Years of political and individual development are summarised rapidly, interspersed with key scenes where the characters are allowed to appear in person and interact. For me at least there was far too

much summary of the wider situation and too little concentration on the personal; this is a novel, not a work of history.

Oesc is Saxon by birth and upbringing, but sworn to Arthur and his friend. The tragedy is that the two men must fight each other and Oesc must die. But for the conflict of loyalties in Oesc to work in the novel, the relationship with Arthur must be established, it must come over as compellingly important. Unfortunately it doesn't; it hasn't been given the chance. The same is true of Oesc's relationship with his wife; she is the catalyst that brings about the final conflict, and yet Paxson's treatment of her is perfunctory. She exists to be abducted and to give Oesc an

excuse to take up arms, and it's never made clear why Arthur should fight against Oesc instead of on his side.

Considered as an Arthurian novel, there is nothing really new here. Arthur appears as the young war leader, surrounded by possible historical versions of Kay, Bedivere and Gawain. Merlin is for the most part off-stage. It's a competent version of the 'historical Arthur' school, and no more.

Reading this review would give the idea that I disliked the book. I didn't; I found it enjoyable to read. But it's also disappointing. Given the larger scale it needs, it could have been so much more.

## Frederik Pohl – *Gateway*

Millennium, 1999, 313pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-818-3

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

I'm of the opinion that Pohl's 1952 classic *"The Space Merchants"*, written with C. M. Kornbluth, was almost pure cyberpunk, sans computers. *Gateway*, published 25 years afterwards, is in a very similar vein, but shows Pohl had learnt some colourful tricks from the New Wave.

The plot centres around the eponymously named asteroid, built by a long-vanished alien race, the Heechee, which contains hundreds of incomprehensible starships pre-programmed for unknown destinations. Brave, or simply desperate, adventurers sign up to pilot these lotteries, hoping to discover scraps of alien technologies at the other end to make them rich. Usually, though, they just die or disappear, hence the huge rewards for success.

Interspersed throughout with wry snippets of ephemera, e.g. the 'Classifieds' from the 'Gateway Daily', orientation lectures for would-be pilots, or "Commonly Asked Questions About the Heechee" (to which every answer is "We don't know.") the insignificant, volatile human nature of the individuals involved contrasts well with the ancient implacable mystery of the Heechee that surrounds them.



The narrative is solidly backed by nuggets of background information about a future where the dehumanising effects of the struggle to support a huge population has reduced the lot of all but the richest to a nightmare grind of undernourished, industrial labour. You get a frightening sense of the desperation gripping the characters, and, more broadly, humanity as a whole, struggling for a quick (alien) technological fix against total collapse.

The story is something of a tour-de-force. We know from the beginning that the narrator, Robinette Broadhead (who, despite the name, is a man) strikes it rich. Of the two alternating narrative strands, one follows his path to riches, and the other, chronologically later one, his efforts to exorcise personal demons in psychotherapy. The former strand is the more engaging because the psychotherapy sessions seem a little too obviously of their time. The scenes on Gateway and beyond are marvellous; full of rich, often blackly comic, detail about the squalor and indignities of spaceflight. Pohl's near-genius lies in the intricacy of the human detail he weaves around an alien environment, the little problems, fears and victories. It's funny, tragic, scary and eminently readable.

## Katherine Roberts – *Song Quest*

Element Children's Books, September 1999, £10.99, 235pp ISBN 1-902618-28-9

Reviewed by Gary S. Dalkin

The generic title of this young adult novel, the presence of a map and a glossary, and the fact that this is the first volume of a sequence give the impression it may be a routine formula fantasy without a proper ending. Happily there is no sub-Tolkienesque quest, the map and the glossary are superfluous, and *Song Quest* has a thoroughly satisfying resolution.

Rialle, Frenn, Kherron and Chissar are trainee Singers on an isolated and stormy island far off the Silver Shore. Singers use the power of song to heal, but there are five types of song, and *Yehn* brings death. A shipwreck leads Kherron to abandoning the Isle, while Rialle is sent as part of a mission to stop the half-creature, merlee, from creating the storms which are sinking ships. Rialle discovers that the merlee are being hunted and slaughtered for their eggs to use as medicine for the Karchlord on the mainland. With Frenn and Kherron her adventures take her to a mountain stronghold, where they must fight betrayal, corruption and the cruel exploitation of another race of half-creature, the quetzal.

There are many vaguely Celtic fantasies that use music as a form of magic, though Katherine Roberts provides more than enough imaginative touches and thoughtful plot twists to set her world apart. Her characters come to life, and, apart from a rather off-the-shelf main villain, develop in unpredictable ways. Rialle in particular is a strong and credible heroine, and her friendship with Frenn develops convincingly.

This is a suspenseful, intense novel with a powerful emotional charge, though a handful of harrowing and graphic scenes make it really only suitable for older children. It is fantasy with a hard edge of reality, which uses narrative to make telling points about the exploitation of other races and species. There is real pain here, and the victories carry a price which makes them all the more valuable.

The writing has an immediacy which is most welcome in a young adult title, though occasionally jars for being a little too contemporary. Likewise clichés such as "Now listen carefully, this

is what I want you to do..." [page 191] should never have passed the editing stage. Against this, Chris Down's line drawings are elegant and attractive. *Song Quest* is a highly commendable

debut, well-plotted and characterised and written with feeling, integrity and imagination.

## Franz Rottensteiner (ed.) – *View From Another Shore: European Science Fiction*

Liverpool University Press, 1999, 256pp, £22.50 hc/£11.95 pb ISBN 0-85232-942-8

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Ah, the memories! The last time I reviewed *View from Another Shore* was back in 1973. The review appeared in *Foundation* 5, the first of the forty-odd consecutive issues of that journal in which I had the privilege of appearing before I fell from favour. But enough of nostalgia – how has the book changed in the interim? In two ways, one of them fairly trivial, the other rather peculiar.

The fairly trivial way in which the book has changed is that it has dated by a quarter of a century. As a showcase anthology of European sf it is, therefore, looking more than a little grey. Not one of the authors represented in it is younger than sixty, although many of the stories were, of course, written when they were in their thirties. The one extra item added to the book, 'The Land of Osiris' by Wolfgang Jeschke, is a meaty novelette first published in 1982 (and first published in English translation in 1985), but its author is older than three of the other contributors. Jeschke's career is still thriving, and deservedly so, but his presence here hardly constitutes an infusion of fresh blood.

Many of the writers represented here did first-rate work once upon a time, and a few of them are still doing it. The fact that their translators are mostly afflicted by tin ears cannot entirely conceal the fact that such excellent men as Stanislaw Lem, Josef Nesvadba, Vadim Shefner, Gérard Klein and Lino Aldani had style as well as imagination. Alas, the re-marketing of the book cannot help but carry the tacit implication that European sf has no younger generation worth showcasing – a proposition as blatantly absurd as it is subtly insulting.

The rather peculiar way in which the book has changed is that its introduction has undergone a dramatic transformation. The introduction to the original edition made up for its selectivity by offering a long list of sf writers active in various European countries. Rather than update this – perhaps because the ageing Rottensteiner hasn't a clue what is going on nowadays – the editor has excised it. The original introduction also offered slightly more detailed commentary on some of the writers and stories included in the anthology, but much of this has also been cut, although

some references to the Strugatsky brothers (who are not featured) remain. These unfortunate omissions pale into insignificance, however, when one considers the material that has been added, which constitutes a vituperative and frankly vicious attack upon the work and intellect of the anthology's original star, Stanislaw Lem.

In his introduction to the first edition of *View From Another Shore* Rottensteiner contended that "Not since H.G. Wells has there existed an sf writer of such significance as Stanislaw Lem... Like Wells, Lem is an original thinker, an innovator, and an intellectual of superior quality... a man who leads, not one who follows", etc., etc. From the introduction to the new edition we learn that "Lem's great weakness is characterisation and social background", that "Lem is a misanthrope and a misogynist, and his inability to understand those 'aliens' has led him to project his non-understanding upon the cosmos at large" and that "Lem shows a disregard for facts (which he makes up as he goes along to his heart's desire); he is rather an ideological writer, an atheist theologian, a casuist and a sophist who sometimes dances, sometimes blunders through various scientific, religious and philosophical systems" and so on.

What on Earth is going on here? One might almost suppose that when he wrote the earlier introduction Rottensteiner was Lem's agent, but that following a quarrel the two have spent much of the last two decades locked in acrimonious legal conflict – and if that were the case, one might be tempted to hypothesise that Rottensteiner has produced a new edition of this hopelessly outdated book purely in order to vent his spleen and wreak what revenge he could upon his former idol. And why not?

What, after all, is the purpose of a university press but to provide an arena in which small-minded pseudo-intellectuals can elaborate their personal disputes and petty treasons without giving a toss for anybody else? – including, alas, the unlucky writers whose work is here used as fancy wrapping for the editor's spite.

## Martin Scott – *Thraxas and the Warrior Monks* ☞

Orbit, 1999, 247pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-731-5

## Martin Scott – *Thraxas at the Races* ☞

Orbit, 1999, 245pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-743-X

Reviewed by Patrick Smith

I enjoyed both of these books and found them very entertaining, relaxing and reasonably funny without being ridiculous. I haven't read much comic fantasy, in fact hardly any. I also haven't read much detective fiction either, so I can't help the more experienced reader with comparisons.

Thraxas is, according to the cover blurb, "a third-rate sorcerer, a second-rate private investigator and a first-rate layabout". However throughout the two books it becomes clear that Thraxas is quite a sharp detective. It's just that he applies himself more to his drinking, which, as he lives above a tavern, means that he is in constant practice. He also lives in the city of Turai, a city so full of corruption, crime, scandal and deceit that he gets plenty of practice investigating too.

In *...the Warrior Monks*, Thraxas has the simple case of discovering if his client is guilty of murder. However he soon becomes involved in a search for a two-ton statue that seems to have disappeared without trace. He is joined, and in some cases encouraged, in his search by two sects of rival warrior monks, a criminal gang and the Civil Guard. The eventual meeting of Thraxas, his friends, the four groups and the statue is hilarious.

With *...at The Races*, Thraxas has been hired by his old army commander to retrieve some stolen artwork. A relatively simple task made more complicated when he is framed for murder. A further hindrance results from Thraxas being hired to protect the already sabotaged orcish chariot team from sabotage.

Martin Scott has created a good character with Thraxas, who I found likeable and believable. Turai has a distinct Roman feel and is populated by men, orcs live in the Eastern nations and elves are in the South. All three races are intelligent with their own strengths and are held together in an interesting web of Scott's weaving. In short it's a world which you would like to explore with characters that you wouldn't mind for companions, so long as you didn't buy rounds.

Both books are fast-paced with intriguing plots. Comedy is very much used as a strong flavouring but is not the main ingredient. A criticism may be Scott's overuse of the same similes, which I found difficult to excuse even though the stories are written in the first person of Thraxas. However, I overlooked that as they are great page-turners and I can recommend them highly.

**Sheri S. Tepper – *Singer From The Sea***

Avon 1999, 426, \$24-00, ISBN 0-380-97480-0

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

*Singer From The Sea* is the latest offering from Sheri Tepper, and like all her books, creates that tingle one gets when a well-liked author has another book published.

Although over the years Tepper has rightly won acclaim for her imaginative blend of both fantasy and science fiction genres, the last few books and years have revealed an undercurrent to her writing, an agenda if you will. Given Tepper's background before becoming a full-time writer, working her way to the top of a family planning organisation, it is well known that she has strong views about birth control, overcrowding and green issues. From past experience of her books, she also has strong views about the role of women in today's society, so it comes as no surprise then to this reader when the agenda is given a new coat to wear and parades itself once again before its less than unsuspecting admirers.

A feudal society exists on the somewhat off the beaten track planet of Haven, a small planet with a large percentage of water and little else to offer the rest of the solar system, except perhaps the possibility of eternal life. Genevieve is the daughter of a lord, and as such, her future is already mapped out for her: finishing school, marriage to a man of her father's choice, and a child at the age of thirty. Genevieve, though, has a secret, handed down to her by her mother, and one that she has apparently no hope of, or way of understanding. Women do as they've told, get married, and at thirty have babies, but why few women live long after having them is a mystery. It is for this reason that women are granted their youth, those years from 18 to 30 where their fathers

cannot force their wills in matters of marriage. The Covenants, written by men, dictate the way things should be, and all young women are reared in the properly prescribed covenantly manner.

Safe at home and learning how to be a properly obedient daughter, Genevieve's life is turned upside down when she and her father are requested by the Lord Paramount to attend Havenor, the capital, and serve him. Prince Delganor, the heir to the throne, is looking to be wed and conceive an heir, and Genevieve is selected to be his wife. Unfortunately, she has fallen in love with a commoner, and eventually has his child. Whilst in Havenor, Genevieve learns more about the role of women in society than ever she was taught at school, and following the birth of her child, is forced to flee Havenor in fear of her life. This begins a journey of discovery for Genevieve, and the true import of the heritage passed to her by her mother slowly unfolds.

Once again, Tepper has produced a novel stamped with all the trademarks of her wonderful characterisation and powerful storytelling. Again though, as with many of her recent novels, Tepper appears to get caught up with the momentum of events and the finale is completely over the top in relation to the whole. And once again the reader is left slightly dumfounded by the ending of the book, and more than a slight feeling that something hasn't quite worked.

A good read as always from Tepper, and recommendable, though I feel she will always struggle to write a novel as good as *The Family Tree*.

**E.C. Tubb – *Death God's Doom***

Cosmos, 1999, 127pp, £6.00 ISBN 0-9668968-0-7

Reviewed by Mat Coward

Stumbling across an isolated inn during an eerie blizzard, Malkar the mercenary is hired by a merchant in search of the Golden City of Gualek, and its fabled secrets of eternal youth. Malkar's job is to guard the merchant's dwarfish guide – to keep him alive and to prevent him from committing treachery.

Sadly for the merchant, eternal youth is not to be had on this journey – rather the opposite, to be blunt. Instead, Malkar becomes involved in a civil war over the throne of Dashkit. Along the way, he travels by land and sea (and air, sort of), battles various monsters (and even a few humans), and has the extraordinary good fortune to be told by not one, but two beautiful women that "I love you. You are my master. I am your slave. Do with me what you will." And he does. Mind you, the first time it doesn't work out terribly well, but even so – two in one adventure, eh?

*Death God's Doom* is sword-and-sorcery as traditional as it comes, right down to the "What say you?" word order in the dialogue. It's very readable, full of no surprises whatsoever, and suggests that Mr Tubb (who created Malkar some decades ago) can still cut the sorcerous mustard.

The introduction describes *Doom* as the first "full-length novel of this fascinating character," which might be overdoing it a bit – 127 pages isn't exactly long by current standards. But for my taste, this is precisely the right length for such a story – with plenty of heroic action and camp-fire atmosphere condensed into a couple of hours' happy reading.

[Cosmos Books are available from 32 Tynedale Avenue, Wallsend, Tyne and Wear, NE28 9LS. A checklist bibliography of the works of E.C. Tubb, published by Becon, was reviewed in V203 by L. J. Hurst]

**Harry Turtledove – *Into The Darkness***

Earthlight, 1999, 592pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-684-85825-8

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

When I was a lad (yes I was!), scraping together my hard-earned pocket money to buy sf books, I hated trilogies. I hated even more the awful moment when I got to the end of a book and discovered that it was the first one in a trilogy. Oh, something like *Dune* wasn't bad, I mean the first book was a book in itself. So were the Dragon books, more or less.

Given this, you can see why the current trend for series books leaves me cold, or at least with mixed feelings. OK, in a series, it is possible to develop characters and plots and still put out affordable chunks of reading material, but what if you, as a reader, can't commit to a series? Low budget, demands on time, the fact that there are other series competing for your attention (*polite*

*euphemism*). There are lots of reasons to buy something that's a book, a real, honest-to-goodness, start at page one and work to the end and wrap enough threads up that the reader is satisfied, and, maybe, leave some hanging for a sequel...

What has this got to do with this *Into the Darkness*? It's a con, that's what. It's not a novel...

Credit where credit's due, Harry Turtledove has put a lot of effort into this slice of realistic fantasy. It starts before the beginning and ends after the end. Like life. Alright, like life with magical elements. There are a *lot* of characters. A subset of those have their own viewpoint scenes, and

the whole construction documents the sta

rt and progress of a world-spanning war. Not on our Earth, the map proves that. Some of the locations might sound familiar (Algarve, for example) but that's accidental. This is not Earth, and these are not Earthlings. They live in a world where magic works, where dragons fly and behemoths crush all underfoot. And it's all done competently enough. But...

Back there a few lines, I used the word 'documents', and this is the other problem with this book, it documents. It is a documentary. In style, it has a lot in common with the film, *The Longest Day* (which also



starts before the beginning and ends after the end...). Turtledove has put a lot of cultural detail in this book, he has spent time and effort in keeping all of those viewpoints (17, if you want a count) occupied, he has worked out a history for all the races involved, but at the end of the day, I was still bored. Nothing in this volume progressed fast enough for me. I even came close to not finishing it a couple of times, and when I got to the end, I found that it wouldn't really have made much difference if I hadn't finished it. Personally, I won't read any more of this series. Nothing or no-one in grabbed me enough to make me want to. Get it out of the library if you don't believe me.

## Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – *The Soul of An Angel*

Avon Books, 1999, 378pp, \$24.00 ISBN 0-380-97401-0

Reviewed by Brian J. Robb

It has become an established sub-genre for authors to take minor characters in the classic literary works of others and give them new life by filling in their back-stories with adventures all their own. However, this kind of literary cannibalism has met with mixed results.

The latest seems like a promising idea – just who were the three mysterious Brides of Dracula featured in Bram Stoker's novel? We find out precious little about them in the book and movies have added nothing. Vampire author Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (author of the Count Saint Germaine series) has taken it upon herself to bring these mysterious, seductive women to life.

It's a great idea, but one fraught with problems. Fans of Stoker may have their own view of who these three women were, so to enjoy Yarbro's approach you have to be open to her take on the possibilities. Secondly, it's a task doomed to failure, as we know where the characters must end up and, unless the final book in this trilogy continues beyond the end of Stoker's novel, we never actually find out what happens to the troublesome trio.

*The Soul of an Angel* is the second in Yarbro's 'Sisters of the Night' trilogy and focuses on the character of Fenice Zucchar, the pampered 17-year-old daughter of a prominent 16th century Venice trading family. The tale chronicles the years from 1569 to 1575, when headstrong and wild Fenice conspires to abandon her family and escape to a life of adventure, like those enjoyed by her seafaring brothers. Instead, she is led to poverty and violence in the city port of Varna and eventually into the clutches of Dracula, the oddly attractive, hawk-faced man of her nightmares.

This all sounds better than Yarbro's book actually is. The first section, telling of Fenice's frustrations with her position in Venetian society is simply tedious. The author's attention to historical detail is commendable, but the downside is that for over half the volume this is no more or less than a simple historical novel in which the author had a bizarre obsession with the intricate details of each 'costume' worn by the characters, as if providing blueprints for some aspiring CostumeCon attendants.

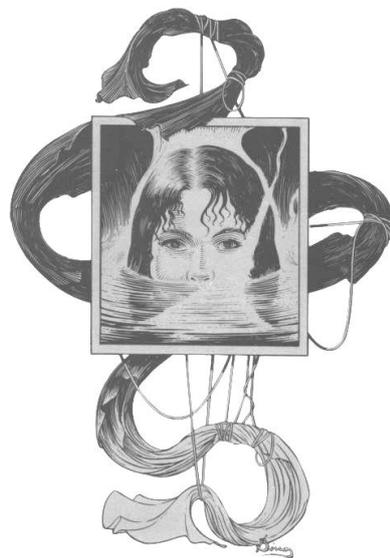
Vampire fans will be disappointed that Dracula doesn't appear in person until about 250 pages in, only 130 pages from the end. Even then, there is a difficulty when an author uses a well known fictional character, especially one which had gone through so many variations from serious to comic, sensual to lampooned, as Dracula. Dracula simple fails to come to life (pardon the pun) in Yarbro's dull prose, and the reader is left feeling that the wait for his appearance has not been worthwhile.

The book finally brings Fenice fang-to-fang at Castle Dracula with Kelene, Dracula's first bride and the 'heroine' of the previous volume in the trilogy, *The Angry Angel*. The expected cat fight never really materialises and the book

simply ends rather than climaxes.

It may sound like a neat idea to explore the lives of Dracula's Brides, but unless it is done with some panache, wit and wisdom rather than in the bland, dull and passionless way Yarbro has tackled it, it all becomes something of a pointless exercise in literary excavation, which even Christopher H. Bing's series of excellent black and white illustrations can't bring to life.

# THE SOUL OF AN ANGEL



# Particles

## Jonathan Carroll – *Kissing the Beehive*

Vista, 1999, 251pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-60281-3  
A slightly disappointing return from Carroll with a near mainstream psychological thriller with almost none of the overt supernatural elements that have been a hallmark of Carroll's previous novels. But still typical of Carroll, as noted by Steve Jeffery in V201, in his scary power, his ability "to wind tension tighter than a drum", and occasional lapses in to sentimental cuteness.

(*The Marriage of Sticks* is reviewed in First Impressions in this issue)

## Peter Delacorte – *Time on my Hands*

Phoenix, 1999, 397pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-75380-838-2

"A clever... playful novel" according to K. V. Bailey, who reviewed this first time in V204. Gabriel Prince is offered a ride in time machine, but on condition he does whatever he can to divert the young B movie actor Ronald Reagan from ending up as the President of the United States. So Gabriel becomes a screenwriter in 1940s Hollywood, shamelessly plagiarising film scripts that won't be written for half a century yet.

## David Eddings – *The Tamuli*

Voyager, 1999, 1400pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-00-648384-4

Chunky paperback omnibus of the three books of the Tamuli, *Domes of Fire*, *The Shining Ones* and *The Hidden City*, which comprise the second 'Sparhawk' trilogy, following on from 'The Elenium'.

## Kate Jacoby – *Exile's Return*

Millennium, 1999, 442pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-878-7

Kate Jacoby's 'First Book of the Elita' impressed Cherith Baldry in V200 for its characters with more depth. The returning exile is Robert Douglas, Earl of Dunlorn, whose motivation in returning to his recently conquered homeland of Luarsa throws everyone into confusion. Well handled, and with, as Cherith notes, a depth and ambiguity of character not always seen in this genre.

## Anne McCaffrey and Margaret Ball – *Acorna's Quest*

Corgi, 1999, 411pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-552-14748-6

Sequel to *Acorna*, in which (as recounted in the preface) a young infant with an unusual cranial protuberance was discovered drifting in an escape pod and adopted by three asteroid prospectors.

(*Three Men and a Baby* in space, anyone?)

Now a young woman, with strange healing powers, she dreams "of a shining world with blue grass and green skies" and sets off with one of the prospectors, even as a ship bearing gentle telepathic aliens arrives with news of a marauding race of space killers and a story of an infant lost long ago. Remind me again, just why we read this stuff.

## Ian McDonald – *Kirinya*

Millennium, 1999, 412pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-876-0

The sequel to *Chaga*, in which an alien life-form is transforming large parts of Africa, *Kirinya* continues the story of Gaby McAslan, who entered the alien environment at the end of the first book. Meanwhile the US is attempting to both ruthlessly quarantine and wrest control of the Chaga while the new emergent states are trying the break the blockade. Despite reservations about the first book, John Newsinger in V202 wrote "*Kirinya* is excellent" while still suspecting McDonald's best is yet to come.

## Eric S. Nylund – *Signal to Noise*

Avon Eos, 1999, 390pp \$6.99 ISBN 0-380-79292-3

"A fast-paced space opera with hard science infusion and a climactic finish" wrote Alan Fraser in V201 while challenging the 'hyperpunk' tag of Nylund's post-disaster novel of alien contact and a two-edged gift of a virus that repairs human DNA but at the cost of changing who you are.

## Mickey Zucker Reichert – *The Children of Wrath*

Millennium, 1999, 576pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-563-X

Part Two of the somewhat confusingly numbered Renshai Chronicles (*Beyond Ragnarok* and *Prince of Demons* are given a Volumes 1 and 2), the heart sinks at the sight of map with large areas labelled "East Lands", "The Western Plains", "The Southern Sea", and you wonder what dull and unimaginative people could possibly live there. The Kingdom of Bearn is also afflicted with a reproductive sterility as well as that of the imagination, seven missing shards of the elven Pica Stone must be found by a group of seven people to lift the curse. Lesley Hatch, in V201, thought this quest fantasy overlong and "could have been cut by half with no problems", particularly "the seemingly

interminable and irrelevant battle between the Norse Gods and an immortal warrior" before the curse is lifted, recommending it only to the dedicated Renshai fan.

## Robert A Sawyer – *Frameshift*

Voyager, 1999, 343pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00648320-8

At nineteen, Pierre Tardivel is diagnosed with Huntington's Disease, which might leave him fifteen or twenty years of life at the most. He elects for genius, to make the most of the time left to him, and turns to the study of the purpose of 'redundant' DNA, those parts not encoding genes, where he finally makes a startling discovery. Alison Sinclair reviewed the Tor hardback edition in V197 and admired Sawyer's "chutzpah" in his handling of speculative genetics wedded to a science fiction thriller mystery.

## Terri Windling and Delia Sherman (eds.) – *The Essential Bordertown*

Tor, 1999, 383pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-86703-4 'Bordertown', where faery and the mundane world, science and magic, meet in a sanctioned American city, derives from a series of shared world anthologies, unpublished in the UK and out of print in the US. This anthology mixes artful 'Guidebook' chapters with short stories from both big-name and relatively unknown writers. Highly praised in its hardcover debut by Tanya Brown in V203. "There isn't a weak story in the book; if anyone still thinks that fantasy is an excuse for poor prose, let them read here and think again."

## Vernor Vinge – *A Deepness in the Sky*

Millennium, 1999, 606pp, £17.99 ISBN 1-85798-825-6

Set some 30,000 years before *A Fire Upon the Deep* at the height of the Queng Ho trading empire, two enemy fleets arrive simultaneously in the vicinity of the strange, periodic On-Off star, the inhabitants of whose single planet, Arachna, are due to break through into a nuclear and information age. Reviewed in the Tor edition by Steve Jeffery in V207, this is wide-screen space opera at its best, with wit, panache and an almost Banksian complexity of plotting and characterisation.

## Tad Williams – *Otherland 2: River of Blue Fire*

Orbit, 1999, 796pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-764-1

The second volume of the 'Otherland' tetralogy and sequel to *City of Golden Shadow*, continues the multi-stranded plot set in a series of virtual worlds, from a Wellsian/Martian London, a carnival Venice and a version of Egypt, where Otherland's creator, Felix Jongleur, now permanently lives, his ancient body sustained only by life-support. K. V. Bailey, in V201, found an Odyssean element to the quest journeys of Renie Sulaweyo and Paul Jonas, a WWI soldier transported forward through time, so that no matter

how despairing the characters, "the reader, however, stays fresh" through a series of virtual worlds along a mutable river that "endlessly spawns novelty of scene and incident".

**Various – *The Web 2027***

Millennium, 1999, 568pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-599-0

An omnibus reissue of the first six *Web* books, series of novella-length 'Young Adult' sf stories from some of the most respected writers in the genre, set in the

shared cyberworld of the Web.

*2027* comprises Stephen Baxter's *Gulliverzone*, Stephen Bowkett's *Dreamcastle*, Eric Brown's *Untouchable*, Graham Joyce's *Spiderbite*, *Lightstorm* by Peter F. Hamilton and *Sorceress* by Maggie Furey. (These last two reviewed by Andy Mills in V200) Two new books in the *Web* series, *Avatar* by Pat Cadigan and *Walkabout* by Eric Brown, were reviewed by Penny Hill in V206.

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**Reviewers Key:** AF – Alan Fraser, AS1 – Andy Sawyer, AS2 – Andrew Seaman, BJR – Brian J. Robb, BS – Brian Stableford, CB1 – Cherith Baldry, CB2 – Colin Bird, CH – Chris Hill, GD – Gary Dalkin, GW – Gary Wilkinson, IE – Iain Emsley, JN – John Newsinger, JW – Jon Wallace, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K. V. Bailey, LB – Lynne Bispham, LH – Lesley Hatch, LJH – L. J. Hurst, MC – Mat Coward, MKS – Maureen Kincaid Speller, MP – Mark Plummer, P – Particles, PB – Paul Billinger, PH – Penny Hill, PK – Paul Kincaid, PS – Patrick Smith, RWH – Robert W. Hayler, SC – Stuart Carter, SD – Stephen Deas, SJ – Steve Jeffery, ST – Sue Thomason, VL – Vikki Lee.