Vector

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The Critical Journal Of The British Science Fiction Association

Articles

Gene Wolfe
Looking Behind The Sun
Brian Herbert
The Family Business
Miha Remec
Slovene SF Writer

Interview

Stephen Baxter/ Keith Brooke

Plus:

Reviews
Letters

Vector

August/September 1991 ⇒ Issue 162

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Editorial

By Catie Cary

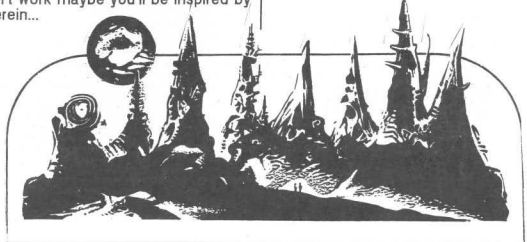
A Number of Articles in this issue of **Vector** have a religious theme. As an Unbeliever, I have often been surprised to note that so many of my favourite SF and Fantasy stories have been written by people of strong religious beliefs and Christians at that. Why? For a start the capacity for believing the incredible must be a help to a writer of the fantastic, additonally the ceremonial and complicated history of most of the great religions have probably given rise to a great many plot ideas and decorations. As to why Christians write fantasies? I can only guess that it is the sterility and dryness of the modern churches that sends them into the realms of fantasy for relief.

I have often been fascinated by the way religion and the religious have been portrayed in SF- particularly by those themselves of a religious turn of mind. Garry Kilworth stated in **Vector 154** that "the people in the book must have a religion of some kind", and this sentiment would appear to be true for many other writers with religious beliefs. Yet as sophisticated people with often com plex beliefs themselves, they often seem to have real problems in conceiving of *other* sophisticated complex religions. Too often their invention seems to come down to a couple of chaps in hooded robes wielding a butchers knife - or if a more sinister effect is required the priest will be a woman.

It's hard sometimes to see why grown adults accept the tenets of many real world religions - so it's perhaps unsurprising that fictional religions are often so hard to swallow.

For me the most successfull working into fiction of religion is where the author alows her beliefs to percolate out and inform her writing, rather than either directly using a religious theme, or using allegory consciously to sugar-coat the message.. As Ursula Le Guion said in 'Myth and Archetype In Science Fiction' 1976 " For an example of the use in science fiction of a living religious mythos one may turn to the work of Cordwainer Smith, whose Christian beliefs are evident, I think, all through his work. Whether or not one is a Christian one may admire wholeheartedly the strength and passion given the words by the author's living belief." Gene Wolfe is another writer of whom this is true, and Steven Palmer's article dredges up some interesting references. By the way, for those of you without a fat dictionary - The *Parousia* is apparently the Second Coming....

I'm hoping that I will have irritated enough people by now to ensure a full postbag containing heaps of letters and contributions! And if that doesn't work maybe you'll be inspired by one of the wonderful articles herein...



Interior Artwork By Kevin Cullen

Letters

Please send all letters of comment to:

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In The Clique
From Maureen Speller

I hate to say this, but the contents of **Vector** are becoming predictable in the extreme. Another Mary Gentle Piece, another Colin Greenland piece. I suspect, in part, this is something to do with a paucity of other material from the likes of the ordinary member (yes, I hang my head), but also I think it is something you are going to have to start actively working to counter. **Vector** articles are beginning to look cosy and cliquey. I'm not interested, and I'm part of the clique. Of course it could be *because* I'm part of the clique, I don't know , but it struck me, looking at the books on the cover, that it was a pity we weren't reading about Misha and Pat Murphy rather than Colin. I've nothing against reading about Colin and I understand that it's good to be aware of our own SF writers, but I'm not so convinced they can sustain the whole magazine throughout the year.

I'm not sure what to suggest to counteract the tendency, indeed I feel a bit mean and unsupportive in pointing it out at all, and I shall certainly be doing my bit in the next few months to try and contribute something a little different. I'm starting to bring myself up to date with my self-imposed reading tasks, so I will see what I can do. It would after all, be sensible to be writing literary articles for **Vector** rather than burying them in Apas and then complaining because no-one reads them. But it had to be noted that **Vector** is going through a quiet patch.

Maureen Speller
Folkestone

We understand that Colin Greenland loved the last issue. We'd appreciate comments and contributions from other ordinary members. **CC**

Reviewing...
From Ken Lake

Oh dear, what makes James McLean imagine that *any* "balanced" view of any book is possible? If I review a book that thrills me, I want to tell you all how much I enjoyed it; If a book strikes me as appalling, I believe It's my job to warn you against it. In *all* such statements - that is to say, in every review in every medium - the words "I believe" are implicit in the reviewer's words, for what he is giving you is his personal view. How could he do otherwise?

For a perfect lesson on book reviewing, turn to **Private Eye #770** (21 June 1991) where "Bookworm" deals exuberantly with the crass stupidities of David Eddings' **Seeress Of Kell**. While joyously demolishing the whole juvenile text, he points out clearly that:

> "Eddings writes for the people who find Tolkien too taxing. If he has taken any pains, it is to make his style halfwit-friendly....How do you explain the popularity of a book such as this? It's certainly not because It's a good read: It's a dreadful read, It's one of the worst reads that you could find....You don't need to do it coherently, tastefully, sensibly. Eddings does it on as low a level as you'll meet... His success is built on his readers' emotional and intellectual deprivation, but who cares?"

Now I happen to approve of this demolition job. But suppose the book had been sent for review to one of the intellectually deprived who enjoy Eddings' writings? The review would have been precisely opposite to this one- and since it honestly reflected the writer's views, would have been equally valid so long as he was able to define his terms and support his argument coherently.

Of course I beg to review books I know I'll enjoy. Of course I have returned some books because I believe my views are so biased I cannot provide a fair idea of their content and style to others who may approve of the textual sub-message which so upsets me. To demand that I give equal weight and balance to reviewing books by a racist, a feminist, a chavinist, a futurist, a scientist, an established author, a newcomer with friends in high places but no style, a plagiarist, an innovator, an idiot and an occasional genius is to indicate a total lack of comprehension of how the human mind works and of the function of reviews.

To summarise: while both can mislead, two names should set the tone for your reception of any review. First the author's name - you already have your own prejudices about this, so it matters to you; secondly the reviewer's name so that you can say " Oh, I usually agree with his views" or "Christ, this man always writes crap!"

Ken Lake
London

Small Press
From Nick Wood

I found Kev's editorial in **Vector 160** interesting - because I've found some of the most exciting SF ideas pithily presented in short stories. I've noticed that the only short fiction magazine to be regularly reviewed by the **BSFA** is **Interzone** - despite the proliferation of small-press magazines in the UK and abroad (USA). This is surely not because they are considered "beneath" the critical attention of the **BSFA**??

Most of these magazines have reasonable standards and carry the potential for growth (eg **BBR**). The comment regarding hopefully reviewing magazines regularly in the near future - I take it you include these magazines? (I know of some people within SF - ironis, aint it? - Who maintain snobbish boundaries about "literary" writing and perceive the small (alternative/slipstream) ? Press as glorified fanzines of dubious quality!)

Because I'm stuck here at the turbulent tip of Africa, I feel frustrated at not being able to attend many of the exciting activities/ conventions staged by the **BSFA**. One item in particular drew my attention: ie Ian Watson gave a presentation at the University of Keele on the "Future of SF". I don't suppose you would be able to organise a transcript of that talk for **Vector** readers who like myself may not have been able to attend?

Nick Wood
Cape Town, South Africa

Yes - to everything I think. Ian Watson, are you reading this?...**KM**

Bull
From Pete Darby

Just a couple of brief points; firstly. A quick correction to Jon Wallace' five books; the second series, featuring the American take over of **A Very Peculiar Practice** was broadcast over a year ago..

Secondly, is it safe to assume that you are a subGenius, or is someone actually paying for those ads? May Jube Slack (TM) and pinkness fall on such a heinous scam if they have.

Pete Derby
Pope Of The Church Of Terminal Paranoid Morality
Colchester

Not Guilty... **CC**

The place: A small room in the Cairn Hotel, Harrogate.
The time: Late afternoon, Saturday, May 4th 1991. Mexicon IV.
The people: Stephen Baxter, author of stories in **Interzone**, **Zenith 2**, **Other Edens 3**, **Writers of the Future** and the novel, **Raft** (Grafton, July 1991 - NB £14.99 not £13.95 as mentioned in text). Keith Brooke, author of stories in **Interzone**, **Other Edens 3**, **REM** and the novels, **Keepers of the Peace** (Gollancz, November 1990) and **Expatria** (Gollancz, July 1991). And an audience of one: Eric Brown, who refused to contribute, although he slipped up a couple of times ....

Steve Baxter: Keith, let's begin by talking about how you started writing.
Keith Brooke: Well, I started indirectly by writing songs for a rock group, which didn't work out. Then I moved into photography, which didn't work out. Then I moved into art, which didn't work out. So I was stuck with writing.
SB: At what kind of age was that?
KB: I started reading again when I was about seventeen and I started to think that perhaps I could do things a bit better, or a bit differently at least. So I started writing ideas down in a notebook. I had this vague idea that writers didn't succeed until their mid-twenties, so why bother starting before then? I wrote my first story when I was at university - in 1986 - and I made my first professional sale to **Interzone** in 1988.
SB: What are your influences, would you say?
KB: Everything's been influenced by people like Lucius Shepard, the cyberpunks, although I wouldn't describe my stuff as cyberpunk. My favourite science fiction book is Robert Silverberg's **Dying Inside**. I think the most important influences come from outside the field: people like Ian McEwan, Graham Greene, Scott Fitzgerald. How about you: when did you start?
SB: When I was at school -
KB: A long time ago.
SB: Yes, a long time ago, in a city far away. There was a teacher who gave me quite a lot of advice on putting manuscripts together and submitting them.
KB: So you were actually starting professionally from an early age.
SB: In a way, yes. The first submission I made was to Harry Harrison around 1976 or 1975. So off it went and back it came: the anthology series had folded. I tried it at Ken Bulmer's **New Writings in SF**, but *that* had folded. The next few years were like that. I kept on writing the stuff, but I didn't have the nerve to send it to America.
KB: Were you aware of the American magazines?
SB: Oh yes, but it was such a hurdle to jump. I mean you saw all the great names in them, the Heinleins, the Pohls. There seemed to be no British magazine at the time either. So it took about four years to start getting rejection slips, as opposed to "Sorry we've folded". But I kept on writing: I worked hard through by university days, but I started to get a bit discouraged. I felt that I was never going to break through, but I was still kind of impelled to keep going. I kept working at a low level until 1986 when I made my first sale to **Interzone**.
KB: I think on that story, at the end, you said that would have been your four hundred and somethingth rejection slip if it hadn't sold. Was that true?
SB: That was a joke. I counted it up: I had about 50 stories, all with one or two rejection slips - quite a selection. But once I'd made that first breakthrough it started to get easier. It also gave me the incentive to start trying out the small press magazines like **Dream**. It appears and you get the readers' reactions. You get a bit more encouragement. And also there's the anthologies. Our careers have almost been in parallel.
KB: Sort of, but they contrast too. You were working for ten years before you broke through. I'd been trying for two. The sort of things we write are quite different too.
SB: Yes. My influences aren't so much the current stuff. I do read the current stuff but I tend to evaluate it more, it doesn't go straight into the subconscious quite so easily. I'm analysing the way the fiction works, and also the ideas. It's all the stuff from the past: James Blish, Bradbury - that was what I was reading as a kid. But as far as the actual writing goes I started studying short story writing: how do you write a short story, no matter what the genre?
KB: God knows.
SB: So I started reading people like Hemingway. He invented a lot of the techniques we use now. But then you can't read Hemingway without getting socked between the eyes.
KB: What's your scientific background?
SB: Well, I did science "A" levels, a maths degree, all that, and that was a big help because it overlapped with a lot of theoretical physics: quantum mechanics, relativity. That's a big help now, because I can read quite heavy stuff, I can go beyond pop science and read the technical articles, at least to get a flavour of what's happening. The closer you get to the source the better you do. Then I went to Southampton University to do a PhD in Acoustics. That taught me how to research - how to use a library, how to follow threads. It's all useful in the writing process. Where do you get your ideas from?
KB: Whenever somebody discovers that you're a science fiction writer, they always ask, "Oh, where do you get your ideas?" and I hate being asked it. But then... it's the question that fascinates me about other writers. Some of the ideas just come out of the blue, like a story called 'Passion Play' which was in **Other Edens 3**, that just occurred to me one day, almost complete. I had the setting and the characters, most of the plot. I thought about it for a couple of days and then I sat down and wrote it, and I don't think I changed it much at all. There are other sort of nuts and bolts ways of getting ideas. Like I read an article in a recent **New Scientist** which set me thinking and since then I've written a first draft of a short story which came directly from that. What about your stories? They feature huge ideas, like the Raft, and like the huge cube - I can't remember the name of the story....
SB: 'Vacuum Diagrams'. A cube-shaped planet.
KB: And 'The Jonah Man'. As Eric said, the ideas are cosmic in scale yet you manage to write a story about them. I actually wrote a

Out in July...

Stephen Baxter
Keith Brooke
Interview

"...it's an up-beat book because people struggling against awesome forces do succeed in the end."

Stephen Baxter

story inspired by that attitude in your writing, but I don't think I succeeded - the idea wasn't big enough.

SB: Which one was that?

KB: It hasn't appeared yet, it'll be in **Aboriginal** some time.

SB: Well, I get criticised, people say the ideas I use are too big for short stories. That's proved by a couple of them busting out to be novels, like **Raft**, which is appearing in July from Grafton, £13.95. It's essentially the idea in the short story, with more extrapolation, more detail... the plot elements are similar but it's seventy thousand words instead of five. The editors said that it was still rushed in places! I do tend to get these big ideas and try to shoehorn them into a short story.

KB: Would you say you were a novelist rather than a short story writer?

SB: Yes, I think so. I do seem to be much more comfortable with handling characters and stuff at that length. The short story's a different art-form really. I wish I could do better; there's nothing better than a good short story, it's a perfect jewel. Like some of Eric's stories, the one in **Other Edens 3**, what was that?

Eric Brown, at last: 'Disciples of Apollo'. I wrote that very quickly, the plot came almost complete.

KB: Most unlike you.SB: As a short story that's... well I won't say it or he'll get a big head. It's pretty good anyway.

KB: I know what you mean. You can read a short story and you can't see any way to improve it. Unlike virtually all novels.

SB: If we're talking about where ideas come from, I think partly the reason my stories turn out the way they do is because of the way I work up the ideas. I don't think I've ever had the experience of a complete thing popping into my head, I always start with something, some seed. It's usually some bit of science. In ''Traces', for example, the key science in there was the archaeological image extractor. So then I thought, well what can you do with that? So I have them going to a comet to get ancient images of the birth of the solar system. So the science is working up into a scenario; but then there's the fiction side of it, there's got to be some kind of human conflict based on the scientific premise - it's causing somebody a problem - and then, ideally, the resolution should tie in with the science. That's the target. But because I work like that the ideas tend to go off in their own direction. Even in 'Traces', a slight little story, you have the collapse of a major religion and you have the discovery of a race that was destroyed by a supernova.

KB: All in one short story.

SB: Yes, about four thousand words. The short version of 'Raft' is another example: you have an alternate universe and a complete rites of passage story for the protagonist in which he saves the human race. The ideas tend to be too big for a short story; I don't know when to stop.

KB: How do you work? Do you write a draft and then revise it or do you write and revise as you go along? I can't understand these people who do that, revising all the way through, and they don't even know where they're going until the end.

SB: I write a draft first, then revise it. I did try with **Raft** - available from Grafton, £13.95 -

KB: In July, was that?

SB: Yes, July. With **Raft** I did revise each chapter as I wrote it, to try and make it easier for myself. With the second novel I worked differently, I consciously went straight through the first draft, trying to get a more uniform flow, more coherence. I think the actual labour was about the same.

KB: How long did they take you? I mean, you've got a full-time job as well, yet you're incredibly prolific.

SB:I wouldn't say that. I aim for about 100,000 words a year, which is a novel plus little bits.

KB: Yet there are professional - I mean *full-time* - writers who don't manage that.

SB: Well I think I'm quite efficient. **Raft** took about four months. I work a couple of hours a night and I'll take the odd chunk out of my holiday from work. I've learned to be efficient: if I ever gave up my day job I might lose the discipline, there'd be so much time not to write. What about you?

KB: As I say, I can't imagine any other way of doing it. I have to sit down and write a draft. As fast as I can. For a novel that'd be maybe three thousand words a day, every day that I can until it's done. Then I just like to forget about the whole thing for several months, and then I come back and I probably spend twice as long revising.

SB: Are the revisions major changes?

KB: I don't like to make big structural changes. I used to think that was lazy writing until it occurred to me that I've actually done all the hard thinking about the structure of the book and the shape of the plot before I sit down and write it, so any revisions to the structure come before I've actually written the thing - they're *pre*-visions in a way.

SB: The second draft revisions tend to be minor.

KB: I mean, I might re-write a scene or cut paragraphs or switch them around, but it's usually just re-structuring sentences and paragraphs, making sure they say what I want them to say.

SB: Have you ever tried to work differently: set off and see what happens?

KB: Never with a short story. I've always got to know where it starts, where it finishes... and what happens in between. With the novels, with **Keepers of the Peace**, which was published in November at £13.95, it had to be rigorously planned because the chapters alternated between the main plot and flashing back to build up the background and that had to be plotted out beforehand. But with the Expatria novels, I've known the shape of the book and where it's going, and roughly where the major turning points are, but the biggest fun I had was in letting the characters do what they want, letting them come to life, letting the scenes take over. I loved doing it but I don't think I'll always work like that.

SB: The first one is called **Expatria**.

KB: And the second one is **Expatria Incorporated**.

SB: **Expatria** is July 1991.

KB: £13.99, I think.

SB: From Gollancz.

KB: Yes. Well, basically the whole Expatria thing works out as a big novel in two volumes. The second volume stands on its own - you don't need to have read the first - and the first volume is a complete novel, but there's the background plot of the overall project which is left unresolved. It's about a colony planet that's lost contact with Earth, and the rest of human civilisation - if that's the right word - the colony has rejected technology. When the original colonists came in their generation ark ships they had become a people of the interior. The planetary surface was an alien environment to them and there was a conflict over whether they should land or just stay at home in their nice cosy arks. They landed, and for generations there was a backlash against the technophiles who had wanted to stay in orbit. The first novel is about the rediscovery of science and knowledge, generations later - not the millennia it says on the jacket - in a kind of soup of different cults and factions and a set of very conservative tendencies that don't want change.

SB: It sounds like there are vaguely similar elements in **Keepers of the Peace**. **Keepers** is about the dehumanisation of a soldier and his gradual re-emergence, the disintegration of the soldier. There's a sort of parallel with **Expatria**: social processes grinding out humanity in **Keepers of the Peace**, social processes grinding out creativity in **Expatria**.

KB: I've never looked at it like that. There may be similar themes, but the books are totally different in tone and in mood. **Keepers of the Peace** is a fairly hard-edged political thriller.

SB: Very dark.

KB: Very dark and moody. Miserable. Depressing.

SB: And desolate.

KB: Angry. Whereas **Expatria** is quite up-beat, positive. And fun. It's meant to be a pacifist adventure novel - the people who succeed in the end aren't the ones who resort to violent means - but I don't think I quite succeeded in that, certainly not in the second book. In that way it had a political edge but it was very much in the

background and I don't expect people to pick up on it. Whereas most of the comments about **Keepers of the Peace** have been about the politics of it, the anti-militaristic tone.

SB: Well it very clearly *is* anti-militaristic, isn't it. Specifically about the dehumanising experience.

KB: It's anti-militaristic, but it's also anti-large-scale-organizations. Part of the inspiration was Northern Ireland and Afghanistan, but a large part of it came from seeing people swallowed up into large companies. Whether they want it or not they become indoctrinated into the mind-set of their employers - to me that's dehumanising.

SB: Have you read **Ender's Game** by Orson Scott Card?

KB: Only the novelette.

SB: There's quite an interesting contrast there. There's this boy who's dehumanised and made into a military machine, but the premise of the book is very different. In that book it has to be done. There's an implacable alien force which is going to wipe out humanity and only the boy can save them: it has to be done.

KB: It's a totally opposing world-view. The idea that there's always someone out there we have to defend ourselves against. I mean, although **Keepers of the Peace** is a totally gloomy book, it puts across the idea that we *don't* always have to fight: surely we're grown up enough to talk about things. Look at Eastern Europe. The revolutions - compared to historical revolutions - were almost totally bloodless. Okay, they killed Ceaucescu, but on the large scale they were peaceful revolutions.

SB: Maybe we're moving towards a more mature society. But that's still to spread to the rest of the world. I'm not just thinking about Iraq - there's the famine situation, made dozens of times worse by civil wars and governments that spend money on arms.

KB: And also by the intervention of First World powers that prop up governments when it's useful to them, then abandon them.

SB: Ask me about **Raft**.

KB: **Raft**. What about **Raft**, Steve? I know it's published in July by Grafton at £13.95.

SB: It's actually cheaper than yours.

KB: Only four pence, come on. How may novels had you written before **Raft**?

SB: One, some years ago. A first draft. But it was hopeless. While I was writing it I knew it was failing, but I kept going to see if I could get to the end. That was vaguely similar to **Earth** by David Brin. A mini black hole hits the Earth and starts destroying it from the inside.

KB: Another small idea from Steve Baxter.

SB: At least that was novel-sized. But **Raft**, which is appearing in July, is very different. It's hard sf, set in an alternate universe in which gravity is a billion times as strong as here. Humans get into this universe through a warp in space and they find themselves in a nebula orbiting a black hole, surviving in what's basically a zero gravity environment. But there are complications, for instance the human body itself exerts a gravitational pull.

KB: What effect does that have on human relationships? I mean Eric's here, so you have to think about the sex side of things. Can people come into close contact?

SB: Oh they can, but they just, sort of, stick together. It's quite appealing really, isn't it? They stick together with the force of about half a gee. There is that metaphorical side to it: the lead character's very attracted to a woman and he describes how her gravitational pull feels different to anyone else's. The essentials of the story are that the nebula is failing and the hero, a young boy growing into a man, goes off on an odyssey through a series of strange situations, strange variants of human society, strange varieties of native flora and fauna, trying to find a way out. Which he succeeds in doing in the end.

KB: You've given it away.

SB: It comes back to what you said earlier: it's an up-beat book because people struggling against awesome forces do succeed in the end.

KB: What are your plans? What are you working on now?

SB: Well, I've just turned in my second novel to Grafton, which is an alternate Victorian piece.

KB: Expanded from the story in **Zenith 2**?

SB: Yes. It looks as if that won't be published for a while. **Raft** is being published in the States so the strategy is to follow that with another hard sf novel and that will be the next one, probably in July next year. I've put in proposals now for three novels, all set in the universe of my Xeelee stories, which is tangentially linked to **Raft**. But they will be stand-alone novels: one will be near-future, a thousand years or so away; middle future, fifty thousand years; far future, a million years. It's big, you might call it space opera, but you might call it Stapledonian. What about you, what do you plan to do?

KB: Well, once the Egyptians are out of the way, I'm working on a few short stories... basically I want to re-learn how to write short stories, because I'm not confident about the way I'm doing it. I want to sit down and work out what I'm going to do and then *do* it. It'll be a big psychological step for me; I hope it'll be a definite leap in the quality of what I'm doing. I often seem to have immense trouble moving from the concept of a story, the initial spark, and developing that into a plot, a structure.

SB: Do you ever study these "How to..." handbooks?

KB: I got through dozens of "How to write" books, but all they show you in the end is how to write a "How to write" book.

SB: One of the best I've read recently was Silverberg's **Worlds of Wonder**, where he publishes classic stories and then takes each one apart.

KB: Well I'm never comfortable with taking other people's stories apart - I'm not sure that what they do would work for me. The interesting thing about that book is that Silverberg dissects stories that had a profound influence on his career and he tells us what he learnt from them.

SB: But there is some specific stuff in there as well. For instance, if you take two ideas and put them together, a story will emerge. That sounds a bit off-beat, but I've tried that and the resulting story was 'George and the Comet' which will be in **Interzone** in October. The two ideas, which seem quite different, are: at the end of its life the sun will expand into a red giant and destroy the comets, which will evaporate into a flash of water vapour (which you can observe around other red giants), and the other idea comes from new speculations about the origins of man: that we were all originally flying creatures with sails and the reason we evolved fingers was to work the sails, and it was only later that we evolved into what we are. It's interesting, isn't it?

Eric Brown: Yes

SB: I'd noted these things down when I found them, but from trying to put these two things together, trying to make them fit - why would these two things be connected? - story ideas emerge. Silverberg used this technique when he was turning out two stories a day; he'd take something like revolutionary politics and an antimatter drive, put them together and there'd be another five thousand words.

KB: You work full-time and write in your "spare" time. Do you have any ambitions to change that?

SB: Sort of. I do enjoy my work. It's a drain on my writing and my energy at times, but I'd miss it and I'm not sure I'd be all that much more productive. But other things might come along, like if we have a family that would wipe me out. It is getting more difficult as I get more deadlines. I think the next, say, five years will tell. The books will appear, the sales returns will come in and I should be able to see which way to go. I imagine I'll always write and I hope I'll always sell, but I'll need to be earning a reasonable income. If I am earning reasonably well I think I'll probably go to a part-time solution. But you have to face the fact that you can't actually sell more than a novel a year. So if you can produce that novel plus some short stories, plus handle the business side of it, that's what you have to do. I could use a bit more time, but not much. What about you? You're a full-time writer now.

KB: I've written full-time for four years and I don't want to do anything else. I don't want to get a proper job, basically.

SB: Maybe that shows in your dread of organizations.

KB: Yes, perhaps that's what it is. I'm going to write full-time for as long as I can afford to. Admittedly you can only turn out one novel a year, but if you can do that and make some kind of living at it and it takes you perhaps six months when you add it all up, then you've got six months to do other things. That's quite appealing to me.

SB: That's true, I suppose. Don't you find the business side takes up more of your time? Here we are spending a weekend at a convention, and an interview can take half a day. If you do other things like signings, it all takes time.

KB: Dealing with rejection slips and sending the stories out elsewhere. That takes a *hell* of a lot of time.

SB: Well, for you it must. I wouldn't know.

KB: Perhaps we'd better end there.

SB: Keith Brooke, thank you very much.

KB: Stephen Baxter, thanks.

"It's meant to be a pacifist adventure novel - the people who succeed in the end aren't the ones who resort to violent means"

Keith Brooke

Miha Remec

The Early SF of a Slovene Writer

By
Žiga Leskovsek

The rare Yugoslav SF stories that have made their way into foreign SF periodicals have failed thus far to present either the wide spectrum of Yugoslav SF publishing, or the work of its most important author, Miha Remec. It can be safely said that, without his work, the Yugoslav SF literary legacy would be mightily impoverished. He is the author of five SF novels (**The Cave**, 1978; **Recognition**, 1980; **Ixlon**, 1981; **Mana**, 1985; **The Green Pledge**, 1989), two short novels (**Unchaste Daughter**, 1985; **The Hunter**, 1987), several plays and numerous short stories. Besides SF he has also written mainstream novels, short fiction, plays and poetry. Remec won the SFera award, the only relevant SF award in Yugoslavia, for his second novel **Recognition** in 1981, and another SFera award for his short story 'The Monument for Euridica' in 1986. Considering that Remec writes in the Slovene language, and that only a fraction of his short fiction has been translated into Serbo-Croat, and none at all into any other language, this is no mean feat.[1] None of his full-length novels have been translated, although the short novel **Unchaste Daughter** first appeared in the Yugoslav SF magazine **Sirius** in 1985, preceding Slovene publication by two years.[2]

Miha Remec was born in Ptuj, in Slovenia, in 1928. During the German occupation in the Second World War, he was deported to Serbia, one of the southern Yugoslav republics, and in 1959 he moved to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, where he lives and works today. He is a journalist by profession, but has been writing fiction for many years. He began writing poems and short fiction immediately after the war, and by 1955 had already published a collection of fairy-tales. His first novel **Solstice** (**Sončni obrat**) was published in 1969.

Only his second play, **The Happy Dragons** (**Srečni zmaji**, 1963) can be considered as a forerunner of his SF work. Technically it is not SF, but its inclination towards SF can hardly be overlooked. The title is a tribute to the crew of the sailboat of the same name which, in the late fifties, sailed to the site of an atomic testing ground, and thus demonstrated against nuclear warfare. The play is a warning against the inhumanity of science, technological civilization and the implacable indifference of governments to the fate of human beings. The fate of the fishermen, exposed to the effects of the nuclear experiment and ill with radiation sickness, symbolizes the fate of all humanity fallen prey to the dehumanizing effects of scientific progress. Just as this group of fishermen is trapped within a circle made by a local shaman that they must not cross, so humanity is entrapped by the mechanistic progress of technological civilization, causing horrible devastation on all levels of existence. The circle, then, clearly represents the fence which must not be crossed, but, whereas for one person it may begin at the door of his own house, for others it may be placed as far away as at the threshold to the stars. This theme recurs again and again, in different variations, in all the author's works. His chief concern is the examination of boundaries that hold back the human spirit, how to escape these walls of our own making, and what happens to human beings in the process. If the shaman's circle holds captive the irradiated fishermen, only a group of human beings, then the cave, in his first SF novel of the same name, is a parable for the entrapment of the whole human race.

In the play **The Happy Dragons**, Remec described the negative aspects of science and its possible future impact on the fate of humanity, reflecting the progress of civilization with man's search for happiness and the meaning of existence, and so produced the seed from which all his SF novels and stories have sprung.

The first work of Miha Remec which can be considered as SF is his novel **The Cave** (**Votlina**, 1978) which, although written in 1972, failed to find a publisher for six whole years. The novel is constructed from three narratives which take place in different space-time continua, with chapters alternating between a prehistoric tale, a tale about the world of today, and the last tale which presents a world of the distant future. The narratives are interwoven with basic human traits and aspirations, and the work as a whole produces an SF vision that forms a framework through which the significance and correlation of human rational and emotional progress in the past and the future can be seen in a new light and more fully understood. The basic theme of the book is the search for the true meaning of human existence, which is symbolized by the search for love and emotional fulfilment. However, love always eludes the protagonists, and the object of their quest remains beyond their reach.

In the tale set in ancient prehistory, human beings are dominated by unarticulated instincts that prevent emotional fulfilment. Remec emphasizes their hopeless attempts to transcend instinctive behaviour by the power of reason and emotional contents. In the second narrative, the author grapples with ethical components of our own times: provincial habits, and the destruction of basic ethical values which occurs in a single night when the protagonist joins a dormouse hunt. People are transformed into absurd caricatures, reducing rich and meaningful relationships to nothing, and so depriving themselves of basic human values and any deeper meaning of life. The main protagonist leaves the scene of the dormouse hunt emotionally drained and disillusioned, and finds himself surrounded by fog, which obscures the view before and behind him. It seems to him that he is drawn into a cave, that walls are enclosing him, but at the same time extending infinitely into the past and the future. It is like being in a tunnel connecting all man's past and future failings. This time-stream symbolizes man's strivings towards a meaningful goal in life, one that emotionally enriches and fulfils human beings.

In the tale set in the future, the biomechanoid cannot attain the true meaning of human existence because he is not human anymore. He cannot analyse his longings, he cannot experience emotions, love lies beyond his understanding. Although his knowledge is practically infinite, he is bereft of fundamental human characteristics. The supreme mind of the future dominates and serves only to satisfy the organic needs of the human body while technological progress, which somewhere and somewhen took the wrong turn, has again reduced mankind to instinctive behaviour and entrapped it in a cave. Man, once again enclosed within walls of his own making, is emotionally inarticulate and unfulfilled. He is doomed to an eternal quest. The cave encompasses all his past and future endeavours. The cycle is complete.

The main protagonists of all three narratives are haunted by strange memories from the past and the future. This is one of the basic connective elements interlaced throughout the novel and, producing sophisticated associative leaps across space and time, it forms the SF framework uniting all three narratives. By a bizarre peculiarity, the protagonists somehow remember unknown words, concepts

unfamiliar and meaningless to them. The protagonist in the prehistoric tale has future memories of the sea he has not yet seen, and carves a canoe for a purpose unknown to him, while his tribe waits in anticipation of whether the sun will rise at all.

Memory of the future is substituted by primordial memory of the past in the third tale, when the biomechanoid from the future is haunted by unsettling images from the past. In all times and places, Man searches to attain a state of oneness, to join the aspirations of body and soul. The hero is Man in search of his origin and purpose for existence, and his longing for love, which is the author's answer to all human strivings, is doomed. The cave is the symbol of his entrapment, be it in the past, present or future. The schematic triplicity of the novel can be recognized further, by analysing the linguistic characteristics of the individual narratives. Remec uses language as a means of alienating imaginary worlds from objective reality. This is one of Remec's typical stylistic specialities, and rests on the fact that language reflects the mechanisms of the mind. Therefore it can be considered as a reflection of the evolution of the human mind throughout the history of civilization, and can serve as an indicator of the evolution of the human mind. When depicting the world of today, Remec uses realistic language which reflects our own speech. The prehistoric section of the novel is archaic in style, the language crude and incapable of expressing symbolic imagery, while the language of the future is very innovative, with a vocabulary containing many new, and from our viewpoint artificially-coined, words with new meanings and concepts. Even the syntax differs slightly from today's grammar. Linguistic alienation, then, is one of Remec's major stylistic specialities, helping the reader overcome unfamiliar thematic concepts and ideas that differ from his own experience. These literary devices break the ordinary optics of the reader, so that he is easily carried into the alien world and can experience the work of art to its full.

The Cave can by no means be called a successful novel. It was scarcely noted by the critics, and practically overlooked by the SF readership. It is among the least known of Remec's works and was only subsequently listed in SF bibliographies. In fact, it was omitted from even so recent a bibliography of Slovene SF as the one published in **Sirius** in 1986[3], so that the author himself had to make an addendum in a later issue.[4] The few reviewers that did note the book failed to grasp the significance of the SF elements interlaced throughout the novel, and reduced its SF content to the final narrative. Those who recognized it as a complex work, with narratives affecting and complementing each other, forming an SF framework and producing a new visionary quality, were exceptional. Let us mention one such rare insight when one critic, recognizing the author's intentions, wrote:

"... *the meaning of the search for human identity lies in the relationship between human beings.*"[5]

Another critic, recognizing the SF framework of the novel and the hero to be Man in search of his identity, focussed on the cave symbol and viewed it

"... *as a fateful cave, which brings pleasure and disappointment, stimulation and resignation, life and death.*"[6]

Furthermore, it is very illustrative that, with such statements as "... probably the most important part of the novel is to be found on the lexical level", linguistic characteristics – the instrument which should be considered as only one of the elements forming the work of art and making the imaginary worlds as real as possible – are hailed here as the most important part of the novel. Certainly there is no denying that Remec's use of linguistic alienation made it possible for his fiction to project itself visibly, resulting in better understanding of the novel, but if some critics consider the lexical level to be its most important part, when it should function as only one of the integral parts of the novel, then clearly the novel is failing to communicate. Works that fail so much in conveying their message to critics cannot fare well with readers either. As a matter of fact, it is not at all surprising that **The Cave** failed to find its readership. The author was not yet known as an SF writer, and the book was not labelled as such. The reviews were misleading; no wonder, then, that Remec decided to subtitle his next SF novel, **Recognition**, "a science fiction novel", in order that it would find the readership it was written for.

Careful analysis reveals some interesting facts. The construction of the novel is obvious, but too artificial. The transitions from one narrative to another are abrupt and demand very close attention. Sometimes it is hard, if not simply impossible, to figure out the metaphorical meanings that are interwoven throughout the novel. While the novel is very interesting in its ethical, psychological and philosophical speculations, expressed through different compositional planes presenting various space-time continua, its integrity is somewhat impaired. The novel is not convincing in its artistic integrity, and fails in its basic function: communication with the reader. So **The Cave** is by all criteria a very demanding read, presenting a problem of artistic enjoyment to even the most serious reader. It must be admitted, however, that the author carefully examines the human search for self, which is identified with cultural, rational and emotional parameters in all three narratives. Also, the answer for the authentic state of human existence is clearly presented as love between man and woman, even though it remains unattainable. The thesis of the novel, and the run of events, then, are well envisioned, but the actual writing leaves the reader rather short of artistic enjoyment of the literary work. It may be said that perhaps **The Cave** sets too high a standard for both the writer and the reader, and that the author is not in complete control of his material, and thus fails to establish basic communication with the reader.

And so, while the novel is a failure as a work of art, the themes Remec introduces in this first SF novel persist and evolve in all his later works. The struggle of human beings for humanity and emotional realization is present especially in **Recognition**, a brilliant though flawed dystopian work, and in **Ixion**, a macabre vision of the far future when humanity struggles to find a new planet to live on. In both these and some other shorter works, the entrapment of the human race and the fear of technological enslavement form the basis of the narrative. Love, as the most important human force, is more or less emphasized in all his work, but especially in **Mana**, a tale of alien visitation, and to some degree an autobiographical work, and in **The Hunter**, a tale of psychic domination and emotional vampirism. **Unchaste Daughter** is a brilliant short novel, an ecological horror story with an extraordinary portrait of the relationship between a father and his two daughters, which also draws inspiration from **The Cave**, this early work of Yugoslavia's foremost SF author.

So, while **The Cave** is not important as a work of art, its analysis casts meaningful light on the later works which it inspired. We must also bear in mind that "A critic who is content to be ignorant of all historical relationships would constantly go astray in his judgement. He could not know which work is original and which derivative; and, through his ignorance of historical conditions, he would constantly blunder in his understanding of specific works of art." [7] In this light **The Cave** must be viewed through the whole literary canon of Miha Remec, since only in its light can it be properly evaluated.

Bibliography and Notes

1 Yugoslavia is a socialist federal republic consisting of six socialist republics: Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia and Slovenia. The Macedonian language is spoken in Macedonia, the Slovene language in Slovenia, while in all other republics the Serbo-Croatian language is spoken.

2 **Sirius** 108, June 1985

3 **Sirius** 124, 1986

4 **Sirius** 126, 1986

5 Drago Jancar: ...i nova slovenacka proza, Knjizevna rec, broj III, 25. Novembar 1978, godina VII (November 25th, 1978)

6 Drago Bajt: Ljudje, zvezde, svetovi, vesolja (Mladinska knjiga 1982), page 208

7 Rene Welleck and Austin Warren: **Theory of Literature** (Peregrine Books, 1976), page 44

Looking Behind The Sun

Religious Implications of Gene Wolfe's Classic Novels

By Steve Palmer

Gene Wolfe's **The Book of the New Sun** set is one of science fiction's greatest achievements, and it is generally recognised that the book conceals rather more than is initially apparent. Wolfe, a Catholic, uses his faith to underpin a monumental work. This article looks at some of the religious implications, and hopes to draw comment from other readers.

If Severian is the Conciliator, who then is the Conciliator? Christ seems to be the answer, the Christ of the *Parousia.* There are several clues. The first Conciliator is described as having a shining face, as Christ had during the Transfiguration; one of the Conciliator's attributes is that he will return to Urth, as the Bible claims Christ will; the Conciliator performed healings and miracles in the manner of Christ.

Severian's name may also be a clue to his nature if it is a future corruption of Steven, the name which comes from the Greek word *stephanej* meaning a crown (the *stephane* was a fillet of silver or gold worn on the forehead). The crown which the undines saw on Severian's brow, and which is implied by the hierodules' use of the term "Liege" to address him, is perhaps mirrored in his name. The name Severian does have another history however, and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary thus:

"A member of the Encratite or Gnostic sect of the 2nd century which condemned marriage, etc."

The dictionary goes on to note that the name may be derived not from a founder called Severus but from the austerity of the typical Severian's life (i.e. from the Latin *severus.}*

There are also hints in Father Inire's effusive letter to Severian at the close of volume four. Father Inire refers to Severian the Autarch as Surya, the Indian god of the sun, Helios, the charioteer who pulled the sun on its course, and Hyperion, the father of Helios. Severian's nature is also revealed at the end of the fever dream in the lazaret, golden rays pouring from him as he stands with the Cumaean and Master Malrubius, light which falls on all the Earth and gives it new life.

There is also a "missing" name in the holy trinity; we hear of the Increate (Holy Ghost) and the Pancreator, but never of any son. The Conciliator, supposedly the greatest of good men, must be this figure.

During his wanderings across Urth, various mystical events occur around Severian. The most remarkable is the appearance of blood on his forehead when, in the House Absolute, he looks into the mirror-leafed book bound in manskin. It seems that Severian has experienced a book bound metaphorically with his own death; he blurts out that he saw his own dead face in the leather. The eclipse carved in the cabinet door that holds this book refers to this death, the hiding of the sun, and Severian's blood is then that produced by the Crown of Thorns.

Earlier, when drinking with Jonas, water becomes wine. When he drinks with Dorcas, as she is about to leave him, wine becomes water. He carries a sword with a blunt end on his travels - a cross.

Two of Severian's personal symbols, acquired when a child in the Necropolis, are significant. The ship refers to his voyage to Yesod, but the other two may have religious implications. The fountain, although it seems to correspond to that laid in the House Absolute, is also an ancient symbol of life (sometimes depicted as a waterfall), while the rose is a symbol of Christ dating from the Middle Ages.

Wolfe, then, wrote a *Parousiafin* which Severian was either Christ or an equivalent figure (there may be in him echoes of the Greek god Apollo, the god of the sun). But if Severian is Christ there are other figures to account for, most importantly the Antichrist (the Beast) and the False Prophet. It would seem that Baldanders is the former and Dr Talos the latter.

Baldanders, who experiments on the world and spends the proceeds on himself, is an ideal Antichrist, for, despite his brutal nonchalance, he embodies an aversion to humanity; understated, but an aversion nonetheless. He is a direct opposite to Severian. The pair duel at the end of book three, as was foreseen in an underwater dream of Severian's. Baldanders is the narcissistic boy for whom the world and all its inhabitants are merely constructions of his own imagination, lacking reality, while Severian is the man fully connected with people and the world, who does not need to place himself at the centre of the universe to live sanely. Baldanders is his own greatest work, and his only work; but Baldanders has nothingness within him, desiring power, money, and facts, while Severian epitomises all humanity.

Dr Talos seems to be the False Prophet. It is interesting that several times Severian is reminded of a stuffed fox when Dr Talos' face appears; if the letters F-O-X are taken according to Cabala traditions they make 6,15,24, i.e. 666, the Number of the Beast. This is perhaps the means by which Dr Talos is marked in Severian's imagination. Meanwhile, Dr Talos' main task seems to be wandering the Urth performing his ignoble play; that is, misinforming the people about the Conciliator. For example, at the very end of the play it is Baldanders who breaks his own bonds to achieve freedom.

As for the Devil, he is trickier to pin down. According to the Book of Revelations, Satan manifests as a dragon. I wonder if Erebus is the Devil? Or perhaps Abaia, the father-hand of the undines? Erebus' minions are Severian's enemies, though in Greek mythology Erebus is a region passed through by the dead on the way to Hades. The Book of Revelations suggests that the *Parousia* will occur at a time of great strife, and indeed the Ascians (Asians? Americans?) are in conflict with the Autarch's forces throughout the main part of the work. Xanthoderm means yellow-skin.

The Claw itself is steeped in the Roman Catholic tradition. Severian refers to the blue shell as a pyx when he finds the Claw wedged between rocks. A pyx is the box or container in which the consecrated host, the Eucharist, is kept, and it can also mean the container in which supplies of wafers for the Eucharist are kept. Meanwhile, the Pelerines wear scarlet in the Catholic tradition ("Pelerine" derives from the Latin for pilgrim).Angels and archangels make appearances, too. Hierodules (holy slaves) are angels, and hierogrammates are archangels. The hierodules wear angelic white. Of the latter class, there are two explicitly referred to, Gabriel and Tzadkiel, perhaps paralleling the only two angelic figures referred to in the Bible, Gabriel and Michael. Tzadkiel appears extensively in the final volume showing his shape-changing ability, while in the fourth book there is Melito's story about birds and an angel who clearly has the same transforming ability.

It is also possible that Wolfe worked the Wandering Jew into his book, although this figure is an invention of later centuries and does not appear in the Bible. According to legend, the Wandering Jew taunted Christ as he dragged his cross to Golgotha. Christ responded, saying he would wander the Earth until the time of the Second Coming.

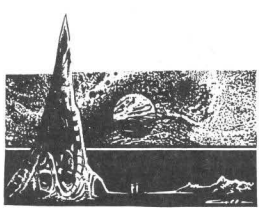
Could Hethor correspond to this figure?

Then there is the problem of Mary. Wolfe intentionally presents an enigma here; there are various candidates for Severian's true mother, but is it correct to assume that there was *one* mother? There are two Severians. Using the scene at the end of the fourth book at the Inn of Lost Loves, it seems that Dorcas is related to Severian because of the facial likeness - perhaps the mother of the first Severian. However, she cannot be the mother of the "second" Severian, the carrier of the Claw; that title goes to Cyriaca, a.k.a. Catherine, who recognised Severian even though his mask was on, then tried to cover her tracks. Incidentally, "Catherine" means "pure", which could be translated as Virginal.

A curious parallel occurs when the Cumaean is considered. This figure seems to echo the sibyls of Roman times, for like them the Cumaean is a prophetess, a seer. But there is a further point, since the Cumaean is "sleekly reptilian" when seen by Severian from his extended temporal perspective; that is, serpentine. In the days before Judaism and Christianity had destroyed the ancient matriarchal religion, that of the Goddess, the snake was the symbol of female potency, wisdom, and prophetic ability. Even today, "pythoness" means prophetess. So it is perhaps significant that the acolyte Merryn refers to the Cumaean as "Mother".

Perhaps other readers could enlighten us further. There are many things I still don't follow. For example, who is Hethor? Do the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse make any appearances? Does Severian commit unknowing incest? What is the relevance of undine Juturna to Lake Diuturna (same pronunciation, different spelling)? Why does the mandragora in spirits refer to Severian as "brother" when he explores the Autarch's rooms?

The most puzzling enigma for me is the status of Father Inire. The name Inire is perhaps related to INRI, King of the Jews, but are we to make anything of that?



The Family Business

Brian Herbert's Writings Reviewed

By Andy Sawyer

When you're the son of one of SF's most celebrated authors you can either look for a steady job in the insurance trade or write your own science fiction without worrying too much about people comparing you with your father. Brian Herbert, son of Frank "**Dune**" Herbert, tried the one and is now immersed in the other, with several novels to his credit (including **Man of Two Worlds**, a father-son collaboration).

His first books were slim volumes of humour based on his sixteen years in insurance; then a novel, **Sydney's Comet**, which was soon followed up by **The Garbage Chronicles**. In 1984, on publication of **Sudanna, Sudanna**, he became a full-time writer. **Man of Two Worlds** and a collection of **Dune** quotations, **The Notebooks of Frank Herbert's Dune** followed, but he returned to his "own" writing with **Prisoners of Ariona**. More "family" collaborations are in the pipeline, with an edition of Frank Herbert's poems, **The Songs of Muad'dib** and another SF novel, **Memorymakers**, this time written with his cousin Marie Landis scheduled for the future.

The latest and seventh novel **The Race for God** (published by Ace in the USA: so far not released in the UK) is a satirical parable about a number of competing religions and the different paths to God. Its characters include a charlatan prophet who receives a message from God (complete with address), an executioner who does really disgusting things with corpses and an android with armament implanted in every conceivable organ - yes, Aunt Agatha, even there. Most of the action takes place on board a ship going to the planet where God apparently dwells, focussing on the wrangling between representatives of different sects and cults, and shows in a relatively undistorted mirror how we spend too much time arguing about the differences between faiths rather than celebrating their similarities. After various debates - violent and otherwise - the survivors of the quest, including the erstwhile charlatan McMurtrey and an atheist, get to interrogate a rather surprising God.

Herbert describes his style as "emphasising humour and satire as my means of addressing serious matters. With each novel I write, I find myself getting more and more serious. **The Race for God** is very serious indeed. In a funny sort of way." The novel mixes SF adventure and metaphysical parable in a way which is perhaps more reminiscent of Philip K Dick than Herbert senior, especially in the drawing of the hero McMurtrey as a little man who eventually meets the ruler of the universe - who is himself a bit of a bumbler. Its main flaw is its particularly skiffyish trait of only slightly hiding the fact that the author really means our world by using names and locations only slightly different from those we know. Thus the world D'Urth has Krassians, Hoddists, Nandus and Isammedans among its religious devotees; there are heated arguments between representatives of different sects which are those we know: only the names have been distorted. This gives a cartoony, often facetious air to the fiction. It is not the paranoid humour of Dick or even the exaggerated black comedy of Douglas Adams. Herbert, however, points out the rationale for his writing as he does:

"The lightly disguised 'this universe' element in my story is meant to remind readers that I'm not talking about some planet out in the far far distance. I'm talking about Earth, and the urgent message I have is immediate. It concerns us **now** and **here** not somewhere 'out there' in an indeterminate future."

It's something noticeable in Herbert's other books, such as **Sudanna, Sudanna**, where whatever the alienness of the physical settings the characters are just ordinary small-town Americans. Arguably, this negates the whole point of making them alien in the first place, and is reminiscent of the bad old days of SF when Earthlings were cowboys and aliens were injuns and that was all we needed to know.

It's a tribute to Herbert's inventiveness that despite this, **Sudanna, Sudanna** picks up pace and ends very well, while there's a strong Dickian surreal poignancy in his holocops with their greed for "big offices", knowing that they **are** themselves artificial but striving for implanted memories of domestic stability. **The Race for God** lacks this haunting edge to the metaphysics but also ends much more powerfully than it started. Its characters may be two-dimensional, but they still act out the ever-present questions of personal responsibility and the nature of evil.

How far, though, does Herbert believe that a novel of entertainment can affect people's attitudes, particularly with regard to something as ingrained and subjective as religious views? "An entertaining novel with a moral message, such as mine, can change people's attitudes, but I don't harbour any visions of a widespread change. I see my message as a small salvo in a very large war, as a voice of reason, perhaps, that will be heard by some in the midst of the emotional, discordant, clamour. People holding the most entrenched, narrow-minded views on religion will probably never pick up my book, of course, because they aren't able to think independently. They don't read novels of imagination. They're only good at following rules and procedures and belief systems that have been laid out for them by others." So there's little hope of effecting a lasting change? "People are influenced in surprising ways, and can be made to change their minds very quickly. If enough people speak as I am speaking, about religious tolerance and understanding, those belief systems that we thought were so firmly entrenched will come unglued. They will change. Nothing about the course of human events is set in concrete."

The Race for God ends with a heavenly host of unresolved questions, both concerning the mechanics of the plot and the higher problems which inspire it. Is God, for instance, only a **local** deity, and why has the killing machine Jin regenerated to go looking for a showdown which never actually takes place by the book's conclusion? "I'm still formulating my beliefs about God. I don't profess for a moment to have all the answers about such important matters. This I know for certain - there is a force of goodness out there, all across this planet and perhaps far out into the universe, and maybe even into adjacent and alternate universes. This force of goodness may be a separate force, a separate entity from Man, or it may be within all of us, permeating every fibre of our being. The God I have suggested in **The Race for God** is a God of Discussion, a God to make people think and wonder: Could there be several universes with a God for each? Could our God be ailing or under attack from evil forces, thus explaining why suffering continues on our planet?"

And the hints of a sequel? "In a sense, Jin represents the capacity of bad things to regenerate themselves. Look at the monster in the movie **Alien** that even when dealt a mortal blow and appearing to be dead, came back to life for an instant before dying. So what if Jin is still moving at the end of the novel? I'm afraid you want everything tied

into neat packages. Life is not like that. When a person comes to the end of his journey there are all sorts of loose ends. In my opinion, stories should reflect life."

"Of course the seeds of a sequel are present, but the fate of Jin crawling up a wall is not the core of it, not by any means. The core of a sequel can be found in McMurtrey's words about a new religion, about a new and better race of man. I leave questions at the end of **The Race for God**, however, not because I plan any sequel but because, as I told you, I do not claim to have all the answers."

But isn't there an ambiguity there? If we're talking about "local gods", then God may not really be God in the first place. Is there a message, then that we must act as if there is no God (if there is) or as if there is (if there isn't)? Herbert tends to agree. "I believe very strongly that people need to be responsible for their own actions, that they should not wallow in self pity, blaming their actions or predicaments on others. This is a great danger in human nature - blaming others, not taking responsibility, not facing up to situations on your own. If God exists and he gave us free will, he did so to make us strong. He doesn't want mankind to be weak. He wants us to stand on our own two feet, to quote one of the better cliches."

While admirable on the surface, this veers close upon a total sidestep of the related problems of suffering and evil. There's a scene where the repulsive executioner Gutan is tried by his peers, but the ship's passengers find it difficult to agree on a criterion with which to judge him. Is murder his crime, or violating the dead? How far is he responsible for his actions? And what should society's reaction be? Death, by one criminal code or another? Yet there are codes which would call the taking of a criminal's life a greater evil or more pointless than the original transgression.

"I don't think it matters whether or not Gutan is 'pure evil'. I placed him in the story as a bone of contention between the various religions - as a person whose fate they would mull over according to their varying belief systems - in the process comparing beliefs, discussing beliefs and trying to understand one another. The situation on the ship is a metaphor for how it is on Earth. The passengers on the ship must get along, must come to understand one another before the ship can continue its journey to God."

"As inhabitants of what Buckminster Fuller called 'Spaceship Earth' we are on a journey through the cosmos - a physical journey. We may not be able to alter the astronomical course of this planet, and this gives some of us a feeling of awe, of wonder, a feeling that we are controlled by a larger force, a God. This God may control the travels of planets, and may control much more, right down to the cells in the smallest creatures in the universe. But even if this is true, I don't think we need to feel at all helpless about our situations, that we can't control our fates to a large degree. I think through free will (or whatever we choose to call it), through independent and controlled action we can get closer to an understanding of God and the tremendous spirit of goodness in mankind."

Although Brian Herbert's fusion of science fiction and religion is allegory rather than the more complex extrapolations of his father, both writers share similar starting-points. In support of this, Brian quotes the stated purpose of the Commission of Ecumenical Translators from the **Dune** cycle: We are here to remove a primary weapon from the hands of disputant religions. That weapon - the claim to possession of the one and only revelation. As writers, though, the son barely touches the highly detailed individual world-building of the father. Is he conscious of an influence? If one exists, it's technical rather than stylistic or - despite the shared religious viewpoint - thematic:

"From the standpoint of the nuts and bolts of writing, Dad taught me a great deal. Many of my novels use epigrams, removing the necessity of fitting such information into dialogue or narrative, where it can frequently get into the way of the plot. It is a technique of reducing verbiage, of presenting information with the smallest possible amount of words. Dad had a potful of message (or a 'mess of pottage' as he put it) in many of his books, but he always said he was an entertainer first - that the messages had to be woven into the yarn in non-obtrusive ways. I have attempted to follow that important advice."

And in doing so we have a genuine science fiction dynasty. What's it **like** being part of one?

"The dynasty question is interesting, but I must say I've never thought of myself as part of one. Perhaps it's because I consciously write in a different style from that of my father. He had a sense of humour as well, but used it as seasoning, often so subtly that only the cognoscenti knew he was being funny. I didn't begin writing, however, until I was nearly thirty. Rather a late start, perhaps, but I had no idea it was a profession I might like to follow. When I finally decided to write, Dad was very generous with his time - and very proud of me when my stories began selling. But if I thought about questions of dynasty or of trying to match what he achieved, I would surely come to a gringing halt at my word processor. No, I don't think about things like that. I just write what flows from my mind through my fingers to the keyboard, whatever I feel like writing."

But it must be irritating to have reviewers and interviewers always mentioning your father's work. Wouldn't Brian like to junk the "Son of ..." tag altogether?

"Some critics tend to compare my writings with those of my father instead of comparing me with larger bodies of literature - and in this sense a number of the comparisons are unfair, and occasionally invidious. It's difficult being compared with one of the greatest science fiction writers in history, but I don't dwell on this at all. I know that I'm a good writer in my own right and that I've paid my dues in the profession with hard work and perseverance. Eventually you accept it as a challenge, as an opportunity to improve your own abilities. Would I prefer to junk the 'Son of ..' tag? Certainly not! If I dwelled upon that, I would soon find myself in a rubber room. If I said to myself each day, I've got to get rid of that tag, I've got to prove to those so-and-sos that I can write **better** than Frank Herbert - that Frank Herbert was in the historical perspective the 'Father of ...' and only secondarily wrote **Dune**, where would that get me? Nowhere. It would be an unnecessary burden on my shoulders, a load I don't need to bear. If people want to call me 'Son of Frank Herbert' or even 'Son of **Dune**' why, that's fine by me. Just so long as they don't call me SOB.

In fact, Brian Herbert is doing his best to keep the memories of his father's greatest creations alive. Frank Herbert has scarcely reached the status of JRR Tolkien when it comes to having work edited by a son, but there have been offshoots of **Dune** and there will be more. For instance, **The Songs of Muad'dib**: "a collection of poems from the works of my father, many of which are found in the **Dune** series. Hence the title, based upon references found in **Dune**. He also wrote a number of unpublished poems. Many people don't realise it, but dad often wrote passages in poetry first and then expanded them, fleshed them out into prose in his novels. This is why many of his descriptive passages are so beautiful. The book will be published in late 1991 or early 1992."

With seven novels published and more to come, Brian Herbert is himself now an established SF writer; one perhaps not of the first rank ("message" still tends to overshadow entertainment in **The Race for God**) but one whose novels offer rewards beneath the surface. In many ways, this is one of the great values of SF, and it does not seem totally cynical to point out that SF's great appeal is to its "Trout Quotient": the fact that big ideas and the eternal verities are struggled with under pure pulp veneers. Brian Herbert is a science fiction writer of entertaining fictions on his own terms: is he *sure* he doesn't mind the "Son of ..." label?

"You can call me anything you like as long as you don't call me late for dinner".

Book Reviews

Edited by Chris Amies

More Tales from the Forbidden Planet

Roz Kaveney (ed.)
Titan, 1990, 268pp, £13.95

"Never judge a book by its blurb" is probably sound advice.
This collection warns the reader, "Prepare yourself for a journey into the mists of magic and madness". But the blurb warning isn't really necessary. Most of the stories in the collection manage an excursion to a popular resort, but not a journey to anywhere new.Roz Kaveney, the editor, also advertises the collection as dealing in "cross-overs and interfaces" between genres, and here the book is more successful. Sf, horror and fantasy are presented in pictures and words by illustrators and writers from novel and comic traditions. All that the contributors have in common is that they've all had signings at Forbidden Planet shops.
Illustrations are an uncommon pleasure outside comics and children's books. I enjoyed all of these, my favorite being Rian Hughes' picture for 'Ellipses' as it was as much a statement of the theme of the story as the words were.
Among the stories, Terry Pratchett's 'Hollywood Chickens' tells a familiar tale amusingly; Rachel Pollack's 'The Woman Who Didn't Come Back' begins powerfully but dwindles disappointingly. 'Wasp Songs' by RM Lamming is a tightly focussed, tense little story. Colin Greenland's 'Best Friends' evokes a delicate mood of poignant loss and confusion. While 'Dining Out' by John Sladek mixes a sharp eye and ear for humorous detail with unexpected horror.
A number of the stories in the collection read like excerpt chapters from novels, thus losing much of the tightness which characterises the short story. Mary Gentle's 'Black Motley', Neil Gaiman's "Webs" and Larry Niven's "The Portrait of Daryanree the King" all fall into this category.
But the one story that really does take you on the promised journey is John Clute's 'Death of a Sacred Monster'. This is a story with its own powerful inner logic which draws the reader inexorably into the menacing and wonderful world of Papa Bear and family. When you finish the story you might not know where you've been but you'll have vivid memories of the trip.
Lynne Fox

The Great Hunt

Robert Jordan
Orbit, 1991, 598pp, L13.95

The Other Sinbad

Craig Shaw Gardner
Headline, 1991, 277pp, L13.95

The Great Hunt is the sequel to **The Eye of the World** in the Wheel of Time series. Former shepherd Rand al'Thor, and his friends search for the stolen Horn of Valere and dagger of Shadar Logoth. The Horn can invoke dead heroes to fight evil; the dagger is fatally linked to Rand's friend, Mat.
Users of the One Power are called channelers. Male channelers can be driven mad as the male half of the power was tainted by the Dark One, Shai'tan. Rand is a channeler, destined to be the legendary Dragon Reborn. In addition to his quest, Rand is resisting being driven mad, and being used by the female channelers, the Aes Sedai, for their own purposes.
There are journeys and obstacles, battles and betrayals, and the personal growth of Rand into hero stature. The landscape and culture is also fully explored.
The Great Hunt is a huge book. It stands alone, with extensive reference to the glossary, but it is better read as part of the sequence. It is readable, and fast moving. Characterization is reasonably convincing, though Rand's stubbornness and Mat's petulance become irritating. The Dark One and his creatures are nicely blood-curdling.
My interest was held until nearly the end, when the plot suddenly became very confusing.
The Other Sinbad is humorous fantasy, but the only similarity to Terry Pratchett is the Josh Kirby cover. Faintly amusing pastiche of the **Arabian Nights** just about says it all.
Barbara Davies

Phaze Doubt

Piers Anthony
New English Library, 1991, 303pp, £14.99

Phaze Doubt is the seventh novel in a trilogy concerning the parallel worlds of Proton, where science reigns supreme, and Phaze, where magic holds sway. The two worlds have been deliberately merged, leaving a string of characters with dual identities, depending on which world they are in, and a astonishing propensity for interbreeding with everything, including robots. All this and far too much more is revealed in the turgid historical recapitulation which forms the first third of the novel, though it is of such opacity, I doubt the reader will be much the wiser.
The meat of the narrative is straightforward. Phaze/Proton is under threat from Bug-Eyed Monsters - Anthony's actual phrase - and must be saved by Nepe, youngest of the Adepts. Let it be agreed that the plot, whilst banal, is not beyond redemption. Even the original premise of the series has a certain charm. Alas, hopes are dashed by Anthony's unfortunate brand of "humour", comprised of excruciating puns, as witnessed in both the title and the puerile Xanth novels, and the adolescent notion that naive characters discovering the joys of uninhibited sex are funny. Once perhaps, but not on every page. Having established his plot, Anthony appears to have no idea what he's doing with it, piling on extra detail and fantasy cliches, not to mention more sexual fumblings, whenever the pace seems to be flagging, without any regard for consistency. The characters never transcend the two-dimensional, and the novel's denouement is achieved only with a very tricksy and apparently pointless piece of time manipulation. One is left with the mounting conviction that the novel is running way out of control.
If you loved the other six volumes, then clearly you will disregard my comments. For anyone less familiar with the work of Piers Anthony, I can only urge you to consider expending money and time on some of his earlier novels, perhaps the **Battle Circle** series, or **Chthon**, which show the wit and invention for which he has been justly praised. **Phaze Doubt** is the work of a talent in decline, and as such is a pathetic spectacle.
Maureen Speller

Thomas the Rhymer

Ellen Kushner
Gollancz, 1991, 247pp, £13.99

Thomas the Rhymer is a minor work of art. It borrows from a well-worn tradition of sources including folk ballads and dangerous faerie liaisons but the book is so well written that it not only gets away with working within established fantasy conventions, it transmutes them into a significantly good novel.
The novel retells the story of Thomas, a bard, who is seduced by the Queen of Faerie (the Celtic Artisan ones, not the soft-centred Disney ones), is possessed by her for seven years, and returns again unaged to his former life with precognitive abilities. The narrative is poised between the overlapping worlds in the story - the rough, hard, bright life of Meg and Gavin, two old crofters who "adopt" Thomas, and Elspeth, his eventual wife; the sensuous world of faerie, created from intelligent, unpredictable magic; and the human court of Kings which Thomas prospers in as a courtly lover, a harper, and later a prophet.
The characterization is superb and apparently effortless. These are not characters from a ballad - the emotions of the protagonists are vivid, painful and real - the cultural jet-lag experienced by Thomas when he returns from his time in paradise is particularly clever. There is a refreshing touch of feminism in the part of the story told by Elspeth which dissolves the sugar-coated pastoral idyll found encrusting too many fantasy novels. But Ms Kushner understands the machinations, sexuality and ambitions of men as well as women. There is also no evidence that the story, set in the England-Scotland border country in the Middle Ages, is written by an American media person.
The language is rich yet crisply economical, and reminds me of Ursula Le Guin in good form. The author has the not-too-common gift of knowing when to stop. The dialogue is realistic, consistent and intelligent; it contains subtle twists of implied meaning understandable only in the frame made by the four parts of the story, told by Gavin, Thomas, Meg and Elspeth respectively.
I think the real achievement of the novel, and the reason why I call it a work of art, is that, even though it's a wonderful fantasy story and excellent exercise for the imagination, it is more than this. It works as a metaphor for the effects of innocence and experience on ageing, desire, creativity, kindness and cruelty.
I find it difficult to think of anything negative about Ms Kushner's novel, but I would say that someone capable of such a seamless piece of work is also capable of working independently of the handrails derived from the fantasy/ballad/wandering bard novel: I think she is capable of creating highly original work, and

even if I'm not given a review copy of her next novel this reviewer will probably spend a few of his well-guarded pounds to buy it. A rare accolade.
Dave Mitchell

The Worthing Saga
Orson Scott Card
Legend, 1991, 396pp, L13.99

Maps in a Mirror
Orson Scott Card
Legend, 1991, 676pp, £14.99

Anyone expecting **The Worthing Saga** to be about an English seaside town will be disappointed. The Worthing of the title is a planet. Described on the back cover as "A collection of ingenious, powerful stories", at least half the book consists of a novel, **The Worthing Chronicle**. Nearly all the stories are fantasies showing the influence of Zenna Henderson, involving "a miraculous and telepathic stranger" who "walks on water" and the like. In his Introduction, Card says that he has left out of the collection some of his stories which were "purely mechanical and soulless", for which one must be grateful, but it still seems rather pretentious of him to conclude: "Now I offer them to you in the hope that you will find them powerful and true".

Maps in a Mirror is much more interesting. Not only does it contain 46 stories dating from 1977 to 1989 but the stories appear in five "books": Tales of Dread, Tales of Human Futures, Fables and Fantasies, etc., and each of the "books" has both an Introduction and Afterword saying something about the genesis of every single story and about Card's personal history as a writer. Some of the revelations are more interesting than the stories. For instance, the one (p138) that: "Shakespeare and Joseph Smith... more than any others, formed the way I think and write". (Visions of Michael Palin muttering, "Say no more!") Card, of course, is a Mormon. He is also a playwright, poet, reviewer and undeniably talented. He writes of having science fiction "thrust upon" him and of having no great interest in science. And it shows. His stories tend to be of the gruesome sort. They are written with such breezy enthusiasm and are such an easy read that it would seem churlish to notice their flaws and be dissatisfied afterwards, but one often is. They are shallow and display the verbosity of a writer conscious of being paid by the word. They are often tricksy and far from "powerful" (which seems to be one of his favorite words) or "true". Card does not always allow the normal rules of grammar to stand in the way of what he wants to say. His style is intelligent but not elegant. His content is strong in emotion but weak in both science and sense. Like so many newish science fiction writers, Card stands on the shoulders of giants but sees very little further than they saw, if that. Nevertheless, as the blurb says, **Maps in a Mirror** is "an important collection by an important author" and good value for the money.
Jim England

Divergence
Charles Sheffield
Gollancz, 1991, 281pp, £13.99

Divergence is, the cover tells us, "Book Two of the Heritage Universe", and a sequel to **Summertide** (published in 1990). Not having read **Summertide**, I turned (of course!) to **Vector**, and a review (Ken Lake, Issue 157) which concludes, "... ultimately less a novel than a puzzle embellished with cardboard actors."

The "puzzle" at the heart of **Divergence** - and, I presume, of **Summertide** too - is the search for "the legendary beings known as the Builders". Little is known about the Builders, we are told, except that they inhabited the "Heritage Universe" many centuries ago, and that they earned their name through the construction of many strange technologically-advanced devices. **Divergence** is set at a time when, although the Builders themselves appear to have become extinct, many of their constructions remain. The mission for our intrepid adventurers, should they choose to accept it, is to find out more about these legendary beings and their toys.

I have to agree with Ken Lake's comments (directed, of course, at Book 1 of this series): characterisation is not the strongest feature of this work. In general, it's difficult to distinguish the members of the cast, and the chief bad-guy proves to be something of a stock "lovable rogue". Even the aliens aren't very: towards the end of the book, we have three races - human, Cecropian and the terrible Zardula - competing for the title "Race of the Universe" (or whatever), the carrot being that members of the victorious team will be allowed to try and solve the "Great Problem" (in effect, the meaning of life). The problem for the reader is that all three races seem to think in very much the same (that is, human) way, and are distinguishable only by the number of legs they happen to have, etc. Thus it doesn't really seem to matter who wins, and this renders the competition between the "different" races essentially futile.

On the whole, this book has far too much science and too little fiction for my tastes: **Divergence** is in no danger of winning the Booker prize. That being said - as far as I can tell - the science is sound enough, and Sheffield does have some interesting ideas. I kept turning the pages, not just for the purposes of writing this review, but because I wanted to find out what would happen in the end.
Michael J. Pont.

Stalin's Teardrops
Ian Watson
Gollancz, 1991, 270pp, £13.99

This book is a collection of Watson's stories published over the last few years in a variety of British and American publications. Consequently, they are extremely varied both in style and subject matter. Several of these stories could be classified as horror, there is little that could be called science fiction; the best are totally unclassifiable.

All of the stories are beautifully crafted. Many are complex and layered with meanings that will take numerous readings to extract. However, some appear to be glib retailings of a neat idea, failing to develop either humour or pathos. I felt distanced from the protagonists and these stories struck me as either pedestrian or just plain daft. In this category I place 'The Human Chicken' and 'From the Annals of the Onomastic Society'.

'The Case of The Glass Slipper' is a slight but witty piece setting Sherlock Holmes on the trail of Cinderella. 'In the Upper Cretaceous with the Summerfire Brigade' mixes time travel, terrorism and Intercity travel with the problems of writers block. 'In Her Shoes' is a nasty little tale about a father who tries to live his life through his daughter. I loved all of these, but three stories are even better:

'Stalin's Teardrops' is set in a Russia facing up to the changes brought about by Glasnost. Valentin is in charge of the Cartographic department of the secret police. This department specialises in the production of distorted maps. As a result of generations of distortion, areas of 'dead ground' not to be found on maps have arisen. In one of these areas Valentin enjoys a secret life, enjoying youth and luxuries unavailable outside. With the advent of new masters looking for accurate maps, these areas are under threat. Valentin joins some of the occupants in a struggle for their retention. What follows gets far too weird to relate, but the story is rich and unusual, conveying strongly the attachment of the old man to the life he has built for himself.

'Gaudi's Dragon' relates the events following the completion by holographic image of the Spanish Modernist architect Gaudi's church, the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, at a time of nationalist resurgence in Catalonia. Spain and the church itself are vividly drawn, but the main interest lies in the relationship of Johnny Butler, who created the hologram, with his twin sister Martha and in the spectre that comes to life within the completed church.

'The Pharoah and the Mademoiselle' interweaves the story of a group of ushabti living in the tomb of a pharoah, describing their graspings towards sentience and the manner in which they survive and learn in their limited environment with a verse drama in five acts, detailing the events that follow when a band of archaeological adventurers discover the tomb in the 1920s. This is gripping stuff - I started to really care about the fate of the ushabti.

There are twelve stories in the collection, some fairly average, but it would be worth buying for these last three alone.
Catie Cary

Shadow Realm
Marc Alexander
Headline, 1991, 438pp, £4.99

The observation that this is book three of a fantasy quartet will cause some readers to move on immediately to another review. Those who remain will probably have already read parts one and two. I have not.

To sustain interest, Alexander has interwoven manifold plotlines, none of which are completely resolved, with enough explanation of what has happened before for me not to feel too lost, without, I think, inducing tedium in those who have read the earlier volume.Alexander exploits the conventions of the genre to advance the plot and add humour. Most mythical beasts make an appearance sometime during the story, with none seeming anachronistic. And there is some clever interaction with our traditional fairy-tales.

Unlike certain other fantasy writers, Alexander portrays real people in his characters. Even an outright villain, such as the Regent, earns our sympathy, while the hero, Alwald, can be quite objectionable. The prose flows easily, even when he is trying to sound archaic.

Many place names have a fashionably Teutonic ring: some genuine German (e.g. "Wald"), some hybrids (e.g. "Toyheim"), and some are wrong (I will need a lot of convincing that "Drankenfel" is an obscure dialect form). However, "Ythan" seems a leftover from an earlier draft begun when everything Celtic was in vogue.

This action-packed story is well written and paced, and my interest did not flag. Those who have read and enjoyed the earlier volumes will not be disappointed. However I do not read High Fantasy by choice, and this did not persuade me to make an exception.
Valerie Housden

The UFO Encyclopedia
John Spencer
Headline, 1991, 340pp, £16.95

To the making of UFO books there is no end, and here's yet another. I wonder who its intended readers are, and how useful it will be to them, since the arrangement of the text does not serve the seeker after information well. The individual entries are short and give no references to other places the topic can be followed up for fuller details (although there is, I admit, a shortish general bibliography at the end of the book). The encyclopedia deals with all the familiar subjects you would expect of it, such as abduction stories, the men in black and UFO photography (fake or otherwise). It also ranges more widely to take in peripheral matters such as the Piri Reis map, Denis Healy

and "Fireball XL5". The last of these prompts the comment that "the interplay of science fiction and UFO reports is more complex than has been accepted so far." What fascinates me about UFOs is the intensity of belief they inspire, even though, for instance, abduction reports may have more to do with the mind of the supposed abductee than with inquisitive extraterrestrials, and 'men in black' and alleged government cover-ups of UFO activity are merely a special subset of the American fondness for conspiracy theories. I was a little disappointed that John Spencer is for the most part content merely to assemble and repeat the information on offer, without bringing to bear any critical faculty. It makes for a very scissors-and-paste flavoured book, definitely one for the none too serious browser, and not, I feel, a very successful one.

Darroll Pardoe

The King of the Hill
Paul J McAuley
Gollancz, 1991, 216pp, £13.99

Before Eric Brown, **Interzone**'s great new hope for British SF was Paul J McAuley. Since then McAuley has produced a two highly praised hard SF novels, shared the Philip K Dick Award, and continued to write high quality SF shorts. This first collection is more than just the opportunity to catch those stories you may have missed, however. It is a document of a young writer's development, of course, and it is an example of the quality of writing the short fiction markets can reveal.

These stories are taken from a five-year period 1985-90 (and curiously the most recent, "Exiles", is the one which doesn't quite work) and from sources as disparate as **Amazing, Fantasy & Science Fiction** and **Interzone** in fairly equal proportions. The remarkable aspect of this comes with trying to guess which came from where. Perhaps the inconclusive ending to 'Little Ilya and Spider and Box' makes it more British than some of the other stories, but really only the eponymous 'The King of the Hill' with its overtly British viewpoint would not have been at home in the US digests. This uniformity is enhanced by the setting of at least six of the eight stories in the same universe as McAuley's novels, though this is never intrusive and each story stands alone. There is no repetition of background detail, and there are no recurrent characters or local settings, yet the effect is of a coherent whole. 'Little Ilya ...' may be the sort of distilled space opera that an author with less feel for his story might have made into a flabby novel with a contrived ending, whilst 'Transcendence' examines the relationships between planet, human, and machine in isolation, and 'The Temporary King' is a visitor from a galactic culture to a small, regressed and undeveloped community, but these stories do fit together.

Perhaps it's the absence of Heroes: the protagonists are people, individuals, often loners (either character in 'Transcendence', Spider, the narrator of 'The King of the Hill'), or trapped somehow (Rayne in 'Exiles', Little Ilya) edging into contact with other cultures. The only hero is David in the title story, and his virtue is flawed by causing the death of, in relative terms, an innocent man.

To be selective, and this collection has very clearly been selected rather than merely collated, the best story is the title piece: a modern, rational and disturbing near-future Arthurian mainstream story which deals with politics and mythic certainties with equal comfort. Hopefully McAuley will continue to write short fiction as well as novels, hopefully he will continue to ignore genre boundaries, and hopefully this collection will sell very well indeed.

Kev McVeigh

The Crystal Palace
Phyllis Eisenstein
Grafton, 1991, 286pp, £13.99

This is the sequel to **Sorceror's Son**. It continues the story of Cray Ormoru, the sorcerer of Castle Spinweb.

Once again we meet familiar faces: Cray's mother, Delivev; his friend, Feldar Sepwin; and the Fire demon Gildrum. There are also several new characters: Alizza, sorcerer of the Crystal Palace; her grandfather, Everand; and the Ice demon, Regneciel.Forced to study Ice sorcery from the age of two by the tyrannical grandfather, her soul confiscated to ensure that she causes no problems and faces no distractions, Aliza's life is radically changed by the attentions of Cray. The latter has seen her in a magical mirror which supposedly displays one's heart's desire, and he is determined to make her at the very least his friend.

But, as always, the path of true love is never smooth, and Cray must overcome many obstacles, not least of which is Aliza's total lack of emotions, in his quest.

The Crystal Palace continues to use ideas from its prequel, the major one being the existence of the realms of Fire, Ice, Air and Water where the demons live. Unfortunately, this time the plot is thinner and the use of the realms and demons more perfunctory. The major part of the book is set in the palace of the title, essentially a sterile and static environment. It reminded me of Superman's Fortress of Solitude. For me, the book really only comes alive when the plot meanders back to Cray's surroundings and friends.

Eisenstein's style is very readable. Her descriptive powers are vivid - her depiction of ice and crystals, their formation and texture, is excellent. There are some nice set pieces, such as Cray's trip to town to purchase some wool for his mother. The characters are well portrayed, in particular the demon, Regneniel, with all his complexity and contradictions. However, Cray is rather too good to be true, and Aliza's emotional numbness becomes tiring after a while.

This book suffers from comparison with its predecessor. **Sorceror's Son** had such a complex plot and original fantasy concepts. **The Crystal Palace** is hamstrung by its subject matter; in places it is, like its heroine, emotionally sterile - in spite of its author's valiant efforts.

Barbara Davies

Scare Care
Graham Masterton (Ed.)
Grafton, 1991, 496pp, £4.99

Charity collections are always a bitch to review: if you really don't like what's on offer you feel like a heel for being negative, and depriving a good cause of funds, and if you genuinely think it's an outstanding piece of work it looks as though sentiment has clouded your judgement.

Fortunately **Scare Care** falls neatly between these extremes. It's a very, very thick anthology, weighing in at almost exactly a hundred pages to the pound, and virtually every significant contemporary writer of macabre fiction appears in its pages.

Moreover, a surprising number of newcomers are to be found among the Harlan Ellisons, Ruth Rendells, and Guy N Smiths. Fantasy art fans will also find the Ron Embleton frontispiece, one of his last completed commissions, a welcome bonus.

Most of the stories are original, written especially for the collection, although a handful of reprints also appear: James Herbert contributes a vignette from the **Rats** trilogy, Roald Dahl a Tale of the Unexpected, and Masterton modestly uses a pseudonym on one of his old **Twilight Zone** pieces.Quality, inevitably, varies; a few of the stories are outstanding, a few dire, and the vast majority simply workmanlike. Given the sheer size of this collection, everyone will find far more to amuse and entertain them than to dislike in it, whatever their taste. On that basis alone, **Scare Care** is excellent value for money.

What lifts it into the essential purchase category is the fact that the thirty-five or so writers represented herein donated their contributions for nothing; all fees and royalties earned by this book go to the Scare Care Trust, a charity set up to help abused children.

How can you possibly pass up the chance to do good by self-indulgence? Don't try. Buy this book.

Alex Stewart

Elven Star
Margaret Weiss & Tracy Hickman
Bantam, 1991, 367pp, £12.99

Elven Star continues the **Death Gate** Cycle begun in **Dragon Wing**. Having departed Arianus, Haplo and his dog arrive on the planet Pryan. This three-dimensional world is composed of trees so vast, that their canopy is solid enough to support all life - except the Dwarves, who choose to dwell on the blacked-out actual surface of Pryan.

The main characters are a Chekhovian family of Elves surnamed Quindiniar. They make and sell genuinely guided weapons; they ask what the target is and you tell 'em - it's as simple as that.

Paithan Quindiniar is the sales representative who gets mixed up in the double-crossing adventures of his human clients, Roland and Rega - brother and sister. The Dwarves are definitely smaller in stature, but I could not see any difference between Humans and Elves. Is the book a parable about racial prejudice and overcoming it? Certainly, the Humans and Elves despise each other - and later fall in love.

Enter the Tytans, ultimate destruction on two legs. The wanderers return to the Quindiniar mansion just ahead of the destroyers. Their warnings go unheeded; the family is so obsessed with their accountancy, scientific experiments, and wedding plans, that they take no notice of the Tytans, even though the house is being smashed around them. The survivors' take-off in Haplo's dragon-ship is one of the most dramatic pieces of writing I've read for some time.

Martin Brice

Pegasus in Flight
Anne McCaffrey
Bantam, 1991, 317pp, £13.99

This sequel to **To Ride Pegasus** (1973) has as its protagonist the daughter of its hero, Dafydd ap Owen (whose name is consistently spelt wrongly all through both books) and takes us into the 21st century where Talented parapsychics abound, working for mankind in a society which is fighting appalling overpopulation and seeking to build a "spread-boat to the stars" space station that will carry the surplus population to planets of other suns.

Jerhalan, spanning the Jersey Palisades and Greater New York, is mostly linear structures 30 storeys high, packed with people evading the contraception laws, speaking hundreds of languages, undereducated and underprivileged. On Manhattan Island are great cone complexes, hives and platforms with monorail cars on tracks garlanding the buildings; a glance at the dust-wrapper shows that the artist never bothered to open the book and read the scene the author so carefully described.

A benevolent autocracy is faced with child slavery, prostitution and the sale of children as organ transplants; many of the autocrats are involved in these activities, and McCaffrey might have woven a taut, gripping thriller out of these ingredients.Instead, she relies on stupidity - the stupidity of a major character,

Exalted Engineer Barchenka, who is incapable of listening to anything she does not want to hear, totally lacking in the simplest tact and politeness, deficient in common sense, and so unable to generate loyalty among her employees to herself or to the project of building the space station that in any reasonable universe she would not keep her job long enough to antagonise every Talent she needs to help her achieve the deadline she is already failing to meet. And that deadline for completion is another stupidity, created like Barchenka solely to make McCaffrey's plot easier but managing instead to make it ever less convincing.

At least this is not McCaffrey the Dragonrider - or so I thought till I noticed the introductory quotation: ''They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps. - Shakespeare.'' Now this has nothing to do with the plot, so I tracked it down to **Love's Labour's Lost** where it is answered with ''O! They have lived long on the almsbasket of words. I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word, for thou art ... easier swallowed than a flap-dragon.'' And I thought: Oh my God, she thinks she's dug out a Shakespearean dragon - for in fact a flap-dragon is a game where people catch raisins from burning brandy and swallow them (or, by transference, it is the raisins themselves). And there I leave the confused McCaffrey, with a slightly bodged plot and a totally bodged quotation. Back to the dragons, forsooth!

Ken Lake

Jurassic Park

Michael Crichton

Century, 1991, 400pp, £13.99

By the author of **The Andromeda Strain**, this is part eco-thriller, part fictionalised, speculative and at points polemical, documentary. To take the second aspect first, it unambiguously sets out the dangers of uncontrolled genetic engineering; and a popular outline of chaos theory is neatly illustrated. Both issues are pertinent to the plot, which concerns the project of an ethically dubious consortium to reconstitute from ''resurrected'' DNA a variety of saurians, to be contained in a zoo-cum-theme park, then nearing completion, on a tropical island. The technology is such that everything should go right: the ''chaos'' factor, which only the project's consultant mathematician understands and takes seriously, ensures that everything goes wrong. The novel's thriller/horror component involves endless (sometimes literally) cliff-hanging, computer wizardry, and grisly slaughter as, security breaking down, the dinosaurs, T. Rex in the lead, go on the rampage. In fact, the accumulating succession of crises becomes slightly tedious, even though Earth itself is threatened, and (paradoxically in the light of story-telling ''rules'') it is the substantial doses of info-dump on such topics as saurian metabolism and the politics of research that bring relief and sustain interest in the doings of a somewhat stereotypical complement of scientists and entrepreneurs, many of whom (the least likeable) meet unpleasant ends while the goodies (and two precocious kids) come through unscathed, more or less.

KV Bailey

Eight Skilled Gentlemen

Barry Hughart

Corgi, 1991, 289pp, £3.99

A third outing for a pair of Chinese sleuths first encountered in **Bridge of Birds** and **The Story of the Stone**. This is NOT a trilogy or any kind of ology; the book comprises a part of an ongoing series of fantastic adventures in China's never-never past (ostensibly AD 640). Master Li Kao, an ancient yet surprisingly sprightly seer, yet again accompanied by his chronicler, Number Ten Ox, of considerable brawn and not a little brain, set out to solve the mystery of the eight bird cages, the plotting of the corrupt mandarins, and the secrets of the eight skilled gentlemen. Along the way they join forces with the amazing puppet master, Yen Shih, and his beautiful magician-daughter Yu Lan.

If you like plenty of local colour, gentle wit and humour, with shades of pathos and wonder, seasoned with riddles within riddles, then this is the book for you. It reminded me of a cross between Conan Doyle's ''The Dancing Men', van Gulik's Judge Dee and a hint of Rohmer's Fu Manchu, yet original for all that. Though not a student of ancient China, I found the details, the historical touches, the characters and belief systems used, the superstitions, and the mysteriousness - above all, the mysteriousness of the people - all rang very true. There is little slapstick; it's more a restrained, ''civilised'' - all non-Chinese are barbarians - humour, with wit, though not much, the unwanted corpse comes pretty close to knockabout laughter!

Poetry, wisdom, and adventure, secret passages, caves, sinister villains, they're all here. Apart from the fantastic elements, such as a hideous vampire ghoul eating people, and other sundry agents of the ancient gods, including magical bird cages, it could read as a good historical detective story: with these elements, however, it's better, much better. If you haven't tried Hughart yet, then this is a good introduction to a rising talent.Covers hardly ever get a mention: this one is beautifully rendered by Mark Harrison, containing much mystery and the feel of ancient China, with obvious signs that he had read the book too.

Nik Morton

The Renegades of Pern

Anne McCaffrey

Corgi, 1991, 384pp, £3.99

The Renegades of Pern tells two or three stories in parallel, but the emphasis on those stories varies considerably, and the dragons play very little part at all.

The title element comes from a gathering together of the unfortunates and homeless of Pern into a new Hold or clan, under the renegade noblewoman Thella. Her attempts to found a new Hold or castle lead her first through a Robin Hood-like banditry, and then after the destruction of her home, into an insane chase after a young girl who can hear dragons.

The second element comes from the rite of passage of young trader Jaygo, whose teenage years are wrecked by one of Thella's wagontrain attacks, and who spends later years in a sort of hunt and fleeing from the renegade, meeting his mate Amarion on the way, and helping her to lose her dragon-aural abilities.

Jaygo ends on the relatively unexplored southern continent, and it is the opening of that continent to immigrants, and the discovery of archaeological artifacts that reveal the nature of the first landings on Pern, that make up the third strand of the story.

I was not impressed by this book: I found the story hard to follow, the characters were indeterminate (frequently I could not tell apart humans and their animals), and the disparate elements did not mix easily. It seemed to be as close to soap opera and to sword and sorcery, and none of those elements could prepare me for what came next. The last few pages describing the last stages of the archaeological dig had almost nothing to do with what had gone before - and the story of the bandit gang was irrelevant to it.

The cover says that the events of this book run concurrently with the earlier **White Dragon**. Reading that might help; this one cannot stand up on its own.

Leslie J Hurst

The Magic Spectacles

James P Blaylock

Morrigan, 1991, 181pp, £13.95

Two other of James P Blaylock's unclassifiable fantasies (**Homunculus** and **The Digging Leviathan**) have been published by Morrigan Publications with illustrations by Ferret. This, his first book for ''children'', is to my mind his best yet, exploring the fairy-tale territory of **The Elfin Ship** and **The Disappearing Dwarf** rather than that of the previous Morrigan books.

There's a certain archness about an adult fantasist writing a ''children's book'' which is emphasised by the book-jacket revelation that Blaylock's sons are called John and Daniel (like the children in this book). There are also references to Ahab the dog in the children's favourite reading - the fairy-tales of ''G Smithers'' - and if a certain metafictional layering is already suspected then I needn't cite the revelation in the denouement which confirms the reflectedness of the fiction. If **The Magic Spectacles** is like Disch's **The Brave Little Toaster** as a children's book for adults, that doesn't prevent it from being a fable which aims at (and reaches) its target through painting an idealistic, childlike world. If it's mainly adults who actually believe in goblins, ''henny-penny men'' and Aiken Drum (or talking household appliances, for that matter), there are also plenty of children who would find this an appealingly modern fairy-tale as well.

After buying some marbles and a pair of spectacles from a ''curiosity shop'' run by someone who may be the Man in the Moon, two boys climb through their bedroom window to a land straight from the imagination of their favourite writer. However, the spectacles by which they can see their way back are broken, and to return they have to help Mr Deener, whose sleeping twin is together with the goblins and the henny-penny men riding leaves laden with fragments of broken glass - an example of a literally fragmented personality. As Danny helps to put Mr Deener back together again he learns some truths about life.

The Magic Spectacles shows Blaylock to be a master of that peculiar genre which neither the term ''fantasy'' nor the expression ''fairy-tale'' quite define. It's a mixture of melancholy and slapstick about coming to terms with loss and memories of the past, and how to deal with the ''bad parts'' inside you; about glass magic and the full moon. Jacket references to **The Weirdstone of Brisingamen** and **A Wizard of Earthsea** are beyond the mark; if there are any touchstones in juvenile fantasy they must lie among the equally goblin-haunted stories of George MacDonald. In fact, despite the modern small-town American setting of **The Magic Spectacles** it has the feel of the Victorian ''fairy-tale for all ages'' all over it, except for Blaylock's magically direct but unsentimental tone.

Andy Sawyer

Summer of Night

Dan Simmons

Headline, 1991, 473pp, £14.95

Fiends

John Farris

Grafton, 1991, 331pp, £12.99

These novels have a number of things in common: a major character called Duane, gruesome, supernatural horrors, American youngsters accustomed to obscene language, much visual description such that they could easily be made into screenplays, and authors as close to being ''born'' writers as is possible. Simmons is said to have begun writing short stories at nine; Farris to have published his first novel while in high school.

Simmons is a former teacher of gifted children (his Duane is described as ''tragically gifted'') a

and has won many literary awards for both fantasy and science fiction; Farris was the inspiration for writers such as Stephen King.

The plot of Simmons' book concerns a bunch of eleven-year-olds reminiscent of William Brown's gang, except for their all-Americanness, who get caught up in horrific events associated with a sinister Old Central School, whose principal cannot speak correct English and whose boys' restroom is wrongly marked boy's. All of them hate school and some, at times, spit, drive cars, carry guns and prove capable of having sex. Simmons obviously has memories of an idyllic, rustic boyhood.

The plotting is masterly but there is switching between so many viewpoints in the interests of maintaining suspense that the reader can easily forget what predicament a given character was last left in, with consequent loss of interest. The book is overlong and has so little to offer apart from its excellent filmable quality that slow readers would be well-advised to wait for the film to be made. (Mistake spotted: "some obtruse reason", p6. When Simmons likes a word, e.g. "scabrous", he is inclined to repeat it.)

Fiends is much the same kind of filmable potboiler. Well-written, much description of caves and countryside in Tennessee (cf. Illinois), *gruesome*. The kids are older, and when they encounter horrors they vomit *ad nauseam*.

One cannot help but wonder what image of the USA is conveyed to the outside world by such books, but they are undoubtedly "commercial".

Jim England

The Voice of the Night
Dean R Koontz
Headline, 1991, £14.95

Collin Jacobs was new in town and had no friends. But then he met Roy Borden. Roy got him into the school football team, takes him to a secret spot on a hill overlooking an open-air cinema showing adult movies. Collin is grateful that a stranger should be so friendly. But Roy does not do anything without a reason. He needs Collin's help.

In juvenile ignorance they become "blood-brothers" and Roy hints at an exciting plan, but refuses to say much. What he does tell Collin, is what his divorced mother is doing with her gentleman friend. In his naivety Collin refuses to believe this news, nor does he understand Roy's fascination with the macabre. They visit a deserted house in which an horrific multiple murder-suicide was committed some years before.

After testing Collin's friendship and loyalty, suggesting he block a railway line that would cause a derailment, his ideas become more and more ludicrous; each one would involve people being hurt or killed. Gradually, one sees what Roy has in mind and, to Collin's horror, the plan involves the rape and murder of his own mother.

Torn between his loyalty to his only friend and fear for his mother, Collin tries to thwart Roy's plans and finds that it's his own life that is in danger. He tries to get help, but no-one believes him.

They say the cruellest animal is an adolescent. Here Koontz capitalises on the idea, and adds a sense of mystery to the proceedings. This suspenseful story, with a gruesome twist, is one book that should not be read alone.

The only real criticism against this book is, maybe, the name Borden being given to the villain of the story. Otherwise it is a powerfully told tale, written some years ago and republished in March.

Martin Webb

Hyperion
Dan Simmons
Headline, 1990, 502pp, £4.99 pb

The Fall of Hyperion
Dan Simmons
Headline, 1991, 468pp, £14.95 hb

These are not the smallest of books, either in page-count or in promotion. Indeed, **Hyperion** and **The Fall of Hyperion** havealready gathered such a fearsome reputation that any attempt toreview them at this time is inevitably destined to be contaminated by the fallout from a barrage of criticism. There's rumoured to be a third book in the offing, perhaps making a trilogy of it; in which case well say I. There's little doubt inmy mind that **Hyperion** and **The Fall of Hyperion** mean something, and will continue to be remembered among SF readersfor some time... the only question is *what*?

Space opera for starters. The first book, **Hyperion**, opens onboard a vast tree-ship that is taking the last party of pilgrimsto the Shrike, an indestructible icon of death that wanders thewilderness of Hyperion. The pilgrimage is final in two ways:firstly, the Hegemony of Man is preparing for the terminal war with the Ousters, space-dwelling barbarians, and secondly theShrike takes the lives of all who participate in such a pilgrimage save one, whose greatest wish is granted.

Hyperion is, pure and simple, structured along the lines of the **Pilgrim's Progress**. Along the route to the valley of the TimeTombs, the pilgrims tell one another their reasons for takingsuch desperate action. Simmons has a predictably varied cast: theAmbassador, the Priest, the Soldier, the Captain (of the tree-ship), the Poet, the Wandering Jew and his baby daughter (who isageing inexorably backwards), and the Private Eye. (Quite how the latter is integrated into the novel is one of the weakest points,insofar as Lamia Brown is two-dimensional in comparison with theother characters, yet the information she provides is critical toan understanding of the background.) Alarums and excursions ensueas the Ouster fleet makes its way in-system and the pilgrims near their destination. Meanwhile, with the curious twist ofbackground-*is*-foreground so common to the best of space opera,we learn that the Hegemony and its surrounding Techno-Core of AI's is less than the all-beneficent interstellar polity that itinitially appears to be.

The Fall of Hyperion is a vastly different novel, yet nonetheless satisfying for all that. Simmons takes the material introduced in the first book and twists it through another dimension, abandoning the classic plot structure for a newer,more risky style of intercut viewpoints on The End of Civilisation As We Know It. He also manages to drag in multiple instantiations of the poet Keats, not to mention a bizarre epistemology in which gods battle for domination of the birth cosmos, and in which the Shrike, with its terrible tree of thorns (upon which its victims are impaled, screaming, for eternity) isfinally confronted.

Where Simmons is going to go from here is anybody's guess. What I can say is that he's recaptured the sense-of-wonder of traditional space opera while combining it with a much deeper,almost Stapledonian, discourse about the nature of good and evil.Too big for you? Then let's just say that this is what spaceopera trilogies *ought* to be like, and leave it at that. Highly Recommended.

Charles Stross

Eternal Light
Paul J McAuley
Gollancz, 1991, 384pp, £14.99

In 1921 Ludwig Wittgenstein published an aphoristic quest for thelimits of knowledge under the title **Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus**. Beginning with a tiny core of empirical certainty("The world is all that is the case"), his quest ended amid the uncertainty of metaphysics which he famously dismissed: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

Wittgenstein's quest is one that a surprising number of hard SFwriters have followed, with one significant difference: whereof they could not speak, thereof they did not remain silent. It iscurious that it is those authors who are most at home amid thecold equations of mathematics, the hard realities of physics, who most pursue this course into the transcendent. It is as if,having mapped the algebraic topography of their universe, they feel a need to go into areas that cannot be mapped. The standard bearers of science deny its awesome rationality by seeking a higher level of humanity which approaches godhood. Bob Shaw went that way in **The Palace of Eternity**, Greg Bear did so in **Eon**,Arthur C Clarke did so most famously in **2001, A Space Odyssey**.Now Paul McAuley treads the same path.

This is a sequel to his first novel, **Four Hundred BillionStars**, a fact which is rubbed home by fairly regular repetition of scenes and elements from that book. Given the extraordinary amount of technical data which McAuley confidently expects us to absorb, this failure of nerve or lack of trust in his readerswhen it comes to the human side of the equation is, to say the least, unfortunate. For ten years after her unique encounter withthe alien Alea, the Enemy, at the end of that earlier book, Dorthy Yoshida has been held a virtual prisoner by the Navy. But now she's on the loose again. With a renegade Golden (the near-immortal super-rich), an equally renegade artist, Robot, who has given over half his brain to an artificial intelligence, and the combat pilot Suzy Falcon, Dorthy sets off to investigate a planet which is approaching the solar system at an artificially high speed, and has been doing so for millenia. Orbiting the planet they discover a moon riddled with wormholes which eventually lead them through to the centre of the galaxy - and a different dimension.

This is a novel absolutely stuffed with drama. There are battles in space, mutinies, bloody conflicts between religious fanaticsand gung-ho military men, desperate missions, daring escapades,last-minute escapes, cliffhangers. If you are not gripped, I despair of you. But it is also a novel which is bloated with its own ambition. It reaches climax after climax, then goes on as McAuley wrenches another twist from the tale.

If I sound ambiguous about the book, that is because I am. It isa book riddled with faults, but that is because it is so massively ambitious a work. We don't often get ambition like this in science fiction, and it is perhaps inevitable that in a work on such a scale some shots should fall short of the target. He is still attempting to do things with the genre that I haven't seen in far too many years. And he succeeds far better than anyone might have expected. I still have a sneaking feeling that the universe is big enough; we don't need to try to smuggle in metaphysics as just another branch of physics. But if it is to be done, let it be in as whole-hearted and full-blooded a manner as it is in this novel.

One is only left to wonder: where next. The rest is silence.

Paul Kincaid

Reaper Man
Terry Pratchett
Gollancz, 1991, 253pp, £13.99

Terry Pratchett is nothing if not alarming and unpredictable. Who could have expected that the rib-tickling slapstick of the early Discworld books would have matured, like fine wine, into something suspiciously like fine writing? OK, there have been some minor stumbles along the way, but **Reaper Man** is Pratchett at his best (which *doesn't* mean that it is **The Colour of**

Magic revisited). There may be less in the way of belly laughs,but there is more in the way of subtlety and (he won't like me saying this) style. **Reaper Man**, for all its humour, is a *thoughtful* book, and says more about the meaning of life than many a serious tome on the subject.

But don't run away with the idea that Pratchett has GONE SERIOUS.When death becomes mortal, and there is no immediate replacement around to take over his job, Ankh-Morpork begins to fill up with the undead, giving rise to ample scope for the usual mayhem, and providing the basis for one particularly excruciating pun. Indeed I suspect that it was the expression "esprit de corpse" that provided the foundation for the book, with everything else being written to provide a setting for it.

I can offer no higher praise than to tell you that I had already bought the book, for real money, before being asked to review it. But I'm almost more intrigued to find out where Terry Pratchett goes from here. Sure, he can keep writing Discworld books until the sands in his own timer run out. But I wouldn't half like tosee him tackling something completely different - something, dare I say it, not even in the SF genre. Provided, of course, hewrites more stories like this one as well!

John Gribbin

Othersyde
J Michael Straczynski
Headline, 1991, 310pp, £14.95

Strangers
Dean R Koontz
Headline, 1986, 537pp, £14.95

Two more additions to Headline's growing list of hardback horror novels, although only Straczynski's **Othersyde** really deserves the genre label. This is the one about the nerdy kid who gets possessed by supernatural forces and starts offing the highschool bullies. Odd to find this so far from its natural habitat in direct-to-video land, and it comes as little surprise to find the jacket bio mentioning the author's career as a screenwriter.What lifts this above the mundane is an evocative and economical prose style, and a rare depth and subtlety of characterisation. I'll be looking out for Straczynski's future work with interest, in the hope that he'll find material more worthy of his obvious talent.

Strangers is a reissue of a five-year-old Dean Koontz paperback original, also currently available in a new A format edition, so the hardback is likely to be of limited appeal to anyone but collectors and libraries. All the familiar Koontz strengths and weaknesses are here: a grippingly convoluted plot developed with consummate skill, a workmanlike prose style, likable heroes,understandable villains, and an irritating tendency to explain things two or three times when one would do.

Though marketed as horror, **Strangers** actually owes more to science fiction and the political thriller; and, for once, the cross-genre mix works without seeming strained or contrived.

Alex Stewart

Orion in the Dying Time
Ben Bova
Methuen, 1990, 356pp, £14.99

Entities called the "Creators" (who are mainly the gods ofclassical antiquity) have created Orion to do their bidding thoughout the "Continuum". In this entertaining adventure he does victorious battle with Set, an evil dinosaur-lord. In so doing, he ties up several of the loose ends of history, such as what really caused the dinosaurs to disappear, and the truth about theGarden of Eden. A ripping yarn with not an unbuckled swash in sight. Taken on this level alone, damn good entertainment.

Unless Bova has written an almost impenetrably subtle pastiche, it would seem from the afterword (which supplies a mythological rationale) that one is invited to look further. Taken against the content of the book, this merely appears sententious and rather silly.

Orion comes across as a trans-temporal Biggles in a leather kilt with a goddess for his consort. The provoking shallowness of his observations upon human nature and life in general made it very difficult for me not to hurl the volume across the railway carriage in which I was reading it, and I suspect that the public nature of the occasion was really all that stopped me.

I suppose that it takes a writer of Bova's celebrity to create a character who can tell us in almost every chapter that all of a sudden his "senses went into hyperdrive" and still be read. At the beginning of chapter two, Orion further informs us: "I havealways been able to control at will all the functions of my body...." I suspect that this is one superhero I shall avoid in future, lest I lose control of mine.

Michael Fearn

Drenai Tales
David Gemmell
Century, 1991, 756pp, £9.99

I really tried, honestly. I read the whole thing conscientiously,every word, no skimming. Every sword thrust in a belly, every head slashed off a neck, every blade cleaving through a helm, every axe lodged in a skull. The little heroic fantasy I've read before made me fairly sure I wouldn't like it, so I made extra efforts to evaluate it objectively.

I still didn't like it.

I don't actually see the point of publishing **Drenai Tales**. It contains three novels - **Waylander**, **Legend** and **The King Beyond the Gate**, and a 15,000 word story, 'Druss the Legend'. Gemmell fans will already have the novels, and won't be best pleased at being asked to shell out £9.99 for a short story. New readers, despite the apparent liking these days for house-brick books, are more likely to try them out by buying just one of the novels. I'd be interested in seeing the sales figures.

The novels and the story are all set in the same world whereseveral generations of Drenai warriors defend their land bloodily against their bloodthirsty enemies. A berserker hero slaughters dozens of the enemy single-handed (or should that be single-sworded?), spurring on his disheartened and vastly outnumbered followers to great acts of heroism. Most of them die, but as they've each bravely killed lots and lots of the enemy, that's okay. Sometimes even the hero dies, eventually, giving an added touch of realism. Sometimes the hero is a reluctant hero, whichgives that all-important quality of will-he, won't-he suspense to the first five pages. And there's usually a romantic element.

That, in detail, is the plot. Of each of them. **Legend**, the first to be written, is by far the best; it's more complex, more detailed, with less hack and splatter. "Druss the Legend", the most recent, is the worst on the same criteria. The conclusion is that Gemmell, along with too many other writers, has been seduced by his publishers and his bank book into formula writing.

Having said that, I'd like to read something by him in anothe rsub-genre, because the one thing that surprised me is how good a writer he is. Despite my aversion to slashed throats and spilt entrails I found myself drawn along by the sheer quality of thewriting. There's also, within the confines of the subject matter,a hell of a lot of insight into human frailties and character traits. And some welcome flashes of gallows humour.

But I'd recommend any heroic fantasy fans to try Gael Baudino's **Dragonsword** rather than this; it's got all the dripping ichor and splattered blood you'll want, but it rises beyond that to subvert the sub-genre. And that, I regret, Gemmell does not do.

David V Barrett

Moondance
SP Somtow
Gollancz, 1991, 565pp, £14.99

Moondance comes adorned with praise from Robert Bloch, Dean Koontz, Dan Simmons and others. Supposedly the book is a significant addition to the horror genre. Certainly there would be no problem with this if weight were the criterion: this is a wrist-breaker! What about the story though? Does this novel stand out from the rest of the pile?

The book tells of the migration of European werewolves led by Baron von Wolfing (honest!) to the American West in the 1880s and of their war with a tribe of Red Indian werewolves. The European pack are vicious predators, preying on humanity, while the Indians have a long-established harmonious relationship with both human and animal kind. This balance is now at risk. Only the crazed child, Johny Kindred, can heal the rift between the two packs.

The story is told by modern researcher and writer Carrie Dupre, who is, unknown to herself, descended from the child's nurse who was also the Baron's human lover. While investigating the case of the Laramie Ripper, she uncovers the story of the werewolf war.

Somtow has tried to combine a werewolf story with a Western epic and has failed in the attempt. The book is far too long, much of it self-indulgent padding that certainly tried this reader's patience. He has tried to pack an enormous amount of material into the story hoping, one suspects, that the sheer volume will compensate for the limitations of his literary skills.

The book does not come alive: at no point is the imaginationdrawn into the world that Somtow has tried to create, except when he writes of sex and violence. The book only comes to life in thescenes when wolves ravage, rape and devour.

Somtow's images of sex as a frenzied devouring have considerable power and certainly serve to make explicit the connection between werewolves and the sexual. This splatter-punk excess is not enough, however, to earn the plaudits heaped on the novel by better writers. All that **Moondance** lacks is convincing characters, a decent plot and severe pruning.

John Newsinger

The Asimov Chronicles
Isaac Asimov
Legend, 1989, 836pp, £14.99

The Asimov Chronicles has missed a golden opportunity to present a critical retrospective of the author's work, with supporting essays and notes, and in addition manages to short-change us on the promised fifty stories (one for every year ofhis writing career, 1939 - 1988), because two 'T-formation' and 'Bill and I', are articles.

The collection contains at least eleven Robot stories, one with Baley and Olivaw and several with Susan Calvin, including the very first, 'Robbie' (a.k.a. 'Strange Playfellow'). There is one from the Foundation universe and seven from the Multivac series,including a poor crossover Robot story, 'That Thou Are Mindful of Him'. There are four non-SF Black Widowers stories and three Azazel tales. One of the latter, the unfortunately titled 'I LoveLittle Pussy', concludes the collection.

The stories which have stood up best and still grip are:'Evidence' (1946); 'Little Lost Robot' (1947); 'Sally' (1953),the closest of any to having teeth; the overly sentimental 'TheUgly Little Boy' (a.k.a. 'The Last Born', 1958); 'The Key', a 1966 Wendell Urth tale which would not have been out of place in a Russian SF collection; 'Feminine Intuition' (1969); and 'TheBicentennial

Man' (1976), similar in theme to 'Evidence' and winner of the Hugo and Nebula awards.
In addition, there are several other well known short stories present: 'Marooned Off Vesta' (Asimov's first ever published),'Nightfall', 'The Martian Way' and 'Breeds There A Man?', none of which bear close scrutiny today.
Since Asimov was not the editor and Greenberg has done a shoddyjob (witness the note after "The Billiard Ball', which belongs to another collection) and accounting for its late appearance in this country, this volume seems stupendously insignificant. Failing some SPECIAL celebration of Asimov's contribution to theSF world, it is merely another gathering of his oft-collected shorter works and, whilst it is interesting to follow his development as a writer, the unedifying result of his style, thegradual eradication of the more excruciating faults, his growing interest in trivial word games, trick endings and himself, andthe increasingly whimsical, unbelievable and petty nature of his plots, one can just as easily gather this from previous collections of his work. Until a complete and critical retrospective of his short story output is published in chronological order, we have yet to see a worthwhile reason for once again reprinting these old, familiar stories.
Terry Broome

The Face of The Waters
Robert Silverberg
Grafton, 1991, 348pp, £13.99

A group on a small boat, their minds those of modern men and women, but their technology that of Columbus, begin this book with their number being reduced as one of them is pulled off the boat by a thing that looks like a fishing net, but still manages to poison and eat its unwilling dinner. Things don't look as if they're going to get any better.
How they got there in the first place is another matter: thesecure residents of Hydros, a planet covered almost entirely by water, and a few sargasso-like islands. "It was a life sentence,being born here." Along with his fellow human islanders, Dr Lawler is expelled from their island by the other sentient race -the Gillies, slow unfathomable creatures, a bit like Capek's newts - after the sleazy human leader has started exploiting yet another animal race and used them as deep sea divers without providing decompression chambers.
No other island will take the tribe, and they quickly discover that almost everything in the sea wants to hurt them a lot and then eat them. As their doctor, Lawler sees a lot of the human side of the pain, if not the being eaten. He does not have much to offer to take away the pain.
Lawler is an introverted character, with a failed marriage behind him; a renegade priest appears as well, together with various kinds of salty dogs of both genders. Oddly, though, for all of them their search never leads them to think of getting off the planet. Weirdos arrange to be dropped, but no-one of any sanity tries to find a way to lift off.
The final solution, when it comes, is unexpected, and requires asort of change of attitude in the reader as to the nature of their problems. Most of the book has been an adventure; it turns into mysticism and did not seem really valid.
I was left a bit surprised because I did not find this book as good a read as, say, **At Winter's End**, and I was left with the vague impression of someone who'd read too much Graham Green orJG Ballard and then turned into Steven Spielberg, rather than Robert Silverberg.
Leslie J Hurst

The Edge of Vengeance
Jenny Jones
Headline, 1991, 305pp, £14.95

This sequel to **Fly by Night** returns us to the world of Chorolonand the character of Eleanor Knight. We resume our acquaintance with Lycias, the Sun God, Astret, the Moon Goddess, and Matthew and Lukas, the Warling brothers. There are also several new characters, among them: Serethrun Maryn of the Elvish; Olwyn Mittelson, a renegade mage of Shelt; and Felicia Westray, the Duke of Eldin's daughter.
Once again, Eleanor Knight is transported to Chorolon from London- this time in a black taxi-cab. She is to be the scapegoat for the wrath of the Sun God whose plans she previously thwarted. She is also sucked *into* a plot to restore the stasis, and a plan by Lucian Lefevre, previously high priest to Lycias and now a monstrous plant called the Desert Rose, to regain his former patron's favour. Rather accident prone, our heroine! Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the City of Shelt is being taken over by Ladon the sea dragon. Felicia, Lukas, Serethrun and Olwyn become involved in a plot to overthrow the Sea Lords of Shelt, twelvepowerful mages, who are *in* league with the dragon.
As you may have gathered, this book is brimful of plot, some of it a continuation of themes begun in the previous volume, andsome of it brand new. Whereas before it concerned the conflict between the Sun God and Moon Goddess, and the impact on their worshippers, **The Edge of Vengeance** is more concerned with the plans of lesser characters and monsters.
Characterization varies from reasonable to good - there are some blacks and whites but also shades of grey. The Desert Rose ismenacing and yet somehow tragic, and Phinian Blythe is pathetic, using the word's original meaning.
The style is lucid and encourages rapid page-turning of the thirty-three chapters. There is a glossary at the front, perhaps an attempt to help those who haven't read Book 1. I wouldn't recommend anyone to read this without having read the previousvolume.
Note to the publisher - the proof reader must have been having an off day. There are several mistakes in my hardback copy.
I enjoyed this book; it is a rattling good read. However, it isominous that this is referred to as the second volume in a''sequence''.
Barbara Davies

Chernevog
C.J. Cherryh
Methuen, 1990, 328pp, £14.99

The Ruby Knight
David Eddings
Grafton, 1990, 347pp, £8.99

Both these authors churn out their work as if beavering on a production line, but of the two Cherryh betrays the opportunist and slap-dash approach the most. **Chernevog** is a sequel to her 'Bestseller' **Rusalka**, now called **Rusalka I**--I only hope that tress will not have to suffer for a Rusalka III (Perhaps the ghosts of trees will come to haunt Cherryh); over 300 pages involving the *same* characters, virtually covering the same ground, page upon page of tedious introspection covering the same thoughts and fears; the first 100 pages could have been more effective if cut to twenty. The blurb would have us believe that great changes have taken place' in those three years: Peyrt has married Evashka--restored to life once more by the sacrifice of her father Ulamets--and they live a life of domestic harmony in the old ferryman's cottage, together with Sasha, the budding wizard, and Babi the yard thing ... (Marriage is a great event, but ... real y!) Eveshak is drawn back into the forest, for a reckoning, and of course Pyetr and Sasha must follow her: is it Chernevog, alive again, not dead, only asleep, casting his malign spell, or worse ...? I wasn't particularly interested.

Eddings never seems to tire - though I've not read any of his work before, I presume he is not regurgitating the same old quest. Whilst the blurb writing isn't the fault of Cherryh, neither is the choice of cover presumably the fault of Eddings. It's not often that you see a less crass depiction of a scene from the story: as you read on, it becomes more and more apparent which scene the cover depicts - none other than the final one in the book! Authors should be allowed to hunt artists who perpetuate these destructive works - and as for the art pderament of the publisher ...
Elana, young queen of Elenia, clings to life by a thread, preserved within a diamond-like block of crystal. Slowly, her allotted span of a year is running out: only the recovery of the ancient, powerful Bhelliom jewel can save her, only her champion, Sir Sparhawk, can accomplish the search for the jewel. And of course, if the jewel should fall into the evil clutches of the god Azash then the world will be doomed forever ...
Familiar stuff, but nicely paced, with ten interesting, personable, brave, humorous and strong people on the side of good, vying with the vile Seeker and his command whole armies, making of them zombies ... The beautiful Sephrina and the mysterious girl-child Flute provide magical aid, but they are mightily stretched against the incursions of Azash. There are dank castles, torture chambers, powerfully revealed communing with 500-years dead heroes plucked from the soil of battlefield, there are rogues and wastrels, and plenty of dry wit and gentl humour. The book isn't outstanding, and I didn't like the Seeker hissing and sssssing like some sort of Gollum, nor the fact that the jewel should be tracked down to a cave and be in the possession of a giant dwarf (I kid you not!) - reasoning to be echoes of The Hobbit. For all that, I enjoyed it, some of the magery was fine. A clean, no-nonsense style, unlike the atrocious style of Cherryh, vis: "Volkhi picked a crooked trailless course through the young trees, knee-deep in seedlings while the taller, three-year growth was constantly enough to screen anything beyond a stone's throw from their track." (The implication is that the once-dead plant-life has only been growing three years since Evashka was brought back: but it's so clumsy, and I doubt if it is English - or American!) There are plenty of other similarly bad examples of poor or imcomplete sentances. The central core of **Rusalka** I and II would have made a good single book of about 250 pages, not two books of 700 pages: it smacks of opportunist padding of the worst kind, to be avoided. But the Eddings you will enjoy, without having to first read its precursor **The Diamond Throne**.
Nik Morton

Against/Beyond the Fall of Night
Arthur C. Clarke/Gregory Benford
Gollancz, 1991, 239pp, £13.99

Against the Fall of Night (to become **The City and the Stars**) first appeared (1948) in **Startling Stories.** The author has said it occupied his mind from 1935, and was in concept much influenced by Stapleton's **Last and First Men.** Thus, it bears the stamp both of that great cosmogonic vision, and of pulp stereotyping e.g., boy-and-companion heroes, mechanical marvels, naive wonder. It is a remarkable, readable and seminal work, indicating at the outset Clarke's preoccupation with escape from limited to less-limited modes of experience and consciousness. The opening scene, Clarke has said, "flashed mysteriously into [his] mind: that towering, desert-isolated city, its myriad faces silently

upturned to see the rarest of phenomena, a floating cloud." Alvin of Loronei escapes from agoraphobic, technologically sustained Diaspar to discover sylvan Lys. His subsequent journey to the stars is a search for knowledge which will dispel the aeonal false myths of earth, renew its organic vitality, and bring the two disparately evolved human stems of its decadence together again. He encounters mystery in the young but immortal supermind, Vanamonde, legacy of galaxy-forsaking imperial Man; and evil in the existance of the Mad Mind, caged in the Black Sun at galaxy's edge. The book ends as Alivn, devoted to a meaningful future for Earth, sends a please-return message to transgalactic Man.
Gregory Benford's book, as much new-vision as sequel, is Stapledonian/Heraclitian/Joycean in prospect and metaphor - "riverrun" is a word used more than once. Benford shifts Clarke's physical (and conceptual) goalposts when, in redefining the Black Sun as a black hole (the cosmology now post-quantum, post-chaos, organistic), he moves it, along with sol and its retinue of reshuffled and terraformed planets, from galacit rim towards galacit centre. He retains a voyaging pair: Cley, the surviving and hunted Ur-woman (eventually instrumental in the absorption of the Mad Mind); and her protector, Seeker-after-Patterns, a kind of huge racoon, evolved to posession of high intelligence, insight, and strange talents: an embodiment of solar life. The "Supra" humans (of whom Alvin, putting in brief though significant appearances, is one) may travel by spaceship, but the bulk of Cley/Seeker travelling is in the organism-sheltering body of Leviathan, a creature of the interstellar spaces, where swim vast plasma-beings, pulsing with electromagnetic energy.
What makes this twinning of such imagistically contrasting novels cohere is the observation in each of complementary relationships between macroscosmos and microcosmos, with final commitment of the protagonists (though with awareness of those relationships) to their origins - Alvin to Earth, Seeker to his "system solar". To contemporary readers Benford's bio/psychic and electromagnetic theatres of action intrigue the more; but, read in sequence, the novels present strikingly one of the constant enlivening themes of sf: the existential role of an individual who is identified with, yet surpasses, tribe, race, species, phylum, biome, as one evolutionary horizon, in transcending it, subsumes another. This does not necessarily assume a cosmic anthropocentricity: in fact, the title (and tenor) of Benford's concluding chapter is "The Heresy of Humanism."
K.V. Bailey

Dreamside
Graham Joyce
Pan, 1991, 248pp, £4.50

The Lords of the Stoney Mountains
Antony Swithin
Fontana, 1991, 374pp, £7.99

These two books are completely different. **The Lords of the Stoney Mountains** is the second in **The Perilous Quest for Lyonesse** series. It continues the adventures of Simon Branthwaite, an English squire of 1403, who has found himself on the mid-Atlantic island-continent of Rockall. In company with Prince Avran (one of the feudal inhabitants of the land), he gets involved in the politics of the various states while still seeking his father and brother in the fabled land of Lyonesse where they have fled after the battle of Shrewsbury. There are many details of Rockall flora and fauna, including the sevdru; it not only serves as intelligent steed, but its twin antelope-type horns make a natural catapult launcher for various deadly missiles. These animals are features on the cover, which also shows the fortress-city of Doriolupta - reminiscent of certain circular stronghold complexes in southern Russia/northern Mesopotamia.
The Lords of the Stoney Mountains is definitely fantasy. I'm not sure that **Dreamside** is; at times, it is frighteningly realistic. That atmosphere is conveyed by the cover itself - a picture of rocks and trees ... No, it isn't; those aren't rocks, they're women - or is it one woman and the rest of the shapes are rocks.
Dreamside is set in 1986, the situation being explained by flashbacks to 1974. The four main characters were at university together. These four prove to be lucid dreamers, not only being able to remember their dreams, but able to direct their dreams - and even re-enter a dream they had been having when previously asleep. They learn to imagine how the dream will continue when they are awake, repeating it asleep and awake until in the end they cannot tell whether what is happening them and around them is real or dream or imagination.
I found **Dreamside** a fascinating read in both senses of the word. I wanted to know what happened. And - as a vivid, remembering, and (I think) occasional director of my own dreams - I found it quite disturbing; which is indeed one of the purposes of fantastical literature.
Martin Brice.

The Revenge of the Rose
Michael Moorcock
Grafton, 1991, 233pp, £13.99

Yes, this *is* an Elric novel. True, there's another quest followed beside Elirc's, and it's this which gives the novel its title, but Elric is on the stylish cover (by Robert Gould) and it's the albino demon-prince who will attract buyers. There's an ironic difference, though, between Elric as viewpoint character and Elric as a novel's pivotal character, and it's arguable that the questing Rose and her vendetta against Elric's mirror image Gaynor the Damned is the true centre of this story. Certainly her "only possible form of revenge" appears most unElrician.
Elric is now a different hero to the early days of **The Stealer of Souls** and **Stormbringer.** Partly because we've known for years how the story ends, so that anything else is mainly filler, partly because Moorcock is a suppler writer than in the old days, reading an Elric story is different these days. There's a sense that Moorcock producing another 'Elric' is like Pete Townsend reforming The Who again, but in this case at least it's not just a matter of producing a favourite brand name. Knowing the original stories helps to get the full flavour of what's happening here, but something *is* happening, at least. The **Revenge of the Rose** may lack some of the early raw romanticism and energy, but it certainly possesses the ironic-baroque stance of, say **Gloriana.** Once more, Elric is helped and hindered by various wildly imagined and strangely named characters, from the titteringly camp Arioch to the multiverse-traversing Phatt family and the noble shapechanger Esbern Snare. And the Rose herself, and three sisters, and even Elric himself, are both subjects and objects of quests.
What made Elric different to most other sword-and-sorcery heroes is that right from the start Moorcock explored symbolism and allegory. Instead of psychic angst, it's not social angst as the doom-ridden Prince sets his interior conflicts against a background of social struggle. So, Elric and his this-time companion the coxcomb-poet Wheldrake, obsessive quoter of his own verse, follows the trail of his father's soul along mobile villages powered by the muscles of an oppressed lower class and the social dispossessed. The "loud superior voices" of their superiors "congratulate themselves on their urbanity, their humanity, their kindness and their graceful manners, while the dead stagger under their feet." Wheldrake - whom we met in **Gloriana** - acts as Chorus as well as Companion, interpreting to Elric the meaning of social structures as Elric uses his cursed blade in time-honoured fashion. Guess which society we can read into the Gypsy nation with its conservatism and blind worship of "progress"? As Wheldrake comments, "a society dedicated solely to the preservation of her past, soon has only her past to sell."
Crude allegory? But then so was the earlier epic where Elric slew and betrayed with his Black Blade acting as a kind of shorthand for humanity's reliance on ambiguous and addictive solutions. Those to whom Moorcock's brand of sword and sorcery is an untried dish would be unwise to experiment with **The Revenge of the Rose.** Those who are hopelessly timelocked in the sixties or who have put all that kid's stuff behind them will both find much to dissapoint. But Moorcock is still writing popular fiction with a radical tinge, and if that pleases you then you'll find this wearied but unbowed episode worth your while.
Andy Sawyer

Young Bleys
Gordon R. Dickson
Tor, 1991, 456pp, £19.95

This book is part of Dickson's **Childe Cycle**. I have nothing against series but I do ask for each book to tell a story which is within itself interesting. Frankly this book just seemed to introduce characters, set up a situation and place the two main characters, Bleys and his brother Dahno, in a predicament ready for the next book; nothing interesting really happened.
When I started to read this I thought it was going to be a "rite of passage" novel. Here was Bleys, a young boy, no father and a mother who was self-centred and just used Bleys as something to show off, Bleys being an exceptional child with the ability to manipulate people, to speed read, to remember and assimilate everything, and so on. The book starts with Bleys manipulating his mother so that she will send him to live with his uncle Henry MacLean, a farmer on the planet Association. Bleys thus goes from a high tech indolent society to a low tech farm in a deeply religious planet. Everything is set up for the rite of passage story but that doesn't happen.
The scene changes to an older Bleys who leaves the farm to live with and work for his older brother Dahno. Dahno is also talented and lives by offering advice and information and he has established a networks on several planets to run such schemes there. Danho sees this as an end in itself but Bleys sees it as the means to a much greater destiny.
This is a male dominated book, a few female secretaries, passing reference to female members of the networks and a wrestling teacher, none of them get very much space in the book. This is explained away by saying Bleys has chosen to avoid close human relationships, particularly with women, which seems just a bit too pat.
Basically we see Bleys learning things, by formal teaching, by reading, by experiencing things. Only in the last few chapters does he actually do anything and mostly that's just talking, the physical action is little and the one killing isn't very dramatic. You may have guessed that I didn't find the book a compulsive page turner. Maybe if this had been the hundred page first part of a novel it would have been okay but as a 456 page book it couldn't hold my attention.
Tom A. Jones

Particles

Short Reviews by Chris Amies

This is the result of much reading and not a little looking at the reviews people have already written. Books included here may be those **Vector** has already reviewed, reprints, paperbacks, or titles not strictly within the **Vector** remit.

Angel Station - Walter Jon Williams [Orbit, 1990, 393pp, £4.50 pb]. Reviewed by Kev McVeigh in V157. Bog-standard space opera with telepathic aliens, genetic hybrids, offplanet casinos, dynasts, gangsters, and so on.

The Empire of Fear - Brian Stableford [Pan, 1990, 520pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Tom A Jones in V149. In a Europe ruled by undying Richard Coeur de Lion and Vlad Dracula, a search for the elixir of vampirism leads to the heart of darkness. Quite the best alternative history I've read in years.

The Final Friends Trilogy - Christopher Pike [Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, 710pp (3 vols.), £3.50 x 3 pb]. "Young-adult" murder mystery set among high school kids. Fine, but what is it doing on **Vector**'s doorstep?

Good Omens - Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman [Corgi, 1991, 383pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Maureen Porter in V157. Originally to be called **William the Antichrist**; imagine **The Omen** rewritten into the **Just William** series, if you will. All good fun, spoilt only by asides designed to "explain" British cultural tropes to a supposed American readership. If you want to imagine the future, imagine a boy and his dog and his friends.

Greely's Cove - John Gideon [Headline, 1991, 422pp, £4.99 pb]. The showdown between good and evil in a small American town. Now where have we heard that before? This is, in its defence, a whole lot better than the general slew (ha!) of post-Lovecraftian neo-Stephen-King stuff.

Hear the Children Calling - Clare McNally [Corgi, 1990, 320pp, £3.99 pb]. Birth drug gives rise to mutations and psi-powers.

Hermetech - Storm Constantine [Headline, 1991, 502pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Barbara Davies in V161. In Sector 23, life imitates art. Ari Famber travels to the city to meet her destiny.

Man from Mundania - Piers Anthony [NEL, 1989, 343pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Barbara Davies in V160. Book 12 in the "Xanth" series. Bad puns and a silly supplement. Oh dear.

Nightfall - Isaac Asimov & Robert Silverberg [Pan, 1990, 352pp, £7.99 pb]. Reviewed by LJ Hurst in V157. Expansion of Asimov's classic story of a planet which only knows complete darkness once every 2000 years, and what happens to society after darkness falls.

Phases of Gravity - Dan Simmons [Headline, 1990, 344pp, £4.50 pb]. Reviewed by Paul Brazier in V158. Non-genre space novel: what happens to a man when he's been to the moon and still doesn't know himself? Thus begins the astronaut's voyage of self-discovery. Truly the right stuff.

Puzzles of the Black Widowers - Isaac Asimov [Bantam, 1990, 253pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Valerie Housden in V156. A series of mannered little detective tales by the Good Doctor, solved invariably by the omnipresent if not omniscient Henry.

Reborn - F Paul Wilson [NEL, 1991, 344pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Jim England in V161. I still think that "he twirled his linguini around his fork" sounds *very* painful.

Secret Harmonies - Paul J McAuley [Orbit, 1989, 333pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Paul Brazier in V156. Hard SF and beyond; the tale of an insurrection on a colony world, a transposition of Australia to outer space (consider the reasons for the original White settlement of Australia, and the troubled relation with the mother country), inscrutable aliens lapsed into their Dreamtime, and talking dogs. This is the new British SF. Let it unfurl.

The Servants of Twilight - Dean R Koontz [Headline, 1991, 499pp, £4.99 pb]. They think Joey's the Antichrist. This starts a reign of terror that leads to a cross-country chase. More police thriller than horror (as it's sold), and good solid stuff at that.

The Sky Lords - John Brosnan [St Martin's Press, 1991, 318pp, $18.95]. Reviewed by Chris Barker in V147. "Centuries in the future, after the world has been devastated by the Gene Wars, the scattered remnants of humanity struggle against both the spreading biological blight on the ground and the great airships that dominate the skies."

Slice - Rex Miller [Pan, 1990, 317pp, £3.99 pb]. The third and final volume in the Chaingang story (after **Slob** and **Frenzy**). A tale of evisceration, cannibalism, and almost adequate levels of violence. Meanwhile the genre of dismemberment slyly dismembers itself.

Soldier of Arete - Gene Wolfe [NEL, 1989, 337pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Paul Kincaid in V157. Sequel to **Soldier in the Mist,** narrated by Latro, whose memory extends no further back than one day, and whose world is encapsulated in the scrolls he carries with him.

The Stake - Richard Laymon [Headline, 1990, 506pp, £4.99 pb]. Horror writer Larry Dunbar becomes obsessed with the discovery of a mummified corpse with a stake through its heart. There ain't no such thang as vampires... is there?

The Stand - Stephen King [NEL, 1991, 1421pp, £6.99 pb]. Reviewed by Jon Wallace in V157. This is the *full* text of King's mammoth story of post-plague America. Possibly his best book, and certainly his most popular. What are the chances of a movie adaptation?

Tarra Khash: Hrossaki - Brian Lumley [Headline, 1991, 246pp, £3.99 pb]. A variant on the Conan archetype, this time with the Cthulhu mythos making an appearance. Surely unpronounceable titles are a poor idea?

Tek War - William Shatner [Corgi, 1990, 300pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Terry Broome in V160. Reasonable space opera - cum - cyberpunk jaunt through the final frontier.

Tigana - Guy Gavriel Kay [Penguin, 1990, 688pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Martyn Taylor in V161. Intelligent fantasy with less of the good/evil split we're used to, more real characterisation, and certainly readable.

The Tower of Fear - Glen Cook [Grafton, 1991, 375pp, £3.99 pb]. It's a shame historical novels don't sell, and authors have to make them over into fantasy. This is a byzantine tale of the Middle East in the last years of the Roman Empire, only it isn't, if you follow me. Damascus becomes Qushnarrah, the Romans become Herodians, and so on. Plus magic, of course.

Twilight Eyes - Dean R Koontz [Headline, 1987, 478pp, £14.95]. In which there are goblins amongst us, in human form, and just a few people can tell them from the real humans. The end of this predicts a sequel, but it isn't **The Servants of Twilight**.

The Vision - Dean R Koontz [Headline, 1988, 270pp, £13.95]. Yet another Koontz reprint, this one revolving around the psychic-predicts-murders tale.

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PHILIP K DICK CELEBRATION - A WORLD FIRST

19-20 October 1991

Two PKD enthusiasts, community worker Jeff Merrifield and actor John Joyce, are currently putting together a celebratory weekend around the life and work of Philip K Dick. This is to take place at Epping Forest College in Loughton, Essex, over the weekend of 19-20 October 1991. The initial response to the idea has been incredible and the program is growing daily.

Already committed are Ken Campbell, who will be delivering the opening address and presenting some enlightening personal insights; Dr Ernesto Spinelli, who will shed some light on the phenomenological nature of Dick's work; the writer John Constable, who will be using "A Scanner Darkly" to focus on drug uses and abuses; Brian Stableford and Maxim Jakubowski, who will lead a discussion on the mainstream novels; Philip Strick, who will look at Dick's growing influence on the cinema; Geoff Ryman will be talking about the challenge of adapting "The Transmigrations of Timothy Archer" for the stage with a reading; Neil Ferguson will form part of a panel on the significance of revelatory experience; Lawrence Sutin, who has two books about Philip K Dick imminently ready for release will be coming over specially for the Celebration weekend; and Brian Aldiss is cooking up "something special".

There will be a number of theatrical elements to the weekend. John Dowie will be performing his celebrated one man play based on Dick's writings, "Take them to the garden" and John Joyce will perform his much acclaimed version of the famous "Metz Speech". John is also working on a new piece "What is human?" that draws on PKD's writings around the human/android theme with follow-up panel discussion. Actress Suzan Crawley is working on a featured piece based around the way females are presented in Dick's work. And Dick's contention that the future lies positively with the young people is reflected by way of two youth theatre groups working on short stories that will be presented in play form during the weekend.

There are a number of people who have expressed a strong desire to contribute to the weekend and are currently trying to reorganise their timetables to this end: highly likely are Norman Spinrad, Fay Weldon and Jack Cohen. Spinrad particularly has indicated his intention to be present and making a significant contribution, if he can be back from a Russian commitment in time,

On the certainty stakes, guest of honour Paul Williams will be present. Paul is the literary executor of the PKD estate and both knew and has written extensively about Philip K Dick. For many years, probably more now than he cares to remember, Paul has administered the Philip K Dick Society and Newsletter. However he has expressed a desire that from August 1992 he would like some other person or organisation to take over the baton. This weekend will see the first major gathering of the membership of the PKDS and the future will certainly be on the agenda - in fact anybody with ideas for the continuation of the society and the newsletter after August 1992 should get in touch with the organisers of the Celebration so that their views can be reflected and considered.

There will be all sorts of fringe spin-offs to the weekend - a PKD community mural painting, sales of books and other valuable Dickian advertising matter) and exhibitions of art works (Grafton cover art and a display of pages from the famous R Crumb comic of the 1974 revelatory experiences). There will also be an opportunity to listen to music inspired by the works of Philip K Dick.

The main purpose of the weekend is in getting people together to meet and talk about Philip K Dick. That's where you come in. Some of the best speakers available have been lined up, but it cannot be done without all you Philip K Dick fans out there.

Registration fee for the weekend Celebration is £13.50. There is a limit of 300 places of which 100 are being set aside for members of the PKD Society. To make sure of your place send your name, address and £13.50 off to the address below, but do it quickly - interest is growing. Accomodation is being arranged through the Fortes chain of hotels and Post Houses, of which there are several within reasonable distance of the college. Bed and Breakfast in en suite rooms will be about £30 to £50 per night, depending on whether you want single rooms or will share in a twin. This includes bussing and the organisers will make the arrangements for you. You will get a detailed information pack back with your registration documents.

Applications to CONNECTIONS, EPPING FOREST COLLEGE, BORDERS LANE, LOUGHTON, ESSEX, IG10 3SA, UK.