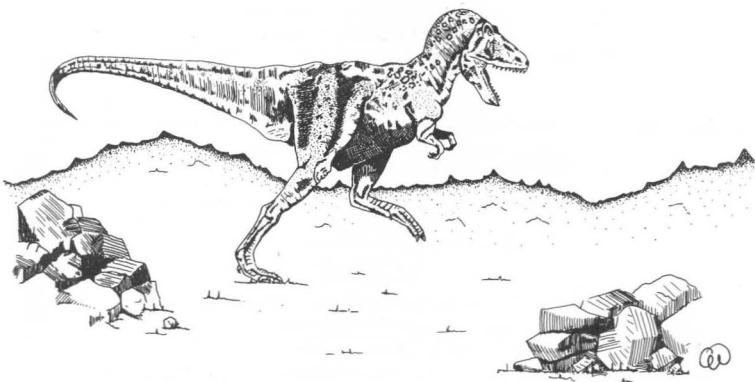


Vector 163

October/November £1.25

The Critical Journal Of The British Science Fiction Association

Brian Stableford on H G Wells
Colin Steele on Australian SF
Ken Lake on Palaeontology
Reviews & Letters & More



Vector

October/November 1991 ➔ Issue 163

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Contributors: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS must be typed double spaced on one side of the paper. Maximum preferred length is 3500 words; exceptions can and will be made. A preliminary letter is useful but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned without an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editors.

Artists: Cover Art, Illustrations and fillers are always welcome.

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Time, a very loose theme of this issue, can be said to have three directions in SF. Forwards, of course, is the classic route, and is one of the key factors in identifying SF for some people. This is fine when the setting is indeterminate aeons from now (although as Arthur C Clarke said, any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, and hence we get into the Fantasy/SF overlap) but with close future SF the borders are vaguer. Is Chris Mullin's **A Very British Coup** SF? Or is Kim Stanley Robinson's **The Gold Coast** a mainstream thriller? There are other factors.

And backwards, either through time travel or as an alternative history, is almost as popular. Again, with some of the histories we find the genre boundaries obscured. James Blish's **Doctor Mirabilis** is a fine example of a singular historical novel.

It is with the third direction, out towards the reader, ie the 'present' that things become particularly interesting, however. The SF novel with a contemporary setting faces a dichotomy: on the one hand, the SF element should perhaps be brought forward in the mix, making it significant enough to firmly implant itself within the genre (at least for existing marketing reasons), but for realism the so-called 'mainstream' elements must be fully developed. These should be mutually complementary, but how often are they?

The present is actually the experienced embodiment of the immediate past (hence *déjà vu* effects, according to some theories at least) and the product of the past as a whole. It also incorporates the dubious concept of the anticipated future. For the SF writer it is surely the most obvious case for the oft-quoted maxim "Write what you know". Unfortunately this often leads to the self-indulgence that **SF Eye's** Stephen P Brown called "Spiderism" after Spider Robinson. Brown's target was Allen Steele's very enjoyable **Orbital Decay** where popular music plays a big role - but rather than the pop music of its setting, around 2015, it is the music of the early 1970s. The argument is not that nobody will be listening to The Grateful Dead in 25 years time, but that some people will be listening to more up-to-date releases. Steele is clearly a big fan of the 'Dead and so all his characters are deadheads too. In **Interzone** 52, Wendy Bradley notes that the date of TV dramas can be guessed from the costumes, regardless of period setting, with a lot of SF the same is true except that 15 years should be added, the same principle should tell you the author's age by the music he quotes. (It also works with other culture references, J G Ballard writing about Jane Fonda rather than Kim Basinger or Madonna, for instance - but since pop music is so fashion-susceptible the effects are more overt.) This is a failure of realism, and it sometimes jars badly.

After all, since so much SF has something to say about life now; this is surely enhanced or even facilitated by allusions to the real "now". I recall a review in **Australian SF Review** which clearly failed to understand the significance of the title of Lucius Shepard's **Life During Wartime**, though again that was a song from several years previous to the novel.

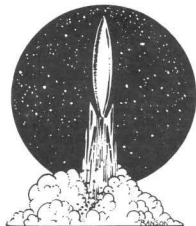
Such references, and I'm only using pop music as an example because of my own interest, can date a novel or story quite quickly, I admit, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Many classics are "timeless", **Little, Big** for example, but others do benefit from recognition of their originating milieu. Thomas Hardy or Charles Dickens portray a time and place which is long gone, but the novels still have worth far beyond simple historical record. In SF, the work of Robert Anton Wilson owes as much to contemporary subcultures as to contemporary quantum physics, and for many writers texts such as Greil Marcus' **Lipstick Traces** are as important as Astronomy textbooks for filling out a novel to a "whole".

For the writer describing a particular "present" references to that present must be accurate to convince the reader that the author is in touch with reality, and hence to promote, where necessary the suspension of disbelief. I'm sometimes dismayed to find talented writers neglecting this.

And so to the future of **Vector**. In partnership with Boyd and now Catie, I've been here for two years, and I think we've covered a lot of ground. Future features already planned should go further, but we do need contributors. It really would become the clique that Maureen Speller fears if we had to rely on a few writers such as Steve Palmer, Ken Lake or Colin Greenland, focussing on a narrow band of SF. So we want articles and interviews covering anyone from Adams to Zelazny. In particular however, there are major authors who have been neglected by us, and by some of the other critical magazines. Does anybody have anything to say about Orson Scott Card or Ursula Le Guin? Or Nancy Kress or James Patrick Kelly? If **Vector** is to truly represent SF readers of all tastes then those readers must represent themselves.

Editorial

By
Kev McVeigh



Artwork by Peggy Ransom

Letters

Ordinary Punters' Views

From Alison McRae

May I suggest to Ken Lake (and the reviewer he quotes: Letter Page, *Vector* 162) that he sticks to reviewing books and not rubbishing the intellect of readers. Whilst I would agree that some authors' writings deserve dismissal and possibly contempt, I cannot see that David Eddings is in this category. He writes enjoyable, lightweight and innocuous books.

Why not save your contempt for someone such as John Norman and his sexist, sadomasochistic *Gor* series? (I was amazed to find him included in *MH Zool's Good Reading Guide to Science Fiction and Fantasy*.) The effect of this rubbish on its readers, especially the emotionally immature male, might well be something to comment on.

The above said, I enjoy reading the book reviews and, as a voracious reader, only wish there were more of them I could read before rather than after having purchased the book! If you want ordinary punters' views, look no further!

Alison McRae
Cambridge

We can't necessarily review books before they appear because we allow a month for a reviewer to complete a review, and this coupled with the lead time to the production of each issue of *Vector* and the fact that publishers' announcement schedules do not necessarily tie in with our schedules, means that the book may well have appeared before it is reviewed. However there can be few readers who have read an appreciable quantity of books upon publication, surely? CA

From Martin Brice

I think I disagree with Maureen Speller's letter in *Vector* 162, but I'm not sure I know why. Finding it equally difficult to marshal any logical arguments for or against *Vector*'s present layout or content, I can only make such comments as have been prompted by Maureen's letter.

Yes, the same names do keep reappearing, but such a criticism can be made of any magazine, whether professional (employing full-time staff writers) or amateur (relying on the same band of dedicated enthusiasts). Obviously, the answer for the amateur magazine is for a greater variety of enthusiasts to contribute; but some people - the majority of people in fact - tend to prefer reading to writing...Which is as it should be, otherwise nothing written would ever get read.

However, it is inevitable that the similar interests of, and problems experienced by, the regular contributors to a magazine and a society's committee members, should result in what looks like a clique. I must say, though, that although some of the meetings and conventions I have attended have been more convivial than others, I have never been completely ignored. I hope that this has been the experience of other attendees. We can only make it so by always approaching anyone who seems alone.

I think, though, that Maureen was mainly referring to the interviews of authors by other authors. I can't say that I spend a great deal of time reading these any way; unless I have been particularly impressed - favourably or unfavourably - by either author's works. And if I have not read their books at all, then the interviews do not persuade me to do so. On the other hand, personal meetings do. Czechoslovak and other Middle and Eastern European features left me cold - until I met Josef Nesvadba at WINCON II; now I'm interested and reading.

Is *Vector* going through a slack period? I personally cannot tell. What does impress me,

is the sheer volume of material being published in combination in *Vector*, *Matrix*, *Paperback Inferno* and *Focus* - and that is without the parallel output of the British Fantasy Society. I cannot think of any other literary genre whose members produce so much. Do cowboy enthusiasts, romantic fiction readers, followers of Hornblower and Ramage and Rupert Bear, produce magazines, fanzines, newsletters or other amateur literary journals in such quantity - and quality?

Yet, according to my copy of *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*, there are over thirty thematic literary associations. It is not clear from most of their summarised descriptions, whether they are solely for academics and professionals - or whether amateurs are encouraged to submit not only factual contributions to knowledge of the novelist's life and work, but also attempt their own creations in that genre.

Perhaps we could start making contact with some of these societies; exchange bulletins; provide some account of ourselves for publication in their newsletters in return for their contribution to *Vector*, invite a representative to speak at one of our meetings or conventions? I suppose The Jules Verne Circle or The H G Wells Society would be logical first contacts.

And of course, there is always the plea for more contributions from our own members. In fact, I've got several ideas myself. I'll set them out and send them in as soon as I've delivered my present work on...And after I've done that work on...And I mustn't forget that...But I will, one day...Honest! In the meantime I can only admire those other people who, though themselves are similarly being continually overtaken by life, still find time to send things in to *Vector* and all our other BSFA magazines.

Martin Brice
Alton

I don't want excuses. I want contributions....CC

Hallowes' Hell

From John C Fairweather

With reference to the review of *Hallowes' Hell* by Neville Steed (*Vector* 161, p.18), though the reviewer does not mention it, the incident on which the book is based is true. At the time, US forces were practising for the D-Day landings in blacked-out landing craft, when a German raider got among them. Though enemy gunfire did not kill many, about 700 troops did die due to the ensuing confusion among the blacked-out craft.

Due to morale and the usual wartime conditions, this was not reported at the time, though it did receive widespread publicity in an ITV documentary about two years ago. There is a memorial about this incident at the scene.

John C Fairweather
Woking

Looking at the Void

From The Revd John Howard

Steve Palmer's piece on Gene Wolfe was particularly interesting, and will be of great help when I come to re-read *The Book of the New Sun*. When I first read it, I hadn't "got religion" and so most of the references were totally lost on me.

Your editorial comments on religion and SF, and their relationship in writers and readers of SF, were interesting. Yes there is a lot of dryness and sterility in modern churches, although this must be a generalisation. I wonder how much this is the symptom rather than the disease....

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I can only speak on religion as a Christian, and an ordained minister in the Church of England. A lot of Christians will not agree with what I have said, and some of my desk theologians will have been a liberal/radical "fringe" Christian for some years now, and such views are not fashionable in today's Church. (I have been reading SF for longer than I have been a Christian. I used to keep my piles of SF and horror books under my desk at theological college, because of the comments I used to get about being a closet Satanist!)

Christianity has always been a thoroughly Bible-based religion. New reforming movements within it have always had as their chief aim the idea of "getting back to the Bible", and this idea of "getting back to the Bible" is what has caused all problems. Fundamentalist and literalist interpretations of the Bible are on the increase. Our liturgies and hymns are still so Bible-orientated and use so much Biblical imagery that anyone would be forgiven for thinking that Christianity has never realized that the Earth is not flat, that people like Copernicus, Newton and Einstein have lived and thought, and that the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and nuclear fission are all facts of history, still influencing us one way or another.

There are generalizations here, too, but I think that the point that I want to make stands. It is the old one that Christianity is offering a different reality to the one now largely revealed to us by scientific discoveries. In most cases the scientific reality has won the day - and this is the reality taken for granted by SF writers and readers. The old Christian reality is only held in total by fundamentalists and the members of some sects. I think that most Christians hold a combination of these realities, uneasily maintaining a balance of the two, but letting what must now be termed superstition get the upper hand on Sundays.

The world-view of the Bible is a pitifully inadequate one for these days. It might work more on a personal level, with such concepts - however they are interpreted - as "salvation", and ethics and lifestyle. But when it comes to a wider, cosmic view, the Bible, and so Christianity, is not making any real contact with reality as we now try to perceive it. (I would want to say that I feel that all notions of "reality" are provisional, and should not be made absolute. It would be wrong to be absolutely dogmatic about our understanding of cosmology as it is to expect people to accept the Bible's view of the universe as fact.) In the Bible, depending on when and where the particular part was written, the cosmos is basically seen and understood as not being very old, and not being very large. It is thoroughly human-centred, with God conceived as a human being writ large - with all the attributes that are good and bad as human beings. (I repeat that I know that I am generalizing, for example, the idea of God as a sort of "Ground of Being" in Acts 17:28 is more sophisticated and a more adult view than what I have been describing.)

Where SF comes in, I feel as a Christian, as being corrective and complementary to the Biblical understanding of the universe. As far as we know, the cosmos is nothing like the Biblical one - it could well be infinite and ageless. SF can correct and expand that part of the Christian vision of things that is based on a world-view that is no longer tenable. I think that human beings need a sense of the Beyond, of the Other and the Infinite: because of the reasons given above, Christianity finds it hard to provide it now (at least in adult form). The Christian concept of reality is just too small. We worship a big man, not God. And that's idolatry. It's not good enough.

SF can counteract this. It shifts the centre of things away from ourselves, and puts us and our concerns in perspective. Almost alone among Christians, Don Cupitt has written about this sort of thing - most notably in *Taking Leave of God* (1980) and *The World to Come* (1982) - and has been attacked for it. And yet his bleak and refreshing vision of Christianity as needing to equip humanity to stare into the "Void", and accept and live with making its

own moral values and judgements against the reality of an indifferent and chaotic and magnificent universe, puts back into Christianity something that went since at least Galileo started teaching his newly-discovered world-view.

The two great novels of Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*, contain this sort of vision, putting it forward with great nobility and clarity. And, for example, in the latest *Interzones*, Stephen Baxter's serial "The Baryonic Lords" restores a sense of wonder that once seemed only to be found to exist within Christendom and its outlook.

Since the time of the Victorian pioneers of geology, and Darwin, there has existed a so-called conflict between science and religion that has been the product of media hype and small and intolerant minds on both sides. I think that the same can be said about any ideas of the conflicts between SF and religion that keep on cropping up with monotonous regularity in the magazines!

I think a few lines from Robinson Jeffers' poem "Quia absurdum" sums things up:
*Guard yourself from the terrible opinion
 of space, the bottomless Pool of the stars
 (Expose yourself to it: you might learn something.)*

The Revd John Howard
 Bracknell

Looking at the Sun From Camilla Pomeroy

Thanks for the piece by Steve Palmer, which sent me scurrying round my bookshelves, and the boxes I've been meaning to unpack for years for old copies of *The Book of the New Sun*. Whatever catapulted me into action? - Unless it was intense embarrassment: I remembered a vaguely religious flavour to the work at the time, but was there really a vast and obvious subtext I hadn't noticed as I gobbled my way through the book (telling myself, I'll read this properly as soon as I've finished...)? I was brought up a Catholic, and decided to become an atheist when I started at an Anglican secondary school (on the grounds that religion is irrational). This sounds intellectually correct, no doubt, and that's how it was. At the age of thirteen, I set about weaning myself off of Catholicism by an act of will....

Now that I'm forty, and hopefully less prone to the grand gesture, I still consider myself an atheist, but not altogether a confident one: I still question whether there isn't an after-taste of deism in my attitudes, philosophy, relationships, world-view. I feel potentially unreliable, like a reprogrammed robot: have I really changed, or at some critical point will I revert under stress?

Anyway, moving rapidly on, this genteelly tortured background presumably goes some way to explaining why the points Steve Palmer raises were so fascinating they needed to be addressed there and then. At a stroke my perception of *The Book of the New Sun* seemed to acquire a mind-expanding additional dimension. What a shame, then, that Steve almost immediately narrows the horizon again by pursuing the imagery so literally and single-mindedly. Now that I've re-read a couple of the volumes, and am once again subdued by the depth and complexity of this work, I feel Steve's somewhat wasted his opportunity here, questioning about for simple one-for-one correspondences with figures and events from the Christian canon.

I can answer one of his questions: he wonders what "Asians" are. My old Chambers dictionary has it as "inhabitants of the torrid zone, shadowless when the sun is right overhead." As the action of the novels takes place south of the "waist of the world" in South America, and the Asians are fighting the Commonwealth somewhere to the north of that, they probably are equatorial. They may well

also be "Asians" in origin, as they are yellow-skinned, and it doesn't seem unreasonable (or even original) to extrapolate a Japanese and/or Chinese takeover of North and Central America.

Camilla Pomeroy
 Cardiff

From Anthony Elliot

Steve Palmer in his article "Looking Behind the Sun", said that he hoped to draw comment from other readers....

It was very interesting to read the conclusions of someone who obviously enjoys decoding and pondering *The Book of the New Sun* as much as I do, but, I think you need to look at some parts of the text more carefully, Steve! Firstly, just because there are two Severians doesn't mean Severian has two different mothers. If you look at the passage where Severian theorizes that he is "not the first Severian" closely, (*Citadel of the Astartech*, XXXVIII) he is saying that the two Severians are children of different timestreams, not different parents.

In any event, Dorcas certainly can't be Severian's mother - she's his grandmother! Ouen, the potboy at the Inn of Lost Loves (*Citadel of the Astartech*, XXXVII), recognises her as "my mother come again"; and Ouen is clearly Severian's father: he resembles him closely, as the Innkeeper at the Inn of Lost Loves notices, and he even has something of his perfect memory ("I don't forget much"). Since the torturers recruit from the children of pregnant women sent to them, Severian's mother would seem to be Ouen's former lover Catherine, a woman dark of hair and eye as Severian is, who had fled an order of monials and was taken by the law.

Is Cyrica Catherine, as Steve suggests? I don't think so. She too belonged to an order of monials. It's true - the Pelerines - but from what she says she left them legitimately, before taking her vows (*Sword of the Lictor* V). Besides which, she only knows of the Citadel, whereas the others know their home, as something in a fairy-story.

So who & Catherine, then? My money is on the mysterious woman who plays "Katherine" in the torturers' holy festival (*Shadow of the Torturer* XI), who in turn appears to be Saint Katherine of the Wheel. Apart from the stunning great clue of the almost identical name, she is also tall and dark. And what better mother for the torturer saviour of the world than the woman who is at once a holy martyr and patroness of the Guild of Torturers?

Anthony Elliot
 Chelmsford

Nick Wood, are you reading this? From Ian Watson

Not everything that is prophesied comes to pass. My talk at the University of Keele, about which Nick Wood very kindly enquired, didn't actually take place. The talk is a non-talk. Rest easy.

I suppose at this point (since four sentences seems a bit terse) my Machiavellian mind might well give vent to an advertisement - for events and publications which have indeed happened. These, up until 1989 at least, are faithfully listed in *The Work of Ian Watson: An Annotated Bibliography & Guide* by Douglas A Mackey (Borgo Press, 1989, \$22.95 cloth, \$12.95 paperback)....

Ian Watson
 Moreton Pinkney



Artwork by Peggy Ransom

Flagging Endings? From Mark Powlson

I was interested to read Ken Lake's avowal in **Vector 162** that he had never written a balanced book review, nor did he think it possible; has he never had a chip on both shoulders?

Reading Nik Morton's review of **Eight Skilled Gentlemen**, it strikes me that the milieu he describes sound distinctly similar to that of the wily oratorical storyteller Kai Lung, as chronicled by Ernest Bramah. He later describes some crass cover art that depicts a final scene from David Eddings' latest; I shall resist the temptation to suggest that this finale might have been fairly predictable anyway, and call instead for a competition to identify the cover artwork of a novel which does most to ruin a reader's enjoyment of the denouement. My offering to set things rolling comes from outside the genre (and I sincerely hope, but am far from confident, that nothing from within SF will be so crass). In Julian Symons' **A Three Pipe Problem**, a fading (and mildly deranged) actor who regularly plays Sherlock Holmes decides to follow the master's precepts to solve the baffling Karate Killings; on the cover of the 1977 Penguin edition the lantern-jawed sleuth, complete with cravat, cape, covered pipe and deerstalker (or ear-flapped travelling cap for purists) appears alone, apart from a parking meter and the red penalty flag up. Whodunnit? Yes, you've guessed it - the traffic warden.

Mark Powlson
Carshalton

French Letter From Hervé Hauck

I'm sorry to write this letter but I'd like to say that, in my opinion, **Vector** is steadily declining. But I want to say first that I'm conscious of the fact that the "technical" (lettering, printing, etc...) Level of **Vector** is increasing. It gives more pleasure to read and is much more "clean". There is one big exception: the article on the Clarke awards by C Nurse in **V161** is on columns so small that the justification of the text renders it totally unreadable.

The problem that I have with the new **Vector** is that I find the subject of the texts mainly uninteresting. I mean that they (the articles) are about topics which are quite unknown to me or, and that's the worse, are written in a sort of verbose English which reminds me of certain French fanzines where you can find very ornate and complex texts with no

discernible meaning.

To state my point, let me pick up a few examples, first of the former category, all in **V162**.

'Out in July' In spite of the fact that **Raf** was already on my wanted books list, I wonder if a large number of the **BSFA** members have already heard of or read something from those two writers who did produce seemingly only a handful of texts and one novel (I mean one available). When I received **V162**, how many people have bought the hardcover of **Raf**? And It's the main subject of Keith Brooke's part. So what's the point in using three pages which will interest a few persons?

'Miha Remce' This one is the worse because I'm quite sure that I never have and will never read SF by a Slovenian writer (either in English nor in French). I'm also sure I'm not the only one. To speak at length of *early* (the emphasis is mine) works of an unknown writer from whom you'll never read anything unless you speak Slovene, seems to me like a joke. The problem is that, devoting two pages out of twenty (I count only the text) to a joke is a bit unfunny.

'The Family Business' shares the same problem with 'Out in July', although Brian Herbert is more famous (a little) than Keith Brooke and Stephen Baxter, he cannot be hailed as a known SF writer.

Now we pass to the latter category (but this trend seems to decrease in **Vector**:

'Cyber and some other spatial metaphors' was in **V159** and was a brilliant text but perhaps too brilliant for me. Some ideas were interesting but somehow underused (I wonder if it's an English word).

'Looking Behind The Sun' in **V162** has the same characteristics; It's also brilliant and visibly "thought" but as I was in maths and physics at the university and I'm in computers now all this flies largely over my poor head. I think **Vector** must avoid the articles which prove to be too "technical" (in whatever senses you want: physics, philosophy or sociology) because it seems to me that in order to fully appreciate this sort of study you'll have to read again (in this case): Wolfe's *létrology* plus the complete Bible, plus some other books. I'm sorry but I haven't got the time so the effort of Mr Palmer is wasted and that's a shame.

Well that's all I have to say, basically that I'm not pleased with the way **Vector** goes and that I feel, as a member of the **BSFA**, I have to express my opinion on a common subject.

Another thing, please forgive my poor English and my syntax which must seem very convoluted at times, but it comes directly from the fact that French is used to be much more "linked" than English and to have longer sentences.

Hervé Hauck

Bland Opinion From Helen Bland

As Catie Cary says, Religion is an integral part of much SF; yet it is often poorly done. What Ms Cary omits is the fact that *everything* in SF is usually done poorly. Nevertheless, there are excellent SF novels and stories with a religious element. Paul Kincaid, writing in the *Friends of Foundation* newsletter mentions the catholic imagery in Walter M Miller's work, to which I would add the names of Gwyneth Jones and, perhaps, R A Lafferty. The excellent US magazine, **SF Eye** has featured a running debate between Peter Lamborn Wilson (and others) and Gordon Scott Carr about the latter's Mormon beliefs; a quick skim of my nearest shelves brings Jeanette Winterson, James Blish, Storm Constantine, Ian McDonald and Nancy Kress to mind.

And, of course, as everyone bar Charles Stross must have noticed, there is Dan Simmons. But Mr Stross appears to have missed everything of significance in *Hyperion* and its companion volume. Aside from alluding to virtually every trope of

classic space opera (particularly to Frank Herbert with the use of the John Keats persona in a manner akin to Duncan Idaho amidst the plotting), Simmons also throws in, and throws away, like so much that other writers would focus on, several widely different religions and belief-groups - Martin Silenus' Zen Gnosticism, the Templars, Silenus' belief that poets are God, the two catholic priests, Sol Weintraub's research into the "Abraham Question", and the shrine cult itself. Religion is a significant part of this novel, but beyond this, Simmons' achievement is in his multiplicity. *Hyperion* occurs in a pantheistic universe to complement his pan-culturalism. There's a PhD in there for some brave soul. Or maybe even an article in **Vector**? Perhaps more interesting than the chance Keats allusion, though Mr Stross should note that Brawne Lamia (not Lamia Brown) is clearly so-named because of the influence of the lamia on John Keats (see Tim Powers' *The Stress of her Regard*. It explains much).

I agree however with Ms Cary that the use of religion is most effective as background, but again this is a simple statement. Whatever the theme, subtlety is most effective in working it into literature.

Helen Bland
Edinburgh

More Bull from Pete Darby

I'm reading **Out on Blue Six** by Ian McDonald at the moment, which is interesting in relation to Catie's editorial. It's as good at reworking *Everyman* as C.S. Lewis was at reworking *The New Testament*. Similarly, I find Robert Rankin's work grating when it comes to religion - even as one who regards the existence of "higher beings" as at best, dubious and the worship of them pointless, this form of easy jibe at religion strikes me as petulant.

It always strikes me as odd when religious/ethnic influences are ignored or marginalised in far future stories. It's probably something to do with the WASA (White Anglo-Saxon Agnostic) domination of the SF community. Scientific Europeans shall dominate the cosmos!

I note that the editorial ignored Frank Herbert, despite the article on Brian's religious novel! Again, his treatment of religion has a cultural background, and is thus believable.

However, to get back to humour & religion, perhaps the best I have seen is the short story "The Real Story" by Michael Puppe, in the collection *Three Fisted Tales of "Bob"*. Humour, philosophy and the SubGenius religion... What more could you want?

On the subject of synthetic religions. As far as I can tell, the Church of Eris was set up in the early/mid '60s to satirize religion in particular and society in general. As such, having a female deity, dedicated to chaos rather than order, and services containing such lines as "Are you sure the candidate is a human and not just a cabbage or something?" Served to point out the ridiculous nature of religion and services.

By the time of the rise of the 2nd wave of joke religions in the early '80s (the SubGenius), the synthetic religion was no longer wholly a joke. The Moonies and, especially important to SF fans, Scientologists had taken the Erisian tactic of the self-created myth system, and taken it seriously, with sometimes horrific effects. There are some tools that only satirists should be allowed to handle.

Strangely, these synthetic religions, as with most satire, seem to be very much male-dominated. Something to do with warring power systems, perhaps, even in satire....

Pete Darby
Colchester

Let's make one thing clear...When I'm making a point I *always* ignore everything that doesn't fit. CC

On 24th January 1902 H G Wells delivered a lecture to the Royal Institution, whose text was subsequently published under the title 'The Discovery of the Future'. The lecture summarised the conclusions which Wells had reached as a result of producing his early scientific romances and his pioneering work of futurology.

Anticipations
The purpose of Wells' lecture was to compare and contrast two different ways of thinking - which, in his view, were distinct enough to be reckoned different types of mind.

The majority of living people, Wells argued, scarcely bother to think about the future at all, except in terms of preserving whatever they value in their way of life. Such people decide how to act, and form their opinions, mainly by reference to the past. In this way of thinking, the fact that something has always been done in a particular way is sufficient grounds for continuing to do it the same way. People who adopt this way of thinking are always suspicious, if not downright fearful, of new things, they are inclined to defend unsatisfactory institutions by means of such proverbial wisdom as 'Better the devil you know than the devil you don't'. We usually describe this way of thinking as 'conservative', but in his essay Wells called it 'legalistic', because of the way that lawyers base their arguments and judgements on precedents.

The other way of thinking is, of course, forward-looking. People of this kind decide how to act, and form their opinions, mainly in terms of the future effects which they expect their actions and the actions of others to produce. Such people, Wells suggested - and of course he reckoned himself to be a shining example of the type - see the world as a great workshop, in which men must labour to bring about a different and better future, never content simply to preserve whatever wealth the past had given them but always seeking to increase it.

Wells thought that forward thinking people had only recently come into being, and that although their number was as yet small, it was bound to increase steadily. Such people would, he supposed, quickly form a new and progressive class which would inevitably take charge of the future course of history. He was to coin many names for them in the course of his career, but his expectations remained much the same; these would be the New Republicans, whose progressive Open Conspiracy would build a world for Men Like Gods.

Wells knew well enough how suspicious and fearful men of the first kind were of the second kind, and he wanted to defend them against the charge of being dangerously reckless. In the hope of persuading the legalistic minds in his audience to be less hostile he took care to admit that their way of thinking is by no means foolish. The past, after all, is something that we know, and there is some justification for the view that whatever ways of behaving have been successful in the past can reasonably be expected to be successful in the present. By contrast, our powers of foresight are limited and speculative. We cannot tell with any certainty what effects new ways of behaving will have, and our best laid plans may go terribly wrong if we miscalculate.

Wells went on to argue, however, that our knowledge of the past is far less certain than it seems to us, and that it is dangerously impregnated with all kinds of myths and falsehoods, so that what we think of as the lessons of history may not actually have any sensible basis in collective experience. He pointed out that our modern knowledge of the distant past, corrected to the best of our ability, is based on inference from very limited evidence - from a handful of artifacts or fossils. He then suggested that if our powers of reasoning are clever enough to produce a reasonably accurate vision of the distant past from such fragmentary evidence as the few tattered relics which have survived into the present, they might also be sufficiently clever to produce trustworthy visions of the future by inference from those aspects of the present

which are the seeds of future change. By this means he sought to equalise the balance of authority between the backward-looking and the forward-looking points of view. Both ways of thinking, he argued, are based in vague images built up by inference from limited evidence, but if we were careful enough in reading the inferences, we might be able to enhance our powers of anticipation until foresight became as reliable a guide for action as our sense of history.

This lecture marked a crucial change of direction in the character of Wells' thought and work. When he wrote it, he had recently published what was to be the last of his classic scientific romances, *The First Men in the Moon*, which had been preceded by *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, *When the Sleeper Wakes* and three collections of short stories. All these works had been issued between 1895 and 1901. Although Wells continued to write fiction after composing 'The Discovery of the Future', it was never quite the same in its nature: *The Food of the Gods* and *How It Came to Earth*, published in 1904, begins as a robust scientific romance, but is soon diverted into another channel, and concludes with the creation of a race of human giants who are a crystallisation of Wells' notion of the future-oriented mind: the exponents of a new wisdom and a new spiritual strength. Virtually all Wells' subsequent speculative fiction was to focus in like fashion on the contrasts between the men of his own world and hypothetical New Men who would - or, at least, should - ultimately replace them and become the custodians of progress.

In more modest representations these New Men are enlightened contemporaries, intellectuals who have heeded the Wellsian message: in more fantastic parables they are men miraculously transformed, perhaps by the gases of a marvellous comet or cosmic rays beamed at Earth by Martians. Either way, the future of theirs and Wells' one and only subject-matter in his later works is the attempt to describe their ways of thinking and behaving. 'The Discovery of the Future' marks the beginning of a phase in Wells' work when he came to believe - that the future was indeed there to be discovered and described, and that the actual Shape of Things to Come could be determined, at least in its vague outlines, if only he were clever enough to do it.

When Wells entered this second phase of his career as a futurist he developed a certain distaste for the products of his earlier phase. He began to make unkind comments about his own early scientific romances, and his introduction to an omnibus issued under the title *Scientific Romances* in 1933 is remarkably condescending toward them, suggesting that they were exercises in youthful exuberance, not to be taken too seriously. The majority of readers have never agreed, and these early works are still read very frequently, while hardly anyone would bother to look at *A Modern Utopia* or *Men Like Gods*, let alone *The World, War, and Happiness of Mankind* or *The Open Conspiracy*.

I think that the readers are correct in their judgement, and that Wells' early scientific romances are far superior to his later attempts to discover the one and only true future. I believe, in fact, that Wells made an unfortunate mistake in the argument which he put forward in 'The Discovery of the Future', which led him deliberately to set aside the most significant aspect of his own talent.

In his early works, Wells had been content to treat the future as a wide-open void, in which the imagination was perfectly free to roam as the whim took it, and into which a whole host of different alternative futures might be projected. After 1902, though, Wells ceased to think in terms of a vast spectrum of possible alternatives, and concentrated his imaginative quest instead on the business of trying to produce out that which could be known and said about the future with reasonable certainty. There is a sense in which Wells' so-called discovery was not discovery at all, but

Rediscovering The Future

By
Brian
Stableford

"In his early works, Wells had been content to treat the future as a wide-open void, in which the imagination was perfectly free to roam as the whim took it, and into which a whole host of different alternative futures might be projected."



H.G.Wells

Artwork by Claire Willoughby

rather a reversion to an earlier way of thinking. He was wrong to think that forward-looking people were a phenomenon of recent history. There have always been individuals who were prepared to take action and formulate opinions with possible future rewards in view. Every society, present and past, has or had its own images of the future, and prophets to describe them, although most societies and prophets have presumed that the historical future will be very like the present unless and until it undergoes a radical transformation by virtue of some miraculous intervention from without. Ideas of this kind are usually combined with images of hypothetical futures which can be experienced after death, beyond the limits of this world.

Wells was wrong to argue that the two ways of thinking he described were the prerogatives of two different types of mind, and therefore of two different kinds of people. Many ardent conservatives, in fact, justify the desperation with which they cling to yesterday's rituals and yesterday's values by reference to some future paradise whose attainment may be jeopardised if social change is not kept under strict control. The problem with Wells' essay, and the attitude of mind which he subsequently adopted, is that it is unfortunately similar to this very ancient frame of mind, whose image of the future is of a single perfect state of affairs, which can be brought about by acting in accordance with a particular brand of faith. Wells' particular brand of faith was secular rather than religious - which is to say that he believed that the future paradise would have to be built by men, on earth, by means of technological expertise and political reform - but it was similarly crippled by its narrowness, its Utopianism.

Wells began his literary career at a time when the established religious faith of his own society was in crisis, partly because its image of human history, and thus its claims to be solidly based in reliable past experience, had been exploded by new discoveries in geology and evolutionary science. The inevitable result of this loss of confidence in the past described by Christian scriptures was a similar loss of confidence in the future paradise guaranteed

by the Christian faith. The dramatic increase in late 19th century attempts to discover and map out new futures was to some extent a corollary of this loss of confidence, but there were also many conflicting movements calling for various kinds of political reform, and their adherents began to produce new images of the future reflecting their ambitions and their anxieties. Their ambitions were reflected primarily in Utopian fantasies of society improved by technological innovations and democratic reorganisation; their anxieties were reflected primarily in Utopian fantasies of future war and natural catastrophes. By the 1890s these subspecies of speculative fiction were merging into the new genre of scientific romance, which was for a while taken up and promoted by the editors of the new middlebrow periodicals that flourished in the period - and H G Wells was the star of the new genre, its first great pioneer.

Many of these writers went forth in search of their own particular paradises, but the sheer profusion of what they produced inevitably presented a considerable spectrum of images, and some writers accepted the freedom to range across that spectrum, unhindered by the crippling effects of faith. Once their exploits began to be seen, by readers, editors and commentators, as aspects of a common enterprise, each individual futurist vision acquired a different significance and a different meaning. What was truly new about Wells' time was not that men were looking towards the future in planning their actions and forming their opinions, but that the future at which they were looking was no longer viewed as a product of destiny, or a matter of a limited either/or choice; it was a future of infinite possibility, in which that world which would ultimately come to be was only one out of an uncountable number of worlds which might have come to be, and which might indeed contain an infinite number of other worlds, alien and bizarre.

The real significance of Wells as a trend-setter and major inspiration to other scientific romancers lies in the spectacular open-mindedness of his early fiction. He was the

first man really to use the future not simply as an arena into which he could extrapolate his own hopes, fears and prejudices, but as an arena in which he could carry out bold thought-experiments, testing hypotheses by extravagant display. No one else was so good at seizing upon tiny windows of possibility opened by scientific theory or technological expertise and projecting through them powerful searchlights to explore their possible implications, unhindered by the choking constrictions of belief. Wells and those who joined him in the writing of scientific romance were the first men to realise how very extraordinary the future might be; how dramatically the life of men might be transfigured, in many possible ways, by new discoveries in science or by interaction with strange things that might already exist - the product of their own processes of evolution - in other parts of the universe.

Wells' essay on 'The Discovery of the Future' was not a report of a discovery at all; it was a turning away from discovery. It was a retreat from the vision of manifold possibility into a narrower way of thinking, in which mankind must either follow the path mapped out by the Wellsian faith, or perish. Wells was not alone in making this retreat; he was followed by most of the other British writers of scientific romance. Others too became preoccupied with certain trends which seemed to them to be inevitable unless salvation could be won by some new creed - and because their contemporaries would not embrace their creeds, they became frustrated, and to some extent embittered. But the thread of Wells' early work was taken up when he laid it down, and carried forward by other writers.

Perhaps ironically, the writers who preserved the idea of the future as a realm of infinite possibility were the ones whose attitude to it was playful rather than serious - ones whose interest was playful rather than serious - ones whose interest was in imaginative adventuring, who had no creeds of their own to promote. It was mostly writers of this stripe who found a home in the American pulp science fiction magazines of the 1920s and 1930s. These writers retained a greater faith in the possibility of progress, but they also had a greater ambition to explore and extend the vast spectrum of possibilities for purely aesthetic reasons. They set forth into the distant regions of time and space not to find Paradise, but simply because the regions were *there*, and might in principle contain anything at all.

Because science fiction remained for so many years a pulp magazine genre, it was treated with scorn by most members of the cultural elite; but it was taken seriously enough by enough people of sufficient intelligence to flourish nevertheless. Much of it was, and much of it still remains, a kind of costume drama which simply replays standard plots in various colourful scenarios, but even when it is at its most playful, science fiction has a special delight in the strange and the new which helps to stretch the imagination. Whatever the faults of individual works, science fiction as a collective enterprise encourages in the reader a love of profusion, a joy in the infinitude of possibility, and a healthy scepticism regarding such ideas as destiny, faith and Paradise.

One can easily see, even within the ranks of science fiction writers and readers, Wells' legalistic frame of mind at work. There are readers who never have, or seem mysteriously to lose, a real taste for invention and the development of new ideas. They are the ones who settle into the production or consumption of endless series of works which explore in ever-increasing detail a single future history, or a single alien world, or even a single set of characters. In society as a whole, the conservative or religious frame of mind is something which disproportionately affects the elderly and women, and it is not entirely surprising, as many elderly science fiction writers fall prey to the allure of navel-gazing, or that so many female SF readers prefer

disguised magical fantasy to authentic science fiction. It is not particularly surprising, either, that the science fiction genre overlaps other genres which are - or at least seem to be - essentially backward-looking. The last twenty years has seen an astonishing glut of stories, almost always extrapolated over three or more volumes, set in worlds which resemble our Medieval past save only for the fact that the mythology and superstition which science has eliminated from known history have been carefully restored. It is probably safe to say that those readers whose primary interest is in serious, science-based futurist speculation are in a minority even among those people who regard themselves as science fiction readers, let alone the population as a whole.

In saying this, I do not intend to be contemptuous of the elderly women, magical fantasy or series of novels. I do want to argue, however, that there is a special virtue in multifaceted futuristic fiction of a serious speculative kind, but it is not the only virtue there is. Like Wells, I acknowledge that there are very good reasons why one should try to derive whatever useful lessons we can from past experience, and because I do not think it necessary - as he did - to draw a sharp distinction between forward-looking and backward-looking types of mind, I see no reason why an intelligent person should not try to obtain the best of both worlds. I certainly do not want to imply that elaborate development of particular future histories or the construction of magical fantasy worlds is inherently bad; and I am entirely happy to acknowledge that such fantasy fictions have particular virtues of their own. Indeed, there is a sense in which all fantasy is virtuous in a fashion not so very unlike the virtuousness of science fiction, simply by virtue of the fact that any invented world denies and challenges the absolutism of the belief in world and time as they are in history. The elaboration of alternative worlds of any character, even when the process becomes so detailed and introverted as to seem obsessive, serves to make us suspicious of inevitability. Fantasy readers are never in danger of losing sight of the fact that the real world could have been otherwise, in very many different ways, and that whatever actually has come to be, or will come to be is but one world haphazardly precipitated from a vast profusion of worlds that might have been.

I do believe, as H G Wells did, that a mind which oriented itself entirely according to the past, submitting itself entirely to the dictatorship of precedent, would not merely be stupid, but dangerous. I cannot agree, however, with his contention that the proper task of the mind which wishes to become more future-oriented is to discover those aspects of the future which seem most certain. That, I think, is a fool's errand, and those who undertake it are doomed to frustration, and eventually to despair. I believe that the kind of future-orientation which really improves a mind is the kind which can see a whole host of possibilities, and which hesitates to admit the idea of certainty at all: the kind of mind which loves science fiction - and fantasy too - for being playful as well as earnest, for its infinite variety as well as its dedication to rigorous extrapolation.

Even in 1902 it was obvious to Wells that the continued dominance in human affairs of what he described as the legalistic type of mind was a dreadful prospect. He saw, and understood, that in a world which is fast-changing - a world which has discovered the arts of discovery - precedent cannot possibly serve efficiently as a guide to behaviour. He saw that the men of his own time did not live in the same world that their forefathers had inhabited, and could not possibly find a reliable guide to behaviour in their forefathers' policies of action. He saw and understood that the combination of yesterday's attitudes and tomorrow's technology was a recipe for appalling disaster. He saw and understood, too, that the remedy which would immediately spring to the legalistic mind when confronted with rapid

technological change - that progress must be stopped, and the world brought back to a state where yesterday's attitudes would suffice - was both utterly unworkable and wholly undesirable.

From the vantage-point of 1991 we can see and understand all of this with even greater clarity, and that is why we must not repeat the mistake which Wells made, and seize upon the wrong kind of future-orientation as a means of possible salvation. We must agree with him that the old faiths will no longer do, and that any power which they retain is destructive and evil, but we must not fall into the trap of trying to substitute some new faith, with its own creeds and rituals. We must instead strive to rediscover the future which he foresaw: the future which has a multitude of possibilities; the future which conserves the possibility that the world of men might not only survive the cataclysmic towards which so many contemporary trends seem to be directed, but might emerge from that cataclysm with a limitless profusion of possible futures still before it.

The majority of the futures imagined by science fiction writers are unpleasant one, at least to some degree. There are hardly any Utopias in modern science fiction, and those images of the future which their authors think more-or-less ideal tend to be set out with various modest caveats to the effect that they should not be regarded as perfect, or finished, or filled with happy people. This is sometimes seen as a kind of pessimism, but it is not. Even the harshest images of oppressive future dictatorships, and the most extravagant accounts of future war or natural catastrophe, should not be seen as exercises in nihilism - even if that is what their authors think they are doing (they rarely do). All images of these kinds should be seen in context, and their context is provided by the sum of all the texts of the genre to which they belong. In that context, all tales of the end of the world are threads in an infinite tapestry, which lie alongside a vast array of alternatives. Because there is an infinite number of hopeful threads in that tapestry, the effect of particular visions of disaster should not be to drive us to despair, or to condemn us to the prison of any particular creed, but rather to warn us - as we desperately need to be warned - of the sheer multiplicity of the threats which face us.

Science fiction, even though it sometimes deals in dreadful horror stories, promotes in its entirety the only optimism which is really worth promoting. This is not the kind of optimism which says that if we will only say the right prayers we will be given Paradise on a plate; nor is it the kind of optimism which says that if we can only kill all the people who do not belong to our particular political party, social justice and harmony will prevail. It is instead the kind of optimism which says that however bad things get, there are things we can do which will improve them. At least a little, in some respect is the kind of optimism which says that people can sometimes get lucky, in lots of different ways, but that the more they know and the harder they work, the luckier they are likely to get. The kinds of optimism compromise with ill fortune that is hardly given that the scientific view of the future - which is I believe realistic, honest and sensible view of the future - is that whatever world we find ourselves in will be the product of a vast number of compromises between people who desire and fear and yearn for and despise very different things, and who cannot choose what discoveries they may make, but who can and must choose what discoveries to search for, and how they might best use those which they actually encounter.

Because science fiction presents to us this kind of image of the future, in place of a straight choice between Heaven and Hell, I believe it to be a uniquely worthwhile species of literature. Because it embodies this kind of optimism - a sceptical, pragmatic kind of optimism - I believe it to be a significant contributor to mental and social well-being. Like any healthy organism, it has a few dead and diseased cells, but we should not regret that: how else could it mirror a universe in which the most important lesson to be learned is that nothing is or ever can be perfect, but that progress is always possible?

Brian tells us that he prepared this piece for an occasion that did not take place, and that therefore it is previously unheard as well as unpublished.

BRIAN STABLEFORD

SEXUAL CHEMISTRY

Sardonic
Tales
of
The
Genetic
Revolution



BRIAN STABLEFORD SEXUAL CHEMISTRY



Down But Not Under Australian SF

By
Colin
Steele

"The current state of play is that small magazines reach only a dedicated audience, but it needs attention in the mass media to increase the sales and the impact of influence on the distributors."

In the 1970s Australian SF bloomed following the World Science Fiction Convention held in Melbourne in 1975. A number of workshops, notably one led by Ursula Le Guin, assisted in this process. Writers such as Lee Harding, John Baxter, George Turner and Damien Broderick capitalised on the new interest in SF. In the 1980s, however, a lot of this promise disappeared. Lee Harding's work became less and less obvious, Damien Broderick's work pursued a somewhat erratic orbit, John Baxter took off for other climes and only George Turner, a writer currently in his mid-seventies, was able to reach new heights in Australian speculative fiction.

New authors who appeared at the beginning of that decade, such as Philippa Madden, Greg Egan and Lucy Sussex, struggled for most of the decade against Australia's difficult distribution and small press environment. Australia's large size (the same size as continental United States) yet with a population of seventeen million people and a monopoly by distribution firms makes small capital ventures difficult.

The purchasing public inundated by quality overseas SF found it difficult to sustain an indigenous magazine. The stranglehold of the distributors meant that each successive magazine, beginning with *Vain* (1975-77) from Paul Collins in the 1970s, through to *Omega Science Digest* (1980-87) and *Aphelion* (1985-7), found it difficult to succeed and all had ceased publication by the second half of the decade.

A new magazine for the 1990s may hopefully break this cycle. *Aurealis*, subtitled "The Australian Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction" has a promising first number with new stories by established writers such as George Turner and Terry Dowling as well as emerging writers such as David Tansey and Sue Isle. An interview with George Turner, the winner of the Arthur C Clarke Award and the Commonwealth Literary Award for *The Sea and Summer*, includes the following comment: "Australianness is not a matter of familiar names and places - and mentioning wallabies and kangaroos and Ayers Rock doesn't get you anywhere either... Australianness is an attitude of mind." This is a relevant comment given Harlan Ellison's ill-fated anthology of Australian SF which wanted to focus on the landscape as an essential ingredient. (*Aurealis* is available for A\$31 sea mail and A\$39 airmail from Chimera Publications, PO Box 538, Mt Waverley, Victoria 3149, Australia.)

Aphelion publishing has arisen out of the ashes of *Aphelion* science and its first two publications are of a high quality. The first, *A Pursuit of Miracles* (A\$12.95) by George Turner collects six of George Turner's limited short story output. In the second of Aphelion's publications, Terry Dowling has produced a fascinating vision of a future Australia combining memories of Cordwainer Smith and Jack Vance with his own unique talent. *Rynoseros* (A\$12.95) consists of eight linked short stories which have as their physical landscape an Australian interior containing genetically altered, Ab'O's who hold sway in multiple states while the white inhabitants cluster around the coastal cities as in the present day.

Dowling's central character, Tom Tyson the sandship captain, travels across the Ab'O lands but Dowling only obliquely provides clues as to the operation and nature of the Ab'O's societies with their colourful mix of byzantine ritual and advanced science. Dowling's underlying questioning of the nature of artificial intelligence and the nature of free will are best encapsulated in the story 'The Robot is Running Away from the Trees', as a forgotten robot in an Ab'O antique shop movingly seeks to carry out his final programme. (Aphelion publications are available direct from Aphelion Publications, PO Box 619, North Adelaide, South Australia 5006, Australia. They are willing to airmail free to anywhere in the world as long as the money arrives with the order in Australian dollars for the price listed.)

Gabrielle Lord in *Salt* (McPhee Gribble, A\$29.95) has stated in a press interview that "nothing like this", i.e. *Salt*, has "ever been done before" which means she has either never read the apocalyptic novels by authors such as Turner or indeed Victor Kelleher, to name but two authors who have imagined a post-disaster Australia of the 21st century, or she is writing in writer's hype. Victor Kelleher, one of the leading Australian children's writers and speculative fiction writers, has produced in *Taranga* and *The Beast of Heaven* two such vividly imagined societies. In Lord's vision of the future the date is 2074 and Australia has been devastated by civil war and by global ecological disasters. In Sydney a small elite survives in an inner city fortress area threatened by rising waters and the barbarism of the western desert. The temperature is in the 50s and prolonged exposure to the UV radiation brings a quick death. Lord's main character, a somewhat unrealistically characterised hard-drinking helicopter pilot, David Sanderson, stumbles across political corruption and then bizarre genetic experiments whose aim is to prolong some vestige of human existence. Lord's fast-moving plot and horrifying vignettes of an ecologically devastated world are weakened by one dimensional characterisation and an awkward conclusion.

It is fascinating, however, to see the amount of mainstream press attention paid to Lord's novel with interviews in Melbourne and Sydney newspapers. It took overseas success of George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* for his major attempt at a much more realistic evocation of a post-greenhouse society to be recognised in Australia, yet a writer like Lord can achieve major press coverage.

In this context, it is also relevant to note that Lucy Sussex has had her collection of short stories *The Sea and Summer* (Ocker Tales A\$12.95) marketed by Heinemann Australia as a mainstream novel, even though all the stories could be categorised as speculative fiction. This is a deliberate attempt on the part of her publishers to market the book outside what is seen as the closed genre of science fiction. However, it also runs a case of missing the steady genre sales by being buried under the increasing output of good creative Australian literature. Fortunately most of the literary pages of the mainstream newspapers, and these are not many, and literary journals have picked up Sussex's work and recognised her outstanding talent as one of Australia's best young creative authors.

The title story portrays a future Australia where a story set in a future feminist ghetto reaffirms man's redundancy and a freedom of choice. Sussex cleverly uses Shakespearean illusions to bring forth the reality of this new world. In "Red Ocher" an Indonesian invasion of Australia is followed by a DNA plague but the inhabitants of a mutant reserve find solace in aboriginal heritage. Sussex's stories are infused with feminism and black humour, although her feminism is far from strident. In "The Man Hanged Upside Down" an artistic rivalry is brought to conclusion by a pictorial form of bone pointing while, in "God and her Black Sense of Humour", a feminist journalist stumbles across the historical path of two female vampires for whom semen rather than blood is a life preserver. The swinging sixties provided fertile ground for the seeds of immortality in showing how aids in the new celibacy are overcoming Sussex's previous work.

Dowling, Sussex and Greg Egan represent the newly established writers of Australian speculative fiction. Greg Egan has contributed numerous stories to magazines in UK and USA, notably *Interzone*, but others still find it an increasingly difficult job to assess overseas markets. The boom in general Australian publishing in recent years has allowed Damien Broderick's novels *The Judas Mandala* (A\$12.95), *The Black Grail* (A\$13.95) and *Striped Holes* (A\$12.95) to be reissued by Mandarin. All these were first published overseas in 1982, 1986 and 1988 respectively.

and now deservedly have local publication. Despite conventional SF and fantasy trappings, however, Broderick's novels are far from routine narratives. His own erudition often causes the reader problems as it spills out into a multiplicity of issues.

The Judas Mandala juxtaposes a Sydney unemployed feminist from the end of the 20th century with a female revolutionary from a 16th century dominated by cyborgs. In **The Black Grail** Broderick's main character, Xaral, is catapulted far into the future to save a dying earth which in turn leads to another future. Light and dark are blurred and the only true values are those which have to be worked out individually. In **Striped Holes**, a comic novel, Broderick is much more at ease with a variant of **Star Wars** and John Sladek.

Another Australian writer, Rosaleen Love, saw her book-length collection of stories, **The Total Devotion Machine**, issued in the UK by The Women's Press but its actual release in Australia was hampered by yet another distribution switch by the publishing company, which left much of the stock of **The Total Devotion Machine** unobtainable by Australian readers for much of 1990.

One look back to the past in 1990 comes from a retrospective of A Bertram Chandler who became classed as an Australian science fiction writer, even though he was born in Aldershot, UK, and emigrated to Australia in the 1950s. A sumptuous edition of thirty of his short stories, **From Sea to Shining Star**, has been recently published by Dreamstone (PO Box 312, Fyshwick, ACT 2609, Australia) in a numbered edition (A\$70) and collector's edition (A\$100). This collection, however, will be largely for Chandler fans, particularly those who followed his popular fictional character, Commodore John Grimes of the Rim World series.

So where does this now leave Australian science fiction writers at the beginning of the 1990s? Perhaps as academic and critic Dr Van Ikin says in a forthcoming anthology **Grass Reptile Breakout** SF may be in a better position than it has been for a while. Basic anthologies such as Van Ikin's **Grass Reptile Breakout** will help. The immense influence of successful young people's authors like Victor Kelleher and Gillian Rubenstein could be carried forward into more adult reading if the right factors prevailed.

Looking back over the 1980s the sense of vigour and inventiveness characterised by the renaissance of the 1970s was lost or muted. It's been a hard grind and it's been difficult for new authors to get published. Authors also seem to get acknowledged overseas prior to their discovery in Australia. To some extent this reflects the tastes of literary editors. Two sympathetic editors of the **Australian** weekend books magazine have helped science fiction be distributed nationally or become known nationally, but two others have completely ignored the genre. The current state of play is that small magazines reach only a dedicated audience, but it needs attention in the mass media to increase the sales and the impact of influence on the distributors.

Please note that Colin Steele's article was written nearly a year ago, and that therefore all price information should be treated with caution.



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Palaeontology and the Pattern of Hollywood Kitsch

By
Ken
Lake

Two striking television programmes about the Burgess Shale purport to show that the whole history of evolution has been overturned by the weird fossils found there. As both programmes were based directly upon Stephen Jay Gould's *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (Hutchinson Radius, 1990, £14.95), I determined to go to the source and check it all out. The result has been complete disillusion – not with evolutionary theory, but with the interpretation of the Burgess Shale findings that Prof Gould has set out in his book.

Charles Doolittle Walcott, who ran the Smithsonian Institution from 1907 till his death in 1927, who was the confidant of US presidents and whose many other posts read like a rollcall of American science, is here described as "one of the most extraordinary and powerful scientists that America has ever produced." As I propose to quote extensively from Gould's own words, I shall in all cases give the page number so that the reader can check my necessary abbreviations; the above was on p.240, where Gould explains that Walcott's "progressionist credo" was that of historical necessity – that when "Mammalia appeared on the scene... It doubtless became a struggle for supremacy until Man was created."

This is self-evident bushwack, and Gould devotes space to showing how not only Walcott

but all scientists in all eras suffer from "the social and conceptual locks upon scientific innovation" that in effect blinker them against any real understanding and against almost all original thought. Yet Gould also wants us to believe that, suddenly, with the advent of modern palaeontologists, this no longer applies: today's theories must, he argues, be right!

Arguing that today we accept that history is unpredictable, he proposes that "a thousand events conspired" (p.278) to bring about every event – he cites the fall of Custer, in a book which is replete with often obscure references to minor American cult figures, historical characters and even cartoon characters. Perhaps I should explain right now that the title of this article is a reference to Gould's own: he draws his inspiration from Ruth Rendell's novel *A Fatal Inversion* (1987), Stephen King's novel *The Tommyknockers* (1987), and most of all from Frank Capra's sentimental James Stewart movie *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

Yet Gould admits that even this "contingency theory" is not proven (p.283) and argues that "When we have established 'just history' as the only complete and acceptable explanation... Then we shall have won" (p.283) without having the realism to re-word that claim to begin with the word *if* instead of *when*.

Walcott bashed away at the Burgess Shale, a small dig in Yoho National Park in the Canadian Rockies in British Columbia, in 1910-13, brought back a vast hoard of fossils, totally misinterpreted the meaning – and even the shape – of almost all of them, used his fallacious reconstructions and retouched photographs to *prove* his theories, and conveniently hid all the contrary evidence. In 1966-67 other palaeontologists went back, dug some more in Burgess and nearby, but added little to Walcott's hidden hoard. Under Prof Harry Whittington at Cambridge, new research began which involved some of his students and others and resulted in the publication of many amazing monographs from 1971 to 1988, with much more still to come.

That is the basis of this book, and a thrilling story it is. Unfortunately, in his enthusiasm to convince, Gould shows just as little judgement as Walcott, and just as happily allows unproved suppositions to serve as the basis for his own theories. Using a wealth of personal anecdote, *fiction*, imagination and invention, he provides us with his own anti-Walcott, anti-evolutionist, anti-humanocentric philosophy. It is my contention that we must look very carefully at Gould's omissions and elisions before accepting his conclusions, and I suggest that there are at least three theories which can stand equally with his as explanation of all that we know about the Burgess Shale and other similar finds at nearby Lagerstaett, if indeed any exist that we can regard as *similar*.

There are many clues scattered throughout this book in such a way as to make it almost impossible to separate fact from theory; as Gould says in one of his typically obscure bywords (p.146), "The reconstruction of the Burgess organism is about as far from 'simple' or 'mere' description as Caruso from Joe Blow in the shower, or Wade Boggs from Marvelous Marv Throneberry." He rightly denounces "Walcott's shoehorn", whereby everything is levered willfully into the nearest available phylum, whether it belongs there or not, where every fossil is seen as confirming creationism, every query is hidden. However, he still espouses the activities of "the divine tape player" who oversees all history (p.320), and footnotes (p.228) that "Natural selection is the cause of evolutionary change; organic variation is raw material only".

Now the whole point about the Burgess Shale is that there appears to be such an immense diversity of hitherto unknown species there, that it is impossible to explain their existence in any hitherto accepted theory; furthermore, hardly any of these specimens fit into known phyla, and virtually none have left any trace elsewhere or any indication that they influenced in any way the course of

evolutionary development revealed to us in later ages.

Yet Gould admits that "most textbooks recognise between twenty and thirty animal phyla" (p.99) – in other words, the whole study is so primitive and open to so much basic argument that scientists cannot even agree within a factor of 50% on the number of major phyla that exist, or have existed, on Earth. That hardly fills me with confidence, but worse is to come.

Gould has a habit of shifting from one typeface to another to insert passages of factual information that he wants you to remember. I shall do this with no more than two very brief passages, for I believe that the whole interpretation of the Burgess Shale hinges upon them:

1: "The Burgess Shale... [has] no tracks or trails, no burrows, no organisms caught in the act of eating their fellows – in short, few signs of organic activity in process. For some reason not understood (and most unfortunately), the Burgess Shale includes almost no juvenile stages of organisms" (p.96).

Here I should interject that the very few alleged "juvenile stages" may equally be regarded as totally different creatures. In essence, the Burgess Shale – despite many sketches recreating its denizens' lifestyles – gives no indication of ever having formed a living environment at all. Is this not strange enough to merit some further investigation, discussion and care? Yet the topic is thrown out here, and then ignored.

2: "Burgess soft parts, by the way, are not preserved as carbon. By a chemical process not yet understood, the original carbon was replaced by silicates of alumina and calcium, forming a dark reflective layer" (p.84).

And here we should ask ourselves whether, as appears to be the case, this is unique in the whole field of palaeontology since, if so, how it occurred and why Gould gives not one word to considering this anomaly and its possible meaning.

It's worth mentioning here that in all his excavations, Walcott never realised that any of his fossils were three-dimensional. He treated them all as flat impressions, and he was of obviously soft creatures, mostly lacking hard parts. It was Whittington who first realised their nature and was, from that point, able to section the fossils to reveal their shape and nature at different levels, and hence with his colleagues to attempt to recreate their original forms.

In a remarkably long section, Gould discusses in turn each of the creatures so far the subject of monographs, stressing their total difference in every possible way from all the morphology that we recognise as setting fossils in the recognised phyla. Virtually every Burgess find is an anomaly, an *oddball* as Gould puts it. A selection of brief quotations from this summary are presented in the table opposite. I propose to use these to reveal the vast range of possibilities that appear to have been ignored or double-guessed in reaching the conclusions with which we are presented as to their actual forms.

Let me stress: these are extracts from, or references to, published monographs by researchers who claim to have produced such fine, clear, final, unarguable details of each creature that a popular artist, Marienne Collins, has created *living* sketches of each creature in the finest detail, these visualisations then being reinterpreted by computer simulations for use in the television programmes I watched!

Asks Gould, "What order is possibly found among the Burgess arthropods? Each one seemed to be built from a grabbag of characters – as though the Burgess architect owned a sack of all possible arthropod structures, and reached in at random to pick one variety upon each necessary part whenever he wanted to build a new

Marella - "only this specimen shows the two pairs of appendages" (yet this was the most plentiful of all the Burgess fossils - does it seem logical to base the final form on one possibly confused specimen?) (P.119)

Yohia - "he finally decided the head probably bears three pairs of uniramious walking legs" (p.122)

Opabinia - "still leave several questions unanswered - and further specimens are needed" (p.134)

Burgessia - "did possess a mixture of characters... Many of which are to be found in modern arthropods of various groups" (implying, surely, that the specimens may not be reliable?) (p.139)

Nectocaris - "only one specimen, lacking a counterpart... Apparently unjointed... Appendages. A pair of large eyes, probably borne on stalks... Perhaps bivalved... With a single specimen, one cannot proceed much beyond the superficial, so this crucial issue remains tantalisingly unresolved." (p.145)

Odontogryphus - "still had only a single specimen... Not well preserved and few structures can be distinguished... Assumes that O. Was gelatinous... Took a chance... But Simon was wrong" (p.147/9)

Amiskwia - "presumably belongs to an extinct phylum" (p.150)

Dinimischia - "Little of A.S anatomy can be well resolved... Presumably a pelagic organism..." (p.152)

Hallucigenia - "has a bulbous 'head' on one end, poorly preserved in all available specimens (about thirty), and therefore not well resolved. We cannot even be certain that this structure represents the front of the animal, it is a 'head' by convention only... Spines... Seem to be embedded... Tentacles seem to be co-ordinated with the seven pairs of spines in an oddly displaced way" (p.155) "perhaps H. Is not a complete animal." (p.157)

Brachiocaris - "The appendages are not clearly distinguishable in the limited number of available fossils, but may have been biramous" (p.159)

Canadaspis - "well-preserved, superabundant... Finally placed a Burgess creature in a successful modern group" (p.162/3) (yet the other facts seem to give the lie to this, and Gould continues to refer to almost all the fossils as "a failed experiment, a washout, a first attempt totally bypassed by a reconstituted modern fauna.")

Naraoia - "could never be properly interpreted" (p.165)

Ayeshaia - "extraordinarily similar to that of the living representations of the group" (p.169) - yet Gould continues (p.171) "does not fit readily into any other extant higher taxon" though (see p.171/2) others seem to disagree!

Odaraia has "two unique and peculiar specialisations... A bizarre structure... Briggs had proven once again that the watchword on Burgess arthropods was 'uniquely specialised' not 'primitively simple'" (p.175)

Sidneyia "a curious mosaic of characters" (p.177)

Saratroceros is seen as "swimming on its back" because nothing else in the reconstruction makes sense

Leancholia with its "remarkable 'great appendages'" (p.184) that may well be nothing of the sort.

Sanctacaris (a pun on Santa Claws) which comes from five miles south of the Burgess shale, 100ft below in stratigraphic sequence, where "most of these assemblages contain the same species as Walcott's quarry but... The find of the decade (why? - He doesn't say) seems to be a genuine chelicerate" (p.186/7) - rather odd that this should appear among what Gould claims as Walcott-type fossils but is a sole example of what he identifies as a normal precursor, surely?

Wiwaxia (p.191) is "inordinately difficult to reconstruct... A horribly confused jumble".

Anomalocaris (p.194), "a tale of humour, error, struggle, frustration and more error" - even Conway Morris and Whittington in their 1979

Scientific American article have major errors, for example showing A.S mouth as an autonomous jellyfish like pincapple slices! This is the one that they assemble into a relatively very large organism although (p.189) of "more than one hundred specimens" there was not one that was not in several pieces. "In one specimen found three additional rows of teeth [which] may have been attached to the circler" (p.203) - or, of course, may not! Here, p.204/5 abound in *probable, may be, presumably, may have, and even reasonable conjectures.*

creature." (P.160). I interject to stress this concept of the *architect* - Gould is wedded to the existence of a creator yet gives no attention to this - or indeed to many another - belief of his. Yet it is worth noting that he accepts the complete lack of pattern, and the impossibility of aligning any of these finds to anything else in Earth palaeontology.

I think it important to cover all these findings, since the actual words I have extracted from a mass of writing reveal that there isn't one of the marvellous Marianne Collins visualisations that can really be trusted.

After a totally unsupported hypothesis about the "grabagab" (p.184/5), Gould gives us some very wild guesses: "small specimens either carry relatively small spines or lack them completely - this providing a rare Burgess example of change of form with growth. Two juxtaposed specimens seem to represent an act of moulting by one individual, not two animals accidentally superimposed" (p.192)... He could find no similarly persuasive clues to homology, or genealogical relationship with any other group of organisms.

As Gould admits (p.208), "The Burgess Shale includes a range of disparity in anatomical design never again equalled, and not matched today by all the creatures in all the world's oceans". Let me remind you we are talking about one small site! And Gould keeps his surprise till the end of the book (p.321): **Pikaia** (thirty or so known) "is a chordate, a member of our phylum" though he has to admit the "rarity of P. In the Burgess and the absence of chordates in other Lower paleozoic Lagerstätten," hardly reassuring when taken with all his other comments about the unique nature of the Burgess Shale creatures.

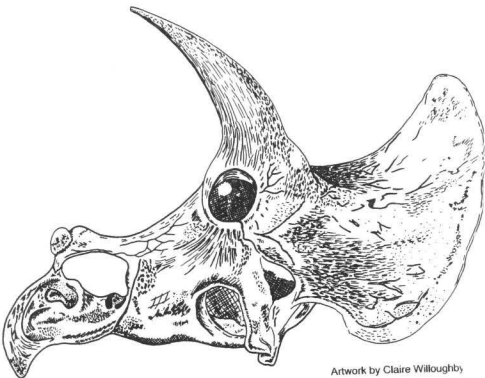
Gould then passes on to "recent developments" which are all very hypothetical and, to my mind, about as reliable as Walcott's early conclusions. "The best estimates" says Gould "indicate that only about one half of the weird wonders of the Burgess Shale have been described" though how one judges what has not yet been found is perplexing (p.212). He then goes on to anthropomorphise his own unsupported, unprovable concept - otherwise unrepresented in all our planet's history of evolution as involving "the grabagab" and "the Great Token-Stringer" (in other words, the entire range of possible and impossible physical and genetic forms, and God) (p.217/8) admitting that evidence for this exists nowhere, and at no time, other than in the tiny, unique Burgess Shale, which has 73,300 specimens so far checked, of which 87.9% are animals, the rest algae; 14% of the animals have shelly skeletons, the rest are soft-bodied; there are 119 genera of fauna according to current classifications in 140 species, and 37% of these genera are arthropods. Hardly something on which to base an entire rethinking of all the paleontological thinking of the past, surely?

But that's what Gould does (p.227 on), under the heading "The Two Great Problems of the Burgess Shale." These are:

1. "How, especially in the light of our usual views about evolution as a stately phenomenon, could such disparity arise so quickly?"

2. "If modern life is a product of Burgess decimation, which aspects of anatomy, what attributes of function, what environmental changes, set the pattern of who would win and who would lose?"

This is the nub of Gould's thesis, the purpose of his book, and its aim is to try and show that evolution doesn't work in any way anyone had ever really thought, and that mankind is by no means the pinnacle of evolution because, he claims, there are so many ways that evolution and other effects could have ensured that mankind - that mammals - indeed that any life out of the sea - could never have appeared on Earth at all.



Artwork by Claire Willoughby

And it is here that Gould's thesis falls apart at once, for he suggests that he will in fact avoid talking about his first problem - though he does - and he starts to use phrases like "this gut feeling" of his and saying that "I just can't accept" this or that, as though such comments prove his point. Yet he stresses (p.230) that "never, not even once, has a new phylum arisen since Burgess times", surely worth considering more deeply, but discarded as soon as articulated!

On p.233 Gould sets out to rubbish traditional "concepts of progress and predictability" - which in fact no reputable palaeontologist today would espouse - and makes the bogus claim that "we are incited to dig in our heels the harder and to postulate that all previous life followed a sensible order implying the eventual rise of consciousness", which is of course the most utter rot and a perfect example of imposing Walcott's discredited views on today's scientists so that he can then attempt to knock them down.

Virtually the whole of Gould's philosophical edifice is destroyed by his own admission (p.234) that "a simple and obvious conventional argument" shows that "the Burgess losers were destined for extinction by faulty anatomical construction" - yet even this is not necessarily so, and nobody else seems to have suggested it is so! After all, the best we can say is that arguing about the form of reptile or mammalian life on Earth on the basis of the Burgess "oddities" is pointless since we share not one feature with any of them. One has only to check their characteristics with Gould's checklist of **Taxonomy and the Status of Phyla** (p.98/100) and **The Classification and Anatomy of Arthropods** (p.102/6) to prove this.

Gould quotes extensively from Whittington and others to show that they do not support his arguments as the conventional theory "makes too much sense" (p.234) - but he says that by looking at the Burgess creatures we cannot identify *what* it is that made them fail to survive. What does he expect from fossils described with so many massive areas of doubt? We cannot even explain why the *anarchos* died out, and that was only yesterday!

He argues (p.237) that the experts began to talk "less and less about 'primitive' designs, and laboured more and more to identify the functional specialisations of Burgess animals" - but this merely indicates their *inability* to explain how such fauna can even have arisen among the other conventional phyla of the Cambrian "explosion".

Gould now argues for the acceptance of a complex mass of individually unprovable concepts in different areas of science because they "jump together" (p.289) to "indicate a particular historical pattern". But this "consilience of induction" (as the 19th-century philosopher William Whewell called it) is just what led Walcott to his long-discredited theories!

We find Gould claiming that "I suspect" (a truly scientific term, that!) "That the origin of life on Earth was virtually inevitable... Much... Must be constrained by rules of construction and good design" (which is of course just what he sets out to *disprove* with his Burgess "grabag" theory) while admitting that "we have virtually no evidence about the pattern of later decimation... Burgess anatomies disappear without issue, and we have no evidence at all for how or when" (p.302). Perhaps his crowning claim is (p.302) that "we do not know the answer... But the solution is obtainable in principle" - in other words, if we could find any evidence, we would have some evidence!

Having constantly argued that "mass extinction" is valid, he admits (p.306) that "palaeontologists are just beginning to study the causal structure of differential survival, and the jury will be out for some time".

And then we come to his most blatant example of "special pleading": on p.309 he admits that when life evolved "nothing much happened for ever so long" and goes into considerably detail about this, only to lay down as dogma that "I do not. View the origin of life itself as a chance or unpredictable event. I suspect that... Life's origin was a chemical necessity. Contingency arises later, when historical complexity enters the picture of evolution". I am sure that scientists all over will be thrilled to learn that only after life has

appeared can there be any question of whether it will appear, and that anything that happens prior to that time is irrelevant to "contingency" - that is, to whether a given event will or will not occur!

One could multiply the contradictions and half-truths in this book tenfold. Enough is enough: basically, all that can be proved about the Burgess Shale is that it is *an anomaly*. Gould tries to reduce "recent developments" in other Lagerstätte as supporting his arguments, but a careful reading again reveals that it's all wishful thinking and unsupported hypothesis.

What, then, can we put forward, at our present state of ignorance, as explanations, or at least hypotheses, for the existence of the fauna of the Burgess Shale and their inability to be fitted into anything else found in our planet's past? To be honest, my three proposals owe more to long reading of science fiction than to Ruth Rendell, Stephen King or Frank Capra, but I don't think that's cause to reject them out of hand. They are:

1. We know that radioactivity can cause mutations that do not procreate, or that do not breed true. The "transmutations" of the Burgess fauna's carbon remains into "silicates of alumina and calcium", otherwise unknown, hints at some cataclysm otherwise not recorded in Earth's history - could this be the answer? And if so, could the radioactivity perhaps be the result of an alien spaceship crashing on to Earth, just to make the proposal a bit wider?

2. Did an alien spaceship not only crash, but bring with it a collection of zoo specimens, or already transmogrified fossils or specimens, gathered from other planets? This would explain the form of the fossils, and their lack of any connection to even the wildest excesses of the Cambrian "explosion" elsewhere on Earth.

3. The third proposal takes this one step further; I call it for obvious reasons the Terry Pratchett *Strata* theory: that at the time Earth was being built by some alien beings, a small group of students, or perhaps a single nutty assistant, deliberately salted the Burgess Shale - and perhaps other Lagerstätte elsewhere - with this accumulation of fossils taken from his research collection, or created out of whole cloth, simply to wind up 20th-century palaeontologists and give himself a good laugh.

Do my readers have other suggestions that so adequately fulfil all the findings to date, especially the two points which I set out and numbered near the beginning of this article as containing the nub of the whole Burgess Shale problem?

Artwork by Claire Willoughby



A PETERBOROUGH POSTSCRIPT

When the base of a Peterborough gravel pit was being cleared in 1991, the 100,000-year-old bones of a woolly rhinoceros were found alongside those of a hippopotamus, together with remains of a mammoth, horses and reindeer. Sixty geologists gathered at the request of Gordon Chancellor, deputy curator of the local museum, to evaluate the findings confess themselves "baffled" as the rhino and hippo remains could not possibly have come from the same climate or geological age.

Members of the Quaternary Research Association may, it is hoped, come up with some explanation of the impossible find; museum services curator Martin Howe announced plans for a detailed analysis of seed, vegetation and snail remains in the surrounding soil. Admitting that "something peculiar happened," he suggests "some inversion of the rock strata"; I suppose one could stretch possibilities that far if one were really stuck.

Me, I think they've uncovered remnants of an earlier museum collection - deposited there 100,000 years ago in the same way the Burgess Shale bears a similar "impossible" collection of mutually incompatible remains. Now all we need is to uncover Terry Pratchett's famous tyrannosaurus with a wristwatch, Neanderthal skull with three gold fillings, piece of coal with a 1909 sovereign embedded in it and ammonite squashed with the fossil imprint of a sandal... Not forgetting the plesiosaur with its "End Nuclear Testing Now" placard.

Ken Lake

Artwork by Peggy Ransom

God and the Little Green Men By Cherith Baldry

If the purpose of the recent **Vector** editorial was to irritate, it has succeeded! As a Christian, and a writer, and a Christian writer, I feel I must take issue with some of the points raised, particularly the implication that to be a Christian one must be suffering from softening of the brain. Some of my Christian friends think that to be a SF writer implies exactly the same thing. Ah well....

The statement that "the capacity for believing the incredible must be a help to writers of the fantastic" begs so many questions that I hardly know where to start. I'll come back to that word "incredible", but what about the word "believe"? Anybody with a feeling for language must be aware that it's being used in a different way in the following examples:

"I believe we've met before."

"I believe the sun will rise tomorrow morning."

"I believe in the truth of my story."

"I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."

Any of these statements may be true in its context, but in Statement (3), nobody rationally expects the writer to believe in the objective reality of her fictions, whether or not she assents to Statement (4), any more than science fiction writers necessarily believe in the latest UFO sighting or the peculiar theories of Erich von Däniken *et al.* SF writers are *mostly* sane, and capable of distinguishing between fiction, scientific fact, and spiritual belief.

The word "incredible" naturally takes its meaning from what sort of belief we are talking about. If I call a story incredible, I probably mean not that it didn't or couldn't happen, but that the writer did not succeed in suspending my disbelief. And we don't on the whole think of scientific fact or the evidence of our senses in terms of credible or incredible. "I believe I am sitting on a chair" is a singularly useless statement except in certain types of philosophical discussion.

In spite of frequent attempts to demonstrate the opposite, humanity defines itself through its intellect: *Homo sapiens*; I think, therefore I am. We like things in general to conform to rational systems which we are capable of comprehending. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, depending on where you're standing, we cannot expect the God who created the universe to be totally accessible to human comprehension. I don't totally understand my husband, my sons, or even my cat; why should I expect to understand God? He exists, or not, but if he exists, he is beyond my human intellect. We cannot know God scientifically, as we dissect a corpse, only through the emotions, as we know a person. A God who could be dissected would fail to command belief for that very reason: *Credo quia impossibile*.

As to the comment on the sterility of the modern churches, I can't help but sympathise to some extent, not being a fan of recent changes to the liturgy. But we still keep a lot: the ceremony of High Mass; the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox; Anglican Evensong in a mediaeval church with the light dying; the vigour of the charismatics. The Church has been censured just as often in its history for excessive sensuality as for sterility, which probably goes to prove that like most other institutions we sometimes get it wrong. And on the whole there's something for everyone; one person's sterility is another's simplicity.

To come back to the writing, I'm fully in agreement that there is an awful lot of inept allegory about. It's not all religious, either. Anyone with a message, whether social, political, religious or whatever, thinks they can put it over by using allegory. Allegory is a seductive form, because it looks easy; it is, in fact, extremely difficult to get right. There are a lot of bad writers or lazy writers about, and also a lot of sincere people who believe so wholeheartedly in their message that they think they don't have to worry about technique. I don't remember who said this, but we should all have it taped to the top of our word-processors: "Art in the service of a great cause is not necessarily great art."

I write Christian SF for older children, in which I hope the story incorporates the theme, rather than being the sugar on the pill. (Do any Christians really think of Christianity as "the pill"? I also write secular SF, and it may be that this is more lastingly Christian. I find no contradiction between my beliefs and my writing. As Christian, I believe in a God of infinite creativity, whose universe is full of marvels that I cannot possibly imagine, although, as SF writer, I intend giving it my best shot.



Reviews

**Edited By
Christopher Amies**

Lion of Macedon **David Gemmell**

Legend, 1990, 416pp, £13.99 hb,
£6.88 pb

The trouble with genres is that they tend to be unyielding. Gemmell is a fantasy author, therefore he writes fantasy books. Which might be true generally, but not in this particular case, because this is not a fantasy novel. Its natural home is in a different genre altogether, that of the historical novel. There are some fantasy elements in it, the magical and supernatural powers Tanis and others display and use are fantastic by modern standards, but may well have been regarded as an acceptable and normal part of life by the ancient Greeks. The series of Egyptian novels by Joan Grant contain far more fantastic things and are firmly labelled historical.

Is it a good historical novel? I know little about the ancient Greeks so I am not in a good position to judge the historical accuracy but the book feels very secure, with the impression that the author has done his research thoroughly and is sufficiently in control of his information only to use what will aid the story and to let the greater part of his diligence lie, like an iceberg, unseen by the reader.

The story is based on the life of Parmenion, a historical person about whom little is known, so that Gemmell is free to use his imagination. He puts Parmenion into the rigorous childhood

training of a Spartan boy, then follows his life to manhood, placing him with historical characters and incidents about whom quite a lot is known, putting together a story which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Parmenion is a believable character and although much of the novel's characterisation could be justifiably criticised as shallow, it has enough depth and variety to sustain the narrative. It is well paced, the descriptions of events and battles detailed enough to give a picture without becoming tedious. The language is clear, unpretentious and effective in telling the story, sustaining the reader's interest and eliciting, although not rising much above it. It is a well written, well crafted book and enjoyable. I can recommend it.

Heleen McNabb

Trojan

James Follett

Line Tree, 1991, 490pp, £14.99

James Follett is the author of some dozen novels, among them a number of scientific thrillers, that is to say: conventional thrillers that have a scientific background. In this particular novel the background is provided by advanced computer technology, while the story involves a struggle for power and domination between two business people. The two protagonists are Beverly Laines, the head of Nano Systems, who is supposedly a sympathetic character, and Marshall Tate, the manic head of a media cum gambling empire who will stop at nothing to achieve his nefarious ends.

Alongside this rather tired business saga, however, Follett has also had an inspired science fiction idea that personally I have never come across before and that sustained a degree of interest. A probe to Mars has its computers infected by an alien virus that then proceeds to colonise the Nano System's Kronos computers which are the subject of the struggle between Laine and Tate.

This virus has ambitions to put on a true physical body and predictably threatens life on earth as we know it. While this could have been much more effectively handled by any number of other writers, all credit to Follett for coming up with the idea.

The novel ends with the struggle between the two business tycoons resolved but with the threat to humanity still lurking.

This book helped while away a fortnight in cloud Cornwall, interspersed with more congenial doses of Paul McAuley and Cecelia Holland, but I cannot really recommend it to anyone. On the other hand, if Follett writes a sequel I will find it hard to resist seeing how he develops his virus idea.

John Newinger

The People Collection

Zenna Henderson

Corgi, 1991, 594pp, £5.99

The Dragon in the Stone

Allan Scott

Orbit, 1991, 301pp, £3.99

The People came from another planet, known simply as the Home, towards the end of last century, and have lived quietly in Groups ever since, gradually gathering in those who became separated during the Crossing. Similar enough to Terrans to permit interbreeding, they have developed mental abilities such as telepathy and telekinesis, that separate them from the natives.

These wonderfully folksy tales, written in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, seem just as relevant to the present, with our worries about the destruction of our planet and our need to be

responsive to nature. However, they are very obviously set in a time when living was slower and less complicated.

Yet the problems faced by the People and the Terrans with whom they interact are very real. Their very difference causes distrust, and in some cases cruel persecution. But despite this, they are forgiving and welcoming, and will help anyone in need. Anyone who has suffered from depression will identify with Lea and wish there had been a Karen around to help them. Debbie is as selfish as any invalid. And we have all felt as alienated as the Francher kid and Perdita. Although the stories are very moral, they do not pontificate (religious intolerance is given very short shrift in 'Angels Unaware'), and the People themselves do not pass judgement but merely chide selfishness.

The collection includes those stories previously published under the titles *Pilgrimage* and *The People: No Different Flesh*, and four unpublished stories, including one which suggests that the first Russian cosmonaut was not Gagarin, but a boy who might have been one of the People. What a pity Henderson did not live to see the Wall come down.

Unfortunately my review copy was riddled with far too many typographical errors of the sort easily picked up by a computer spelling checker. This carelessness spoils an otherwise very welcome replacement of my battered old copies.

The Dragon in the Stone is a reasonably well-written fantasy thriller set in a suburb of modern-day Copenhagen using Danish and Old Norse mythology as its source. The fact that it has been written to satisfy the requirements of various markets does not get in the way of the action, which moves along briskly. I rather like the beastie on the cover.

Valerie Housden

Brainrose

Nancy Kress

Avon, 1991, 320pp, £3.95pb

Phases in Chaos

Martin H. Greenberg (Ed.)

Avon, 1991, 273pp, £3.95pb

Brainrose is about memories and what happens when we have too few or too many of them.

The world in 2022 is threatened by a memory plague which erases its victims' brains until they are reduced to an endless activity loop. Humans have a race-memory which can be used to reveal previous lives. A charming thief, a wealthy woman whose daughter has the plague, and an attorney with MS, undergo 'previous lives access surgery' so that memories from previous lives are accessible to the right stimulus. As the memories surface, it becomes clear that the protagonists' previous lives were connected. There is also a connection to the source of the plague—but what is it?

The existence of race-memory does not necessarily imply reincarnation—but the author makes convincing use of the idea. The characters are complex, and I cared what happened to them. Kress' style is very readable, though at one point she did lose me with technical jargon, perhaps deliberately, when a character explained the connection between the datanet and the plague in terms of 'Hofstadter ropes'.

Verdict—worth reading.

Isaac's Universe Volume Two: Phases in Chaos contains eight short stories set in a universe of Asimov's devising; he credits E.E. Smith's *Lensman* books as the inspiration. It is a thousand years in the future and six sentient races possess starflight, among them the Erthumoi I.E. Humans.

The stories vary widely in both style and content. I was bored by Hal Clement's title story—the scientific detail swamped the plot. Poul Anderson's 'Woodcraft' and Janet Kagan's

'Winging It' were my favourites, with Karen Haber's 'The Soul of Truth' and Lawrence Watt-Evan's 'Keep the Beast' as amusing runners up. The other authors included are George Alec Eflinger, Harry Turtledove and Allen Steele.

Verdict—a mixed bag.
Barbara Davies

The Fall of the Sky Lords

John Brosnan

Gollancz, 1991, 284pp, £14.99

The concluding volume of the *Sky Lords* Trilogy sees the obnoxious Milo Haze escape from his fundamentalist haven only to die and suffer a fate worse than death, for Milo (he is a very complicated character, or is it characters?). The airship *Sky Lords* which once held sway over the trashed Earth have fallen victim to the crazed program Ashley or, in the case of the *Lord Mactain*, their human crews. Up in orbit the paranoid lost souls in the habitats watch everything very closely, especially themselves. Meanwhile in the land of Oz a few brave souls defy the blight in their little island Utopia of Palmyra. The inevitability of everything coming together over, in and around Palmyra is all but historical. All ends are neatly tied by the end of the volume, just desserts handed out all round and Earth made clean and new.

I have to say there is nothing wrong with this book. It is finely written, the plots rattle along and the characters are interesting. A reader will close it with the satisfaction of a good story wrapped up neatly. And yet ... The plot felt just that too mechanical, the suspense, action and sex happening at exactly the correct time in the book but not quite at the right time in the story. Which may seem like nit-picking, and probably is. What left me feeling much more dissatisfied was the literal *deus ex machina*, the super program, which rescued the heroes and delivered them when all other hope was gone, and then set about redeeming the planet for its ecological death throes. The Phebus program and its purpose, easily the most interesting idea in the book, is introduced as a dying fall and left there. I would rather like to have seen it developed.

I have not read the other volumes of the trilogy, and I was not moved to do so. However, I doubt this lessened my enjoyment of this book — and I did enjoy it. It may not be the most original book ever, but it has a strong story which is deftly told. If you are facing that mythical train journey you could do a whole lot worse than chase this book to occupy it. On the other hand, you could just read it anyway, for pleasure.

Martyn Taylor

Child of Time

Isaac Asimov & Robert Silverberg

Gollancz, 1991, 302pp, £14.99

In 1958, Asimov gave us 'The Ugly Little Boy', a charming and utterly innocent tale in which a Neanderthal boy is brought forward in time, learns to read and to understand much about modern civilisation, and is then catapulted back in time by — and with — his devoted nurse-teacher. The story has been anthologised and collected many times, and while it reveals many of the sexist and cultural patterns of the fifties it can still be read with pleasure.

In his ongoing search for fine early stories that he can expand, modernise, confuse, distort and fudge up, Silverberg has persuaded Asimov to let him have a go at this story, adding a whole sub-plot, a lot of pseudo-sociological claptrap, and a back-to-nature-red-in-tooth-and-claw setting in which the protagonist's tribe meets a wandering tribe of homo sapiens which dedicates its goddess shrine to Lascaux-cave-like sketches of mammoths and wolves.

Many details in the original story have been altered with no apparent reason, but it is still

possible to trace its simple prose through the twists and turns of the modern book version and to regret the misuse of a simple tale to create a run-of-the-mill bit of populist sci-fi. To be honest, I had expected a great deal more, and better, of Silverberg; he can be a consummately skilled and enlightened writer when he tries, but not one of his recent pastiches has come off in any way creditable to him or to the benefit of the original pieces.

However, to be fair, I should add that if you have never read 'The Ugly Little Boy', if you like to read modern novels with a healthy helping of modern sociological theory, if you are looking for a hackneyed but smoothly crafted few hours' relaxed reading, you may well find this reworking right up your alley. Coming from two Old Masters of the genre, it bears the mark of their joint literary inheritance and experience, so it can't be all bad!

It's just that it could have been so much better, given that it was worth doing at all, and there I have to express my doubts.

Ken Lake

Wilderness

Dennis Denvers

Simon & Schuster, 1991, 255pp, £13.99

In Dennis Denvers' first novel, Alice is a woman who avoids close contact (especially lasting sexual contact) with others, because every month she becomes a wolf. Even her psychiatrist does not believe that this happens, although she invites him to watch the transformation. Signing up for a college course, she becomes attracted to Erik, a lecturer, who is in the process of being divorced. They become lovers, and Alice reveals her secret to Erik. He hesitates, and Alice flees while Erik must choose whether to come to terms with what Alice is (whatever that may be) or return to his unstable but familiar wife.

Well-written, particularly in the early stages describing Erik's teaching, *Wilderness* is described, accurately, as "neither a horror novel nor a traditionally werewolf tale". This is perhaps actually where the book falls down. In attempting to escape the genre clichés associated with his subject, Denvers veers dangerously close to the genre clichés of the modern literary novel: the psychological love story involving characters we aren't *that* interested in in situations we read about so often: glossy-mag, fashion-romance with impeccable caring credentials.

We can talk, as so often, about werewolf as metaphor. Normally, it's the "beast inside". Here, it isn't. Although Alice has killed, her transformation is a simple, straightforward, unmetaphorical one: human to wolf. Real natural wolves are not particularly threatening to humans. Alice is no symbol of evil, but simply a wolf.

But real wolves inhabit a wilderness and it is this wilderness which is the metaphoric centre of the book; the wild and lonely place at the heart of relationships where the intellect cannot reach.

This works, and is thought-provoking. But even as I type that previous paragraph, I think, yes, but aren't we getting a bit *precious* here?

Wilderness has several imagistic gems (the concept of Alice dealing with the mechanics of her monthly changes, the outcome of her psychiatrist's relationship with her) but is less passionate, less wild than the subject demands.

Andy Sawyer

Walker of Worlds

Tom De Haven

Roc, 1990, 242pp, £6.99

Walker of Worlds is not simply yet another fantasy novel of mages, heroes and kings. De

Haven's treatment of the conventional story and transparently thin plot treads a fine line between straightforward fantasy narrative and comic, self-reflexive disbelief. As one of the characters remarks, "This isn't a book... Yet."

True to fantasy type, characters from a parallel world, Lostwithal, arrive on earth to continue their battles of good versus evil. Earth characters become embroiled and are ultimately taken to Lostwithal to act as witnesses to the adventures of Jack, a Walker.

In Lostwithal itself the magic seems feeble and almost inconsequential. But translated to Earth, or viewed through the eyes of a variety of characters, the magic is a source of much humour. Alternately disbelieving, irritated, bemused, and amused the characters — cat, bag lady, chauffeur, amnesiac *et al* — attempt to come to terms with the intrusion of fantasy into their 'normal' lives. Almost incidentally, by the end of the novel we realise how redemptive the experience of 'fantasy' has been for most of them. (A point well argued by many writers and readers.)

The story itself is told cleverly as De Haven switches viewpoint from character to character to forward or broaden the action thus involving the reader in a kind of jigsaw game. He has an excellent ear for conversation and humour and richly enjoys the characters he creates.

The advertisement on the jacket, *Chronicles of the King's Tramp BOOK 1* is ominous. But I will read Book 2, if only to find out if the bag lady from earth ever makes an honest man of Mage Squintik from Lostwithal and to hear how Herb explains to Marge where he's been. 'Marge? He would say, Honey, let's make some coffee and get comfortable, You're gonna LOVE this...'

Lynne Fox

Wulf

Steve Harris

Headline, 1991, 440pp, £14.95

Chase

Dean R Koontz

Headline, 1991, 240pp, £14.95

These two books exemplify what is to me, the difference between horror and terror. Horror is fear engendered by experience, even if that experience is vicarious; terror is fear engendered by the unknown.

Wulf is a horror story. In it, nasty things happen to the village of West Waltham, near Basingstoke in Hampshire, England. It all emanates from a malevolent field named God's Teardrop. Electrical equipment goes dead; there are muggings, murders and madness, masturbation and rape, arson and anti plagues, and a particularly lousesome skin complaint. One character wonders if it is some human variant of BSE, the mad-cow disease. Could it be caused by toxic gas leaking from geological strata? Another character *knows* it is spread by people he calls 'wolves'; fellow-villagers who, though themselves apparently immune to the germ — are contagion-carriers. They must be exterminated.

Horror follows horror, each physical attack, act of torture or mental cruelty, sexual activity, and the spread of madness and skin-disease, being described in graphic detail. In the end, the Army is called in, the area quarantined, and they all live happily ever after... Or at least, some of the survivors do — perhaps.

Sex and violence also feature in *Chase*, but here the dominant atmosphere is fear of the unknown, fear of the unseen; threatening telephone calls from someone whom you do not know, but who knows all about you, the bullet by night, a loved one in unnameable peril. All these strands are woven together in a novel first published in 1972. The author was/is K R Dwyer, that being the early pseudonym of Dean R Koontz.

Chase is the surname of the main character, a

Vietnam hero with a nervous breakdown. He witnesses one murder, prevents another, and himself comes under threat. This is a whodunit novel, not fantasy, but it is an excellent read, besides being an indispensable volume for all fans of Dean R. Koontz. All the chilling themes of his fantasy novels are displayed here. And besides everything else about it, I appreciate his confident handling of the subjective. This man is both a master of suspense, and a master of his craft.

Martin Brice

The Dark Descent: The Colour of Evil

David G Hartwell (Ed)
Grafton, 1991, 491pp, £4.99

Several times a year, another anthology comes onto the market and, more often than not, the reader is disappointed. While this volume is similar to others of its kind, there are a few gems included that might otherwise be missed.

Hartwell could have improved the content of this book by approaching contributors for new stories. Stephen King's 'The Reach' has already been published twice before - in *Yankee* magazine and King's own book *Skeleton Crew*. On the positive side, this compilation covers fifty years of short horror fiction, illustrating the changes in style and content and includes some of the biggest names in the genre. One would expect something more than this book actually offers.

Shirley Jackson's 'Summer People' is gentle, while Harlan Ellison's 'The Whimper of Whipped Dogs' is overtly sexual and violent. Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' begins with great promise, written in Ye Olde English, but fails to deliver the shocks that readers of modern horror expect.

Fritz Leiber's 'Belsen Express' is one of the few outstanding pieces in this book, but even here the writer has left questions unanswered. The protagonist, George Simister, finds a pile of unnumbered and unwanted books on Nazi atrocities by his front door. The books play on his mind. His wife disposes of them but the next day they are back. In the final pages Simister is travelling to the office in a crowded bus, feeling as the Jews who were used in modified lorries might have felt. On arrival at work, he collapses and dies. At first it is believed he's had a heart attack, but when the doctor examines him another cause of death is diagnosed: carbon monoxide poisoning. A good book for bus and train journey reading.

Martin Webb

Seeress of Kell

David Eddings
Bantam, 1991, 431pp, £14.99

"We've been at this for a decade now. About all either of us could have reasonably expected from that was to come out of it ten years older..." This is how David Eddings begins an open letter addressed "To Lester" (his wife?) (*His editor?* ...CC) at the front of *Seeress of Kell*, the fifth and final book of the *Malloreon* series. If you're wondering why Eddings didn't just speak to Lester, rather than write to her in this way, the answer may be that he didn't have time. In the busy decade Eddings refers to, he's written ten fair-sized books that share a large number of characters and together form the *Belgarath* and *The Malloreon*, and at the time I write this review, he's already well on the way to a third 'major' fantasy series.

There can be little doubt, therefore, that Eddings has managed to do more in the last decade than age ten years: the *Belgarath* alone has sold more than a million copies and his cover price of about a fiver a copy and his ten percent (I'm guessing) cut, he's made a goodly sum of

money from the sales of this first series alone. Can anyone maintain a serious work of literature for so long without going stale, I wonder? A cynic might argue that Eddings is in this business simply for the money, but this isn't the case: he turned to fantasy writing "to develop certain technical and philosophical ideas concerning the genre", to quote from the blurb on his earlier works. Nevertheless, high ideals aside, ten big books in as many years adds up to a lot of words, and sometimes the strain shows: did he really mean to write, for example (p.64), "Again and again she awoke screaming as the same dream came again and again." Well, maybe he did, and if he didn't I'm sure his fans will forgive him.

The story of *Seeress* is simple. In the final stages of their quest for his son, Garion and his companions travel to Kell to consult the only undamaged copy of the Malloreon Gospels, which they hope will provide clues to the location of "the final meeting place". Should Zandramas the Sorceress reach this place before Garion and his company, then Garion will be forced to slay his own son or the world will be no more...

For a better or worse, *Seeress of Kell* is another David Eddings book in the now familiar vein.

Mike Pont

The Eighth Rank

David D Ross
St Martin's Press, 1991, 461pp, £22.95

Not having read *The Argus Gambit* of which this is the "sequel" in the *Dreamers of the Day* series, I was able to face it in all its Libertarian/Objectivist (whatever that may mean) glory.

One can learn a great deal from the opening pages of *Ross* thanks someone "for calling" to my attention my many grammatical errors, and where we are presented with a *dramatis personae* listing (always a bad sign) of 56 characters, of whom 10 are politicians and CIA types in Washington, five are "cops", three "capitalists" (doesn't that say it all?) And five senior rulers of the "Unified Soviet State" (that, surely says the rest).

Ross has, we're told, spent more than a decade envisioning the plot, seeing "many of his most extravagant ideas become reality" while he fiddled around. Thank God the rest of this farago of murderous, wooden-charactered, universe-encircling tripe is far less likely to be reflected in any real-world events; in evidence I cite just one brief quotation:

"All your money couldn't buy what I'll get for proving that you spent twenty-five years murdering everyone who could link you to the death of Adam Scott and that you hired saboteurs to cripple U.S. Aerospace industry and that your monster planted a bomb on a GILGAMESH scrapjet and stole a scrapjet. And we have new evidence that Python was the main supplier of plutonium to Black Africa. Have I left anything out, Hardin?"

Not convinced? Think people actually talk like this? O.K., Let's try a word from Sasha, computer officer aboard the battleship Lenin, a man fatally addicted to exclamation marks and verbal overkill and one of many characters not mentioned on the vast initial listing:

"I can't believe this! Absurd! Unbelievable! Ridiculous!"

Why even fanzine writers can do better than this, not forgetting a "secret international conspiracy of intelligentsia", war, famine and assorted skullduggery. If this is indeed, as the blurb writer avows, "a dynamic science fiction novel of the highest rank", someone somewhere is misusing the English language even more offensively than the author who at one point describes a character "with his piggy eyes like blackbeads surrounded by sphincter muscles". Enough already!

Ken Lake

The Sorceress and the Cygnets

Patricia McKillip
Pan, 1991, 220pp, £7.99

Talots and the Paths of the Dead

Steven Brust
Pan, 1991, 182pp, £4.99

"There are no better writers than Patricia A. McKillip..." Says Stephen R. Donaldson, unwisely, on the back cover. She is elsewhere described as the bestselling author of a World Fantasy Award winning novel and as living in New York; her style is said to have "an understated elegance". Perhaps this style can be judged from the opening paragraph of the above novel which goes:

"He was a child of the horned moon. That much Corleu's great-grand told him, after, pipe between her last few teeth, she washed the mud out of his old man's hair and stood him between her knees to dry it." (Note the mannered ambiguity.) This, incidentally, is the first of what seem like several hundred obsessive references to hair.

On pages 35-36, the sentence, "There was a smell of fish cooking" is repeated four times. As for what the novel is about, it is chiefly about people poking fires, getting up and sitting down again, lighting pipes and re-lighting them, sipping wine and adjusting their hair whilst engaged in endless conversation. Very little happens and what does happen is portrayed uncreatively. The conversations are usually characterised by a nagging tone. The characters ask each other questions repeatedly and get unsatisfactory answers. It is like trying to get blood out of stones. For instance, when one character is asked on page 120 why she killed a tinker, the reply comes "He was not a tinker" to be followed by "He's not dead" and soon ceases to care. If this is the literary standard of a World Fantasy Award winning writer, one dreads to think of that of the losers.

Steven Brust is yet another New Age writer on the theme of swords and sorcery but, in contrast with McKillip, lacks all pretension to be taken seriously. His novel is lightweight, action-packed and full of humour. It addresses the reader frequently and directly with such phrases as, "In case you haven't figured it out yet..." And it's hero is Talots, an assassin who is assisted by a creature with leathery wings and poisonous teeth and who has featured in other Brust potboilers. Although slowed down slightly by flashbacks, it is a quick and easy read, if you like reading that sort of thing.

Jim England

Temps

Nell Galman and Alex Stewart (Eds)
Roc, 1991, 354pp, £4.50pb

This collection of stories presupposes a world where superheroes of the American type are set against a British Cultural background.

"Talented" individuals are co-opted into the Department of Paranormal Resources, paid a retainer by the state and called in as required for temporary assignments. Hence the title. In my teens I was an avid reader of Marvel and DC, so I plunged in with relish. I suppose I expected to see titanic British talents unleashed upon our island scene. I was disappointed.

It would appear that British means second-rate to the majority of the contributors; The Civil Service are largely treated in a clichéd manner reminiscent of Ealing Comedies or St. Trinian's films, being run by a bunch of chaps in grey suits, ineptly assisted by cloned bimbo secretaries. I suppose there's little harm in this in the odd story, but the accumulated weight

across the collection is depressing. The book is intended to be humorous, but I found the supporting material mostly funnier than the stories.

That's the bad news, the good news is that the quality of the stories is high; some of them are excellent and would be able to stand without the "shared-world" crutch. I recommend dipping in rather than reading straight through. In particular read these:

'Nothing Special' by Colin Greenland is a slyly political story following the advent into the DPR of Hussein Azhdarb, a youth whose recited manner and insignificant appearance bely his considerable talent.

'Pitbull Brittan' by Kim Newman, writing as Jack Yeovil, is an outrageous blood-spattered pastiche of *Bulldog Drummond*. Our hero, Dick, has a musculature composed entirely of erectile tissue which expands during arousal conferring superhuman strength, limited invulnerability and the desire to rescue damsels. Larded with in-jokes, steeped in bad taste, gratuitous violence and sexual stereotypes - this story nevertheless reaches an extremely satisfying climax.

'The Oedipus Effect' by Brian Stableford is a wry, clever tale exploring the paradoxes implicit in precognition. To what extent does the foreteller of an event unconsciously cause it to happen? If an event is predicted and evasive action is taken, so that that event cannot occur - does this vindicate the prediction? These questions are chillingly worked out through the story of a child who was ignored when he foretold his father's death.

'A Lonely Impulse' by Roz Kaveney is my favourite. It follows the fortunes of Carrie Smith, an unemployed lesbian activist living in London, who wakes up one morning with a hangover and able to fly. The story follows Carrie as she learns to use her new abilities; copes with the adverse reactions of friends, acquaintances and total strangers; becomes involved in PR work for the DPR and lends out hostility from envious fellow talents. The lazy good humour of the narrative, the exuberant enjoyment of the flying scenes, the creeping onset of detachment, as Carrie becomes aware of her loss of interest in sex, in friendship, in dealing with ordinary people - all these things combine to make this story a superb deliciously enjoyable read.

Catie Cary

New Worlds 1

Edited by David S Garnett

Gollancz, 1991, 265pp, £4.99

This is *New Worlds 1* reading in one direction, or *New Worlds* two-hundred-and-something in another, though twelve years is a long time to wait between issues. Goodbye *Zenith* with its total strangers; welcome back, *New Worlds*.

The wish behind the resurrection of such a legendary title is for the leading edge. For "publishing the best new SF that can be found anywhere," says Garnett in his manifesto. This should mean writers; and by large, this is what we have. The authorial biographies at the back refer more or less obliquely to the authors' youth, as well as showing a predilection for cat-coupling.

Does it hit the spot, though? Some stories did at least: in 'Floating Dogs' by Ian McDonald, bioengineered pseudo-animals carry on a war in the wake of humankind, provided with just enough sentience to believe themselves living and not to balk at self-destruction. Kim Newman's 'Übermensch!' fuses Nazi Germany and prewar German cinema, *Superman* and *Man and Superman*, with newly-reunited Berlin as Lang's *Metropolis*, and a Simon Wiesenthal figure visiting Spandau Prison to visit its only captive: the German Man of Steel. 'Heat' by JD Gresham reads like a feminist rewrite of a Somerset Maugham story, which is not to be seen as a Bad Thing, all sexual tension

and frayed tempers in the heat of the night. In 'Colours' by Michael Moorcock, the world is falling apart due to some environmentally unsound mining, and is seen doing it through the eyes of a Southern riverboat gambler searching for his lost beloved. 'Something Sweet' by Simon Jones and Charles Stross (actually an old *Street* story rewritten by Stross) is a technothriller story of hackers, police, pocket nukes, and fighting in the dissolved tunnels of the London Underground. John Clute's essay on 'SF Novels of the Year' is required reading. And for some recent worlds, Garnett's afterword is wallpapered with rejection slips.

New Worlds? I hope so.

Christopher Amies

Raft

Stephen Baxter

Grafton, 1991, 264pp, £14.99

Raft is very distinctly Stephen Baxter's achievement, but it is also a fully-paid-up member of the Hard SF genre. Baxter uses engineering and science well, and accurately, with just a single device to create his universe increasing the strength of gravitational attraction by an order of one billion times is no small step, and the changes it brings are enormous. Most obviously the human technology which brought the ancestors of this novel's cast to this universe cannot take the strain. Hence the Raft, a flat structure built from the remnants of a starship, and from asteroid mining in the new universe.

Rees is a young man who lives amongst the shanty-like trail of the Belt, a community of miners now isolated from the main Raft except for irregular trade. Although ill-educated, Rees has noticed that the nebula in which the Raft drifts is dying, and his curiosity leads to his escape from the Belt as a stowaway. Once on the raft he persuades the Chief Scientist Hollerbach to apprentice him, and despite rivalries and outright opposition, he achieves great things. There then is a coup, and chaos ensues.

From here onwards, *Raft* is compelling fiction, carefully told. Up to this point, the novel has been promising but awkward, (perhaps the world-building of such novels makes this inevitable), with enough outright strangeness to lure the reader through a few uncomfortable early scenes.

Stephen Baxter does more than just change the value of one constant for scientific convenience, he then explores a multitude of related effects: the life of the nebula is greatly reduced, people are literally attracted to one another (this is dealt with rather coyly in fact), space has an atmosphere, and so on. Alongside this technical imagination, Baxter explores the political problems of a closed community, and the frustrations of scientific isolation and decay caused by the loss of the Ship's computers. This mix causes as many fresh questions as it gives us answers - this is no blind optimism. Even as the principals survive this novel's challenge they are made aware of the difficulties of a fresh start. A sequel is possible, but not necessary. As it stands, *Raft* is a satisfying debut, confidently mixing the human, the scientific, and the alien. And bringing welcome freshness to Hard SF.

Kevin McVeigh

Expatria

Keith Brooke

Gollancz, 1991, 252pp, £13.99

On *Expatria*, colonised many generations ago by Alien Arks, two nations exist in a state of tension. In Newest Delhi, headstrong young Matt Hanrahan, first son of the Prime, loves investigating alien technology, and so does his father, disapprove. When his father is assassinated Matt is framed, and manages to

escape to the free city of Orylons. His half-brother Edward not only succeeds to the title, but gets Matt's girl as well.

Matt is persuaded to leave Orylons a couple of years later to do scientific research in Alabama City, capital of the other nation. His old enemies from Newest Delhi come after him, still wanting him to be tried, found guilty and executed. Relations between the two nations deteriorate.

And then Matt and his new colleagues receive a message from the mythical Arks, still orbiting the planet. Ships are coming from Earth, and they don't sound too friendly. All of *Expatria* must band together to form a common response.

Expatria is an easy and undemanding read. On that level it's quite a decent book, and maybe I'm judging it against too high a standard. But there's a lot of little things wrong with it.

I find it particularly unconvincing that old Earth place names crop up everywhere; as well as those already mentioned, a quick glance reveals Soho, Dixie Hill, the Rue de la Paterdorio, Route Magnificat, Canabrake House, and 'a small Harrod-store'.

You'd think that a cut-off colony would by now have grown a little identity of its own, similarly the people: I don't believe names like Vera-Lynne Perse, and when Kasimir Sukui has all the stereotypical characteristics of the honourable Japanese, and Decker sounds like a typical heavy check-shirted American, I wonder why.

Being picky, I also wish the author (or his copy-editor) would learn the use of semi-colons; far too often there are sentences like "Mono was a real artist, she had a natural gift for her music, she could make that old Gibson sing, she could make it weep, she could make it tell any story she wanted." Apart from the punctuation and the cliché, the damn thing is presumably hundreds, if not thousands, of years old, and I doubt if there's a decent guitar workshop on the planet to keep it in good nick. Similarly, since the old electronic components Matt and his mates find would be pretty dull by now.

The author's not really thought through either the social development of the colony, or the technical side of things. Also, the revelation of who actually did murder Matt's dad may have come as a tremendous surprise to the other characters, but I'm afraid I found it all too obvious.

But to be more positive for a moment, some of the characterisation is pretty good. I'm quite fond of the prostitute-guitarist Mono, and Chet Alpha, "host of the travelling peep-show and General Purveyor of Pleasure (Most Tastes, No Surcharge)" is joyously OTT - especially when he turns his brothel into a religious community, Chet Alpha's Pageant of the Holy Charities. "Now, said Alpha, 'Which of the Charities was it you wanted to fuck?'" A nice touch.

David V Barrett

UFO Crash at Roswell

Kevin O Randle & Douglas R Schmitt

Avon, 1991, 327pp, \$4.95pb

The supposed crash-landing of a flying saucer near Roswell in New Mexico in July 1947 is one of the earliest and best known of UFO incidents. The story is that the wreckage of an extra-terrestrial craft, and the bodies of its occupants, were quickly gathered up and put under wraps by the US military, never to re-emerge into public view. Roswell view Schmitt set out at this late date, to discover what further information they could squeeze from a very cold trail. It is apparent from the book that there was very little more to add to what is already on record. The authors' main tactic was to interview everyone they could locate who was involved or in the vicinity at the time, but I don't think they need have bothered. The amount of hard information secured, as opposed to waste, just wasn't worth the effort, and it sheds no new light on the question of whether

the incident really did happen. The photo section of the book features family album photos of various of the interviewees, contemporary plans of Roswell air base (and some photos of the air base as it appears today) and a couple of "artist's impressions" of the crash site (with saucer) and the aliens' bodies, of no value whatsoever. Not a book to take very seriously, whatever your views on the incident itself.

Darroll Pardoe

Bill the Galactic hero on the Planet of Tasteless Pleasure
Harry Harrison & David Bischoff
Gollancz, 1991, 213pp, £13.99

This book is tasteless, but not pleasurable!
Jon Wallace

Teklorids
William Shatner
Bantam, 1991, 223pp, £13.99

Heir to the Empire
Timothy Zahn
Bantam, 1991, 361pp, £9.99

What a team, Zebra Kid and Horace Batchelor... No, seriously, all these books have in common is that one is a film script turned into a novel while the other is a novel which thinks it is a film script. I know which movie I will go to see.

Shatner writes in short, sharp sentences, one or two sentences to the paragraph and an average of five and a quarter pages per chapter. When I began to read I was appalled at the standard of the writing - even Jeffrey Archer is better than this - but by the end of the first chapter I thought maybe he was really taking the piss. Hey ho, a comedy. By the end of the story I still believed it was intended to be a comedy, but I hadn't laughed much.

Heir to the Empire is another kettle of fish altogether. Not that the film is better made than anything involving William Shatner. Timothy Zahn is a "real" writer. While the plot is as relentless as we all know the **Star Wars** movies to be he manages to add characterisation, introspection, reflectivity - you know, the qualities which distinguish novels from film scripts! I enjoyed reading it. My eight year old son demanded to have it read to him, and it read well aloud (always a good sign).

I will not bore you with the plot, which you can probably guess anyway if I say it is set 5 years on from Return of the Jedi. All the old favourites are here, plus some new villains and - who knows? - the future Mrs Skywalker. I have just one caveat. One major plot element is resolved by the Noghti discovering that Leia is daughter and heir to Vader (Vader having "adopted" the creatures somewhere along the line). Yet my viewing of the film tells me that he didn't know he had a daughter until minutes before his death.

In summation, forget the Shatner, watch the **Star Wars** movie, and if you really must spend £10, why not just see the movie three times instead.

Martyn Taylor

Reign of Fear: Fiction & Film of Stephen King (1982-9)
Don Herron (Ed)
Pan, 1991, 254pp, £4.99 pb

This book seems to follow on from **Fear Itself** (published by Pan in 1990) which covered King's work from 1976-1982. I say "seems" because a lot of the essays in this book deal with all of King's output, and some only

look at his latest works briefly.

Basically, this (along with the earlier volume) is a collection of essays by various writers on the King phenomenon. Some are detailed and critical examinations, like Burton Hatlen's 'King and the American Dream', some like Thomas M. Disch's 'King and his Minions' have little to do with King himself, and seem a bit unfocused and still others are virtually blurb copy (see Whoopi Goldberg's 'Digging IT'). The main question I could ask about a book like this is "How useful is it?" And with this one the answer has to be not really. A major plus point of **Fear Itself** was the comprehensive bibliography, but **Reign of Fear** misses this out and most of the essays are either shallow or nitpicking.

Finally, the editor, Don Herron seems to have been completely the wrong choice to edit a book like this. His article 'The summation' is a hatchet job of King's massive novel, **IT**. Now I'm not saying that that is a bad thing on its own, but with a bit of time and space Herron's sloppy objections to the novel could be overturned. The kindest view is that world-weary cynicism has warped his perceptions.

Jon Wallace

The Year's Best SF: 8
Gardner Dozols(Ed)
St Martin's Press, 1991, 617pp, \$27.95

Recommendations or otherwise seem spurious; if you have any interest in short SF, you will buy this, and this year's David Garnett **Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook** sight unseen, and damn the overlaps.

The best thing about this year's Dozols is probably its wide range. Previous collections have seemed to feature about 50/50 cyberpunk and other genres. Not so this time, although such as James Patrick Kelly chip in their usual ten megabytes worth, his 'Mr Boy' leading the collection off with a fairly standard exposition of Californian angst circa 2090. Ursula Le Guin re-enters Hainish territory with 'The Shobbies' story, reaffirming her storytelling powers with a story that reaffirms the power of the story-teller. Honest. Lucius Shepard is down Latin America way again, in the company of Robert Frazier, in a typically bizarre and hallucinatory tale about the ultimate Japanese tourist.

There is a clever, languid contribution from Michael Moorcock, on the hippy trail to Egypt, while John Brunner re-emerges blinking into the 1990s with a story combining AIDS and Western liberal guilt to create the ultimate revolt of the have-nots. Silverberg is in dark mood with 'Hot Sky', a strangely flat account of an everyday iceberg jockey in a world almost out of ozone and water. The longest contribution comes from Joe Haldeman with a shorter version of his novella 'The Hemingway Hoax'. Haldeman has been treading water ever since he finished the last part of **The Forever War** for me, and this effort, an homage to the Heinlein of 'By his Bootstraps' and 'All You Zombies' rather than **Starship Troopers** does little to reverse the trend.

Standout new writer is the Australian Greg Egan, with two entries, including 'Learning to be Me', a subtle musing on the nature of identity. Standout offering is Bruce Sterling's 'We See Things Differently'. By a happy coincidence I read it as John McCarthy reached freedom; Sterling brilliantly enters the mind of a Muslim fundamentalist and shows his views of a western civilisation visibly in collapse. It is always tempting to take a cross-section of predominately American SF like this as a sounding of the American psyche. In this case, I don't much like what I see. A recurrent theme, as with the Silverberg, the Sterling, and stories by Molly Gloss and Nancy Kress, is of a society at the end of its tether, worn down by AIDS, war, pollution, and a clear belief that next year will be worse than this.

Put this aside, and pack **The Year's Best SF** for the beach, or those lengthening winter

evenings. Try to keep it away from the sun cream, though; the front artwork is rather evocative too.

Martin Waller

SETI
Frederick Fichman
Headline, 1991, 336pp, £4.50pb

The time: the present. The place: Southern California. Sam is an amateur radio enthusiast, implausibly only six years old. Time passes and both his parents disappear and are presumed killed in a plane crash. Sam is now a teenage radio enthusiast, competing with NASA's SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) program. His grades are "above average but not superior". His friends are the typical shallow, slang-using, Coke-drinking, junk-food-eating, joy-riding Southern California youths immortalised in a thousand Hollywood movies, but he acquires a girl-friend, Lisa, with similar technophilic interest in gadgets. And suddenly he is contacted by aliens orbiting Tau Ceti who want to meet him, alone, in the Mojave Desert.

And there you have it, more or less, in all its implausibility. Sam tries to inform the authorities of his discovery through a friend of his father's, but the latter turns out to be insanely jealous. A myriad obstacles are placed in the way of his going to meet the Tau Cetians, all of a contrived kind, there are thunderstorms, Russian spies, melodramatic car chases and sand buggy chases over the desert. The author even tries to wring suspense out of Lisa, disguised as a male, not being able to find a suitable toilet. The reader waits in vain through hundreds of pages for the meeting with Tau Cetians to take place, and when it does it is a tremendous disappointment.

It is hard to see what kind of adolescent this novel is aimed at, when the author feels the need to explain more than once that "Sound does not travel in a vacuum", refers to planets quite wrongly as "planetesimals" and yet assumes much knowledge of electronics and vehicle mechanics. It is soulless stuff, padded out shamelessly and written clumsily. Typical are consecutive sentences beginning "Sam...". When the pronoun "he" would have sufficed in most of them.

Jim England

Aleph
Storm Constantine
Orbit, 1991, 314pp, £7.99

Aleph is the sequel to **The Monstrous Regiment**. It focusses on the same central character, Corinna Trogtarden, and takes up the story after the exodus of the rebels from Silver Crescent at the end of the earlier novel.

Aleph traces the settlement of the rebels, now called Freespacers, and their contact with a mysterious being which operates through Corinna and another Freespacer, Farris Windtessel. In a parallel storyline, the rulers of Silver Crescent have relaxed their attitudes after the death of Yand Gishbandun, and are re-establishing contact with other planets through the unexpected, but amusingly probable agency of a tour company prospector, Zy Larrigan. The storylines converge when Larrigan is drawn, by the mysterious being, to the freespacers settlement. The novel then concentrates on the discovery of what this strange being is, and what its purpose is.

Like its precursor, **Aleph** is an immediately readable novel. By continually raising questions - what is the mysterious being? What impact will renewed interplanetary contact have on Artemis? How will the various sexual pairings resolve themselves? - the story entices the reader onwards. But, I think, we are enticed only to be ultimately disappointed.

The story line and issues raised in the novel offer Constantine great scope to explore issues

of gender, sexuality and their influence on personal and public politics. But these questions are handled conventionally and with an adolescent naivety. Characters who are potentially complex and interesting are manipulated by the dictates of the plot to do their behaviour lacks motivation and coherence. Why does Carmenya Oralien, a General in Silven crescent, abandon all of her previously held beliefs at the end of *The Monstrous Regiment* to join the rebels? And further, why in *Aleph* does she, after hundreds of pages of exclusively lesbian relationships, settle, in a few pages, into happy wife and motherhood? One is left with the feeling that Constantine plays fast and loose with her characters and is willing to betray them for a storyline. Similarly the created world of *Artemis* lacks a binding logic. Though there are many excellent descriptions, many vivid details, there is no coherent explanation or understanding of how this planet works.

Aleph is like a low calorie drink. The immediate sensation of sweetness is pleasurable but it is ultimately dissatisfying.

Lynne Fox

Creed

James Herbert

NEL, 1991, 364pp, £4.50pb

The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'

William Hope Hodgson

Grafton, 1991, 188pp, £3.50

I suppose both these class as horror but whilst *Creed* is today's horror, *The Boats* was first published in 1907. I found neither of them horrific, but for different reasons.

The Boats... is written as notes of a gentleman's adventures. It starts with two lifeboats adrift, initially they find a strange, lonesome island which apparently has no life but some strange trees. This is only a short interlude before the boats are back at sea and facing a storm. The storm sends the hero's boat to a vast sea of weed, an area populated with sea monsters. The story involves finding an island, fighting sea monsters, the death of crew members and the eventual escape of the survivors.

There is no characterisation; the crew just react, the bosun is a practical leader of men and the narrator an enlightened aristocrat. Everyone buckles down, every problem has a solution. The book reflects its times; it's an adventure story of the survivors.

Creed is described as a modern horror story with sex and humour. It opens with Joe Creed, a paparazzo, photographing the funeral of an old movie star and after it watching a wizened old man masturbate on her grave. What follows involves attempts to recover this film, largely by trying to scare Creed to death, the kidnapping of his son and a showdown in an old folks' home. I suppose it's modern because really it's Creed's cynicism which wins the day rather than any heroics. There is a little sex and a little humour, the latter coming from an authorial voice which intrudes into the narrative. I guess this book will also be considered to reflect it's times - what a pity.

The Boats... Was more readable than I'd expected, perhaps reading all those Verne stories in my youth prepared me for this style. Whilst *Creed* isn't a page turner, it is okay for filling a time journey.

Tom A Jones

Reunion

John Gribbin & Marcus Chown

Gollancz, 1991, 285pp, £14.99

This is the sequel to *Double Planet*, but set many years later. In that novel, the Moon gained an atmosphere, brought by comets from out of the galaxy, and it was colonised and became Earth-like. Now the comets do not come, the Earth and Moon have lost contact, and in the thin air the Selenians are reduced to a poor feudal life of post-technological barbarism. Naturally, revolt is in the air (what there is left of it), and Tugela, a girl from an odd family, just happens to fall into it.

Later on, we will discover Ondray, an unsuspected whizzkid who has been communing with the sleeping giant computers on Earth, and Ondray will meet Tugela, and together they will cross the universe without being aware of what they are doing; but before that Tugela will meet the rebel leader and his trusty swordsmith who has re-discovered the art of metalworking, she will free her parents from underground jails, reveal the illusions of the evil priesthood who oppress the people, and cross deserts before coming face-to-face with incomprehensible high-tech left across before (or a thousand years according to the cover blurb).

It is in the second part of the book that the experiments with typography begin, representing the different thoughts of two computers one good and one bad. The good computer explains, "My counterpart suffered a breakdown. The conscious mind retreated from reality". In fact the computers are just about the closest we come to thought or internalisation: there is not much in the human characters.

Reunion is a curious book. It seems to include so much that it would have been wiser to omit, and to omit nearly everything - but especially originality - from which it would have benefited. There is no reason to re-invent Heinlein or Clarke, and there is no need; the worlds they created are still accessible. Unless this book is intended for juveniles or other people who have not read at all in the genre, and to whom all the stylistic paradigms or clichés it contains are completely unknown, it has no purpose, and nothing to offer, I'm afraid.

L J Hurst

Heavy Time

C J Cherryh

NEL, 1991, 314pp, £14.99

It starts with a space-mining incident (accident?). A death and a rescue, out in the Belt; and the complex of guilt, love, hate, self-promotion and an intricate plot which develops from that event triggers the ultimate destabilizing of a system, already through corruption ripe for the axe. To this extent C J Cherryh's scenario could be matched to many high capitalist/post-capitalist models; but in fact it is specific to her own *Merchanter* universe. A jacket blurb quotes SF *Chronicle's* description of her earlier *Rimrunners* as being an excellent novel that just happens to be set in space. If "novel" implies a fiction whose characters and their interactions matter to the reader (as distinct from a space adventure with disposable stereotypes), then *Heavy Time* qualifies; but it doesn't just happen to be set in space, for Cherryh's sense and use of space, both as dimension and metaphor, is so integral, so pervading, that no appreciation of motive, of phobia, of the workings of chance and necessity, can be achieved apart from the reader's involvement with it. For example, the "Well" - designating the depths of solar or planetary inward gravitational drag - is always, physically and psychologically, present as the opposite pole to her characters' liberty and aspirations. Its role as an element in the sustained death/life equation is wonderfully defined when the controversial corpse resulting from that Belt incident (accident?) is

transferred almost as a symbolic projectile to the location of the Well.

Although the action starts in a mining ship when the two-man crew effect a partial rescue and acquire salvage rights, most of it is continued on *Scrivner 2*, a space base with "heavy-time" facilities for recuperation, refitting and recommissioning, a grim multi-layered, multi-levelled construct. Cherryh's description of this is such that you soon come to live amidst its grotesqueness, its pollution and palliatives, experiencing the varieties of piped music and coloured lighting, the food and drinks and relaxers of its clubs and "sleeperies". Two unlike mining partners, two contrasted opportunistic girls, potential partners for bed or ship, one rescued loser (the hero or anti-hero), and the corpse of his partner: these are the human actors/victims around which the story of individual versus system, commercial system versus military/political system, is spun. The outcome, in terms of R2 demotic is severely brut for the sumbitch corp-rats, and a so 'er boy future for the jeune fils hero (the lingo is part of the experience); this in a denouement which satisfactorily straightens out the many confusions of a furious climax. Cherryh at her sharpest, paciest, and most readable.

K V Bailey

Grounded

Chris Claremont

Pan, 1991, 352pp, £4.99pb

Grounded is Chris Claremont's second novel, and a sequel to *First Flight* published last year. As the title suggests, the central character, Second Lieutenant Nicole Shea of the United States Air Force, has been grounded following her exploits in *First Flight*. Shea now serves as a diplomat working with the USAF and the alien Halyan'ta on the design of a new form of space shuttle. However, she is not to be allowed to retire gracefully from her flying career; somebody is trying to kill her. I can remember reading somewhere that the first cut of the film *Star Wars* was shown in-house with the final battle in space replaced by black-and-white footage of a dog-fight between biplanes. The point was, of course, that *Star Wars* re-told an old story, and that the biplane battle gave the *Star Wars* production team a feel for the way in which their film was developing.

Claremont's novel also purports to be set at a time when space-flight and space-stations are commonplace; and, as in *Star Wars*, such a setting wasn't strictly essential to the plot. At heart, *Grounded* is a book about flying, and it could, with minor modifications, have been set any time after the Wright Brothers made history. All right, so virtual reality, designer drugs and aliens are all thrown in, but they aren't really 'get in the way' of the plot. Indeed, at times, *Grounded* reads a little like a reference manual for students studying for a Private Pilot's Licence.

But these are small niggles. In general, *Grounded* is fast-paced, lacking in pretension, and thoroughly enjoyable.

Michael J Pont



Artwork by Kevin Cullen

Articles

Short Reviews by Chris Amies

Earth - David Brin [Futura, 1990, 751pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by John Gribbin in **V157**. Fifty years from now, a black hole falls into the Earth's core. **Earth** the novel is a complex and textured work using this premise as a central device, and concentrates on varying methods, some successful, some disastrous, to avoid or live with environmental catastrophe.

Riders of the Winds - Jack L. Chalker [NEL, 1991, 276 pp, £3.50 pb]. Volume 2 of the **Changewinds** fantasy series, which doesn't seem to change a lot nonetheless. We still get princesses and words like 'minion'.

A Tiger by the Tail - Jack L. Chalker [Penguin, 1991, 294pp, £4.50 pb]. Volume 4 of **Lords of the Diamond**. More SFnal than **Changewinds**, much more Chalker's forte. However this is a fourth volume, and it shows. And the cover stinks.

The Sentinel - Arthur C. Clarke [Grafton, 1991, 319pp, £3.99pb]. A-format reissue of the 1983 collection which includes such as 'Refugee', 'The Wind from the Sun', and 'The Songs of Distant Earth'.

Breeder - Douglas Clegg [NEL, 1991, 310pp, £4.50 pb]. The cover makes it look like scientific/medical horror, which it isn't. It's the old haunted-house routine plus voodoo.

The Monstrous Regiment - Storm Constantine [Orbit, 1989, 344pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Barbara Davies in **V156**. The story of the planet Artemis, settled by separatist feminists, and of the result of extremism. Intriguing, vivid, and strong on characterisation.

Wolf and Iron - Gordon R. Dickson [Orbit, 1991, 468pp, £4.99 pb]. Dickson's usual riff on back-to-the-land survivalist stuff. Sort of, a boy and his dog and an AK-47.

The Door Into Shadow - Diane Duane [Corgi, 1991, 334pp, £3.99 pb]. Sequel to **The Door Into Fire**. As with the first volume, there is some very competent fantasy going down here. It's a shame the genre as a whole isn't this interesting.

The Ruby Knight - David Eddings [Grafton, 1991, 444pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Nik Morton in **V162**. Book 2 of the **Elenium**, sequel to **The Diamond Throne**. If you've read that you'll probably read this too, but it does stand on its own.

The Difference Engine - William Gibson & Bruce Sterling [Gollancz, 1990, 383pp, £7.99 pb]. Reviewed by Edward James in **V158**. The alternative 19th Century: what if the industrial revolution had been accompanied by the information revolution? Gibson and Sterling's version sets the stage for global anarchy.

Ritnym's Daughter - Sheila Gilluly [Headline, 1991, 437pp, £4.99 pb]. Described as "the triumphant conclusion to the magical fantasy epic".

The Red Defector - Martin L. Gross [Headline, 1991, 506pp, £4.99 pb]. Near-future thriller; or near-past, as it concerns "the murder of the progressive leader of the Soviet Union; the old guard who have ruled Russia since the Revolution are not prepared to surrender to glasnost just yet." Even if Gorbachev's was a victimless assassination, Gross can say, "told you so."

Seven Little Girls - Chris Hockley [Grafton, 1991, 380pp, £4.50 pb]. A spy story seen from the viewpoint of some inconvenient witnesses (civilians never did count for much in the Great Game). I don't buy the ending at all, though.

White Lies - Christopher Hyde [Headline, 1991, 501pp, £4.99 pb]. Hyde's previous novel, **Egypt Green**, was SF, but this one is a near-future thriller, revolving around the assassination of a US president.

Dragonspell - Katharine Kerr [Grafton, 1991, 495pp, £4.99 pb]. Welsh-Celtic fantasy, the fourth in the **Deverry** series.

Shadow Steed - Richard A. Knaak [Orbit, 1991, 263pp, £3.99 pb]. This seems to have something to do with **Dragonlance**.

Shadowfires - Dean R. Koontz [Headline, 1991, 598pp, £4.99 pb]. Scientist comes back from the dead to preserve the secret of his immortality treatment. Trouble is, death's had a bad effect on him and he starts mutating... shades of **Blood Music** and not a few 50s movies.

The City, Not Long After - Pat Murphy [Pan, 1990, 320pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Helen McNabb in **V160**. The city is San Francisco, after the Great Plague of some near future. Reality and magic begin to intertwine. **The City...** was shortlisted for the Clarke Award, 1991.

Eric - Terry Pratchett [Gollancz, 1990, 155pp, £2.99 pb]. Reviewed by Kev McVeigh in **V161**. Eric is the Discworld's only demology hacker, which means you get jokes like "I'll have to rewrite the source code". The small-format paperback doesn't have the Josh Kirby illustrations.

Hide & Seek - Paul Preuss [Pan, 1991, 281pp, £4.50 pb]. In Arthur C. Clarke's **Venus Prime** series. You do get illustrations this time, and you might expect it's fairly heavy on the tech stuff.

Black Milk - Robert Reed [Orbit, 1990, 327pp, £4.50 pb]. Reviewed by David Mitchell in **V157**. A scientist attempts to sow life in the atmosphere of Jupiter but ends up threatening the home planet. The story is narrated by the boy Ryder, who has perfect memory.

Prime Directive - Judith & Garfield Reeves-Stevens [Pan, 1991, 403pp, £4.99]. A novel in the original **Star Trek** series.

Orbitsville - Bob Shaw [Orbit, 1991, 219pp, £3.99 pb]. The A-format reissue of Shaw's 1975 novel of intrigue, megalomania, and vast spaceborne structures.

Death's Grey Land - Mike Shupp [Headline, 1991, 322pp, £4.50 pb]. "An epic time-travel adventure of a man stranded eons in the future," says the blurb. Yes, and a military little future it is too.

Son Of Man - Robert Silverberg [Gollancz, 1991, 192pp, £3.99 pb]. Reissue of a 1971 novel, and it does show a bit in the love of psychedelia and not necessarily making a lot of sense. However, this is also a tale of a man stranded eons in the future, in this case encountering the many forms that humankind has evolved into, and mostly making love, not war.

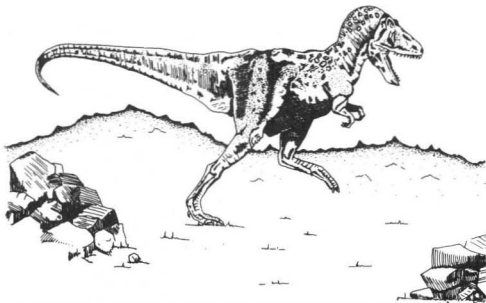
The Eyes of Night - David C. Smith [Avon, 1991, 254pp, £3.95 pb]. Another story of black magic and global conspiracy.

Piper at the Gates of Dawn - Mary Stanton [NEL, 1989, 307pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Barbara Davies in **V155**. This is a sequel to **The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West**. The Piper is the Great God Pan, the quote from **The Wind in the Willows**, the book a novel of horror.

Born Burning - Thomas Sullivan [Pan, 1991, 262pp, £4.50 pb]. A haunted chair, no less. But if you really want chairmakers, go to Iain M. Banks' **Use of Weapons**.

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Recommendations for the Future

By A N Green

I mean the future of SF, not the future in general, which doesn't accept or respond to recommendations. Nor, perhaps, does SF itself. Perhaps we should confine ourselves to comment, and to celebration, to being {fans}, to declare what we know and what we like, to influence by consumption: for what other option is offered, in the universal democracy of the universal market place?

What doesn't help is being sidetracked by the old humanism that kept our thoughts in order before we were treated to the end of history. Poor out-of-style people who are concerned about *dehumanisation*! Where does that concern manifest itself in public life? In sport or performance played for the sake of cigarettes or financial corporations? In the multiple deaths which are the celebrations of the might of the great corporations, the *disasters* on which we feast? In our lawnmowers and names on packs enclosing packs scaling in the perfect and the clean, the names emblazoned on our chests and thighs? **Adidas O Adidas** (whatever that means) we worship and declare allegiance: deification and mystification always went together, didn't they?

And that's a distraction, because we may worship the god of our choice and **Benetton** too. There is no new god, of technology or of **Panasonic**. There are only layers of knowledge, of means of knowing, palimpsests of epistemology, one on the other, piled high to form archaeological strata. But we aren't archaeologists: we only half remember what lies below: humanism's badly discoloured down the old pile of papers and magazines, somewhere under **Picture Post**.

We are not archaeologists but predictors, self-appointed interpreters of the future which is, of course, the present. We *warn* as best we can. We warn best by celebrating - celebrating the gleaming technology, the ruthless cyborgs, the triumph of intellect magnified through the interweaving of semiconductors. Who believes that we celebrate the future? There will be no cyborgs. And even now alien intelligences sweep through space, passing through the interstices of our minds and creating paranoia!

Beats Bettelheim's psychoses. The alien **Pepsi** crept in when I was watching **Kramer versus Kramer** and took up residence, but I'd learnt not to mind it. Why should I? I can't know what's unknowable, and our knowledge is the knowledge offered by **Coca Cola** along with our games, by **Amstrad** under our screens.

And that knowledge comes from things, physical forms. We can't discuss ideas, abstract concepts. Our knowledge is formed by **Ford** and **Nissan** and **Electrolux**, and we are constituted by them. There is nothing else, in practice.*

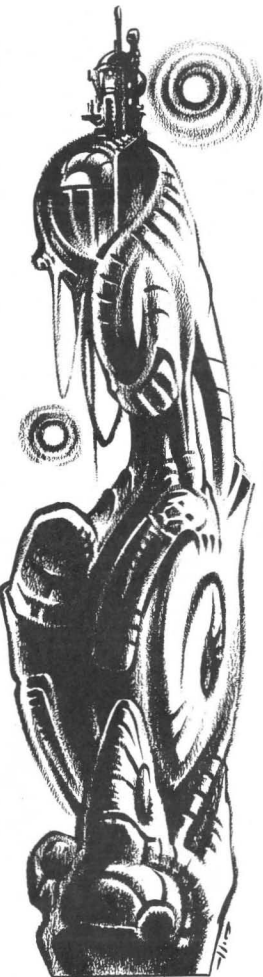
{Why aren't we looking at what's in front of our eyes? Why are some SF readers and writers obsessed with values available only to those with excavators, lost and forgotten by the advanced development of the system which no longer needs them? Why can't we go with the fans and content ourselves with the visceral, the image, movement, interpretation of data we actually receive?}

Meanwhile we meander towards the end of our century, remarkable in history because:

- . genocide became a normal concept, often practised;
- . special instruments were invented specifically for genocide;
- . racism became practicably enforceable;
- . most people became poorer and many died of starvation; and
- . we approach cultural monotony and total powerlessness.

I list these things to remind you interpreters and predictors that you bear a heavy responsibility, which can only be relieved by allowing yourselves to receive and record.

Unless you look into the family. Dare you look into the family, and report what you find there? It's terrifying... {The mechanism of the spectacle wields such force that private life reaches the point of being defined as that which is deprived of spectacle; the fact that one escapes roles and categories is experienced as an additional privation.} - Raoul Vaneigem



Artwork by Kevin Cullen