

October/November 1992

£2.25

Vector 169

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

Lisa Tuttle Interview



Ben Jeapes on Orson Scott Card

Stephen Baxter on George Zebrowski

SF in France, Reviews, Letters, More

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Editorial

Well, Here it eventually is. All forty pages of it. I hope the result is to your taste. While I think there is still room for improvement, I'm quite pleased with the result of the changes put in place so far. I hope you will be too.

As always I would be interested to hear from you with your opinions and suggestions. I am indebted for a great deal of good advice from Joseph Nicholas, Gareth Rees and "reality guru" Ian Sales, which I considered carefully when designing this issue. These gentlemen should not, of course, be blamed for any shortcomings you notice. I would also be grateful for your patience. This issue has been a considerable learning process for me. Using a new DTP package and discovering new ways of doing things; I've had a lot of fun and I think made great strides, but undoubtedly still have a lot to learn.

The changes are not, of course restricted to the appearance of the magazine. **Paperback Inferno** joins us this issue under its new title **Paperback Graffiti** and new editor Stephen Payne. You will find this section at the back of the magazine. Stephen is going to have a tough job in following Andy Sawyer. I wish him the best of luck.

Maureen Speller gives us a round-up of the "Big Six" Magazines this issue. She tells me that she has been disappointed by the number of offers to review that she has received. Come on People, don't be shy, you don't have to currently read everything on the market to be suitable. Maureen is waiting to hear from you.

Familiar features have been given new titles. Chris Amies' Review Section has been retitled **Shock of the New** to reflect the fact that it concentrates on original publications in depth rather than exclusively on hardback books, as some readers have suggested. The Letters column has been retitled **Front Line Dispatches** for reasons that seemed good at the time. Unfortunately, this was after several beers, and I'm bluffed if I can remember. If you want to know, ask Ian Sales; it was his idea.

I hope you enjoy the new **Vector**, I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Contributions: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS should be typed double spaced on one side of the page. Submissions may also be accepted in Ascii on IBM format disks. Maximum preferred length is 5000 words; exceptions can and will be made. A preliminary letter is advisable, 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 should first write to the appropriate Editor.

Artists: Cover art, illustrations and fillers are always welcome.

I don't just read SF. I know most of you don't just read SF. Even at its widest definition, incorporating fantasy and horror, we don't just read SF. Amongst **Vector** contributors, I note that Maureen Speller reads crime fiction, Steve Palmer reads science books, I read rock music books, and we have all read, at times, a motley array of classics, modern literature, poetry, etc. Most of this is only relevant to **Vector** in the most peripheral sense: it creates our own individual viewpoints which flavour our tastes and criticism, within SF. I was offered Norman Spinrad's **Little Heroes** to review because I am deeply interested in rock music, and could potentially offer a useful perspective on an SF novel about rock music.

Some of this is very relevant to **Vector**. The writing of SF is developed from and takes inspiration from, a universe of sources. The better SF writings include allusions within and without the genre; genuine new ideas, and retellings of ancient tales. Old themes can be reinvigorated by new settings, new themes emphasised against familiar backgrounds. Sometimes what is new is simply unfamiliar. The alien in our genre might be commonplace to thriller fans. The excitement comes from both the beauty of the writing and the thrill of the new and undreamt of. The best writers manage this even within the most conservative sectors, but most of this mixing and blending and borrowing and stealing happens at the edges, for obvious reasons.

In the 1990s not only are the boundaries of SF and Fantasy blurred and meaningless, but the fringes of SF and the so-called mainstream and the interfaces between SF and the scientific fields are equally indistinct. **Vector** aims to review anything that looks like SF/Fantasy. **Vector** also seeks to investigate and illuminate certain sources of SF inspiration. Hence, for example, Steve Palmer's **Insight** column and the previous series of articles on the Burgess Shale maybe followed up by pieces relating Chaos Theory or Virtual Reality to SF versions of the same. Their purpose is not to ask whether William Gibson gets his computer "facts" right, but to show how the author's conceits and devices relate his fictions to our lives (and maybe vice versa).

As I've said elsewhere, SF is not just about science nor Fantasy simply magic. There are books which are clearly of interest to **Vector** readers which contain neither. Garry Kilworth's **Stand on Shamsan** is a fascinating book which I would have missed had I not known the same author's SF and Fantasy. Many other "SF authors" have books well outside all conventional genre

Slipstream Agenda Set By Kevin McVeigh

boundaries, and they deserve our attention, both because they are by "SF authors" and for the missing links they may reveal within persistent thematic concerns.

More relevantly, there are unclassifiable authors; those who might bear Bruce Sterling's Slipstream Label most comfortably; those whose fictions are just too weird to be conventional, mainstream

"You mix fiction and reality, you get friction"

Kathleen Brennan

literature, yet bear equally little relation to the heartlands of SF.

Many **Vector** readers already read many of these books, informed by word of mouth, by fleeting mentions in columns like this, and recently, by magazines like **Territories**. **Vector** ought to be covering these too. Not in the sense of presenting a novel and "proving" that it is SF, but looking at it freely as almost-SF, para-SF if you wish, that is at least as relevant to **Vector** as some re-hashed Space Opera. SF cannot survive in isolation; there are only so many stories, and it is in the combinations and recombinations and juxtapositions that the imagination works its spell. The "Literature of the Unknown" must venture into the unknown, it must cross borders and report back on what it finds. Scientific borders, Literary borders, Social borders.

In the past **Vector** has done this sporadically. Readers may recall articles on Thomas Pynchon, Russell Hoban, Josephine Saxton and others. Reviewers have found authors like William T Vollman by accident almost, whilst a novel like Katherine Dunn's **Geek Love** slipped past

most of us because it doesn't look like SF (but definitely is!) Many of these books won't be to the liking of many **Vector** readers, perhaps, but there are many that will be, and as we are all individuals, none of these groups will overlap entirely. Which means, I think, that **Vector** ought to cover this "slipstream" thing in a more determined fashion.

I don't want to produce a long list of

books or authors to accompany this

article (Bruce

Sterling did an

excellent list in

SF EYE #5) but I

will just offer a

handful of examples to show you what I'm talking about.

Jeanette Winterson

Iain Banks

Martin Millar

M John Harrison

Lewis Shiner

Mary Gentle

Patricia Ghealy

Steve Erickson

Don Webb

Angela Carter

Leigh Kennedy

Those are mostly personal favourites, listed simply to start things off. I'd like to start a regular (though probably not every issue) column looking at some of these books, written by various people from a variety of angles and in a variety of styles. Anybody who wants to write, or has suggested titles to cover, or even thinks it's a terrible idea - you know where to find us.

I don't just read SF, and I don't just want to read about SF.

Front Line Dispatches

Prudent Management

From Alan Dorey, Verwood,
Dorset

I've just received the latest **BSFA** mailing and of course, **Vector 168**, I must say that it's an improvement on recent issues and the occasional piece of suspect artwork certainly doesn't detract from the written contents as it has done so far this year.

You're obviously finding your feet and I earnestly hope that the **Paperback ParLOUR/Vector** combo will succeed. The membership must accept that from time to time, belt-tightening is good, prudent management, rather than a knee-jerk response. It is far better to survive and fight another day, rather than go out in a blaze of glory, only to be forgotten in less than a year.

I know, I've been there.

This issue had a good selection of comment and features, although I have to say that Ben Jeapes defending Ballard's **The Wind From Nowhere** is a bit thick. Yes, I know that he practically expects Ballardophiles to leap to the attack, but even the man himself has disowned the book: it no longer appears in current reprints as an item in his bibliography, and, indeed, no longer seems to count as his "first" novel. It was, after all, allegedly dashed off in a mere fortnight, and whilst some of the later Ballardian symbols and icons appear, it really is very slight and inconsequential.

quantal; nothing more than a novella expanded to pot-boiler length. Full marks though to Ben Jeapes for begging the question.

Finally, good idea to involve Maureen Speller in reviewing SF magazines, of whatever hue. Unfortunately I always cringe at such considered phrases as "sorting the wheat from the chaff". Still, good fortune in attempting to place magazines in context as a generic whole,

I trust there'll be some good reading to come.

PS: I see Ken Lake's still at it - yes, yes, it's so simple to up the membership to the levels he suggests, but it has to be done professionally, and until the **BSFA** bite the bullet and PAYS someone to do the deed - rewarding by results - it ain't gonna happen.

Arguing the Toss

from David Bell, North Kelsey,
Lincoln

I don't know what academic qualifications Ken Lake possesses, but I would not be fool enough to start an argument with him about postage stamps. Equally, I wouldn't wish to argue with either Stephen Hawking or Michael Talbot on the subject of gravity. However, I think I might risk an argument with Ken Lake on what appears in **A Brief History of Time**.

Hawking does not put forward the rubber sheet model of space-time that Ken Lake criticises. In fact, Hawking specifically states that General Relativity, which the rubber sheet model is a simplification of, and Quantum Mechanics, which includes the particle-wave duality Ken Lake refers to, *cannot* both be right. (**A Brief History of Time** pp 11-12). Where he does deal with curved space-time he doesn't even mention the rubber sheet model (pp 29-34). In particular, "Space and time are now dynamic quantities: when a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the way in which bodies move and forces act." (p 33).

What Ken Lake criticises seems to me to be more the sort of philosophical question that ought to be addressed to a Wittgenstein rather than a question about Theoretical Physics. What do we mean by "gravity"? Whatever we mean by it, the word itself is still a useful label. The large-scale universe is dominated by the effects of gravity, whether we choose to think of it in terms Newton would have used, or as a

consequence of the curvature of space-time due to the presence of mass-energy. Is using this convenient label "pretending that gravity exists"?

Incidentally, while Philip Muldowney is probably right about the reason why most people buy **A Brief History of Time**, I reckon it might also be worth asking why British schools have turned out so few people who can understand it. The mathematics involved in Special Relativity is routinely taught in school, and you could argue that our old dog had the basic idea of curved space-time on a practical level (While next door's cat went over a fence, our dog knew that its space-time geodesic went through the open gate ...).

From Gareth Rees, Leeds

Ken Lake, in his attack on Hawking in **Vector 168**, appears not to have understood the "Rubber Sheet Theory" which he makes so much of. This, insofar as I understand it, is not really a theory, but rather an analogy intended to illustrate that the geometry of space-time depends on the strength of the gravitational field and vice versa. Mr Lake appears to be under the impression that since gravity is "really" geometry, then any attempt to base a theory upon the assumption that gravity exists is incorrect. However, he is mistaken. The theories of gravity and of the curvature of space-time are merely different ways of describing the same phenomena, their mathematical descriptions are identical. Any theory based on one is as good as, indeed is the same as, a theory based upon the other. This is because the shortest path between two points - ie the metric of space-time - is given by the path that light takes in a vacuum, and this path is determined by the gravitational field. Hawking gives an explanation of this on pages 29-34 of **A Brief History of Time**. (I say curvature of space-time here, but this is only because the (Minkowskian) geometry of space-time appears curved relative to the Euclidean geometry with which we are familiar.

As for the rest of Mr Lake's poetic flights of fancy, I do not care to comment. I am not surprised that Hawking and his students declined to engage in correspondence with Mr Lake, for his letter to **Vector** shows a lack of understanding of the subject and a personal axe to grind, and I'm sure that they know from bitter experience that it does them no good to encourage cranks and mystics.

Moral Geology

From Robert Gibson, Windermere, Westmorland

Every year comes this time of heart-searching: shall I, or shall I not, renew my subscription to the **BSFA**? And every year, it seems what wins out is the desire to keep in touch with news and views and the information service and the frequently impressive articles. Opposed to the renewal impulse is another composed of grief and irony.

It is sad how trendily the articulate SF readership adheres to the voluntarist conception of evil - "so-and-so can't help doing such-and-such, therefore there can't be anything wrong with such-and-such". For all of human history - until now - there has been an intuitive understanding that "evil" does not just involve the will; that it involves in addition to malevolence, something of "distortion". So that it is inadequate to say, for instance, that because Count Dracula can't help being a vampire, there can be nothing morally wrong with vampirism. Ignore the "distortion" element in evil and you'll eventually dismiss those who object to necrophilia and bestiality as merely "necrophobic" or "zoophobic". You libberoids who write in **Vector** and **Matrix** are all moral physicists, with principles that are smooth; I seem to be one lone "moral geologist", believing in a bumpy ethical landscape of particular do's and don'ts. I recognise that, in an age of libberoid supremacy, moral physics holds sway over moral geology and that therefore I should expect to find myself in a minority? But - in a minority of one?

Here is where the irony comes in: for you are science-fiction fans, supposedly with soaring imaginations, supposedly unfettered by the local orthodoxies such as the permissive society.

Can we please have a few more puritans and reactionaries in the pages of **Vector** and **Matrix**? Since there's no such thing as a safe idea, you might as well vary the dangers a bit; and meanwhile I'm renewing my subs.

It Wasn't Him

From Brian Griffin, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria

I would like to apologise for, and disassociate myself from, the sentiments expressed in **Vector 168** by "Dr William J. Erkoff" of the University of Barrow-in-Furness. The good doctor's display of unbending dogmatism, combined with darn apparently total ignorance is worrying. Darn sinister, in fact. I bet he's the one who, when he sees me lingering near the Aldis, says,

"Bradburys, and PKDs, in vain search of Ballard's **The Drowned World**, sneeringly refers to me as 'a right Herbert'. Seriously, Erkoff, as an impersonation of Peter Sellers playing Clare Quilty impersonating a German psychiatrist in the Kubrick film of **Lolita**, you're pretty good. But watch out, or I might do a Humbert Humbert on you.

(Wait a minute, you're not "John from the planet Zog", are you? If so - pull yourself together, man!)

Repetitive Strain Victim

From David R Smith, Broxburn, West Lothian

A few comments on **Vector 168**. I am really glad to see that the vertical headings have gone; I do hope they are gone for good. The doctor says my neck will recover from its repetitive strain injury real soon now.

Like Philip Muldowney, I don't always find the interviews all that interesting or informative, and wonder how many folk actually do enjoy them. Or are they the written equivalent of chat shows; beloved of thousands, avoided like the plague by myself?

I found some of the letters' references to Hawking rather amusing, especially the thought of Ken Lake writing to Hawking and expecting one of his assistants or students to comment... If I got a letter from Ken questioning my views, I'm not sure I would reply either.

Finally, **Compass Points** is a nice idea, and I hope you will get a wide variety of contributions; as for it becoming a "definitive guide to the best in the genre", I doubt that such a thing is possible, folk's likes are just too varied - which is as it should be.

Altered State

From John Madracki, Bolton, Lancs

While I appreciate that the transition of the magazine is not yet complete, I thought I would write anyway and comment on the altered state of **Vector 168**.

I always find interviews with authors irresistible and was pleased to see two in this issue. I am unfamiliar with the work of Katherine Kerr (and, having read what her books are all about, this is a situation that I will be more than happy to maintain) but Lawrence Sutin's biography of P K Dick sounds absolutely fascinating.

Compass Points, was another case of a miss followed by a hit. **Deserted Cities of the Heart**, despite Kev McVeigh's articulate appraisal, is definitely a book I shall pass over - but **The Wind from Nowhere**, which I hadn't even heard of before, is certainly one

to track down. My thanks to Ben Jeapes.

Barbed Wire Kisses looks very promising, a detailed and comprehensive review of all the SF magazines currently available is long overdue, and should prove to be invaluable. Good luck to Maureen Speller on what I suspect will turn out to be a gargantuan task.

Steve Palmer's exploration of consciousness in **Insight** seemed at first a little dry, and I put this piece aside until later, but when I did get around to it I found it most instructive.

But, as always, the really interesting part of **Vector** was the letter section. Ken Lake being contrary to the last, is a regular feature that I am sure we shall all miss - one way or another.

In **Vector 167**, Jim England made a very valid point concerning the facile observations of Carola Biedermann (**Vector 166**) and the chauvinist response voiced by Helen Bland was not unexpected. It was typical of that peculiar form of feminism that argues for equality with one breath and then pleads to be regarded as "a special case" with the next, while all the time displaying the very same sexist attitude that it professes to find so deplorable.

Philip Muldowney's letter was much more pertinent. His lengthy run-down of the last issue contained many points that I do not go along with - for instance, considering that space is at a premium, the more books that can be included for evaluation the better, even to the inevitable "capsule-reviews"; and just what is wrong with "pub chats"? Done well they can be very illuminating, as well as entertaining - but it was his last remark that I really must take issue with.

Philip may find them endearing, but to me they are an intolerable nuisance. I am, of course, referring to typos (*typoses*!). Admittedly, they can be amusing - Roger Robinson congratulating a competition entrant for a solution with "no spelling errors" (**Matrix 98**) - but they can also be quite inexcusable - as in the obituary to "Angela Caster" (**Matrix 99**). I know you cannot be held responsible for your sister publication but these were just two memorable examples that happened to spring to mind. Not that you are immune yourself, and these "bugs" seem to pervade the whole of the **BSFA** mailings.) Also, considering the amount of hard information that is offered, these typos can be very damaging (as in addresses, etc). Finally, while these errors may be annoying to the reader, just think how frustrating it must be for your contributors who, having laboured long and hard on their word-perfect copy, eventually see their precious prose irrevocably flawed, by no more than a

careless hand.

Fortunately, and I hope I'm not speaking too soon, types seem to be on the decline, and perhaps their virtual extinction is imminent.

But this is my only grumble, and all the changes so far have been for the better, in fact you are teetering on the verge of excellence. Furthermore, you have managed these improvements without impairing the very individual character of the magazine.

Please don't risk spoiling it now, and continue to resist any impulse you may have to "gloss it up".

Passionate Plea

From Philip Muldowney, Looseleaf Cross, Plymouth

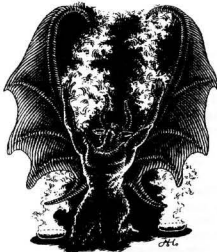
Compass Points does seem like a good idea, however whatever hopes you might have for it in the future, they are not going to be met by the two examples in **Vector 168**. If I am going to the somewhat difficult task of exhuming old SF classics, then I want some encouragement, some excitement, enthusiasm, nay even passion! In his article, Ben Jeapes manages to damn with faint praise from the introduction "I find Ballard tedious"; it meanders on to nowhere, until only in the final paragraph does he seem to remember that he is actually recommending the book. A definite turnoff. While Kev McVeigh's piece might be an interesting review, again he just does not strike a spark within. Perhaps that is because it is just that, a competent review, which engenders no excitement, what about a bit of old-fashioned polemic? A good old fire in the belly, that recalls that frisson of excitement when encountering a great SF read. We have all had them, else surely we would not be here. So, a plea for passion.

It is interesting to note the different layout treatment that you give the two interviews. The Lawrence Sutin with lots of white space around, and the Katherine Kerr somewhat crammed up. Indeed, with the Steve Palmer piece opposite it, they looked as though they were going to run into each other.

Has the epic fantasy novel taken over from the epic historical novel? It is interesting to see that Katherine Kerr's origins are from the historical novel, rather than the fantasy side. I have often felt that these mammoth series of epic fantasies resemble more the historical novel than the fantasy origins. Examine any bookshop nowadays and the fantasy (in all its forms) seems to be elbowing SF aside. There seem to be endless Dragon imitations, Celtic twilights, barbarian thews, faerie magics, etc. etc, so that you have to look for the

straighter SF with a strong arm. As additional proof I quote **The Sunday Times'** Hardback bestseller list of 6th September. This has **Domes of Fire** by David Eddings at No 1; **Elf Queen of Shannara** by Terry Brooks at No 5; plus what is more expected, Stephen King's **Gerald's Game** at No 3. There is no denying the immense groundswell of popularity that fantasy is enjoying. It seems that it is much stronger than that for SF. I would be very interested to see hard sales facts rather than just personal impressions. I would be even more interested to see other people's views on this explosion. After all, this whole "Adult Fantasy" genre is not much more than two decades old, being principally the creation of Ballantine with their Adult Fantasy series. Is it, as the economic news gets more grim by the day, that we want to retreat further and further from reality.

The Lawrence Sutin interview was interesting more for the sidelights on Philip K Dick, than for anything that Sutin had to say about himself. First and foremost though, how did Sutin actually make any money out of it? The sort of research and interviewing that he was doing must have eaten up the money, while the envisaged market for a biography of Philip K Dick could surely not have been that large.



Am I alone in finding the Steve Palmer **Insight** column somewhat boring? What with two reviews in **Compass Points**, the reviews section itself, Steve's column turning into yet another review set my eyelids drooping. If Steve had perhaps used the reviews as a springboard to say something of extra interest, fair enough; but he did not, and that is all that they come over as, fairly pedestrian reviews. This is perhaps a point that you are going to have to watch in the new super-duper, all-singing, all-dancing, expanded **Vector**. A core of material to counterbalance what is going to be a large

reviews section, because in this issue too much of the other material reads like reviews.

Oh God not another piece dissecting the works of Ursula LeGuin! She seems to be the all time favourite for intellectual pieces in which one just has the vague feeling that some English student is polishing up their doctorate thesis. While Cherith Baldry's piece was readable, I had that overwhelming feeling of déjà vu. Beware when the establishment takes a writer to its heart, it is inclined to smother it in rationalisation.

Let's hope that the duplication of effort between **Vector** and **Paperback Inferno** will now finish. This issue in particular with duplicates of Alan Foster's **Cyber Way** and **Cat-a-lyst**; Silverberg's **Pluto in the Morning Light**; and Simon Ing's **Hothead**, that is a 20% rate. While reading opposing opinion is interesting, the extra time and effort involved does seem a mite wasteful of talent.

I like the changes in layout. The overall effect has a pleasant readable air about it. Perhaps a few more changes with the title headings ie, not all boldly across the top, with these two black bars. All those parallel lines had me resisting the urge to draw geometry angles on them. I am impressed with your learning curve, the experimentation in designs and typefaces are paying dividends. The only thing that I personally might like to see more of would be more internal illustrations, to break up those large slabs of prose.

Have **Vector** reviewers got a prejudice against major writers? According to Martin Webb, Stephen King's **Gerald's Game** is a "masterpiece", yet it has the shortest review in the whole section, and 90% of that is plot summary. Rather than Maureen Spiller set down her parameters (which incidentally might have been better included when she starts to review magazines, and was a bit like a three course meal with hors d'oeuvres only) I would love to see the reviewing parameters for **Vector** and **Paperback Inferno**. They do have their inconsistencies.

Anyway, thanks for another interesting issue, the best of luck with the new issue, and perhaps a few figurative Kleenex to wipe the sweat (nerves? surely not) from your brow.

Please address your letters of comment to:

**Catie Cary (Vector)
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A strand in science fiction - major in influence, but comparatively minor in words written (or read) - is the SF of the Big Idea. the subject matter is the life and death of the universe(s), the plasticity of the concept of humanity, even of life itself... you get the idea: these are themes that go far beyond the accepted limits of fiction, let alone of SF.

Stapledon is the obvious example of this sort of lofty stuff. Aldiss and Wingrove (*Trillion Year Spree*) describe Stapledon's material as "chill but intoxicating... from such an altitude, all sense of the individual is lost". That is, the drama comes from the unfolding of the ideas and speculations, rather than from the traditional wellspring of fiction, human conflict... but that is also the trouble with this type of SF. Without the familiar frameworks of fiction, based on close-ups of people doing things, there's little to engage our emotions. How can we care about the death of a universe if we don't care about the guy who's witnessing it, damn it?

Thus the fiction of the Big Idea tends not to be too popular with readers or publishers.

Which seems a pity to me, because - if you're prepared to accept the unfamiliarity of the narrative techniques used - the ideas in stuff like this can deliver you with sensawunda, mainlined. And that's why we read SF anyway. (Isn't it?)

One author who's been mining this seam for years is George Zebrowski. Zebrowski has only published five novels that I can trace over 20 years; I'm not sure if they've all had British editions. He's probably best known for *Macrolife* (1980), which described a series of space colonies which form the basis of a mass consciousness and ultimately find a way to escape the death of the universe. *Macrolife* has acquired a cult following, but as with so much Big Ideas stuff, opinions are polarised; it is either Stapledonian (Aldiss and Wingrove) or bogged down in philosophy (Pringle in *Ultimate Guide to SF*), depending on your point of view.

In Zebrowski's latest, *Stranger Suns* (Bantam Spectra 1991), Juan Obrión is a scientist who discovers an alien craft buried in the Antarctic. The craft turns out to be a way into "the web", a travel complex uniting the universe abandoned by mysterious, vanished aliens. Pieces of the puzzle are gradually revealed: the web is composed of multilayered technology left behind in strata as the aliens evolved, ranging from "simple" sub-relativistic craft to instantaneous wormhole-style doorways between galaxies. But Obrión's biggest surprise comes when he tries to return to Earth, only to find that passage through the web actually takes him

Compass Points

3 Stranger Suns by George Zebrowski

Recommended by Stephen Baxter

into "variants" - parallels of reality differing at the quantum level. some of the variants are more different than others - in some Obrión finds his dead parents still alive, in others he finds Earth devastated by nuclear war.

Obrión travels through many variants and becomes more and more dispirited with mankind; in world after world basic flaws in human nature emerge to dominate. we seem "imprisoned by our humanity", Obrión moans, trapped within the event horizon of the bestial basis of our biology; society consists of a series of warring gangs, with no essential moral difference between criminals and lawmakers, and so on.

At last Obrión reaches the place the aliens went - "superspace", a super-universe within which the finite variant cosmoses are embedded like insects in amber.

Zebrowski's themes in *Stranger Suns* are the moral and philosophical meaning of life in an infinite universe (or series of universes), and what it means to be human. Unambitious in scope, it ain't, then; and if you're looking for stirring speculation and wondrous ideas - a vision of "dancing minds" to borrow one of Zebrowski's chapter headings - then you'll read this book.

But how does *Stranger Suns* rate against the traditional yardsticks of fiction? Well, we do follow one character, Obrión, through the book, and he does - as is usually demanded of fictive characters - go through conflict; and he changes as a result of his

experience. But much of the conflict is within Obrión himself, concerning his own philosophical angst at the limitations of humanity. and his change, when it comes, is to a greater level of understanding of the nature and purpose of life. Which is all very well as long as we sympathise with Obrión, but it's all too easy for us, conditioned as we are by more conventional fiction, to see Obrión as, frankly, a pompous asshole who doesn't actually do very much.

And yet, and yet....

Where else, but in this sort of meta-cosmic fiction, are we going to find such wondrous ideas? Even the throwaway lines are dazzling. at one point Obrión and his chums reach a pocket universe which does not suffer decay. "Entropy is constant here ... The gamelike, goal-oriented aspects of life are nonexistent. Only play exists. If we can call it that!" A different reality in a sentence... Many of us are prepared to put up with a hell of a lot for such jolts of wonder.

Perhaps the problems of this type of SF are intrinsically insoluble; perhaps it simply isn't possible to reduce such concepts to the cosy level of traditional human conflict. So stuff like this, I suspect, will always have trouble being accepted, either by publishers or readers. but we need the Big Ideas - we addicts do, anyway. So, if you're feeling jaded, I urge you to give Zebrowski a try; read *Macrolife* or *Stranger Suns* with an open mind and look for the wonder beyond the challenges of the fiction.

Orson Scott Card

An Appreciation by

Ben Jeapes

People have recoiled when I reveal myself in their presence as a Card lover. Card, the Mormon? Card, the baby killer? (More of that later.) Sometimes it seems to be the ultimate *faux pas* in the hard-headed, unsentimental scene that tries to be British SF in the early 'nineties.

Orson Scott Card, as even my cat knows, is a Mormon. He is also an American, and he's proud of both. These attributes in combination aren't necessarily a good thing in producing SF - you could cite **Battlestar Galactica**, and I would agree - but, then, **Battlestar Galactica** is a crap space opera, whereas Card is a highly talented playwright-turned-SF-writer.

Where does the difference lie? They start from the same roots and they both deal with living legends-in-the-making. And **Battlestar Galactica**, if you recall, was basically about the search for a Promised Land, i.e. Earth, which is how Mormonism got started. Where they come apart is that Card accepts the existence and validity of other viewpoints and stocks his stories with rounded, developed, believable, *human* characters, with emotions and thoughts and feelings. **Battlestar Galactica**, even leaving out the tacky special effects and considering that it displays less respect for the laws of physics than **Star Trek**, got stuck right from the start with being *The American Way* in Space, starring Pa Cartwright as the Patriarchal Sage (no change there) and what's his name from **Streets of San Francisco** as Number One Space Jock. Oh, please.

Card also knows something about decent plotting, which helps.

Not that Card preaches. He's a practising, churchgoing Mormon but he keeps that out of his writing; he doesn't go

riding to the rescue with the Gospel thinly disguised as SF ("Say, Doc, I know you've already explained it, but how does this vicarious redeeming sacrifice of Christ work again?") His two ongoing protagonists, Ender Wiggin and Alvin, are specifically *not* Christian; they are at the very best agnostic. In **Xenocide**, Ender's sister Valentine is asked if she is a believer. Her reply is, "I'm a suspecter." Instead, Card lets the worldview of his religion inform and colour his writing. Maybe Mormons hold up Card's books as definitive Mormon allegories the way that evangelical Christians do with CS Lewis - I know that non-Mormons can read and enjoy just as much.

Card is *aware* of religion - it doesn't matter which one. Whatever your views, whatever your background, we all live in a world that was shaped by religion. Keep your eyes peeled and count the number of churches, used or unused that you pass on a normal trip to work or the shops. Spot the dog collars in the crowd. We have a religious heritage, like it or not, that stretches back for thousands of years. And yet, so many authors ignore it altogether - or, if they must include a religion at all, either misrepresent an existing one or invent an implausible one. Card doesn't. It's one more piece of reality that he adds to his fiction, and his fictitious worlds are that one bit more complete for it. Card is also aware that his religion makes him an outsider. He admits that, try as he might, he is more comfortable surrounded by Mormons than by gentiles (his word, not mine). It's this outside view that gives his writing a freshness and an askew view of the world that marks it out.

Finally, consider the worldview of both mainstream Christianity and Mormonism. A

world full of human beings, created in the image of God; who have fallen into sin through their own fault; who are capable of the most astounding atrocities; and yet *who can be redeemed* if they only face the facts of what they have done. Card forces his characters - and readers - to face the truth, in all its glory, unclouded by hypocrisy or guilt. Refreshing, in an age when more and more of everything that goes wrong is Someone Else's Fault. And it's all covert. The redemptive processes, the coming of the character to terms with what's going on, are all internal, known only to the character and to the reader.

Take Ender Wiggin, star of **Ender's Game**, **Speaker for the Dead** and, lately, **Xenocide**. Ender starts as a member of an army of children, into which he was either born (the novella) or conscripted at the age of six (the novel). Either way, his capacity for moral development has been, shall we say, stunted. He develops into a master strategist and a vicious little sod - his winning tactic is generally to strike below the belt with overwhelming force and he manages to kill at least one other boy this way in a fight.

It is not surprising that he becomes... well, a xenocide. He wipes out the one known sentient alien race, the Buggers (a name that only Card would give his aliens. In fact, only Card would have a hero called Wiggin.) After all, they had launched an unprovoked attack on the first human ships to encounter them and every indication is that they intend to carry on attacking Earth's colonies and - who knows? - Earth itself.

Actually, the Buggers had long ago regretted the attack; a hive race, they hadn't realised that each human is an individual (only their Queens have this kind of self-identity - the drones are just drones) and that each human death means robbing the universe of a unique entity. (They therefore have a slightly higher estimation of the value of individual humans than humans do: Card doesn't come out and say this, but it's there.) They want to stop the war and are still desperately looking for a way to communicate this fact to the humans when the xenocide happens. When this is eventually found out retrospectively, after the xenocide, young Ender goes from being the saviour of mankind to the enemy of the world, and his mere name becomes the ultimate curse (people say "Ender" in the same way Zaphod Beeblebrox might utter "Belgium". That bad.)

But can Ender actually be blamed? He was manipulated by his (adult) officers at every turn, and he thought the battle he was fighting was just a simulation. Even if he had

known, like everyone else he believed that the Buggers were the enemy, and having been so thoroughly indoctrinated as a child-soldier (he is only in his early teens at the xenocide) he was in no position to make moral judgements.

Humankind was scared witless by the Buggers and wanted a hero. Say the Buggers *had* been ready to subjugate humanity. Would we humans have contentedly said, as we struggled beneath our daily load, "Ah, well, we're slaves to this merciless alien race, but at least we didn't commit xenocide to protect ourselves"?

I doubt it. So does Ender. He feels the need to atone, but he does it in the most low-key manner, by preventing a second genocide when another alien species is found (the Pequeninos, a.k.a. the Piggies in **Speaker for the Dead**) and simultaneously finding a planet on which to plant the sole surviving Bugger Queen egg. It's his own private mission, which he performs without fanfare or show.

In **The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction**, Brian Stableford is quoted as saying **Ender's Game** "remains in essence a hyped-up power fantasy". Assuming this quote stands alone and hasn't been taken out of any kind of qualifying context, I'd have to disagree. **Hammer's Slammers**, now... *that* is a power fantasy. The Lensman stories are power fantasies. **Ender's Game**, if you look close enough, is the exact opposite; Card (as he often does) is following the age-old principle that if you want to write about a subject in a way that will stick in the reader's mind, write a story that overtly opposes the point you are trying to make. Anyone read **Candide** lately? It's a funny kind of power fantasy where everyone ends up as pacifists.

And that's one reason why I like Orson Scott Card.

The redemption thing has further implications. Card rarely creates baddies *per se*. There are people who from time to time work against the hero of the story, but the only real *baddy* to be found in his novels is the Unmaker (a.k.a. the Devil, a.k.a. Entropy) of the Alvin tales, whose very nature is to destroy (see below). Sometimes you think you've got a baddy pegged, only to find out you've got it wrong. Peregrino, the Bishop of Lusitania (a planet settled by Portuguese) in **Speaker for the Dead** could so easily have become a stock Authoritative Religious Figure, opposed to everything that the humanist Ender does. As it is, he and Ender manage to make their own quite plausible peace by the end of the book (helped by the fact that in helping the

humans communicate with the indigenous Piggies, Ender has opened up a whole new mission field). Card judges his characters by their own internal standards, and they usually get given the chance to make good somehow.

You're never really sure what a Card character is going to do next, and whether or not you're going to like it. Palicrovol, one of the several viewpoint characters of **Hart's Hope** (a sword-and-sorcery fantasy world which got there long before **Villains** - you would really rather *not* live in this world) is a Duke who overthrows his not-very-nice, despotic king. Good! To consolidate his power, he forcibly marries and publicly rapes the king's 12-year-old daughter. Bad! Out of mercy, he doesn't have her killed. Good! And very, very stupid, because she grows into a very powerful enchantress who takes over his kingdom and who takes care to humiliate and spoil everything Palicrovol holds dear. And yet, *she* isn't such a bad ruler - her people don't especially like her, but then they've never really liked any monarch (liking or disliking a ruler in this kind of world is a luxury that most people can't afford), and she does rule fairly and reasonably by the standards of the world they are in.

Spot the baddy? It's difficult. The characters weave around each other, veering from good to bad to good to bad... it keeps the readers on their toes.

Card has a reputation for being gruesome - for writing in detail of mutilation and torture and then being impervious to the overtones. It's stories like 'Kingsmeat' that have done this for him.

'Kingsmeat' is set on a colony world enslaved by a pair of aliens with a taste for human flesh. It is the habit of their species to land on a human world in pairs (setting themselves up as King and Queen, hence the title), waste it entirely, then move on to the next. Until they come to Abbey Colony, unscathed. Read the story.

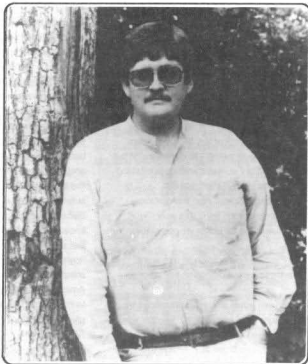
Card came under fire for this. One reader wrote to complain about him "relishing" writing about the Shepherd's removal of a woman's breast (he deals with it in one small paragraph). It's disturbing, it's uncomfortable. It's

meant to be. It's meant to make the reader think, and ask "What would you have done?"

(By contrast, I recently tried to read Brian Lumley's **Necroscope**, a free copy picked up from Fantasycon. I couldn't get past the first chapter, with someone literally sucking the juices and essence out of a corpse. People say *Card* is gruesome?)

But, I suppose the question remains - *why* so much mutilation? Answer - I don't know. Could it be because Card believes in a fallen world? A world where it's not what happens to you in *this* life that you have to worry about? Or just a world where, frankly, shit happens? Like I said above, a world of fallen beings... Card is under no illusions as to just how unpleasant we humans can be if we put our minds to it, or even *without* especially putting our minds to it, and this is the result. Perhaps we've become so used to nastiness that he has to be this extra bit nasty, to make the point.

There isn't room to go into all Card's short fiction. It has been published in collections like **Unaccompanied Sonata** and **The Changed Man**, but you can find most of it in one place in **Maps in a Mirror**. This suffers a bit from the inclusion of his very early, non-SF "What I did in the holidays, by OS Card" stories, but they're at the end in a section of their own and easily avoided. Read the rest of it instead. The original 'Ender's Game' novella - far punchier than the novel, if suffering slightly from loose ends (but what the hey, it was his first published SF). 'Kingsmeat' - see above. 'Dogwalk' - Card's stab at cyberpunk. 'I Put My Blue Genes On', which is as serious as



the title suggests.

"Eye for Eye", about a lad you really wouldn't like when he's angry, because when he's angry he instinctively, uncontrollably, lashes out with the evil eye and gives you cancer... and who do adolescents get angry with the most? Yup, their loved ones....

And one of my all-time favourites, 'Lost Boys' (first appearing in the October 1989 **F&SF**) - a ghost story starring the actual Card family plus a fictitious elder son, Scotty, which uses Card's own career as background detail. The *Lost Boys* in question turn out to be the ghosts of boys killed by a serial killer, and the fictitious Scotty is one of them.

This is where the "baby killer" tag comes in. There was an on-going, spiteful and unbelievably closed-minded correspondence in *SF Eye* over this, in which the readers apparently queued up to pour vitriol on Card's good name. The basic premise was that Card had written a story in which he fantasised about his son's death. Even leaving aside the interesting contention that writers necessarily fantasise about what they write, this just ain't so. Scotty's death occurs offstage and, like I said, it takes a while to realise that this actually is a ghost we're talking about.

Even so, Card isn't oblivious to the implications of writing a story like this, and saw fit to include an Afterword. 'Lost Boys', he says, is actually about his youngest son, Charlie Ben Card, born mentally handicapped in fact and in fiction. Card Senior is the first to admit he has never had the pain of losing a child; what the story does is express in some part the pain of having a child with cerebral palsy - "a child who is not dead and yet can barely taste life despite all our love and all our yearning" (from Card's Afterword to the story).

That's what Card says and, not having made up my mind in advance that Card can do nothing right, I find no good reason to disbelieve him. One of the *SF Eye* letters mentioned above asked the question, "What the hell was Ed Ferman thinking, publishing that obscene story?" Perhaps the correspondent approached the question from the wrong end. Try it this way round.

- (1) Ed Ferman is an editor whose opinion we respect.
- (2) Ed Ferman has published this story.
- (3) Maybe there is something in it after all.

Card will admit to being influenced by other writers (and name one SF writer who isn't), but when other people's influences do turn up, he takes them and wrings them and makes them his own. The *Ender* stories are

space opera (as is *Songmaster* in a far stronger form), but flashing starcruisers and ray guns are the last things on his mind. They are positively *anti-war*. Ditto the *Worthing* stories (collected into *The Worthing Saga*, previously published as *Hot Sleep*, *Capitol* and *The Worthing Chronicle*). This was the earliest stuff he wrote and he borrows shamelessly. The planet Capitol, centre of the Empire, entirely built over... sound familiar? And a hidden race of telekinetic/telepathic/whatever mutants, always on the run from the powers that want to stamp them out... also sound familiar? And how about the one lone planet in the galactic boondocks carrying the flag of civilisation after the Empire falls... but read them, and see a universe of real people, in real situations, coming to terms with their world.

I haven't really dealt with *overtly* Mormon influences. Well, there's the fact that Mormonism is a highly communal religion that grew up in the untamed frontier, and most of Card's characters find their peace in frontier-type, small communities. Big empires always fall or are, if not the bad guys, then the undesirables. Comfort and luxury are seen as bad for the soul - it's through suffering that characters find their strength.

More specifically, the *Alvin* stories are said to be reworkings of the life of Joseph Smith - I'll come to them in a moment. Myself, I'd say his most overt celebration is *The Folk of the Fringe*, a collection of shorts of which my favourite is 'Pageant Wagon', about a roving troupe of thespians who are keeping alive just the idealised American spirit that you would expect to see in a post-holocaust people looking back at a supposed Golden Age. The premise is: after the nuclear holocaust (which wasn't actually much, but enough to knock civilisation out), the Mormons are the only social group in the USA with enough get-it-togetherness to start rebuilding things. Card talks about this society in a range of stories which describe both the growth of the Mormon hegemony and, as the climate changes, the flowering of the West (the descriptions of a half-submerged Salt Lake City are almost Ballardian, though you probably need to know your Utah to get the full benefit). The last story is both climactic and a bit of a let-down with its elements of fantasy, but the message is clear: the people of North America have abused their divine mandate to make good with the world they have been given (*very* Mormon, the idea of North America being given to its peoples by divine right), and now must make way for an upstart South American civilisation.

And Alvin. I don't see the Joseph Smith influences, to be honest, even if the overall tone is often downright Messianic, though it must be said that the *Alvin* tales published so far - *Seventh Son*, *Red Prophet* and *Prentice Alvin* - are the most clearest examples of good vs. evil in Card's writing.

It's an alternate, early nineteenth century America. Britain is still ruled by a Lord Protector two centuries on, and Bonaparte is an upstart French general sent out to the colonies to cool off. The Stuarts live in exile in the south. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, *et al.*, are big names, but the United States never happened. And here is the big difference - the normal, everyday folk of America use a normal, everyday type of magic - charms, spells, etc. Certain people have certain specialities - Dowders, Torches and so forth. And once in a while, once in an era, a Maker is born - someone who can shape matter, whose overpowering urge is to create, to bring order and pattern out of chaos. The last Maker, theorises Miss Larner in *Prentice Alvin*, probably had the skill of turning water into wine....

Mormons also believe that North America's original inhabitants were immigrants from the Middle East (Jerusalem, specifically), guided there by God thousands of years ago. This makes them pretty special and, sure enough, in the books the Indians (known as Reds) are the good guys - one of them is Alvin's most influential guru. Oh, there are those who just want to fight the whites, but they get the usual Card perception-shift treatment and emerge as goodies. At the end of *Red Prophet*, some of the less-enlightened whites go on a killing spree of Reds and are punished by one of fantasy fiction's most truly horrific curses. Read the book.

America as the Promised Land (where the actual *Americans* need a lot of improvement). The idea that men can become Gods (the American Dream?!). The pioneering, frontier spirit. Oh, it's Mormon all right.

BUT - there is no preaching. It's Mormon influences, not a message. You don't have to buy it. And if anyone points out that until recently the Mormons had a less-than-enlightened attitude towards people of colour - well, so do a lot of people here. The *bad* guys. The good guys couldn't care less about colour. Card is a *modern* Mormon.

This isn't meant as a hagiography, and I'll be the first to admit that Card has his faults. A tendency to use two words when one would do comes to mind.... Next down the list is his attitude to sex. Take the *Alvin* stories. These are fantasies that come like a

breath of fresh air in the midst of the usual triple-decker bricksize epics that flood our bookshops but, apart from eighteen-year-old Alvin's occasional musing that, well, a girlfriend would be kinda nice, sex is either utterly irrelevant to the plot or it's coldblooded and clinical. "Come on, Scott," the reader cries, "half your characters are teenagers for at least part of the story, and they don't give sex a thought?"

Or Josef, the homosexual character in **Songmaster** who talks so calculatively about the contrasting percentages of how much he's attracted to men and how much to women. You get the impression that everyone he meets, man or woman, is judged and given a score and, if they make a certain grade, he's attracted to them. Still, it's a good effort from Card, considering that the official view of his religion on the subject would not look out of place on the Isle of Man. **Songmaster** even goes so far as to have a homosexual love scene which despite its offputting (and climactic, but not in the usual way) ending is handled with sensitivity and tenderness.

And, in mitigation, Card is (to use his own words) a good little Mormon boy who saw the sixties through the wrong end, and if he wrote about the subject in any greater depth it would probably be a disaster. It also means that the characters can get on with the story in peace, and when they do fall in love you can actually feel glad for them.

Going into everything Card has ever written would need a book on the subject. I haven't mentioned **Wyrms** or **A Planet Called Treason** at all, or gone into **Songmaster** in any depth, but I have mentioned what I think is the best stuff. My advice is: start with the short fiction in **Maps in a Mirror**, go on to the Alvin stories, maybe graduate to the science fiction novels. Even if you're one of those to whom the very idea of starting on a series is anathema - well, I'm one too. I honestly feel that in this case it'll be worth it.

Cardography

(SF and Fantasy Novels Only)

A Planet Called Treason

Definitely one for the fans only. Card has yet to find his voice. Very early stuff, not especially well written. Still interesting

in the proto-Card tropes: an optimistic yet fallible protagonist with a liking for the simple, rural life - sadly all in one unlikeable character.

The Worthing Saga *

The Card we know and love begins to emerge. Protagonists begin to show signs of self-doubt. Also first showing of Card's compulsion to destroy complex societies and replace with simple ones. Note *somec*, the suspended animation drug that only the rich can afford. Your social status depends on how much *somec* you can use to while away the centuries.

Songmaster **

Protagonist begins actively to loathe what he is, but he keeps on with his life's mission - another Cardism. First time a protagonist actually has greatness thrust upon him. Features Card's one and only gay character.

Wyrms *

Card marks time here - a good read, but no major developments in style. Also suffers from having a title that ought to belong to a Pratchett book (though nothing else about it does.) First female protagonist. Note the house where practically every item of significant knowledge in the world is written down - [but you have to ask the right question to get it].

Hart's Hope **

A well-realised, gritty fantasy world, though the pacing is variable. The magic obeys convincingly worked-out laws - no *deus ex machina* powers or anything. Absolutely no Tolkienesque, saintly do-gooder heroes or Dark Lords. Plenty of ambivalent people you wouldn't really want to know. Great stuff! Wipes the floor with **Villains**.

Seventh Son/Red Prophet/Prentice Alvin**

There's not much I can say that hasn't already been said, if not by me here then by someone else. This alternate frontier America is one of the most original and convincing fantasies now in print. The series developed from Card's poem 'Prentice Alvin and the No-good Plow', which is daunting because the third book is only part of the way through the poem's story.

Ender's Game **

The novella was deliberately expanded so as to create the background for the adult Ender in the next book. Portrayal of an army of children (they have no moral values, you see), zero-gee fighting and an interstellar war fought at sublight speeds. Note that it

was written before **Alien** hit our screens, so the image of an alien Queen didn't originally carry quite the connotations that it might now.

Speaker for the Dead ****

Best yet - a book you don't mind reading into the early hours. Card wields his characters like a master. Ender atones for his previous sins. Fascinating interdependent biological setup on the colony world of Lusitania, with the Piggies, the trees and the descolada virus, which makes leprosy look like a mild rash but which is essential to the whole caboodle. Enables the memorable straight line from the next book: "Here's a killer tree if ever I saw one! (p322)"



Xenocide **

Not bad, but still the least of the Ender stories so far. Chapters of this were published together as a separate novella, 'Gloriously Bright', in **Analog**, and that was the best bit. Interesting, though, that Ender finally starts being fallible - he's so good at saving the world he's no good at handling his own family. Sadly *deus ex machina* ending - Heinlein-esque overtones of breaking all the laws of physics where centuries of scientists have failed just by putting your mind to it, because plot requires it. I also thought of the solution they use for the descolada virus before the characters did, and it takes them thirty years.

Folk of the Fringe ***

Vignettes of a Mormon-dominated, post-holocaust North America. The West is becoming fertile and Salt Lake City is half-drowned. Interesting to us gentiles because of its genuine feel for Mormon family life. Also actually makes you feel sympathetic towards the American Way - the land of the free and the home of the brave. Nice that their idea of the pre-holocaust golden age doesn't quite match our on-the-spot perceptions.

Barbed Wire Kisses

Magazines Reviewed by Maureen Speller

When I show visitors round the house, they marvel at the books. "All those books", they say admiringly, but show them the serried ranks of magazines and there's not a flicker. True, my back runs of SF magazines don't look terribly interesting, but to me they are as important as the novels and the anthologies. They're important because they offer a more accurate reflection of what is going down in SF and fantasy writing at any given moment. The Datlow/Windling and Dozois anthologies give you the best of the short stories, but the magazines give you everything, the good and the downright awful.

If, as Ernest Hogan, recently claimed in *SF EYE #10*, short story writing is in terminal decline (he lays the blame for this on over-generous editors, but that's a discussion for another place) then the regular magazine readers will be the ones to spot it. Except that Hogan also claims that people don't read SF magazines any more. I don't know, but I can't believe that I'm the only person who believes that SF short stories are the cutting edge of work in the genre, with novels as a kind of Johnny-come-lately aberration. And I can't believe that the publishers consider it worth their while to continue covering trees in newsprint just because they feel vindictive towards the environment. So, let's assume there are other people like me, who like SF short stories, and who think they're worth critical interest. What's on offer for them? And if, marooned on that famous deserted island, they could only choose one magazine, which would it be?

In this column I'm concentrating on discussion of what I consider to be the "mass market" SF magazines, to wit, *Amazing*[™] *Stories*, *Analog*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Interzone*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and, new kids on the block, *Pulphouse*. Curiously enough, alphabetical order almost matches order of age. The definition of

"mass market" is necessarily loose. For example, I had planned to include *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, but I've only seen one copy of it so far, and unlike the other magazines, it's quarterly, with a more limited distribution, the six titles listed have all, at one time or another, had a fairly wide-ranging newsstand distribution and continue to be widely available.

When I started the lengthy research for this article, I was casting round for ways of comparing the magazines. Comparing the fiction across the board was one possibility, but as the same names tend to crop up in different magazines this comparison seemed, if not pointless then insufficient as a criterion. Do you jump up and down on Magazine A because author X has had a poor story printed, when magazine B has a much better story from the same author? You can, but it doesn't mean much unless magazine A has an outstanding record of buying the second-grade output of authors, and none of the magazines I'll be reviewing here could be accused of that. Lapses of judgement, yes, for all editors are human, but consistent poor judgement tends to mean no magazine. Punters vote with their wallets, it's as brutal as that. What did catch my attention fairly early on was the peripherals used by each magazine to interest the reader who wasn't sure she wanted her fiction straight. I rapidly realised that you can make a stab at the overall profile of a magazine's readership by looking at the "rocks" it offers as well as at the fiction, which is what I plan to do.

Amazing

Amazing[™] *Stories* has a long and chequered history, stretching back to 1926, when it was conceived and edited by Hugo Gernsback, the "Father of Science Fiction". It would take a strong interest in the history of science fiction to read some of what was being published then for Gernsback's interest lay in the science as much as in the fiction, an attitude which still holds sway in

certain camps. He refused to acknowledge any plot elements which might not be achieved through scientific development, dismissing them as "fairy tales". What he would make of *Amazing*'s most recent incarnation is anyone's guess.

There was fluttering in the dovecoat back in 1982, when TSR Hobbies, Inc., producers of *Dungeons and Dragons*[™], bought up the title and magazine aficionados waited to see what would happen. TSR appointed George Scithers as editor, and the format was similar to that of *Asimov's*, from whence he had come. Merged with its stablemate *Fantastic*, *Amazing* carried a mixture of science fiction and fantasy writing, similar to, but not indistinguishable from, *Asimov's* and *F&SF*. In 1990, it was expanded to quarto-sized glossy format, reminiscent of *Omnib*.

To those accustomed to the sleazy-looking American digest magazines, and *Interzone's*, by comparison, urbane style, *Amazing* comes as something of a shock. Glossy paper is used throughout, and the magazine makes a feature of highly-finished artwork for each story, reminiscent of the overwrought, photographic style of The Brothers Hildebrandt. It takes a little getting used to, but it has its attractions. Why shouldn't SF magazines look good as well as reading nicely?

The look suggests that the magazine is appealing to a more general market than the digests, which thrive on subscriber loyalty, in the States at least. It would certainly attract attention on the newsstand. And if the look implies a non-specialist market, what about the fiction? This is where the real surprises begin. Granted, the fiction is not the most dangerous and experimental you'll read, and the last five issues have featured one or two real horrors, but for all that, the editor, Kim Mohan, has a catholic taste, and I enjoy reading the magazine. You won't find the thrustingest new writers here, but you'll certainly find those nibbling at the big

time as well as the more established writers. Names like Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Alexander Jablovskov and Marcos Donnelly, as well as people like James Morrow, Anne McCaffrey and Mercedes Lackey, Roger Zelazny and Paul Di Filippo. The range is as broad as that list of names implies.

You'll also find one or two people who should be consigned to the outer darkness. 'Deep Gladiators' by Philip C Jennings, in the May 1992 issue, is a classic example of how to ruin a story through too much infodumping. He is an **Amazing** regular, and I wasn't too impressed with his 'The Vortex' in the July 1992 issue. Long-time regulars are a problem with any magazine. Editorial loyalty can obscure the fact that a story is awful, and demands from undiscerning readers for more of the same, one of the reasons why the pulps were originally so popular, can make life difficult for those in search of a little innovation.

Peripherals are perfunctory, which suggests to me that the editor is primarily concerned with fiction. Robert Silverberg turns in a thoughtful column each month, and there are some brief book reviews, wide-ranging in the choice of titles, and including obscurities like Damon Knight's new critical magazine, **Monad**. There is a science column, inevitably, but given the resurgence in interest in science relating to science fiction, this isn't a bad thing. It's well-written and accessible and suits this unreformed arts student very nicely. My one major objection to the magazine is the taster chapters from forthcoming books. I presume the publishers pay for this privilege, so it is a valuable source of income, but it distracts from the short fiction in the magazine and takes up valuable space.

Analog

Amazing has come a long way since Gernsback's "scientifiction", but I'm not sure you could say the same for **Analog**. I admit that of the mass-market magazines I regularly read, this is the one I like least. I used to think that this was because it was so scientific, but lately I read the science fact articles with more interest than the science fiction, which at times is the literary equivalent of Mogadon. There are good reasons why stories from **Analog** tend not to feature in Dozois' Best of the Year anthologies, and they have to do with that word "best". Nevertheless, **Analog** is a venerable institution and can still surprise, even if its great days are past.

It is almost as old as **Amazing**, first produced in 1930, when it was known as

Astounding (the name-change came in the early 60s). Undoubtedly, the most important event in **Astounding's**, and by extension science fiction's, history was the appointment of John W Campbell as editor in 1937. Whatever we may now feel about Campbell, there is no doubt that his influence on the writing of SF was seminal. He fuelled writers with ideas, and many authors testify to the effect that Campbell had on their writing careers. There is good reason to refer to that time as the Golden Age of SF. Of course, many people now consider Campbell's style of SF to be old-fashioned but in its day it was innovative and challenging, if somewhat restricted where social and moral values were concerned. Campbell edited the magazine for 34 years and, while he maintained standards, he also stifled any chance of progress in the magazine's attitudes. After his death, Ben Bova took over as editor, easing the passage of the magazine into more liberal times, though not without protest from readers. The current editor is Stanley Schmidt, who took over in 1978

Familiar digest size, the magazine has could probably pass for **Asimov's** if you weren't paying attention. The contents are a mixture of novellas, novelettes and short stories, mixed up with science fact, articles, and an irritating fiction feature called "Probability Zero", which reflects the chances of my reading it regularly. In this, a writer waxes magisterially about the future. Whatever else it does, **Analog** is big on didacticism. I also find it distinctly right-wing. Schmidt's editorials, and the guest editorials of people like Reginald Bretnor, have more than once offended me with their reactionary views.

Moving on to the fiction, each story, accompanied by often fuzzy title art, is prefaced by a homiletic sentence which, tells the reader how to approach the story, pointing out the impending moral and the right attitude to adopt. It's an irritating attitude, which indicates that if you follow us, everything will be fine because We Know What's Right. It is certainly faithful to Campbell's vision of bringing the value of science to everyone's attention; the message is driven home by inspiring little quotes from great men, interlining the texts.

The fiction is scientific in flavour, Nancy Kress's Alaskon address noted that the trouble with science fiction is that writers are willing to sacrifice characterisation on the altar of scientific correctness. The technical changes are what's interesting so it doesn't matter if they happen to two-dimensional cardboard cut-outs. This seems to be the attitude here, which is why it came as a

shock to discover Roger MacBride Allen's **The Modular Man** being serialised in this magazine, particularly as it seemed to be concerned with states of consciousness, and definitions of humanity as applied to cyborgs. Actually, he is more interested in the techno-junk rather than the philosophical implications of the transfer of consciousness from the human brain to an AI, which reinforces my initial perception of the magazine, but there might yet be hope.

So why bother reading it if I hate the magazine so much? Two reasons - some of the authors tend not to appear elsewhere, even people like Charles Sheffield and Michael Flynn, who are more readable than the average **Analog** writer and I enjoy the science articles, and some of Tom Easton's book reviews. However, **Analog** is a magazine I work at rather than read for pleasure.

F&SF

Fantasy and Science Fiction, originally **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction**, is another magazine with a distinguished pedigree. Begun in 1949, it briefly included both Anthony Boucher (best-known as a crime writer) and Avram Davidson among its editors, before Joseph Ferman, and later his son Edward, took control. It's only recently that Ed Ferman finally stood down as editor, to concentrate on publishing the magazine, nominating rising star, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, as his successor.

F&SF has long been a favourite magazine of mine, because of its synthesis of fantasy, before it became an adjunct of the Gothic bodice-ripper-with-dragons genre, and science fiction without rivet-counting. Recently I have read it as an act of devotion rather than because I really enjoy it. Each issue has one or two high points, but there has been a sense of tiredness about it. I have most relished the intermittent book reviews by Algis Budrys, a master of discursive criticism, and the regular reviews from Orson Scott Card who is a very sharp commentator on other people's fiction. When so many magazines seem to believe that reviewing means giving a quick précis of the plot, I take great pleasure in the fact that pulp does not necessarily equate with crap, so that readers of **F&SF** are getting some of the best popular criticism around.

KKR did not come storming in when she assumed the editorial seat but instead quietly set about introducing innovations, the first being an editorial. Editorials are a mixed blessing, as both Schmidt and Asimov have demonstrated. Like Mohan, Rusch takes a

small incident and relates it to her experience as an SF writer and editor. It's often as anodyne as *Thought for the Day*, but you have a sense of someone thinking about the readers but not lecturing. I've heard it suggested that Rusch is right-wing in her thinking and that this shows in her editorials. I've gone over a few but my political antennae are either very blunt or I'm more reactionary than I thought I was, for I have no sense of her lambasting me with demands that all races should assimilate themselves into the Great American Dream of Brotherhood, as did one notable contributor to *Analog*.

It is impossible to tell how far through the inventory Rusch has worked her way, what are her purchases and what are Ferman's, but I feel that the stories are becoming harder-edged and more interesting. Not slipstream, but certainly not traditional, Golden Age fiction. *F&SF* has a distinctive stable of writers, they're different from those of, say, *Analog*. Less lip service is paid to the grand masters. Writers are, for the most part, of a younger generation though Algis Budrys unexpectedly pops up in a recent issue. We are more often talking at the level of Alan Dean Foster, who turns in some very amusing stories about Mad Amos Malone, as well as people like Tanith Lee and Jane Yolen. We also have the not-so-young Turks, like the two Pats, Cadigan and Murphy, Sterling, di Filippo and a clutch of new writers, people on their first or second story, unlike *Amazing* and *Analog* who both prefer tried and tested authors. *F&SF* is more receptive to new and experimental writing, but there is still a limit to how far off the wall they're willing to bounce, even if it is further than in Ferman's time as editor.

Although digest size, *F&SF* does have striking, readable covers, thanks to the lettering design. Consequently, *F&SF* is an attractive looking package. Peripherals are very respectable. The science column was, until shortly before his death, written by Isaac Asimov. Whatever I might feel about his dreadful egotisms in his own magazine, Asimov was a first-rate commentator on science, and was undoubtedly a hard act to follow. Rusch has managed it, albeit by employing two science writers, Gregory Benford and Bruce Sterling. Oh God, not Bruce Sterling again, I hear people mutter. He's a talented and opinionated commentator and polemicist, something the world badly needs. It's going to be interesting to see what reaction he provokes, particularly as *F&SF*, does not include a letters column. Gregory Benford is of course a real live scientist and while I find a lot of

his fiction as palatable as dry toast; as a commentator on science, he is very readable. One could wish that his first column hadn't so rigorously let us know that he's, you know, a friend of Stephen Hawking (pause for reverent hush) but subsequent columns look as though they'll address scientific issues without requiring the reader to possess three PhDs.

Interzone

The next magazine on the list is *Interzone*, *enfant terrible* of the British publishing scene. Well not so *enfant* now, as *Interzone* is ten years old, which makes it younger than Asimov's. It has been described as our national magazine, as though it's a "Living Treasure", when it certainly is not. Let's get a few things straight here. *Interzone* is the only professional or semi-professional SF magazine published in this country with anything approaching mass circulation (I leave David Pringle, *Locus* and the Hugo administrators to split hairs as to what it actually is, for it hovers uneasily in the void between two categories). It is not the only SF magazine published in this country, but it is the only one you are likely to find on the newsstands, subject to demographic whim (I've never seen it in Folkestone, for example, though I can buy *Omni*).

Interzone, the magazine you love to gripe about, the one you read for the non-fiction but certainly not for the fiction; the complaints are endless, and equalled only by the number of people who take a venomous delight in reporting that they never read the magazine. Are the complaints well-founded? It's a tricky question. Quite apart from anything else, *Interzone* is more or less all we've had since the demise of *New Worlds*, at least until the surge in small press activity began five or six years ago. Consequently, a huge constituency of British SF readers, ranging from those locked in the Golden Age right through to those on the furthest atom of the cutting edge, have all looked to *Interzone* to satisfy their needs, not least as a local outlet for their own fiction.

And what of *Interzone*'s vision of itself? The first editorial, signed by David Pringle, last surviving member of the original editorial team, stated that *Interzone* would bring before a wide but discerning readership "the best fantastic fiction we can find", fantastic meaning speculative fiction rather than a preponderance of dragons. Initially, it had a rather "arty-farty" feel to it, certainly according to a lot of its denigrators, but rapidly it assumed a role which was to be

significant in the eyes of many of its readers, the ones who kept a typewriter at the bottom of the knapsack. It was going to search out new writers, very welcome when the only markets were in the States and it cost a fortune to submit manuscripts.

It's debatable whether *Interzone* has discovered quite as many new writers as it implies, especially as in recent issues I could only find four writers entirely new to the magazine, two of whom had already sold elsewhere. In many ways, I suspect it has transcended that function, particularly since the small press swung into action, but it did introduce us to the Baby Bs (Baxter, Brooke and Brown, linear descendants of the Killer Bs; Brin, Bear and Benford) as well as to the rich, baroque fiction of Ian McLeod and Richard Calder.

The point is that *Interzone* has evolved while its potential readership's expectations have not. It disappoints those who want it to remain faithfully British, but when will any editor pass up a good story? When I briefly edited *The Gate* I planned a policy of two thirds British to one third anything else, but it wasn't easy to maintain that balance, not least because there are so many more American writers, and standards have to come before regional chauvinism.

So where is *Interzone* now? Basically it's a solid and stolid regular SF magazine, published in Britain, with some interesting stories, and some not, struggling to break free of some out of date notions. Pringle as editor does not have the flair of Rusch, Dozois or Dean Wesley Smith, but he keeps the magazine rolling along, despite ill-advised excursions into the realms of fantasy and popular fiction. He's taken it from quarterly, through bi-monthly, to monthly publication in ten years, something which does deserve recognition. Some fresh blood in the editorial team might not come amiss, plus an assessment of what they're doing, but there's a long way to go before the magazine becomes moribund.

Interzone's strength lies in its non-fiction; criticism from the likes of Paul McAuley, John Clute and Nick Lowe (who turns in the best film reviews I've seen in any of the magazines) makes the cover price worth paying. I'm not so convinced about the stream of interviews with various people though I can see that for those who take no other magazine, they must increase its appeal. Even the readers' letters are surprisingly interesting when you rack them up against the letters columns in some of the American magazines, though I wish Pringle would curb his enthusiasm for publishing the gushier letters of praise. The same habit

persists in **Million** and I find it sickening and self-congratulatory; to be fair, he does publish the critical ones as well, or some of them; as readers we never know exactly what editors receive in return. It's a competent magazine, though I am irritated by the faintly patronising editorial tone and Pringle's regal use of "we".

Asimov's

Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, until recently, was dominated by the presence of Asimov himself, interesting since he claimed to have no hand in the story selection. I know one should not speak ill of the dead, but I would have said the same thing while he was alive; while the fiction was good, the editorials sucked. As he freely admitted, Asimov had a monstrous ego, but he did nothing to restrain it, making the editorials painful to read, likewise the responses to letters. In fact **Asimov's** was a paradigmatic example as to why letter columns were a bad thing. I stopped reading the editorials and the letters pages, turning straight to the fiction. Editorials are now mostly a memory. Dozois is contributing a guest editorial and other people will be invited to follow suit from time to time, but the intention is to concentrate on good fiction.

The only thing I disliked more than the editorials were Baird Searles' book reviews which are alas still with us. One falls with gratitude on the occasional columns from Norman Spinrad, who dispenses criticism with a razor, while Searles delivers it like an infant wielding a blunt butter knife. On peripherals, it's **Asimov's** which lets you down, every which way. Maybe Dozois doesn't care one way or the other about them. Fair enough; for the fiction is comparable to that in **F&SF** though more mainstream within the genre. It's a fine distinction though, and Dozois is the man who brought us Pat Cadigan's '50 Ways to Improve Your Orgasm', which is not about what you think it is. Unfortunately, Dozois also brought us Maggie Flinn's '50 More Ways to Improve Your Orgasm', which is about exactly what you think it is, and not half so witty. When Gardner Dozois has a bad day, it is, as with most things involving Dozois, on an heroic scale. But Dozois is also the man who brought you 'Bears Discover Fire' by Terry Bisson, 'Cibola' by Connie Willis, Haldeman's 'the Hemingway Hoax' and a host of other excellent stories.

Pulphouse

A recent correspondent to **Pulphouse**; **A Fiction Magazine** claimed that **Asimov's**

published "anal-retentive techno-fiction", a description more applicable to **Analogue** I feel, but it gives you a flavour of what **Pulphouse** promises to be, contentious and up-front about itself.

This is the newest of the more obviously mass-market, mass-appeal magazines, and is at the literary end of the scale. The original conception, a weekly SF magazine, was attractive but ill-advised; the birth was protracted and messy. It was quickly borne in upon the publishers that distributors were not thrilled with the idea of a weekly magazine, as they'd scarcely have time to put one traditionally slow-mover on the shelf before taking it off for the next one. Newsstands do not like to keep back numbers, and the standard sale-or-return (ie dump the mag, send back the cover) routine would have lost a lot of money. The next move was an announcement that the magazine would be fortnightly, after which there was silence for six months, until June this year when issue 9 appeared and **Pulphouse** settled down to a monthly schedule. The birth was finally over.

American quarto-sized, with glossy covers but pulp paper inside (unlike **Interzone** with a matt cover and glossy paper inside) **Pulphouse** promises to be eclectic though not as daring as the top of the small press. The contributors are drawn from among the younger and less well-known writers, though both Lisa Tuttle and Suzy McKee Charnas have had powerful and resonant stories published in recent issues.

Strangely enough, like **Interzone**, **Pulphouse's** current strength lies in its non-fiction. True, some of it is fluff, particularly the contributions from Esther Friesner, and Debra Gray Cook & Nina Kiriki Hoffman, but Barry N Malzberg is writing a regular column, and Jack Chalker turns in a fairly opinionated regular survey of the specialty press. Nancy Kress delivered a contentious one-off, a practice I hope will be encouraged.

We need to see more people talking about SF, not just explaining where they get their ideas from. Charles De Lint, a writer whose fiction I regularly revile to anyone who'll listen, turns out to be a perceptive if somewhat rosy-tinted columnist, and then there is Uncle Harlan. Avuncular is not an adjective I've ever thought of applying to Harlan Ellison, a writer at times so opinionated you want to hurl his writings against the wall, but dammit, when he turns down the ego and starts talking about his craft, he is fascinating. As he says, he calls 'em as he sees 'em and it's probably best to

do the same with him

Of the six, I'm currently most excited by **Pulphouse**, simply because it is the newest, and I hope it will continue giddily and uniquely on its way. Pushed to a favourite, I can't honestly choose between **F&SF** and **Asimov's**, with **Interzone** as a sidebar, because it is British and gives some glimpse of what's going on in the British SF group-mind, if only by default or omission.

Amazing is lighter, more entertaining, and I won't reiterate my opinion of **Analogue**. The point I'm making is that each one has its strengths and weaknesses, and you pick and choose according to your need, or if you're as obsessive as me, you buy the lot and then gripe about their deficiencies.

Which brings us to the end of a brief critical survey of the biggies. In future columns, some lucky souls will be scrutinising individual issues and discussing the stories in them, but I felt it appropriate to kick off with a broad survey of what's available.

I've been asked to talk about availability of these magazines in this country. Obviously you're talking about dealing with the specialty shops and mail-order outlets, and placing standing orders, which is what I do. Prices vary, so I'll not quote for any American magazines. If you haven't got an outlet locally, then I advise you to either contact Andromeda Bookshop (84 Suffolk St, Birmingham, B1) or else Fantast (Medway) Ltd, PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs, PE14 9BU, either of whom are likely to be able to help you.

Interzone is available in specialty shops and some branches of WH Smiths, or you can place a subscription directly with the magazine at 217 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6FL. A year's subscription costs £26, and cheques should be made payable to "Interzone".

Before I finish, thanks to the editors of **Scheherazade** and **Territories** for providing review copies of their magazines. I'd appreciate review copies from any other magazine editors reading this. I'm still looking for volunteers to help with reviewing. I'd start picking on people but I haven't the faintest idea who reads what. I've had one volunteer so far, any chance of a few more, so I can edit this column rather than write it?

Review copies of magazines should be sent to Maureen Speller at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ. Also contact Maureen Speller if you are interested in reviewing magazines. Please list those magazines which you read regularly.

Magic In The Real World

Lisa Tuttle

Interviewed by Catie Cary

I met Lisa Tuttle on a sunny Saturday in June, fresh from a signing session for *Lost Futures*. I recognised her immediately as I had seen her on television a few years ago in the *Horror Cafe* with Clive Barker and other luminaries of the horror genre, improvising a horror story around a dinner table. I asked how that came about:

"Well, I gather they did one first where they had a bunch of comedy writers or comedians which was a disaster because it ended up with one of them insulting the others, they got into some huge argument and then one guy walked out. So they left it for a while thinking that the idea was not very good. Then they thought they'd do one with horror writers, and my understanding is that they were going to do some others like mystery writers, but I haven't seen them."

"It was enjoyable oddly enough... when they told me that I was going to be sitting round a dinner table, eating dinner I thought 'I can't eat dinner when somebody's taping me.' And they wire you up, they clip this thing on your belt, and you've got a microphone, and you're aware when you move in your seat, and they say 'just be natural!' The first few minutes were a bit awkward, I was very aware of the lights glaring down on me and that every word was being recorded. But then, we got into the discussion, which was open-ended and endlessly interesting. I don't know how it developed that we were telling a story round the table, I don't know if that was the original plan, whether it was Clive's idea, whether it was the producer's idea or whether it just emerged somehow. At first I thought this sounds like a terrible idea, to try and make up a story amongst a whole group of people, but it was fun, and when I saw the program, I was surprised at how entertaining it was."

A number of Lisa's stories have as their theme the loss of control, is this a personal fear?

"I suppose that it's something I find very frightening; it's something that almost everyone can identify with. It goes back to childhood, I think life is a process where you learn how the world works, or how you think it works and you gain certain measures of control; I think it would be nightmarish if you were to be reduced to the limits of an infant or a child again. To me it's a very potent image."

To watch life happening around you without being able to affect it...

"Yes, that's the same fear as of madness. They're sometimes talked about as if they're different fears, losing control and madness, but they're both different types of control, and not even control over others, but just control over yourself, over your own perceptions. When I think about scary things, that's the scariest."

Lisa's first novel was *Windhaven*, a collaboration with George RR Martin. How did that come about?

"It was going to be a short story, and at the time I knew a number of other young writers, we were all at about the same stage of our careers, had a few stories published, and for some reason we all got into this thing of collaborating; people would be at a party, or a writer's workshop or a convention and somebody would have an idea and start talking about it to somebody else and before you knew it they'd be off together writing it. Now many years later when I said something about 'well you know it just kind of happened', George said 'don't you realise this was intended to be a seduction ploy?', I thought how can I get Lisa away from all these other people so that we can just sit in a bar and talk'. It was at a convention, when he said, 'I'm thinking we could do a collaboration', so because it was common currency, I said 'Yes, that sounds like fun, let's go off to the bar and talk about it.' ..."

"It was just going to be a short story, but

when we started writing it, it became longer. We wrote the first draft, where we set up the conflict, and solved it with Maris presenting her case so well that every one was won over, 'Yes, you can have the wings', fine, nothing else happens, we sent this to Ben Bova, who was editing *Analog* at the time, and he said 'I really liked it, but, this is not a story, you have no real conflict; you set it up; then it's all settled so easily; I need more of a story'. So, we talked about it, thought about it, wrote it, it then turned into a novella, but at the same time it threw up all these other ideas. We started saying, 'we could write more stories, growing out of this, naturally.'"

"At one time we were torn between expanding the novella that we had, just add more to it and do it as a young adult novel, because the character was quite young. Or we thought, we can follow Maris's life, which is what we did, or we had ideas for other stories, it took us years to write it. So although it was my first novel, it wasn't written in the way that novels usually are written. It was written in three separate chunks, with quite a few years between the first chunk and the second chunk; but then the third chunk was written almost immediately after the second, because by then we realised we nearly had a novel. It wasn't going to turn out to be six or seven stories, we just needed one more."

"Something that I think was unusual about that book, it felt like that to us at the time, was that we didn't have a happy romantic end..."

She should have gone off with Dorrell...

"Yes, exactly, her first lover is not her life's partner. It's more like real life. You fall in love with someone when you're young, but you're not necessarily with them when you're middle-aged."

"Part of the impulse behind writing it, for me anyway, was at the time, I had had stories published in *F&SF*, I had not ever sold anything to *Analog*, and I felt that it was too difficult, I felt cut off from that, and George had had stories published in *Analog*, so when he approached me about a collaboration, I said 'I'd like it to be a story we can sell to *Analog*.' I'm not a hard science writer at all, and neither is George, so it ended up being an adventure story. It was just a wish-fulfilment

fantasy, writing about flying. Neither of us are hang-gliders or had ever flown a small plane, yet part of the book was serialised in a magazine for hang-gliders, and we got some fan letters from people saying 'it's obvious that you must be hang-gliders, because you write about it so well.'

"Because it was a collaboration it's unlike anything I would have written on my own, or anything I've written since. Because it wasn't a Lisa Tuttle book, and it's not like things George has written since, although it may be slightly closer to his area."

What did she read as a child?

"As a child? My favourite books were books that were not total fantasies. They were books that were set in the real world, with intrusions of the fantastic. Like I loved E Nesbit and Edward Eager."

I loved *The Story of the Amulet*, and Edward Eager wrote *Half Magic*, I read all those...

"Yes, those were my favourites, and then books about time travel, I always loved *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce. When I first moved to this country, I lived in a house, Ortygia House, which seemed to me like the house in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, because the woman who owns it, lives at the top of the house, she's in her nineties, and there's a beautiful garden at the back, at the front there's a very busy road, but a magic garden. And I could imagine this old woman at the top of the house dreaming, she wasn't brought up there, she moved there when she was newly-widowed. In the 19... before I was born, so it wasn't her story. But she remembers things like driving around in a pony and cart, she remembers another world."

Had she ever come across the *Green Knowe* books by Lucy Boston?

"Yes, I loved those, in fact, when I came here I wanted to go there, so I wrote her a letter, and she said 'Yes, come'. When I arrived there, she was surprised that I didn't have a child with me. Because she said most people who come, bring their children. And so I said, 'Well, I don't have any children, but I love the books'. She showed me around and I took a lot of photographs; it was magical. I'm so grateful that I went. Because she's dead now, she died quite a few years ago, she was very old then. I loved those books, it was wonderful to see that it was a real place. I like that, I like a book with a very strong sense of place, and if possible a real place; and then something magical."

Was she an avid reader?

"I was always reading. Then I wrote, I can't remember when I didn't write, just like I

can't remember when I didn't read, they started at the same time. I read books and I wanted to write them."

Did she always want to write?

"Oh yes, I had a fairly realistic assessment of the writer's life, and I used to think, 'Well, I'll probably have to get a job', except that I also thought, 'Well, I'll have a job, then I'll get married and I'll quit my job, and then when the children are old enough to go to school, I'll write books.' My life didn't turn out like that, but I always knew that even if I had a job doing something else, teaching school or working on a newspaper or whatever, that I would be writing, because I've always done it. I didn't just want to write, I always wrote."

What does she read now?

"I read all sorts of things. I was reading a lot of science fiction for reviews, but now I've decided that I just want to read what I want to read, because I don't have so much time for reading now that I've got a child."

She has a child, now?

"Yes, I've got a baby. She's sixteen months old, so she takes up a lot of time. But, fortunately, my husband is also freelance, so we both do a share of the childcare, so I do have time to write, but I don't have a lot of time to read. I really have quite wide-ranging tastes. I don't read very much contemporary fantasy, because it all tends to look too much the same to me. However, I was talking before about the blending of real life with something fantastic. An excellent, brilliant example of that is a book I read last week: it's *The Course of the Heart* by M John Harrison.

Another really good book that I read

happening. It's magic in the real world. That to me, evokes what I used to find as a child".

Is it difficult to find time to write now that she has a child?

"It's fine when Colin's home. He's an editor, and he recently took on a job that means he has to come down to London about twice a month, so that he's away for a few days. When he's away, I can't work. The only time I can work is if Emily takes a nap in the afternoon. But I know she's going to wake up, so I can't concentrate; I just do the chores. I could work at night, but usually I find I'm tired, because she gets up early in the day. When Colin's there, he works in the morning and I look after her, and then in the afternoon he looks after her, and I've got the whole afternoon, which is all I need. When I used to have all day, every day to write, I wasted a lot of time just sitting there and thinking. Now I have to be more ruthless with myself; I have to do my thinking whenever I can, and not wait till I'm sitting at my desk. I have to use my sitting-at-a-desk time for actually writing. Looking at the progress I'm making on the novel I'm writing now, I feel quite certain that I would not be writing it any faster if I had every day to write, because I'm making better progress than I did with my last novel. I think that I'll have the first draft finished by the end of the summer. I have to take every day as it comes. As Emily gets older it may be more difficult. But then in a few years, she'll be off at playgroup, and then she'll be off at school..."

Lisa was describing *Lost Futures* in interviews three or four years ago, why has it taken so long to appear?

"It took me a long time to write and then when I sold it to Grafton, they had a very long lead time. When they scheduled it for 1992, I thought 'What?' I did some rewrites after I sold it, but I did the final rewrite when I was pregnant, which wasn't that long ago, but two years, three years... It's quite a while."

Lisa's stories are often ambiguous about the supernatural.

We're often led to believe that, for instance, this is reincarnation, but then later on doubt is cast, there is never any certainty,

Artwork by Claire Willoughby



recently is Jonathan Carroll's *After Silence*. Both of those are books that are grounded in the real world, then there's this fabulous strange stuff, that's

"Yeah, my attitude is I can't take a lot of the supernatural thing totally seriously, I feel happier with it if you can take it both ways. I think that these things do happen, or should I say that people experience these things."

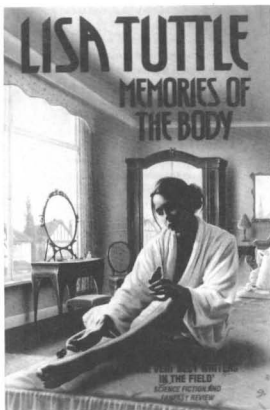
She is more interested in what the person is experiencing?

"Yes, so I find it harder to present something as if it's totally unquestionably real. It's real to a person, but that leaves it open to you to interpret that that person might have been mad, hallucinating or whatever. It feels more true to me, and it comes down to being more interested in the character, and their interior experience, than some idea about ghosts or whatever. I'm more interested in why this person might have seen this ghost, and what it does to them."

She has said in the past that she prefers writing short stories to novels, yet she has another novel on the way, is this still true?

"I think I've changed; I still find short stories easier, but I find that in the last few years, most of my ideas have felt like they need more length to explore them. The novel I'm writing now, is called *The Pillow Friend*: at least that's its working title. I tried to write it as a short story about five years ago. That short story is unrecognisable from what the novel is now, but it began from the same basic idea. I couldn't handle it in a short story; I recognised that. I began to think of it as a novella. One day I thought 'well, I'll just start', and suddenly, it's going to be the longest novel I've ever written. I think on the rewrite I'll probably end up taking a lot of stuff out, because I have to put a lot of stuff down when I'm writing first, just to discover it, but when I go back and rewrite, all of that doesn't have to be there, I now know it; I take it out."

"And then, I wrote a short story, a few weeks ago, because I'm going to a writer's group, which I thought of as a novel, an adventure story. I didn't have the plot, I only had the idea, I needed a structure of things to happen. So when I needed a short story, I thought I wonder if I could do that as a short story, well, I'll just start and see how it goes. So, it developed into a short story, and I think it works as a short story, but I'm not done with it, because now I need to do research, because that was the thing that was holding me up. Because this was a book where I needed to know certain things. I needed to develop the core of a plot, because as the short story it's really just about one woman's internal experience and what's going on in her mind: what she thinks



about something that's happening to her. If it was going to be a novel there would have to be a lot more action and things going on outside, and I think I am going to write that as a novel, whether that will be my next novel after the one I'm writing now, I don't know."

"And I've got an idea for another novel. Because I got the idea of something taking place on a Scottish island, and I started writing it; after I'd written forty pages I thought, this is going to take me another forty pages to get to the climax, and maybe this is a novella or a novel, so I put it aside too. I still like writing short stories, I feel happy about them because they're more controllable. I can get an idea, and sit down and write it, and in a couple of weeks I can have written and rewritten and everything, but they are limited, in that they're just little bits. Most of the ideas I'm getting now, even if they could be done as short stories, you have to leave out so much, and there's more I want to say, more I want to think about, so I'm getting more into novels now. They're harder to write than short stories, but they have their own rewards."

Many of Lisa's stories are interior, almost confessional in style. Do people imagine them to be autobiographical? "I once read a reference to a story I wrote called 'Husbands', which described it as a brave story, and I thought 'for Gods Sake, it makes

it sound as if I'm bravely revealing something about my own life.' The first section of the story is presented as if it were autobiographical, but it's a *fantasy*. For one thing, I didn't have two husbands, I do now of course, I am now married for the second time, but when I wrote the story, I was divorced, I had been married once. But the story begins 'My First husband was..., My second husband was..., and there will be no third husband.'"

"Of course, there often is, in my stories and in my novels, an emotional autobiographical element. It's not usually the way I feel at the time I'm writing the story. I'm trying to write about something that I felt, and I'm putting it in fictional, completely imaginary terms. So there was an emotion in 'Husbands', which was, I've had this powerful crush, as an adult. Here I was married, divorced, and here was this man who made me feel like an adolescent, it was like I felt when I was sixteen and had an incredible crush on someone who didn't know I was alive. I was amazed by this

feeling in myself, nothing ever came of it; we went out a few times and I tried to pursue it, but it just wasn't there on his side. What amazed me was that I could feel so strongly about someone who wasn't giving me that feedback. It wasn't that he disliked me, he quite liked me, but there was no return, Where did this passion come from? So, I wanted to explore that fictionally."

"Over the last few years that whole area of desire is something that I've explored in a number of short stories, most of which are reprinted in *Memories of the Body*, out in September from Grafton. Also there's an element of it in the novel I'm writing now, and maybe all my life. If you think about *Gabriel*, there's this kind of obsession. But it's not been a major factor in my life."

"I do sometimes put autobiographical touches in my stories, because if I describe a room, well maybe I'll describe a room that I've actually lived in. Or maybe there will be elements in a character that will be elements within someone that I know. And it may or not be related to the relationship that the main character has with them. Because my main characters all have elements of me in them."

A lot of Lisa's stories have been about might-have-beens, exploring the blind alleys of alternative decisions. Why does she think this is?

"I don't know quite what that is. I was thinking about that this morning because

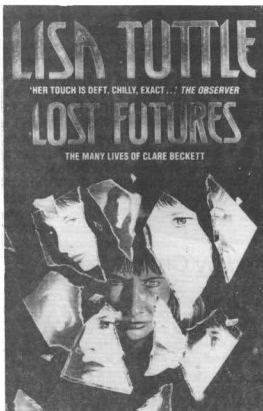
Brian Aldiss once said to me 'Do you ever find that you're thinking obsessively, just going over and over about something that's completely unimportant and thinking how you might have done it differently?' and I said 'Yes' and he said 'Do you suppose only writers do that'. Or does everyone? I don't know, because I certainly do do it, and I know other writers who do it. But does everyone do it? or is it just a certain personality type? I don't think that Brian Aldiss is obsessed with things like that, but obviously sometimes you do start thinking, I think most people think at some time how their life would have been different if they'd made some different decisions. It seems to be a very fertile area for fiction."

What was the starting point for *Lost Futures*?

"I wrote a short story which was published in *Spaceship Built of Stone*; called 'No regrets'. And when I wrote that story I thought 'I'm not through with this idea'. I like the idea that someone thinks about a point in their past where they might have made a different decision and lived a different life. And I liked the idea that somewhere that life almost existed, and this whole thing in physics, this idea of alternate realities. If you read about that, there can be no walking through doors to get to this other world. But then I thought - maybe mentally. Just like I thought maybe you can't physically time travel, but maybe mentally. I was taken with the idea of someone getting mentally in touch with her other selves, the other possibilities of her life. not just imaginatively, but what if they were really real, what if she started getting confused about what was real. I thought, in the same way that sometimes you have a dream, and it seems so real, that you start wondering if you're dreaming about something that really happened to you once, was it real?, and how can you tell in memory? This is one of the things that really intrigues me."

One of Lisa's stories was in *Interzone's* all-women issue; she's been published by the feminist press. How does feel about women's fiction being ghettoised?

"I'm not entirely happy about it, I didn't know my story was going to be in that *Interzone* issue. The thing about The Women's Press... I was very happy to be published by them; I think they did very well by me. *Spaceship Built of Stone* got more attention than it would have if it came out from a number of other paperback houses, but very often you go into a bookshop and



you can't see it, it's not on the shelves with the science fiction. They put it over with the women's books, which means that people who might want to buy that book and who aren't going to look there, won't see it. Still, it was the Women's Press editor who suggested it. I also think that because it was published by the Women's Press it was read in a different way, stories which were not seen as feminist when they first came out were seen in a different light. Suddenly, I was seen as a feminist writer."

Is she happy with being called a feminist writer?

"Well, I am a feminist, but what I don't like is if people make assumptions about what is feminist science fiction must be, or assume that I'm writing with a polemical intent. I do occasionally write with a polemical intent, but if my stories reflect feminist values it's because that's affected me. Certainly I have written things that would offend feminists at times just as much as anyone else."

"Sometimes I do want to make a point, by twisting things around, by saying 'what if there aren't two sexes? what if there's only one sex and we just pretend?' I love that idea, and I've used it more than once. It wasn't original with me, Monique Wittig proposed that we are not two-sexed creatures, that we are more alike than we are different and I just love it... I don't think that it's very practical. Certainly biologically it's ridiculous, but I love the idea."

What are her ambitions?

"Well, now that I have a daughter, that one's solved. I'd like to have a wider readership, I'd like to make more money, I'd like to write better books."

Does she have any heroes, role models?

"What impresses me is when I meet a woman who is very successful, who is on top of things, outgoing, knows lots of people, is friendly, is helpful ... and has children. Someone who comes to mind is someone I don't know well at all but I interviewed her once. She's Helena Kennedy, you might have seen her on television, she's a barrister, so she's rare being a woman barrister. She has a couple of kids and she also does a lot of stuff on television; she writes. I only met her the once, but she was enormously helpful, she really impressed me. It is people like that that I most admire, because I feel that I can barely manage to do one thing. I can write, but then when something else comes along like this child, I think that if I didn't have a husband who was as committed to raising her as I was, I don't know how I'd cope. I don't know how single women manage to have careers and bring up children as so many of them do."

"Generally women in the past who might have been role models were women who had children and wrote, or did something that they were engaged in with their hearts and their minds. E Nesbit; what a wonderful woman. Maybe a bit fey at times, but they were broke and she was writing to make ends meet, and raising her children and also raising children by her husband's mistress and taking all this in her stride. Wow!"

Has she ever read anything by another writer that made her think 'I wish I'd written that'?

"I wish I could have written *The Course of the Heart*. I would love to have written any of E Nesbit's books. *A Traveller in Time* by Alison Uttley... However, I've never read anything where I've thought 'that's mine, how did this person get to it first'. Since *Lost Futures* has come out, I've noticed several books using the same idea, because, after all it's an obvious idea. There was a novel a few years ago, which I was afraid to read because I thought it sounds too like *Lost Futures* which I was still working on. But they're never what I would have written. In terms of style, I have a different style from other people. I often think 'wouldn't it be great to have written that'; it gives you something to aspire towards. Yet I know I never will because what I aspire towards is something that isn't there yet. It's just me perfecting whatever it is I do."

SHOCK of the NEW

Reviews Edited by Chris Amies

Arthur C Clarke
How the World Was One
 Gollancz, 1992, 289pp, £15.99
 Reviewed by Darrold Pardoe

In 1967, when I moved to the United States, I developed the habit of phoning my parents in England every month or so and chewing over the latest family gossip. There was none of the simplicity (for the user) of modern international direct dialling, but at the time the fact that the call had to go through two operators (one at each end of the transatlantic link) didn't seem much of a hardship. There were odd variations in the quality of the transmission: one month it would be crystal clear (apart from an annoying echo), and the next very fuzzy and broken. But it was the best there was, and I was content.

What I didn't realise at the time was how recent was the technology that enabled me to make those phone calls. The first telephone cable between the US and England was opened to traffic in 1963 (although a telegraph cable had existed for over a century); and the satellite links had only been in place since 1965. How the ease and speed and volume of intercontinental communication has grown over the last quarter-century! In 1992, we accept worldwide TV linkups, and instant communication with a friend who may be half a world away, without a thought. Even five years ago, if I wanted to send a document to the United States, I had to put it in an envelope, post it off, and wait a week for it to arrive. Today, I simply walk over to the fax machine, put the document through, and the document is transmitted instantaneously to the machine at the other end.

This growing ease of communication around the world, binding us all ever more

closely together, is the theme of Arthur Clarke's new book. It's a gripping story, from the struggles of the pioneers of 1858 to lay the Atlantic telegraph cable (which after its completion only survived in working order for a little over two weeks) to the fligree of communications channels that exists today. It's the kind of tale at which Clarke excels, and I can't help but agree with his speculations about the future. Are we heading for an electromagnetic Babel, in which so much information will be washing over us that we can drown in its superabundance, unable to comprehend, trap or control more than a minute fraction? Satellite porn and religious fanatics are only the tip of the iceberg: there is much more to come, and soon.

This is an excellent book, on a topic important for our time, and I'm sure you will enjoy reading it.

Paul Kearney
The Way To Babylon
 Gollancz, 1992, 349pp, £14.99
 Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia

I loved *The Way To Babylon* and don't ask to borrow it, I'll be re-reading it for the third or fourth time. It was one of life's weird coincidences, but just as I was packing for my hole, Chris Amies sent me a book located on the Isle of Skye, my proposed vacation destination: the Misty Island, backdrop and horizon to this quite remarkable epic.

The Way To Babylon is the story of a writer who having written the first two parts of a Fantasy trilogy is destroyed by the death of his wife and cannot find the inspiration to write the third part. "NO, it's no good. It's gone," thinks Michael Riven, and Paul Kearney explains: "His (Michael's) imagination drifted into icy gloom without stars. Battles became ugly, desperate affairs and corpses piled in the snow. Wolves

worried at the bodies and the stench of burning hurt the air."

What comes next is wonderful. Out of devastation, out of despair, characters walk out of Michael Riven's imagination and lead him over the Cullin Ridge into his own fantasy land with the sole reason of forcing him to put their world to right (write?). Michael discovers the evil battles he has written have really taken place and becomes part of a quest to save the world he created and to find a way home.

The Way To Babylon is Paul Kearney's first novel says the cover, but without having met Paul himself I daresay there are a couple of other manuscripts gathering dust under the bed. How do I know? Well, the descriptions of Minginish are just too good. Paul Kearney has lived in this land for many years; it has quite fantastic texture and detail, better than most Fantasy that you may find in WH Smith's. Call it female intuition, I just know that Paul Kearney has first written several stories about his world Minginish and now with some maturity, and I must add considerable writing skill, ekes out the fantasy of actually meeting his characters.

Note to other writers: it's not just a question of travelling over the sea to Skye, then climbing the Cullin Ridge. There are no magical properties on the island itself that will lead you to the realms of your own imagination (I tried it). No, the hero Michael Riven first nearly dies himself in the same accident that killed his wife, high up on Skye's Red Mountain, and is blocked by aching guilt: why hadn't he changed his rope, the rope that broke causing his wife to die?

Actually *The Way To Babylon* is very much a writer's book, dissecting an author's soul with the same detailed observation that authors normally reserve for the world around them. Paul Kearney is a very good writer too, the words flow across the page with musical rhythm. Plot, characters, dialogue, it all works ... I absolutely recommend it.

David S Garnett (Ed)
New Worlds 2

Gollancz, 1992, 300pp, £5.99 pb
 Reviewed by Michael J Pont

As I grow older, and on occasions start to wonder why I'm still reading SF books when I should be into something sensible, I need to have my faith recharged; with *New Worlds 2* David Garnett has done this job admirably. The cover picture is a striking monochrome sketch by Jim Burns, taken from a set of illustrations by this artist that accompany the contributions to this volume

by the late Philip K Dick.

So far, so good - but what about the writing? Fortunately, most of this is good, and some is very good indeed. In his introduction, Garnett argues that the heart and soul of modern SF lies in short stories. The first piece of fiction in **New Worlds 2**, 'Innocents' by Ian McDonald, certainly seems to back this up: it's tightly written, evoking very effectively a world populated by the 'dead'.

After the first of three less-than-riveting instalments of 'Corsairs of the Second Ether' by 'Warwick Colvin Jr', there are two excellent pieces by Brian Aldiss and then Peter Hamilton to keep you reading. Also better than it sounds (after a slightly shaky start) is 'Great Breakthroughs In Darkness' by Marc Laidlaw, a story set out rather curiously in the form of extracts from an encyclopedia of photography. Simon Ings then contributes an unusual piece called 'Bruised Time'. Jack Deighton is the only previously unpublished author to make it, but his 'The Face of the Waters' - about a man who plans to make canals on Mars a reality - reads as well as many of the contributions by more experienced writers. The last 'real' story in the book is 'Inherit the Earth' by Stephen Baxter, who also features briefly in 'A Gadget too Far' in which David Langford highlights a few scientific blunders and inconsistencies in recent SF.

Philip K Dick's contribution takes the form of two outlines for novels, written in 1967 in order to secure advances from publishers, but destined never to appear as novels in the form suggested. You may have misgivings about reading outlines - forget them! The first, 'Joe Protagoras is Alive and Living on Earth', is excellent, faintly reminiscent of 'The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch', written three years earlier. The second outline, 'The Name of the Game is Death', isn't so readable, probably because it's clear Dick hadn't quite decided what to do with the plot. The central idea is of a board game (faintly reminiscent of **Alice Through the Looking Glass**, as the author himself acknowledges) to which the characters are transported.

So, with a brief 'Afterword' by Michael Moorcock, that's **New Worlds 2**. It's not all brilliant, but most of it is intelligent, and fun. I look forward to seeing what David Garnett can do with **New Worlds 3**.

Robert Silverberg **Kingdoms of the Wall**

Harper Collins, 1992, 288pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Gareth Rees

foot of an enormous mountain they call the Wall. According to legend, the First Climber made the dangerous climb to the summit of the Wall and brought back knowledge from the gods who dwell there. Now, every year, each city at the base of the Wall chooses twenty men and twenty women to make a Pilgrimage to the summit, but very few ever return, and those that do have gone insane. Poular Crookleg (a transparent alias for Odysseus) feels destined to go on the Pilgrimage, to reach the summit and return. And so he is, and so he does.

The odyssey is not without its difficulties; the Wall is home to multitudes of wonderful and deadly creatures, and there are plenty of Sirens and Circes and Lotus-eaters that attempt to beguile the Pilgrims into abandoning their journey (these are the 'Kingdoms' of the title), but there is no doubt that Poular and his friends will be successful. The only question is exactly what sort of revelation they will find at the summit, and this is largely foreshadowed so that only the most unperceptive reader could find the ending a surprise.

Silverberg must have found **Kingdoms of the Wall** as dull as I did, for while his writing is as professionally and slickly readable as always, and while he is as adept as usual at giving a good sense of the dramatic vastness and strangeness of alien landscapes, the characterisation is perfunctory, and the plot development half-hearted. From time to time there are suggestions of character interaction: there's the obsessive curiosity of Poular's crippled friend Traiben, there's rivalry for the leadership of the pilgrimage, there's love interest, but each of these developments is quickly forgotten when the pilgrims face the next Kingdom of dangerous creatures.

Eventually Silverberg gives up and skips forward to the end: 'There were other Kingdoms too, but we kept clear of them, for

I was weary of these strangenesses," says Poular, but it is the author who seems to be the weary one.

In short, **Kingdoms of the Wall** is predictable and tired, and this is no more than we should expect, for Silverberg has written this story before, most recently in **The Face of the Waters**, and there's nothing in the book at hand that wasn't done better in that earlier novel, and nothing in **The Face of the Waters** that hadn't appeared before in any of a hundred other novels of this explorers-braving-improbably-hostile-fauna-and-flora-in-search-of-some-kind-of-revelation subgenre.

Eric Brown **Meridian Days**

Pan, 1992, 165pp, £8.99 pb

Reviewed by Edward James

Readers of *Interzone*, and/or of Brown's first book, **The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories** (1990) (a stunning debut equalled only by Ian McDonald's **Empire Dreams**), will know the kind of thing to expect. It is not just the setting: a Brownian universe in which the wealthy can alter their bodies at will, or augment their physical bodies with computer add-ons or implants (as starship pilots do), and in which experimentation with exotic drugs is commonplace. The personnel are related too: people so tortured by their past experiences that they resort to drugs, and artists so tortured by their longing to express their whole lives in art that they court with death. Exotic characters; powerful emotions.

The setting of **Meridian Days** is offworld: not Addenbrooke, where the star-crystals were found which can carry the imprint of human emotions (as in 'Star-Crystals and Karmel'), but Meridian, a planet whose artists (using Addenbrooke crystals or other imported media) are virtually the sole export



On a distant planet a race of shape-changing aliens live in the lowlands at the

earners. Meridian is an exotic planet: its Darkside perpetually frozen, its Brightside so hot at the equator that rock melts to magma, while its fauna and flora, like the sand lion (a carnivorous triceratops) or the pink cactus flowers that yield the drug 'frost', are dangerous as well as exotic. For the elite of the planet, the Altered and Augmented artists, the small strip of ocean and archipelago near Darkside in which the human colony lives, its artificial night provided by a floating shield, is near utopia.

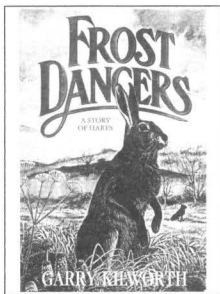
For Brown's tortured protagonist, Bob Benedict, a starship pilot who lost his job after a catastrophic crash, it is, of course, a long way from utopia; and gradually, as he is sucked into the private troubles of crystal-sculptor and event-creator Tamara Trevellon, he learns more about the seamy side of Meridian existence. The novel is structured like a detective novel: Benedict sees a body ravaged by a sand-lion on Brightside; his fellow-witness is murdered. At the same time he learns of the death of one of Trevellon's daughters in suspicious circumstances. He learns first who has been doing the murdering (not a difficult matter), but unlike a detective, he fails to find out the motive for the murders; at the denouement he learns all from the last videotape made by the last victim, and discovers that it is not a minor family affair but is entangled with the whole fate of the colony planet.

I don't think that summary destroys any of the suspense. It may be structured like a detective novel, but the pleasures derived from it have very little to do with the traditional ones of the detective novel, and much more with those of the classic SF novel, in which the protagonist and the reader learn together about the mysteries of a particular world and its systems. But the detective format gives the novel its shape, structure and drive that is so often lacking in first novels (and indeed, in all the novels of some SF writers). The blurb to *The Time-Lapsed Man* tells us that Brown wrote and trashed sixteen novels between the ages of 15 and 29; perhaps that explains how, with his first published novel, he came up with something which is, in many ways, so perfect.

Maureen Speller, in her piece on Eric Brown in *Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Writers* (Chicago, 1991), notes that 'Brown has a marked tendency to sell his stories short by drawing them to a close before he has fully explored the possibilities presented by the situation he has created'. I see what she means; and that she might think the same of *Meridian Days*. But one of the delights of the book, for me, is that all kinds of possibilities are left open for the reader to explore, or to imagine. The really

significant events (those, presumably, known about by the imaginary audience of the first person narrative) are in the future; they may be revealed in a sequel, but I hope that Brown will manage to restrain himself from that. Novels, like life, ought to have a plethora of loose threads to fuel the reader's imagination.

I need hardly add that I recommend this novel very highly, and I have no doubt that it will confirm Eric Brown's reputation as one of the very best of the new generation of British SF writers who have emerged in the last four or five years.



Frost Dancers Garry Kilworth

Harper Collins, 1992, 381pp, £14.95
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

Those who enjoyed Kilworth's previous book *Hunter's Moon*, described by him as a "non-quest animal fantasy", will be pleased that he has returned, this time with a story about hares rather than foxes. The "Frost Dancers" of the title are male hares that box each other to win a mate.

The hero, though that is perhaps too strong a word for the young hare whose story this relates, is a mountain hare named Skelter. He is captured by hare-couriers and transported far to the south, away from his native highlands. Skelter escapes and travels to a nearby peninsula where he meets and befriends rabbits, hedgehogs, otters and of course hares - in this case field hares. He also encounters Bubba the "floger", short for "flying ogre", who is terrorising and decimating the animals in the vicinity. This monstrous, unidentified bird of prey is an avian psychopath large enough to

steal a small dog, and is the product of a deprived and perverted childhood (nestlinghood?). Skelter's highland skills enable him to teach the superstitious lowland hares a thing or two and save them from the predator - though it is a close shave.

The environment is the same as that of *Hunter's Moon*. The animals speak their own languages - hares speak "Leporidae", badgers speak "Mustelidae", and humans bark at each other. Once again human activities are incomprehensible except when their actions are explained by their pet dogs, and once again we see the contrast between the animal lover and the bloodsport fanatic. Skelter's adventures also reveal the contrast of instinct with thought, and unreasoning superstition with logic.

I felt the viewpoint was a bit shaky in parts. The narrative is omniscient, but the hares are supposed to have a limited viewpoint and to be puzzled by humans. Just occasionally, Skelter seems too knowledgeable - would he really understand what jugged hare was? But this is a minor carp.

Kilworth has certainly done his homework on hares and their habits. The details of their day to day existence, their interaction with each other and with the seasons, feels accurate and convincing. The superstition of the field hares is fascinating and seems likely given their isolation on the peninsula.

There is again no quest; this is primarily the story of Skelter's growing up, of his friends and his travels, and of his battle with Bubba. There are some nice touches, like the subplot involving the 'tractor man' which turns out to be an animal's-eye view of adultery and murder.

Kilworth takes the opportunity for a few potshots at superstition, politics ... and critics! The latter "had none of the skills themselves, they decided what was good and bad according to their own idea of taste, and the language they used to describe 'good' and 'bad' ... was entirely composed of airy phrases that when examined closely made little sense to anyone outside their circle." Well, if you enjoyed *Hunter's Moon* you'll enjoy this. Does that make sense? Good.

Steve Harris The Hoodoo Man

Headline, 1992, 405pp, £15.99
Reviewed by Alex Stewart

The premise is a familiar one: brain damage from a bizarre accident leaves protagonist Danny Stafford with the ability to see into the future. So far, so *Dead Zone*; and the surface plot, where Danny finds

himself psychically linked to a serial killer, bears more than a passing resemblance to **The Eyes of Laura Mars**.

What lifts it out of the usual rut, however, is some edgily-evoked existential paranoia, where past and future collide in a bewildering web of retroactive causality. Unfortunately the strengths of the book are badly undercut by the lazy deployment of the usual plastic sex-'n'-slash imagery, which has become as much a part of the genre as singing elves and grouchy dwarves in sword&sorcery, and equally devalued. The last thing rape and murder should come across as is cosily familiar.

All in all, though, recommended for its strengths, which more than compensate for its weaknesses.

Blood Trillium Julian May

Harper Collins, 1992, 336pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Martin Brice

The first novel in this series, **Black Trillium**, was written by three authors: Marion Zimmer Bradley, Julian May, and Andre Norton. However this second novel in the series has been written by just one of those three.

I don't know if that makes the later book read differently; nor should I like to judge whether or not it makes the sequel a better read; probably if I had not known of the different authorship then I might not have been aware of, nor even looking for, any differences in style and content.

However, I preferred **Black Trillium**; but that might have been because I was intrigued by the very idea of triune authorship, which gave additional fascination to the character development of the three princesses: queenly Haramis, adventurous Kadiya, and gentle Anigel.

Blood Trillium opens with a huge lammergeier alighting at the White Tower where Haramis, now Archmage, dwells. The messenger warns that an evil magician called Portolanus is coming out of the Sempiternal Iocap, a wizard who proves to be the revitalised Orogastus of **Black Trillium**. With ambitions to rule the whole world, he also wants to destroy, or at least neutralise, the three sisters.

Much of the story involves the sisters' efforts to recover Kadiya's lost Trillium talisman, and also to rescue Antar and the three royal children, held hostage by Orogastus' machinations. There is a lot of journeying and magicking, polkiticking and battling, but all comes right in the end. However I found myself hoping that Orogastus would win. Descriptions of his childhood and apprenticeship arouse

sympathy and it often seems as though he might prove a good guy after all. Then there are the piratical King Ledavardis (a deformed teenager), and the spoilt boy-prince Tolivar. I felt that these three characters were becoming more interesting than the three princesses. It will be intriguing to see how they develop in any future sequel.

Anno Dracula Kim Newman

Simon & Schuster, 1992, 416pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Christopher Amies

Kim Newman isn't afraid to take a good idea and run with it. He may be the most innovative Horror / Fantasy writer we have at present. He is also very prolific, and the latest result of this prolificacy is **Anno Dracula**. This takes as its basis Stoker's original **Dracula**, diverging at the point where Dracula is defeated. In this version of the tale, the victorious vampire Count marries the widowed Queen Victoria and begins a steady repopulation of London with his own kind. Vampires hold the positions of high office, and 'warm' people - the unturned - are viewed with distrust or hostility. Van Helsing's head adorns a stake outside Buckingham Palace along with those of other enemies of the realm; and Dracula being who he is (Vlad Tepes, 'the Impaler'), sometimes it's not just the head that goes on a stake. Vampirism is fashionable, Gilbert & Sullivan write operas about vampires, and in Whitechapel there's a flourishing trade in blood for money.

Cue the Gothic underbelly of late 19th-century London, cutpurses, pure-finders, cly-fakers, mutchers, Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, Fu Manchu, Dr Moreau, Jack the Ripper ...

We're back in Newman's cinematic omniverse watching the shadows race across the wall. Someone is cutting up vampire prostitutes in the East End, replacing their Dark Kiss with a darker one of silver-edged steel. The secret cabal of the Diogenes Club calls for investigations which point more and more to corruption in high places, though what could be more corrupt than the awful gothicity of Vlad Tepes's court? A major player in this drama is Genevieve Dieudonne, whom we have met in **Drachenfels** and is also the key character of other stories of Newman's. This resourceful 400-year-old Undead girl works on the Ripper case with the Diogenes's man Charles Beauregard, while caring for the victims of failed attempts at vampirisation.

What's so good though is the background and the readability of the whole thing. Yes, it does draw heavily on our perceptions of the

late 19th century, and if there isn't actually anyone walking along the Strand whistling "Yesterday", there are references to Brecht, Wedekind and Weill, signalling that what we have is not so much the True History (oh, that gets a mention too) of the Ripper murders as an extrusion of its cultural identity. The legend, if you like, rather than the real thing. This book could be seen as the third avatar of Kim Newman's gormenghastly adventure begun in **Bad Dreams** and continued in **Jago**. And true to its gothic intentions, the references fire in like overkill. We have for example a chapter about the Commercial Street Police station called 'Commercial Street Blues'. Lestrade of the Yard figures largely (Holmes, always problematic when discussing the Ripper - *Holmes would have caught him* - is in a concentration camp on the Sussex Downs). Newman's list of sources is extensive and shows he's also done his reading in the books of the period.

Anno Dracula is also a political fable: about the way that the ruling classes are no longer just in better positions than the rest of the people, but have become in some way different. Previously, the intent of those in power was obvious: more power, more money. Anyone could identify with that; in a smaller way, that was what people wanted in their own lives. But then the rules changed drastically, and for the majority of people the very intentions of the rulers became baffling. It was as though an alien hand held the reins of power; a baleful intelligence was seated on the throne and no reasoning would edge it off.

And **Anno Dracula** is also bloody good fun. Read it.

Children of the Night Dan Simmons

Headline, 1992, 408pp, £8.99 pb

Reviewed by Marcus Rowland

With a title like this, and a Gothic castle on the front cover, it's easy to recognise a vampire novel. There's also a case for calling it science fiction, since much of the plot revolves around scientific explanations for vampirism, and the clues a 'vampire virus' might yield in the fight against AIDS.

In the 1960s Romanian dictator Ceausescu outlawed all forms of birth control and used taxes and fines to force a huge population increase. As revealed in the opening chapters, the secret goal of this plan was the creation of a huge population of orphans, who could be used to supply blood to hungry vampires. Unfortunately primitive medicine and AIDS made things go horribly wrong, and the 1989 rebellion that toppled the Ceausescus was organised by

dissatisfied customers.

A few years later top American haematologist Kate Neuman is working in an orphanage in Bucharest, and stumbles across a baby who seems to suffer from a variety of blood disorders, all potentially lethal. He can only be diagnosed properly in America. Father O'Rourke, an omni-competent Vietnam veteran, persuades Kate to adopt the boy, as the only way of getting him out of Romania. With his help she eventually succeeds, despite the worst efforts of the Romanian and American authorities.

In America baby Joshua's medical condition looks increasingly peculiar, until Kate eventually realises that his disease could be the reality behind the vampire legend. The medical and genetic details in this section are reasonably convincing, given the essential unlikelihood of vampirism. Meanwhile Kate foils a violent attempt to kidnap the baby, and is increasingly worried about his safety.

Inevitably the kidnappers strike again, this time successfully. Joshua vanishes, the labs are vandalised and burned, Kate is injured and her house destroyed, and her ex-husband and a sympathetic scientist are murdered.

With her life in ruins, Kate recruits O'Rourke and sets out to recover Joshua. This involves a long chase across Romania, and an attempt to stop a series of blood sacrifices at sites that were important in Dracula's early life. Naturally this isn't easy, especially when most of the other characters turn out to be working for the vampires; Neuman and O'Rourke are eventually taken

prisoner, and scheduled to be the hors-d'oeuvres at the vampire celebrations, escaping via one of the oldest clichés in adventure fiction. The ending is apocalyptic, but eminently predictable.

As a pure horror novel, with most of the science removed, this plot might work. As SF, with the horror toned down, it could still succeed. Unfortunately a wobbly hybrid plot is bolted on to an action-adventure framework that would be more at home in an Alistair MacLean novel, and has some huge logical holes. For example, one major plot thread involves a plan that will only work if Neuman keeps Joshua; another has been set up over several years, with split second timing, and will only succeed if the vampires have the child. Both schemes come from the same source ...

There have been good medical / SF / vampire novels: **Stableford's *The Empire of Fear*** is an excellent example. At its best **Children of the Night** entertains, but fails to convince, relying on tired plot devices and a good deal of coincidence at crucial moments. Simmons can, and should, do a lot better.

In Dreams Paul J McAuley & Kim Newman (Eds)

Gollancz, 1992, 447pp, £4.99 pb
Reviewed by Catie Cary

It was with some trepidation that I started to read this anthology. If you take the best writers in the field and commission stories on a universally fascinating theme, what can go wrong? Usually plenty; however,

McAuley and Newman are to be congratulated on putting together the most impressive original themed anthology I have read.

Ostensibly the collection celebrates the 7-inch single in SF and Horror stories. The narrow-minded will be up in arms, for the net is thankfully cast much farther than that. It might be truer to say that the book celebrates pop culture with stories by writers known for their contribution to the SF and Horror Genres. The fictions vary widely in texture and style, and are not restricted by genre; they have been artfully arranged to make sustained reading, not only possible, but pleasurable. The book is introduced by Charles Shaar Murray, and each piece is informatively prefaced by the

editors.

The 7-inch single was, at its peak, an omnipresent and powerful artefact of youth culture, at its best capable of summing in three minutes the crucial emotional experiences of adolescence, at its worst the puerile drivel of the novelty song. It is perhaps no accident that most of the writers hearken back in some way to its golden years in the fifties and sixties, or its last bloom in the punk era; it is probable that the book will be most attractive to those who are old enough to have memories of those years.

The musical territory covered is huge: Stephen Baxter on Glenn Miller; Nicholas Royle on Siouxsie; Colin Greenland on the Girl Group phenomenon; Steve Rasnic Tem on Link Wray; F Paul Wilson on Laura Nyro; Barrington Bayley on Mary Johnson, and many further permutations.

The quality of writing is high; while not all of the authors can match the incandescent linguistic pyrotechnics of Ian McDonald or the hydroscopic wit of Ian MacLeod, the worst you can say of any of the stories here is that it is *good*. There are 27 stories in the collection, which makes it excellent value by any reckoning, but means that I can only discuss the very best.

The first story in the book is Ian McDonald's 'Fat Tuesday', which tells how Annunzio changed the world with his glass guitar. I was blown away by this sweaty evocation of *street*.

In 'Digital to Analogue', Alastair Reynolds mixes manic hard SF speculation with cold-sweat real-world horror and a detailed examination of rave culture in a controlled narrative of rising terror.

'Honey, I'm Home!' by Lisa Tuttle hilariously examines the pros and cons of living with a sitcom husband or having a screen lover on tap. A warmly witty examination of the allure of trash culture with a delightfully frank angle on female sexuality.

Christopher Fowler's 'Black Day at Bad Rock' is a blackly humorous horror that takes you right back with a breathless thud to the anarchy lurking in the classroom, back when rock music was not only important, but true.

'Riders on the Storm' by Mark Timlin is a cold-hearted horror story about sex and death and rock'n'roll at the murkier edges of the music business.

Graham Joyce's 'Last Rising Sun', features a jinxed jukebox in an All-Nite Milk Bar in a story about love and terror, fear and hope, which could have been sung by the Shangri-Las. This is for me the most successful story in terms of evoking the pop-trash ambience of the anthology's 45 rpm



icon.

Ian MacLeod's 'Snodgrass' achieves what I thought impossible. A dead rock star story that works, free from sentimentality or hero-worship. The postulate is that John Lennon dropped out of the Beatles before the big times hit, and is living the washed out life of a rock'n'roll bum in Birmingham. His inability to cope with his own failure is pointed up during a reunion with McCartney at the NEC. The narrative is dry and witty, capturing perfectly Lennon's style of delivery and pitilessly raking through his faults. The character of Lennon is depicted in three huge colourful dimensions; the man is revealed as a charming monster with an all-too-human heart. This story should win prizes.

I recommend this book to you; it sets a standard for future anthologies that will be very hard to match. If you have an interest in pop culture or good writing you need this book. Read it; buy it. Buy more; give them to your friends.

James P Hogan Entoverse

Orbit, 1992, 488pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Pete Darby

This is the fourth book in what many had hoped would be the Giants Trilogy. Prior to the "action" (I use the term advisedly) of this book, Man has discovered that he was the result of alien experimentation, that the aliens are still around, and everything bad in human history is down to another, extra-terrestrial faction of homo sapiens interfering with their superior technology.

I don't know this from reading the previous books, but simply from the prologue, which reveals this to the reader. Furthermore, I know it from the following hundred or so pages, where the team from the previous books is reconvened, revealing their amazing propensity towards informing each other of what they already know.

Yes, it's that sort of book.

I usually don't take the ideology of a novel into account when reviewing it, but when it shouts it from every page, as this does, I cannot ignore it. The heroic characters (yes, I know they have hacked-on foibles, in a desperate attempt to approximate characterisation) are with one exception, hard scientists. The exception is the female spunky reporter, leaden love interest for the main character, who seems to have been so gosh darn taken away with all this alien wizardry in the previous books that he needed no human jollies in any form.

Needless to say, the nasty ET humans are unspeakable (despite informing each other that their new police chief is "on our patch";

The Sweeney in space?), and the alien master race are inscrutable. Well, that's not quite true; the human ETs are psychotically overwhelmed by the technology bestowed by the inscrutables, and have made a near religion of the respect to their super-computer. And the inscrutable aliens, who must be really inscrutable, because Hogan keeps reminding us, just come across as big guys in blue suits.

Well, the human ETs have had their computer shut down, so they're going even more ape than before, and the Giants want to send Terrans to sort it out, because, gosh darn it, human folks are so hard for us big blue guys to sort this out. So do they send diplomats, or psychologists, or sociologists, or even moral philosophers to put these alien fellers straight? Of course not, when you have a team of spunky physicists, biologists and a reporter to drop in there.

Further to this, we have the arrival of a young feller from a parallel universe, where Gods exist but the wheel doesn't (but they somehow still manage to build castles and temples), who was looking for a place where rules work and gods aren't all powerful. It must be remembered that in Hogan's book, religion is the enemy of Scientific Rationalism, and is thus Very Bad (even when the gods exist and interact with humans).

I'm not one to defend religion; this is why I must point out that Hogan's absolute faith in science presents one of the worst excesses of intellectual bigotry I have ever encountered. In placing everything in the hands of the scientists, in his eyes, we can solve all the problems of this and all other worlds. Politicians come out almost as badly as priests in here; but he seems to forget that his ideal society (the Giants) requires an insane degree of abundance; no Utopia; not even his, could survive a famine. But this is irrelevant to him, as the scientists will stop the famine, and ask no more reward than the opportunity to control society. It's Plato's Republic with the philosophers replaced by super-computer. If that computer is self-aware, how the hell could anyone stop it becoming tyrannical?

Hogan's alien science is intrusive (nice essay on alien zoology; what does it matter, though, if the creature is only seen in a lab, and not even in its own environment), and the super-science shaky in the extreme. The anti-gravity drive relies on an understanding of the last half of a quantum physics textbook; but is rendered unworkable by the first half of a quantum physics textbook; but is rendered unworkable by the first half. The FIL drive requires a fundamental misconception of the nature of gravity fields around a singularity (yes, spinning a black

hole would make it flatter, but not so as you can push a space ship into it with it getting torn apart.)

When a self appointed High Priest of Hard SF falls down on not only their old stumbling blocks of trite plot (yes, the good guys totally win; you don't even have an excuse for reading it now), weak to non-existent characterisation and tell not show dialogue, but also on the basis of hard SF, the science, then you have, all in all, possibly the most worthless book I've yet come across.

For my and you sake, get some Clarke, or Bear, or Brin if you like SF hard; please don't do this to yourself.

Robert Harris Fatherland

Hutchinson, 1992, 372pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Ken Lake

"Historic announcement from German Reich: President Kennedy to meet Adolf Hitler.... Pound strengthens in ERM.... Beatles Berlin Bash Banned.... Berlin prepares for Hitler's 75th birthday..."

Headlines from the *Daily Sketch* (price 3d) dated 16 April, 1964, and yes, we are in an alternate history situation, courtesy Robert Harris, the *Sunday Times* alternate politics columnist, the man who in one week insisted that a Labour Party failure must lead to the immediate resignation of the leaders, and the following week asked plaintively why they had chosen to go.

The headlines come from a publicity sheet which sketches out in some detail the strange world we are to enter - that Kennedy, for example, is Joseph P., the anti-Semitic, anti-British former US Ambassador to the Court of St James whose son John F., is reported here as being about to marry Marilyn Monroe. A combination of chilling "what if?" and slightly OTT humour, the broadsheet is far, far better than the book it advertises, although it must be said that by mimicking pre-war German bookbinding and presentation the product itself achieves a weight and impressiveness sadly lacking in the contents.

The real problem is that all the stage setting is nothing more: neither Kennedy nor Hitler, nor anyone close to them, makes an appearance at all although many characters in the story bear the names and attributes of real men of the Nazi era. We are plunged into a Berlin redesigned by Albert Speer after a German success in the war has led to the creation of a Greater German Reich from Alsace to the Urals, from Murmansk to the Caucasus, in a Europe where the Greek-Yugoslavian rump is backward and unimportant while a coincidental number of

twelve nominally free nations from Great Britain and Italy to Portugal and Finland form an EC with the same twelve-starred flag we know today, a coincidence I found it impossible to swallow and unnecessary to invent.

We are buried in immense architecture but battered by foul weather, in the style of the similarly clichéd **SS-GB**; all is dirty and threatening, and as Len Deighton similarly foresaw almost everyone wore some kind of uniform - the Corporal from Koeppenick has a lot to answer for!

The action is very slow, and reactions mottle even slower. We are in a world where an increasing number of wealthy and influential older Party stalwarts are dying or being murdered mysteriously, and only the oddly named Nazi criminal-detective Xavier March is interested in finding out why. Aply assisted by an American female journalist named Charlie Maguire - of Irish and German parentage, with an immaculate German accent but looking far too liberated to pass for a Hausfrau - he finds himself pursued by one of the nastier Nazi bosses, one Odilo Globocnik who, after being in our world captured by the British in Carinthia in 1945, committed suicide before he could be tried for his crimes.

Apart from a few silly mistakes, both in German spelling and in such things as implying that only criminals would have their fingerprints on record whereas it seems obvious to me that in a Nazi State of this kind everyone would have been fingerprinted, the plot seems fairly convincing. The trouble is that Harris has never decided just what kind of book he is writing - is it a crime thriller, a political thriller, a historical survey, even a romance? We keep switching from one to another, while ever more inefficient police and Gestapo officials muddy the waters and wipe out a few more fringe characters.

Modern novels have developed a frustrating but attention-catching system of "tasters" - subsidiary plots are introduced early on and then left hanging, to be brought back later as the story unfolds. Harris fails to use this technique, and the book suffers because we are left, like March, unravelling the plot bit by bit with no real suspense at all. Even the denouement can be guessed, if not necessarily the reasons for people's actions.

I confess I was deeply disappointed by **Fatherland**: the advance publicity offered so much, the book gives us so little - in fact, the whole plot could be transferred to many other places and times without undue difficulty because Harris just does not make use of the universe he has so painstakingly created. You say, for example, have read of

Speer's plans for a railway with carriages the size of houses, immaculately furnished and with lecture halls and bedrooms; Harris refers to it and to the specially built stations from which the trains go, but we never ride on them or have any real contact with them - it's all background and nothing to enjoy.

If the author would care to visualise his universe more clearly, and then take us right inside it - especially at the top level of political chicanery - he could well give us a book of immense power and interest. He has failed, poverty of imagination leaving him messing about in dirty streets on the fringes of that society; his failure is our loss.

Larry McCaffery (ed)
Storming the Reality Studio
Duke University Press, 1991,
387pp, £14.95pb

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

What is it we are talking about here? Postmodernism is a cultural mode which has developed since the Second World War. First identified by the French philosopher Lyotard, it is a reaction to, and development from, the modernism of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. It can be seen in the music of John Cage and Talking Heads, in the performance art of Laurie Anderson and the rise of improvisation comedy, and in the fiction of Borges and John Fowles. Among its characteristics, it is anti-hierarchical, what Michel Foucault called a heterotopia, where there is no authority, no absolute, no clear ordering within a list. This results in the breakdown of boundaries between genres, and between author, character and reader.

Cyberpunk is a mode of science fiction which developed during the 1980s. First named by Gardner Dozois in response to the fiction of William Gibson, it is identified by a detailed interest in the surfaces of the worlds described, in the interface between computer/machine and human, in low-life and urban decay, in the glossy, glamorous conflict of low-life hero and multinational corporation. It is a form of romance which builds on traditional SF formulations (cyberpunks acknowledge debts to Alfred Bester, J G Ballard, Samuel Delany among others), salted with some influences from the edges of the mainstream (cyberpunks also acknowledge debts to William Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon). Since these latter are clearly identifiable as postmodernists, does that make cyberpunk postmodern?

That is what Larry McCaffery believes, and what he sets out to demonstrate in this fascinating and entertaining book, which bears the slightly unwieldy subtitle "A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction". The problem is that my

opening paragraphs are closer to a definition of terms than you will find anywhere in this book. Maybe definitions such as this run counter to the heterotopic grain of postmodernism, but one can't help feeling that McCaffery is stretching boundaries as much as possible in order to shoehorn in his thesis.

Let us begin with what the book contains. After an introduction and a checklist there are 29 short stories or novel extracts, followed by 20 essays or extracts from longer critical works. The authors of the fiction are impeccable: Acker, Ballard, Burroughs, Cadigan, Delany, DeLillo, Gibson, Pynchon, Rucker, Shepard, Shiner, Shirley, Sterling. There's good straight-down-the-line postmodernism here, straightforward SF, clear no-doubt-about-it cyberpunk, and a few which hover in between. But they don't all cross boundaries in a way which fits the thesis. Delany's tale of a homosexual encounter with a thread of fantasy shows SF fitting the postmodern mould, but cyberpunk it ain't. And what about Lewis Shiner's 'Stoked', which isn't cyberpunk, isn't SF, and is no more postmodern than **Catcher in the Rye**, which it closely resembles? In fact the only story here which unequivocally fits McCaffery's case is Bruce Sterling's 'Twenty Evocations'.

As for the non-fiction, there are some of the best critical essays I have seen on cyberpunk, especially by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr and Veronica Hollinger. There are also extracts from longer works by Fredric Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard which are clear and informative on postmodernism. There is little of the turgid and impenetrable prose you might expect from such a gaggle of academics. However, Timothy Leary (yes, that Timothy Leary) is far too precious for his own or anyone else's good. And there is one infuriating instance of pretentiousness, when Arthur Kroker and David Cook disguise an interesting premise (about "TV [as] the processed world triumphant") in statements such as "TV functions by substituting the negative totality of the audience with its pseudo-mediations by electronic images for genuine sociality, and the possibility of authentic human solidarities" (p232). Yet, these articles hardly seem to touch upon the presumed central link between postmodernism and cyberpunk.

McCaffery tries to set the agenda in his introduction, when he equates the postmodern world with post-industrial capitalism, where information has become the key global resource. In so far as cyberpunk deals with the human and societal problems of information overload and other aspects of our information age, it can be seen as an outgrowth from post-

industrial society. But does that lead us to infer the identification between cyberpunk and postmodernism?

Part of the problem is that McCaffery speaks of "terms that were previously speculative abstractions ... suddenly become literalized" (p6). This may be a phenomenon of postmodernism, yet it is also the backbone of all science fiction. Cyberpunk may literalize the abstract in this way, but as science fiction has always done rather than as

postmodernism is now doing. Cyberspace has bled outward from SF into postmodernism, rather than, as MCCaffery would have it, from postmodernism into SF.

And this is a point which is backed up by one of the few essays in the book which directly addresses the question of the relationship between the two modes. Brian McHale, in 'POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM', points out that the growing legitimization of science fiction, and especially of cyberpunk, is part of a general postmodern phenomenon, the collapse of genre distinctions between high and low art, between pop culture (SF) and "serious" fiction. In fact, this feedback between "high" and "low" is a universal of our cultural history. The only thing which makes postmodernism any different from the rest is the speed of the feedback loop, which has allowed postmodernists such as Pynchon to feed on the SF of their youth in their own fictions, for cyberpunks to feed on Pynchon for inspiration, and for Pynchon to feed in turn on cyberpunk in his most recent novel.

There is a relationship between postmodernism and science fiction, though the blinkers imposed on this book do not allow it to be properly explored. But cyberpunk is not, in and of itself, a purely postmodern phenomenon, nor is it the only part of science fiction which could be so identified. The result is a readable, fascinating book - well worth reading whether you are interested in postmodernism or cyberpunk - but it consistently manages to miss the one target it has set itself.



Graham Joyce Dark Sister Headline, 1992

Reviewed by Molly Brown

Dark Sister is one of those stories that estate agents must hate - those stories where that "character cottage with original features" is hiding something unspeakably evil - those stories that make you swear you'll never move house again.

Like most books in the *there's something nasty under the floorboards* (or in this case: up the chimney and down at the archaeological dig too) genre, **Dark Sister** opens with a bit of DIY and features that increasingly rare phenomenon: the nuclear family where Daddy has a job and Mummy stays at home. Daddy is an archaeologist named Alex; Mummy is a housewife named Maggie. They have two cute kids. Sam is a lively little troublemaker, three years old, prone to telling fibs. Amy is straightforward, fearless, and wise-beyond-her-years. She is five - going on thirty. They have the obligatory dog (a Labrador).

But all is not well within the family unit; even before the discovery that will trigger the main conflict, this is a marriage heading for the rocks. Alex is insecure; he is afraid that if Maggie finds outside interests and friends of her own, he will lose her. Maggie understands this, but still feels trapped; Alex doesn't realise that his possessiveness and need for control are driving them apart. At home, Maggie finds a witch's diary hidden behind the fireplace. At work, Alex makes a grisly find: the skeleton of a woman who had been squeezed into a tiny box and buried alive. The two discoveries are of course

connected. Maggie's interest in the diary becomes an obsession; as she delves further and further, experimenting with the magic formulas in the book, she begins to lose her identity, eventually becoming both the diarist and the "dark sister". Alex's personality changes from merely

irritable to violent and then vindictive as he and Maggie enter into a bitter custody battle over the children. Meanwhile, down in the playroom, the kids are involved in a battle of their own, with the five-year-old pitted against a spirit that is trying to kill her brother.

Doing their bits on the sidelines are a gentle herbalist, a wacky child psychiatrist whom I visualised as the professor from the **Back to the Future** films and whose unorthodox methods provide a bit of comic relief, as does an eccentric woman of eighty-something who dispels evil spirits by spitting beans at them and who - if **Dark Sister** is ever made into a film - absolutely *must* be played by Julie Walters.

Genre fiction is often accused of paying too little attention to characterisation. Not so in this case. It's the characters that bring "Dark Sister" to life. As people, they are far from perfect; they have strengths and weaknesses, good points and infuriatingly bad points. They do not remain static; they are constantly changing, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. No one is completely good or completely evil. Each is the kind of multi-faceted character that any actor would see as a gift.

In fact, the first thing I did when I finished reading the book was to cast the movie version in my head. I won't go through the entire list - I've already mentioned my choices for the psychiatrist and the old woman - but guess what part I have in mind for Jack Nicholson?

Between Entropy & Renaissance SF in France

by André Ruaud
with Jean-Daniel Brèque

A few years ago, Norman Spinrad in an essay in *Locus*, compared the state of SF in France with its state in the U.S.A. before the so-called "big boom" in SF publishing.

Norman Spinrad neglected the thriving publishing industry of "bandes dessinées" (hardcover graphic novels or albums), which has taken the place of SF in French culture, or has at least robbed SF of an important part of its potential audience: for anybody who looks for the kind of intelligent escape reading SF generally affords, there are literally hundreds of graphic novels on the stands, often with SF or fantasy themes, which are well-distributed, reasonably priced and, for the most part, very good. Most of the specialised bookshops which handled both SF and comic albums have been forced to neglect SF in favour of "bandes dessinées"—when they did not drop SF altogether.

As a result, SF in France is not as popular as it should be. And with only a few lines and a few editors, you'll understand that our SF lines have some difficulties in being a representative sampling of what is published in English. The editors are mostly receptive to new trends in American SF, and as a general rule books by the most important writers are regularly translated over here. Nevertheless a great many writers are still waiting for a wider translation—authors such as James Tripp Jr., Michael Bishop, Julian May, or Poul Anderson,

amongst the undeservedly neglected. Not to speak of fantasy writers—French editors are just now beginning to publish some fantasy writers.

For the French SF writer, not only is it difficult to get published—it is also very difficult to find a good outlet. The old rule of "Success breeds success" applies here, and if "old hands" like Jean-Pierre Andrevon, Philippe Curval, Serge Brussolo and Pierre Pelot have relatively little trouble selling, young and up-and-coming writers find it more difficult.

As this new decade starts, there are only eight SF lines in France (seven in a mass market paperback format, one in a trade paperback format—hardcovers don't exist in France outside the book-clubs). During the last decade, almost twenty SF lines have vanished—a disappearance not notably compensated for by the publication of SF books not labelled as such by mainstream publishers (despite the efforts of editor Jacques Goimard with some houses like Orban and Presses de la Cité). As a matter of fact, a sizeable portion of the reading public now regularly buy SF in second-hand bookshops ...

Of the eight SF lines, four never publish any French-originated fiction, two publish it only from time to time, and two are totally devoted to French writers. Two SF lines totally devoted to French writers, isn't that great? Well, not exactly ...

The "Futurs" line is put out by a very small publisher (Editions de l'Aurore), their books

aren't easy to find, they publish only one or two titles a year, and they pay ... not a lot, and when they can. An interesting and useful French SF line, but hardly the best outlet a writer can dream of.

The "Anticipation" line is far more interesting: Fleuve Noir is a department of one of the main publishing houses (Presses de la Cité), "Anticipation" is nearly 40 years old, most of the French SF writers have been published in it, the books are well distributed, there are four new titles a month (six until recently), and "Anticipation" has allowed a lot of writers to become professional.

There are many problems, though: first, the "Anticipation" books are short—they are novellae more than real novels, and the new editor has decided to reject many-parts novels. They are on the stands for only one month (in many regards, "Anticipation" can be compared to a monthly magazine, only that in this case each text is a volume in itself). And, most of all, "Anticipation" is a "low brow" line—that is to say, they mostly publish science fiction of a very basic kind, space opera, adventure SF, sword and sorcery ... As a result, "Anticipation" offers a lot of low grade novels, easily read, easily forgotten, and a writer can hardly have a really good career being published only in Fleuve Noir "Anticipation".

The best outlets certainly are the Denoel and J'ai Lu lines. Denoel offer three sub-lines, "Presence du Futur" (pocket books, devoted to SF), "Presence du Fantastique" (pocket books, devoted to "dark fantasy"). Jacques Chambon, the editor, regularly publishes a small number of French writers (Jean-Pierre Hubert, Emmanuel Jouanne, Colette Fayard and Jacques Barberi are the

more frequent ones), allowing them to develop demanding works. He seems to prefer the more literate and "borderline" edge of the genres, for the translations as well as for the French works. Thus, no French writers are able to publish within the Denoel lines any mainstream SF, any fantasy, any space opera, even demanding ones. However, it's almost impossible for a writer not already part of the usual team to get published by Denoel.

J'ai Lu sometimes publishes French works, but not regularly--and of course some writers tend to be the "house writers" of the line (Christian Leourier, Joelle Wintrebert).

When you're French and you write SF which isn't "low brow" or "very literate", and you aren't already in one of the teams, well, it's quite difficult to be published--writers like Pierre Stolze, Jean-Claude Dunyach, Claude Ecken or Richard Canal, for example, are very good ones, but they

have great difficulties in getting a contract. And the writers of "Anticipation" have difficulties in getting recognized by the readers, and publishing more demanding fiction.

On the short stories front, things are even worse--there's no more prozine, the only one, **Fiction** (the French edition of **F&SF**) disappeared some two years ago after a long and pitiful agony ... **Asimov Presente** is a series of original SF anthologies (from Isaac Asimov's **SF Magazine**), but it doesn't accept any French writers. You can publish horror short stories in **Territoires de l'Inquietude** (the anthology series edited by Alain Dormieux, part of the "Presence du

Fantastique" line). The fandom foers some anthologies, a small press publisher (Editions Ca rien n'a d'importance) and some fanzines

and both

(Miniature K.R.N.

Swiss SF&F museum "The House of Elsewhere" are also an interesting outlet.

A few French writers have translated their own works into English in order to get published in the USA and the UK--some have already succeeded. Yet it can be done only for the short stories, translating a whole novel being too great a work, and of course there are but marginal attempts.

With French SF still more or less in a ghetto state,

one would think we have a thriving fandom here. That is not quite true.

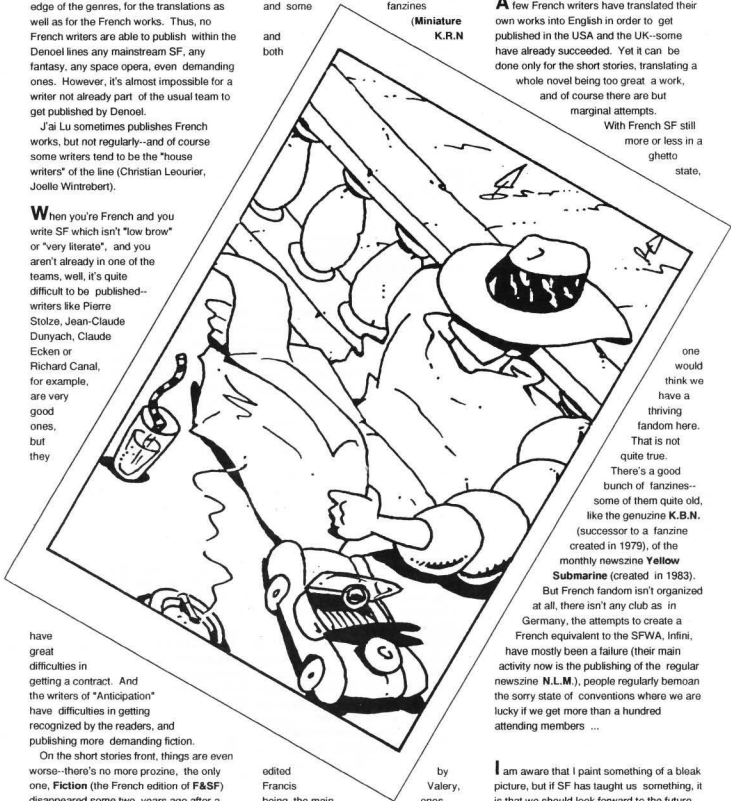
There's a good bunch of fanzines--some of them quite old, like the genzine **K.B.N.** (successor to a fanzine created in 1979), of the monthly newzine **Yellow Submarine** (created in 1983).

But French fandom isn't organized at all, there isn't any club as in Germany, the attempts to create a French equivalent to the **SFWA**, **Infini**, have mostly been a failure (their main activity now is the publishing of the regular newzine **N.L.M.**), people regularly bemoan the sorry state of conventions where we are lucky if we get more than a hundred attending members ...

I am aware that I paint something of a bleak picture, but if SF has taught us something, it is that we should look forward to the future. Between entropy and renaissance, French SF is still there. The engine is ticking over, but it only waits for the smallest spark to go at full speed again.

edited by Francis being the main publishing good short French is also spoken in Belgium and Quebec, thus French writers can be published in the various semiprozines of those countries, **Imagine ...** and **Solaris** in Quebec, **Phenix** and **Magie Rouge** in Belgium. The anthologies published by the

by Valery, ones stories).



Paperback Graffiti

Edited by Stephen Payne

Pulp Culture

I have just seen *Alien*². The cinema wasn't all that full (comes from viewing the 2:45 screening, I suppose), but I guess that the producers, having spent \$50 million or so, must be confident of a reasonable rate of return. That means burns on seats; a lot of burns on seats. Last year the largest grossing film was *Terminator 2*, the year before one of the largest was *Total Recall*; and it's not just 'Arnie'. There's also *Robocop*, *Predator*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *ET*, *Back to the Future*, *Batman*, *Hook*, plus all those Grade 'Z' SF cheapies that turn up with depressing regularity on the video library racks. SF films are big business. And the ensuing argument goes something like this: if all those hundreds of thousands of people around the world are prepared to spend good money, and their good time, to see a film like *Terminator 2*, then that audience must also be an enormous untapped market for literary SF. Well, there is a problem here: *People don't read books*

Okay, I know you read books and I do too. But we're in the minority. How many of your family, friends, work colleagues, etc. actually read books; be honest now. Here are some figures. Last year almost a quarter of the adults in the UK didn't read a single book and the average amount per person spent on books was £34, less than all major western european countries and America where the average citizen spends almost double at £66. Now, while some of the difference between UK and USA spending will be made up by users of our Library Service, it's also worth remembering that books are significantly cheaper in America and therefore the average American citizen could be buying, and reading, up to four times as many books per head as we are. Simply put,

£34 isn't much money. It's just about enough for 7 mass-market paperbacks, or between 4 and 5 trade paperbacks (if you're lucky), or only 2 (count them) hardbacks. Still, even 2 can make the difference, as it only takes sales of about 300 a week to push a book into the hardback top ten. Hands up those of you who bought *any* full-price hardback fiction last year. I thought so. If you've been buying books at all, you've been buying paperbacks - and that's where we come in; well sort of.

We are a minority within the minority pursuit of reading books. We in the BSFA, and even here at **Paperback Graffiti**, have the power to influence a book's success. And if you don't believe me, just think of the furore that has surrounded *Chung Kuo* or, conversely, the plaudits that have been heaped upon *Take Back Plenty*. In fact, this book is a case in point. Written by a relatively unknown SF writer, Colin Greenland, published and barely publicised by a company who were in the process of gurgling down the plug hole at the time, now it has won awards from several British Institutions, including the BSFA, and is recognised as a major SF novel of the nineties. No question, *Take Back Plenty* would have done well without us - but we did help raise the title in the SF book-buyers conscience, we did help draw it into the culture of SF.

That's right, *the culture of SF*. What all these blockbuster SF films prove is that there is a market for some form of SF and that, even amongst those who do not read or want to read the fiction, there is a recognition of the genre's popular motifs. After all, where would the cinema be without Androids, Cyborgs, Laser

weapons, Spaceships & Spacestations, Computers with errant personalities, Time Travel, Matter Transmission and all the other paraphernalia of our genre? Indeed, what could be more Asimovian in it's humanist attitudes than *Star Trek*? And there's the rub. The culture of SF begins with the written word; the short story, the novel, the article in **Vector** or **Foundation**. Then the talking, the publicity, the critical appraisal take over as that collection of words move into the public domain. Finally, the reader has his say with his five pound note. For it is only in the mind of the reader that those words, that imagination, really comes alive. *Terminator 2* and it's ilk could not exist without us. The creators of such fantasies *need us*, *need our* culture, and even if we can only realistically expect 1% of their audience to take to the fiction, at least that *is* 1%; at least it's not all one-way traffic. That's why I believe the culture of SF, the *pulp culture*, is so important, and hopefully **Paperback Graffiti** will rise to the challenge of informing and promoting it.

I'd like to thank Andy Sawyer for his assistance and lots of good advice in the preparation of this **Paperback Graffiti**. Much appreciated Andy. I'd also like to thank Catie Cary for *finally* agreeing upon a title

Finally, a plea. I intend to operate a policy of positive discrimination in favour of the 'small-press'. So if there are any small-press publishers out there, then review copies, information, promotional material, etc. would be most welcome. I cannot promise a good review, but I can promise a fair one.

Novels

C J Cherryh Heavy Time

NEL, 1992, 314pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

For anyone, like me, who has not encountered the work of C. J. Cherryh before, this new novel is probably as good a place to start as any. Certainly it displays a catalogue of strengths and weaknesses which seem absolutely typical.

The greatest strength is her plotting. This is a resolutely gripping story which opens when a pair of hard-boiled spacers, Bird and Ben, pick up a distress signal from a place where there shouldn't be a ship at all. Miraculously, they find a survivor, Dekker, barely alive and not quite sane; they also find a salvageable ship which could be their financial making. Back at base, as Bird and Ben go through the routines of heavy time to recover from months of free-fall, they engage the byzantine workings of the company to establish their salvage claim. Meanwhile, even more elaborate and nefarious politicking is set in motion by the events that caused Dekker's wreck. All builds to an explosive climax as the long-submerged antagonisms between the wildcatters and the company burst to the surface.

This is a very satisfying piece of storytelling which evokes echoes of the action-adventure space yarns of the forties and fifties, yet even amid these strengths there are weaknesses. Longueurs, for instance, as when the antagonisms between Ben and Dekker are repeatedly shown during the journey back to base. Since these characters tend to be somewhat wooden, changing little if at all during the course of the novel, all we get is repetition rather than character development.

The main weakness is in the writing, in particular a tendency towards rambling sentences which abruptly run into a colon: which is made to serve as the uncertain glue tying together two totally different sentences leading in different directions, and there might even be a second: which sets the sentence dithering in yet another direction until it runs out of steam with a - Yet even here there are strengths, especially a tough verbal language, polyglot in its sources, which lends a very believable edge to the society she creates.

If this really is typical of Cherryh's hard SF stories, I think I would find them irritating but, on balance, entertaining.

David Eddings Seeress Of Kell

Corgi, 1992, 444pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Jessica Yates

Seeress Of Kell concludes not only the 5-book epic fantasy **The Malloreon**, but also the 10-book saga of the reluctant hero Garion begun in **The Belgariad**. It is fashionable to sneer at authors who make the best-seller lists, but those who sneer have missed a good deal of escapist entertainment (unless they've tried Eddings and find him not to their taste). Of the three authors marketed by Ballantine books as Tolkien's successors - Donaldson, Brooks and Eddings-, it is Eddings who provides the most enjoyable read - even the second and third time through. For the most part he avoids high-flown epic language, rather choosing to send up the genre in the American tradition (cf. Leiber and the **Incomplete Enchanter** series).

However, the climax of an epic fantasy demands heightened solemnity and although Eddings manages the style, he fails to pull a trick out of the hat at the grand moment of the Seeress's Choice, a disappointment when he has come through with cliff-hangers and other surprises en route. It is true that Tolkien set his followers a hard task when he made Frodo claim the Ring instead of throwing it into the Crack of Doom; one can't now simply fight the Dark Lord to the finish, but both Donaldson, in his first trilogy, and Guy Gavriel Kay, in the **Fionavar Tapestry** series, managed to rise to the challenge. In **Seeress Of Kell**, however, the Seeress Cyradis makes the obvious

choice of Light against Dark and this supposedly climatic scene is less memorable than the adventures along the way that preceded it, and the tying-up of loose ends that follow - especially the marrying off!

Not that **Seeress Of Kell** isn't entertaining. Eddings enlivens the early chapters with the discovery of the long-lost colony of Mimbrates (the 'thee' and 'thou' knights), whose pompous language is bound to raise a smile, especially when debunked by Silk. We learn the answers to riddles posed in earlier books, such as, "Which quester will die?", "Who will be the new God of the Angaraks?" and "Who will be Vella's mate?" I scored 100% on these, but didn't anticipate the sensitive scene of Vella's 'marriage', one of the book's strongest episodes. Other pleasures are the way Silk is manoeuvred into marriage with Liselle, and the Emperor Zakath's eventual route to happiness. The essay on Eddings in the new **Twentieth Century Science-Fiction Writers** was, I thought, a very fair account of his merits and defects.

Charles L Grant Something Stirs

NEL, 1992, 275pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

"Nobody died until Eddie Roman screamed."

Eddie Roman and his father are hacked to death by someone or something which

disappears without trace. That is the start of this, another of Charles L. Grant's psychological novels. Like **Stunts**, **Something Stirs** builds gradually to it's climax. Unlike **Stunts** this one gets somewhere. Grant

peoples this book with an assorted cast, their characters revealed a piece at a time as the story unfolds. He is a believer in 'slice of life' style writing, with characters who have lived before the book opens, and continue past



Art by Charles Grant

the book's end. The problem here is that his people are not convincing enough to sustain the premise. Still, the plot isn't too bad. A group of teenagers are stunned by the horrible death of one of their number and gradually they come to realise that Something Horrible is stalking their town. But will anyone believe them?

The tension slowly builds as the main characters weave in and out, and experience the terror released by Eddie Roman before he died. In a way, this is reminiscent of Stephen King's *It* (although King handles his characters better), and as in *It* the individual confrontations lead to a concerted joint confrontation with the Dark.

This is a competent book, it holds the attention, the pages keep turning and as I said before, it gets somewhere in the end, which is vastly more satisfying than the free-form ending of *Stunts*.

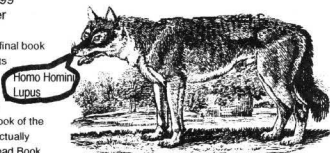
Patricia Keneally
The Throne Of Scone
(Book 3 of "The Keltiad")
Grafton, 1992, 480pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Alan Fraser

The Throne Of Scone is the final book chronologically in Keneally's Kelts in space saga, completing the story started in book 2, *The Copper Crown*. As I explained in my review of Book 2, the "first" book of the series, *The Silver Branch*, was actually written after Book 3. You must read Book 2 before this one, but it's not necessary to read Book 1.

It continues the story of Aeron, Queen of Celts, sorceress and warrior, on her quest to save Keltia, which is occupied by the evil Cabiri empire. The Cabiri, like the Celts, are the descendants of races that settled on earth millennia ago in Atlantis after the destruction of their own home. When the war between the two factions, the Danaans and the Telchines, destroyed Atlantis, the honourable Danaans became our Celts, while the wicked Telchines headed off into space to found the Cabiri Empire. The Danaans eventually migrated into space themselves in AD 453 to found Keltia a thousand light years from earth. The history of Keltia from then until the time of the story, AD 3512, includes a virtually identical Arthurian legend. The Keltian Arthur defeated the invading Cabiri 1500 years before, but his ship disappeared into the Dead Sea of space, taking with it the Cabiri flagship. He will, of course, return to save the Kelts in their hour of desperation. Aeron's quest to save

Keltia and Earth is to brave the perils of the Dead Sea and find Arthur's flagship, together with the lost treasures of Keltia brought from the home of the Danaans before Earth. These artifacts, product of an incredible lost science, are the only things that can save Keltia.

Keneally has shamelessly plundered the Celtic and Arthurian mythologies for her ideas, a fact which she cheerfully admits as "the old Celtic tradition of cattle-raiding", and she's mixed in a heavy dose of space opera to finish off the brew. The story got off to a cracking start in the previous book, although it does resolve itself a trifle weakly in this one. Another problem is that Keneally just doesn't make the Cabiri Emperor horrid enough for us to be really glad when he meets his fate. Come back, Ming the Merciless! Nevertheless, well worth a light hearted read, and Keneally is now writing a second Keltic trilogy based in her "Arthurian" days, I believe.



Garry Kilworth
Midnight's Sun
Grafton, 1992, 317pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Brendan Wignall

Midnight's Sun - A Story Of Wolves is the second talking animal book by Garry Kilworth which I have come across; the first was *Hunter's Moon - A Story Of Foxes*, and - to my surprise, since I'm not keen on the sub-genre - I found it pretty enjoyable.

The same cannot be said of his latest outing, however. This book carries a commendation from *Punch* on it's cover, and this is appropriate, as both magazine and novel belong to the past. Where *Hunter's Moon* carried a lightness of touch and an originality of treatment which made it a pleasure to read, *Midnight's Sun* seems to hark back to a host of less original animal books.

The story concerns Athaba, a wolf exiled from it's pack for being too "original"

(a certain irony here) who meets up with a hunter facing starvation, and together they form an alliance to enable both to survive. The echoes of *White Fang* are strong in places, perhaps inevitably given the subject matter, but what really causes problems is the dialogue between the wolves, which at times is far to latinate to be plausible. I know that wolves don't talk, and that if an author wishes to have them talk he is free to decide how best to portray their linguistics, but this dialogue simply doesn't work. Complared to the dialogue in *Hunter's Moon* it is leaden and ponderous and (worst of all) unbelievable.

Midnight's Sun will probably satisfy those who seek out talking animal books, but to the rest of us it will be something of a disappointment from a writer as talented as Kilworth.

Mercedes Lackey
Magic's Promise
Roc, 1992, 320pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Magic's Promise runs into the difficulties often found in the second volume of a trilogy. The first volume can tell the story of the hero's youth and send him on a voyage of self-discovery. The third can describe the climax of his career and his life. But what do you do with Volume Two?

There is also the problem that the three parts of a true trilogy should be independent enough to be read separately, but how much do you tell the new reader about what went on in the earlier volumes? Mercedes Lackey tackles both these problems in *Magic's Promise*; I'm not sure that she manages to solve them, but it is at least an interesting attempt.

Vanyel, who came into his magic powers in *Magic's Pawn*, is now seen in his maturity, the most powerful Herald-Mage of the Kingdom of Valdemar. Visiting his family after a period of service that has left him exhausted, he becomes embroiled in the struggle for the succession in a couple of neighbouring kingdoms, defending the only surviving heir against a charge of horrific and magic-induced murder.

Readers of *Magic's Pawn* will enjoy revisiting this world and it's characters, some of whom develop in surprising directions. The difficulty is that Vanyel is never all that involved personally in the events of the story. His attempts to make sense of his own life lean heavily on the events of *Magic's Pawn*, and might not

mean much to new readers. He may have discovered some new insights into his situation, but he does not change fundamentally.

Magic's Promise ends with some clear pointers as to how the trilogy will develop. For all the book's flaws, there is certainly enough to hold the interest, and I look forward to Volume Three.

Joe R. Lansdale Savage Season

NEL, 1992, 210pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

I have to say right from the start that **Savage Season** is not SF or horror. Joe Lansdale is building quite a reputation for himself as a horror writer, but this book is no more than a straight thriller, despite the flash on the backcover that proclaims "Nominated for the Bram Stoker Award".

Lansdale seems to have the idea that fleshing out characters is done by making them smart-mouth each other all the time, then throwing in a bit of biological knejerk reaction. He's wrong, this gets very wearing after a while. The plotline is a little thin too and by the end, I wasn't really concerned for the characters or the outcome. The mark of a good thriller is that the writer makes you interested enough to keep you turning pages long after bedtime. This one doesn't have it.

(It didn't win. SP)

Simon Louvish Resurrections from the Dustbin of History

Bloomsbury, 1992, 215pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Steven Tew

Parallel universe stories involving key moments of 20th Century History most commonly adopt the "Germany wins WWII" scenario. Simon Louvish takes a slightly more original premise: the rise of the Nazi Party in the 1920s and 1930s never takes place. Instead, a Communist revolution drives Hitler, Goebbels et al, to emigrate to America. The USA, particularly in the South where the KKK/WASP faction is at it's most dangerous and powerful, proves a hot-house for a Nazi Party under another name; the American Party. The main events of the novel take place in the 1960s, focused around Goebbels' (now Gable) clandestine attempts to engineer the establishment of a Fascist state headed by Adolf Hitler's son. Against this awesome and frightening backdrop, the book follows the efforts of three film

students to capture the events of the day on film.

The plot unfolds as a series of extracts from Rachel Levy's book on the Party's 'Terror Campaign of 1961' (foiled by the assassination of Hitler's eldest son), punctuated by single person narratives from the book's protagonists. Events in America, Russia, Germany, Poland, Britain, Abyssinia and the Middle East are described, as the Globe undergoes radical political changes. In writing about this fictional world, Louvish's true interest is in the politics of our own 20th Century, the conflicting political philosophies of Communism and Fascism, and the role of both society and the individual in history.

It is ambitious, to say the least, to attempt to get inside the minds of major 20th Century figures, like Hitler and Goebbels, and to invent new characters with equally important roles, whilst exploring the thoughts of the ordinary person from the fanatic to the apathetic, and setting all in a believable alternate world where the motivations, mechanics and outcomes are much like our own. I am, I must confess, not especially well versed in the political history of the 20th Century, and I suspect this rather dulls my appreciation of Louvish's handling of the contrasts between this invented world and our own: nonetheless, I was engaged by the narrative and impressed by the handling of characters, both real and fictional. Boring *not*.

Michael Martin A Year Near Proxima Centauri

Corgi, 1992, 157pp, £4.99

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

"Move over Provence!" says the cover. That challenge, the book's title, it's month-by-month diary format, it's vignettes of food and bric-a-brac, all indicate an obvious s'n'l parody/satire, targeted on Peter Mayle's best seller **A Year In Provence**. Martin attempts the doubly difficult task of having a crack at Mayle's depiction of gastronomic extravaganzas and rural Gallic manners, while making that a vehicle for spoofing SF. So in place of Provence we have the planet Provender, subject in winter to (mistral surrogate) sheets of freezing green vapour, and invaded in summer by hordes of uppity 'Parisian' Palissandrians.

Parody needs an ear as fine-tuned as - to cite a master - Max Beerbohm's was to Kipling in his story 'P. C. X 35' and whereas **A Year In Provence** dances

lightly through it's events and anecdotes, here the prose and satire are somewhat heavy-footed. In burlesque SF, Martin is more successful than he is in sending-up the expatriate idyll/anti-idyll. He weaves bizarre but recognizable themes, biological, technological, space-operic, into happenings which are analogues of incidents in Mayle's narrative. For example, a high-spot in the Provencal diary is the 'Grande Course des Chevres', where tipsters predict results by observing the goats' weight-reducing pre-race droppings. In Provender's annual Fainting Clovis races, the incidence of entrants' fainting determines the result; and the account of the evolutionary mating/fainting behaviour through which this street-racing Clovis hybrid has emerged, guys effectively the stranger reaches of fictional xeno-genetics - say Naomi Mitchison's. At other times parallels are tenuousely extended. He uses an account of 'Life Force' donating (Provender-style), matching Mayle's hilarious one of blood donating (french style), to tag on a mini-epic of planetary miscegenation - not really very funny; but then it's easier to be funny humans than it is about aliens - unless, that is, you're a Lafferty-like genius.

Michael Moorcock The Revenge Of The Rose

Grafton, 1992, 233pp, £3.99

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Michael Moorcock's well-known recipe for a trilogy or a three-part fantasy (such as this) is Introduction: Development: Conclusion. Here we have that neat division into three Books, each Book having five chapters, often captioned to indicate a similar triplicity. This may seem forbiddingly formulaic, but is quite appropriate to an Elric novel, suggesting a framework consonant with one of Moorcock's cosmic principles - the ordering principle of law; while within each chapter, and overspilling from book to book - as humans, unhumans, horses, demons, weapons and quest objects travel or are willfully propelled from sphere to sphere of the multiverse - the principle of Chaos becomes manifest. The principle of Balance, dependent on love and courage, and at risk throughout, eventually establishes itself strongly in the dénouement.

Moorcock's now sophisticated multiverse being as spatially and temporally labyrinthine as it is, able to accommodate both Putney and the Garden of The Rune, there is no obstacle to the action being located between events described in **The Vanishing Tower** and **The Battle Of The**

Black Sword. The story starts with Eric (and sword) questing for his father's soul-box, picking up en route the clairvoyant Phatt family, the bird-like poet Wheldrake and, beautiful and mysterious, the Rose, out to inflict retribution on Chaos, and questing for various objects in the possession of the equally mysterious Three Sisters. Every positive move, every half-success, is frustrated either by the strictures of law or the dispersive cataclysms of Chaos; though this mutually supportive gang manages always to re-unite and eventually to win-out. The occult legerdemain of the Rose's ultimate revenge is satisfyingly ingenious. Of the many magnificently-imagined structural artefacts, the symbolically jurgernautish rolling-platform villages of Book One and the Breughlesque 'Ship That Was' of Book Three are the most striking.

The coloured prose, the sub-legends, the wit, the fantasy's overall panache, provide abundantly all that enthusiasts of Melniboné could wish for.

J. & G. Reeves-Stevens Nightfeeder

Roc, 1992, 285pp, £4.50
Reviewed by Brendan Wignall

Nightfeeder is the second of "The Chronicles of Galen Sword". It looks like trash, the portentous title of the series sounds like trash, and compared to the first of the series, **Shifter**, it's that bit nearer to being trash.

Shifter was a surprise: it's pedigree didn't lead one to expect much, but it's energy and aversion to cliché came as a pleasant revelation. **Nightfeeder** is still not as good, but it's still not bad.

The novel continues the human Galen Sword's investigations into his origins in the First World of elementals, shapeshifters and vampires. The first book concentrated on the shapeshifters, this one features a vampire is forced to ally himself with Sword to further his own vendetta against a power-group of the first world. The politicking is simplistic, but drives the plot adequately, and the whole thing moves swiftly enough to be enjoyable. However, there are rather more naff moments than the first book - such as a throw-away line about an outbreak of Rolex thefts being caused by magpie-like First Worlders rather than conventional crooks - and these slide **Nightfeeder** towards the trashier end of the market where most fantasy has taken permanent root.

I hope the Reeves-Stevens don't allow themselves to slip further in the final book of the trilogy; the whole thing started with considerable promise and it would be a

shame if it were not fulfilled. Worth persevering with, but giving off worrying signs for the future.

Michael Scott Rohan & Allan Scott Spell Of Empire/ The Horns Of Tarturus Orbit, 1992, 462pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Terry Broome

Supposition would lead one to the conclusion that this book is the first in a series, although the packaging gives no hint apart from the two-fold title. If it is part of a series, again one can only suppose after careful reading, that **The Horns Of Tarturus** is the volume title and **A Spell Of Empire** the title of the series, but all this conjecture remains unsupported by any direct statement.

The characters talk and think anachronistically, one using the term 'Führer' to describe a monster at least several centuries before that title took on such unsavoury connotations. But then there seems little sense of history and a scantier appreciation of scenery, so that the story may well have been set on another world as seven-hundred years after the death of Attila (the date given with the obligatory map).

Saying this, the story is far from dull and kept me happily amused for several hours. It isn't quite in the tradition of either **Leiber's**

Swords series or **Dumas's The Three**

Musketeers as the back cover blurb suggests, although it does have elements of both, but follows more in the less pure footsteps of **Indiana Jones** and three-hundred other fantasy titles.

Volker, the hero, is hired with a gang of others by a loose association of merchants in a get-rich-quick enterprise, which involves a long and hazardous journey, ostensibly as traders. The real scheme, however, is to thwart an evil organisation of sorcerers and monsters by disposing of a magical horn with which Volker is soon entrusted. He and his three companions make an interesting, harmy buch of adventurers, whose scrapes are amusing, character building for Volker, and rather too easily overcome.

The villain's identity is immediately obvious and the big scene at the end anti-climatic, but you can't expect meat from a self-confessed fantasy romp and this time the salad is well-dressed (*run that by me again* - SP).

Bob Shaw The Shadow Of Heaven Gollancz, 1992, 174pp, £3.99 Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

An over-populated earth, after a war which has caused sterility in the soil, is dependent for it's food upon the sea. The only areas where conventional food plants can be grown are a series of floating platforms, the International Land Extensions, otherwise known as Heaven. Because of the urgent need for food, the Food Technology Authority which controls it's supply is rapidly assuming supreme political power.

Into this scenario comes Victor Stirling, a reporter, searching for his half-brother who has disappeared. Evidence leads him to believe that his brother has gone to heaven and when Stirling follows, he finds a whole community of illegal immigrants, unable to live in the cramped conditions of Earth. Stirling's attempt to come to terms with his brother lead eventually to an upheaval which looks likely to change the whole future of the planet.

Stirling is the sort of person whom I always think of as a typical Bob Shaw hero - which is not to say that he is a stereotype. An apparently ordinary man, finding trouble he never meant to look for and, at the same time, finding that he has the inner resources to meet it. For the discovery of the truth about Heaven is also Stirling's discovery of himself and his relationship with his brother.

The background is logically constructed and completely believable; every detail convinces us that this is a future society that could easily come about, if we're not very careful. The book is ich readers of Bob Shaw will recognize. Read it.

Rodney Stone Cries in the Night Grafton, 1992, 304pp, £4.99 Reviewed by Stephen Payne

The premise is simple enough. Take one family on the brink of estrangement due to the father's workload, add a holiday in the deep south of France - the Aveyron region - which is supposed to unite the disparate parents, then have their two children *disappeared* on the first night (thus the 'Cries' in the title). Simple enough, but curiously this mish-mash works rather well, at least on the level of a light-hearted read. The descriptions of France are nicely evocative and the tension between the characters - as, for example, the relationship between the two parents strains to breaking point - is also particularly effective. Perhaps less so, is the sense of alienation that

Stone attempts to create as the plot follows the father in his dealings with the French Police and his desperate investigation of his children's disappearance. This is the meat of the book and here, at times, it all seems a little too easy, as if Stone has not exploited the opportunities of such a frustrating, inimical situation perhaps as well as he could have done.

Grafton are marketing this novel as Horror; it isn't. There are no supernatural elements and the events at the well choreographed denouement are no more horrific than those that might take place in the dark crime fiction of, say, Stephen Gallagher or Ruth Rendell (though Stone is not as clumsy linguist as Gallagher). If anything, this book reminds me - rather curiously - of those quaint Hammer horror films of the sixties and early seventies (you know, the ones starring Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee & *Roy Castle*), where the monster turns out to be not very monstrous at all. Indeed, it would probably make quite a good TV mini-series, cue the surge of oscillating strings, barely discernable night scenes shot from obtrusive angles and the crocodile tears of a young, up & coming, British actress, etc...

Margaret Weis & Tracey Hickman Firesea

The Death Gate Cycle Volume 3
Bantam, 1992, 452pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Long ago in the history of the universe of this series of seven books, the world was divided by a race of magicians called Sartans into the four realms of air, fire, stone and sea, and linked only by the normally impassable Death Gate. This was so long ago that none of the worlds know of the others' existence or of any previous history. The main character, Haplo, is a member of a race called Patryns who are historic enemies of the Sartan, and who were sentenced by them to imprisonment in a horrific environment called the Labyrinth. Haplo has been ordered by his master, the Lord of the Nexus at the junction of the realms, to journey to each of them in turn to stir up dissension. The first two books in the series took him to the realms of air and fire; now *Firesea* tells the story of his third voyage through the Death Gate to Abarrach, the Realm of Stone, an underground world of seas of molten lava, ice and death. Once again he is accompanied by his dog, and the annoying Sartan magician called Alfred.

Andy Sawyer's reviews of the two previous books in the series have been very positive, particularly concerning the

humour present in *Eleven Star*. *Firesea* on the other hand, is rather a grim tale. Alfred believes himself to be the last of the Sartans, but they find in Abarrach a race of Sartans practicing their most forbidden magic, necromancy or the raising of the dead. Also, the world of Abarrach itself is gradually freezing to death as the *Firesea* shrinks and ice grows. The inhabitants of one city, Kairn Teleset, have been forced to leave their homes because of the cold and to seek shelter in Kairn Necros, the only remaining inhabited part of Abarrach. Haplo and Alfred arrive in this midst of this civil war, with armies of the dead fighting one another. They soon become embroiled in the conflict, especially when the dead rebel and start exterminating the living.

In this novel we learn more about Haplo and Alfred, and about the worlds of Th Sundering. Despite their ancient enmity, the two soon discover that even if they are not friends, their fates are inextricably linked.

I can only endorse Andy's reviews of the earlier books in this series. After turning out some of the worst formula fantasy ever written, this American pair seem to have found their feet mixing humour and serious SF in with the elf, dwarf and wizard stuff. Recommended - I shall definitely be picking up the first two Death Gate books, as well as looking out for book 4, *The Serpent Mage* (even though Greg Bear thought of that title first), set on Chelestra, the realm of water. After book 4, the realms begin to interact and then the action will really start!

Just one grumble about an increasing trend - at the end of *Firesea* there are thirty pages of adverts for the other books in this series, and all the other books by Weiss & Hickman as well. This does tend to have the opposite to the intended effect, and put you off their mammoth output.

Walter Jon Williams Days Of Atonement

Grafton, 1992, 437pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Ken Lake

Previous Williams books sent me for review have been cyberpunk, alive with murder, torture, complex computer-talk and have been very hard going. This blockbuster is much more in the style of the Great American Novel, set in a small mining town in New Mexico at the beginning of the next century, a place small enough for the police chief to know everybody and their business.

But a new high-level physics laboratory is being built on the outskirts of town, where scientists are (wait for it), "experimenting with the nature of space and time". And on the floor of the police station is, of course, a dead body.

Unfortunately, the body is of a man known to the police chief - known, that is, to have been killed in a terrible accident twenty years earlier.

From this, Williams creates a closely-knit, complex plot which provides the reader with a vast amount of carefully researched background on life in a small New Mexico town, cultural patterns which alternately intrigue and annoy as they intersect with the police investigations and with the regrettably rather jejune activities of the scientists up the road, most of whom seem to behave like immature college students and who speak that strange mixture of cheap slang and technological jargon that seems to permeate far too many American SF novels these days.

In fact, I would go as far as to say that if the sections of reported speech and conversations were rewritten with anything approaching the style and panache of the rest of Williams' writing in this book, it would be vastly improved. But that, of course, would mean imputing to the scientific personnel a level of intelligence and good speech that seems far beyond their reach in today's United States. Gnometic utterances and staccato instructions are all very well from a police chief, but one does expect better of eggheads, and one is disappointed.

All in all, this is a fine, taut novel of some depth and perception, but written almost exclusively for a American readership.

T. M. Wright Boundaries

Gollancz, 1992, 277pp, £3.99
Reviewed by Colin Bird

It is not hard to imagine where T. M. Wright finds the inspiration for the titles of his novels like *The Island*, *The Place* and *The School*. Instead of thumbing through Shakespeare or the Bible for a quote, Wright picks a word from his dictionary. Judging from this example that chosen word came first, long before the story, and is typical of the short titles in publishing these days that allow for BIG eye-catching print on the cover. But enough of the cover, what is inside?

Boundaries is a ghost story of the old-fashioned sort, but written in modern style. Short chapters, fractured narrative time-lines, jump cuts... You know the sort of thing. The story centres upon Anne Case, a recluse who is brutally murdered by a man who then commits suicide. An open and shut case say the police, except her twin brother, David, who is psychic, isn't convinced. He feels Anne has crossed to the wrong side

of a barrier separating the living from the dead. A nosy detective is troubled by the murder and feels the presence of Anne Case as if she is still alive. David attempts suicide to find Anne's spirit and to solve the mystery of life after death.

The writing is lucid and the style masks the underlying lack of narrative flow. In fact it's all over the place with multiple characters pursuing different objectives in different locations and times. The author just about maintains control so that reading never becomes a chore, it's just confusing and, fatally, not very interesting. I became involved only with the finale where the spectre of murder returns, but the action is so interrupted and prolonged that the tension evaporates. I haven't read any other books of his, so I don't know if this is typical. It certainly contains some nice writing and it makes a change from the monster-

anthologies

Mary Gentle & Roz Kaveney (Eds) Villains!

ROC, 1992, 337pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Brendan Wignall

Villains! is a surprising disappointment: it's "created" by Mary Gentle and Neil Gaiman, edited by Gentle and Roz Kaveney and it is a "Midnight Rose shared-world anthology"; as was *Temps*, which I enjoyed enormously. The idea behind this shared world is to tell the untold stories of fantasy from the villains' points of view: as the cover of the book has it, "Who needs heroes anyway?"

Well, on the evidence of this collection the heroes have relatively little to fear yet. The best part of *Villains!* is the framing narrative, 'Cartomancy' written by Mary Gentle, a smart allegory of the fascination which evil can exert. For most of the rest, however, Hannah Arendt's remark about "the banality of evil" seems more appropriate. 'The Strongest Armour' by Stephen Baxter is a neat tale about the immortality of arms dealers, and Dave Langford's 'The Arts of the Enemy' is as off-beat and entertaining as one might expect, but otherwise we have a host of impressive names turning in relatively unimpressive stories.

This is a good idea from a so-far successful team, but somehow it just doesn't come off. Gentle's next novel *Grunts* sounds as though it's taking place in the same sort of area as *Villains!*, and give her

performance here at least, we might expect to see a successful story from the bad guys' point of view. Until then, though, villains seem destined to deserve their voicelessness.

Stephen Jones (Ed.) The Mammoth Book of Vampires

Robinson, 1992, 553pp, £5.99
Reviewed by Jim Steel

This book must have been a bugger to edit. Dave Langford has pointed out that many stories which rely on a weird twist often fail when included in a thematic collection. Not for nothing did he call it the Vampire effect - at times this anthology looks like twenty-nine games of spot the vampire. Consequently, several great stories are crucified in here; a prime example being Frances Garfield's 'The House At Evening', a superb piece of American Gothic which reveals its two heroines to be vampires with it's final paragraph.

Overall, though, Stephen Jones has done a better job than would be expected. For example, while there are plenty of pieces here which utilise vampirism as a metaphor for disease, there are no vampires with AIDS stories.

Given that the entire subject has long since reached the stage of self-parody, the stories which prove to be most enjoyable are the ones which skirt around it, such as those by Clive Barker, Dennis Etchison and E. F. Benson, and those which pick up the cliché and run with it. Of the latter group the success rate is lower. While Brian Stapleford, Howard Waldrop and F. Marion Crawford are represented by delightful extrapolations, Karl Edward Wagner's 'Beyond Any Measure' turns out to be a very sorry sex and shopping variation. Les Daniel's 'Yellow Fog' starts off strongly, but is unable to maintain it's momentum. The remaining novellas are more successful. Hugh B. Cave's 'Strangella' is a delicious pulp tale and Kim and F. Paul Wilson both work with emerging vampire societies to good effect in both Victorian and modern times respectively, though to very different ends.

This is a flawed collection, but it is certainly more substantial than a chance to merely compare differing authorial styles on the same theme.

Reissues

Philip K. Dick A Maze Of Death

Grafton, 1992, 191pp, £4.99

Philip K. Dick The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch

Grafton, 1992, 204pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

These two books are Dick at his most chilling. In *A Maze Of Death*, a group of people arrive on a world where tiny artificial insects observe them, huge gelatinous things can copy whatever artifact is put in front of them and a huge building changes location and function. Then one by one they are killed. This is a universe where religion is revealed; an artificial theology which may or may not reflect the theology we know of.

The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch continued Dick's obsession with religion in a world where participants in the communal chewing of the drug Can-D fall into a shared fantasy described in the language of Christian Communion and transubstantiation. Then the eponymous Eldritch returns from an interplanetary journey with Chew-Z, which delivers the subject into another reality entirely: one which cannot be escaped from.

The theme in each book is, just what is reality? Are the new inhabitants of Delmek-O in *A Maze Of Death* the subject of some bizarre experiment? Does the world actually have a location? And is Palmer Eldritch human, alien or God? **The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch** is listed in the compilation *Horror: 100 Best Novels* (Jones and Newman) and I can see why Tad Williams chose it. Someone once described reading Dick as waking up from a dream - only to discover you are still in a lucid dream, having dreamt that you've awoken. So then you *really* wake and find... (etc.).

Both books are set to be classics of Twentieth Century SF. Dick is uncompromising in his use of medieval theology and philosophy, but this to me is one of his strengths. He must be one of the few writers who can genuinely dramatise abstruse theological questions in a popular form. And if this itself seems to dry, check his reference to 'Winnie-The-Pooh Acres' (Palmer Eldritch) and ask yourself if this writer's dark humour has not been undervalued. It's currently fashionable to rave over Dick, but this is one case where fashion is quite correct.

Gordon R. Dickson
The Dragon and The George
 Grafton, 1992, 279pp, £4.50
 Reviewed by Steven Tew

Jim Eckert is a teaching assistant (and member of the volleyball team) at Riveroak College. He and his girlfriend, Angie, struggle to make ends meet as he is continually passed up for promotion. Tired of departmental politics, he longs for the simpler life of medieval (his expert field of study, of course). When Angie disappears in a spatial displacement experiment, Jim follows to find that only his mind is displaced - into the body of a dragon. Angie has been taken to the Loathly Tower, which is controlled by the Dark Powers, and Jim has to save her. But to do that he must gather companions along the way to defeat the Dark Powers as well, as they threaten both the world he has been transported to, and his own - experimenting with the fabric of space/time can only end in tears.

The inverted humour of a dragon saving a damsel in distress is appealing. It is a situation that has to be explained to all he meets. The Mage, Carolinus, who has some understanding of Jim's origin introduces him to all as Sir James Eckert, Baron of Riveroak, magically transported into the body of a dragon. The ease with which this is accepted, and the willingness of complete strangers to accompany him on a dangerous journey to rescue someone they've never met, is something that the reader can accept as a natural part of the way this world works.

The best parts of this book are where Dickson delves into the thought processes of his main character. As Jim comes to terms with his dragon body, and comes to accept his dragon-lust for battle and killing, his appetite for the raw flesh of animals, food and wine in vast quantities and his dragon-avarice for gold and jewels, the human part of him is racked with guilt. The Dark Powers use this guilt and his memories of life in American Academia to sour his relationship with his companions and lose his faith in them, to see them as little more than animals and criminals. The contrast between Jim's erstwhile idealistic picture of medieval life and this projected dark cynicism, puts him into a state of despair, in which he is at his most vulnerable. This is the heart of the conflict between good and evil.

Winner of the British Science Fantasy Award, originally published in 1976 and based on a 1957 novelette, *The Dragon and The George* is apparently a classic of the genre. It is listed in *Modern Fantasy: The Best Hundred Novels*. Indeed, there is much to recommend it. The stock figures of a particular brand of medieval fantasy -

dragons, knights in armour, magicians, forest dwelling outlaws - are dealt with finely in a light, rather than rib-splitting humour. It is highly readable; thoughtful in places, but in the final analysis, benignly escapist (and why not?).

Misc

Robert Rankin
The Brentford triangle
 Corgi, 1992, 237pp, £3.99
 Reviewed by Andy Mills

The Brentford Triangle, the second novel in Rankin's *Brentford Trilogy*, is set a few years after the first and visits old haunts and inhabitants in the eponymous town. It's pretty much the same delightful mixture too, with the commonplace, such as pubs, darts matches, and allotments meeting the ridiculous, in this case an alien invasion fleet. But not to worry, because those two unlikely heroes, John O'mally and Jim Pooley, are here to save civilisation with a little help from a familiar cast.

Rankin's control over the novel is more assured than that displayed in *The Antipope*: his characterisation is a considerable improvement on the earlier book. A few new faces are introduced; the cameo roles for Small Dave and Young Jack indicate that they'll play a part in later works; they are, unfortunately, underused here. The humour is as bright and sharp as it was in *the Antipope*, where the Allotment Golf match at the beginning to the diabolically influenced darts tournament at the end. There are throwaway ideas and incidents by the score, the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe and Noahs Ark somehow both appearing (in Brentford, remember!) And, it should be noted, the whole hangs on the hoariest cliché in modern SF, beloved of schoolboy scribblers and bemoaned by editors. Rankin, of course knows this. And lets us know he knows.

"None of this smacks of sound science fiction ..." muses Jim Pooley at one point in the novel.

Quite. Buy *The Brentford Triangle*. If you haven't read *The Antipope* (and you don't need to in order to follow the former book) treat yourself and buy that too.

Glen Cook
The White Rose
 Roc, 1992, 317pp, £4.99
 Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

I was less sure about volume three of the *Black Company* than the previous two,

partly because at one point there are three separate strands of narrative going on, which seems to complicate matters. Nevertheless, I still like Cook's line in fantasy; so hard-boiled if I win any page-egging competition you care to set up.

Once more physician/analyst/romantic Croaker recounts the Company's struggle in the epic conflict between Ultimate Evil and - well - Slightly less Ultimate Evil. Croaker's romantic pash for The Lady is tested in another attempt to resurrect the Dominator.

With some intricate detective work in tracking down her True Name. Furthermore, someone else is recreating the train of events which originally awoke The Dominator from his imprisonment, and some really odd alliances are made before the final few pages - which don't necessarily signify a conclusion to the saga.

If so, we're heading for some problems: will Cook really be able to handle the demands of six narrative strands at the end of the next set of three? Considering the rate of attrition of the Black Company, would there be anyone left anyway? Best not to consider these matters - just savour some good old-fashioned down-and-

dirty sword-and scumwork for the 90s, with that so-essential touch of yearning idealism. B-Movie manipulation? You bet, but it still feels like fun to me.

Stephen Jones & Kim Newman
Horror: 100 Best Books
 NEL, 1992, 366pp, £5.99
 Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Note the lack of the definitive article in the title. Jones and Newman have compiled not a critical "reader's guide" to horror but what, arguably, "a general reader" would find more interesting. They have come up with 100 books chosen as personal favourites by 100 top writers, together with their reasons why. (Actually, unless they used Ouija board they didn't actually *invite* M R James to contribute his piece on J Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*, or Edgar Allan Poe and H P Lovecraft for their evaluation of books by Nathaniel Hawthorne or R W Chambers, but be that as it may ...).

Updated from the original Xanadu edition of 1988, this is a book which offers insights on its contributors as well as causing the reader to desperately scribble down lists of fascinating titles to read and re-read. Harlan Ellison goes for Clark Ashton Smith. Brian Aldiss doesn't go for *Frankenstein* but Kingsley Amis' *The Green Man*. Garry Kilworth tells us about James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Thomas Tessier urges us to read a

nineteenth-century Swiss gothic that I've never even heard of, while Terry Pratchett recalls reading the copy of William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland*, given to him by his granny.

But there's no use in re-living everything. Even the most jaded and/or knowledgeable horror fan will find new material or insights here, Essential.

Katherine Kerr A Time of Exile

Grafton, 1992, 476pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Jan Malique

Ms Kerr's saga of Deverry continues in *A Time of Exile*, the first volume in the Westlands Cycle. It's a stirring tale of sorcery, Celtic mythology and a man's fight to come to terms with his own identity. The book opens in 1096 and works backwards tracing the history of the human inhabitants of Deverry and the mysterious elfen people in the Westlands. This history is filled with genocide, power struggles and colonisation, humans pitted against Elves. This is played out against an atmosphere of a world crackling with raw energy and power. The mysterious dimensions on the other side of reality are a mere step away. So is a knife in the back.

Amidst this Rhodry Maelwaedd, ruler of Aberwyn stands as a bridge between the

human and Elvish world. Sworn to Silence about his ancestry in a time bristling with power struggles and warring factions, he is forced to come to terms with his destiny, which dictates that he relinquish his worldly ties for the sake of clan honour and stability. He has no choice but to fake his own death to prevent his heirs from being disinherited and Aberwyn being captured in civil war. So begins a journey to search for selfhood and ancient magical learning.

I found this book to be a mixture so rich and filling that I could only digest bits at a time, although this does not detract from what is wonderful storytelling. The book has to be read more than once to get at the essence. My problem was with the different past-life incarnations of the characters. By the time I had worked out who was who and where the relationship came in with X and Y, my eyeballs needed a rest and my mental faculties gave up and went for forty winks. I would recommend reading the early Deverry books for a little background knowledge.

Stephen Baxter Raft

Grafton, 1992, 251pp, £3.99
Reviewed by John D Owen

The debut novel from British author Stephen Baxter, *Raft* is hardest of hard SF, centuries previous to the novel's beginning, a human spacecraft fell through a fault in space-time into a very different universe, here, because of an increase in the strength of gravitational attraction, stars are very small and have lifecycles of a year. The descendants of the original crew split into two camps: the scientist survive on the raft, made from the spacecraft's remnants plus iron mined from dead star cores. The miners work the star cores, trading metals for Raft food. The colony survives because their "galaxy" is an

old nebula, rich in elements like oxygen, and only a few thousand miles across. But the nebula is fast running out of fuel, and the stars are no longer forming at the edge of the galaxy. Soon the nebula will be unable to support life.

Rees, a young miner, stows away on one of the "trees" used to traverse the nebula, arriving on the Raft to find that the scientists aren't all that they are cracked up to be, operating an aristocracy while losing the knowledge to control their own environment. Rees, with luck, becomes an apprentice scientist, and rises quickly by virtue of his enquiring mind. Just as he cracks the mystery of the failing nebula, the discontent among the lower classes overflows, and Rees is exiled from the Raft by the new leaders. But, this being SF, he wins through by dint of bravery and luck, discovering the means to leave the dying nebula along the way.

The fascination in this novel comes from the detailing. The plot is SF standard fare; rites of passage for the young hero, who breaks out of his lowly station in life to become the saviour of his people. But Baxter's universe, and the way his characters interact within it, make for a fascinating exercise in scientific logic in an exceptionally well-written book. Why, Baxter can even get away with lifting a large chunk of *When Worlds Collide* for one climactic episode within the story!

Terry Brooks The Druid of Shannara

Orbit, 1992, 471pp, £5.99
Reviewed by Jan Malique

The *Druid of Shannara* is the second volume in the Heritage of Shannara series. The evil Shadowen have almost totally poisoned the Four Lands, the people starving and dying under the onslaught. The King of Silver River, guardian of the people of the Four Lands grieves for his people and the suffering they have to endure in a world which has changed immeasurably since the dawn of time. His power has been eroded by the Shadowen to the point that he is kept a virtual prisoner in another plane of reality, powerless to help.

It's all terribly gripping and so accessible. The quest is to find the Black Elfstone which will restore equilibrium and peace in the Four Lands, cleanse the world of the evil which is like a cancer at its heart, restore the order of Druids, protectors of mortals, givers of magic and true teachers. Four descendants of the old Druid house of Shannara begin a journey into the heartland to recover the lost faerie magic and pull back the Druid's keep from limbo. Each has a task



to complete (inner and outer battles must be fought) to achieve some form of understanding about themselves and the world around them. Each has their own karma to fulfil.

I enjoyed this very much. Its mythology and symbolism were ones I enjoyed because they did not aspire to any great literary pretensions. The book allowed me to become a willing participant in the action and the narrative. I believed.

Diane Duane
The Door into Sunset
 Corgi, 1992, 384pp, £3.99
 Reviewed by Jessica Yates

When Corgi published the first of Duane's adult fantasies **The Door into Fire** in 1991 they announced it as the first of a trilogy, apparently unaware that it was part of a quartet (information available in David Gerrold's "overture" to the original US 1979 edition). Only now, with the publication of **The Door into Sunset**, is it acknowledged in the tailpiece that the fourth volume **The Door into Starlight** will tell the end of the story.

The sequence has not been well received in PI. I'd like to remedy this: it's a corking good read with a sensual quality somewhat lacking in Tolkien, though I do note a few borrowings from the Master in the name of the heroine's horse (Steelshen), the catchphrase "Well, I'm back", and the late arrival of a flock of dragons (rather than eagles) to aid the Goodies in their battle against the Shadow and his army.

In this medieval fantasy world we follow the fortunes of five major characters: the sequence is called **The Tale of the Five**. Herewiss, a prince, is the major hero: both he and the heroine Segnora are seeking to control their magical talent, or Fire. Herewiss's lover is Freelon, an exiled king, and the three are aided by two supernatural beings, a dragon who becomes symbiotic with the heroine, and a fire-elemental who becomes Herewiss's second lover. Volume 1 was Herewiss's story, volume 2 Segnora's: **The Door into Sunset** tells how Freelon masters his fears, undergoes initiation and becomes worthy of his sacred and magical task as king. In the final battle the dreaded Shadow manifests itself, (having much in common with the Lone Power in Duane's "wizardry" trilogy). One wonders how much plot is left for volume 4 and whether any of the main characters will die: nearly all of them have already come back from the dead! That, and the use of Sunspark, the fire spirit as *deus ex machina*, plus all the hints of satisfying sex, and the tempting menus, make the series a little soft-

centred.

I must also mention the woman-centred qualities: though not books for male chauvinists, they don't seem to be hard-line feminist books either. The world is ruled by the Goddess, who created it, and women have prominent jobs like Ambassador and Commande.

General of the army as well as serving as soldiers.

William R Forstchen
Union Forever
The Lost Regiment II
 Roc, 1992, 457pp, £4.99
 Reviewed by Mat Coward

The Tugars (monstrous man-eating inhabitants of the alien planet) to which Colonel Andrew Keane and his Civil War Yankees have been unwillingly space-time-warped) were soundly seen off in episode one. This middle volume in the fantasy adventure trilogy opens with a civics lesson, as the Americans bring democracy to the Russian-descended people of Rus, who now have a peasant as President, and a former boyar as opposition leader in the Senate.

The Yanks aim to spread around the world by means of railway, a sort of democratic version of free enterprise, based on adult male suffrage and free trade. It's all rather idealistic, and makes ironic reading in the light of current events on Earth: only an American today, or an Englishman 100 years ago, could write with such cheerfully unquestioning faith in the rightness of his home customs.

But we're soon back to the fighting. While the Rus enter prickly diplomacy with the Roum, whose ancestors were ancient Romans, the Merki - who like the Tugars, endlessly circle the planet, feeding off human "cattle" - plan to obliterate the dangerous example of the Rus revolution. To this end, they form a treacherous alliance with the Carthas, eternal foes of Roum. They also have a secret weapon, not revealed until the last pages of the book - unless you mistake of glancing at the jacket illustration on your way in, that is.

It's all good, exciting, thought-through stuff, given that the shocking revelations of **Rally Cry** must lose power with repetition. As before, the novel's only real problem is the almost incredibly bad editing. Just one of many examples: on p.431, in an eight-line speech, we have "Ferguson said softly" twice and "Ferguson said" once. Does nobody at Roc give a damn about this book? Even so, I have rarely awaited so eagerly the final volume of a trilogy.

Correction

Joseph Nicholas notes a typo in his review of Iain Banks's **Use of Weapons** in final issue of **Paperback Inferno**.

"As printed, the first sentence of the second paragraph states that the Culture novels 'would have no human protagonists: Humans alone (with a capital H and a sense of directive purpose) would be the hero'. This should state that these novels 'would have no human protagonists: *History* alone...would be the hero' (emphasis added) -- a correction which restores sense to the later reference to Olaf Stapledon."

Apologies to Joseph and all concerned.

Competitions

Andy Sawyer announces the winners of the competitions in PI 97.

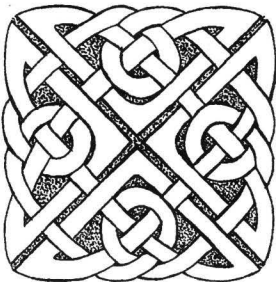
Orson Scott Card

Winners: Pete Lancaster, Pam Baddely & John P Rickett, who will receive copies of the Ender's game trilogy, courtesy of Random Century's Legend books.

Orion

Winners: Peter Tennant, Chris Lewis & Jim Steel, who will receive copies of the first three "Millennium" books from Orion.

Many thanks to Cathy Schofield of Random Century and Jackie Freshfield of Orion. And to all who entered -- it was a record number of entrants, very satisfying to go out with!



A DEADLY GAME OF SEX, POLITICS AND BETRAYAL

GWYNETH JONES

WHITE QUEEN

'WHITE QUEEN would be my choice to win this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award, not to mention the Hugo, the Nebula, the Tiptree and anything else going' *Lisa Tuttle, TIME OUT*

'Seductively weird . . . respectively grainy and bizarre in just the measure to convince, and populated by characters that live on in the mind long after the book's been put back on the shelf' *Iain Banks*

'Thoroughly original, genuinely weird, and stuffed to bursting with deep-dyed genre virtue' *Bruce Sterling*

'Cogent and tough and content-driven, and I think it may be wise. So buy it' *INTERZONE*

