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Vector 172

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The Critical Journal of the BSFA

1992 Year's Best Books



Policing
Virtual Reality

McCaffrey, Bradley
Heroines

**Brian
Stableford
Interview**

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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.

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Nuts & Bolts

I owe you all an apology — your mailing is late and it's all my fault. I'm sure you don't need to hear excuses, but you're getting them anyway. Since the beginning of February, since the morning I delivered the last issue of **Vector** in fact, I have been working in Norwich, while continuing to try to produce **Vector** from my home in Guildford. This has created all sorts of difficulties, and **Vector** has suffered less than many other areas of my life. I've had to be fairly ruthless in setting my priorities to get here at all.

Furthermore, I owe an apology to all the people who have written to me over the last few months; some to offer help, and to whom I have not yet replied. Your interest and support has been much appreciated, believe me, and you should be hearing from me "real soon now".

The less forgiving of you will now be asking whether this means that you have in your hands a second class scrambled magazine. Well, I certainly hope not. That is where all my energies have been directed.

This issue brings you the results of our annual reviewers' poll. This year, with more reviewers than ever taking part it is brought to you in chart form. The "top thirty" are listed this issue. I intend to bring you the rest along with short story and "worst read" charts, in later issues. Let me know what you think of the new format. Tom A Jones suggested to me in a recent letter that we run a poll of the readership to compile an All-Time Greats chart. Let me know if you'd be interested to take part and to see the results in a future issue of **Vector**.

It may have come to your attention that the result of the Arthur C Clarke award for 1992 has generated a certain amount of controversy. I

have invited John Clute to contribute a guest editorial next issue to explain his views, which I am sure will occasion a great deal of discussion.

Finally, the picture is provided in response to a reader's request — I haven't changed much. Honestly

Catie



Front Line Dispatches

(Readers' Letters)

Correction
From Norman Beswick
Church Stretton

Please do explain to puzzled people that on page 18 column 2 of **Vector 171**, where it reads "Reassuringly, it is also explained by reference to *quotations*" my word was "equations" — which does make better sense. Ooops!

Recognising The devil
From John Howard
Bracknell

Norman Beswick's letter in **V171** made some interesting points. I had never thought that the traditional image of the devil might not ring true with as many people as I assume Clarke thought it would. Maybe it does work well enough — I don't recall Norman's point being made by anyone else. They've had over forty years to make it in!

I have used Stapledon's *Star Maker* in a sermon, and referred to the film *Star Trek VI* in a school assembly on prayer (or did I refer to prayer at the end of a talk on the film?!). How I connected the two is a long story, but I was told it worked well enough. It has never occurred to me to use Clarke's 'The Star' for an Epiphany sermon — yet — so, too, Harrison's 'The Streets of Ashkelon' or Lewis' *Perelandra*, both of which have much to say theologically, as well as being excellent SF or fantasy.

The song and hymn writer Sydney Carter makes some interesting and thought-provoking points in his Christmas carol 'Every star shall sing a carol' (*Hymns Ancient and Modern New Standard 354*). Stanzas 3 and 4 go like this:

Who can tell what other cradle
high above the milky way

still may rock the King of Heaven
on another Christmas Day?

Who can count how many crosses
Still to come or long ago
crucify the King of Heaven?
holly is the name I know.

Some real thoughts to get to grips with underneath the usual sentimentality of that time of the year.

Taking Exception
From Martyn Taylor
Cambridge

I don't ordinarily take exception to what anyone makes of my reviews. After 12 years you just accept that anyone's opinion is as valid as yours but I feel compelled to take issue with Helen Bland over *Was...*

I read this book expecting to find serious insight. I didn't find any. So I read it again. I read it four times, and you ought to try doing that with a book you like in six weeks never mind one you don't like. "Hostile" I shall accept, but "shallow"? If Helen found insight and illumination, good for her, all I can do is state honestly that I didn't find any.

AIDS is too serious for my flippancy? Damn right it is. It is also too serious to be treated like the ultimate fashion accessory from the S&MMuscle Bosun Bazaar, like some latter-day consumption, all romance and evocation, as some gay writers appear to propose. AIDS is not a "Gay Plague" confined to affluent white bourgeois Americans. The vast majority of HIV+ people today are black African married heterosexual Muslim women — how's THAT for multiple disadvantage! Tomorrow they will be brown Indian married heterosexual Hindu women. But of course they're third world women and, by definition, their lives are worth less than some

Californian avant-garde artist with a taste for Ugandan rough trade. AIDS is too serious for my flippancy? Damn right it is. It is also too serious for any author of fiction to proclaim he will illuminate and then simply recycle Armistead Maupin clichés. Every time the moment arrived for Geoff Ryman to illuminate the situation he went back to icons and totems, came up short, didn't deliver the goods, cheated me, the reader. Artists have a responsibility to their subject matter and their audience. I don't believe Geoff Ryman discharged that responsibility and I didn't find *Was...* a beautiful book however hard I tried.

Sorry to seem a bit prickly, but that's the way it goes. Doubtless *Was...* is absolutely politically correct but no-one asked me to sign that manifesto.

Conspiracy Theory
From John Madracki
Bolton

Re **V.171** — There were three consecutive letters in *Front Line Dispatches* that had much in common, in that they each vehemently objected to Gareth Rees' review of Freda Warrington's *A Taste Of Blood Wine*.

But the points raised were so similar that I could not rid myself of the distinct impression that all were written as a group exercise with a free exchange of ideas. There was even the same tendency to lapse into trendy pc, ('differently advantaged', 'genre challenged', 'culturally disadvantaged').

The first letter was from Freda herself and, while her sarcasm was most amusing, and her rancour understandable (I'm sure all fellow-novelists will have some sympathy), her misinterpretation of Gareth's remarks only reduced her indignation to little more than "sour grapes".

This misreading of the review was shared equally by the two following letters, written by Susan Bentley and K L Woods, who each questioned whether Gareth was talking about the same book. I began to wonder if they were referring to the same review.

They both assumed that Gareth's main quarrel with the book was that it is not a Horror novel; but that is precisely what the title and cover suggests, and Gareth was quite justified in pointing out this discrepancy.

One of Freda's complaints was a lack of objectivity on Gareth's part (as compared to the cool restraint shown by Brian Stableford, perhaps. And I wonder how unbiased the review would have been had it been written by either Susan or KL.)

Does Freda really expect nothing but unqualified praise? Obviously she does, or she wouldn't have reacted so bitterly to what was only an honest, personal reading of her latest work.

For myself, I found the review concise, telling and witty; but it was still only the opinion of a single critic and I remain totally unwayed by it, one way or the other. Just remember, Freda, there is no such thing as bad publicity.

Finally, while on the subject of reviews:

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may I say how much enjoyed those by Martyn Taylor and Maureen Speller.

Subscribers to Dreamberry Wine will already be aware of my own feelings regarding Messrs Barker and Hutson as, last year, I wrote: that while Barker is a capable wordsmith, "his work is utterly soulless. His characters are little more than ciphers and cut such unpleasant figures that it is impossible to care a jot what happens to them. Naturally, without the empathy from the reader, his stories are robbed of all tension, suspense and, ultimately, any sense of genuine horror... His place in literature is as undeserved as that of Shaun Hutson..." And it was most pleasing to see Martyn and Maureen give these two mountebanks the treatment they deserve.

A Reviewer Replies From Gareth Rees Cambridge

I was somewhat overwhelmed by the considerable interest in my review of Freda Warrington's novel *A Taste of Blood Wine* in **Vector 170**; it is good to see people getting together and defending books that they like with wit and enthusiasm and political correctness (I am apparently "differently advantaged", "genre-challenged", and "culturally disadvantaged"), and I do wonder whether I might have missed something; I shall read the novel again and reconsider.

Which isn't to say that I don't disagree with the correspondents. I hope no-one mistook my review for anything other than it was: an account of my subjective opinions. I think I tried to be honest and to call it as I saw it. Surely no-one would expect me to praise a book just because Brian Stableford praises it, or because the author put a lot of work into it?

I will content myself with responding to one very minor point raised in the letters. Ms Warrington and Ms Bentley comment on my ability to understand the title, the latter saying "As to the title, which Gareth could make no sense of — Vampires drink Blood Wine, don't they?". But Vampires don't drink blood wine, they drink *blood*, which doesn't ferment. If the image in the title is going to have any meaning beyond the prosaic, if we are meant to see a correspondence between the heroine's first taste of blood and a teetotaler's first taste of wine (say) then something needs to be made of this in the text.

Ms Warrington's letter was very witty; I hope that if I am subjected to similar criticism I can respond with such insouciance and poise.

Protests From Joseph Nicholas London

One opens one's copy of **Vector 171**. One starts reading the letters. One comes across the latest protests about bad reviews of David Wingrove's *Chung Kuo* novels. One groans aloud...

This has gone on far too long. It is now virtually guaranteed that, for every bad review

of a David Wingrove novel which appears in a BSFA magazine, the next issue will contain a letter from the author complaining that the reviewer has misunderstood the work, that he is not being treated fairly, that people are so challenged by what he says that they can only protect themselves by rejecting it... (In a notoriously self-serving article in **The Daily Telegraph** last December, Wingrove claimed that he was being attacked solely because he was perceived as politically incorrect.) At least this latest set of protests comes entirely from his associates — Wingrove having perhaps grasped that for him to do all the protesting makes him appear not wronged but merely hurt that he is not as loved as he thinks he should be — but the impression given is exactly the same: the wounded bleatings of fragile egos that can't tolerate adverse criticism. And if the *Chung Kuo* series is as successful as Susan Oudot claims, then what difference can a few bad reviews in **Vector** make? (A crueler observer might also remark that the fact the author's partner is also New English Library's publicist, or vice versa, explains why the series has been so lavishly promoted.)

I therefore suggest that, in its magazines, the BSFA exercise a moratorium on all mention of David Wingrove and his works for at least the next twelve months — no more reviews, good or bad, no more letters attacking or defending him or the series, not one more word about it. This should allow all those involved in the apparently ceaseless argument about *Chung Kuo* to reflect on what they have said so far and how they have said it (I recall especially the multi-page letter of expurgatory refutation that Wingrove circulated to individual BSFA members a year or so ago), and on how they might proceed in the future — not least the author and his associates. In particular, they might reflect on the fact that the more they will be seen as protesting too much; that the more reviewers they attack the more they set potential readers against them. I, for one, have never read any of the *Chung Kuo* series; but the consequence of Wingrove's protests is that I am now scarcely likely to.

Fourth Dimensional Reality From Kevin Smith Woking

Obviously somebody likes David Wingrove's *Chung Kuo*. David Wingrove himself does, of course, and Mrs David Wingrove, and Susan Oudot, that makes two. We now discover that Brian Griffin likes it as well, from the good yawn at the beginning of a chapter (I can relate to that) to the sudden realisation of a fourth-dimensional reality by the end of it. (And then, presumably, another yawn at the beginning of the next chapter, when Wingrove starts on an entirely different tack.) Fourth-dimensional reality, eh? Well, that's possible; I hadn't thought of that. Pity the first three dimensions are so thin. And of course Brian Griffin as he acknowledges is an interested party.

I cannot in all honesty say that *Chung Kuo* is unreadable. I have in fact read the whole of book 1. At least, I think it was the whole of it. I may have stopped a chapter or two before the end. Not that it matters, of course, at any point after the first hundred pages there seemed to be about the same number of open plot lines. As one was resolved, usually by the death of a character one had become vaguely interested in, another opened. Just like EastEnders, really.

I've just reread Cherith Baldry's review of book 3. Exactly the same review could be applied to book 1. This is a significant point. The whole series is "about" a future Earth All of it consequential. None of it particularly revealing about the state of humankind.

Cherith expressed with some precision what she felt about the book. Susan Oudot demands more; she requires chapter and verse, examples yet, to substantiate Cherith's opinions. Give me strength! The review contained entirely enough to satisfy any ordinary reader. Only those looking to pick holes, those with a vested interest, would want more. A pity, then, that Cherith spoilt her review by retaining that last "grieving" paragraph. I'm on the side of the Oudots in this. It's entirely out of place, and drags a low-key, careful, honest review into the realms of Mills & Boon emotion. Stella Gibbons (in *Cold Comfort Farm*) would have given it three asterisks.

You know what irks me most about all this? It's the way that the slightest derogatory remark brings out Wingrove & Associates in full-throated defence. Their response machinery seems as efficient as Bill Clinton's. The difference is that Bill was the object of concerted, orchestrated attacks by the Republicans. Against Wingrove there are only individuals expressing their opinions.

An Indian Perspective From Syd Foster Swansea

Just a quick comment on the zine: the print being clear and sharp gives a good first impression overall, and the contents of **V171** were interesting throughout, so I'm feeling contented about continuing to renew my membership. I do think the idea of indexing reviews is a good one, (perhaps starting now rather than trying to make a retroactively complete index!) since I have often found that I have a very different view of a book to that expressed by other people, and it is useful to get more than one reviewer's opinions of any particular book (the letters page in **V171** demonstrates very well the dubious authority claimed by a single review!)... but unless you can keep track of them, (especially confusing when the same book gets reviewed in several successive issues) a deadening sense of degraded déjà vu arises to haunt the reader. Perhaps this could be cleared up by ensuring that all reviews of a book in any one issue appear next to each other, and appending a list in smallfaced type to each review (or group

of reviews of the same book) saying in which previous issues the book has also been reviewed, if any.

This would clear up a major dissatisfaction that I felt with the BSFA's mailings during the first 18 months of my membership. Besides, it is also fun to read a review again after having read the book in question, just to see how it looks in the light of the actual book itself... and in lieu of publishing a complete index, the above system would at least ensure that locating one review would lead to finding all the others of that book. (I think this is a good idea and will see what can be done — Catie)

Finally, in parting I'd like to refer to Norman Beswick's letter, where he refers to the "traditional" image of the horns-and-spiked-tail of the Christian devil. I don't know the history of this image, but I do know that in India you can see calendars etc. with images of various gods in every chain shop and virtually everywhere else, and one of the most ubiquitous images is of Shiva, one of the three top gods in the vast Hindu pantheon, second only to Brahma (the originator) in importance, and most popular of all: Shiva the Destroyer and Recreator.

The Indian paintings of him show a beautiful face of feminine strength and radiant serenity (the holymen smoke hashish, which is consecrated to Shiva, as a sort of sacrament, and the face of Shiva demonstrates their holy resonance). He invariably holds a trident spear upright in one hand, while his dreadlocks are piled high in a rakish temple of hair from which great torrents of loose dreads cascade, representing the holy river Ganges which springs from the head of Shiva deep in the Himalayas. Now, some years ago in Europe I saw a poster which showed a perversion of this popular Indian image, depicting a creature with a snarling, dementedly acquisitive face and a devil's tail, along with the usual trident (which was now understood to be the "pitchfork" clutched in the snatch of talons), and with the ganges-locks, which were now redolent of both horns and spiky tail!

The painting was a truly perverse interpretation of Shiva, predicated on ignorance. An obvious piece of propaganda. At the time, I immediately realised that the Christian worldview is implacably monocultural, and that Shiva was indeed the Christian devil... But which came first, the devil or the god? Was Satan the Deceiver

always depicted so similarly to Shiva the Destroyer and Recreator? Was the Nature of this Being (who had destroyed Creation in a great destructive dance of jealousy of Vishnu the Preserver after Brahma had set the Universe in motion and then fallen asleep for the duration [leaving it to Vishnu to complete the details and look after the shop]) and then in remorse danced everything back into being again) something which uncannily fitted the rôles already set up for God's foil by the medieval theologians? Or was it the popularity of this God which demanded a redrawing of Satan to match the image of Shiva?

I don't know the answer, but perhaps there is someone with more knowledge out there who can shed some light on the semiotic history of our cultural fascism. For myself, after my experience of Christian evangelical types and the violence of their mental rapine, I would not be surprised to find that the devil image we learn as children only appeared after the first contacts with the Hindu culture.

In The Psychiatrist's Chair From Philip Muldowney Plymouth

You look as though you might be giving in to signs of burn out, given the sleepy nature of your editorial. I certainly hope not, as you are getting together a product that is starting to zing. More power to your elbow.

God, you have even got a letter column that is worth reading. I wonder if Freda Warrington regrets her letter. Quite honestly, the heavy-handed sarcasm does not do her any justice at all, it just makes one wonder how thin a skin she has got. I think it was a letter in the David Wingrove affair which stated that the best response of a professional to offensive criticism, was no response at all. Otherwise, you can tend to look just a little silly, as Freda Warrington does here. It would have been more interesting if she could have given us a detailed rundown on her thoughts about the novel, rather than the somewhat juvenile response that she gives.

On the other hand, the review was a pretty poor one. Your comment 'the subjective impressions of an individual reviewer' begs all sorts of questions. The reviews in **Vector** go all over the scale from excellent to 'orrible, perhaps a little objectivity might be a good idea' After all, the reviewers are also writing

for other people, and must surely bear this in mind. A knee-jerk emotionalised rant, or one where the book has obviously been skipped over, is not a good review. Too many times the reviewer gives the feeling that they are tossing it off too quickly, too few seem to have much thought behind them.

I wonder also, if you do not underestimate the significance that a review in **Vector** has. Given that there is very little

reviewing of SF in the general press, unless you take an SF magazine, then **Vector** may be the only journal in which a review is seen. Myself for instance, if I saw a book with a very good review in **Vector** then I might well seek it out, conversely, a piss-poor review would probably make me dismiss it. After all, what does one read reviews for? Surely to get some guidance. Where else to come then than a leading amateur magazine? There is a certain sense of responsibility here. People need to trust that your reviews will be decent examples of their kind. A magazine's reputation is formed by many things, and since **Vector** is a significant reviewzine, certain standards need to be imposed and maintained. Good reviewing is difficult, but the cop-out review is irrelevant. I'm not arguing the reviewer's right to an opinion, but asking the reviewer to justify that opinion, honestly. Not all the reviews in **Vector** do that by any means. Remarks like 'Clive Barker is a taste I never acquired' (Martin Taylor) 'Well, cards on the table, I like neither of these authors' (Pete Darby) do not encourage one to expect a balanced review. (Personally, I think that the honest expression of bias, is an aid to the reader in adjusting their reading of a review. The reviews would not be less partial if these admissions were omitted — Catie)

The Lois McMaster Bujold Interview by Ken Lake was undoubtedly the best interview that you have run. Indeed, it was one of the best that I have seen in a long time. It succeeded on that rare level, of getting the author to open up, and reveal more of themselves and their writings. Most interviews sound like ordinary conversations; this one sounded like that radio programme 'In the Psychiatrist's Chair' with Anthony Clare. Congratulations to Ken Lake.

I must admit that I have tended to dismiss Lois Bujold as a standard action SF writer, after reading 'Falling Free' and 'Barrayar' in **Analog**. This interview reveals a fascinating mind, I wonder though, has she let herself be too limited by the SF trappings. I would love to see Bujold transcending Space Opera, that would be a very interesting book.

Is high fantasy so popular, because women especially are buying it for a hidden understatement of erotica? As Bujold says 'far too many men, and women, are unaware that they can use fantasy to enhance their sexuality...' I wonder, not much fantasy is pornographic, but some does have an erotic element. Any ideas?

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BRIAN STABLEFORD

Interviewed
by
Catie Cary

Brian Stableford is a modest man with a formidable reputation within the Science Fiction field as a writer both of scholarly reference and intriguingly intelligent fiction. He has been a member of the BSFA for a mind-boggling thirty years, having joined in his early teens. I was drawn to wonder when I met him at his quiet house in Reading, on a sunny day in September, what had set his feet on this rocky path...

First Beginnings

What do you first remember reading?

The first book I read was a Ladybird picture-book called *Clatter Clatter Bang*, when I was about three. Somebody gave me a set of Arthur Lee's *Children's Encyclopaedia* when I was four. I read odd bits of that, including all the sections on mythology. I joined the local library when I was five, and read everything I could. I didn't become conscious of Science Fiction as something separate until I was about 12 or 13, by which time I'd already read most of the Scientific Romance novels and all of the short fiction of H G Wells and I'd read things like Captain W E Johns' space series.

When I was about 12 or 13 I began reading SF exclusively, and read it more or less exclusively for seven years. I still do in a way; my notion of what qualifies has broadened out considerably. I now read a large number of eccentric things, thinking of them as being part and parcel of the same thing, though to other people they may seem just eccentric...

Like my interest in 1890s decadence, I think this is all related; most 19th century writers wrote off-beat stuff of one kind or another. So I know a great deal about antiquarian horror, fantasy and science fiction, and it doesn't make sense to categorise them in the usual way, because the categories we're used to grew up much later. I suppose these days my interests

are more antiquarian than they were, when I was 13. Although I still think of myself as a specialised imaginative fiction reader, most of what I read would be classed as eccentric by your average Science Fiction reader.

Simply because it's older? Do you read mostly antiquarian books?

Not necessarily, I'm updating the library guide in *Anatomy of Wonder* which commits me to reading all the reputable science fiction published over the last 5 or 6 years, so I do read a lot of modern stuff, but quite a long time ago I became interested in the history of imaginative fiction, and the way that ideas have been used across time. In a sense it's much easier to read a work that you know is published in 1931 and see how it fits into the entire context of the history of imaginative fiction, than it is to read contemporary works and see how they fit in, because they're still part of something that's being formed.

There is much more contemporary stuff, and much of it I confess I find hard-going. Since the genre became a standardised area of publishing expertise there's been a standardisation of the product which means that there's a lot of stuff churned out which is recognisably the result of certain editorial theories about what people want to read and what people like. By its very nature that kind of thing is very repetitive.

Production Line

You're talking mostly about genre fantasy?

Not necessarily, a lot of what's published as genre science fiction is in the same sort of vein. If you look at the militaristic SF about heroic female mercenaries, that's coming out in the States, some of it is quite good, but the fact that there are occasional quite good stories in there, doesn't excuse the fact that

there's a lot of it and most of it is produced in imitation of the few successes. You get **Star Trek** clone fiction which is extremely uninteresting; some good writers have written the occasional **Star Trek** novel. But because it's imitating something which is essentially ropy to start with, that's terribly handicapped in becoming interesting.

I find it difficult to enjoy that kind of material. Partly for ideological reasons, (I don't really approve of stories about heroic mercenaries), and partly because it is produced in considerable quantities. Genre fantasy is a particularly blatant example of that, because whereas there's a considerable vocabulary of different kinds of science fiction idea, genre fantasy is less well supplied with ideas so that the repetition tends to be more noticeable. But a lot of what's marketed as science fiction is really genre fantasy in disguise. You have the same magical abilities, they're just slightly jargonised to make them sound like science fiction and you have the same kind of routine plot. Clearly there are people who find these plots rewarding; that's why there's a big market for it, but personally I find some obscure 1930s novel which conforms with nobody's idea of what a plot ought to look like, which may be frankly silly, in many ways more interesting. Because I can bring to bear upon it a context which can make it interesting even if it's pretty bad, whereas much pretty bad contemporary fiction just seems to be completely boring.

Business and Pleasure

But you're reading most of this for duty, what do you read for pleasure?

I try to combine business and pleasure to the maximum extent. What I do for reference books depends upon what I've found interesting. Writing for something like *Anatomy of Wonder*, although I'm obliged to cover all the best sellers, the work is rewarding because I can also put in some eccentric things which I think deserve to be more widely read. I pander to my own idiosyncrasies shamefully, and I'm gradually by infiltration altering the history of science fiction, more into the image of what I would like to see.

I work on the principle, that if somebody asks what I want to do, I say these are the things that I can't do, I'll do anything else, it puts a terrible strain on me occasionally, when I'm supposed to pretend that a work I thought was appalling, actually has some merit. Even that's an interesting challenge in its way.

That's the way to see it, I suppose. Do you remember the first thing you wrote?

The first thing I published and got paid for was when I was nine and the **Manchester Evening News** had a Children's section on Saturdays. They published poems that had been sent in by readers, and you got half a crown for it, which was an awful lot for ten minutes work. I published three poems over a couple of years. I suppose that was what corrupted me, it gave me the idea that there was money to be made from this.

I wrote a trilogy of Science Fiction stories

when I was nine or ten, which were modelled on W.E. Johns' stories. But I wrote others at the same time, mostly very short. None of them survive. Then when I was fifteen, there was another boy in the same class at school, who was also interested in science fiction, and we could tell that Digit books, Badger books, were really, really, really bad. We counted the number of words there were and decided we could do that as well. We shared out alternate chapters and each wrote thirty thousand words; it was a sixty thousand word novel; having written it the labour of typing it up, re-writing and rewriting it, made us give up, which was a pity really because it was as good as any of your average Digit or Badger books and it was publishable by those standards.

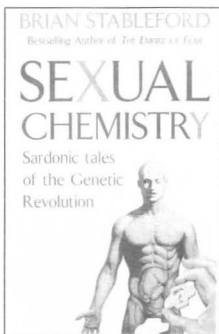
Later we began to type out shorter stories, and the first thing I sold to a science fiction magazine was one that we'd written together. It was a bizarre piece of work, though with a certain odd charm; God only knows how we sold it. It was published as by Brian Craig, a pseudonym that I later resurrected for use in Warhammer books. We wrote a couple more by this method of farming out chapters and I continued cannibalizing those for years; bits of the longest one kept cropping up in my novels for the next four or five years, because whenever I'd need a scene that bore any resemblance to something I'd already done I'd just yank it out and use it. I wrote lots and lots of short stories when I was sixteen/seventeen which I mailed off to *Science Fantasy* and *New Worlds*. It was Kyril Bonfiglioli who bought the first one. Selling that was the confirmation that you could make really easy money from writing. I continued to have such strokes of good luck because the first full length novel I wrote solo also sold, although it was incredibly bad.

I haven't actually read any of your novels previous to *The Empire of Fear*, so I can't really comment.

Right, well there are a lot of them, and one or two of them are alright, some of them are quite fun. I was fortunate to start writing short stories when there were still British science fiction magazines. They disappeared shortly after that. I started writing my first novel while there were still Ace Doubles; they disappeared within a year. I managed to get in on these soft markets before they disappeared forever. I was very fortunate. It's much harder to get into now, because over the last twenty years there's been such a buildup of professional writing; the competition is much stronger now than it was back then when only mad people read science fiction, and only three of them could construct proper sentences.

If you wrote so many short stories back then, you must have been bubbling over with ideas.

Not necessarily, I'm not saying that all these stories had ideas in them! What qualified as sufficient stimulus to write a story was not necessarily guaranteed to produce ideas. It took a long time to figure out what it was. A lot of the stories were triggered by images, described strange environments or people doing unusual things. It's much easier to come



up with ideas for novel length stories, because much of what happens can be fairly routine plot, it's nice to have a few original twists in there, but you can do novels on a fairly pick-and-mix basis; select ideas from the vocabulary of symbols, put them together in a slightly new pattern and run your hero through the usual hoops. Nowadays I find it much harder to come up with ideas that will sustain short stories, because they need a very interesting twist that you can hang a plot on. Most of my early short stories didn't have a plot at all and most of my early novels are crudely strung together over long journeys or crude chases.

So if the driving force wasn't the ideas, what kept you doing it?

I suppose the driving force was the ideas, but they were not particularly good ideas. I can't claim that I was a particularly original thinker or that many of these were worth the effort I put into them. But I fell early into the habit of collecting things if I thought they were interesting or I might be able to do something with them; I kept a file full of notes. But once I'd sold my first novel, it was a question of "what can I write another novel about and get some more money?" The money has always been the most important motivation, although I've never thought I could make really large sums of money, so I never tried to simulate bestsellers, but I've always thought what will be saleable; what can I produce that someone somewhere will pay a trivial amount of money for? I think that's a primary obligation.

Busman's Holiday

You took quite a long break from writing fiction; what started you going again?

I stopped in 1981, there was a lot of things that contributed to that. I got tenure in my job in 1980, I'd continued writing until I got tenure, just in case I had to go back to it full time, so I took care to maintain my production, but in 1981 having delivered the last of the books that I was obliged to, I was faced with a

situation where the market was in disarray. There was the double hit recession of the 1970s, many publishers were getting out of publishing SF at all, the market was shrinking rapidly.

Several of the last few books that I'd sold to Don Wolheim in the States hadn't been published in Britain and didn't seem likely to be. Even one that had been bought and paid for was just junked, and I was also running into problems with Don Wolheim; he'd begun to reject books, although he would have been willing to continue to publish books by me on a regular basis, I felt that he only wanted to publish the same two books over and over again, and I began to get a little bit tired of writing those two books over and over again.

I had a lot of non-fiction work lined up. It was easy to keep busy with hack non-fiction for reference books, while at the same time working on bigger longer non-fiction books. Some of the large scale projects collapsed, but others kept me going for the next four or five years. Things like *The Third Millennium*, though really that was a fiction presented as fact. But once 1984 had passed, the boom in futurology books went with it; once the reference books had been written, that kind of work started to dry up; and the fiction market began to come to life again.

So I decided to write some more fiction, by that time the members of the *Interzone* collective who actively hated me had resigned, leaving more or less in sole charge, David Pringle, who didn't. So I started writing short stories and sent them off to him. He published about half a dozen over a couple of years. A few others went elsewhere. But when I came back to fiction I had a file full of ideas, for six months, I was able to go to it every fortnight or so and pick out another one and write a story round it.

I began floating ideas round book publishers. I sold *The Empire of Fear* to Simon & Schuster on the basis of a long outline, which had come out of attending the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in 1987; they invited me to go over there to receive a distinguished scholarship award, so they paid my air fare. It was the first time I'd been to the States, because nobody had volunteered to pay my air fare before and indeed nobody's ever volunteered to pay it since. I attended a lot of the panels and the academic papers and I picked up an astonishing number of ideas from those.

They had two or three panels on vampire fiction — at that point I'd already written the short version of 'The Man who Loved the Vampire Lady', but it hadn't been published yet — *Fantasy & Science Fiction* bought and paid for it and kept it in their inventory for two years, they just got it into print before the novel in the end. I was sitting listening to these academics talking about revisionist vampire stories; by the time I got to the end of the conference I had a whole series of ideas for vampire stories written down.

Immediately after that I went to Nice for an academic conference, and I was stuck in Nice airport for two hours because the guy who

gave myself and Angela Carter a lift to the airport had timed his run for Angela's plane which left two hours before mine. So I sat there with this pile of story ideas and plotted four or five stories that became the basis of the novel *The Empire of Fear*.

Oddly enough, when I wrote 'The Man Who Killed the Vampire Lady', although I thought it was a neat idea and I could hang a story on it, I didn't really like it much. I got to like it a lot better when I figured out that there were a lot more consequences of this idea that one could play with and there were a lot more things I could do with it; I worked very hard on the novel. I took far longer over writing that than I ever had over writing anything before; perhaps two times as long.

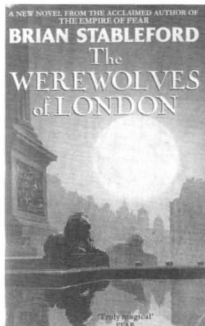
Yes, it took me an awful long time to get through the Silver Forest...

Well, yes there is that long section in the middle, the African section... on the outline, there was just my little note saying "perhaps do a version of *She*"; so it's Rider Haggard adventure, but if you read Haggard's African adventure stories, they're incredibly light on detail. You get these "chaps" who wander round for a few days shooting game, and apart from describing what they shoot, it might as well be a stroll through Regent's Park. What Haggard was doing all those years when he was a Colonial Officer around South Africa... Actually he was taking part in military campaigns which is why his good African novels are all about the Zulu wars.

The idea of what it would be like to trek across Africa in the seventeenth century doesn't come across from Haggard at all. I wanted to do it properly so I did a lot of research, reading various autobiographical accounts of "on Horseback through Nigeria" and so on, and I incorporated material from several anthropological accounts. I tried to build up a picture of African society; the whole point of doing this was to show that if you introduce vampirism into a different social context from Europe you get different results, you get a different type of elite whose power is expressed in a different way. So I built an entire African empire dominated by what are the equivalent of the Yoruba tribes now; built up their history and their anthropology in some detail.

When I turned in the book, Simon & Schuster's editors wanted to take all that out; they didn't want to leave any words that the average reader wouldn't recognise. They wanted to take out all the Yoruban terms, including all the references to their pantheon. They wanted to take out all the stuff about how you get by when you're walking across Africa, and what you eat and what sorts of problems you're likely to encounter and what the tribes are actually like.

There was a bit of a contretemps, I said if they were going to do that I'd take the book away. We reached a compromise in the end, when they said 'alright you can cut the book, but you've got to cut 20,000 words, and they've got to come mainly from that section'. So I cut the words without cutting the content; all the complicated words are still in there. I



tried to point out to them that science fiction readers don't mind finding lots of unfamiliar words. They're perfectly prepared to read through them if necessary or refer to a glossary; but these editors hadn't done science fiction before, it was difficult to convince them that if you look at lots of best-selling science fiction or even fantasy novels, you find that they have extraordinarily elaborate private languages. At least my private language was a real one and all the "invented words" I put in were real words, even if they weren't in their spell-checker. So, we compromised and I cut it in length a bit, but in a sense that makes it even more complicated. Many people reading the book have felt that that section is a bit slow, because of the density of detail involved.

I put a lot of work into it, and it is the necessary centre of the book. There is a lot of movement of the feet, but I can understand how a lot of people thought it was lacking in action. I threw in a couple of bits of violence to keep things moving, but really it's the progression of the ideas that's vital and I daresay there are a lot of readers who are not terribly interested in the sociological observations you can make on the way that this kind of invention will affect one type of society rather than another.

Actually, it's not much more slow than reading *She*, an awful lot of *She* consists of absolutely nothing happening...

The Hunger and the Ecstasy

What is the fascination of Vampirism?

When I wrote *Empire of Fear*, I'd recently read a couple of modern revisionist vampire stories. I wrote a long article about eroticism in supernatural literature for *The Salem Press Survey of Modern Fantasy Literature*. There I pointed out that the vampire stories had an elaborate sexual subtext and that modern vampire stories tend to be

sceptical of the Victorian subtext for obvious reasons; we now live in a different moral universe and vampires have lost many of the automatically horrifying aspects they used to have. They have become more negotiable, so that you get stories like Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's in which the vampire is the hero, and Suzy McKee Charnas's *The Vampire Tapestry* in which the phenomenon of vampirism is taken as a given and then looked at objectively in terms of "How would a vampire think about human beings?" "What would their attitudes be?"

It was a hypothetical exercise in vampire psychoanalysis, and I was very interested in this rôle reversal, but it seemed to me that if one were to take as a given that some form of vampirism existed; taking as its basic characteristics that they'd have to drink blood, they'd have to be long-lived and resistant to many things that kill ordinary people, and they'd have to be incredibly sexy.

If one takes those as the basic attributes then vampires wouldn't be lonely fugitives hiding out from hordes of Van Helsings waving wooden stakes; they'd be the people who were running the world. So I decided I would write an alternative history story in which vampires did run the world; in which they had become the aristocracy of Europe.

Later vampire stories have just been doing different things. I was specifically asked by Simon & Schuster to write another vampire novel which was *Young Blood*, partly because of delays in the paperback publication of *The Werewolves of London*. I said I'm halfway into a Science Fiction novel, and they said "No, no, no, we want you to write another vampire novel". So I sat down to write a vampire novel that was as different as possible in terms of its basic premises from *Empire of Fear*. It takes the same erotic subtext but addresses it in a different way; you don't have vampirism as a biochemical given but you have it as a psychological response to various circumstances, both the environment of the central character and biochemical opportunism. The whole thing is then formulated by the erotic subtext, rather than simply referring back to *The Empire of Fear*. And I've written another one since then...

There was a curious incident, when I delivered *Young Blood*. The editor rang up and said "The Sales Department don't like the title very much; they think it would be easier to sell to bookshops if they had a title with the word 'vampires' in it". So I wrote back and said that I wouldn't mind if they called it 'The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires' provided that they added a little note to the acknowledgments section at the end, saying that I thanked the sales department at Simon & Schuster for pointing out that 'Young Blood' however appropriate a title it was for the text, was not sufficiently sexy to hold its own in that fervid hotbed of competition that is the modern British bookshop. Having received this the editor decided that perhaps they'd stick with 'Young Blood' after all. But I quite liked 'The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires' so I wrote another one...

Tell me more...

It's a bit eccentric. It's set in 1895 and the situation is a pastiche of **The Time Machine**. An ageing professor summons a group of people who listen to his story about his explorations of the future; which he's conducted by means of, not a time machine in the bicycle-like Wellsian sense, but a drug which enables the consciousness to be detached from the present and sent to the future. But the people he summons, rather than being an anonymous group of hacks as in the Wells' story, are all people that one might have heard of. The story's rather coy about it, but it gradually becomes clear as the plot advances that the people assembled to hear this are: H G Wells, who's rather miffed to find that he's already been plagiarised (the story's been written, but not yet been published); Sir William Crookes, who was a noted physicist with a strong interest in the Society for psychical research; and the narrator of the story who's been invited along by Oscar Wilde, in a sense Dracula, although not quite the literal sense that one will find in Kim Newman's book **Anno Dracula**.

Exactly in what sense he is Dracula is the point of negotiations throughout the plot, in this version of the future, vampires as the superior species come into possession of the Earth: human beings become extinct, and there's a long history of vampire biotechnology, but the question of where the vampires came from is a bit blurred. You're never quite sure if this guy's visions of the future are accurate or to what extent they're polluted by his own psychological anxieties and hangups, nor are you quite sure to what extent his informants in the future are telling him the truth, because he gets very worried, at one point, whether what they really want from him is to find out exactly where he's from so that they can get back and stop him revealing all and thus threatening their inheritance. But none of this ever gets settled. It all revolves around the reader's interpretation of who the narrator is; if he really is a vampire, then he may be in a position to ensure that this future does become true, and you don't find out exactly what he is and why he's there and why he has the viewpoint he does until the end, and I won't tell you...

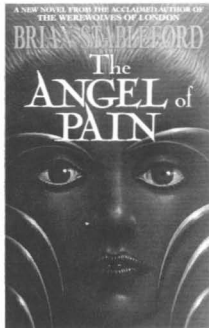
Young Blood

You play the same trick in Young Blood to an extent...

Well, **Young Blood** is ambiguous in that there are two possible interpretations of what's going on until you get to the end and find out that the two possible interpretations are really the same. Yes, in this new one too, you have what look like two possible interpretations, but in the end you find out it's neither...

Fine... When I was nearing the end of Young Blood, I kept putting it down and muttering "there's only so many pages left — it's got to start resolving soon..."

Well, it all depends what you count as a resolution. The traditional resolution of vampire stories has gone the way of the erotic



subtext. In Victorian times what happens is that the vampire is banished and everybody forgets about him, but as Victorianism came to an end in about 1905 or thereabouts this is no longer a viable solution as even Hammer films demonstrate; you can't do that, it's bound to recur. You get a sequence of recurrences, and it keeps getting put away and put away, but a sensible resolution doesn't involve that kind of putting away; it must involve some other kind of reconciliation or change of the situation.

Young Blood is absolutely chock-a-block with symbolism, and I've only read it once so far. I feel under-equipped to talk about it, because I feel sure that second and third readings will bring more out.

That's the whole point really, if one is going to analyse vampire stories in terms of their sexual symbolism, or if you're going to write one then it has to have a whole lot of symbolism in it. It's full of various kinds of symbolism which are important in various kinds of vampire novels. So yes, you get all the play with light and dark, and the Science Buildings in the campus building are always lit up even when nobody's in there, whereas the Philosophy department is completely blacked out. The effect it has on the little wood which is central to the campus, then when they rail it off and put bright lights round it, how it transforms it. But that play with light and dark is central to a lot of horror fiction.

I develop it in a rather odd way whereby owls become creatures of light, but as one would expect in something of mine, there's no simple relationship between light as good and dark as evil; quite the reverse. It gets much more complicated than that. That's the whole point about the knowing use of these symbols, the elementary symbolism becomes re-complicated, because of a conscious knowledge of what they refer to and a knowledge that it's not really as simple as that: it isn't the case that beauty and good are simply equatable, or that ugliness and evil are easily equatable. Therefore when you come to re-

appraise Victorian horror fiction as Angela Carter does in **The Bloody Chamber** and the **Internal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman** it all gets more complicated than the things to which she is referring back. So the symbolism of horror fiction itself is built in with references to **Dracula** and **The House on the Borderland**. The novel, in a sense, is about the symbolism of gothic fiction, including modern gothic style.

The Spider and the Web

I did start to wonder if you had a thing about spiders?

Not really, but the spider is the most easily available symbol of fear; it's been overkilled now, largely because of Stephen King's **It**, which is an ultimate novel of the idea of incarnate evil, which does incarnate evil to death. And what you're left with is this big spider surrounded by a vast halo of imagery which takes in everything that's ever been done.

The spider's at the centre of it, as it's entitled to be, because you've not only got people's phobia about spiders because they look repulsive and move in a repulsive way, but you've also got the metaphor of the web which extends around them, so it is a useful symbol to use in that context. But yes, I am a bit worried about the over-conventuality of the spiders. You get to that bit and think "Oh no, not bloody spiders again!"

But it's difficult to get round that and think of anything else that "it" can be once you've got to the point where you've got to bring "it" on stage in some way. It's no longer functioning through a halo of derivative imagery. It would be nice to have something else, and Stephen King uses a sinister clown, deliberately uses a figure who would normally be on the other side, and that's very effective.

But you can't do that once you move into the heart of the maze, because you've got to have something that is much more innately repulsive and fearful, and you haven't got much to draw upon, there isn't that much in terms of a ready-made vocabulary of images that people can instantly relate to. So spiders it is, it does come down to "the spiders round the doorway, the vampire in his coffin", that's what you find when you get there, and it is banal and clichéd. Because after all most of our everyday fears are very commonplace. Besides, the spiders are really just décor, the heart of the horror is the loss of identity, the fear of the loss of self is the point of issue.

Yes, I mentioned spiders because I think they get a bad press, I'm quite fond of them myself...

Yes, that's okay, I don't think I've ever written a story about heroic spiders, but I've done a lot for rats! In the course of my career I've said a lot in the favour of rats. I don't see why I shouldn't write a nice spider story, I'll bear that in mind... It would be nice to write a story in which all the traditional images of evil and fear were in fact squeaky clean.

I thought Anne Charet was a really rounded female character. I didn't like her, to be honest, but I found her believable...

Not that likeable no, I wouldn't say that she was supposed to be a heroine. But yes I did try hard to make her a reasonably rounded character, because more than one person, in reviewing previous works of mine, said that I couldn't do female characters. So, I thought I'd see if I could do a real proper female character. I worked quite hard on Anne, although she's not terribly sympathetic. It's a bit difficult when you're working with an unreliable narrator, to make them entirely sympathetic. Entirely sympathetic characters have to be heroes or victims, but if you're not quite sure where they fit into this character spectrum; if their role is ambiguous, then it is a bit more difficult... I hope she works.

My wife said, when she read the book, that she thought Anne was a terrible person, with her vanity and the fact that all the moral conclusions she comes to are such obvious rationalisations. Not moral decisions at all in fact; quite the reverse in the key cases. All of this means that you can sympathise with her rather less than some readers would like with their central character. I very rarely work with central characters who are entirely sympathetic. Readers have always complained that my central characters are whingeing bastards. Which I suppose is the truth... very few of them are genuinely heroic, except when they're forced to be. Very few of them are out-and-out victims either. I prefer to work with characters who are at least to some extent morally ambiguous. They're not team players for the most part; but then I've never been able to believe in anyone who was. I suppose one's protagonists are likely to reflect at least certain aspects of one's own personality... I always have been a whingeing bastard!

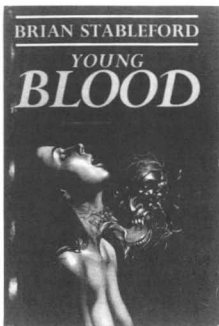
Sex and Symbolism

You say, in *Young Blood*, that it's impossible to describe the sexual experience itself properly, stating that what's coming next is going to be that much better, therefore more pleasant than what's described... then you go on to have a crack at it anyway...

Got to try, haven't you? But you do it entirely in terms of metaphor and impressionistic language. The problem is that you don't have any language for talking about the sexual experience except metaphor, and over time the popular metaphors change, particular authors have particular ideosyncratic sets of metaphors. There isn't any way to get behind that curtain of metaphor. To do as D H Lawrence does in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and just use straightforward obscenities, doesn't work. It isn't really any better than talking about it in terms of metaphors, the language of direct description just doesn't exist.

Really it's an internalised activity...

Of course, we pretend much harder than we do about certain other things that are essentially internal, but even those run into difficulties, there is an awful lot of personal experience in particular, which can't get talked about except in symbolic terms. You have to use an elaborate vocabulary of metaphors



and symbols, even in ordinary everyday conversation about your internal life. Although you can compare your descriptions of objects out there, and what they look like and feel like, and you can reach some kind of sensible consensus, nobody ever can look inside anybody else's head and see what it's like. You can only do that by building a set of linguistic bridges, and you don't really know that the two ends genuinely connect up. You end up in a situation where it's entirely conceivable that the words might mean very different things to different people; that's just the way it is. But you can't not talk about these things, you can't not communicate. That's what human community is about, binding together people with different experiences, in such a way that they can function as a society. I try to use odd metaphors, mix it up, see what will work.

Sisters of Mercy

I was intrigued to see all the references to *The Sisters of Mercy* in *Young Blood*...

I like *The Sisters of Mercy*... Well, one of the things I wanted to do in *Young Blood* was to use the imagery of 'gothic' as a style of dress and music, so that the fantasies of the female narrator refer both to gothic in the true sense and also in this sense, and the two get mixed up, so that you get explicit imagery borrowed from Hope Hodgson's *House on the Borderland* and then there's supposed to be this gothic rock band called *The Night Land*, who perform early on in the plot. I am quite fond of *The Sisters of Mercy* so I used both overt and covert references to their current record at the time which was *Vision Thing*. I didn't quote the lyrics, because I couldn't be bothered with clearing the permission, but for readers who know what the chorus line of 'More' is, that provides a key point for the central character's changed motivation in part three. I just drew on the lyrics as a running theme. Obviously the reference to 'I don't exist when you don't see me' is because at the beginning Madurewe doesn't exist and

she doesn't see him, that becomes just a way of anchoring the idea, and it also gives you a series of cultural references, which you can exploit. To what extent the fans of *The Sisters of Mercy* will feel that this is a legitimate use of the music, I don't know. Nor to what extent readers will notice or be interested in it, but it does help if you know what the chorus line of 'More' is...

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Policing Virtual Reality by Ian Sales

In his article on **Virtual Reality** by Howard Rheingold (**Vector** 171), Stephen Palmer briefly discussed an episode of **Reportage** dealing with video games and computers and their effects on users (or the "Screen Generation" as **Reportage** called them). Mention of the programme reminded me of several points that have been aired recently in the National Press regarding "hacking", and the way the dark underbelly of Information Technology seems to be fascinating the public at the moment. Whether this fascination is in response to the publication of Bruce Sterling's **The Hacker Crackdown**, or Sterling's publisher's have just been lucky with their timing, is hard to say.

At the time of writing, a 19 year old youth, Paul Bedworth, is in court charged under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, and the national papers are printing the usual OTT crap about the dangers of kids with PCs and modems. Even Channel 4's **The Big Breakfast** got in on the act and, in its typically asinine manner, interviewed a teenage hacker (although his motivation for hacking, he "loved the operating system", sounded remarkably thin to me). Whilst I can't defend hacking (malign or otherwise), it strikes me as odd that when the government is gradually moving the onus of home security from the authorities to the individual, they should do the opposite in an area where there is no real way for outside policing to be effective.

Bedworth's case will no doubt set a precedent. From the news reports, it can be seen that most of his "crimes" took place in other countries (the European Organisation for the Research and Treatment of Cancer database in Brussels, for example). Certainly, it's true that a large amount of damaging hacking done in this country is perpetrated by people in other nations. Hacking is a truly international crime. Part of the evidence in

Bedworth's prosecution came from a conversation where Bedworth and another person swapped net addresses for corporate system nodes. This conversation took place on a machine in Germany, and the addresses mentioned were AT&T ISEL in the US and Lloyds Bank in the UK.

Devil Worship

But what has this to do with SF? **Vector** is, after all, an SF magazine. The answer is simple: Cyberpunk. Dungeons & Dragons players are regularly accused of devil-worshipping (I know, because I was); so is it fair to accuse Cyberpunk of creating an ethos which makes hacking acceptable?

Yes and no.

Cyberpunk novels, both good and bad, have romanticised the hacker; a breed of computer user that existed before William Gibson's **Neuromancer**. There have been phone-phreaks since the Sixties, and the danger they represented has been known since shortly afterwards. Every now and again, it seems there is a public hue and cry about hacking. The one in the late Seventies inspired the film **Wargames**, starring Matthew Broderick and released in 1983 (and may have inspired the film **Sneakers** which took over ten years to make it to the screen).

However, whereas **Wargames** was based around the subject of hacking and pointed out the irresponsibility of Broderick's character (although he later redeemed himself by solving the problem he had created), characters in Cyberpunk fiction generally only hack as a means to an end.

In **Dreams Of Flesh And Sand** (1988) by W T Quirk, two of the characters, Ozzie and Calley, hack into the Net just for a look-see, and are later employed by an organisation to hack into part of their system that is locked to

them. The original look-see hacking is plainly illegal, and amongst real world hackers this is not uncommon as a motive; the majority of hacking incidents reported to the Metropolitan Police computer crime unit appear to be motivated by nothing more than inquisitiveness.

In Gibson's **Neuromancer** (1984), Case is asked, in typical Forties "heist" novel fashion, to hack into a corporate system to steal information. The book goes on to describe the emergence of an Artificial Intelligence. The later novels in the trilogy continue the theme of Als loose in the Net.

In Cyberpunk, much like the real world, the commodity everyone fights over is information, and the means by which this information is collected often involves an illegal act. That the information serves a morally right purpose is relevant only within the context of the story. We know that the ends do not justify the means, but we can overlook this minor peccadillo because it's easy to see why and how important the information is. Perhaps in this respect, Cyberpunk provides justification for hacking. But then, you can't be prosecuted for having information you should not have, but can be for breaking a law in the process of gaining that information — cf Watergate, Paddy Pantsdown, and any recent scandal with "gate" in it.

There is a further justification in Cyberpunk for hacker activities, and this is in the way large corporations and multinationals are painted as inimical to the person on the street. There are thousands of urban legends about inventions that have been squashed by organisations because they jeopardise their activities — the perennial favourite being the water carburettor. Perhaps this is just another twist on the David vs Goliath archetypal story. Certainly, as a motive for a Cyberpunk deck jockey's illicit forays into a multinational computer system, it is easy to identify with. Real hackers don't have this justification. They are not saving humanity from the profit motive.

Cyberpunk hackers are also described using such poetic euphemisms as "deck jockey", "net runner", or "icebreaker". The whole image of them, from the mirror shades to the counter-culture sensibilities, is far from that of an irresponsible criminal — perhaps in an effort to make them more easy to identify with by the reader.

Ego Boost

How transferrable are Cyberpunk motives to the real world? Inquisitiveness, yes; but then, in Cyberpunk this is rarely explicitly ascribed as a motive, although that it happens is implicit in the level of knowledge of net runners. One particular motive which does not appear in Cyberpunk fiction is plain ego-boost. As one group of hackers recently declared: "Don't want money. Got money. Want admiration"

It should also be pointed out that, whilst in Cyberpunk, hacking is a means to gain information relevant to the development of the

plot, real world hackers do not break the law to learn something new. They very often have little use for the information they uncover — although, other parties may be interested and willing to pay for it.

So, have Cyberpunk authors been irresponsible?

No. It is unfair to accuse Cyberpunk of providing justification for hacking. However, the literary sub-genre has spawned a media culture, and this perhaps is guilty of buttressing that ethos. But then the media culture is in part a creation of the hackers themselves — which came first?

Pornography

Similar arguments have raged about everything from pornography to video nasties. One side will claim there is no relationship between accessibility to pornography and sex crimes, whilst another will claim a link provable by statistics. In arguments of this kind, it's worth bearing in mind that statistically the most dangerous place in the home is the bed; ie most people die in bed. It's all lies, damn lies and statistics...

Personally, I put my faith in the people involved. Of the hackers that I have met, few could be called Cyberpunks (and several are not even fans of SF). If there is any commonality amongst hackers, it is their irresponsibility and lack of awareness of the real effects of their actions. But then a lot of hackers are precocious teenagers. And because the targets of their hacking forays are removed from them, or they have no use for the information they might gain, they cannot comprehend the criminality of their acts.

Hackers also form a closed community, with its own heroes and villains — such as Cartel, or the Legion of Doom. As in any private group, the culture can create its own justifications for its actions. Warped as these may appear to those outside the community, within the group they make perfect sense.

It's true, there are those that deliberately wreak havoc on computer systems, just as there are those that vandalise bus-stops. Most are none too smart about it. A couple of years ago, a pair of hackers at Coventry Polytechnic found a terminal that had not been logged out, and used the user ID to send obscene messages to lecturers and trash several grands' worth of software. They were quickly tracked down, fined, and expelled. There was even talk of prosecution.

There will always be people, whether they have computers or spraycans, that damage other people's property for kicks. It's unrealistic to blame Cyberpunk for their depredations. A literary sub-genre read only by a minority of readers of genre fiction (even if there is some overlap between expert computer users and SF) is unlikely to have had such an impact.

This does not mean, of course, that should a copy of *Neuromancer* be found on Paul Bedworth's bookshelf, Cyberpunk will not be put on trial. Of course it will. And it will no doubt lose. As SF fans, we are all too familiar

with the lack of understanding of the genre by outsiders; and as British citizens, we are all too familiar with the lack of understanding of Life In the Twentieth Century by British judges.

It seems ironic that shortly after the death of Cyberpunk, its premise has suddenly burst into life in the public consciousness. Has Information Technology at last become pop science? Or is it just another incarnation of the person in the street's fear of what they don't understand? It is equally ironic that SF has generally tried to make us question the ethics and morality of science and technology, and now science and technology is forcing us to question the ethics and morality of SF

Coda: An interesting development in Paul Bedworth's court case has been the opinion offered in his defence by a psychiatrist. This person claims that Bedworth (and by inference, all hackers) is a compulsive-obsessive and this explains why he had little or no realisation of the criminality of his actions. The Prosecution countered by asking if anglers — who will often sit up all night in inclement weather to catch a fish, or devise ever more devious methods of catching carp — suffer the same disorder. The psychiatrist denied this — a reply that suggest that angling is not compulsive-obsessive because the sport is harmless (unless, of course, you're a fish).

(Amazingly, this defence was successful —Catie)



Artwork by Roddy Williams

1992

The Reviewer's Poll

Edited by Catie Cary

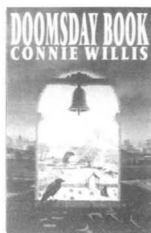
1992 was a stunning year for SF. This year I was one of the judges of the Arthur C Clarke award; necessitating the evaluation of seventy odd books. Of course it's always more pleasurable to read books you enjoy, but the generally high quality of works submitted led to a great deal of difficulty in agreeing a shortlist... You will probably know by now that the clear winner was Marge Piercy's **Body of Glass**, a surprise for many in the SF establishment. There were many other titles that could have won in another year, and next issue Maureen Speller will give you a detailed look at the shortlist, and explain for you why she thinks Marge Piercy won.

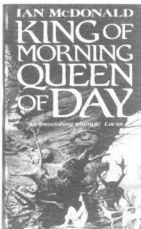
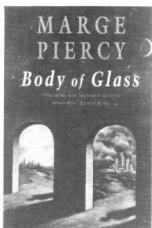
Before I took temporary custody of the hardback reviews post, it had already occurred to me that with the addition of the Paperback reviews team to the **Vector** stable, the customary annual presentation of reviewers' favourites would need an overhaul. Then Chris Amies resigned and I realised I would have to take on the job myself. Life's like that.

So, I solicited the views of all the reviewers contributing to **Vector**; close to 70 letters went out. I asked them to list in order the three best books they read in 1992, their favourite three short stories and one nomination of worst read of the year. I also asked for comments to be quoted. Over fifty replied with lists; many with extensive comments. This issue I bring you a chart showing the most recommended books, next issue I will follow up with short stories and worst reads.

Quoting oneself would seem rather odd, so I will just finish by revealing my own three favourite books;

1. **The Course of the Heart** by M John Harrison, gritty and delicate, exploring the fantastic in realistic terms; it's an unusual book that makes *me* cry.
2. **Young Blood** by Brian Stableford, innovative and original, largely described in realistic terms yet laden with symbolism, a fascinating intellectual treat.
3. **Gojira** by Mark Jacobson, the mutant philosophy of the 'bunch' and the 'beam', weird histories, odd quests, fabulous language; the strangest most compelling *huge* book of the year





- 1 Vernor Vinge **A Fire Upon the Deep**
 "the kind of New Golden Age far-future epic which I keep reading SF for"
 Andy Sawyer
 "rates high for sheer imaginative audacity" K V Bailey
 "Space Opera of vast proportions, full of bursting with excellent ideas" Gareth Rees
 "Enormous in every way" Martin Waller
 "the kind of thing that got me hooked on SF in the first place" John D Owen
 - 2 Kim Stanley Robinson **Red Mars**
 "The definitive fiction of the current 'martian wave'; a remarkable perception and exploration of planetary terrain" K V Bailey
 "It really brings the grandeur of the Martian landscape to life" Ian Sales
 "contains some of the most haunting imagery you will find" Colin Bird
 - 3 Connie Willis **The Doomsday Book**
 "I had tears in my eyes and was swearing at Connie Willis, 'It's not *fail*!' Andy Sawyer
 "Brilliant" Brendan Wignall
 "researcher Kivrin is dropped into the past... just days ahead of the Black Death that killed a third of the population of Europe. The novel ... is inspiring and moving"
 Chris Amies
 - 4 Geoff Ryman **Was...**
 "beautifully told commentary on our nostalgia for the world that never was of Judy Garland and Dorothy of Oz" Gareth Rees
 "original... memorable... a book with impact and force" Helen McNabb
- = M John Harrison **The Course of the Heart**
 "A tragedy in the classic sense, but suffused with Harrison's continual absurdist humour, and laid across some of the most evocative depictions of real places in modern literature, This should have been a Booker winner." Kev McVeigh
 "one of the darkest, bleakest most wonderful novels I've read" David V Barrett
- 6 Gwyneth Jones **White Queen**
 "her aliens... are alien not just humans in disguise" Lynne Bispham
 "a different slant on aliens, a different future, an individual eye" Norman Beswick
 - 7 Marge Piercy **Body of Glass**
 "fresh and absorbing... the most important thing, perhaps, is that Piercy's characters have warmth, humanity" Maureen Speller
 - 8 Ian McDonald **King of Morning, Queen of Day**
 - 9 Terry Pratchett **Witches Abroad**
 "Something like **The Wizard of Oz** and 'Cinderella set in New Orleans'" Chris Amies
 - 10 Karen Joy Fowler **Sarah Canary**
 "this novel contains a central core of strangeness which places it firmly in the tradition of the literary fantastic." Maureen Speller
 "Beautiful prose, a powerful, strange, humanistic story." Andy Mills
 - 11 Jonathon Carroll **After Silence**
 - 12 Lisa Tuttle **Lost Futures**
 "a moving and strange book which defies categorisation" Colin Bird
 "Superb" John Gribbin
- = Ian McDonald **Hearts, Hands and Voices**
 "Vivid exploration of far-future based on genetic engineering, intelligently uses political allegory without being swamped by it" Gareth Rees
 "undoubtedly the best new novel I've read this year. The richness of the language is astonishing." Cherith Baldry

- 14 Orson Scott Card **Memory of Earth**
- 15 Mark Jacobson **Gojiro**
"Like Tom Wolfe on peyote... the best book about a 500 foot tall intelligent monitor lizard I've ever read" Ian Sales
- 16 Alasdair Gray **Poor Things**
"Almost perfect" Paul Kincaid
- 17 Tim Powers **Last Call**
"a fast moving but complex story of old gods, tarot, Las Vegas and Bugsy Seagal. Brilliant, scintillating prose" Andrew Lane
- 18 Rudy Rucker **Hollow Earth**
"this novel's got everything except British publication" Jim Steel
- 19 Simon Ings **Hot Head**
"A first novel is always enjoyed with a hopeful expectancy. Here hope is rewarded by its approach towards that over-used definition 'the cutting edge of SF; a fruitful miscigenation of dream and reality exhibiting skilful structural use of Tarot symbolism" KV Bailey
"A great debut novel - hyperkinetic, but deep enough to demand attention" Chris Hart
- 20 Storm Constantine **Burying the Shadow**
"Ingenious reworking of the vampire myth and also of angelology" Norman Beswick
- 21 Jenny Jones **Lies and Flames**
"absorbing and original" Lynne Bispham
"highly subversive, politically and emotionally complex and highly entertaining" Kev McVeigh
- 22 Kim Newman and Paul McAuley (Eds) **In Dreams**
"the effect of a late night Golden Oldies radio show complete with annoying interruptions from the DJs - was very satisfying" Chris Hart
- 23 Terry Bisson **Voyage to the Red Planet**
"almost as convincing as Hard SF speculation but with Bisson's cherishable wit I love those interplanetary phone calls" Colin Bird
- 24 Paul Kearney **The Way to Babylon**
- 25 Theodore Roszak **Flicker**
"Can be read as a series of overlaid cinematic in-jokes that would make Kim Newman green with envy" Andrew Lane
"It has false trails, conspiracy theories, the Cathars and an ending which no amount of suspending belief can accept. Roszak can create an atmosphere... 'paranoid fiction' describes it best... you really ought to read it" Tom A Jones
- 26 Michael Swanwick **Stations of the Tide**
"Tantric sex, state-of-the-art tech, a bizarre plot and setting, and blinding prose"
- 27 Brian Stableford **Young Blood**
- 28 Sue Thomas **Correspondence**
"The structure of this novel is particularly attractive in its complexity, constantly challenging the reader to sift the information being offered." Maureen Speller
- 29 Kim Newman **Anno Dracula**
- 30 Eric Brown **Meridian Days**



Only A Girl

Heroines in the work of Anne McCaffrey and Marion Zimmer Bradley by Carol Ann Green

Marion Zimmer Bradley and Anne McCaffrey have both contributed widely to the science fiction genre, they are quite possibly the best known female science fiction authors. Bradley is known best for her Secondary World novels set on Darkover, she has written over fifteen of these in the last twenty years. Similarly, McCaffrey has written over ten novels since 1968 set on her world of Pern. Both novelists incorporate strong willed female characters into their novels.

McCaffrey's Lessa is a headstrong young woman impatient to be allowed to fly her Queen Dragon, Ramoth — and although her lover Flar is Weyrleader through her, and she his consort, she is the one who has all the exciting adventures. Rohana Arda is Bradley's *The Shattered Chain* flies in the face of convention by accompanying the Free Amazons in the rescue of her kinswoman, Melora, a chain of events which sets off a re-evaluation of her own life and her place in society.

McCaffrey is at heart a romanticist, and many of her novels are — “unashamed love stories. That's what I do best: combining either science fact or fantasy with heterosexual interaction.”¹ And indeed McCaffrey has given the science fiction world some of its best loved heroines, Sara in *Restoree*, Helva in *The Ship Who Sang* and Killashandra in *The Crystal Singer and Killashandra*. In this article though, I intend to concentrate solely on the Dragon novels set on the planet Pern.

Pern, originally colonised by Earth has slipped back into a feudal society dominated by the Weyrs and Holds, due to the threat of Thread, a “space travelling mycorrhizoid spore [which] devoured organic matter with mindless voracity and, once grounded, burrowed and proliferated with terrifying speed.”² This led to the original colonists being driven into cave like Holds, to escape Thread.

“The Anne McCaffrey fantasy canon provides some sorely needed heroines who are exactly that, successful female protagonists.”³ These “successful female protagonists” provided a breath of fresh air after all the years of “simpering” heroines waiting to be rescued — McCaffrey's heroines do their own rescuing. Lessa, the only survivor of her family after a raid on the Hold of Ruatha, lives in disguise for ten years waiting to take her revenge. However, Lessa's fate is not to claim Ruatha, but to impress the dragon Queen, Ramoth, and become Weyrwoman. Lending her considerable strengths and courage to the fight against the once again falling Thread.

Strong and Biddable

Although Lessa is a strong character and knows her own mind she is still denigrated by the main male character Flar as having “too much power and was too used to guile and strategy.”⁴ All he is interested in is getting a Weyrwoman who will be strong and biddable, able to hold her own but not challenge his authority. So, although McCaffrey has given us a strong female protagonist she still portrays the patriarchally dominated society as the norm this novel, and her female characters do not rebel against this. In fact, many of McCaffrey's strong female protagonists turn into the archetypal female heroine in the presence of their loves. It is as though as soon as they fall in love, they become putty in their lovers hands. Lessa gives in to Flar in more ways than she rebels.

In many ways, *Dragonflight* does not differ from much of the science fiction written before it in the presentation of its male characters, but Lessa is for the majority of the novel no milk-and-water heroine and is quite capable of holding her own against many of

Flar's orders; it is through her ingenuity and bravery that Pern is saved.

McCaffrey gives us another strong female protagonist in Menolly of the *Dragonsong/ Dragonsinger* novels. These novels, more than any of the others deal with the place of women in Pernese society by an examination of gender roles. Menolly, daughter of Seaholder Yanus longs only for one thing — to be a harper, a traditional male role. Her ambition is hindered by her father's belief that harping is man's business and a mere girl like Menolly would bring disgrace to the Hold in attempting to fulfil her ambition. These two novels follow Menolly as she thwarts her father and attains first, recognition from the Masterharper Robinton, then apprentice status and finally at the end of *Dragonsinger* the elevated position of a Journeyman Harper.

Perseverance and Talent

All of the above, Menolly achieves through her own perseverance and talent. However, in the process of telling Menolly's story, McCaffrey allows the reader to learn about the place of women in Pernese society. Apart from the lucky few, who, like Menolly achieve outstanding success, women are for the most part kept in the kitchens doing domestic work. This reflects the status of women in our own society — a few attain the heady pinnacle of a career, whilst the rest are relegated to the typing pool; and careerist and typist both remain tied to domestic servitude.

However, McCaffrey's “Menolly” novels are not feminist deconstructions of the situation of women on Pern, but more of a romantic tale of a young girl achieving her ambitions. Menolly is forever apologising to those around her, and in spite of her considerable talents insists on putting herself down as “only a girl”. It is easy to get the impression that Menolly is just a token woman in a man's world. McCaffrey has not set out to alter the status quo, which is borne out by her portrayal of the other girls at the Harper Hall who are all archetypes of female pettiness.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* is, like Pern, a feudal society, and like Pern it was originally colonised by Earth. *Darkover* is a harsh planet, the weather especially makes life difficult for the colonists, but *Darkover* is also devoid of nearly all metals which makes a technological society practically impossible. Bradley's main concern in the *Darkover* novels was to show the clash of two cultures, the non-technological culture of the *Darkovans*, with that of the technological-dominated Terra, “an extrapolation of our own egalitarian but plastic culture.”⁵ There is however, in many of her novels a specific emphasis on the role of women and the choices they face in a patriarchally dominated society.

In *Darkover Landfall*, an Earth colony ship crash lands on what will become known as *Darkover*. Having lost a lot of people in the crash and being unable to repair their ship, the crew and colonists decide to establish

their colony where they are. In the full knowledge that they do not have enough people to set up a viable colony, they decide that, in order to survive, the women have to have as many children as possible by as many different fathers as possible, to keep the gene pool as diverse as possible. Not all the women are fertile and it means that women like Camilla Del Ray, the Ship's Third Officer, is unable to secure the abortion she wants when she finds her self accidentally pregnant.

Second Class Citizens

This move means that for women, "biology is to become destiny once again. Intelligent women are valued for their genes, not for their skills." Camilla speculates that "Maybe it would be better *not* to survive under conditions like that," and is forcibly sedated by Ewen to stop her even contemplating such thoughts. Women on Earth might have been protected by Article Four but as Moray points out to one of the other women, on a harsh colony world "women have to be pampered, Alanna. Co-operate, or you'll be sedated and hospitalised." It does not take long for women to return to being second class citizens.

Joanna Russ in her novel **We Who Are About Too...** has written about what might have happened if women like Camilla were allowed to rebel. In her novel, the female protagonist decides, when her tourist ship crash lands on an unknown planet, that she wants nothing to do with any attempt at setting up a colony with insufficient resources. By the end of the novel she has killed off her fellow passengers and is in the process of committing suicide. Russ' novel is a feminist rendering of the theme of Bradley's novel and shows more the difficulties and soul searching that the female protagonist faces when she chooses to exercise her freedom of choice; thus making it the harder novel to read.

Discussing Bradley's ethics of freedom, Susan Schwartz points out that she "takes the decline of women's status from people who must be protected from hard manual labour because they are so valuable and continues to reveal the consequences of this choice: protectiveness becomes oppression." By the time most of the Darkover books take place, society has become patriarchal and feudal under the rule of the Comyn Lords with their telepathic powers known as *laran*. Women, are reduced to producing children for their Domain, and if they have *laran*, passing it on to their sons, or if they are truly gifted they may be allowed to serve in a Tower, using their telepathic skills either as Keeper or matrix technician.

Bradley's work has been discussed in woman orientated fanzines and she acknowledges that her overtly feminist novel **The Shattered Chain** — which contains discussions of celibacy, lesbianism, and conventional heterosexuality as equally viable, alternate lifestyles — developed in response to such fanzine and fan conference discussions of her work.¹ This novel follows the choices made by three very different



women: Rohana Arda, Lady of the Domains; Magdalen Lorne, Terran undercover agent on Darkover; and Jaelle n'ha Melora, Free Amazon. All three are faced with choices which will change the way they think and live their lives.

The Free Amazons are a band of women who have decided to live outside of conventional Darkovan society; they live in Guild Houses and are honourably employed wherever they can find work, as midwives, weavers, guides, mercenaries etc. Each Free Amazon before joining the Guild of Renunciates, their true name, has to swear an oath before her sisters that she renounces the "right to marry save as a freemate" that "No man shall bind me", and "swear that I am prepared to defend myself by force if I am attacked by force, and that I shall turn to no man for protection."² Once she has renounced her dependency on men, the new Free Amazon gains a family of sisters and mothers.

It is Rohana's interaction with the Free Amazons she hires to rescue her kinswoman, Melora, that forces her to re-evaluate her own life. To question for the first time whether she is no more than a machine to make sons for her husband or whether she has any other destiny. In the end, Rohana decides to return to her husband, not out of duty, but because that is where she feels she belongs and where she can contribute the most to her society.

Magdalen Lorne, a Terran brought up on Darkover, is as much constrained by Darkovan conventions as Rohana is — she suffers from a kind of sociological schizophrenia, her social conditioning is Darkovan, her political allegiance is Terran. However, when Magda is caught on the trail impersonating a Free Amazon and forced to take the Oath in recompense, she finds herself reacting both as a Darkovan and as a Terran. At the end of the novel, Magda decides to honour her oath as a Darkovan and enter a Guildhouse for training.

Jaelle, Melora's daughter, rescued with her by Rohana takes the Amazon Oath at fifteen.



It is only when she falls in love seven years later that she realises that she may have been too young to renounce that which she did not know about. In the end though, she too comes to terms with the choices she has made and learns to accept that, even the freedom of the Amazon choice, is often filled with pain.

Viable and Believable

Both Bradley and McCaffrey are important female science fiction writers, proving that female characters can have a will of their own. McCaffrey's achievements for women's science fiction have been many. Her novel **Restoree**, was the first science fiction novel to have a viable and believable female protagonist; she was the first woman science fiction writer to win the Hugo award (for her novella **Weyrsearch**, which later became the first part of **Dragonflight**).

Footnotes

1) Anne McCaffrey, **Get Off the Unicorn**, 1977, London, Corgi, 1981, p13

2) Anne McCaffrey, **DragonQuest**, 1971, London, Sphere, 1978, p11

3) Wendy Bradley, 'The Big Sellers - Anne McCaffrey', **Interzone**, No 34, March/Apr 1990, p28

4) Anne McCaffrey, **Dragonflight**, 1968, London, Corgi, 1979, p58

5) Lynn F. Williams, "Great Country for Men and Dogs, but Tough on Women and Mules": Sex and Status in Recent Science Fiction Utopias', **Women Worldwalkers: Dimensions of Science Fiction and Fantasy**, ed. Jane B. Weedman, Texas, Texas Tech Press, 1985, p227

6) Barbara Hornum, 'Wife/Mother, Sorceress/Keeper, Amazon/Rennate: Status Ambivalence and Conflicting Roles on the Planet Darkover', **Women Worldwalkers: Dimensions of Science Fiction and Fantasy**, ed. Jane B. Weedman, Texas, Texas Tech Press, 1985, p154

7) Marion Zimmer Bradley, **Darkover Landfall**, London, Arrow, 1972, p114

8) **ibid**, p107

9) Susan M. Schwartz, 'Marion Zimmer Bradley's Ethic of Freedom', **The Feminine Eye: Science Fiction and the Women Who Write It**, ed. Tom Stacur, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1982, p74

10) Natalie Rosinsky, **Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction**, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1984, p113

11) Marion Zimmer Bradley, **The Shattered Chain**, New York, DAW, 1976, p157/159



First

Impressions

Reviews of Hardback & Paperback Originals

Edited by Catie Cary

Isaac Asimov The Complete Stories Volume One

HarperCollins, 1993, 615pp, £15.99
Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This book is the tip of a considerable iceberg, the first volume of what is to be a uniform edition of all Asimov's fiction. A mammoth task, which kicks off with this compilation of three previous collections: *Earth is Room Enough*, *Nine Tomorrows* and *Nightfall and Other Stories*, the first two dating from the 1950's, the last from the late 60's. Additionally, Asimov has thrown in two or three of his attempts at comic verse. In the Introduction, he says that this new edition will make sure that all his output is once again in print; since his recent death, it also becomes a retrospective.

I confess that my first reaction on unwrapping this handsome volume was to wonder, "What is there new to say about Asimov?" We all think we know all about him, and some opinion suggests that the book under review will not be greeted everywhere with howls of delight and the ringing of cash registers. I should like to advance a rather daring theory: Asimov is better than we think he is.

I read recently — and I can't remember where — that the arts of writing and story-telling, although related, are actually distinct. This seems to me a very useful concept, for while we might not think of Asimov as a particularly effective writer, accepting the pedestrian language and cardboard characters, he is a good storyteller. He keeps us turning the pages. We want to know what happens next.

Another idea that seems self-evident when you think about it is that is that his writing (or story-telling) is uneven. There are penalties for being as prolific as Asimov. Some of his later stories — *The Black Widowers* collections, to name but many — rely on such a tiny wisp of

plot that it vanishes if you breathe too hard. The later novels, when he got Messianic, and tried to connect the robot stories with the Foundation series, don't work. But in the middle of his career, in the period covered by this collection, what he was writing was extremely readable.

A further reason for my sympathy with Asimov is that he gave me a lot of pleasure when I was younger. He was the first SF writer I actively looked for, as opposed to grabbing anything with an SF imprint. And he remains an excellent writer to recommend to young people who want to move away from children's books and into adult SF: not too demanding, not 'blue', but still the real thing.

I tend to think of Asimov as a short story writer, not as happy with anything over novella length. He does not dig deeply into character to sustain a novel. With a few exceptions — the first two Elijah Bailey novels, and *The Gods Themselves*, notable for the only truly alien aliens he ever created — his best writing is at the shorter length. Some books which are marketed as novels, like the original *Foundation* series, are linked short stories; even *The Gods Themselves* falls into distinct sections. There's every reason to hope that a collection of Asimov's short fiction will contain something worthwhile.

So what is on offer in this one? Listing all the stories would be absurd, but a few need to be mentioned. 'Nightfall' appears, and 'The Ugly Little Boy', both of which have recently been spun out into novels; there are those who say they would have been better left alone, and if you haven't access to the originals, you can check them out here. There is 'The Last Question', which Asimov says is his own favourite, and others which can be mentioned with respect are 'The Dead Past', 'Jokester' and 'Eyes Do More Than See'.

Since the collection contains none of the

positronic robot stories, which presumably are to have at least one volume to themselves, there is a fair amount of variety. While many people will feel that a reissue of the whole of Asimov's fiction is too much of a good thing, it would be a pity to dismiss it. It will undoubtedly be very popular

Isaac Asimov
Forward the Foundation
Doubleday, 1993, 418pp £14.99
Reviewed by Keith Freeman

It has been a long established tradition in SF to write several novellas connected by characters and/or background and publish them in the SF magazines. After this, with a little re-writing or the addition of some connecting material, a 'novel' is published. There's nothing wrong with this and it's what Isaac Asimov did with this book. Four parts plus an epilogue make up the body of this book — tracing the days when 'psychohistory' was being formulated. I had read two of the parts as individual stories but found re-reading them no chore.

Perhaps the old criticism of the Foundation series could be applied to this book — there is little action and about half of what occurs does so off-stage! There is also a feeling that Psychohistory, although mentioned, is never really seen to progress towards the science that existed in the late Foundation books.

Another criticism is the lack of editing and author re-write (understandable in the circumstances) that cause flaws in the internal logic to be present. For example (p 304): "Las Zenow smiled as he greeted Seldon. 'Welcome, my friend,...' which would indicate they knew each other, and continuing to read down the page confirms this. Twenty pages on, therefore, it is a distinct shock to find "Now, however, his plan had taken on new dimensions and he wanted to meet Las Zenow. It was the first time he had ever met him face-to-face." Only careful re-reading revealed that on page 306 Asimov moved the plot back a considerable time and the action was not linear.

This is a very minor point and the main discussion will centre on what order to read the Foundation Series in — in time sequence (eg Prelude onwards) or in the order in which they were written. For thousands it is an academic point because they will already have read some, if not all, of the previous books. My reading of the original trilogy was a long time ago but it says much for the story and writing that I still remember them. I have not read the other three books but would suggest any order is fine — although a series, each book stands on its own.

Scott Bradfield
Greetings from Earth
Picador, 1993, 296pp, £14.99
Reviewed by K V Bailey

Nine of these stories comprised the 1988 collection *The Secret Life of Houses*. Added are twelve more, few of which rival 'Dazzle' for the stars I gave it in a *Vector* review those

several years ago. Dazzle is an alienated but tough-minded dog into whose mouth the author puts his conditionally upbeat aphorisms:

There's a hidden continuity between signs and things, thoughts and the world. Our fears of discontinuity are a fiction, but one which we must be maintaining for some reason.

When it comes to action, Dazzle's line is "to maintain some faith not only in the world but in our dreams of it"; to determine our world rather than be determined by anxieties about it. The story is not so much anthropomorphic as fable-like, and a little evocative of Don Marquis's immortal cockroach, Archy. So is 'The Parakeet' and the Cat', in which Sid, the abandoned-for-dead little bird, having outlived the stupidly complacent ducks and outsmarted the predatory cat, stoically concludes that maybe such elusive "destinations" as love, home, safety, marriage, heaven and hell are just invented shields against life's impermanence. But, says Sid, that is no reason to give up life. The story ends: "Completely out of the blue, Spring had begun".

It is perhaps significant that Bradfield looks to animal fables as vehicles for this resilient if simplistic philosophy, for when it comes to the specifically human comedy of life on the West Coast he finds sustaining it difficult. Its overwhelming seems imminent beneath the flood-tide of conformist pressures, brand-name acquisitiveness, and general megalopolitan meaninglessness. His characters become schizophrenic as the dream struggles to survive. Appropriately he epigraphs his most celebrated story, 'The Dream of the Wolf' with a quote from Nietzsche: "Without the dream one would have found no occasion for a division of the world". That story is no easy lycanthropic entertainment but a poetic and often painful account of the unstable coexistence in an obsessed human psyche of hunting forays conducted alternately or simultaneously over Pleistocene ice-deserts and through office files of the downtown Los Angeles Tower Tyre and Rubber Company. It is not a case of never the existence/environments shall meet, but of the frustrations and traumas that stem from their pathological convergence.

That Nietzschean theme occurs in the many stories which feature various and sometimes ambiguously transposable dichotomies: man/woman, adult/child, youth/age, life/death. Resolutions are seldom straightforward. In 'Closer to You' the author surveys the lacuna between consciousness and 'reality' through the perceptions of a severely autistic child. 'Greetings from Earth' follows schizophrenic flight into the relative space of fantasy; envisages some freedom from "shopping plazas, Chrysler LeBarons, Hostess Ho Hos, Mitsubishi, Saran Wrap, Johnny Walker Black Label and Sears". "I can still go to Sears," says Jessica. "Being a disembodied essence doesn't mean you still can't go to Sears". Sears however is not a finality. "I travel through space like a beautiful angel and walk on the icy moon".

Scott Bradfield teaches English — for several years did so at UC Irvine. Monstrosities in many stories mirror that blend of the bland and the violent to be found in California.

'Sweet Ladies, Good Night, Good Night' exudes it. In 'The Darling' the power of the gun and the nostrum of the brand-named artifact chime together in a passage where the abused girl-child Dolores murder Dad:

Then, very slowly, Dad lowered his head on to the kitchen table as Dolores moved his Jim Bean to one side, Dad's brains and blood virtually ruined the checkered tablecloth Dolores had bought at K Mart just that summer....

If these twenty-one excursions into the American dream in *extremis* were read in sequence, the foregrounded consumerism and materialism could weigh the spirit down, were it not that the authentic gaian dream always tries to sneak in. Split-brained prototypical Californian white man soliloquies (in 'Diary of a Forgotten Transcendentalist'):

I am standing beside a tiny puddle which is filled with reflected trees and spinning insects. I can't see my reflection in the puddle, but then I haven't really approached closely enough to look properly.

Tempering grace, too, is a talent for mercurial humour and satire, sharpening dialogue and shaping quirky simile and metaphor — as in 'White Lamp':

Time began to radiate rather than flow. Events didn't occur in the world around Aunt Doris so much as strategically assemble, like places on a map around some large city or natural resource.

The collection is full of such gleams, with the result that the total reading experience is as much pleasurable as it is cathartic — though that it surely is

Orson Scott Card The Memory of Earth

Legend, 1993, 294pp, £4.99

The Call of Earth

Legend, 1993, 304pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

Orson Scott Card, however we judge him, is talented, award-winning, unmistakably original, a major contemporary SF author. He is also a convinced member of the Church of Latterday Saints, the Mormons. This latter aspect is, I suggest, very much in evidence in this curious new series.

Curious? Well, take the basic premise for a start. The planet Harmony has been under the care of an artificial intelligence, the Oversoul, ever since it was settled by humans forty million years previously. Somehow during this immense (and oddly specific) period, the human species has remained free not only from serious conflict and dramatic change but also from physical mutation, because of the Oversoul's discreet interventions.

Though a machine, it monitors human thoughts, sends meaningful dreams and even initiates direct telepathic conversation.

But, after forty million years, even Oversouls wear out, and recognising its decline, it wants to be taken back across the light-years to lost Earth for repairs before Harmony is overtaken by catastrophic war. So someone on Harmony has to be given back the forgotten knowledge of space travel. It focuses on one family group living in the woman-ruled city

of Basilea.

The Memory of Earth introduces us to these people, at a moment when Basilea faces internal dissension and war. We particularly follow fourteen-year-old Nafai and his elder brothers Elemak, Mebbekew and Issib, through a complex pattern of city rivalries and petty family squabbles. Head of the family, Volemak the Witchik, is forced to flee the city into the desert, and the brothers are directed by the Oversoul to return in great danger to Basilea to recover the Index, a gadget they neither recognise or understand. How this is achieved, and at what cost, is the main thrust of the story.

In The Call of Earth, Basilea is threatened from outside by General Vozmuzhainoy Vozmuzhnoy of Goranyi, a powerful individual hostile to the Oversoul. Meanwhile the brothers return again to Basilea to collect family womenfolk and new wives for themselves. The city falls to its conqueror, the group finds itself closely threatened by the General, and we see how the Oversoul uses even those antipathetic to it for its own purposes.

Clearly, more is to come and the move to Earth seems a very long way off. Meanwhile what do these stories give us so far? The plot is intricately worked out and not entirely predictable. There is some interest in how the two sexes (Card hasn't shown us more than two since Songmaster) operate and interact in Basilea. We watch Nafai and his brothers learning moral lessons, in a way rather reminiscent of those worthy tales written for young teenagers by responsible authors.

But the Oversoul is the guiding character, always referred to by women characters as "she", the deity in the sky sending dreams and commands and manoeuvring human freedom towards "her" purposes. Like Jason Worthing in the The Worthing Chronicles, the Oversoul knows more than "her" subjects do but is not omniscient, yet it is hard not to be reminded of the God of the Old Testament, and of the Book of Mormon, intervening, commanding, not always being obeyed. The difference perhaps is that here is a flawed, limited, ailing god, needing human assistance for "her" own needs.

Until the remaining volumes in the series are before us, we must suspend judgement on its final, overall virtues. In the meantime, it's an interesting read, essential for Card specialists: though for this reader the characters are rather simplistically portrayed and it's not as immediately gripping as (say) Enders Game or Seventh Son, each the beginning volume of an intriguing series.

D G Compton Nomansland

Gollancz, 1993, 286pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Carol Ann Green

It is year 40 of the Attrition — Dr Harriet Kahn-Ryder, a Research Scientist, is looking for a cure for MERS (Male Ejaculation Rejection Syndrome). A syndrome that, whilst making women immune to AIDS, has caused the world wide phenomenon of no live male births

for forty years.

In a society where there are no young men, the aging male population hold onto their positions and their patriarchal power with a frightening tenacity, refusing to retire when there are 'only' women left to follow.

Compton's novel is a book that hits the gender question head on, but to my mind he doesn't fully explore the situation he has set up. Yes, I can see men holding onto their power until the bitter end, I can see full scale research into finding a cure, yet... No exploration is made of any alternative. Sperm is collected and stored against the day when men die out, and parthenogenesis is explored (though heavily rejected by the men in the book — "It was men that made babies"). Co-parenting is mentioned as a feasible lifestyle for two women bringing up a child, but no mention is made of alternative lesbian lifestyles and women who don't find a man are pitied — like Liese, Harriet's co-parent until she marries Mark; Harriet wonders one night after making love to Mark "...How Liese could bear it". The idea of finding sexual gratification on one's own or with another woman doesn't appear to be taken into consideration.

Nomansland is well written and keeps the reader turning the pages. The mystery of where MERS came from is well developed, as is Harriet's fight to have her research published despite threats against herself and her daughter. In contrast with Harriet's life long search is Daniel (her brother's) obsession with killing women and destroying PTG clinics in the belief that women are deliberately "...Killing all the boy babies". The tension between the sibling's two stories is well maintained.

However, although I enjoyed some aspects of this novel, like the Mother Superior who tells Harriet that the silence she can hear is;

"Peace... For the first time in humankind's life on planet, peace. There are no wars."
(P177).

Overall I found the treatment of the gender question disappointing and felt it was there, not to be explored for what might be, but as a backdrop to a near future thriller.

Storm Constantine Sign for the Sacred

Headline, 1993, 373pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia.

This book is exquisite.

Storm Constantine's **Sign for the Sacred**, is a feast. Oh, how I enjoyed it. Yum yum. Yum yum. Yum yum ...Yum!

O.K. Pause... Let's savour **Sign for the Sacred**'s gorgeous cover. Colour: passion mauve. Detail: tiny branches painted gold and twisted into a frame. Staring out of the page, a wanton boy-man and ooh how bored... I have spent up to five minutes at a time just admiring this book's cover.

Diving down and on, deep into the text, it may be black and white and smoothly plain, but **Sign for the Sacred** is a wonderful read. It's pacy. It's sensual. You'll probably want to read it in one sitting, before returning to key

passages over and again.

Sign for the Sacred tells four tales in one. I was particularly taken with the sorrowful quest of Lucien Earthlight. For six years he has been haunted by prophet Resenence Jeopardy. For the last four years, he has been endlessly searching for Resenence the magician. Resenence the preacher, Resenence the lover. God, how I wanted Lucien to find Resenence! This is a beautiful, yearning tale of self-discovery even though Lucien is seeking another. Nor does the reader escape unscathed after witnessing Lucien Earthlight's trials.

Consider this quote from Resenence Jeopardy, a whispered promise running along the bottom of page 167: 'I am going to use you, Lucien, do you realise that? But I shall teach you too.' I defy anyone to read these words in context without going totally wobbly: weak knees, whirling tummy, damp eyes, the works. The hairs rise on the back of my neck at the memory. Yummy...

Of the three other tales, watch out for Cleo Sinister's fenniks, wonder at Delilah Latterkin's encounter with the saltcats, smile at the sly political machinations of Perpetua Sleeve.

So there you have it. I strongly recommend you all to dash out and buy a copy of Storm Constantine's **Sign of the Sacred**. It is fantastic.

Ellen Datlow
& Terri Windling (Eds)
Snow White Blood Red
AvoNova/Morrow, 1993, 432pp, \$22
Reviewed by Judith Hanna

In the olden days, there was a simple test of whether a fairy tale was good: if it stuck in memory and got told again, it survived; if not it became extinct. By that criterion, it is the narrative bones that count, and in this collection of 18 stories and a poem, those which stand retelling are Charles de Lint's boggy 'The Moon is Drowning While I Sleep', Tanith Lee's clinically elegant 'Snow-Drop' with cameo appearances of seven dwarves, 'The Springfield Swans' by Caroline Stevens and Ryan Edmonds which features baseball, and Neil Gaiman's 'Troll Bridge' which features dead railways.

Introductory essays by editors Datlow and Windling point out that fairy tales were not just children's stories, but had lots of gore and what we now call smut. This collection is certainly not aimed at children, with lashings of lust and a good rogering seemingly obligatory elements of the earlier stories. Yet the clunky look of the book, from soulful Mucha-style lady languishing on its jacket to the large schoolbook-type print suggests that the publisher at least is angling to persuade mums and aunts to buy it for Jackie-age readers — won't their mummies be surprised?

Yet belying the stories' adult tone though in keeping with the book's adolescent look, the editors' introductory essays make much reference to Bruno Bettelheim's excellent **The Uses of Enchantment**, which is about how children use fairytales to come to terms with

their own fears: on the one hand, ambivalence between the 'good', indulgent and protective, mother who turns into a screaming and punishing 'false' mother, and on the other, fear of what lies in the unknown, adult wide world outside the family. A number of these stories play on this traditional generational theme. Perhaps most interesting is Tanith Lee's focus on how a 'stepmother' fails to come to terms with her own adult status — an interpretation, one realises equally applicable to the original 'Snow White'. Most dubious in this respect is Wendy Wheeler's 'Little Red', in which the wolf narrates how his lover's young daughter is actively tempting him — no doubt this is how many child sex abusers feel, but Wheeler's text sounds no note of scepticism while presenting the child as temptress.

But if, as Windling and Datlow emphasise, fairytales aren't really for kids, all you are left with from Bettelheim is a vague Freudianism about sublimated sexual symbolism, an interpretation which more crudely informs Maureen Duffy's **The Erotic World of Faery**, one of the few 'about fairytales' recommended in the reading list at the back (which surprisingly omits Bettelheim). Duffy is given to statements like 'Peter Pan is the irresponsible, disembodied phallus flying into Wendy's bed' (at an ICA discussion on myth). The list points to other modern fairy-tales, many novels: I would add Hope Mirreles **Lud in the Mist**.

This volume, by the contradiction between the schoolgirlish packaging and insistently adult content, provokes further probing — are fairytales kidstuff, and how should sex raise its head (ugly, magical, disguised or whatever) within them?

First, it is worth looking at the idea of childhood, which Windling and Datlow don't. Back in your oral history days of robust Breughelian peasantry getting what fun and colour they could out of a hard life, babies seem to have been regarded somewhat like kittens, piglets or puppies — endearing enough, potentially useful when grown but too bad if they died as they often did. When they stopped being babies, they started working like miniature adults. In short, no status of 'childhood' as such. Nor could modern inhibitions about privacy of bodily functions, or parental sex, obtain with all the family living and sleeping in one room, and pissing behind handy trees. Windling notes in an early French version (written down, of course) of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in which Red is told by big, hairy 'grandmother' to 'relieve herself' in the bed: a passage unsuitable for children, to the prudish middle-class mind. But I suspect that an oral peasant version would say 'piss' (more frankly than Windling's translation) to get the same rude laughs as any willy/fart jokes today — what is a dead giveaway, today, is that no good grandmother would tell a child to act dirty, either pissing or eating people. Only bad wolves do that sort of thing. The old fairy-tales were told, not just to children, but to gatherings which included adults as well as children.

What identifies fairytales, as Vladimir Propp and others have documented, is a plot

in which a child hero, passes some form of testing adventure which qualifies them for adult status. By that traditional test, not all the stories in this volume can be considered modern fairytales. De Lint's tale of a girl rescuing her mother/moon from drowning is, I think, an original plot on the traditional theme — but to contemplate it as retellable, one must strip the lubricious sentimentality from its love element. Gaiman's 'Troll Bridge' is a down-beat play on this theme. But few enough of these stories tackle any generational rite of passage, or indeed of any other moral or quasi-mythic element. Without that, fairy-tale trappings are superficial.

Fairytales were essentially tales for telling — that is why they have become children's tales now, for the only stories ever read or told are to children. Real fairytales can indeed be bolder, cruder, bawdier, and more savage than the sanitised and sentimentalised "children's version" now current. Daltow and Windling are right in that. But substituting sentimentalised or simply lubricious sex for Victorian-moral does not make for good fairy-stories: you must be able to tell it aloud without yourself or your audience breaking into giggles at what is not intended to be funny bits. This collection is, on the whole, enjoyable: romantic tales to go with chocolate and falling asleep. But only the few stories noted at the beginning of this review strike the true fairy-tale note.

Nicola Griffith Ammonite

HarperCollins, 1993, 397 pp. £4.99
Reviewed by Maureen Speller

Grenchstrom's Planet, GP, is a Company planet, abandoned for centuries because of the presence of a virus which wipes out men while irrevocably changing the surviving women. Now a vaccine has been developed and Marghe Taisan, anthropologist and former employee of the Settlement and Education Councils (SEC), is recalled to test this, and also unravel the biological secrets of GP. With this knowledge, the Company can exploit the planet to its full potential, a process that will adversely affect the indigenous population and its culture.

As an anthropologist, Marghe is faced with a dilemma. As a trained observer, her role ought to be one of impartiality. Assimilation, while it may bring a true understanding, brings the risk of judgement being clouded, of accusations of "going native". Yet, the information she brings will be used to destroy the culture she has studied. Rootless in her own society, she is prepared to take the risk and embarks not only on a mission for SEC but also on a journey which she anticipates will change her life.

Her journey mirrors the classic structure of the rite of passage familiar to our own anthropologists. The ritual marks a transition from one state to another, usually higher, bringing with it status and understanding. The initiate, stripped of her selfhood, often her identity as well, embarks on a quest, physical or spiritual,

to achieve a greater understanding. Thus does Marghe arrive on GP, knowing that the Company will not, as originally promised, allow her to return home. Her life is threatened and she must learn to survive.

Marghe's decision to throw her lot with the women of GP is not surprising. After all, she has little choice, thanks to the behaviour of the Company and also her own carelessness in not taking the vaccine. Yet one might argue that this is her destiny; conscious decision does not enter into it. Beyond that, as a woman in an aggressive, male-dominated organisation, she can identify strongly with the society constructed by the colonists. As a person whose roots have been severed, she seeks a new place of safety.

This is a society of women but not an excessively feminine or feminist society. The "natives" and Company employees are portrayed as people, nothing more or less. Traits which, in a more gender-oriented society, would be designated "masculine" or "feminine" are, in this single-gender society, seen simply for what they are, individual expressions of character unrelated to gender stereotyping. In this and many other small details *Ammonite* succeeds in portraying a believable society of individuals, who happen to be female. Procreation, always a problem in any attempt to create a single gender society, is by a form of parthenogenesis, the result of the virus's action. My one caveat is the mysticism surrounding the act of conception but ultimately, is it any more ridiculous than the bottle of wine and box of chocolates? More attractive is the fact that the act of conception is and must always be a matter of will and intention.

In completing her quest, for information, fulfilling her role as an anthropologist, so Marghe also completes her "inner" quest. She journeys across the planet's surface, meeting various tribes, undergoing incredible deprivation before she meets the tribe with whom she will settle. Likewise she journeys into her own being, seeking the completion represented by the ammonite of the novel's title. In doing so, she gains the knowledge necessary to become a *vijagera*, a seer, a wise woman, the equivalent indeed of an anthropologist; her role was always clear but not necessarily

being carried out in the proper place. It will be through her skills that the women of the colonies and the Company town will be brought together and the final confrontation with the Company will occur. In this lies her own fulfillment and that of GP itself.

Griffith has taken up large themes and turned them into a satisfying and absorbing novel. She explores the notion of an exclusively female society without turning this into a clarion call for the feminist movement. Her women are people, with their own needs, their own agendas. They don't hate men; many of them don't really know what men are. They are secure in the roles they have taken on. Griffith also observes the ethical conflict between colonist and coloniser and it is here that the sex war is brought most clearly into focus, as biology rather than ideology is for once on the side of women. And at the centre of the novel is the journey we all undertake throughout our lives, to find the place, the moment where we want to be. Griffith deftly twists together the threads of all these themes to produce a book which is absorbing while niggling incessantly at the edges of the mind, posing as many questions as it answers.

Maxim Jakubowski & Edward James The Profession of Science Fiction

Macmillan 'Insights', 1992, 298pp
Reviewed by Lynne Fox

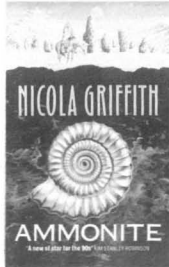
At first sight I didn't expect to be thrilled by a collection of essays on the Profession of Science Fiction, even though I'd read and enjoyed a couple when they first appeared in *Foundation*. But I couldn't have been more wrong. Reading this was like being down the pub (or in the wine bar / restaurant depending on your taste) with a bunch of passionate, opinionated, articulate and very different people all talking about something you are fascinated by. It's hard, being the reader, not being able to get a word in edgeways, but my margins are full of scribbled comments, so this reader wasn't entirely silent!

I suppose it's because writing and reading are both parts of the same creative act, the realisation of a text, that a collection of essays about writing can so intimately involve a reader. But it's also a legacy of the tradition of vociferous and informal debate which characterises SF that readers are considered, even expected to be, as active as writers.

Sixteen essays have been selected for this collection and the editors have made excellent choices. The different voices of the writers, sad, timid, bumptious, coolly theoretical or aggressive, combine to create the flavour and energy of a conversation. There are anecdotes and revelations which make you laugh out loud or silence you with sympathy.

Yet different though these voices are, the writers explore many of the same issues relevant to SF and express many feelings in common.

By and large, both writers and editors avoid the endless quest for the holy grail of



SF definition; an omission for which I was profoundly grateful. Of course the question is there — as are some of the answers — both are spin offs from other issues.

With regard to the SF/mainstream dichotomy (another SF quest myth), this collection reveals that above all, these people are writers, not SF writers. As such, the collection would make a wonderful ambassador to those legions of mainstream readers and writers from which SF feels itself divorced.

But, as writers, they have chosen to write SF and in doing so, reveal a community of inspiration, need, and concern. First and above all is the "sensawunda", that response to the universe which is composed of all the other reasons for writing/reading SF: curiosity, speculation — the "what if?" factor, a sense of alienation, the estranged and critical vision, imagination let loose at full throttle, the revolutionary stance. All of these reasons — in differing proportions — are given by the various writers as reasons for working within SF as opposed to straight fiction. As they discuss how and why they write SF, they articulate how and why we read it too.

It is this engagement of writer and reader which makes this collection such a pleasure. It captures the passionate democracy which is special to SF.

Read it. Argue with all those people

**Stephen King
Dolores Claiborne**
*Hodder & Stoughton, 1993,
241pp, £14.99*
Reviewed by Colin Bird

Stephen King's books are getting noticeably shorter, the master of the blockbuster turns in a mere 241 pages here — practically a short story by his standards. **Dolores Claiborne** consists of a monologue with no breaks, telling the story of the eponymous housekeeper suspected of two murders. The narrative consists of her testimony to the police revealing her version of the truth; both an admission of guilt and a plea of innocence.

Nobody can accuse King of playing it safe, despite the guaranteed sales of anything bearing his name, he still attempts to ring the changes with this surprising subversion of a genre which he is largely responsible for creating. The story is in three seamlessly blended parts ranging back across the decades. The first section gives us the middle of the story; Dolores Claiborne's husband has recently died and she develops a stormy relationship with her employer, Vera Donovan. Then we travel back to discover how Dolores' husband met his untimely end. King uses the solar eclipse of 1963 as a backdrop to this key section and incest plays a part in triggering the tragic events. Strange parallels are drawn between the events of this novel and the contemporaneous flashback sequence in King's previous book **Gerald's Game**. The resonances between the two stories inspire some of this author's most personal writing. The final part of the book comes almost up to date with the events leading up to Vera Donovan's death,

resulting in Dolores' arrest for murder.

Whatever else this book is — it features some bravura storytelling with a strong sympathetic female character; homespun country wisdom dripping out her mouth. The control of dialect is impressively consistent, although the homilies wear thin after a while. The horror quotient is played down from the start and only surfaces in a prolonged messy murder and revelational ending. Damn it — this is almost wistful pastoral fiction! And yet it's every inch a Stephen King novel. A fine book and further evidence that King is creeping towards some kind of masterpiece.

**Tanith Lee
Personal Darkness**
Little Brown, 1993, £15.99
Reviewed by Martin Brice

This is the second volume in the **Blood Opera** sequence, which relates the activities of the Scarabae — a group of vampires living somewhere in England.

Some seem to be vampires; some seem to be ageless, but age; some seem to be immortal, but can be killed; some desire blood, but eat normal meals; some shun the light, but apparently live ordinary daylight lives; some are Scarabae by inheritance, while others become vampires through choice, circumstance or compulsion; some may not be vampires at all, but are criminals or tearaways or misfits, or sad, lonely people who find acceptance in the Scarabae community, which can be both tolerantly all-embracing and remorselessly vengeful. There is rivalry between various groups and individuals for power over Scarabae destiny, but it is so protean that I could not decide whose side I wanted to be on.

I can identify the most frightening character, though... Most frightening not only in this book, but in many other stories... Frightening, because she is so believable and plausible.

Ruth is a teenager who employs a blend of lost-little-girl innocence, seductive lust, personal violence and skilful arson, to carve a terrifying trail of haphazard death and destruction across the Home Counties. Set against a background of the nastier aspects of present-day urban life — including muggings, cleaning asbestos from the London Underground, and illegal dog-fights on abandoned stations.

Even against this background, Ruth stands out as very unpleasant indeed. But why can't she be stopped? There are hints at Scarabae conspiracy in high places, which ensures Ruth's immunity from arrest. Perhaps this high-level involvement will be revealed in a later volume. In the meantime, the author gives us at least one clue as to how we can recognise a Scarabae.

Ruth had drunk orange juice with her meal. She did not consume alcohol unless it was offered and freely available.

Admittedly she did not want to attract attention to herself by being accused of underage drinking... But... We've all met people like that of all ages, haven't we?

**Lance Olsen
William Gibson**
*Starmont, 1992, 131pp, \$20.00,
\$11.00 pb*
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

You normally have to amass a considerable body of work to be considered a suitable subject for a Starmont Reader's Guide. William Gibson has got in on the strength of three novels and one collection of short stories. His collaboration with Bruce Sterling, **The Difference Engine**, gets a passing mention but no serious examination, a pity since that flawed work could repay more attention than his better solo works. But it is a measure of the impact Gibson's relatively small output has had upon the genre. He is the subject of academic conferences, he has acquired heroic (if not semi-divine) status to an underground of hackers and computer nerds, he is openly plagiarised by non-SF authors, and he has already joined the ranks of that small handful of SF authors whose names are known to non-SF readers.

This is not the book to explain Gibson the social phenomenon of the 1980s, but it is a marvellous stab at explaining Gibson the author and that goes a long way towards solving the larger mystery.

To call this slim book entertaining would be accurate but misleading. Academic works aren't supposed to be entertaining, not even popular examples such as this. But Olsen is one of the liveliest critics writing today, with a love of puns and wordplay which make his books brittle, sharp, enthusiastic and surprisingly funny. You only have to read the pages he devotes to the various readings of the title **Neuromancer** (new romancer, necromancer, neuron romancer, neuron mancer) to see how appealing and how fruitful this can be.

Nearly half of this book is given over to a brisk overview of Gibson's trilogy, examining the strands of development which thread through his parallel worlds of the *Sprawl* and *cyberspace*. Then Olsen goes on to examine the collection of stories and the three novels in greater detail. It is a revealing and rewarding study. Olsen is primarily known as a student and critic of postmodernism, and, of course *cyberpunk* is acclaimed as a postmodern form of SF. His examination of the books from this angle, therefore, is fascinating. He examines influences from Thomas Pynchon to Dashiell Hammett, and shows the formidable intellectual underpinning which went into the notion of *cyberpunk*. It is a powerful reason why the best examples of the sub-genre are so convincing, while the countless copycat exercises are superficial and unsatisfying.

The downside of this approach is that *cyberpunk* in general, and Gibson's work in particular, seem to be siphoned off from SF as if the science fictional element of the work is little more than accidental. The entry for "postmodernism" in the index is longer than the one for "science fiction"; Pynchon gets 21 references, Bester and Brunner, two of Gibson's notable precursors, only 1 and 4 references respectively. The notion that cyber-

punk invested science fiction with a post-modern intellectual base is well argued and convincing but at the expense of showing how science fiction provided the language and a library of images and references which had as vital a part to play in the cross-fertilisation.

Still, that quibble aside, this is an essential book for everyone interested in the movement which revolutionised science fiction over the last decade.

Cherry Potts Mosaic of Air

Onlywomen Press, 1992, 205pp
Reviewed by Maureen Speller

"Definitely about women in space not just the usual glossy tomboys of standard SF", or so says the quote from Gwyneth Jones on the back of this book. Yet reading this collection shows that, title novella apart, there is little to interest the reader of SF, other than one or two cautious forays onto the boundaries of the literary fantastic, with a story concerning the truth about Helen of Troy (ground already well-covered in Jean Girardoux's *Tiger at the Gates*), a delicate myth about the elements and a distressingly obvious reworking of the story of Penelope and Odysseus.

Mosaic of Air seeks to evade the standard portrayal of women in space, aping men. Calista Gerrard, a space pilot who has lost her licence, is forced by her desperate need to be in space to steal a ship containing an experimental computer. Cal is a lesbian who drinks hard, plays and works hard and accidentally becomes pregnant while seducing the man originally meant to fly the ship. Pursuit drives her to hide in a black hole where tragedy threatens. Does this sound somewhat familiar? Is this not ground that Colin Greenland has already covered in his award-winning *Take Back Plenty*?

Dr Rhani is the woman who devised the computer. She regards it as her child but, thanks to a shipboard accident, her computer acquires knowledge of Cal and some sort of sentience, and falls in love with her pilot, as does Rhani herself. Again does this not seem familiar? Surely we are venturing into the realms of 2001 and HAL the deranged computer. The finale is highly charged with emotion and the reader is left to ponder on the nature of love and jealousy between human and machine.

This reader is also left to consider the problem of ideology versus originality. Is this story any better because its characters are lesbians than it would be if the characters were heterosexual? The answer surely has to be no, it isn't. The sexual habits of the characters can in no way compensate for the fact that this story is over-sparingly written, poorly plotted, cliché-ridden and, in fact, almost stereotypical in its portrayal of women in space, even though the ectopic pregnancy is an unusual touch.

To be fair to Cherry Potts, science fiction is perhaps not her forte. Some of her mainstream stories show a neatness of touch which somehow eludes her in *Mosaic of Air*.

The same tolerance cannot be extended to the copy-editor and the proofreader of this book. It is riddled with unacceptable errors of grammar and punctuation and one is astonished that Onlywomen Press has allowed it to reach the bookshop in this condition.

Mickey Zucker Reichert The Last of the Renshai

Millennium, 1993, 533pp £8.99
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

The Last of the Renshai bulges with the wizards and battles of traditional "sword and sorcery". It's huge, and its cover reads, "A new fantasy epic begins..." — So be warned.

The world has been stable for years, according to rules decreed by Odin; four Cardinal Wizards maintain the balance of power — the good Northern Sorceress opposing the evil Southern Wizard, the Eastern and Western Wizards remaining neutral. The Wizards make prophecies which they must then enable mortals to fulfil; the latest is that Ragnarok is at hand, and a champion, the last of his race, will fight in the Great War.

The plot follows Rache Kallimrison, a Renshai warrior — possibly the last — and those whose lives intersect with his, in particular, Mitrian, the teenage daughter of a western chief, and the gladiator Garn, a boyhood friend now turned implacable enemy. When Mitrian runs away with Garn, Rache follows. Their journeys are beset with hardship and adventure. Meanwhile a Cardinal Wizard has been accidentally killed, jeopardising the world balance and the fulfilment of the prophecy.

The author has created her world in some depth, as evidenced by the appendix including lists of previous wizards and kings. Her characters are interesting and distinctive, but the emphasis on one main trait for each protagonist — Garn's unthinking rage, and Rache's blinkered attitude to bravery, for example — begin to pall. It is the minor characters, like Arduyn the hunter and the soldier Nantel, who are most successful.

I was confused that there were Cardinal Wizards, but not cardinal races; there were Northmen, Easterners and Westerners — but where were the Southerners? This has a knock-on effect when the Wizards each champion a race; why should the Southern Wizard back the Easterners while the Eastern Wizard backed the Westerners?

There are some refreshing ideas in *The Last of the Renshai*: Rache becomes physically disabled yet finds a way to continue as a warrior; and Mitrian is a female sword-wielder who reacts humanly to all the blood and gore.

At the start of an "epic", there are plenty of loose ends for a sequel to tie up. The Northern Sorceress, Trilless, has a walk-on part (don't blink or you'll miss it!) which is crying out for development.

Is it worth reading? I wanted to turn the pages — always a good sign — and enough of the plot strands were completed to give some satisfaction.



Phil Rickman Crybbe

Macmillan, 1993, 664pp £14.99
Reviewed by Catie Cary

This is Phil Rickman's second novel; his first, *Candlelight*, attracted critical acclaim and has been recently issued in paperback where it will undoubtedly attract further praise as an extremely strong debut. *Crybbe* builds on that impressive start and offers a complex and rounded entertainment.

Crybbe is a small town in the Welsh borders inhabited by the customary terse and mysterious yokelry, and locked into a pattern of ancient rituals, the most obvious of which is the nightly curfew of 100 tolls. It is the kind of place where strangers do not linger... Until it attracts the attention of the New Age dabbler and Music Tycoon Max Goff, who wants to turn the place into a centre for psychic research and spiritual uplift.

We meet and follow a knotted web of characters; from Fay Morrison, broadcaster, who stays out of duty but longs to escape; to Warren Preece, local wastrel, whose one dream is to achieve sufficient success with his rock band to escape; to Joe Powys, ex-best-selling author, who is only looking for a bit of peace and the wherewithal to pay the bills. Some of these characters are depicted in three dimensions, some in only two; just sufficient to animate the archetype. The hero of the piece is the town itself, a constant brooding presence.

A variety of moods are encountered; affectionate mockery of the New Age phenomenon is sketched, a more bitter grimace is pulled at the lifestyle of the rock-rick Goff, the narrative builds through stages of hopelessness and despair to an extended depiction of real evil run riot.

Rickman is a very skilful writer. This large and absorbing book borrows many of the props of the old-fashioned ghost story, yet avoids cliché; it depicts excesses of lifestyle fit to fret a tabloid editorial, yet resists overt parody; a huge cast of characters is directed

through these pages, yet intimacy and empathy are retained.

Crybke has style and verve and wit. The writer clearly loves the area he writes about and has a great affection for the people who fill his pages. This is not what you'd call an overtly literary novel, but it's an excellent entertainment. Highly recommended

Keith Roberts Kaeti on Tour

Sirius Book Co Ltd, 1992 320pp £13.95
Reviewed by Ian Sales

Kaeti on Tour a collection of short stories featuring the eponymous heroine and a fixed cast of characters. The stories themselves, however, are anything but fixed. A framing narrative between stories suggest that each tale is a play or a film, with Kaeti as lead and the others filling supporting roles (hence, the *On Tour* title). There is no continuity between the stories — other than that implied by the characters. Kaeti plays numerous roles, and each is central to the story as it unfolds.

The opening story, 'Kaeti And The Shadows', is the one I liked the least. The dialogue is written close to as it is spoken, with dropped aitches, phonetic spelling and dropped gees on present participles. This takes a bit of getting used to, but the deeper you get into the book the less you notice it.

The best two stories are 'The Tiger Sweater' (the story that inspired the very nice cover illustration by Jim Burns) and 'Turndown'. In the first Kaeti is a junior reporter on a local paper. A sweater she is a given begins to have a strange effect on herself and those around her. 'Turndown' has Kaeti moving back and forth from a present-day hotel to a medieval brothel. The historical parts are extremely well done.

Bit by bit, as you read further into **Kaeti On Tour**, pieces of dialogue and small insignificant events start leaking across from story to story — in much the same way Frank Zappa uses ideas and lyrics across songs. Throughout the book there are little touches and observations that read as though the author picked them up from real life. If they do in fact come straight off the top of his head, then I take my hat off to him.

Kaeti has been described as one of those characters that blur the distinction between fiction and reality. But then if you're going to base a book around a single character, you have to do a good job for the book to succeed. Kaeti is a success.

I was surprised to find myself enjoying the book, and even more surprised once I had finished it to find that I was impressed.

Recommended.

Kristine Katherine Rusch Heart Readers

Millennium, 1993, 250pp, £7.99
Reviewed by Lynne Bispham.

In **Heart Readers**, Kristine Katherine Rusch has taken the traditional fantasy idea of revenge and the fight for control of an empire and has added the original idea of heart readers who can look into a person's heart and reveal the truth about their character. Stashie is a heart reader. Years ago, when she was a girl, and Pardu, king of Leanda, was carving out an empire from neighbouring lands, Stashie's village was occupied by Tarne, Pardu's most vicious general. Her resistance to Tarne led to his massacre of her family, and this experience has left her with an almost pathological fear of soldiers.

Pardu is now old and dying and knows that he must decide which of his twin sons will inherit his throne. He wants to prevent his empire being torn apart as brother fights brother and decides to employ heart readers to tell him which of his sons has the pure heart that makes him fit to rule. Stashie's partner, Dasis persuades her to read for the king — the money will enable them to retire. However, Tarne, now a royal advisor, recognises Stashie and determines to use her fear to subvert the readings, he plots to stir up enmity between the twins, ultimately aiming to seize the throne for himself.

The interweaving of the stories of Stashie and the king's sons enables Rusch to draw on many themes that appear in fantasy novels, like power and kingship. The difference in this novel is that the larger themes are important for the effect they have on the characters, as when individuals like Stashie are inadvertently caught up in the jostling for power on the death of the king.

The character of the brutal Tarne reveals the difficulty for an author in portraying violence. The massacre in Stashie's village is well-handled by Rusch, but I felt that Tarne's eventual death was unnecessarily drawn out. This is a minor grievance with what is a well crafted, atmospheric and intriguing fantasy.

Brian Stableford Young Blood

Simon & Schuster, 1992, 328pp, £14.99
Reviewed by Alison Sinclair

This novel is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It looks like a horror vampire novel: in certain circles the cover should be carried turned inwards and slid onto tables face down. But inside is a constantly turning, somewhat dark crystal, with facets of scientific romance, fantasy, and science fiction, with speculation

on human psychology, emotions, morality, neurochemistry and evolution. It is a literary-scientific-philosophical vampire novel.

It begins true to the classical portrait of the vampire as a receptacle of sexual anxiety; in its modern (feminised) form of fear of sexual violence. The setting is a university campus, and the threat is ever present. Rapists lurk in the woods, and 'wolves' eye the newcomers at the freshers dance. The heroine, Anne Charet, is a philosophy student, thin, wary, distrustful of men and unstirred by sex. For her the vampire is both real, and a projection of her own desires, which she controls. The vampire's seduction is accomplished because he liberates her from ordinary anxieties, because the act of enfleshing him gives her power. She makes the transition from vampire to hunter of vampires, and thence, to something else...

The elements of scientific romance arise in the perspective of her boyfriend Gil, Anne's first 'victim'. Classical scientific romances reflected the impact of both Freud and Darwin, the discovery that 'we have met the monster, and he is us.' Gil's monster is not the unconscious or the ancestral ape, but the modern menace to personal integrity, genes. He is a postgraduate student researching psychotropic viruses, and believes the vampire, and the blood hunger, are both hallucinations due to accidental infection (perhaps contracted through sexual encounters with another researcher). He rejects the vampire, succumbs to the hunger, and becomes the monster incarnate, and after that, something else...

The action moves between a contemporary world of philosophy tutorials, university social rituals, police investigations, and tabloid reporters (another kind of predator), and a shadowy borderlands inhabited by the vampires, who have their own predators, the 'owls', cruel creature of the light. The owls trap Anne to break her of her addiction to blood, and to her demon lover. There, in the rambling house of her own soul, Anne hunts the vampire to drive a stake through his heart.

But what is the vampire: is he real, or fantastic? Is he a modern female fantasy, not merely of the perfect lover, but the perfect protector? Is it an expression of power culturally denied to women? A fever-dream, embodied by gothic cliché? A projection outside oneself of one's basest desires? A metaphor for our common origins as embryos feasting on our mother's blood? A new evolutionary stage? All these ideas, and more, are passed on the way. I won't mark the endpoint I reached. Yours may be different, and getting there is half the fun.



Allen Steele
Rude Astronauts
Legend 1992 261pp £9.99
 Reviewed by L J Hurst

Rude Astronauts is Allen Steele's first short story collection, but the stories carry on the themes and some of the characters of his novels.

The first part of this book consists of realistic near-future stories, where the workers are "professional spacers" — "shuttle pilots, launch pad ground crews, firing room techs, spacecraft mechanics, flight software writers, cargo loaders, moon dogs, the Vacuum suckers, and beamjacks" (I think I can guess what most of them do). Like Arthur C. Clarke characters, they meet in a drinking hole and tell tall tales.

Most of the characters are red-necked and brave, but know they are expendable while the space corporations who employ them are puritan and double-dealing. The best story about this is "Sugar Blues", about the dubious function of a space station being used to develop pharmaceuticals in zero-gravity, and the paranoid police state the corporations will enforce to protect their investment. The two stories before it are both black comedies, based on the red-necks revenging themselves on their bosses and not as funny as the cover illustration suggests. The last story in this section, "Live From The Mars Hotel", recounts how pop groups in the early twenties of the next century will be exploited and make terrible albums after selling their souls just like today.

The second set of stories (just two) dealing with alternate histories is better than the first, and "Goddard's People" about the Americans and Nazis rivaling each other to build vast rocket planes rather than atomic bombs during World War II, written like a straight magazine article, was the second most memorable in this book.

The best is in the third section, and has nothing to do with the rest. It is "Trembling Earth", which must have been written about the same time if not before, Michael Creighton's *Jurassic Park*. Three flesh eating dinosaurs have been re-created from fossil DNA bio-markers and given the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia as a playground. Unfortunately or not, depending on your point of view, the flesh they eat includes a U.S. Presidential candidate.

So the future involves the exploitation of the workers or exploitation of scientific discoveries or both. Allen Steele gives you a different view of how it can be done. None of it is really funny.

George Turner
The Destiny makers
Avon Books, 1993, 321pp, \$20.00
 Reviewed by Marcus L. Rowland

Despite one of the most irrelevant cover illustrations I've ever seen on a serious SF novel *The Destiny Makers* is a rarity; a convincing and thoroughly nasty future extrapolation that avoids both easy cop-outs

and the total despair of predecessors like Harrison's *Make Room, Make Room*.

In 2069 there are twelve billion people, and most of them are hungry. Harvests are failing, and many plant species are dying or mutating. In all nations there are fertility laws, and it is illegal to give the elderly medical treatment, but the population is still rising. Australia, the setting for the story, is one of the wealthier nations, but is still in desperate trouble; with near-total unemployment, its states are ruled by a small elite known as the "minders", presumably people who mind other peoples business, while most of the population are "wardies", wards of the state.

Against this background a state Governor arranges for the illegal rejuvenation of his formerly senile father, once a power behind the governmental throne. It's obvious that a crisis is developing; one so important that the best possible advice is needed. The nature of the crisis is easy to guess, from early remarks about population control and "culling", but the politics, ethics, and psychology of the decisions that must be made are fascinating, and conceal several dark secrets. Subplots dealing with the unlawful pregnancy of the Governor's daughter, and the use and abuse of psychological conditioning, add more complications. Unfortunately Turner piles on too many coincidences in these subplots; there is no real reason why everything should happen at the same time, apart from the mechanics of the story. This isn't a major problem, but it detracts slightly from the important issues of the novel.

Turner's story won't appeal to anyone who thinks space colonisation, or some other technological rabbit, will be pulled out of a hat in time to save humanity, but it should satisfy anyone who prefers a more realistic approach to the future. Ultimately it doesn't provide answers to the problems it poses, but at least it admits that they exist.

This book isn't an essential item for every SF fan's library, but it's well worth reading. Recommended.

Jack Womack
Elvissey

HarperCollins, 319pp, 1993, £15.99
 Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Having novelled closehand this *Elvissey*, I lightbulbed how easy to demetamorph language this futurist so long as you don't wonder how "back and forth" backwards into "forthback". A few inversions, a few words run together, a few nouns transformed into verbs and slam, you're in the future.

It is a pretty exhausting future, at least if you're trying to cope with this language throughout, and it doesn't really tell you as much about the nature and mores of the society as Jack Womack seems to think it does. Russell Hoban did it all more radically and a lot more effectively in *Riddley Walker*. But then, this future isn't as debased, or as sharply imagined as Hoban's. It is ruled by big corporations — especially Dryco — though there isn't much notion of what they actually

do. People either wander its corridors of power or they are beyond the pale, so far beyond that you wonder they could afford to buy any product from any corporation. Is Dryco's entire market made up of people it employs? It is a future in which people no longer breed true, and sculpture is made out of deformed foetuses. In which case, the fact that the heroine is pregnant and appears to be breeding true should have had more of an impact upon her and her society than it does in this book. But all of the characters are curiously effectless. The use of aborted children for sculpture doesn't shock us, because it doesn't shock anyone in this world. And given the subject of the book it is strange that no other 21st century art form is mentioned, not even music.

The subject? Oh yes, in this future they worship Elvis Presley.

In fact the Church of Elvis has schism (the language is catching) into all sorts of curiously named sects — the prearmies, the Shaken Rattled and Rolled. So, in a scam aimed at mass population control, Dryco plan to kidnap Elvis from a parallel America and set up their own puppet messiah.

A black woman, Iz, is subjected to drug treatment which turns her white, then sent across to an alternate 1954. Here, all the blacks have been rounded up into Nazi-style death camps, Nazi flying saucers are spotted in the skies over America, and the Elvis Iz has discovered has just murdered his mother. This section of the novel is all that you'd expect of Womack, it is vivid and original, bizarre, buffeted by the cross-winds of all sorts of high-octane plot ideas. But it is over before the book is more than half done.

The rest of the novel takes us back to a future Womack doesn't seem to care about half as much, and a plot in which he doesn't let rip. Iz discovers that her drug treatment was carcinogenic, her marriage crumbles into violence, Elvis is a frightened boy who doesn't want to play messiah, and it all turns out to be a bit of dirty political in-fighting between the top echelons of Dryco, with a happy-ever-after which doesn't begin to convince.

Womack has ploughed this furrow before. In fact he has ploughed nothing but this furrow. Dryco's machinations and their horrible future New York is at the centre of all his books, the alternative America crops up in the second novel, *Terraplane*, and the new messiah first steps forward in *Heathern*. It is perhaps this repetition that makes me think he isn't really as anarchic as everyone says, how can he be when he has fashioned his very own straightjacket? Or maybe it's just that his invention is running out of steam. Whatever the reason, when I finished this book I didn't feel as bowled over as I feel I was meant to have done.

BARBED WIRE Kisses

Edited by
Maureen Speller

There isn't much room for me to comment, this time. However, I would welcome some direct feedback on this column. It's still in its infancy and I haven't yet settled on its final format. It seems likely that I will settle for a combination of shorter reviews and in-depth articles but if you have any constructive comments, I'd like to hear from you.

Scaling the Walls

Critical magazines reviewed by
Paul Kincaid

There is a scale in operation here, an axis defined not by quality or reader expectations, but by the aims and ambitions of the editors and contributors.

At one extreme, with *Science Fiction Studies*, you have an academic journal whose main raison d'être appears to be providing a place for those articles necessary to assure tenure. At the other, *The Hardcore* offers enthusiasm flooding over into print with little space for reasoned argument or contrary positions in the determined espousal of the cause. In between we find all the myriad ways people have chosen to write about science fiction. It is instructive, though not always in the way envisioned.

Science fiction has one hell of a chip on its shoulder. It is the poor relative of literature, a childhood enthusiasm which looks awkward when pursued by an adult. But those of us within the walls of the ghetto see what riches we have to proclaim, understand that science fiction is not so poor as we imagine others see it. In defence of our *amour propre* we go onto the offensive, enter upon a concerted critical campaign, scale the walls with the hooks and grapples of literary respectability.

It may be that this is the wrong course. Certainly that is what Brian Stableford suggests in a spirited defence of R. Lionel Fanthorpe in the December *New York Review of Science Fiction*. He argues, convincingly, that such formulaic SF should not be condemned the way it routinely is by critics within the genre. By accepting the goalposts laid down by critical standards from outside the genre, we are skewing our own pitch.

This is an interesting position, but it is hard to see where we go from there. What goalposts do we aim at now? And do we invalidate the efforts that have been going on for 20 years or so to define a critical standard for SF in magazines like *SFS* or *Extrapolation*?

Maybe we should. *SFS* in particular seems to consist of academic talking unto academic. Which is not to say that there is not good stuff in the magazine. The latest issue, for instance, contains a review-article on Larry McCaffrey's *Storming the Reality Studio* which provides a strong argument against the underlying assumptions of that book. Gary Westfahl's 'The Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe Type of Story' is an excellent statement of Hugo Gernsback's view of science fiction and his rather self-serving efforts to devise a history of the genre (a history in which, for instance, *Frankenstein* didn't get a mention). And it was good to read Neil Easterbrook's attack on two of the icons of cyberpunk, Gibson and Sterling, who are usually held inviolate by today's critics.

But to set against that you have to wonder what Lorenzo DiTommaso's 'History and Historical Effect in Frank Herbert's *Dune*' can add to anyone's enjoyment (or otherwise) of that book. And Ellen Feehan's article on Herbert's *The White Plague* is an object lesson on what can be bad about academic criticism. Feehan is so eager to tease meanings out of the book she commits two cardinal errors. She assumes that because she has chosen to study it the book is worthy of study, avoiding any suggestion of

objective critical standards. And she twists the facts to suit her case. Her contention is that Herbert is making use of Irish myth to provide the resonances that underpin his novel about the IRA; yet she repeatedly excuses mistakes he makes in the myth, supposes at one point when the text doesn't match her analysis that it could have been a typesetting error, and by accumulation abandons any rigour in her analysis.

Extrapolation is closer in tone to our own *Foundation*, a journal which leaves critical rigour with a more accessible approach. Having said which, it must be admitted that the Winter 92 issue contains one example of critical hubris which is inexcusable. Robert F. Fleissner takes about three pages to examine the influence of H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* on Ralph Ellison's novel of the black experience, *Invisible Man*. A valid exercise, and along the way he makes some comments also about the more usual critical stance, that Ellison's work owes a debt to T.S. Eliot. So far so good? Then why is a third of the article devoted to the coincidence: "Elison = Eliot's son" and "Wells = Ell...s". It is childish and irrelevant, an attempt to be clever which adds absolutely nothing to the validity or otherwise of the critique, and a prime example of why academic criticism can have a bad name among those from outside the ivory tower.

Yet if that is a low, this issue also contains a sublime high. It may be only tangentially relevant to science fiction as such, but Virginia Allen's examination of the famous friendship and very public split between Henry James and H.G. Wells is an object lesson on how it *should* be done. She writes with a light touch, amusing, informative, never assuming knowledge on the part of the reader or patronising in her explanation of asides and references. Along the way she reveals some gems. James, the guru of high art, is supposed to have disdained the idea of collaboration. Yet here we find a letter from James to Wells, one of the great demotic writers, in which James practically begs to be allowed to collaborate with Wells on a Mars book. What a concept! And where does that place the current rush of Mars books from Robinson, Bisson, Bova, McAuley, Greenland and others?

Virginia Allen's article is something of an oddity within these pages. Not in subject: Wells crops up in four of the five articles in this issue of *Extrapolation*, but then the more academic critics have a tendency to concentrate on a limited number of subjects. Of the usual suspects, in fact (Wells, Orwell, Atwood, Ballard, Gibson, Herbert, Dick, Le Guin) only Dick and Le Guin are absent from these two journals. Allen's article stands out because of its tone: she has an almost narrative voice, stating a position, chasing through its ramifications, pursuing it to a resolution. Surprising as it may seem, that is not always the case in these academic essays, which tend to work by accumulation of detail. They offer a list of titles in lieu of analysis, lose their theme within a web of fine detail. Thus Patricia Monk's article, 'Not Just 'Cosmic Skullduggery' has some

interesting things to say about space opera, but these are scattered rather than gathered into a coherent whole. Monk seems to be trying to rescue space opera's critical reputation by offering a definition of the term, but the definition remains unclear at the end.

But if we leave aside the academic route, what is there? *Million* is not about SF but popular fiction, and suffers from the fact. Biggles and Robert Graves, Evelyn Anthony and David Nobbs, really have little in common, which makes it difficult to find a coherent approach to interest the varied readers of these very varied writers. The general solution is a populist tone which doesn't go deep enough to say anything interesting, or skim the surface lightly enough to be entertaining in its own right. And given the people behind the magazine, or who appear regularly in its pages (David Pringle, Kim Newman, Kathy Gale, Maxim Jakubowski, Brian Stableford, Mike Ashley) it is perhaps inevitable that it is strongest when it touches on the fantastic. The most interesting piece in these two issues is the article on Robert Aickman by S.T. Joshi (a regular in the pages of *SFS*), which is also the nearest to academic in tone. Though it contains a few unforgivable howlers: the Inland Waterways Association, which Aickman helped to found, was devoted to preserving our canals, not our rivers; he earned his living as writer and literary agent (as well as having a small private income) rather than from the IWA; and if you are going to list just about every English ghost story writer, as Joshi does, it is odd to miss out Aickman's main rival and opponent on the IWA, L.T.C. Rolt.

Like *Million*, *The Hardcore* tries to be all things to all people, but it doesn't come out as badly. There's tiresome posturing ('for mature readers only' squawks the cover); a couple of strips, one of which is crudely and unnecessarily violent; and a couple of too short stories. But when it gets down to the non-fiction the narrow focus of the magazine gives it a strength and vigour which is refreshing. Nor is it as kneejerk as you might expect. Though Chris Bateman apologises that Walter Jon Williams's *Angel Station* is not cyberpunk in his favourable review, when editor Jael Nui reviews Cyberpunk The Video he is sharp and highlights the excesses. It is interesting to see a supporter of cyberpunk expose the shortcomings and dangers of what has grown out of the movement. The centrepiece of this issue is an interview with J.G. Ballard, with off the wall questions which elicit some fresh and revealing comments.

Nevertheless, the magazine has a blatant attitude, a far from hidden agenda. It is fan writing of high quality, more challenging and informative than *Million*, but limited in what it can do, and what it can allow itself to do.

Which leaves us with the centre point of the scale, *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, which combines the serious study of the academic journals with the accessibility of the more popular magazines. For example, the two issues reviewed here include two

lengthy extracts from *The Monster Show*. David J. Skal's cultural history of horror fiction. This is wide ranging stuff which gives the subject a sociological aspect, linking the horror comics of the early 1950s with the state of America immediately post-war, and looking at the success of Stephen King in the context of the urban angst of the baby-boomer generation. The result is vivid, full of insight, and one of the most enthralling and convincing examinations of the subject I have read.

This sociological approach is typical of the magazine, providing a context for science fiction which takes it outside the narrow realms of academia or fanaticism. It avoids the jargon which normally accumulates in a restricted compass, opening SF up to a more general but not less thorough examination. Thus the article by Brian Stableford, which I mentioned earlier, opens with C.S. Lewis's attempts to define good and bad books in terms of good and bad readers, and suddenly Fanthorpe's work, which might normally be considered of only limited interest even within the field, becomes central to the whole question of how we read and judge SF. Even the book reviews, allowed considerably more space than is usual within the genre, broaden out to provide a more interesting perspective. So that James Cappelro can take more than four large pages to turn a review of Gardner Dozois's *Year's Best* anthology into an overview of the state of the art at the moment.

NYRSF is too thin, 24 A4 pages a month featuring an article or two and half a dozen reviews. It can hardly provide a comprehensive coverage of the field. But it does prove that writing about science fiction can be as readable, as exciting and as challenging as reading SF itself.

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Inc. Arthur B. Evans, East College, DePaul University,
Greencastle, IN 46135-0037, USA
Extrapolation Winter 1992
\$24 for four issue sub, The Kent State University Press,
Journals Dept, Kent, Ohio 44342, USA
The New York Review of Science Fiction
Dec. 1992 & Jan 1993
\$27 for 12 issues, cheques payable to Dragon Press
P.O. Box 78, Pleasantville NY 10570, USA
Also available in UK from Andy Richards, Cold-Tonbridge
Books, 136 New Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK44 1BT
Million Nov/Dec. 1992 & Jan/Feb. 1993
£14 for six issue sub, Popular Fictions, 217 Preston Drive,
Brighton, BN1 6PL
The Hardcore No 8
Cover price £11.50, Contact PO Box 1893, London N9 8JT for
more information

In Poetry, no less than in Life

Poetry in magazines reviewed by KV Bailey

Reviewed along with magazines devoted to SF/verse are magazines of SF and criticism which also publish poetry. That most are American is indicative of genre verse's greater popularity there. In Britain publication is often by chapbook, card-poem or collection. Verse with a science fictional or fantasy feel appears slipstream-wise in some mainstream poetry journals — e.g. *Ore*, *Acumen*, *Bare Bones*, *Envoi*, but such aren't considered here.

StarLine

V.15, no.7, 1992 (Special Issue)
V.16, no.1 Jan/Feb. 1993

An American originated newsletter/journal, circulated to members of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. I give it prominence for its importance internationally as a focal point and because of the SFFA's involvement in the Rhysling Award and Anthology. As a consequence, administrative matters can monopolise many pages, though poetry predominates. Some special issues are thematic; e.g. parody, horror. This one features the prose poem, which Thomas Wilcox defines as "a quirky fantastical hybrid, a haven for the surreal and the macabre". Some inclusions strike as being less poetry than over-the-top prose; others meet both the OED definition of "a work of prose having the style and character of poetry" and also Wilcox's (e.g. Karl Rouston's 'Childhood Companion'). Others bring about fusions of the distinctive rhythms and music of the two media. W Gregory Stewart's hypertextual Heisenberg's Wolf does so; as does Brian Skinner's Latin/English manifesto of the unhappy robots, 'De Dolore Automatum'. The Jan/Feb. '93 issue contains more of excellence than I can detail. Of the free verse poems, Bruce Boston's planetary-seasonal lyric is superb. There are also two rhymed pieces: a rhythmically beautiful and typographically intricate lyric from W Gregory Stewart; and four-and-a-bit stanzas of romping rhymed couplets by Jeffrey G Liss in *Bab Ballad* — or perhaps Thomas Hood — mode, beginning: "From helpless babe to muscled bones/The planet nurtured Thomas Jones". *StarLine's* market notes intrigue: *Hysteria* wants 'humorous verse on women's issues'; *New Era* verse appropriate for Mormons; *The Tome* would reject 'trite monster stuff', limericks etc.

Riverside Quarterly

V.9 No.1, August 1992

A magazine, edited from Big Sandy, Texas, by Leland Shapiro; it is renowned for perceptive critical articles and sharp letters of comment. This issue prints eighteen poems, occupying a fifth of its space. They are arranged in dispersed groups, a poem usually commanding a single page, which encourages more reader attention than the squeezed-in filler. The poems ring all kinds of changes between fantasy and surrealism, the stark and the magical.

Xizquil

No.8, December 1992

Is edited from New Mexico by that Uncle River who enlivens the pages of *BBR*. It describes itself accurately, if a shade inflatedly, as "a place where social conscience and creative speculation meet". Fiction is its main concern, but it prints plenty of interesting verse. Most experimental in this issue are two poems by a winter-demon, master of the lower-case, the ampersand and linear fragmentation. In a cyclic evocation of Aztec rites, and in the poem 'Conscious Avoidance', whenever you think the techniques have drastically taken over, he produces the simple

and perfect trope — "genocide at trainload rates: the ape grows fangs of wood and stone."

Barddoni

Latest Issue, No.7

An irregularly appearing zine chiefly devoted to poetry, much of which is genre/ecology-oriented, this is edited from Chwyd by Peter E Presford. More fanzine, perhaps, than periodical, I include it as one of the very few British outlets. Both international and Welsh flavours are present. Verse is varied in quality and style — limerick, haiku, lyric, doggerel. An Andy Darlington poem expresses sympathy for the Golden Age writers who thought they held the keys to the future "but time/ changed/ all the locks".

Xenophilia

No. 1 & 2 (1990 & 1991)

Artistically produced, California-based semi-annual magazine edited by Joy Oestreicher. Striking illustrations in these, the only numbers I have so far seen. It has, as its title confirms, "an abnormal appetite for the strange, the foreign, to be satisfied through thematic numbers" — Exploration, Wind and Fire etc. In **Vegetable Grace**, Bruce Boston has contributed a poem which contains the adroitly complex metaphor "the intricate eye of the needle of birth". Poems run to fantasy and psycho-fantasy rather than SF, though the latter gets its share, e.g. (in no.1) Denise Dumas' "Love Poem of an Exiled Species".

Works

No. 7 & 8 (1992)

This British small press magazine gives ample space to SF verse. Imaginatively illustrated by the **Works** stable of artists, Kevin Cullen in the lead and **edited by genre verse Parnassus Dave W Hughes**, **Works'** verse is representative of many modes: the speculative (Andy Darlington); the experimental (Joy Oestreicher); the humorous (Sean Friend); the prose poem (William Wood); the neuro-psychological (Dave Memmoth). Andy Darlington's "Vertical Frontiers/Prisoners of Mars" (no.7) dwarfs most of the rest.

Fantasy Commentator

V.7 No.2 (Fall 1991)

(Weinbaum Memorial Issue)

A semi-annual journal of critical articles, reviews and verse, edited by Langley Series from Bronxville, NY. It reprints older more traditional poems alongside contemporary genre verse. In this issue there is **A Sheaf of Sonnets**, including one of 1916 by Wilfred Gibson, but there is the gritty free verse articulation of John Frances Haynes' "Stone Demon" and the rhythmically precipitate enjambements of Steve Sneyd's "Colonyship Capers", which has a subtly postmodern flavour — "On one cubicle seethrough/a sticker advertising Malmsey wine the taste/princes drown in till the end of time".

Asimov's S F

Mid December 1992, January 1993

Asimov's collects Rhyslings for its poetry

as it does Hugos for its stories. The magazine displays and graphically decorates its poems in ways that both distinguish them and lend distinction. Robert Frazier's melding of Africa with neuronal synapses, and Rachel Pollock's **The Wild Cows**, each gets, and merits, a double-page spread. I sensed a Ballardian mood in Bruce Boston's "The Mutant Rain Forest Meets the Sea", where vines abound "like mad organic lace". The magazine is an appropriate setting for Ashley Hastings' meandroidral threnody "The Last Nightfall", which ends: "The three laws are whispered in positronic reverence/ And oily tears roll down each metal cheek."

The Magazine Of Speculative Poetry

Summer-Winter 1992, V.3, No.4

Eedited from Wisconsin by Robert Dutcher and Mark Rich, this magazine like **Star Line** provides internationally a forum and show-case for genre verse. It has a substantial critical section, here devoted chiefly to Lee Ballantine's milestone anthology, **POLY**; George Macbeth is remembered by Brian Aldiss. Its poetry can be relied on. Outstanding in this issue are Wendy Rathbone's transition from the erotic to the metaphysical in "Unmaking Love", and Steve Sneyd's *tour de force* "A Service to Lost Explorers", a running-on of twelve haiku-shaped stanzas leading to their final revelation, while each stanza holds a haiku-like insight or paradox — e.g.: "What finer ending to the search is there for you/than spectring the feast?"

This batch is far from exhaustive. The paucity of British inclusions reflects some native indifference. There appears more firmly fixed here than in America an intellectual stance that empirical science (and hence its fiction) is antithetical to the more subjectively grounded premises of poetry. Counter to that stance is such a view as Roger Jones's (in **Physics as Metaphor**): "There may be a culture gap between science and the humanities, but there is no existential gap". Lines by Rainer Maria Rilke would endorse it: "The world is large, but in us it is as deep as the sea".

Start of the Breakdown

Reviews by Philip Muldowney

We are all prisoners of our past, no more so than in **Analogue**. As a letter in the mid-December issues states "Stanley, you have been the nearest thing to a clone of old JWC that I could possibly imagine", or Tom Easton in the book review column: "**Analogue** has a better claim to the soul of SF than any of its competitors". Or perhaps **Analogue** stories have a tendency to remain memorable, seminal stories long after the flashy literary fads visible elsewhere have died. **Analogue** carries its past like a visible wraith, the old shibboleths still visible. While the mores and word usage of

the '90s are self-evident, the themes and treatment are reminiscent of a former era.

The February **Analogue** starts off with "Mourning Blue" by Jayge Carr, a traditional tale of dim, unloved, immensely strong space junk falling in love with innocence of an alien planet and its denizens. Combined with a captain scheming to get him away, and a villainous cardboard cut-out first mate, it all ends in tragedy. It has pretensions of saying something more about the alienness within human relationships, but the stock plot and characterisation just cannot carry it.

"A Touch of Diphtheria" by Roger McBride Allen offers us an interstellar cop investigating the nefarious activities of two con-men involved in murder on an out-of-the-way hell-hole. It's a good read on a light level, with some satisfying plot twists: a story that could have appeared in any John W Campbell issue! "Beyond the Blue Circus" is a novelette that reads like part of a greater whole, with an interesting next-century future, well conveyed, promoting the message that in the end you have to take sides. A man of action must act!

A trio of so-so stories finishes the fiction. "The Boy Who Wanted To Be a Hero" by Geoffrey A Landis, is a propaganda piece on the value of reading SF. "Hydra", by Ian Stewart, gives us super-competent space miners outthinking the mechanical alien menace, only this time the keys are female. As for "Match Point", by David Burkhead, tennis on the moon sums up the plot. It's an uninspiring issue yet **Analogue** has the capability of putting a new shine on old shoes. It is a pity that Stanley Schmidt cannot exorcise the past because, even with its faults, **Analogue** is still the best-selling SF magazine, and probably the magazine that most people think of as leading the field. Nostalgia is indeed a powerful tool.

As editor of **Asimov's**, Gardner Dozois has walked away with the awards for eight years; the contents page states that stories from **Asimov's** have won 19 Hugos and 19 Nebulas. The partnership of **Asimov's** fame and ego, and Dozois's professionalism, produced the dominant SF magazine of the late '80s. You could always guarantee a good strong story somewhere here. With **Asimov's** death however, one gets that vague feeling that Dozois is a little insecure; the quality of stories has dipped somewhat.

Four novelettes provide good reading without being exceptional. "Entrada" by Mary Rosenblum, a thriller on the value of information and contacts, and the sadness of relationships, is a good read, typical of the polished level of the magazine. "One Morning in the Looney Bin" by Maggie Finn is an offbeat story: is the strange patient who cures others an alien, a figment of the imagination, a miracle? The style is light, the message not necessarily. Maggie Finn is a writer to watch.

"Some Things are Better Left" by Gregory Frost demonstrates **Asimov's** weakness for whimsical cliché. Another vampire story, this time set at a High School reunion. If the humour had been stronger, it might have succeeded. "Aconcagua", by Tony Daniel, is a climbing story with a tenuous fantasy touch.

His dying lover's spirit warns the hero of danger on the mountain. If you like he-man mountain stories, okay, but I think it is somewhat misplaced here. The story blurb is notable for a sex-scene warning. Which raises the question: how old does Dozois think his audience is? In today's liberal times, the scene is tame compared to what you would find in most best-sellers. Are **Asimov's** readers all puritans, or twelve years old?

A quartet of short stories completes the roster. 'A Handful of Hatchlings' by M C Sumner is another dragon story, this time set in Los Angeles. Oh please, hasn't Anne McCaffrey done it all? Maureen McHugh's 'A Coney Island of the Mind' is a little gem of virtual reality and reality itself. However, Michael Armstrong's 'Everything that Rises Must Converge', is a rather strange in-groupish story of a dying female writer who was right up there with Heinlein. Whimsy? I don't know what it's doing here. 'Sea Scene Or Vergil and the Ox-Thrall', by Avram Davidson, is Davidson doing the type of story that only he can do!

Asimov's now rarely has an editorial, so leads off instead with the letter column. This is a bad mistake. Under **Asimov**, it was an embarrassing exercise of the **Asimov** ego as man-of-the-people. Deprived of that *raison d'être*, it is now just limp. The whole is rounded off by a book review column by Baird Searles. It is not a bad issue of **Asimov's**, but not a gosh-wow one. It feels makeweight.

As a footnote, the change of publisher last year, to Bantam Doubleday Dell, is not necessarily one for the better. Paper quality in both **Asimov's** and **Analog** has deteriorated remarkably, and reproduction of front cover artwork is looking increasingly inferior.

The times they are a-changing. **Asimov**, Budrys and Ellison have all more or less disappeared from **F&SF** now, and Kristine Kathryn Rusch is well into her editorial stride. Indeed, she seems to be marching in seven league boots. Her editorials have a literary flavour, with a strong **SF** seasoning; they tend to be on the worthy side, she seems to need to end on an upbeat note, giving the whole a Pollyanna-ish feeling. One could wish for more trenchant, sharper editorials. Rusch is also an exponent of the literary diarrhoea style of story blurb. The intro to 'The Macaw' runs to nearly 200 words. Is it relevant to the appreciation of the story to know that George Guthridge has been 'nationally honoured for excellence in teaching for his work with Alaskan Eskimos'?

By your deeds be judged, though, and by the evidence of stories herein, Rusch is a very good editor. The lead story is a long, absorbing, suspenseful novella by veteran Kate Wilhelm. In less sure hands a superchill growing with amazing rapidity might well have become the cliché that the subject matter threatens. Wilhelm is too much the professional, and from the initial info-dump before our hero meets an unusual four-year-old, through the government agency pursuit, to the final, bitter-sweet denouement, she had me by the gonads with an excellent, exciting tale which

would grace any magazine.

Jerry Oltion's 'The Grass Is Always Greener' is that *rara avis*, a genuinely funny **SF** story. It takes the alternate universe story in a personal direction; what happens when you get all your other selves together and compare sex lives? The straight-faced style makes it work well.

There is also a clutch of excellent short stories: 'The Macaw', by Steve Perry and George Guthridge, opens with a stunningly visual first few paragraphs. As a love story mixed with art and mysticism, it would have been tremendous if it had sustained its exotic feel to the end. Unfortunately, the story gets lost in ecological correctness, but still stands way above the average. 'From Our Point of View, We Had Moved To The Left', a first sale by William Shunn, is a chillingly effective piece about a choir at the inauguration of an extreme right-wing American president. 'Sophie's Spyglass', a Michael Coney story, is a reflection on the nature of passing time and middle age, which prompts a few thoughts.

With Kathy Malo doing an extremely effective feminist hatchet job on the film **Sneakers**, and Bruce Sterling explaining the wonders of **Internet**, there is a lot going on. Kristine Rusch is doing a fine job. The somnambulist habits that **F&SF** slipped into under Edward Ferman's editorship have gone forever. It will be interesting to hang around.

Analog February 1993
Asimov's Science Fiction February 1993
Fantasy and Science Fiction February 1993

Daylight chasing the Dark

Small press magazines reviewed by Lynne Fox

The hard work, energy and determination of **SF** enthusiasts amazes me. I don't even mean the monumental efforts it must take to gather material, print, advertise and sell these magazines. It's difficult enough simply to become aware of them. You can find magazines once you are within the network of **SF** — **Matrix** lists selections of magazines and this column is a further attempt to alert potential readers as to what is available, but until you get within the (relatively) closed world of **SF**, it would be difficult to find out about them.

All this is accepted wisdom but it has important implications for these magazines. Written by and for existing **SF** enthusiasts, they are in-house publications. Writing for a captive audience inevitably influences your writing, and not always for the better! The inextricably fused reader/writer relationship peculiar to **SF** encourages an ossification of subject matter and style.

In reading these magazines as opposed to books published for profit, I'd expected a qualitatively different experience, like going to see a band in a pub before they are famous, when the performance is risky and unconstrained compared to later when they have been groomed by a label. I was disappointed that

the fiction generally rehearsed old ideas and treatments. If new writers, poets and artists are given a voice here, let's hear them shouting something new and astounding.

So what of these four magazines? They share a wonderful amateur flavour, by which I mean that energy and interest has not yet succumbed to the profit motive. This is reflected in the editorials, which all note problems in just keeping going. They share a similarity of layout and content, with letters, stories and a sprinkling of artwork, poems and articles.

Fiction Furnace, edited by John Williams, advertises itself as a multi-genre magazine. It declares that it will differ from the usual and indeed makes a good try by offering a couple of odd-ball articles entitled 'Paranoid's Corner' and 'Tongue in Cheek'. At present, there is little artwork but contributors are sought.

Works, edited by Dave W Hughes, is an altogether glossier and more established production, containing more fiction, lots of artwork and many poems. There is a wide variety of genre and style on offer, with nine stories, plenty of good illustrations and fourteen poems packed in. The quality of **Works** owes much to the standard of the contributors but also to the editorial skills of Dave Hughes, whose balancing of prose, poetry and illustration I enjoyed. Two of the poems included, by A Lee Frith, were as delicate and as strong as steel wires.

Nova SF, edited by Adrian Hodges, returns after an absence of eighteen months. The shortest of the four magazines, it contains four stories. The editorial warns us that **Nova SF** will reflect the diversity of contemporary **SF** and fantasy and contain the occasional bit of weird avant-garde writing. The first story was certainly provoking, if not weird, being a dreadful piece of sexist and racist fantasy. In compensation there was a curious piece, written as a series of poems, questioning assumptions about narrative and prose. Best of all, there were some beautiful illustrations from Cathy Burburuz. **Nova SF** is attractively laid-out. Its pages are less busy, neater and cooler than **Works**, where the illustrations and differing typefaces create a rather manic feel.

Auguries is edited with obvious enthusiasm by Nik Morton. There is a continuous witty editorial presence which manifests itself in scattered one-line quotes. In its 74 pages, **Auguries** offers 13 stories and two poems, all of which were enjoyable. It also has a reviews section.

Of these four, my favourites were **Works** and **Auguries**. I felt that the editors were not only selecting their material well but also creating a whole out of the disparate parts so that the magazines had well-defined personalities.

Auguries No 16
Single issue £1.25, 4 issue sub £7
Nik Morton, 48 Angles Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants, PO12 2EC

Fiction Furnace No 1
Single issue £1.50, 4 issue sub £6
John Williams, 17 Arkmoor Close, Shard End, Birmingham, B34 6TF

Novas No 4
Single issue £1.50 4 issue sub £4.00
Adrian Hodges, 3 Ashfield Close, Bishop's Cleeve, Chatterham, Glos, GL52 4LG

Works No 8
Single issue £1.00, biannual
David W Hughes, 12 Blakesstones Road, Slaitthwaite
Huddersfield, HD7 5UQ

Paperback Graffiti

Edited by Stephen Payne

Signposts

Greg Bear Songs Of Earth And Power

"The whole story is well written, strong in emotional terms, and has a satisfactory resolution at the end of the book. Well worth seeking out." John D. Owen

Hans Bemman The Broken Goddess

"Perhaps because *The Broken Goddess* is European...it seems to offer new ways of looking at material. It's a book to think about; I recommend it." Cherith Baldry

Lois McMaster Bujold Borders Of Infinity

"Borders...is Analog-style science fiction at its very best. And I'm not damning with faint praise. Buy. Read. Enjoy." Norman Beswick

Samuel R. Delany The Einstein Intersection

"Hard SF it's not, but audacious and compelling it still is, and in this novel at least, he (Delany) writes like an inspired angel." Norman Beswick

Kim Stanley Robinson Down And Out In The Year 2000

"Robinson shows as complete a grasp of SF's breadth and depth as anyone now working in the field."

Mat Coward

Novels

Jerry Ahern The Survivalist: The Legend

NEL, 1992, 383pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Ian Sales

With the glint of world domination in their beady little eyes, the Red menace have started World War III and wiped humanity from the face of the earth. But a farsighted few managed to survive the nuclear conflagration. Among these was Doctor John Thomas Rourke, "CIA-trained weapons and survival expert", and his extended family. Unfortunately, some hard-line KGB communist bastards also survived.

Five centuries after the "Night of The War", John Rourke awakes from cryogenic sleep and ends up battling the Soviet survivors. Once he's defeated them, there's a resurgence of Nazism in Argentina, so he has to quell that. During the battle Rourke's wife is shot in the head (but doesn't die). John Rourke ends up in a coma, and their newborn child is kidnapped. Rourke's family decide to put John and his wife into cryogenic sleep until cures can be found. The remaining Family defeat the perpetrator of this foul deed, Dietrich Zimmer, Nazi supremo (Himmler and Mengele rolled into one). They decide Earth is safe enough now for them to return to sleep to awaken when cures are found for John Rourke and spouse.

125 years pass. Rourke comes out of his coma and the family is awoken (although Rourke's wife is still doing her Ronald Reagan impression). But a lot has changed. Rourke may be revered by all (the "legend" of the title), but he finds an evil dictatorship in the hands of Martin Zimmer — who is, of course, none other than the baby that Dietrich Zimmer

kidnapped all those years ago.

Rourke prevents Martin's heinous plot to take over the world by single-handedly wiping out his army of Nazis. But the story is far from over; Dietrich Zimmer is *also* alive and well and out there somewhere. And he is the only person who can save Rourke's wife...

The Survivalist reads like Mills & Boon for people with gun fetishes. There's lots of violence (in which the Rourke's win against enormous odds), lots of female yearning — to wit: "She would willingly have accepted death if only John would once have made love to her, penetrated her body with his" (p194), and characters that appear to be a survivalist's wet dream — especially John Rourke himself: "(his) IQ was nearly off the scale, his physical prowess, stamina, dexterity and agility all better than the best of the athletes" (p174)... But best of all; every single weapon in the book is described in loving, often obsessive, detail — from the Crain Life Support System X (a knife called a "life support system"?!) to the Detronics CombatMaster .45 pistols. After a while you get sick and tired of reading how effective a suppressor-fitted Smith & Wesson 6906 is, or how much Natalia Tiermerovna wants Rourke's, er, *John Thomas* to penetrate her (and him already being married and all).

Definitely for those who think a big weapon (9mm or .45, of course) makes a woman go weak at the knees and cures all a man's inadequacies.

Hans Bemman The Broken Goddess

Penguin, 1993, 234pp, £5.99
Reviewed By Cherith Baldry

A young academic lecturing on the themes of fairytale is shocked to be asked by a woman he finds attractive, whether he believes the tales are true. 'True' is not a concept he has previously considered, until the woman leads him on a journey into the fairytale world which for him had been merely material, for academic speculation.

From then on, he moves between different planes of reality; it is not always clear, to the reader or the protagonist, where he is at any given moment. He endures three experiences, in a world composed of elements from traditional fairytale, classical mythology and medieval literature; in the first two he makes mistakes, and only on the third occasion can he complete his quest and be united with the woman he has pursued.

The book's style is individual and intriguing; the first person narrator speaks directly to the woman, in response to her request that he should describe their meeting from his own point of view. The tone varies, from gentle fun at the expense of German academics — Bemman himself is a German academic — to the grotesque and the highly imaginative. The structure of the three quests is bound together by the broken goddess, the mutilated statue which embodies the theme of the book and which proves in the end to have a double meaning.

Perhaps because *The Broken Goddess*

is European, and we are more familiar with American imports in SF and fantasy, it seems to offer new ways of looking at material. It's a book to think about; I recommend it.

Ben Bova Mars

NEL, 1993, 567pp, £5.99
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

There is a point early in this novel where the central character wonders which genius issued the only black man on this mission to Mars with a white spacesuit. It was probably the same genius who names his central character, in a novel about the search for life and water on Mars, Waterman.

It is such nuances which let this book down. As Science Fiction, Bova has done wonders with the science, but his grasp of fiction is abysmal.

So, we have a story about the first manned expedition to Mars which is convincing in its detail. You can believe that this is what it would be like. The vicissitudes they face, and the way they overcome them are thrilling. The discoveries, first of water, then of a primitive form of life, are genuinely exciting. The details of training, and of daily life on an inhospitable world, sound as if they come straight from a NASA training manual — perhaps they did. And the final bout of ill health which nearly brings the whole expedition to a fatal end, and the explanation for it, provides the neat working out of a scientific idea which used to be the staple of Science Fiction, but which is now so rare.

All of this is excellent, and is sufficient to provide a gripping and satisfying read.

Unfortunately, what Bova has strung around this central device drags the book down, sometimes to the level of the unreadable. He could be deaf for all he is able to convey of the way real people actually talk. He cannot tell a joke without first saying: this is a joke. The English doctor on the expedition is embarrassingly unbelievable as a human being, but then this is only the most obvious facet of a tendency to write stereotypes, not people. The Russians are all stolid, humourless, sticklers for obeying orders — they are also all Soviets, in Bova's world whatever the political situation they will forever be apparatchiks of the evil empire.

Ah, politics. Earthbound shenanigans are an important part of this novel, but in Bova's black and white world every politician is automatically self-serving, duplicitous and anti-science. Every scientist has the making of a hero. Bova is exact in his understanding of what make a scientist or technician tick in a scientific situation, but he hasn't the first notion of what makes a politician, or indeed the entire rest of the world, work. And when the poor of the world protest that the money spent on getting to Mars could be better spent elsewhere, he thinks it is sufficient answer for the leading proponent of the trip to say: I was poor once myself. Even an out and out believer in man's destiny amid the stars should be able to see round his blinkers

enough to come up with a better answer than that.

Come to that, shouldn't such an enthusiast as Bova be able to convey the Mars landing with something of the awe, terror, amazement, wonder, elation and relief that the event is liable to incite? Bova brings no colour into his flat, pedantic recital of events.

These deficiencies in the fiction of the book really annoy me, because the story really caught me up in its excitement and in its pure factual understanding of what the first Mars landing really will be like, it is a major work which stands above the rash of other Mars books with which we seem to be afflicted at the moment. How can a book be so good and so rotten all at the same time?

Lois McMaster Bujold Borders Of Infinity

Pan, 1992, 311pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Lois McMaster Bujold comments (in *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers*: Third Edition, 1991: "All my science-fiction books so far are united by the series device of sharing the same universe or future history. I do not consider myself bound by this, it just happens to have worked out that way for the topics I've wanted to tackle...With the exception of *Falling Free*, all my novels touch the life of one hero, Miles Naismith Vorkosigan...I've tried to write them so each stands alone as an independent novel..." (p. 92).

Borders Of Infinity (1989) is probably the best entré to the Vorkosigan series. It comes after *Shards Of Honor* (1986), *The Warrior's Apprentice* (1988), and *Brothers In Arms* (1989); before *The Vor Game* (1990: Hugo Award winner, 1991). The physically handicapped Vorkosigan is not a mutant — "it's teratogenic, not genetic" (p.31).

DESCRIPTION: "Too-large head, too-short neck, back thickened with its crooked spine, crooked legs with their brittle bones too-often broken, drawing the eye in their gleaming chromium braces" (p.11).

BACKGROUND: "Could his whole career to date have been, not desperately needed Service to the Imperium, but just a ploy to get a dangerously clumsy Vor puppy out from underfoot?" (p.6).

Borders... is a fix-up novel. No — it's three novellas 'linked' by a particularly blatant let-me-tell-you-a-story framing device. "You have a visitor, Lieutenant Vorkosigan" (p.1). The hospital visitor turns out to be Simon Ilyan, "inconspicuous" Chief of Barrary's Imperial Security. Take it from there... "The Mountains of Mourning" ("Wish I'd said that, Lois"/"You will, Graham, you will") is about the twenty-year-old Vorkosigan's investigation of a murder in back-country Barrary. He is the (noble)/Yon on the spot: "There was no refuge for him in the automated rules, no hiding behind the law says as if the law were some living overlord with a real Voice. The only voice here was his own" (p. 90). And he finally

makes himself heard. "Labyrinth" is set on the naughty planet of Jackson's Whole, where the twenty-three-year-old Vorkosigan attempts to retrieve a defecting scientist. It features industrial espionage, synthesized gene complexes, super-soldiers, a sex-starved teenage werewolf, and hermaphroditic 'quaddies': "...the was this rush of genetic experimentation on humans (following the practical uterine replicator" (p.112). ('definite article') Borders of Infinity is one of those for-you-the-space-war-is-over transcriptions of *The Colditz Story*. For example: Russell's *The Space Willies/Next Of Kin*: White's *Open Prison/The Escape Orbit*. But 'Borders' is more realistic than the (humorous) former and less stiff-upper-lip than the (ingenious) latter. "How could I have died and gone to hell without noticing the transition?" (narrative hook: p. 215). Vorkosigan isn't in yer actual fire-and-brimstone hell, but Dante's ABANDON HOPE... sign would not be out of place. He has allowed himself to be captured by the Catagandans and sent to the energy-domed Dagoola IV Top Security Prison Camp # 3. His mission (impossible?): rescue Colonel Guy Tremont, the "real hero of the siege of Follow Core. The defiant one, the one who'd held, and held, and..." (p.231). *Borders...* is Analog-style science fiction at its very best. And I'm not damning with faint praise. Buy. Read. Enjoy.

Arthur C Clarke The Ghost From the Grand Banks

Orbit, 1992, 253pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Andy Mills

This is a fun book. I'm stating that now because such a thing may not be self-evident from the title or the subject matter. But Clarke obviously enjoyed writing it and I certainly enjoyed reading it.

The Ghost of the Grand Banks is 'The Titanic'. With the approach of 2012 (the centenary of her sinking) the race is on to raise the liner from her grave. It's a perfect theme for Clarke to tackle and he approaches it with his usual style and manner. There is competition — but not conflict — between the two parties trying to separately raise the two halves of the ship. And naturally there are technical problems to be overcome and the scientific developments over the next twenty years to be outlined (the main characters are of course the typically competent Clarkian engineers and inventors). It's true to say that this could have been a much slimmer volume; there is a somewhat unnecessary sub-plot involving fractals and one or two other digressions. But this is a minor caveat.

The Ghost From the Grand Banks is a cracking science fiction adventure yarn with a surprise — and satisfying — ending. At times it is dreadfully old-fashioned (such as when Donald Craig's mentally ill wife shows signs of recovery by wanting to buy a new hat... "A new hat?" thought Craig. That was a typically feminine reaction..."). Having said that, one cannot help feeling that Clarke knows what

he's doing and he's doing it deliberately. At one point we meet the board of Parkinson's, the famous family firm of glass manufacturers. There is 'William Parkinson-Smith — the family's secretly admired black sheep... Rupert Parkinson, famous racing driver... Gloria Windsor-Parkinson (100 Metres Silver, 2004 Olympics)... Arnold Parkinson (world authority on Pre-Raphaelite art)...' Delicious! The novel is also packed with witty SF references, my favourite being the letter to *The Times* written by a certain Lord Aldiss of Brightfount. The core of the novel is serious, however, and whilst in many ways it displays Clarke's perennial optimism about the benefits science, used wisely, can bring to the world, it also deals with death and loss.

Purely coincidentally, I completed reading this book on December 16th, Clarke's 75th birthday. Happy birthday, Arthur!

David Eddings The Losers

Grafton, 1993, 298pp, £4.99
Reviewed By Mat Coward

You've got to read this. It isn't SF, or fantasy, or even slipstream, and it's only reviewed here because it's by the author of *The Belgariad* series — but you've got to read it. It's wonderful, and if there was any literary justice it would win as many awards as a Bloomsbury novelist has readers (at least 14).

Raphael, from small city USA, is bright, beautiful, athletic, and a nice guy. Really, an angel. Then he goes to college, rooms with rich, cynical, bitter Damon and is transformed into a crippled welfare victim, living in Spokane with all the other losers.

There, the caseworkers have total power 'to twist and mold and hammer the client into a slot that fit their theories — no matter how half-baked or unrealistic. The client who wanted — needed — the thing the social worker controlled usually went along, in effect became a trained ape who could use the jargon to manipulate the caseworker even as she manipulated him. It was all a game, and Raphael decided he didn't want to play'. But beating the system is hard; and Damon's no help.

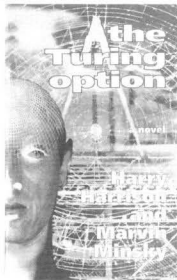
Satirical, sad, very funny, courageously radical, marvellously descriptive of people and society, a beautiful cover illo: if all mainstream fiction were this good, there'd be no need for fantasy.

Harry Harrison & Marvin Minsky

The Turing Option
Viking, 1992, 422pp, £8.99
Reviewed by Chris Amies

Perhaps we need to start with explanations. Harry Harrison is an American SF writer currently living in Ireland, with a large output of varying quality over the last forty years: from *Make Room! Make Room!* and *The Stainless Steel Rat*, to the recent sharecropped variants on his *Bill the Galactic*

Hero, which consist largely of parodies of other SF works, and may only have been inspired by him. Marvin Minsky on the other hand is the world's no. 1 authority on Artificial Intelligence, or should we say, Machine Intelligence. The Turing Test is a test in which a human operator converses with an intelligence in another room and attempts to discern whether the intelligence is human or artificial; a true AI would be indistinguishable from human. This seems to impose a rather obvious limitation on AI, and points towards the difference between Artificial Intelligence (aping the human) and Machine Intelligence (intelligence in its own right).



The Turing Option is a detective story involving the creation of the world's first fully-autonomous Machine Intelligence. Irish boy genius Brian Delany, working on AI for Megalob Industries (I kid you not) is gunned down by a rival corporation. The rest of the book details Brian's recovery after having had eight years of his past blown away. As he has downloaded his life's work into the AI, so now the AI has to upload its mind into his. Whose intelligence were you calling artificial? Then there is the quest for further minds — the intelligences that will not be Artificial but true Machine Intelligences. This is all very well — the MI is loaded into a bush robot, an infinitely branching nanomachine grex able to remodel itself at will. This is a useful trick for dis-patching of the enemy, but if you've seen *Terminator 2* it will hardly come as a surprise when it occurs in the denouement and Sven the Machine Intelligence saves our Brian's life (shades of *Blade Runner*?). However, if it's so hard at changing its form why is it that when it has to walk around incognito it looks like C3PO?

The Turing Option is set in 2023 which seems a reasonable timescale for this kind of caper, but the world described doesn't feel like anything other than 1992. Referring to 'an old Macintosh SE/60 with a Motorola 68050 CPU' is all very well (the latest computer in our time, which by this year 2023 has become a doorstop), but you need more than hackish infill to populate a future. I'm not sure what makes me feel uneasy about this book:

maybe it's just that. Considering the story takes place in Brian's head (and any other head he may be using at the time) I had no sense of him whatsoever. People speak in info dumps most of the time, almost contradicting the subtitle 'a novel' on the front cover. This is not an AI primer, a metalanguage for the construction of further AI/MI novels (von Neumann-type), or a novel worthy of the talents of either of its authors. It reminded me of *Days of Atonement* by Walter Jon Williams, but despite the monstrous nature of Williams's protagonist, I found that book a whole lot more rewarding.

Robert Jordan
The Dragon Reborn
Orbit, 1992, 699pp, £5.99
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Book three of *The Wheel Of Time* brings our characters through searching tests to a gripping climax which prefigures the fourth volume. For different reasons, each group converges on the City Of Fear where *The Sword That Cannot Be Touched* is kept. Grasping the sword will confirm Rand's status as *Dragon Reborn*, a male wielder of the True Source which can only be safely tapped by women: the saviour who will also destroy. But the Dark One and the Aes Sedai also have their parts to play, leading to more unresolved conflict in volume four, *The Shadow Rising*.

Jordan's ambiguous flow of Good and Evil is impressive. Both on the sides of Light and Dark there are individuals and forces who are playing their own games. The Good forces are riven by feuds (there are even 'minor' sympathetic characters who give in to the Evil forces) and beyond Light and Dark there is a realm of Dream which several of the characters have learnt to enter and from which another mysterious character seems to come. The epic as a whole is flawed by the slapdash attitude to naming (can we really accept 'Mountains Of Dhoom' without a giggle?), but Jordan handles a large canvas with a majestic sweep into which the characters of the three main male characters have grown. Rand, the *Dragon Reborn*, changes probability and destiny by his very presence, Perrin has developed a mental and spiritual link with wolves, and Mat (whose determined efforts not to be heroic make some of the liveliest reading in this volume) is just *lucky*. While they grow through their experiences, as soon as the female characters appear they become blushing teenagers again though, and the author keeps the running joke about how each lad is envious of the others' style with girls.

There aren't many 600 page fantasy epics which bring you through volume three panting for volume four, but this is certainly one. Having said that, volume four (issued simultaneously in hardback) is something of a disappointment, despite some mental time-travel back to the ages just before and after the *Breaking of the World*. Perhaps even in heroic fantasy, broad sweep and size isn't everything.

Patricia Kennealy
The Hawk's Grey Feather
Grafton, 1992, 464pp, £4.99
 Reviewed by Alan Fraser

After experiencing some success with her initial Kelts in Space trilogy, the fascinating Patricia Kennealy is now planning to expand the Keltiad into a series of twelve books. Since writing the first trilogy she has relived her former life as the significant other woman in the life of rock star Jim Morrison, acting as a technical adviser to Oliver Stone's film *The Doors*, and also appearing in it as a Wiccan priestess performing the 1970 "private religious ceremony" (as her bio page puts it) of marriage between Kathleen Quinlan as her younger self and Val Kilmer as Morrison. Ms Kennealy has also written a well-received autobiographical book *Strange Days: My Life With And Without Jim Morrison*.

The historical appendix to each of the first three Keltiad books recounted Kennealy's own version of the Arthurian legend, taking place 1500 years before the time of that story of Earth and Keltia's reunion. *The Hawk's Grey Feather* is the first book of a new trilogy called *The Tales Of Arthur*, giving the details of the Celtic King Arthur's story. It will be followed by *The Oak Above The Keys* and *The Hedge Of Mist*. Set in the Celtic Kingdom of seven star systems a thousand light years from Earth in our year 2100 AD, this book's plot is a faithful retelling of the first part of the traditional Arthurian legend, covering similar ground to T.H. White's *The Sword In The Stone*, although in vastly different style and detail. All the major characters are here, although their names are differently spelt: Merlynn, Gweniver, King Uthyr Pendroic, Arthur's mother Ygrawn, and his half-sisters Morgan and Marguessen (eventual mother of Arthur's Nemesis Mordryth). The story is narrated by Taliesin the bard, another character from the Celtic legend, and Merlynn's love Birogue, the Lady of the Loch, also plays her part in bringing Arthur to the Sword in the Stone.

The book starts with Keltia in the grip of a cruel Theocracy headed by the Arch-druid Edeyrn, and the Kingdom overthrown. Technology and inter-world travel is forbidden to all but the members of Edeyrn's own regime. Most of the story is of the early lives of Taliesin, his foster-brother Arthur, and Arthur's cousin Gweniver. Arthur is, of course, eventually revealed as the future King of Keltia, and the man whose destiny it is to overthrow Edeyrn and restore the Kingdom. Just like the first-written book of Keltia, *The Copper Crown*, *Hawk* ends on a cliffhanger, with the Counter-Insurgency just beginning, King Uthyr slain, and Arthur apparently dead also.

Even though the material is very familiar, Kennealy brings off a significant achievement in giving it all a fresh slant set far away in space, and telling her story well. She fleshes out the major characters and succeeds in showing the young Arthur to us as a believable heroic figure with Gweniver as a

young woman of spirit and strength and his equal as future ruler. I can therefore recommend *The Hawk's Grey Feather* to lovers of Celtic fantasy. I found it well worth reading, and look forward to the second book in this series.

Graham Masterton
Burial
William Heinemann, 1992, 507pp, £15.99
 Reviewed by Colin Bird

Masterton returns to the world of Indian rituals and malignant spirits with which he hit the bestseller list way back in 1975 with *The Manitou*. In fact this book is direct sequel featuring the return of the Misquamacus, the spirit of a powerful medicine man who can possess humans. Harry Ersine, the hero of *The Manitou*, also returns to do battle across the continental America. This time Misquamacus has a powerful ally in the form of Aktunowihio, a god who can shape shadows.

I must have missed the original book, but I did see the rather ludicrous film version with Tony Curtis as the fortune teller Erskine. *Burial* begins with scenes of poltergeist activity in a New York apartment. Harry Erskine is called into the scene and begins to investigate. Meanwhile, around the country more violent manifestations of spirit activity are occurring, particularly near the sites where atrocities were committed against Indians. The narrator pieces together the plot about one hundred pages after the reader. The ancient spirits wish revenge against the white man by reclaiming the land they believe is rightfully theirs. When entire cities start disappearing things get a little silly, but this is a large scale, cinematic tale and plot takes a backseat to the literary special effects.

Masterton's references to the Indian magic is fascinating. I don't know whether it's all made up, but it is convincing. The confrontation scenes are also well done with Misquamacus an original enough villain to justify resurrection in this sequel. Some of the author's borrowing from recent horror movies is a bit obvious, although he often acknowledges his references in the text. It's a bit weak on the moral repercussions of colonialism and the climax is a bit rushed, but there is enough originality to make *Burial* a good read for horror fans.

Larry Niven & Steven Barnes
**Dream Park:
 The Voodoo Game**
Pan, 1993, 346pp, £4.99
 Reviewed by Bill Johnson

The Voodoo Game is the third in the series beginning with *Dream Park* and *Barsom Project*. All separate novels, they can be read in any order although this one is the worst of the bunch. It is about the battles, real and political, within and behind real time role

playing games which take place in a kind of holographic, virtual reality, Disneyland. These violent encounters have taken the place of the Superbowl in that perpetual centre of the universe, California, USA. Unsurprisingly, despite all the technological changes, the culture and attitudes remain stubbornly, contemporary, right wing American. The novel uses the technique, successfully exploited by Elizabethan playwrights, of advancing several sub-plots by turns until they all meet in a grand resolution. Unfortunately Niven and Barnes use scenes near to the length of politicians' sound bites so that if your attention span is longer than ten seconds the continual hacking to and fro becomes enormously irritating. Sprinkled pearls from Sun Tsu and a job lot of books on Voodoo don't help either. The whole thing lurches along like a supernaturated Robin Reliant on the three buckled wheels of cardboard characters, stock situations and endless clichés. Come on, fellas, time to change the formula and try something new.

Robert Rankin
East Of Ealing
Corgi, 1992, 284pp, £3.99
 Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

The plot — and I use the word loosely — of *East Of Ealing*, the third novel in the "now legendary" Brentford Trilogy, describes how Armageddon comes to Brentford, which, as we all know, is the hub of the universe, the site of the Garden of Eden no less. Theoretically the reader could treat the plot as something to be followed, but this is probably not a good idea — coherence is not its strong point.

The novel presents itself as humorous SF. So, is it SF? Well, there are SF/fantasy bits — a time machine, robots, the discovery of perpetual motion — and SF is notoriously difficult to define, so I guess *East Of Ealing* scrapes in. Is it humorous? Well, I was expecting to laugh raucously, having read glowing reviews of earlier novels in the trilogy. As it was, I chuckled occasionally. The basic premise of the book is that two ordinary blokes, whose lives revolve around the Flying Swan pub and the betting shop, aided and abetted by Sherlock Holmes amongst others, are called upon to save mankind from annihilation. All the jokes are variations on this theme. The prophecies of the Book of Revelations are being fulfilled in mundane Brentford; all men must bear the number of the beast: a computer bar-code.

The first half of the book lacks pace and the two main characters, O'Malley and Pooley, are irritatingly unchangeable — possibly they were well established in the earlier novels. Possibly I might have appreciated the book more if I had read the predecessors. About half-way through, the book and the jokes do gather momentum. Sherlock Holmes comes under the influence of Clint Eastwood movies and takes to sporting a forty-four Magnum. Niven, the part-time barman at the Flying Swan, the

becomes an Ancient God. Norman-the-shopkeeper builds a time machine in his kitchenette. Norman considers that 'Scientists always did tend to over-complicate the issues... Once you'd nicked the idea, this time from H. G. Wells, you simply went down to Kay's Electrical in the High Street and purchased all the component parts. What you couldn't buy you hobbled up out of defunct wirelesses and what was left of the Meccano set.'

East of Ealing is neither bad nor brilliant. Take it or leave it, but don't take it too seriously.

Kim Stanley Robinson Down And Out In The Year 2000

Grafton, 1992, 351pp, £5.99
Reviewed by Mat Coward

This collection of eleven novellas and short stories must be one of science fiction's bargains of the year; if you can't find anything you like here, then you're probably wasting your time reading SF at all.

The variety of styles and tones Robinson employs really is astonishing, and most encouraging in these days, when so many genre writers seem happy to turn out the same piece over and over again. All of the stories are literate and very readable; some are magical and surreal, while others are straightforward and character-based in the finest traditions of the American short, and would probably appeal equally to non-SF readers and to fans.

Only one of them doesn't quite come off — the title story, in which an expanded class of buskers and beggars scratch a living in a partly-deserted Washington DC. The trouble is that, though set in the near future, there's nothing very futuristic about it; it rather baldly portrays a way of life which, from what one hears, is already pretty routine in many US cities.

'Glacier' by contrast, is a perfect demonstration of Robinson's most particular talent: an almost unrivalled knack for finding an unusual perspective from which to illuminate a theme. It shows the effects of a new ice age on urban America, a place where people have to keep moving in pursuit of a crumbling economy, by putting at the heart of the story a cat — which also has to keep moving home, as one family after another is forced to abandon it. The result is heartbreaking and marvellously convincing. A much lighter note is provided by 'The Blind Geometer', a sort of hard science version of a Richard-Hannay-vs-the-enemy-agents-yarn. In fact, whether he's dealing with Navaho mysticism, claustrophobic space horror, or personality breakdown, Robinson shows as

complete a grasp of SF's breadth and depth as anyone now working in the field.

Michael Scott Reflection

Warner, 1992, 378pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Simon Lake

The tacky front cover shot of a naked (from the waist up) woman posing moodily against a misty backdrop suggests that this book is aimed at a fairly down-market audience. The contents inside will do little to dissuade you of the fact. **Reflection** is a rather long and grim horror novel with a very high body count, but precious little in the way of style, flair or original ideas.

The action centre's on Margaret Haaren, a police inspector who is offered the chance of promotion if she can track down the perpetrator of a series of ritualistic killings that have been taking place in Edinburgh and London. Inextricably linked to the case is wheelchair-bound Manny Frazer, victim of a similar series of attacks two years earlier, who has inherited possession of an ancient mirror with a bizarre and gruesome history. Via a series of flashbacks we discover the magical origins of the mirror and the truth behind the image trapped inside it. Predictably, with the leader of an occult group also anxious to own the mirror for his own evil purposes, everything eventually builds towards that traditional good versus evil climax.

It's hard to find much of merit in this book. Margaret Haaren is the most interesting character, but she spends too much of the novel merely attending the scenes of various murders and doing little in the way of actual detective work. As for the rest of the cast, they prove to be almost uniformly nasty or embittered, corruptible on a whim and, in many cases, exhibit barely any character at all beyond an alarming tendency toward orgasm at the prospect of spilling another few pints of blood.

Sadly the author seems only too happy to revel in the seedy and the vaguely obscene. The horror elements are neither subtle nor, by dint of repetition, particularly effective (there are only so many ways you can describe someone having their tongues bitten out, after all). A few of the ideas and themes could have been used to better effect, but frankly they're wasted here.

They say never judge a book by its cover, but on this occasion I think you should.

Laurence Staig Dark Toys and Consumer Goods

Pan, 1992, 151pp, £3.50
Reviewed by Simon Lake

Every so often a book comes along that makes you sit up and take notice and Laurence Staig's **Dark Toys and Consumer Goods** is one such book. Throughout the eight stories in this thematic collection the author offers us glimpses of an all too

plausible future where rampant consumerism has engulfed the country, shopping has replaced work as the main daily activity and credit cards can quite literally run your lives.

Written in an engaging and easy to read style these stories can be viewed partly as an entertainment and partly as a direct warning against the direction society is currently headed. From the opening story 'Closed Circuit' in which a family find themselves trapped within a giant shopping centre, every aspect of our consumer culture is put under the microscope. With unfailing accuracy Staig hits his targets spot on and the real strength of this collection lies in the credibility of the basic premise underpinning each story. Despite the seriousness of the message, there is also plenty of invention and wit to savour. In 'The Hologram of Uncle Emilio' laser technology is used to create moving images of the dead, while 'home improvements' takes a hilarious swipe at the type of person who has to own every piece of hi-tech gadgetry as soon as it comes on the market. Elsewhere Staig covers everything from TV addiction to fast cars with an innovative style and a conciseness that so many authors lack.

Although this book is aimed primarily at young adults there's no reason why people of any age shouldn't enjoy this amusing, original and often frightening collection of stories. Read it now, before the fiction becomes fact.

Tad Williams and Nina Kiriki Hoffman Child Of An Ancient City

Legend, 1992, 80pp, £7.99
Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

This beautifully written fantasy conjures up a world that is reminiscent of **The Arabian Nights** and at the same time is completely convincing. In Baghdad, a group of friends are lingering over the dining table, having enjoyed a magnificent banquet. Amidst calls for more wine, the host, Masrur, is prevailed upon to narrate the story of his adventures in the north, when he and Ibn Fahad, one of his guests, were young. Although he is reluctant at first, Masrur relates how he and Ibn Fahad had been members of a caravan carrying gifts from the Caliph of Baghdad to a prince of the Armenites, north of the Caucasian Mountains. Just after they had crossed the high mountain passes, they were attacked by bandits and only a few survived. These few faced a terrible journey back to Baghdad across a hostile terrain, and it soon became apparent that they were threatened by a far greater horror than bandits or a shortage of food.

The plot of **Child Of An Ancient City** is actually very simple, yet the authors manage to create an atmosphere of menace from the first when, at the banquet, Masrur hints that his youthful adventures were far from pleasant. As the men who escaped the bandits struggle through the mountains, and one by one they meet their deaths, the sense of horror grows. The reader knows exactly how it must feel to be one of these travellers

sitting huddled around a camp fire, while out in the darkness, amongst the trees, unspeakable evil awaits them.

The descriptions of the landscape through which Masur, Ibn Fahad and their companions must travel contribute a great deal to the atmosphere of the book. So often such descriptions are superfluous to the story and skipped over by the reader, but in this tale the environment of the mountains, so alien to the narrator, is integral to the overall effect. The characters, and the way they react to their terrible predicament, are entirely credible, and the illustrations complement the text.

This reviewer found *Child Of An Ancient City* to be a superior and very enjoyable fantasy. And yet, without wishing to reduce art to the level of £ per lb, £7.99 for 80 pages (trade paperback) does seem excessive, however exquisite the writing. Do read this book — but wait until you can buy it in a less exorbitant format.

T.M. Wright

Little Boy Lost

Gollancz, 1993, 247pp, £3.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills

If losing one's first wife through murder is misfortune, and losing one's second through a mysterious disappearance is carelessness, then it is hardly surprising that the police take a keen interest in Miles Gale when his youngest son goes missing. But Miles is not the key to this bizarre chain of events. The truth lies in the past and that is where he and his eldest son, C.J., are drawn in their search for little Aaron.

Ramsey Campbell describes Wright as being "a master of quiet horror... a one-man definition of the term". The first part of *Little Boy Lost* certainly merits this accolade. C.J. — who has a photographic memory — describes Aaron's disappearance to a social worker in a series of taped interviews, reinterpreting and revising what happened again and again. This could have been an exercise in tedium; instead, Wright's adroit handling of the reveal technique makes it fascinating.

The second part of the novel, though, is not as strong; it is almost as though the author, having done the difficult bit, tired of his creation. Having said that, the book still held my interest, its conclusion is surprising and the notion that time-travelling in the past results in you losing your memory of events that have not yet occurred is a neat touch by Wright.

Shorts

Christopher Fowler
Sharper Knives

Warner, 1992, 263pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Another short story collection following the author's enjoyable 1990 anthology *The Bureau Of Lost Souls*. This book shows

Fowler is a fine practitioner of the traditional ghost story, but blends in enough street-smart urban wit to bring the genre up to date. The grisly mayhem is leavened by ample doses of humour in most of these fourteen stories. Renowned cult artists (it says here) provide black and white illustrations for each story and Fowler gives brief afterwords explaining the origins.

The collection kicks off with 'On Edge' — don't read this if you're due for a dental check-up soon! You can almost hear the author's gleeful chuckles as he unfolds this macabre tale which preys on one of our commonest fears that dentists sometimes drill a bit longer than necessary. The quieter stories like 'Norman Wisdom And The Angel Of Death' only seem that way until some shocking violence creeps in and turns the story into a broad Gothic tale of a Dennis Nilsen type murderer. The fractured world of 1950's nostalgia contrasts with unspeakable crimes to create an atmosphere that reminds me of some of Ramsey Campbell's stories of horror in suburbia. I must, with regret, reveal the author's shameful secret — he still finds Norman Wisdom funny; probably the most terrifying moment on the book.

Broad humour is provided by 'Dale and Wayne go Shopping' in which a trip to the supermarket becomes a lesson in the art of survival. 'The Legend of Dracula Re-considered As A Prime-Time TV Special' is just that and possibly too clever for its own good. 'Contact High' almost qualifies as SF with a storyline concerning rogue enzymes transferred by human sweat, an intriguing idea which gets bogged down in a conventional thriller narrative.

The best stories contain Fowler's own unique blend of sick invention and good storytelling. 'Last Call For Passenger Paul' is a chilling tale, this time preying on the fear of falling asleep on an airplane and waking up at the wrong destination. The Vintage Car Table-Mat Collection' is a neat morality tale and confirms my suspicions about anyone who collects table-mats. Fowler's well honed prose and filmic sense of location make this a highly readable collection.

A TRIP TO THE CUTTING EDGE OF TERROR...

**SHARPER
KNIVES**

**CHRISTOPHER
FOWLER**

Martin H. Greenberg (ed)
After The King
Stories in Honour of
J. R. R. Tolkien

Pan, 1992, 534pp, £6.99

Reviewed By Sally-Ann Melia

This sharp looking book has a soul-warming red cover of a decent-looking dragon. The dragon looks like Smaug in his lair, the whole thing is very Tolkeinesque. So far so excellent.

In *After The King*, Martin H. Greenberg has brought together an impressive selection of the best Fantasy writing: Stephen R. Donaldson, Terry Pratchett, Robert Silverberg, Poul & Karen Anderson and John Brunner.

The Pratchett piece 'Troll Bridge' is excellent, as is the piece by John Brunner. Most of the rest is mixed. Harry Turtledove's 'The Decoy Duck' starts: 'The Videssian dromon centipede-walked its oared way into Lygra Fjord'. I fed this sentence into my grammar-check and it crashed in a spectacular flash of light. This is the computer equivalent of fainting in a dead heap, then lying bundled in a corner muttering. Fortunately, this one sentence, is out of character with the rest of the collection.

So, *After The King*. Pick it up, thumb through it, if your fav. author is there, buy it. Why not?

Shared Worlds

Gary Gyagax
Dangerous Journeys:
The Anubis Murders

ROC, 1992, 299pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Jan Malique

I approached this book with relish, mostly due to the extravagant promises of the publisher's blurb. Ah! I thought, an Egyptian (or Aegyptian as used by Mr Gyagax) wizard-priest hot on the trail of a nefarious blackmailer come gruesome murderer. Looks promising, I could spend a happy few hours glued to my armchair reading this mystery. Sadly this was not the case.

Magistar Setne Inhetep and beautiful bodyguard, Rachelle, are thrust from the relative calm of a holiday on balmy Iberian shores to investigate a series of gruesome murders. Said murders apparently being committed by the followers of the god Anubis. Looks like a smear campaign against the "pocs" (Pharaohs Own Citizens) to me, Setne. What do you think? Well, riots ensue in London, ancient capital of Albion, over these murders, which dot the kingdoms of Avillonia (where Setne and assistants have gone in search of answers) with ever increasing frequency. Blackmail demands shadow every horrible event. Where will it all end? Who is

behind all this? Why am I asking all these questions?

The Anubis Murders is the first in a series of adventures featuring Setne Inhetep. After reading this one I am in two minds about reading any of the others. Perhaps because it meandered all over the place and seemed rather 'murky' in places. Murky in the sense it got bogged down in unnecessary detail. I also did not like the mushy 'I find her damn attractive but she probably doesn't realize I'm a man' musings on the part of Setne about Rachelle. Bigger the thought of any romance between these two! It would smack too much of slave being grateful to master for rescuing her, etc..

Laurell K. Hamilton Nightshade

Titus, 1992, 276pp, £3.99

Reviewed by Brendan Wignall

I'm in the relatively unusual position, I guess by BSFA standards, of never having seen a single episode of **Star Trek: The Next Generation**. I saw most of the original **Star Trek** episodes, but partly through relative lack of interest, and principally through lack of time I've not caught up with its successor.

This ignorance makes for some difficulties, therefore, in reviewing **Nightshade** which is number 24 in a series of novels based on **ST:TNG**, and is — presumably — written for people who have seen and enjoyed the TV series. I can't bring any knowledge of character or convention to the book, and this should be borne in mind by anyone who is a **ST:TNG** enthusiast.

The plot at least is a familiar enough one and has strong echoes of **Star Trek**: Captain Picard and the USS Enterprise are sent to try to help negotiate a peace settlement on the planet of Oriana, a planet that has been racked by civil war for two hundred years and is now on the verge of a final ecological collapse. The Enterprise is called away on an emergency mission just after Picard, Lieutenant Worf (a Klingon) and the empathic Counsellor T'Pol are beamed down to the planet. Left on their own, Picard is accused of murder, and delicate negotiations are left to Lt Worf, a person not noted for subtlety or diplomacy.

Worf seems to be a plot substitute for Mr Spock, a character unable to understand human emotions and expressions. Like Spock, therefore, a fair amount of heavy-handed humour gets attached to him and this becomes rather wearing after a time. To be fair, the characterization is no worse than that of the original **Star Trek** TV series, but if we're honest, that was direly two-dimensional and clichéd, forgivable only because it was TV and it was one of the few SF elements on screen at the time.

Within its own — extremely limited — terms **Nightshade** works quite well, but it's a sad reflection on the relative inability of SF to make it into any media other than text successfully, that **ST:TNG** is seen as anything other than down market entertainment. If this

novel and my own expectations are anything to go by, in TV terms it is Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell or Colin Dexter; unfortunately, unlike crime fiction the SFnal Rendell or Dexter adaptations are notable by their absence.

As they say, **Nightshade** is OK if you like that sort of thing.

Chris Kubasik Shadowrun 5: Changeling

ROC, 1992, 325pp, £4.99

Reviewed By Andrew Seaman

Taking a cue from Arthur C. Clarke's dictum that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" the **Shadowrun** series postulates a 21st century future where the forces of magic have re-emerged into the world, co-existing sometimes uneasily with high technology — a world where mages and shamans rub shoulders with street samurai and computer "deckers". Cyberpunk meets Tolkien.

Peter Clariss, 15 year-old son of genetecist William Clariss, awakes one day in hospital, a victim of "Unexplained Genetic Expression", transformed like many other humans by the activation of latent magic genes within him, into a creature from mythology — in his case a troll. Rejected by his father and society, he flees to the conventional cyberpunk low-life of "the street", determined to find a cure for his condition. What follows is, essentially, an archetypal rite of passage story, albeit in an SFnal context, as Peter struggles to come to terms with what has happened to him and control his ultimate destiny.

If you can swallow its initial premise, then **Changeling** is a competently written, if derivative, action adventure aimed squarely at the teenage games market, mixing a little adolescent angst, quite a lot of violence and some euphemistic bad language (all "frags" and "dreks" à la 2000 AD), and spoiled only by occasional stylistic awkwardness and some pretty dubious pseudo-scientific gobbledegook. Still, an entertaining evening's read if you're in the mood.

Michael Perrin (no relation to Reginald), a sixteen year old boy in Los Angeles, is given a key and a set of instructions by a mysterious neighbour. Michael uses the key after an incident which leaves him confused and embittered. He finds himself in the Realm, a land where the Sidhe rule, where humans are definitely not wanted, despite many of them being 'transported' there, in incidents normally associated with music.

Michael is met in the Realm by Lamia, a grossly fat woman who directs him to the half-breed Sidhe trio, the Crane Women. They teach him how to survive in the Realm, opening up a range of possibilities in his mind that take the rest of the first book to resolve, and most of the second to come to full fruition.

The Realm is a magical land, an artifice created to give the Sidhe somewhere to retreat to when a disastrous war with the proto-humans on Earth left them with no long term future. But, at the roots of the Realm there are faults, and the whole place is beginning to decay, a process accelerated by the conflict with the Isomage, a human with great skill in the magic arts, who was only defeated in an earlier conflict between the Realm's humans and the Sidhe with much sacrifice, and who still haunts the Sidhe from his place of exile.

The first story is taken up with Michael's adventures in the Realm, and his rites of passage in becoming a man with magical powers. The second tale deals with his further development on returning to Earth, and how he learns to cope with the further machinations of the Isomage, and with Sidhe refugees fleeing the dissolution of the Realm. The whole story is well written, strong in emotional terms, and has a satisfactory resolution at the end of the book. Well worth seeking out.

Samuel R. Delany The Einstein Intersection

Grafton, 1992, 155pp, £3.99

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

This is one of those key books. When it first appeared in 1967, it deservedly won a Nebula, and Delany was beginning to be hailed as an SF prodigy. Arguments rage today over the tendencies and merits of some of his later work, but many still talk of **The Einstein Intersection** as his most completely satisfying novel. So how well does it stand up, twenty-five years later?

The story-outline is deceptively straightforward. Lo Lobey, with his musical machete, inhabits an Earth from which humans have (mysteriously) disappeared; the new inhabitants, surrounded by human artefacts, find themselves enmeshed in a culture and mythology alien to them. Lobey sets out like Orpheus to rescue his beloved from the grip of Kid Death, a quest that leads him to deeper self-understanding and a kind of release.

The prose is spare and immaculate, and the learning dauntingly paraded. Each chapter is headed with quotations from a startling variety of sources, from Plotinus, St John,

Reissues

Greg Bear Songs Of Earth And Power

Legend, 1992, 693pp, £9.99

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Songs Of Earth And Power is not a new work, but a revised omnibus edition of **The Infinity Concerto** (1984) and **The Serpent Mage** (1986). **The Infinity Concerto** was Bear's first written work, though published at about the same time as **Blood Music**. Together, in an apparently heavily revised form, the two make up a very strong and effective fantasy, one of the best works I've seen from Bear, ironically, as his work since the mid-eighties has largely been 'hard SF'.

Machiavelli, Sartre and (unexpectedly) Emily Dickinson, to Delany's own journals, and the story is packed with references to a fair range of myths (Orpheus, Theseus, Billy The Kid, Jesus, Elvis Ringo Starr...). Delany sought also to embody the youth culture of his period, so the achievement of mystical vision is to be "at one with the great rock and the great roll". We can still understand that one, but how long before older-sounding references to "45s" have to be footnoted?

Disentangling it all (if that's what you like doing) is a fair old task, and the story works best when it follows its own curious logic. Read it for that first, and go back for any subtleties later. Hard SF it's not, but audacious and compelling it still is, and in this novel at least, he writes like an inspired angel.

Michael Moorcock The Sundered Worlds

ROC, 1992, 220pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills

B' dum, b' dum...

This is *The First Book of the Multiverse*. It first appeared in 1962. Cue Moorcock himself, from his introduction to the book: "I wrote it as a two-parter for Ted Carnell's *Science Fiction Adventures*, meant to be the last of the British pulps but which kept slipping from its intentions by publishing stories such as *The Drowned World* by J. G. Ballard. I believe *The Sundered Worlds* brought the standards back to a level more appropriate to the magazine's title. I wrote it in thirty-six hours..."

Moorcock was twenty-one when he penned *The Sundered Worlds*. As the above quote shows, he is in no doubt as to the standard of the work (it should also be noted that the garish cover also proclaims this to be pulp fare).

A brief outline of this plot-driven book: Renark, a "senser", and Asquid go to the Shifter System (the *Sundered Worlds* of the title) to find out how to save the human universe, doomed to extinction. Our universe exists within the multiverse, "the multi-dimensional universe containing dozens of different universes, separated from each other by unknown dimensions..." The two men eventually come into contact with the Originators, who seeded the multiverse, and are given the means to save humanity. Asquid leads the exodus to another universe but the space-fleet is attacked by aliens and challenged by them to play the Blood Red Game, a telepathic duel with winner-take-all as its prize...

The concepts are interesting. The execution is not. The young Moorcock's prose is crude and his treatment pedestrian (one acquires, for instance, no sense of the scale of the universe). To summarise, *The Sundered Worlds* conveys a sensibledom and one is left wondering why it has been dredged out of its pulp grave where it surely should have been left to lie, undisturbed.

Graphics

John Arcudi, Evan Dorkin &
Armando Gil

Predator: Big Game

Titan, 1992, £7.50

Reviewed By Stephen Payne

Predator is well suited to the primitive, unsophisticated nature of the graphic storytelling medium. Both of the films were little more than moving comic-books and the character of the Predator itself, created as an excuse for gratuitous violence, is essentially viable in its impact: we are not talking deep and meaningful here.

The story, which I found very reminiscent of the first film, concerns a Navahoe Corporal, Enoch Nakai, posted at Cole Army Base on the plains of Cibola County in New Mexico. A Predator crashlands nearby and proceeds to plonk around the place desecrating the wildlife and some of Nakai's mates. The army find the Predator's spaceship and the Predator, now in a very tardy mood, retaliates by nuking the army base. Luckily Nakai was on a 3 day pass and having missed all the fun is rather weakly motivated to go out and exorcise the beast from the face of the earth.

All this is not necessarily a bad thing. Although the violence is shocking and bloody, the characterization of Nakai both minimal and stereotypical. I liked the crude energy of this book. It is, however, a slight publication at £7.50 and I suspect that may limit its market to Predator devotees only.

Clive Barker

The Yattering and Jack
Adapted by Steve Niles & Fred
Burke, John Bolton & Hector
Gomez

Eclipse, 1993, £6.99

Reviewed By Andy Sawyer

This is one of the first of a new (for the UK, at least) line of "graphic novels" published under a new HarperCollins imprint. Forthcoming goodies for early 1993 include more Barker, Neil Gaiman's *Miracleman*, *The Golden Age* and (would you believe?) Doris Lessing with *Playing The Game*.

So far, big names and proven hits are the watchwords. This is, in fact, another raid on *The Books Of Blood*, with the title story adapted by Steve Niles and another story, 'How Spoilers Breed' adapted by Niles and Fred Burke. *The Yattering and Jack* is perhaps the best Barker adaptation I've seen, highlighting his mastery of the ironically macabre with its story of the trials and tribulations of a demon angling for the soul of a bland and phlegmatic pickle salesman. Bolton impressively teases out the visual implications of the original, especially in its humour (though he has ignored a phrase about the Yattering tying knots in its genitals, for the squeamish among you). The second

story is a more straightforward tale of the revenge of a tribe of Amazon Indians driven off their lands. Gomez's style is less surreal than Bolton's, but centre's firmly upon the gory tale of the exploiters without going over the top into glossiness.

Barker's fans should enjoy this impressive adaptation of their author's work. In particular, Bolton's knowing fusion of styles (the expression on the face of the "realistically" drawn cat on p.16 is straight out of the cartoonists handbook) makes this book as near state-of-the-art in "adaptation" comics as I can think.

Chris Claremont, Adam
Hughes & Karl Story
Star Trek: Debt Of Honour
Titan, 1992, 92pp, £6.99
Reviewed by Maureen Speller

This graphic novel, set shortly after the fourth *Star Trek* movie, brings us once again into familiar territory. Kirk, still in the grip of menopausal angst, takes on the universe in an attempt to expiate his guilt at his son's death and the loss of the Enterprise. Aware that the cosmos is under threat from an unidentified insectoid race, he and a select group of humans, Klingons and Romulans, mavericks all, gather secretly in order to avert galactic disaster. The three peoples, working together in a traditionally Trekian display of inter-racial harmony and antagonism, solve the problem and one is left feeling slightly nauseous at the predictability of it all.

This novel seems less like a genuine attempt at an original story, more like literary grouting, cementing inter-movie gaps. The story feels not so much familiar as threadbare. As a graphic novel, the garish colouring and stereotypical presentation of figures, particularly the women (all large breasted and protruding posteriors) place it closer to the comic book tradition than the work of, say, Dave McKean or Ian Miller. It's also plagued with very irritating authorial in-jokes from Chris Claremont. All in all, I find this a disappointing production.

Anne McCaffrey
Dragonflight
Adapted by Brynne Stephens &
Lela Dowling, Cynthia Martin &
Fred Von Tobel
Eclipse, 1993, £7.99
Reviewed By Sally-Ann Melia

There is little need for me to introduce either Anne McCaffrey or her well-known, best-seller *Dragon books*. You may have read them all, certainly you'll find them in every bookseller in every corner of the land.

Perhaps you have not met the McCaffrey graphic novels. It surprised me to see one fall through my letter box. I love all of Anne McCaffrey's work and greeted this new

offering with open delight.

Translating the words into comic-book pages, the book lost a lot of Anne McCaffrey's sensitivity and sensuality. I'm not a good judge of artwork, I walk around convention art shows, that's it, however these full-colour pages do not heat my blood like Judge Dredd does. No impact. Worse the three artists have quite different styles. Through the pages you see three different heroines, three different styles of dragons. A detail maybe, but it jars the eye and gets in the way of the plot. So disappointment.

Forget the graphic novel — read the book.

The Ender Series

**Orson Scott Card
Ender's Game**

Legend, 1988, 357pp, £4.99

Speaker For The Dead

Legend, 1992, 415pp, £4.99

Xenocide

Legend, 1992, 562pp, £4.99

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

These novels, although they deal realistically with themes of suffering, responsibility and atonement; although they have relevance to the anthropological and political issues of colonisation and culture-contact, and at points extrapolate from such theories of hard science as 'daisyworld' ecology and 'the selfish gene'; although they do all of this, it is on levels of fantasy that involvement and speculation are at their liveliest. Disparately conceived, as the new introduction to a revised **Speaker** reveals, the three are yet, like Theseus's lunatic, lover and poet, "of an imagination all compact".

Consider **Ender's Game**. A six year-old, monitored by the military as of high combat potential, is taken to a satellite barracks and subjected to harsh training. Aged eleven, Ender, using ansible (instantaneous) battle control, destroys an alien race (the insectoid "buggers") while believing that he is playing a simulation test-game. Meanwhile, the combined genius of his sister Valentine (12) and brother Peter (14) determines Earth's future. Ender, atoning for what proved unnecessary genocide, tours the planets for 3,000 years seeking a breeding home for a surviving hive queen and "speaking" for the dead race.

Even as extravagant SF goes, it's an outrageous scenario; it holds because Card is strongly rooted in the rich soil of archetypal fantasy. Ender becomes "the child-god, the miracle worker, with life and death in his hands". Moreover, Ender (warm-eyed) and Peter (cold-eyed) are, as sister Valentine ("the metal inbetween") puts it, "two faces of the same coin", with her comprising a triple persona, which actually functions as such in

Xenocide. But already in Ender's fantasies his siblings are active as projected and fragmented self-aspects. His 'End of the World' psycho-experiences, with their tower, snake, mirror and giant symbolisms, are at the core of **Ender's Game**, and, being within ansible /mind-penetrating reach of the alien buggers, contain information whereby they are able to construct a corresponding planetary simulation to which Ender is drawn to find and take into his care the breeding hive queen.

Ender travels the planets by starship at light-speed, aging therefore slowly. In **Speaker For The Dead**, he reached a Catholic colony on the plague-devastated planet of Lusitania, quarantined and fenced-off from the indigenous, intelligent, mammalian "pequeninos", or "piggies". The humans have acquired protection against this "descalada" virus: the pequeninos depend on it for their bizarre life-cycle. If the fence comes down (it does) will this foster a piggy inter-planetary expansion? Ender interacts with, is eventually stepfather to, an unstable family of child scientists and activists. Their inter-individual and inter-species problems carry the action; but the two paths which take speculative interest furthest lead to areas where SF and metaphysics fantastically interface. These are: the metamorphosis of the pequeninos, through ritual torture, into sentient trees; and the emergence of a guiding and communicating alien species of one, Jane, spontaneously created from the nexus of Ender's memories/fantasies and the universal ansible net. Finally Ender finds a birthing place on Lusitania for the hive queen.

In each novel each chapter has an 'objectifying' introductory section: in **Ender's Game**, top brass strategic talk; in **Speaker**, scientific records. In **Xenocide** these chapter-introductions are somewhat discarnate conversations between the hive queen and a "father-tree" resurrected piggy ("We live a long time, we hives, you trees"). Within the frame of these fascinating commentaries on humans, intelligence and history, the history that continues is of the slow (light-speed only) approach to Lusitania of a fleet armed with a planet-disintegrating device sent by the now fearful Congress of the Hundred Planets. A second focus of individual action is the sino-settled planet Path, where Congress has bred a super elite, the "godspoken", but with a crippling genetic brake on their potential. They are conditioned to constant guilt-expiation by compulsive repetitive actions. A sixteen year old, godspoken girl, Quing-jau, is instrumental in reversing the staying of the fleet (achieved by Jane through ansible manipulation), a consequence of which could be Jane's death or disablement. There is, however, time for Ender and Jane to produce a descalada-annihilating bacterium, harmless to piggies; also an antidote to the godspoken's compulsive syndrome. They effect this by travelling FTL (a Jane-created facility) to "Outside", where new things can be brought into being by wishing them to exist while mentally holding the pattern. A by-product of that trip are further split-off creations from Ender's

being, adolescent Valentine and a young Peter redivivus, who, as we wait for the next volume, sets off FTL, inhabited by Jane, to attempt to cancel the xenocidal threat.

Cynic Peter calls the FTL sphere "that magic flying football" and Jane likens it's dangers to those of the "Sorcerer's Apprentice". We are, at the conclusion of **Xenocide**, as far into the fantasy area of the SF/fantasy borderland as we were when immersed in the dreams of **Ender's Game**. Yet is it fantasy, even in it's concept of miraculous origins 'in' the extra-spatio-temporal "Outside", only at a remove from the ambiguities of contemporary cosmology — to some extent a playful **remove his** analogues, remains a player of games. There is a certain Peter Panishness at work. Experience is savoured and action progressed via continuously renewable youth, as generation succeeds generation, or is reborn, or is ageless. The freshness and imaginative flexibility (and assertiveness) of youth pervades the novels. In **Xenocide**, Ender, by implication identifying with Prospero, sees rejuvenated Val-child as Ariel, Jane, too, in her ubiquity, in her protean holo-shapings and caprices, is Ariel-like. The great godspoken Han Fei-Tzu, contemplating his protégée Si Wang-mu — a girl of fourteen, "boyish in body, with hair cropped very short" — says: "A bright mind to which all is new. Like having my own lost youth perched at my elbow." Travelling with such mercurial minds as they perpetually traverse the bridge between science fiction and fantasy is not the least of pleasures of this still unended Ender Wigen saga.

The Eternal Champion

Last autumn Millenium began the long and arduous task of recompiling, revising and re-issuing The Eternal Champion sequence of novels that Michael Moorcock has been producing since his youthful days in the early sixties. Here, Chris Hart evaluates the first four volumes.

**Michael Moorcock
Von Bek**

Millenium, 1992, 504pp, £10.99

The Eternal Champion

Millenium, 1992, 530pp, £10.99

Hawkmoon

Millenium, 1992, 533pp, £10.99

Corum

Millenium, 1992, 392pp, £10.99

Reviewed by Chris Hart

This year we could see a cosmic imbalance. A triumph of Law over Chaos! Millenium are bringing together "the Many that Are One" — the novels of Michael Moorcock. A complete listing of Moorcock's output is a bibliographers' nightmare: there are countless reprinted, retitled, revised, reissued and re-

written versions of his books lining the shelves of every second-hand bookseller in the country. These four handsome volumes are the first batch of a projected fourteen part collection of The Eternal Champion series, an attempt to crystallise Moorcock's prolific achievement once and for all. The series has become legendary within the genre and, like the incarnations of the Eternal Champion, Hawkmoon, Corum, Erekoš and Elic, Moorcock has to carry the weight of the energy draining pulp novels to keep alive things he believes in. Paradoxically, he is a hack, but at the same time he is admired by the literary cognoscenti. Most of these novels were produced in a three day, whiskey induced frenzy to financially support the troubled *New Worlds* magazine in the 1960s and early 70s. Now they are occasionally produced to pay the bills while completing more literary pieces, such as *Mother London* and the *Pyatt* novels (though the protagonists of these books are aspects of the Champion themselves).

In the preface to these volumes, the world weary Moorcock is self-deprecating, warning the reader that these novels are mainly escapism, entertainments without literary or political value, and are mainly the idealistic polemics of an adolescent. He is aware that these novels were produced by a brain-storming scatter-gun of images and effects to write these novels in a short period of time. Undoubtedly, they show signs of haste, but it would be wrong to condemn the collection as a mindless pulp-fiction that serves to merely elevate the reader from the humdrum of modern living. I may have been convinced by Moorcock's Preface if it was not for 'Epic Pooh', his witty essay slaughtering the sacred cow of fantasy *Lord Of The Rings*, in which he exposes the preoccupation with social class veiled within Tolkien's trilogy. Also, the fact that it is possible to contrive parallels between the author and the characters he creates reveals a deeper significance; he is addressing universal and personal issues.

As in the best fantasy The Eternal Champion series depends upon new worlds or different planes that are tainted by aspects of our own, so making it possible to draw references between fantasy and the 'real' world. Moorcock adds a further dimension to this dichotomy by including a chaotic web of inter-textual references. When compiling this series it was necessary to force the novels into a false, linear sequence. I believe that the editors have made the right decisions in what must have been a difficult task, because each novel, each trilogy, depends upon an understanding of the others to enrich the understanding and enjoyment of the series.

The chronicles of the Von Bek family start the sequence. They belong to a neutral plane not unlike our own. The narrative of both Von Bek novels, *The Warhound And The World's Pain* and *The City In The Autumn Stars*, are concerned with a gail quest which turns out to be futile. These two stories are possibly the most sophisticated as they were written in the 80s. The later is a witty, topshish

tale that is set in the late seventeenth century. It reveals The Enlightenment as not merely a question of a couple of Old Testament teachings being proved false, but that human beings were no longer central to their own destiny, that the Earth was not the centre of the universe, and that there was a possibility of a myriad of different worlds. The principle of the 'multi-verse' is introduced, the central impetus behind the series. The Von Bek family, along with Hawkmoon, Corum and the others, inhabit the multiverse and frequently stand at the point where different worlds converge. The flux between the different planes is reinforced skillfully by repeated imagery: such as coastlines with unseen horizons and chapters that start in half-wakefulness, a magic sleep between one world and another.

There are many oppositions set up between reason and faith, right and wrong, and ultimately, Law and Chaos. The Champion in each form is faced with resolving these oppositions. In *The Eternal Champion*, John Daker in many different forms and persona has to betray personal loyalties in order to satisfy his quest for identity and a sense of 'doing the right thing'. The *Hawkmoon* quartet is structurally, hermetically sealed. There is a sense of resolution that is not properly achieved in the previous collections, the virtuous Castle Brass triumphs against the aggressive Granbretan. *Corum* too is tightly structured, but less episodic and less evocative in its treatment of plane by plane chaos bashing. Corum is less ambiguous than the other incarnations as he is openly an agent of Law. However, the purpose of the Champion is not to defeat Chaos in favour of Law, or vice-versa, but to ensure a balance. Each novel puts the Champion amidst the tug and pull of opposing forces, usually in the form of Imperial Empires hellbent on ethnic purity; with Corum it is the Mabbden; Hawkmoon it's Granbretan; John Daker and Von Bek it is humanity itself. Each of these forces is personified as the Champion's nemesis — Melidius, Klosterheim, Hitler — Yrkoon, Elic's brother even makes an appearance. The Champion, aided by a stoical assistant, engages in metaphysical combat of wills and epic battles with a cast of thousands.

If there is a central philosophy, it is the struggle for human choice against the confines of the conventions of the fantasy quest narrative. All gods, Utopias, and their objects such as the Black Sword, Runestaff and Holy Grail are exposed as false. There is also a repeated message that harmony can be found through destruction and that the apocalypse may be a chance to start again. Whether the compilation marks a beginning or end in Moorcock's career, it is not clear. We may not see a resolution between Law and Chaos this year, but with the reawakened interest in his back list (and other titles are also being reprinted), it is a chance to reflect on his influence on contemporary fantasy writers — and pity the fact that his laconic, vivid prose and healthy cynicism has not reached them...yet.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Von Bek

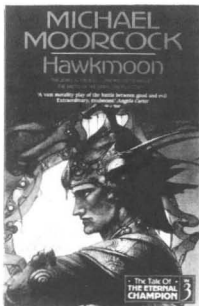
THE ETERNAL CHAMPION



The Tale Of
THE ETERNAL
CHAMPION 1



The Tale Of
THE ETERNAL
CHAMPION 2



The Tale Of
THE ETERNAL
CHAMPION 3



HOTEL ST NICHOLAS, SCARBOROUGH — 28TH-31ST MAY 1993

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