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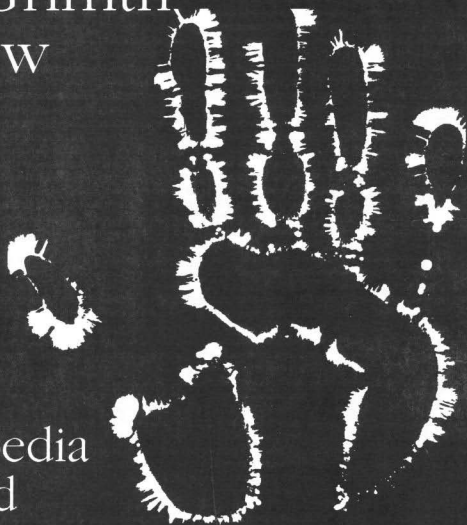
# Vector 173

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

Nicola Griffith  
Interview

Lewis  
Carroll

SF  
Encyclopedia  
Reviewed



Clute on the Clarke Award

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# Nuts & Bolts

Time is still tight, I'm writing this not far short of midnight and I'm off to Norwich again in the morning. Please try to be forgiving of any lapses in presentation...

I've had to postpone the rest of the results of the reviewers' poll for lack of time and space — hopefully they will be in the next issue. Meanwhile the reviewers who voted for A Fire Upon the Deep may like to know that I received a note of thanks from Deborah Beale at Millennium, who says that the vote made her week!

Philip Muldowney may not be the only person who was confused by my various scattered remarks regarding the outcome of the Clarke Award this year. There was a great deal of surprise when the winner was announced. It is fair to say that the result was not popular. John Clute was one of the most prominent and passionate critics; while it should be clear that I do not agree with every word he had to say, I felt that he had some serious and important points to make and this is why I asked him to contribute the guest editorial on the opposite page.

Nor are the points that he raises the only criticisms that were voiced. It is clear that some publishers have concerns of a more commercial nature, which are not new, but have grown through the history of the award.

I hope that a positive discussion will be started by the publication of this editorial, and look forward to seeing your contributions to the debate. One word of warning should be sounded... Any letters attempting to make specific points about books that the correspondent has not read will be dealt with ruthlessly by the editor.

For a more positive discussion of the shortlisted books and the reasons that the judges made their decisions, turn to Maureen Speller's summation on page 11. Note that it has been a tradition for Vector to print a summary of this type every year; Maureen did not see John Clute's editorial in advance of publication, nor did he see her article.

Finally can I draw your attention to Paul Kincaid's article length review of **The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction** which you can find on page 15, this is a fascinating exploration of the most necessary book of the year.

Read and enjoy!



# On the Arthur C Clarke Award 1993

## A Guest Editorial By John Clute

As I'm going to claim that a mistake has been made, and because hindsight is a cheap shot, perhaps I should make it clear right off that I had read and reviewed Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* long before it won the 1993 Arthur C. Clarke Award, and that I knew what I thought of the book long before finding out what the panel had decided: I certainly never dreamed it would be a serious contender for the prize. My immediate reaction when it won — that the decision was so bad my ears must have deceived me — came from the heart. My subsequent reactions — which I expressed aloud after the announcement — welled up from an already-formed matrix of assumptions and convictions about this year's shortlist, about the nature of SF publishing in the UK, about the history and present state and future health of the Arthur C. Clarke Award as an institution, and about the nature of sf as a genre. So. The winner. Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* — I

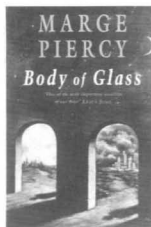
reviewed it, quite favourably, in the March 1992 issue of *The New York Review of Science Fiction* — is an easy-to-read attempt at crossover SF, though overlong, stylistically a bit over-decorated and — even granting that it's less intrusively melodramatic than the stories this author usually tells in her non-genre works — too damned *knowing* about its various characters. Karen Joy Fowler's *Sarah Canary* (but see below for the panel's response to *that* book) is a *genuine* demonstration of contemporary "literary" style at its concise, allusive, complex best. *Body of Glass* in any case fatally gives off that gingerly feel one often detects when a mainstream author is manipulating sf devices and scenarios to illuminate her own concerns. One can grant willingly that Piercy did a good deal of homework, in contrast to day-trippers like Paul Theroux; and that her near future USA is described, competently enough, in reasonably up-to-date, cyberpunk-derived terms. But *Body of Glass* still reads like a primer-level guidebook-to-the-future, on the pattern of most mainstream sf; and the very heart of the enterprise — a long narrative tracing the allegorical and literal links between an AI housed in an android body and the golem of Jewish legend — fatally reveals an absence of any genuine new contribution to the complex interwoven record of generic attempts to cope with that issue. Forget that in *The Golem* (1956) Avram Davidson had long made a trope out of the AI/golem metaphor, doing so with wit, concision, and a thorough grasp of its various implications; or that *The Golem*, having been reprinted at least 12 times, is hardly an obscure text. The real point is that in *Body of Glass* old tropes are presented — as often happens in this kind of cross-over tale — with an air of portentous, Book-of-the-Month-Club Bulletin, Big-Think iconoclasm that in its secondhand staleness

is *exactly the opposite* of what sf cognition *should* be; which is threatening, risk-taking, novel, premature. *Body of Glass* is a belated book.

(Sf cognition, as here described, is not common. Nobody will deny this, when we run across it, as we have over the years in some of Arthur C. Clarke's own novels, and as we did in several books on this year's shortlist, we should give praise. It is the sort of thing SF prizes should be awarded for.)

Of the other titles shortlisted for this year's Award, I'd also previously reviewed Ian McDonald's *Hearts, Hands and Voices*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (since short-listed for the Hugo), Michael Swanwick's *Stations of the Tide* (which won last year's Nebula), Lisa Tuttle's *Lost Futures* and Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* (which has since won this year's Nebula); it is also on the Hugo shortlist. I had furthermore reviewed Karen Jay Fowler's *Sarah Canary*, a brilliant SF meditation on First Contact, whose exclusion from the shortlist on the grounds that it was "ineligible" was a first sign, along with the unwieldy size of the list itself, that all was not well with the panel (the book was shortlisted for this year's Nebula). The remaining novels, Richard Paul Russo's *Destroying Angel* and Sue Thomas's *Correspondence*, I had neither reviewed nor read; and had either won. I'd have no express response beyond mild oceanic disappointment that books I *did* know and love had been passed over.

So it looked to be a very good year, and I thought there were some exciting books to choose among. I came to The Groucho Club on 25th March 1993 with a pretty clear sense of what I thought about most of these texts, a sense which (for what it's worth) had been amply recorded in print. Several of the short-listed novels, I thought (and argued, through the tenor of the reviews I wrote and published before the shortlist was announced) were among the most significant examples of the ambitions of 1990s SF during a trying time for



## 4 Vector

the genre. Out of this impressive array, I thought that **Red Mars**, for a number of pretty clear reasons, should win, but I would have been neither surprised or discontent had the Swanwick, the Tuttle, the Willis or (if it had been "eligible") the Fowler taken the prize; my feelings about the McDonald were exceedingly ambivalent, but if it had won I would not have felt that these feelings constituted reason for complaint. I have already hinted at my sensations when the actual winner was announced.

Let me attempt to be methodical.

1) The book itself (see above) was a good though slightly po-faced read in Piercy's usual style; but as *SF* it reeked of the second-hand in a manner which made it clear its author did not *know* she was reworking old material. It was, in my view, an inherent non-winner of any prize (and as far as I know, the Arthur C. Clarke Award is the only recognition the book has received, either within or without the genre).

2) Several of the other books shortlisted (again, see above) are centrally important texts in the *SF* of the 1990s. This is not the place for me to go on for hours about my feeling that traditional (or agenda) *SF* is in a state of crisis, and that books like those by Fowler, Robinson, Swanwick and Willis represent a significant creative response to that state of crisis. What I can argue is that — whatever you think about the condition of *SF* at the moment — it is surely clear that these novels show *something is happening*. Each of them is full of stuff and energy and pertinence, and, like all the best *SF* novels, each of them is Janus-faced about *SF*: they gaze backwards knowingly at the web of genre, and they stare outwards, too.

I think that the panel of experts should have noticed this.

3) Market and publishing realities. We are

in a time of financial constraints. It cost the *SF* publishers an estimated £3-4000 to supply to the members of the panel of the Arthur C. Clarke Awards copies of the large number of books which were read last year. In doing so, these *SF* publishers assumed they were contributing to a process which would generate an award that was relevant to the *SF* world, relevant to *SF* authors, relevant to *SF* publishing and marketing, and relevant to the audience gathered to hear the announcement. This audience included senior representatives of those publishers seriously involved in *SF* publishing, but no representative from Marge Piercy's house, Michael Joseph; her prize was accepted by a representative of Penguin Books, which owns Michael Joseph. What happened on the night was registered by the senior editors of the *SF* publishing houses of the UK as a slap in their face, and a slap in the face of *SF* as a mature communal endeavour.

They clearly felt they'd had their money taken, and their time wasted, under false pretences. They felt that good writers had been insulted, they felt that the event was a sham, a public-relationships flop. They felt — rightly (see below) — that the Award itself would be treated with very moderate respect by Penguin Books, who do not market Marge Piercy as an *SF* writer. They made it clear their feeling that — whatever the motives of the panel might have been — it would look to the world as though the Clarke had been given to Marge Piercy because she seemed upmarket.

Let's look briefly at the Penguin 6th May 1993 re-release of **Body of Glass**. It comes with a Press Release which does list the Award; but the book itself — despite consoling rumours that a "Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award" sticker would be put on the front cover — is entirely blank on the prize. On the back cover we can, on the other hand, read a couple of excerpts from the kind of reviews of the book Penguin wish to emphasize. Martin Mulligan in the *Financial Times* says it "elevates its author to the pantheon of *haute SF* alongside Doris Lessing and Ursula LeGuin." The *St Louis Post Dispatch* says that "**Body of Glass** is much more than science fiction. It's a touching love story (several, actually) and a gripping adventure tale..." The condescending ineptitude of these quotes gives all the explanation one needs for Penguin's lack of interest in pushing **Body of Glass** as a genre title: because what they *really* want to do is reassure potential buyers that **Body of Glass** is *not SF* at all, that it's really much more *haute* than that greasy genre stuff.

So the *SF* publishers' money was wasted, as far as they're concerned; and Arthur C. Clarke's own thousand pounds went to a writer whose publishers think that if she wishes to associate with the man, she had better sup with a long spoon; and half a dozen genuine *SF* books of high calibre (each of

them better as literature than **Body of Glass**) are set aside. The publishers will probably divvy up next year (but there is a strong sense that this may very well be under duress); it would be presumptuous to guess at what Arthur C. Clarke thought of the award (but see below); and *SF* writers continue at their precarious task, regardless.

It's a mess.

4) Everyone who has been involved in any of this knows that Arthur C. Clarke himself has made absolutely no attempt to shape the award. He has never said a word in public to suggest that it would please him to have the Clarke given to writers who worked within the extremely broad-church version of *SF* that he himself might recognise as home-like. He has never said a word in public to suggest that any of the awards so far granted have given him a moment of disquiet. It is, therefore, entirely to his credit that this year's panel selected the book *least* likely to fit within any definition of *SF* as Arthur C. Clarke has lived and written it for 60 years.

As is well known, Clarke does not normally blurb books; and it is also well known that last year, in the highest possible terms, he *did* blurb one of the novels — *not* the Piercy — which was eventually to be shortlisted. It is entirely proper that Clarke's enthusiasm for one particular book had no effect on the panels decision.

This is right, we know that. We do know that. But it is still a temptation to posit an alternative world in which Arthur C. Clarke was innocently given some innocent pleasur, the *SF* world of England was rewarded for its loyalty, the marketing of *SF* was made easier, the nature of *SF* as a genre was affirmed, and a good book was awarded a good prize.

But of course that's an *alternate* world. In the real world, none of these things happened.





# Front Line Dispatches Readers Letters

*Plagued by Devils*  
K V Bailey, Alderney

A few words about the devil, and then about the printer's devil (or sorcerer's apprentice). Norman Beswick (re *Childhood's End* in Vector 171) and Syd Foster in Vector 172 both ask if further light can be thrown on the origins of Old Horny. I'm not sure whether Syd's speculative direct derivation from the destructively aspected Shiva holds water, but a common 'long distance' descent from the Indo-Iranian *dævas* I'm sure does — and in the case of the 'Christian' devil, Greek goat-demons and pagan deities, such as the Celtic horned god Cernunnos, are among the transmitters. There's a sentence worth quoting from Gordon Rattray Taylor's excellent *Sex in History* (Thames and Hudson, 1953, p117): "...when Gregory I (Pope 590-604) decided deliberately to incorporate heathen material into Christian myth, he had constructed a master devil, taking his horns and hoofs from Pan and German forest spirits, his red beard and his smell from Thor, his limp from Vulcan and Wotan, his power over weather from Zeus and Wotan, and so on." The image assumed most powerful and widespread acceptance during the late Middle Ages; and a thousand years after St. Gregory, late in the Renaissance, Richard Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* equates devils described by Paracelsus with the ancients' Lares, Fauns and Satyrs, Clarke drew on some of these attributes, but added the wings and the massive stature of Dante's and Milton's Lucifer — in fact Karellen is the very replication of Dore's illustration to accompany Canto 34 of the *Inferno*.

Now to the printer's devil. There is an apology due to David Hughes for dubbing him, most absurdly, Parnassus in my Vector 172 'Barbed Wire Kisses' paragraph (p. 28) descri-

bing *Works* magazine. Somewhere in the printing office a line was part dismembered and part omitted from my text, which reads: "It is edited by David W. Hughes from West Yorkshire — that genre verse Parnassus." Makes sense. The same devil, maybe, also got at my long review (p. 38) of the Card *Endor* novels, unfortunately towards the conclusion where a key summing sentence is printed with a whole line of my MS missed out so as to make it gibberish. I say there that the fantasy of Card's extra-spatio-temporal "Outside" is only at a remove from the ambiguities of contemporary cosmology, and continue (the missing line here restored): "—to some extent a playful remove because, through all the trials and traumas, Card, mediated by Ender and his analogues, remains a player of games. There is a certain Peter Panishness at work." Makes sense. Sorry to be pernickety, which I never would over the odd typo, but must be when the printer's devil's gremlins have plunged your readers into bedlam.

I'm Sorry K V — I can't blame the printers of course, I have shot myself in remorse — Catie

*True Story*  
Steve Palmer, Luton

Can I just agree with the sentiments of Joseph Nicholas' letter about Wingrove Inc. however, as a sort of coda, I must relate the following true anecdote. Having bought *Chung Kuo: The White Mountain*, and not liked it, I thought I might as well sell it and buy something good. I took it to my local second-hand SF shop, only to be told, "I'm sorry we don't take Wingrove. Nobody buys his books here." So he isn't even selling in the second hand market.

## Virtual Context

Ray Girvan, Birmingham

Re the article by Ian Sales — Policing virtual reality — in Vector 172.

I've a minor criticism of the piece, the part where Ian writes: "As one group of hackers recently declared: 'Don't want money. Got money. Want admiration.'"

The quotation has already appeared in at least one newspaper article, equally out of context. It comes not from a hacking group, but from the documentation of *Fractint*, the well-known fractal generation program.

*Fractint* was created by the Stone Soup Group, an informal collaboration of programmers and mathematicians. Despite it being the best general-purpose fractal program available, it's distributed free of charge and the "Don't want money...etc" is included as the policy statement about the Stone Soup Group's non-profit philosophy for the product.

It's unfortunate that their statement seems to have gone into the popular-media mythology as an alleged insight into what motivates hackers.

*2001: A Space Sermon*  
Adrian Soames, Norwich

In response to Norman Beswick's query in Vector 171 and further to John Howard's reply in V172, I, too, once employed an SF work in what was, at least, a quasi-religious context, although in hindsight it does seem to have been more than a little of an exercise in pretension.

The book in question was actually one of Clarkes, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the context was assembly at my old school, Diss Grammar. As a lower sixth former with the task of taking the lesson for a week foisted upon me, I decided, out of teenage hubris, to substitute *2001* as the text in place of The Bible, an action which was just within the permissible leeway granted to me.

I chose passages from three chapters in 'Primer Night', the first section of the book, the extracts coming from 'The Road to Extinction', 'Encounter in the Dawn', and 'Ascend of Man', and rounded the week off with 'Star Child', the final chapter of the book. I then wrote an essay (sermon would be too grandiloquent) to accompany each reading.

All in all, I was quite proud of my little effort, and kept my four carefully crafted lesson for a number of years, until they were lost forever in one of my Dads' spring cleans. Looking back I suppose I was terribly conceited (some who know me might say I still am), but at least then I could claim the innocent enthusiasm of youth.

To hark back to Norman Beswick's point, there was one aspect of the affair which struck me then, and which I think is still valid, and that was how well the book substituted, in both theme and structure for the Bible, if only for my limited purposes. I wonder if it might not be the case that, to paraphrase the Master, any sufficiently sophisticated science fiction might be indistinguishable from a

religious tract.

## Rampantly Obvious!

Freda Warrington, Swadlincote

I was startled to see the comments in **V172** generated by letters from Susan Bentley, K.L. Woods, and myself in **V171** disagreeing with Gareth Rees's review of my novel **A Taste of Blood Wine** (**V170**). It's ironic that the only gracious reply came from Gareth Rees himself! As for the rest; yes I do know the other two defendants, but they don't each other. I knew they were seriously annoyed by the review, but I had no idea what they were going to write. Is this a conspiracy? If so, I wouldn't warn anyone to Beware the Ides of March on the strength of it! And why is it biased, to defend a book you believe in?

Of course I don't expect unqualified praise, nor a critic's opinion to be anything but personal, but it's nonsense to say that we misread the review. My argument is that, while Gareth said the book had failed, not just as horror, but on every level, he seemed to have read it so superficially that he hadn't even understood it. If lack of understanding was actually lack of empathy — something quite different — it wasn't clear. This is where a little more objectivity is called for. The reviewer needs the perspicacity to say, not, 'the book fails, period', but, 'the book fails for me because I couldn't relate to it.'

This does, however, raise a broader point about the right of authors (and readers, come to that) to respond to unbalanced reviews. Have BSFA members decided en masse that we're not allowed to open our mouths without being ridiculed? (OK, so I'm thin-skinned — so what? I'm not Jeffrey Archer!). Reviewers can comment on novels, but writers can't comment on reviews? H'mmm. Don't your correspondents want authors to be accessible and open to dialogue about their work?

As for the meaning of the title **A Taste of Blood Wine** — Oh dear, sigh, OK, look. 'Blood Wine' is a metaphor for something distasteful, yet tempting and intoxicating, which is going to you a power of no good, ie, Charlotte's relationship with the vampire Karl. This is rampantly obvious throughout the text — at least I thought it was! Even if you take Gareth's (and Susan's) more literal reading and equate vampires with alcoholics, it still works, albeit in a subtler way. After all, the novel does make reference to different forms of 'compulsion' and 'addiction'!

One last point, digressing slightly. 'Politically correct' terminology is fertile ground for parody, but some people wouldn't recognise parody if it sprang naked through the Arndale Centre. See Al Johnston's article in **Critical Wave 30**, on 'Culturally Sensitive Terminology' for scientists, in which the noble gases become 'valently inconvenienced' and electrons become 'very dimensionally challenged snowflakes'. Splendid stuff!

## Defensive Screen

Philip Muldowney, Plymouth

Late? I thought that the very last day of the month was normal on for receiving Vector now! Seriously though, given the pressures of work that have seen many others before you, gafiate, you deserve a thanks for getting anything out at all.

To the issue at hand. At times the Brian Stableford interview resembled those megaguest interviews on the TV chat shows. The I am here-to-promote-my-latest-book/play/film - and will not deviate from that mission. It did keep on coming up with odd little bits that like a rattling terrier, I would love to have pursued further. The members of the Interzone collective who actually hated me had resigned' is this another flyleaf of the secret libellous history of British SF? Who were these dastardly gentlemen who prevented our Brian from writing short stories? There were still American fiction markets for short stories were there not?

Why does Brian Stableford feel the need to trash the majority of work that he wrote over what is usually the most fecund part of a writers career? To condemn the effort of fifteen or so years of one's life so thoroughly, implies a profound sea change in what Brian Stableford thinks important in writing. Your comment 'I haven't actually read any of your novels previous to **Empire of Fear**, was a somewhat leaden one! It certainly put paid to any significant indication as to why Brian Stableford feels like that about his early work. The change from journeyman SF writer to academic populist/scientific romance one, is a significant one that would have been quite fascinating to have explored. *C'est la Vie*. (Given the limited space available, it was my judgement that most readers would wish me to concentrate on Brian's recent work — Catie)

The arbitrary divisions between First Impressions and Paperback Graffiti are becoming increasingly daft. Paperback originals in First Impressions? Yet a lot more paperback originals appear in Paperback Graffiti. For instance **Mars** by Ben Bova, **Borders of Infinity** by Lois Bujold, **Down and Out in the year 2000** by Kim Stanley Robinson are all first time publication in this country. No doubt there are more that I do not know about. Whoever takes over First Impressions is going to have to give this some consideration, as it stands, the division of the two review sections within Vector seems rather odd, and increasingly unjustifiable. (Yes, there's some overlap in criteria, but I don't find this particularly odd or unreasonable. Whence this need for tidy pigeonholes? — Catie)

By the way, on the subject of reviews, it sounds as though Sally-Ann Melia was reviewing an extremely tasty confection rather than a book. Over enthusiasm in a review can be as useless as sniping pessimism. As Sally-Ann Melia's review stands, it is very clear that she had a whoopee of a time reading **Sign for the Sacred**, but she really gives us no idea as

to whether everybody would enjoy it! Such total subjectivity is useless.

Why the defensive screen in front of the Arthur C. Clarke award? A guest editorial by John Clute, and another article by Maureen Speller to 'explain... why she thinks Marge Piercy won.' This is certainly bringing the heavy artillery out, to quell the plebs! Your editorial comment of the 'controversy' surrounding the Arthur C. Clarke award this year, presumed that we all knew what the hell was going on! Go on! Let us all in on the dirty washing! On the other hand, it is a little confusing when assumptions are made about information that few of your readers will have. Is this something to do with the inherent difficulties of selecting an award by appointing a small committee? The many shenanigans within the Booker prize committee would point to this. (Defensive? I don't think so! The intention was to stir your curiosity as to what was to come; this seems to have succeeded — Catie)

I would whole-heartedly agree with your critics poll with Vinge's **A Fire Upon the Deep** and Robinson's **Red Mars** as by far the best of the SF books published in 1992. They will obviously be up there amongst all the leading award contenders. They so much typify the best qualities of SF, and that old Sense of Wonder feeling. I have not read Marge Piercy's **Body of Glass**, so cannot comment, but is this something to do with the controversy? I liked the whole idea of your poll though, much better than last year's attempt at the best of the year.

Am I being pernickety in the fact that Marion Zimmer Bradley's **Darkover** series is a much older Hybrid than twenty years. **Sword of Aldones** was published in 1962, from material in a 1958 **Amazing**, and the earlier novels were very different in their feminist emphasis than the post 1975 books.

Surely, somebody somewhere must have commented on the symbolism of these female pubescent characters riding that emphatically male symbol of power, a fire breathing dragon?

Given the sexual agenda, what is it about the resurrection of the Vampire novel that appeals so much to women? The vampire of writers like Anne Rice and Chelsea Yarbro is a very romantic figure amongst other things. Given Brian Stableford's interest in vampires, and the sheer quantity of vampire fiction of yore, there is a whole agenda of symbols and imagery, unstated or otherwise, going on here. No doubt another subject for a thesis.

Thanks for another interesting issue. By the way, from the photo on the front inside cover, where do you get your rejuvenation treatment from? (It's reading letters like yours, that keeps me young — Catie)

Please send your letters of comment to:  
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# Pretty Bloody Happy! Nicola Griffith

Interviewed by

## Carol Ann Green

**Was 'Mirrors and Burnstone' the first story you published?**

It was the first story I published in *Interzone*. A story called 'An Other Winter's Tale' appeared in a magazine called *Network* which was produced by the Network of Women Writers, it won their short story contest. Nobody else would buy the story because it was very short. It was a fable about a woman on the dale who is transported to a magical land of ice and snow and falls in love with the Snow Princess.... It wasn't bad, it was just very light weight. So my first *real* story that got published was 'Mirrors and Burnstone'.

**How long after that was it that you sold Ammonite?**

I got the contract for my book in spring '91. But it wasn't a direct connection; although the book was connected to the story, I wrote 'Mirrors and Burnstone' sold it; then I wrote a bunch of other stories. Then Malcolm Edwards wrote to me and said 'Dear Nicola I have enjoyed your short work in *Interzone*, if you're writing a novel please send it to me.' So I wrote back saying 'Dear Malcolm, lovely to hear from you. I'm writing two novels and this is what they are about...' Wrote a paragraph on each and sent it off. And it was a complete lie of course, I wasn't writing a novel at all. Then he said 'I like both of them, can I see them', I thought 'Shit!' Sat down at the computer and banged out four chapters, sent them off. He said 'I like this when we see the rest?' So it was at that point that I had to sit down and plan the novel.

**So that was the beginning of Ammonite?**

Yeah, except then it was called Jeep, it was essentially the same chapters, but it was very much rewritten once I'd finished the book and I knew exactly what I was doing.

**'Mirror and Burnstone' is set on the same planet. You get some of the same characters in Ammonite; did you conscious-**

**ly go back to that?**

I'll tell you how the whole germ of this book occurred, it was at Mexican. I was on a panel, 'Earthman give me your Seed — are women aliens or are aliens really women?'

Sherry Goldsmith who was moderating turned round to me and said 'So Nicola, tell me about the aliens in your story 'Mirrors and Burnstone'.' My mouth dropped open, because I realised at that moment that the aliens in my story were in fact human women, and the implications of that filled my head up and I didn't say another word. I was gobsmacked, because the implications were unfurling in my head like a sail and blotting everything out. I thought about it for a while, and I started to write a novella about that idea. It was partly based on 'Mirrors and Burnstone', but it wouldn't go anywhere, it got stuck. So I set it aside. Then I moved to America and started writing short stories, and Malcolm wrote to me, and then it suddenly popped up again like a cash register; and it was all there.

**Why did you decide to write a novel with no men in it?**

It wasn't a conscious decision. In that I realised that 'Mirrors and Burnstone' was about only women. And realised that there had to be a reason for there being just women on this planet. Then I came up with the idea of the virus — and that meant that the whole book would have to be women only. So the reasoning was subconscious, it was basically because I got so tired reading books, mostly written by men, about women who were honorary men who acted like men or acted for men. Who weren't human in and of, and more particularly, by themselves. Then you get the books in reaction to that, lots of Lesbian Feminist Utopias. Which made women out to be wise kind seven feet tall vegetarian amazons who weren't human

either; they were saints. So on the one hand you have honorary men, or madonnas and whores acting for men or you have perfect saintly sorts of women who were healers and nice women... until you wanted to throw up.

And I thought, no, women are human, they're ordinary, they're dull, they're stupid, they're kind, they're interesting, they're vicious, they're gentle. They're everything. And I thought the best way to write about women as people is to have them fill all the roles and to do that of course is to take out the men. So I don't really see it as a book with no men in it. I see it as a book about women.

I've had some bad reaction, in America from reviewers who say it's a man-hating, man-fearing novel. But it isn't it's a man/less novel. It's simply a book without men in it and that's what pisses men off. You see, the women in my book don't mourn men, they don't dream about them, they don't dance ritual celebratory dances at the full moon cackling about the fact that all the men are all dead. It's just that men are not part of their world view.

**I read a review in *Locus* by Dan Chow, who said that although the book was not a man-hating novel, it was a man-fearing novel...**

That's bullshit, it's ignorance on his part. The first time I read the review I burst out laughing. I thought here is a man speaking from white male, middle class, straight privilege and he's been caught with his pants down. He's made so many mistakes, he's probably embarrassed at the mistakes he's made. Every single opinion he expressed in that review was wrong. He says it's a man-hating, man-fearing novel, it is a man/less novel for all the reasons I've already outlined. It makes a lot of sense to me. He says it's a novel about coming to terms with one's lesbianism, which makes about as much sense as saying that *Neuromancer* is about coming to terms with one's heterosexuality. Just because the author's a dyke and the character's are dykes and there is a dyke love affair does not mean that that is what the book is about. Then he says 'Whether Griffith intends or not...' he's saying, oh Griffith does some neat things but she does it by mistake. He also says that the novel appears to be autobiographical, by saying that he makes the obvious mistake, which is that I have never lived on a woman only planet, never had children by parthenogenesis, never taken an experimental vaccine. But more to the point, he's denying my imagination. He is saying it must be autobiographical because she's not smart enough to imagine it for herself, and that is a play used against women's writing...

**It's something that's being used a lot, I don't know if you've read Joanna Russ'...**

**How to Suppress Women's Writing — denial of agency.**

**That's it, they say "She wrote it but she must have had help"**

**It's continuously suppressing the advances that you've made. It's turning around and saying, well yeah she wrote it,**

but she must have based it on something that she had experienced herself.

Then there's that bit where Dan Chow says "How much more rich and complex the world would have been if only Marghe had had a brother..." now that is like saying how much richer a novel by an African American would be if only it had some white folks in. What he's implying by that statement and that imaginary statement we've just made is that women and minorities are not human in, of, and by themselves, that they are only human in relation to men and in the presence of men. That women are not interesting enough in, of, and by themselves, because they're not fully human, etc. etc. It's a huge circular argument that he's using, and he couldn't even see it.

You know, the really sad thing is, is that I think he liked the book.

Yes, that came across in the review that he thought this was a really good novel... but he just thought it was flawed because it didn't have any men in it.

It's like saying this Western is really flawed because it's not about opera. It does not compute, at all.

**In the capsule review in Locus, Faren Miller wrote about the Celts in Outer Space, I thought that was a bit weird.**

I've been thinking about this and I came up with an idea, and then I discussed this with Gwyneth Jones. She says that Americans will be upset about the Echraidhe staff, because they have a very twee view of Ireland, all nice little thatched cottages, everything sweet, and their long distant ancestors. They see it as a kind of folklore place. Whereas we Brits are used to the awful realities of Northern Ireland, the brutality.

The way I see it, is that Faren Miller is used to reading science fiction where the protagonist is invincible, is a cartoon character, a cardboard cut out. Nothing fazes her or him, they deal with everything they're superbly talented, superbly confident and competent. But poor old Marghe, she almost loses her marbles, she loses her way geographically, emotionally, spiritually. She doesn't cope, and I think that really offended Faren Miller's sense of rightness.

**The idea that the main character of the novel can't cope with being captured and having their identity taken away from them. Exactly.**

Which is what happens, her identity is stripped away from her and she goes to pieces, which anybody would. But, the 'hero' is supposed to be strong and march through it all with nary a scratch.

Especially without losing any fingers.

Or tips of her ears, or anything else.

I thought that worked really well. That she didn't just come out of this with a new mental outlook, but that she came out of it physically scarred, to prove she'd been through it.

That was important to me. That was something I learned from my own life. Not denying my imagination here, but when I got badly beaten up and had my nose broken...

not many people can tell, but I can see it in the mirror. And I knew that the physical change was important.

**It seemed to me, that although it was only a short review, Faren Miller concentrated on that one aspect of the novel, and she didn't go on to any of what happened afterwards.**

Yes, and the stuff that happens afterwards wouldn't have been possible without...

...What had gone before. It's building upon what happens to Marghe as she goes through the novel.

**Was the virus there because you wanted to kill off all the men, or was it there because you wanted to explore what Marghe and Thenike explore, the senses, going backwards, finding themselves?**

It's like the chicken and the egg thing for me. Because I wanted to find a way to have women reproduce parthenogenically, and the only thing I could think of was a virus. Now, the only reason women would have to reproduce parthenogenically was because there were no men. So it was six of one half a dozen of the other. Also I was fascinated by DNA, what would happen to DNA that was changed and I thought maybe a virus would rewrite it, would that make them human? Would it change them? Would they be no longer human? And what happened if it was a virus with Alien DNA? Some Goth DNA getting slotted in, how would that change consciousness and humanity and memory? It was many things.

**I thought that was one of the things that worked very well when she remembers the 'memories' of the Goth and then later on realises that the DNA includes their memories.**

Several people have asked me if there is going to be a sequel. They say what happens to the Goth and what happens when the Company comes back? And I say, no there isn't a sequel. It's up to you. You take it and do what you want. You imagine. It's all yours. The kind of book I really enjoy has a springboard ending, where I'm left free to imagine, I find nothing more irritating than having all the loose ends knotted up together. It cuts off my imagination, I can't think about it in bed before I fall asleep or in the bath or whatever.

It's a very rare person who can write a sequel to a book that is better than a reader's imagination, because a reader's imagination is tailored perfectly to her or his fantasies, so it's hard to beat that.

**Do you think the reading you've done before has influenced your writing?**

I think it's true to say that every first novel writes what she or he most enjoys to read. Ammonite comes from two places really. It comes from — anthropologist lands on strange planet, which is the tradition of Le Guin and Gentile. And it also comes from what I like to call the English Landscape Writers, Mary Stewart, Mary Renault, Henry Treece, Rosemary Sutcliffe — where they took you somewhere 'other' with a sort of fantastic element to it; not actual fantasy but

more legend, ie King Arthur, Alexander the Great and so on. Those two came together very much for me in this book. I could do all the description stuff that all those people do, because I love that. I think in some places I was probably overindulging.

**I like the descriptive bits, to fix in my mind where someone goes.**

I like to do that too, I like to write the kind of book I like to read. I would love to find this on a shelf.

**How important is portraying lesbian feminism in your work? Do you think you are sending a message or is it part of who you are?**

It's part of who I am. This book is not polemic, none of my work has been, I never intended my work to be polemic, a reader may see it as she or he chooses, I have no control over that. But I always intend my fiction to be fiction, to be a story to be interesting, this book I see not as an examination of the roles of women in the world, although that is certainly a peripheral interest. To me this is a story about a woman becoming human, becoming herself, becoming adult, just becoming... growing into herself, finding out who she really is. And I suppose you could say that that's a feminist concern because many women are never allowed to find out who they really are. But I don't look at it like that, I feel as though...who was it that said "Whenever I express opinions that distinguish me from a doormat, I am called a feminist"?

**Rebecca West**

I honestly think that writing about women who are truly human expresses feminist sentiment. And as for the lesbianism, I write about what interests me. I'm a dyke, I know what it's like to be a dyke and it just happens naturally.

I think everything I've ever written has a lesbian as a protagonist, except the first Warhammer story, 'The Other' that's written from a male point of view, it still has a dyke in it but it's written from a male point of view because I wanted to see if I could do it. To see how sympathetic I could be. I'll probably write more about men, certainly in my next book it's like half women half men, although again the protagonist is a woman who's a dyke. Simply because that's what interests me, like white people generally write about white people, men... although lately have you noticed how many men are writing about lesbians? How many science fiction writers are writing about lesbians, Simon Ings in *Hothead*, many of Eric Brown's protagonists are dykes, it's amazing, I wonder why they're doing it? I'm not saying they shouldn't, but I wonder why they're doing it, it would be like me writing about a straight man, or a gay man — I could do it now and again and I probably will do but it's not one of my first interests.

**I find it interesting that Colin Greenland's main characters are nearly always female. All of his novels I've read have a female main character which I find unusual in male writers.**



Gwyneth Jones said something about this, she wondered if it was because male writers, especially those who are sensitive to feminist concerns are trying to disassociate themselves, distance themselves from the science fictional male image, the macho he-man conquering hero type. So they write about women. Also it might be that to a certain extent any protagonist in one's books has an element of the writer in it, 'I'm writing about me', and those men who are sensitive to feminist concerns don't want to write about the macho type. A lot of science fiction is adventure fiction, so if you put a boy in there, you immediately start falling into stereotypes, you don't have to but it's more difficult to stay away from the stereotypes using a man than it is a woman.

**You've been suffering from ME? Can you tell me about that?**

Well ME is Myalgic Encephalitis. In America it's called CFIDS - Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome which I think is a more accurate name, although I don't like the chronic fatigue bit being tacked on the front. It's like calling tuberculosis a chronic coughing syndrome, fatigue is one of the symptoms.

Basically it is disfunction of the immune system, so for a couple of months my immune system is deficient, it doesn't really work, with all the attendant problems. And then sometimes it's like an auto immune disease, like Lupus or Rheumatoid Arthritis, my body attacks itself. It goes through these swings. It's not like some one with AIDS who has a deficiency and might die, it's not like someone with Lupus where the body is attacking itself constantly and they may sometimes die. I

have a mix. And it can cause very severe symptoms, I have heart problems now, my right leg isn't working. I walk like a spastic or someone with polio, it's really hard. Because some people think of ME as being vague tiredness, well 'you know you'll be tired for six months, then you'll be better won't you, pat pat', well it's not like that, it's a vicious illness. It's really changed my life.

**You've had it, what four, five years?**

Four years.

**How do you find that affects your writing? If you're suffering, then you can't be writing constantly as you might like to.**

It's very frustrating. When I first got sick I had neurological problems and I couldn't remember anything and I got very confused, I was trying to write a Warhammer novella and I kept forgetting what my characters were called. I'd have to call them A B and C and then I'd get them all muddled up anyway and it was awful.

Now I find that if I work hard for a week I have to take the next week off, it makes me ill, it's bad for my heart, my heart goes crazy. Like now when I get back from doing this publicity, I won't be able to work for a month, I'll be in bed.

**It must be very frustrating for you.**

It drives me crazy. That's partly fatigue, and then I get physical symptoms that I can't work with. A while ago my right arm was spasming, and I couldn't type very well, I was hitting the wrong keys. Sometimes I have such bad headaches I can't look at the screen. Endless symptoms. But having said all that, although the actual putting the words on screen, on disc, on paper takes longer, I'm not convinced that I would write more books if I wasn't sick because it takes so long for a

novel to come together in my head. I do not know how some people can pump out three books a year. Even if I was the fittest person on Earth, I doubt that I would do more than one novel every two years.

**Do you find that you are thinking about it subconsciously, so that when you do get to a screen you can start writing about it straight away — so it has its advantages as well?**

I wouldn't have become a full time writer so soon if I wasn't so sick. I went on disability here in England and didn't have to have a job, of course disability pays fuck-all but it's better than nothing. Then I moved to America where I couldn't work anyway because of the immigration status as well as the illness.

**What's the situation at the moment in America about your immigration status?**

I have a H1B Professional Visa, they gave me that on two planks, one was because I got a contract for a book of short stories from New Victoria Publishers, and one because they regarded me as a 'Writer of prominence'. It took me a long time and four thousand bucks, and it runs out in February 1994.

So the next step is to get together as much evidence as I can and apply for a Green Card which is permanent resident status on the basis of being a fabulously famous and brilliant writer. Normally to get that sort of status you have to do something like win the Nobel Prize, the Booker Prize or something like that. I'm hoping to get nominated for something, and I've got reviews coming out, I sold a book in the UK and the US and maybe someone in Japan or France will buy it at some point. I can put all that evidence together and talk

really fast and get some letters from famous people, maybe that will swing it. If it doesn't then I have to look at again at the possibility of getting another H1B, another four thousand dollars another stressful two years while I wonder what on Earth I'm going to do.

**What will you do if it doesn't come off? Have you got any contingency plans?**

Kelley and I will sell our house and probably move to Holland. Because Holland and Eire are the two places where we can live together quite easily, I'm an EC citizen I could live in either of those, in the Netherlands you can work without special permits so long as you can get a job.

We got a tape out, teach yourself Dutch, and it's such a bizarre language. I thought we're never going to be able to live there, lots of people speak English, but that's not the point, if one is going to go and live somewhere, one should be able to speak the language. I was despairing until we came across the word for beer, which is *bier*, I thought okay we can live here, we'll manage.

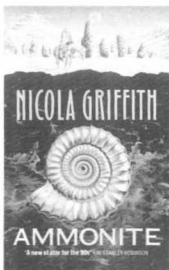
**How important is it to you that Kelley is also an SF writer?**

Very important. She is my first reader, my first editor. I can't explain to you how wonderful it is to live with someone who understands what's going on. When I sell a story she knows what that means, she knows how marvellous that is. When an editor rejects my book, or says we'll take your book but you have to cut 25% from it in order to fit our product size, she knows why that's not acceptable. She doesn't say "well honey why don't you just take the money." She understands very clearly.

She understands that awful desert that writers sometimes meet in the middle of a work, where they suddenly stop... this happens to me every single time no matter what I'm working on. Soon as I hit about a third or a half way through, I suddenly think "I can't do this, it's no good, it's all useless, it's rubbish, I'm going to burn it." I think I'll go stack shelves, I'm not a writer! And she can say "Okay honey, have a cup of tea. Now what do you think is wrong?" "Well all of it's wrong!" And she says well this bit is really good, or sometimes she just says "Well you just keep going, keep trying and maybe it'll get better." And of course it always does.

She's invaluable as an editor. Because I'm so tired a lot of the time, this is where my health really affects my work, I'm very tempted now, whereas I never used to be, to send off a less than finished draft. And she always says "Now Nicola this isn't good enough, go through it one more time". You know what they say, Genius is the infinite capacity to take pains, or the capacity to take infinite pains — 10% inspiration, 90% perspiration. And if you're tired and you just want it to be done, you can really fuck it up. So Kelley is invaluable for that. She just folds her arms, taps her foot and say "uh uh one more time", and I do the same for her. I work with her.

I think if a person took all my work and laid it down chronologically and took Kelley's work



and laid it down chronologically parallel you would see a lot of... it's not exactly cross fertilization of ideas, it's more that we read the same things we watch the same pieces on television, we talk to the same people, we have the same interests, so often we'll write on the same theme. We'll write about being alone, or about feeling not in control of who you are; because we are different people, we'll examine it in a different way, we'll take the same subject but we'll look at it completely differently.

**That can be interesting, finding out what each of you comes up with.**

One of the nicest things about having Kelley as a partner and being a writer, a science fiction writer in particular, means that we can go to functions together. We went to the Nebulas together. We're seen as equals she's not seen as my helpmate, and I'm not seen as hers which is equally important.

I think it's just wonderful actually. I'm very happy. If it wasn't for my health and the visa situation, I would be one of the happiest people I know. As it is I'm still pretty bloody happy, I'm broke, I'm sick, I'm probably going to be illegal in a year but I'm happy.

**What are you writing now, have you got any other novels coming up?**

I have a short story in April in *Interzone*, 'Touching Fire' that no-one in America would buy. I have a novella coming out I think in the Summer of 1994 — which was a strange challenge I set myself, think of something really bizarre, think of why it's bizarre then think of how you could make it not bizarre. Make it real and down to Earth and meaningful. I thought wouldn't it be neat to read a story about lesbian were-jaguars in Central America. So I wrote a novella, and Ellen Datlow has bought it for an upcoming anthology of erotic horror, and Kelley sold a story to it too, which is a first for us. It's coming out in Summer of '94 from Orion I believe.

I'm working on two novels. One of which is science fiction and one of which I'm not sure

what it is to be honest, I don't think it's going to be science fiction. The science fiction one I have three chapters done already and a lot of it stacked up in my head for when I'm better — and that's set in the near future, it's set here on Earth and it's set in a Northern English City, which will not be named but I'm sure everyone will be able to guess which one it is! The technology in *Ammonite* was viruses, biological stuff; the technology in this one is bio-remediation, using biological means to combat pollution.

I have one chapter of the other book which is going to be — I think — a love story, coming of age, industrial counter-espionage, martial arts novel! I don't really know what it's going to be, I never do until I can spend time thinking about it. The first chapter just popped into my head so I wrote it down.

As for short stories, I don't have any more in the works right now, I think they're the sort of thing that happens to me when I reach a state where I'm stuck on something or I've finished something. Right now I'm in the middle of planning and working, so I probably won't write another short story for now.

**Grafton bought your first novel, are they in the running for the next?**

I only had a one book contract, because the second book is going to be a lot better, I think the sales of *Ammonite* are going to be reasonable, perhaps more than some first novels, it's not going to be the biggest best seller since the bible or something, but I think the sales are going to be reasonable. I think frankly I could get more money this way.

They have an option for my second book, but they always have options. They just have to make sure they can offer me as much as if not more than anyone else. Having said that I would like to stay with HarperCollins because they've done marvellous work publicity wise, given that they don't really have a budget. I like the cover and the editing's been great.

**I was impressed by the cover. SF novels are not particularly well known for having relevant covers.**

The American version shows an airlock, with a jelly bean spaceship heading towards the planet. I wanted an ammonite on the front cover, which they put on to start with, but someone high up took an exception to it, "this is science fiction, no one will know it's science fiction if it doesn't have a space ship on the front". So they replaced the ammonite with a planet and a spaceship. The furthest they will go towards my wishes is to put a vaguely ammonite-like cloud swirl on the planet.

This cover (the British version), I like it. Malcolm and I drew little pictures backwards and forwards to one another by fax and this is what we ended up with. I think it's lovely. I love this blue and gold.

**It certainly stands out. Thank you very much, Nicola.**

[A couple of weeks after this interview, I received a letter from Nicola saying that what she has is probably a more serious neurological condition than she thought at the time.CAG]

# A Judges Summary of the Clarke Award by Maureen Speller

Like the Booker Prize, the Arthur C Clarke Award is no stranger to controversy, though this time the recriminations have ranged louder and longer than usual. Kim Stanley Robinson wuz robbed, while Marge Piercy didn't deserve to win because her novel had been marketed as mainstream fiction. We'll come back to both those points later. First, let me re-introduce you to the other books on the shortlist, the ones which got lost in the uproar. I'll take them in alphabetical order of author to avoid misleading judgements.

Unfortunately, this means that Ian McDonald's **Hearts, Hands and Voices** is first onto the podium. Unfortunate because of all the books, this is the one with which I find myself least in sympathy. Even rereading it has not changed my opinion and I have found myself seriously at variance with one of my judging colleagues over this book. The Land is the last remaining province of a crumbling empire, separated by a river. Given the various environmental conditions, it ought to be paradise but the province is riven by religious conflict between the Proclaimers and the Confessors — does this begin to remind you of something, taking into account that McDonald himself lives in Belfast? In the midst of violence and bloodshed, Matthebe Filili and her family become refugees, are separated, leaving Matthebe to journey through the Land in search of her lost family. The parallels with the Irish conflict are obvious but equally the book stands as a metaphor for every war, every conflict, and the refugees they create. I prefer McDonald's lush, almost baroque, style when it is penned within the confines of a short story. Left to rampage at will through a novel, I was overwhelmed by the words to the point where I was gasping for breath. There are touching vignettes throughout the story but taken as a whole, it was too much for me.

By comparison, Richard Paul Russo's **Destroying Angel** was underwritten, to the point of carelessness in places. It features that staple of so many private-eye novels, and a

growing number of futuristic novels too, the burned-out ex-cop. Tanner is a surprisingly decent sort of man to be an ex-cop in any historical period. Like Robin Hood, he robs the rich to give to the poor or rather, he smuggles drugs, giving a percentage of his cargoes to the free hospitals which patch up the poor for next to nothing. He makes money from the cut he takes, selling drugs on the street. The police turn a blind eye, even co-operating by allowing him to use the police van. In the midst of this evocation of futuristic San Francisco lurks a serial killer. Dead bodies are discovered, with chains welded to their bodies and Taylor, you won't be surprised to learn, has a clue and sets off after the killer.

What I liked about this novel was the general sketch of the corrupt and violent society where people, within certain parameters, can still live fairly decent lives, even in the dreaded Tenderloin. San Francisco is partitioned into sectors; depending on who and what you are, certain areas present a risk. On the other hand, the risk isn't always as great as is claimed. When sprawling megalopolises and wall-to-wall brutality are the order of the day in so many novels, this much made a refreshing change. However, there was too much else that dissatisfied me about **Destroying Angel**. For example, it was impossible to get any sense of when this novel was set. The twenty-first century was mentioned as though it had already gone yet, putting aside the fact that the rich live off-world, so America must have restarted its space programme, the story could be set right here and now. There wasn't enough to convince me that this novel was what it claimed to be. And it has to be said that the story itself was feeble; a rogue military cyborg wreaking havoc by killing and tattooing its victims. The cyborg, presumably the destroying angel of the title, is rarely seen; the final confrontation between it and Taylor takes place off-page, which is hardly satisfactory. In the end, the gaudy patched skin of this novel has nothing to support it, alas.

Curiously enough, Michael Swanwick's **Stations of the Tide** has been criticised by some, not necessarily the judges, for precisely the reason I disliked Ian McDonald's novel, namely its baroque nature. I guess it's a question of degree. Swanwick is much more restrained in his descriptions of Miranda, a world about to be inundated by its own ocean, as periodically happens. It's a restricted world, denied the technology its people feel it needs, but one of its inhabitants has stolen that technology and brought it back to Miranda. The bureaucrat is sent to retrieve the items and finds himself entirely unprepared to deal with a world on the brink of cataclysmic change. His hunt for Gregorian is, in some respects, an education for the bureaucrat himself as he discovers a completely different perspective on life. The novel is also distinguished by its entirely plausible use of virtual reality technology during a long sequence in the latter part of the novel. Yet, in the end, the novel somehow fails to satisfy. It comes so close to being prize-winning material but stumbles at the final hurdle.

One (male) critic has dismissed Sue Thomas's **Correspondence** as an exercise in creative writing rather than an SF novel. I mention the gender of the critic because it is becoming clear to me that men and women, for the most part, react very differently to this novel. People are also distracted by the layered structure. True, the book is a little more complicated than a straightforward narrative but perseverance is handsomely rewarded.

Apart from the complexity of the novel's structure, that of role-players exploring the story of Rosa and the woman, now more machine, who has created her, I was particularly fascinated by Thomas's exploration of the transition from human to machine, in this instance by choice. It's something of a cliché to describe a person, in the trauma of bereavement, as dying inside, but in this instance, the narrator is systematically annihilating herself as a human being, rebuilding herself as a machine, a ruthless response to the situation in which she finds herself, an ultimate withdrawal from the world. I always value a book that can withstand rereading and still offer fresh insight. This was one such book and I regret that more of the judges didn't share my enthusiasm for it.

Lisa Tuttle's **Lost Futures** touched on another subject much in vogue in current SF writing, the quantum nature of the universe. One version of the theory suggests that there is no such thing as time-travel; we cannot reach our own past or future because they don't exist. There is only the moment, the second. Every changing second opens a multitude of possibilities. For Clare Beckett, the possibilities seem to have become probabilities, as she shuttles between her many other lives, each determined by something that she decided in her 'real-time' life. Other Clares represent the successes and failures she might have been while she drifts, discontent-

ed, in her current life. So far as it went, this novel was fascinating in its attempt to portray the nature of the quantum universes, switching rapidly from one to another. In the same way, the portrayal of the Clare Beckett believed to be mad because she can recall some of her other lives was chilling in the extreme as her parents and friends struggled to cope with her condition.

Unfortunately, the thread of the novel began to break down once we met Clare Beckett from the future, Luz, who dreams her way through other lives. After this it was really no longer possible to accept the existence of quantum universes. Rather, it was as if we had strayed into *Dallas* country, where entire lives could be wiped out in a blink with the explanation that it had all been a dream. Beyond that, I felt that Tuttle's ending reneged on her female readers who, having worked their way through Clare's harrowing experiences, and her search to make something of her life, are then expected to accept the trite assumption that meeting the right man will be enough. I felt cheated but I still rate the novel highly for its ambitious attempt to explore the nature of life itself and through the eyes of an ordinary woman at odds with society's expectations.

**C**onnie Willis's *Doomsday Book*, by comparison, is like the irrepressible child in class, the one who clown around but whom no-one can quite find it in their hearts to chastise. It's set in a future Oxford, an Oxford where Kivrin, a student of Medieval History, is planning to travel back to the fourteenth century. She is prepared; she's learned the languages, knows the period thoroughly, has been immunised against all the relevant diseases but, as she rapidly discovers when she arrives in fourteenth century West Oxfordshire, is utterly unprepared for real fourteenth century life. Thus far, I was with this novel, and not just because it is set in my birthplace. It set up an interesting tension between history as perceived through books, texts and the actuality of being there.

However, it has become almost a tradition that when any two readers of this book meet, they begin to point out the errors and inconsistencies. Future England has inexplicably returned to paper money; everyone refers to scarves as 'mufflers', an old-fashioned and regional usage in England even now. Willis's knowledge of Oxford is, let me assure you, patchy. Likewise, her understanding of medieval Oxfordshire history is riddled with fundamental inconsistencies.

I have a suspicion that Willis doesn't really care that much about this inaccuracy such is her absorption in the real story. And the real story is of Kivrin struggling to care for the family which takes her in and which tragically, horribly begins to die of the Black Death. The settings on the time machine had been false and Kivrin, far from avoiding this threat, finds herself in the middle of it. I cannot think of any description of death which is quite so moving, so harrowing as this. Juxtaposed with the 'flu epidemic in future Oxford, and the deaths of

people unused to germs in a sanitised society, the effect of both is quite overwhelming. But is it science fiction? Yes, it is but the SF is almost incidental to Kivrin's struggle, with knowledge she can't use and a complete lack of medicines. This story is about people and the will to survive; the SF content is incidental.

**W**hich brings us to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* and Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*. *Red Mars* is the first part of a trilogy about the colonisation of Mars, and concentrates on the arrival of people on Mars itself, the first hundred scientists and engineers, and their struggle to create an environment suitable for humankind. The scope of this novel is vast, encompassing every range you could think of; race, attitude, religious beliefs, environmental theories to name but a few. My biggest concern about it was the very hugeness of the subject and Robinson's attempts to cram it all in to one book. I felt there was just too much in too small a space. A myriad issues were raised but not fully confronted, not through any cowardice on the part of the author but because the magnitude of the undertaking was simply too great for the arena in which it was being undertaken.

This is not to say that I don't like the book. There is much about it which I find admirable. For example, Robinson raises moral issues about the right of Earth, for which read the United Nations, for which read whoever has the ascendancy at the time of the mission, to decide to terraform Mars. There is much discussion about this throughout the novel but the issue is not comfortably resolved. Although one recurring motif is that of plans having been laid by people who would never visit Mars, without taking into consideration the local conditions, I still find it difficult to believe that the basic decision wouldn't have already been taken. In fact, it is clear that despite appearances to the contrary, the mission is very poorly organised; how plausible this is, I don't know, but I can't help feeling that, for instance, the disappearance of so many personnel to form their own colonies ought to have been foreseen. Surely the authorities would have realised that for many this would be a chance to start over rather than act as puppets on behalf of the UN.

The novel raises a thousand puzzles of this sort and, in its vastness, fails to satisfy my curiosity. It is a brave attempt at describing the colonisation of Mars, the best so far, certainly the most rounded, but I was still left with an uncomfortable sense that we had already stepped too far beyond 'should we colonise' for the ethical issues to be raised. Likewise, I felt that Robinson hadn't entirely got control of his characters or their stories. Too many doubts were being raised in my mind for me to feel entirely comfortable with this book. It was my second choice, not my first.

**A**nd, as we all know, the judges selected Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* as the winner. Just to clear up one minor controversy, this book was placed first by five out of the six

judges, and was the second choice of the remaining judge. For some reason this is considered damning by certain critics of the choice, though I can't imagine why. The Booker Prize has, on more than one occasion, been settled by a majority vote, as indeed has the Clarke Award itself in previous years. Why it should be such a big deal this year, I can only guess.

The story centres on Shira, a square peg in the round hole of corporate culture. A computer whizz-kid, she cannot bring herself to conform to the requirements of her company and is punished with the loss of her child when her husband leaves her. Returning to her childhood home, the freetown Tikva, she finds that the life she remembers is under threat from the conglomerates and participates in the creation of an illegal cyborg to help protect the town.

Piercy cuts this with the story of the Prague ghetto in 1600 and the creation of the golem to support the oppressed Jews in their struggle against the Gentiles. The stories of Yod and Joseph intertwine, the one a creature of clay, the other a complex assembly of circuits and organic material. Each develops far beyond their creators' original intentions. Each becomes human? How do you define human? Human because of the nature of its structure? Human because it thinks and feels, possesses emotions, can love, as each of them does? Joseph's humanity is recognised in his acceptance of the need to unmake him, the golem. He has the strength to resist but doesn't. Yod sacrifices himself in order to save Shira and the freetown. It's been argued that as an AI he didn't have to make the sacrifice quite as he did. He could have downloaded himself and preserved the intelligence, sacrificing only the body. This criticism, I feel, misses the point about the nature of the sacrifice, made as a human rather than as a cyborg. In fact, Yod does live on, in the crystals which Shira later destroys. He leaves the choice with her and she recognises his humanity; thus the choice is doubly made.

It has also been said that this book should not have won because it was marketed as a mainstream novel, that Marge Piercy has no track record as an SF writer, in other words, that she is not one of 'us'. This overlooks both *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* and *Woman at the Edge of Time* and her immense popularity among science fiction readers. Quite apart from anything else, if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck and is labelled a hen, it is still undubitably a duck. *Body of Glass* is a science fiction novel, the equal of every other novel on the short list and, as the judges decided, the best of them.





# Change At Fayfield For Elveston

## Lewis Carroll's Sylvie and Bruno

recommended  
by Andy  
Sawyer

Pints  
6

How can a Victorian children's book in which one of the main characters says things like "oo don't want face to tell fibs wiz - only a mouf" be worth recommending to proper grown-up SF readers? Well, for a start, one of the best books of the 1980s is heavily indebted to it and most of us have been guided to imaginative literature by the author's more famous classics.

True, those of us who grew up during the 1960s may well remember some peculiar interpretations attached to the *Alice* books. Jefferson Airplane's song 'White Rabbit' was all about size-changing pills, hookah-smoking caterpillars and 'the Red Queen off her head'. Modern readers have doubted the innocence of the Reverend Charles Dodgson's hobby of photographing little girls in the nude. But whatever lurid interpretations can be placed on them, what's most startling about the works of Lewis Carroll is his flights of fancy and playful exploration of the wilder shores of logic. To claim him as a science fiction rather than a fantasy writer would seem to be pushing the definitions considerably, but as a mathematician and logician his parodies of scientific method certainly push at the rigorously analytical boundaries of fantasy; akin to scientific *jeux d'esprit* such as Edwin A Abbott's *Flatland* (also written by a Victorian clergyman with a mathematical bent.)

*Sylvie and Bruno* was an attempt to repeat the popular success of the *Alice* books. Expanded from a short fairy tale, it was published in two installments as *Sylvie and Bruno* in 1889 and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* in 1893. It never achieved *Alice*'s popularity, possibly because of flaws in the plotting, and its sentimentality (Bruno's babytalk as featured above is a major feature of the dialogue). The first volume ends with the title characters seemingly forgotten. While large parts of the story share *Alice*'s tone of

whimsical nonsense, even larger parts are filled with adult satire and moralisms and saccharine romantic interest looming irrelevantly like Zeppo in a Marx Brothers movie. However, Carroll's ability to present several layers of meaning is still apparent. The whole story, in fact, is a fascinating handling of different levels of perception and relationship.

The action lies in two intertwined plots. The first, and least interesting, is the relationship between the narrator's friend Arthur and the beautiful Lady Muriel; Arthur's rivalry with Muriel's cousin Eric, his apparent self-sacrifice while doctoring in a disease-stricken village; the irony of how Eric saves [his] life and the way his devotion teaches Eric the truth of religion.

The second plot is the fairy melodrama of how the Warden of Outland is victim of a palace coup by the wicked Sub-Warden, and how his children, Sylvie and her young brother Bruno, are tested, as in all good Christian moral tales, and redeemed by unselfish love. It's here we meet the surreal characters of the tale: the Gardener with his disturbing nonsense-verse, the Professor, and the Other Professor, with their gadgetry and logical inversions. It's also here, where the meat of the story, its flights of illogic and extended philosophical punning, exists. This is, of course, Fairyland, where nothing is quite what it seems and reality is a function of perception. Nowadays, Carroll may well have talked about Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the function of the observer in Relativity Theory and Quantum Physics, and probably added some parables about Schrödinger's Cat and the Collapse of the Wave Function as well. As it is, he confined himself to charmingly and evocatively talking about 'eerie' states of consciousness.

Carroll's preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* is in fact one of the most interesting examples of a writer of pure fantasy concerned to explain his fiction in rational terms. If, he argues, Fairies existed, then our perceptions of them and their perceptions of us would be based on natural laws. For humans, our ordinary consciousness gives us no awareness of the presence of Fairies, but we are capable of an "eerie" state in which we can be aware of both our natural surroundings and Fairies. The narrator, for example, sees and converses with Sylvie and Bruno in a wood: he is aware of them as minute beings (Bruno is shown sitting on a dead mouse with the shape and proportions of humans (ie no wings). We are also capable of a kind of trance state in which consciousness migrates to other scenes either in Fairyland or in our world, and Fairies can be directly perceived. In these scenes, what is experienced in one state is often an analogue of what is happening in another: a piano played by the music-master to the Sub-Warden's son is also played by Arthur; phrases uttered by Lady Muriel are often heard by the narrator as said also by Sylvie as he slips into the "third" state.

Fairies are also capable of analogous states: an ordinary consciousness with no awareness of human presence and an "eerie" state in which humans (or their immaterial essences, if in Fairyland) can be perceived. Fairies can also travel from their realm to ours, and appear as humans to our everyday eyes. They can choose to whom they wish to appear (so, for example, Arthur and Lady Muriel are on one occasion brought together by the physical exertions of the invisible fairy-children) and create lifelike if evanescent forms. One such is a bunch of flowers which Muriel's father, an amateur botanist, recognises as a mixture of rare tropical blooms. Like more traditional fairy gold, they disappear after a day, causing consternation to all (except the narrator).

Scattered throughout the story, also, are discussions of many ideas which will later appear in the mainstream of science fiction.

Their appearance in *Sylvie and Bruno* is not so much because Carroll was a prophet of the Gernsbach tradition, but because discussion of the latest scientific thought was itself part of the Victorian cultural mainstream. Carroll parodies the fashionable parroting of half-understood theory, and the technomania which explored far-fetched inventions - the Professor, for example, is working on a gadget for carrying yourself: "Whatever fatigue one incurs by carrying, one saves by being carried." Carroll also plays half-seriously with the ideas of ecologies based on size ("The common grass would serve our inch-high cows as a green forest of palms, while round the root of each tall stem would stretch a carpet of microscopic grass... and it would be very interesting, coming into contact with the races below us.") and the possibility of changing or even reversing the flow of time. There is a scene in which the narrator, using

another of the Professor's inventions, witnesses that stock sense of virtually every novel postulating the reversal of the time-flow, a meal in which food is regurgitated and replaced on the serving-dishes. Yes, we all know about Martin Amis, but perhaps even Phil Dick's *Counter-Clock World* is not that original!

Further scenes show the Professor appearing as a human to the "mundane" characters. As "Mein Herr", a philosopher of indeterminate origins, he acts like Kilgore Trout in the novels of Kurt Vonnegut, ridiculing modern behaviour by means of quoting the customs and inventions of "my country" or even "a planet" - leading to speculations that he himself is a visitor from another world. He discourses on the paradoxes of topology, on antigravity, on selective breeding, politics and "visiting a planet so small that he could walk right round in in twenty minutes". Later on, Muriel's father speculates about that now well-known science-fictional trope, the hive-mind of a swarm of bees, while back in Fairyland the Professor, in a Serious Scientific Talk, brings us a kind of reverse microscope through which we can perceive an elephant as the size of a mouse, Black Light ("I saw *nuffin*" Bruno sadly replied. "It were too dark!") and an experiment to show that if a weight were hung for a sufficiently long time it would lose the capacity to fall when let loose: "If it still shows (as perhaps it will) a slight tendency to fall, we

will hook it on to the chain again and leave it for *another* thousand years."

True, our Fairy characters are, as I've said, somewhat sugary for modern tastes. But even Bruno's naive babytalk is more apposite as a moral commentary than the "mundane" sequences. When the narrator witnesses Sylvie and Bruno using their occult influences in that favourite pastime of Victorian improving literature, reforming a drunkard, all the modern reader can do is cringe in horrified embarrassment, but when Bruno on being asked to decipher the word spelled *evil* says it's "live" backwards - well, you smile at least, and Carroll's moral point becomes much more palatable.

To claim *Sylvie and Bruno* as a proto-SF novel is, as I hope you've cottoned on to by now, largely a joke. But there's a sense that it is true, because it does contain that preoccupation with ethics, society, religion and science, and how the four interact, so characteristic of late Victorian thought and which we still see in the best SF. (Look again at Philip K Dick's combination of High Philosophy and pop-lit forms, and his wrestling with the question of what's *really* real and his personal *angst*). Carroll's parody of all this may well display his own unease in his religious conservatism, but the logical and scientific playfulness is pure delight.

For modern readers, abstruse and not altogether psychological and literary-critical

explanations can be suggested by the way in which the prepubescent fairy-child Sylvie is in symbolic and structural ways the same character as the more nubile but equally virtuous Lady Muriel, and the way the narrator is sentimentally attracted to each. A more poignant picture of the narrator as an emblem of Carroll himself may come from the way we see him as an elderly bachelor who is estranged from love in the mundane realm by his age and the prior claim of his friend, and in the Fairy Realm by the fact that though Sylvie and Bruno can see him he is not "really" there. But above all this really is a novel of ideas in the way SF ought to be. While in comparison with the *Alice* books, or "The Hunting of the Snark", *Sylvie and Bruno* may well deserve its obscurity, it is still an unfairly neglected work of its author: track down a **Complete Works** and see for yourself!

\* Sylvie and Bruno, and the relationship between "Fairy" and "mundane" consciousness, appear in somewhat different forms in John Crowley's wonderful novel *Little, Big*. But that is another story....



# Anatomising Science Fiction

by  
Paul Kincaid



An Encyclopedia is a curious enterprise. It aspires, it can only aspire, to contain worlds. Here, we must assume, is the fount of all knowledge, our first step on the road to enlightenment. It is an enterprise doomed to failure by the simple fact that no one book might embrace a world. Even when that book is 1,370 pages long, when its small, double-columned type contains 1.3 million words. The infinite "Library of Babel" by Jorge Luis Borges (p.143, where he is quoted as saying "the compilation of vast books is a laborious and impoverishing extravagance") could not contain such knowledge.

Nevertheless, the original *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* became, when it was first published in 1979, the authoritative reference work on science fiction. And in the years since, despite the feeble efforts of the **James Gunn Encyclopedia** (p.529), and the "murkily inconsistent" **Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers** (p.277, Critical and Historical Works about SF), and despite the fact that most of the authors leading the field now had not begun to publish when the *Encyclopedia* first appeared, it has remained preeminent.

This expansion and updating of the *Encyclopedia* has, therefore, been long-awaited, if only because any definitive reference work on the genre must at least include articles on **Iain Banks** (p.88), **Pat Cadigan** (p.183), **William Gibson** (p.493), **Terry Pratchett** (p.955), **Bruce Sterling** (p.1163) and a few dozen others. But the question remains: how does this *Encyclopedia* embrace the worlds of science fiction? What is the science fiction anatomised by editors **John Clute** (p.239, entry by **JC**) and **Peter Nicholls** (p.870, entry by **PN**)?

There is, of course, no entry on *Science Fiction* (except the US pulp magazine of that name — p.1062), for such an entry would, recursively, have to encompass the entire

book. But there are, scattered within its pages, a series of articles which, taken together, provide a distinct perspective on how they see the genre. "Definitions of SF" (p.311) rounds up the usual suspects but fails to arrive at any conviction: "There is really no good reason to expect that a workable definition of SF will ever be established... In practice, there is much consensus about what SF looks like in its centre; it is only at the fringes that most of the fights take place."

Indeed, the centre does seem to be generally accepted, and here gets its own entry as "Genre SF" (p.483): "SF that is either labelled science fiction or is instantly recognized by its readership as belonging to that category". This, the editors recognise, provides the bulk of this encyclopedia. The *Genre SF* entry itself lists only **Arthur Leo Zagat** (p.1363) and **Miles J. Breuer** (p.157) as examples of this category; but it is not difficult to find all the names you would expect to encounter in a work of this nature — **Asimov** (p.55), **Heinlein** (p.554), **Herbert** (p.558), **Shaw** (p.1094) and **Wells** (p.1312) all receive substantial entries, **Asimov's** is probably the longest single author entry in the book. But the editors are more willing to venture into the fringes and accept as SF works which others (they quote **Gunn's** *American-centred and hard-SF oriented Encyclopedia*) might not. But they don't tell us how *Genre SF* is instantly recognized, so we must follow the trail further.

Two concepts are set up in opposition to *Genre SF*: the *Mainstream* lies outside the genre while "*Fabulation*" (p.399) is, we must assume, that SF which is not "instantly recognised" as such. Both notions might give us some clue about the subject of this *Encyclopedia*. Let us begin by stepping right out of the genre.

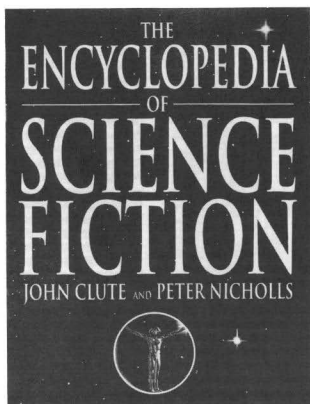
"*Mainstream Writers of SF*" (p.768) tells us

that "as a piece of jargon, not yet fully accepted into the language, 'mainstream' lacks precision". Nevertheless there is a useful distinction to be drawn, so long as we are not over-eager with the word "mainstream". The notion of a mainstream writer of SF actually has no meaning before about 1960 when SF books began to appear regularly enough to be labelled as such. Previous to that they list **Huxley** (p.606), **Burdekin** (p.175), **Wyndham Lewis** (p.717), **Priestley** (p.961), **Stapledon** (p.1151) and **Wyndham** (p.1353) among others as writers whose work moved, without remark, from one side of the genre boundary to the other. The way those within SF have grown to regard the mainstream writers of SF as invasive and alien is castigated as "one of the sadder results of SF's ghetto mentality". Nevertheless they are right to distinguish between the writers whose work demonstrates some knowledge of SF motifs and those who "cumbersomely re-invent the wheel". (One could almost begin to feel sorry for poor **Paul Theroux** (p.1218) who is repeatedly held up as an example of this worst case.)

What it comes down to, it would seem, is that "their work does not feel like *Genre SF*". It is that feel which is the proper subject of this encyclopedia, and which I am pursuing through the book's abundant and invaluable cross-referencing. And here we do get some glimpse of what they mean by feel: "SF ... lies at the heart of the realist mode; its whole creative effort is bent on making its imaginary worlds, its imaginary futures, as real as possible".

This notion is amplified when the editors turn to their other figure of opposition to *Genre SF*, *Fabulation*. Here they contend that *Genre SF* (and by extension all that is truly SF) is "essentially a continuation of the mimetic novel". The writers of the great mimetic, realist novels of the 19th century assumed that "their novels were written as though they opened omniscient windows into reality... Writers of *Genre SF* have never abandoned this assumption." The second great assumption is a more Modernist one, that the world has a story which can be told, that there is an underlying connectivity of things which allows us to make sense of the universe. This also is a belief held by pure genre writers. But both assumptions have been denied by fabulists, allowing us to arrive at the sort of definition which has been denied SF: "a fabulation is any story which challenges the two main assumptions of *Genre SF*: that the world can be seen; and that it can be told." It is, at heart, "profoundly antipathetic to *Genre SF*."

How uneasy this distinction is, between *Genre SF* and *Fabulation*, is indicated in the list they give of writers whose works (or some of whose works) are fabulations. Here we find **Blumlein** (p.140), **Dish** (p.339), **Effinger** (p.371), **M. John Harrison** (p.547), **Moorcock** (p.822), **Priest** (p.960), **Saxton** (p.1053), **Shepard** (p.1100), **Sladek** (p.1113), **Spirrad** (p.1146) and **Wolfe** (p.1338). Too many of these are seen as at the forefront of what



constitutes SF today to allow us to accept that they are 'profoundly antipathetic' to the genre. It leads me to suppose that either SF as we know it today is no longer genre SF (at least as it is here presented) or that there is no valid distinction between genre SF and fabulation (at least as this encyclopedia tries to draw the line).

Can we explore the book to examine this question further? Certainly the article on Fabulation itself suggests a growing inter-relationship between the two. In the first edition of the Encyclopedia the article on Fabulation was perhaps a tenth of the length of this new incarnation. It referred the reader, as examples of the type, to Lawrence Durrell (p.359), Kurt Vonnegut (p.1289) and John Barth (p.94), none of whom as used as exemplars this time around. And in terms of theme entries it cross-referred only to Absurdist SF (p.2), while this time around we are directed also to Magic Realism (p.767), Slipstream SF (p.1116), and Postmodernism and SF (p.950). Obviously, no serious examination of SF can cover the subject adequately without casting its net far wider than genre SF would allow. Curiously this latter article, the only one of these key articles on theory not written wholly or largely by JC and PN (it is by Damien Broderick), accepts a much closer relationship between the two. 'Both SF and Postmodernism ... stress object over subject, ways of being over ways of knowing. The Universe itself becomes a text, open to endless interpretation and rewriting.' While among postmodernist writers are listed Dick (p.328) (oddly listed with Angela Carter (p.200), Don DeLillo (p.318), Umberto Eco (p.364) and Thomas Pynchon (p.981) as being outside the genre but edging

close to it) and Ballard (p.84), Delany (p.315), Russ (p.1035) and Watson (p.1302) as well as the cyberpunks (p.288). Again there is the suggestion that, if SF and fabulation aren't the same thing, then they are at least part of the same contemporary literary endeavour.

As one of the linking points between Postmodernism and SF, Broderick cites 'Gothic rapture', which brings me to my other problem with the notion of SF as realist fiction. Certainly one of science fiction's key characteristics is to make a realistic presentation of the unreal. But it goes beyond the real in its evocation of a sense of wonder (p.1083). This is a term which serious critics of science fiction have come to dismiss as a superannuated cliché (p.234) and which, it is true, is often associated with badly written books — E.E. 'Doc' Smith (p.1123) and A.E. Van Vogt (p.1268) are both quoted in this context, which suggests very close links with what they term 'Genre SF'. Nevertheless it is important to what SF is. It comes not from brilliant writing nor even from brilliant conceptualizing; it comes from a sudden opening of a closed door in the reader's mind, and the editors contend that it may be necessary if we are to understand the essence of SF that distinguishes it from other forms of fiction.\*

Having expressed such importance, however, the editors remain a little snuffy about sense of wonder. True it is easily counterfeited by the importation of big dumb objects (p.118 — which talks about the 'endearing ... disjunction between the gigantic scale of the BDO and the comparatively trite fictional events taking place on, in or about it. The SF imagination usually, if charmingly, falls short at this point').

True, also, that the examples given in the article tend to be from the potboiler side of SF, by, for instance, Poul Anderson (p.31) and Edgar Rice Burroughs (p.177). When Alexei and Cory Panshin (p.906) link sense of wonder with transcendence, John Clute rages against a 'refined wet-dream', yet where the sense of wonder is not counterfeited, is not a potboiler, then however 'charmingly' it falls short of its goal it is an attempt to achieve something sublime, something transcendent. When Arthur C. Clarke (p.229) takes us through the gates of worlds to the climax of 2001, *A Space Odyssey* and Paul J. McAuley (p.746) does something similar as the conclusion to *Eternal Light*, or Cordwainer Smith (p.1121) plays 'The Game of Rat and Dragon' they are taking us outwith the normal orbit of realist fiction and into something which many of us would feel is truly and intrinsically science fiction.

But still we ask: what is science fiction? More and more as one flicks back and forth through the encyclopedia, following a trail of cross-references like some hypertext ramble, one comes to the conclusion that it is a loose collection of 'protocols' and 'conventions' whose old cohesion is now nearing an end. In the article on John Crowley (p.282), for instance, it is remarked that his 'free and supple use of numerous generic conventions ... [is] ... possible only late in the life of any genre'. Back in 'Mainstream Writers of SF' we reach the conclusion that 'by the 1980s the quarrel [between those inside and outside the genre] was of historical interest only, for the walls were tumbling down. Some still shelter behind those shards left standing, but, if they look, they will see that the traffic is moving freely in both directions.'

The second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* provides as thorough an anatomy of the genre as it is possible to squeeze between the covers of one book. The editors have already begun to collect a list of errors but these are, for the most part, trivial. As far as you, me and the rest of the SF world are concerned this is as authoritative as you can get, certainly much more so than any other potential rival. And it is liable to remain our first point of reference for any question on SF, at least until some third edition might appear (one hopes without a gap of 14 years). Yet perhaps this magisterial perspective is only possible by imagining, if not that the walls still stand, then at least that the ground plane is still visible. For, while they avoid any definition of science fiction, the editors have to behave as though SF were distinct and definable. This is just one version of science fiction; still it is large enough and contentious enough to overlap with most other versions and to provoke us into examining our own universes of discourse sufficiently to see where our personal science fictions might lie.

*The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* D  
edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls  
[Orbit, 1993, xxxvi + 1370pp, £45]

# InSight

By Steve Palmer



## Nightmare On Channel 4

A new series focusing on the down side of technology made a fair start as part of Channel 4's *Without Walls* series. A three-parter entitled *New Nightmares*, it strove to explore the relationships between science, science fiction, society and technology.

The first programme, 'Man — Machine', looked at artificial intelligence, computers and robots. A curiously mixed affair, both dated (silly 50's style schlock horror fragments of Alan Turing's lab being taken over by a computer) and provoking (William Gibson speculating), it meandered from AI research through computers insinuating themselves into our lives, to far-future speculation on technological intelligences taking over. Most notable in the programme was a lack of speculation of terms used. 'Intelligence' was a word routinely employed, yet only AI researcher Margaret Boden considered what the concept might mean. As expected, intelligence was considered in terms of computation, mathematics and science: never a mention of other facets; understanding of people, emotional intelligence, wisdom.

Of the other contributors, only J G Ballard and Brian Aldiss came close, both noting the ability of technology to drain emotion from people and from society; in Aldiss' words, it is more likely that future technologies make us unemotional than we make a feeling technology. Why is this? Perhaps because late twentieth-century technology is firmly rooted in mathematics and information. Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not understanding. Maybe it is precisely because we live in an age of excess information without understanding that shallowness, in the from of inability to feel and accept emotion and the more profound understanding it brings, has become a dominant social metaphor of our age.

By far the most interesting contributor was

William Gibson. Echoing the recent work of Nicholas Humphrey (reviewed in *Vector* 168) he wondered what people would feel 'if the body's background noise was not present'; for example, if a mind entered some hypothetical cyberspace. This thought is remarkable in its underlying assumption, which is, as Humphrey has suggested, that consciousness is rooted in sensation; in feeling. Gibson's 'post-human' experience, which he found personally frightening, is really a way of conceptualising death. Without the myriad of sensations from our skin, eyes, ears, etc. Human beings are nothingness. I suspect there could never be a post-human experience of this cyberspace variety because, once the body had been abandoned, consciousness would not exist; the person would either be dead or dead-until-returned. Actually, I find all this rather comforting since I believe 'leaving our bodies' in some future computer space is both dangerous and immoral. The Western doctrine of the human mind as separate from the body was invented by the Greeks, has been promulgated by all the western churches, and is thoroughly absurd and socially divisive. (It is because of this concept that people like Hans Moravec, also a contributor, can talk about 'taking dispositions and memories' from people's minds, as though minds were oranges from which segments can be plucked, instead of what they really are; wholes.

Ballard also realises this. For the first time, people can substitute an artificial reality for the real thing (sic), as he has noted on many occasions. This is surely dangerous. Humanity is not yet mature enough to decide what this new reality ought to be like. You only have to look at computer games to realise that. This is not a time to let our minds

leave our bodies: a fact that, significantly, has been made into an article of faith by rave, crusty, and 'alternative' culture; I look upon this as a reaction to humanity's disembodiment. Dance and hippy culture understands that people must get back into their own bodies.

Part two focused on what natural responses might be created by technological excess (as usual nature was characterised as female, Mother Nature, counteracting masculine technology; the usual preconception in other words). More rambling than the first programme, it was nonetheless stirring in places. Correctly starting from the now recognised point that our scientific view of the world, based as it is on eighteenth century doctrines of separateness and objectivity, is defunct, it tried to give some impression of how science and science fiction have dealt with the domination of 'Mother Earth' by 'Technology'. Writers such as Michael Crichton, J G Ballard and Kurt Vonnegut all knew that arrogance and the need or domination was the main problem, but none of them went further than this and suggested where the arrogance came from in the first place. New Age folk, at this point will go on about being in tune with Gaea, etc. But this is just as bad. Surely, the separation of our concepts into a female Earth and a male Man is divisive. Using the term 'Mother' Earth is silly. It is only because we still experience humanity in terms of male and female that this charade still exists. The natural world is neutral.

Most interesting contributor by far in this programme was ironically James Lovelock, originator of the Gaea hypothesis (and, as he pointed out, a man annoyed by the erroneous assumption of media folk that Gaea is a conscious earth spirit). Only he seemed to have any concept of our biosphere in all its depth and vastness. This was especially apparent when he talked about how successful bacteria were, how crucial they were to the functioning of all life, and how they would survive long after people. Anybody who stands up for bacteria is all right by me.

Perhaps the nub of all this argument, which was missed by the programme, is that we are not faced with a scientific problem. The despoliation of nature by our technological excesses is a moral problem. Morals exist because human beings are forced by their condition to act. We cannot like animals or plants be lived by nature. The whole edifice of human religious thought is in part, about determining how people should act. Thus, what is required is a new moral vision; not technological fixes, however brilliant.

As a committed Green, I found this programme a bit bland. While it is good that it was broadcast at all, it could have explored more fundamental issues through, for example, the science fiction of Frank Herbert (Brian Herbert could have appeared). Gwyneth Jones or George R R Martin; even Ben Elton.

The final programme was called 'them': billed to explore aliens. This exceptionally subtle and rewarding programme, easily the best of the trio, mentioned aliens hardly at all. Most of its hour was spent exploring how people are dehumanised in crowds.

Really, the programme was about the internal splitting of people's psyches due to their inability to experience themselves fully (to be fair, the programme could have only been made in the West, where the individual is more important than the society; it would have been incomprehensible in China or Japan).

Starting with the starkest interpretation of the alien — that it represents the other, the outsider — there followed many excellent contributions, including Harry Harrison's most valid point that, in a situation of population growth and urban life, most people have only one option for survival, and that is selfishness: 'lots of Thatchers', as he described it. It is this selfishness of narcissism to give it a better name, that stops people from experiencing emotions and understanding, not to mention themselves and other people. It is narcissism that leads to ethnic cleansing, hierarchy, centralisation; and it leads also to supposedly humane eugenics programmes, devised amazingly recently by such people as H G Wells.

Judge Dredd is a fascist, as Alan Grant gloomily pointed out, but people actually like him. I expect that what he really meant is that boys roughly between the ages of ten and twenty five like him; and want him to be tougher on the outsiders — the mutants and undesirables — of his Megapolis.

Don DeLillo, author of *Mao II*, concluded the programme. Although he seems to believe that there is a herd instinct in people, rather than social attraction owing to be human in the first place (an entirely different thing), he did make the valid point that being human is actually very difficult. In crowds, there is a loss of accountability; a shrugging off of responsibility and the burden of living. In a crowd there is a release of thousands of selves, all giving up their ability to decide things; to be moral people. Everybody is taking the easy option, and perhaps we should try to sympathise with that (it doesn't mean condoning, for example, mob violence).

Ken Livingstone's point that the crowd is inherently fascistic is not so much wrong as inaccurate. In a crowd, people are able to suspend their critical faculties. Keeping up with the real world is not easy; for the narcissistic, it is easier, indeed

essential if they are not to psychologically fall apart, to believe what everybody else believes. In the case of a crowd this will be the lowest common denominator. So the crowd is only inherently fascistic, with no grip on reality, when its individuals are inauthentic. A crowd of twenty thousand happy fulfilled people would not be fascistic.

Science fiction's concept of the alien is almost without exception its concept of what individual people cannot bear to experience within themselves: their vulnerability, their emotions, their sadism; the badness that their

parents made them feel because they too were narcissistic and had been made to feel that they were bad. Exceptions: Brian Aldiss' *Phagors*, Orson Scott Card's *Piggies*.

Rarely do aliens appear solo in SF. Aliens seem to appear as races; homogeneous planets. This is because they originate within the inauthentic human mind. If humanity ever does discover aliens, or is contacted by some, it could provide the necessary kick up the backside that we require if we are to transcend our self-obsessed, unrealistic mindset.



# First Impressions

Reviews of Hardback & Paperback Originals

Edited by Catie Cary

## Brian Aldiss Remembrance Day

HarperCollins, 1993, 271pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

The title tells you that this is a companion piece to Brian Aldiss's previous mainstream novel, *Forgotten Lives* (1989). But if you expect a positive counterpoint to that book, forget it. As he grows older, Aldiss seems to fall more and more out of love with life and this is the most negative and dispiriting book he has written.

Ray Tebbutt has been thrown on the scrapheap by the recession of the mid-80s and is scraping a hand-to-mouth existence where everything that happens to him is presented as one more burden of misery. Dominic, the yuppie dream come true, is celebrating his first million, but that doesn't make him happy. He is watching his marriage come apart while an extraordinary childhood has robbed him of the human ability to do anything about it. Peter has been prevented from following his chosen career as a film maker by the Big Brother apparatus of Czechoslovakia and leads a life browbeaten by his formidable cousin and his drug-addict girlfriend. All these lost lives come together in the curiously low-key climax of an IRA bomb. It is as if anything so cataclysmic that it might actually change anything in this stew of primordial sorrow has to be shifted off-stage and downgraded to something basically irrelevant. It is odd and dramatically unsatisfactory that the only thing which ties together the disparate elements of the novel should be treated as if it doesn't really impinge on things.

But Aldiss's real theme is unhappiness, a threnody about which he hangs a selection of barely dissimilar variations. To the sympathetic observation: "Your wife's an unhappy woman" one character receives the angry response: "Everyone's unhappy". In this book they are.

Not that it is unrelievedly pessimistic, there is a thread of humour which runs through the book. But it is a sour humour of which the characters seem as much victims as they are of everything else in Aldiss's world. And even when there are moments of happiness, they are always qualified: "a sullen pleasure", "a grave joy".

At one point a character observes: "That's how life is. Never better, never worse. Always shit." It seems a reasonable summation of this book.

## Piers Anthony Demons Don't Dream

NEL, 1993, 343pp, £15.99

Reviewed By Tom A Jones

This is one of Anthony's *Xanth* series. I've not read any others but picked up the rules fairly quickly; a blend of Earth's mythologies plus bad puns. The story follows two Mundane teenagers (ie they're from Earth), Kim and Dug. They're typical, lonely, not one of the gang teenagers, the sort of person who reads SF and plays computer games. I'd probably have found it easy to identify with Dug when I was a teenager as his isolation is attributed to his cynicism rather than because he's a nerd. They separately enter Xanth through a computer game and unknowingly become players in a game between two demons for control of Xanth.

Kim and Dug undertake standard fantasy quests. Throughout, they're guided by Xanth characters and pick up acquaintances who help them.

There's no tension; the plot requires both players to reach the end and each hazard is just a computer game test that the character can get out of if they understand the rules. The book reads like a travelogue through Xanth. As there are a large number of Xanth

books there is obviously an audience and if this gets people interested in SF and fantasy that's fine.

## Iain M Banks Against a Dark Background

Orbit, 1993, 496pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Sharrow, the protagonist of this novel — I deliberately don't call her a heroine — is a retired mercenary forced out of retirement because she has become the target of an extremist religious cult, the Huhsz. Their apparent reason is that Sharrow is the last surviving member of a family with whom the Huhsz have been feuding for generations, in the belief that their Messiah cannot be born until the female line of the family is wiped out. Sharrow suspects that their real reason is to obtain possession of the super-weapon, the Lazy Gun, the theft of which was the original reason for the feud. Since the Lazy Gun is missing, and information about its location is contained in a book which has also been missing for generations, the plot is swiftly wound up to state of extreme complexity. With scope for detailed ramifications.

Iain M Banks' plots are dense. If you blink and miss half a sentence, you risk finding yourself in want of a piece of vital information three hundred pages on. Like a good detective story writer, he springs surprises which you kick yourself for not having anticipated. All this means that he is not an easy read, but he can be a very satisfying one.

The background has the same density and complexity as the plot. Banks describes a detailed future technology impossible to cover in the scope of a review; you can't imagine it unless you've been there. Minor details get the same loving attention as the major inventions that move the plot; the result is an unusual depth of authenticity.

Some of the characters and backgrounds in this book will stay with me for a long time. Sharrow herself, and the friends of her mercenary group, who gather round her again to meet this new challenge. Her twisted, equivocal half-sister Bryeguh. The attractive but slippery Geis. Girmeyn, enigmatic and charismatic. Above all, the setting of the Sea House, the monastery where everyone, even a visitor, must go chained. Whether the writer intended it or not, this for me was the dominating symbol of the book.

The style of *Against a Dark background* is terse and witty. Banks has a wise-cracking approach to violence — "...After nearly eight years of peaceful banality, that made two men she'd hit in less than twenty hours." — Which is not to say that the violence is trivialised or made amusing. Sharrow and her friends have the same cool, throw-away idiom. And — unusually these days — the funny robots are really funny.

I can't imagine there are many people reading this review who aren't familiar with at least some of Iain M Banks' work. If you are, you will want to read this anyway. If not, now would be a good time to start.

**Katherine V. Forrest**  
**Daughters of a Coral Dawn**  
*Women's Press, 1993, 226 pp, £5.99pb*  
 Reviewed by Alison Sinclair

This is a book to be read in the bath, with suds. It begins in a promising comic tone: "The idea to smuggle Mother off Verna II came to Father when Jed Peterman fell down a hill of keteraw and proceeded to smother in a pile of mutherac, managing to do this in spite of all his training and thorough briefings on the planet's topography." Space suited hero and voluptuous alien marry in "the pleasured capital of Vega", and shortly (to Father's considerable shock) Mother produces female nontuplets, prodigies all. Father disappears down a black hole. Several generations of women later, Mother and her immense, long-lived, woman-loving tribe conclude that patriarchal Earth holds no place for them. The problem of parthenogenic reproduction lately having been solved, they purchase a reconditioned spaceship and, under the leadership of the young, purehearted Megan, decamp to a coral-tinted planet in the Pyades. There they found a Greek-flavoured Utopia, complete with exotic architecture, erotic art, Olympic games, and much rose-tinted sex. Every woman is beautiful, beloved and blissful, except Mother, whose astringent observations on it all are a relief.

Fifteen years later a spacecraft from earth lands on Maternas, with a crew of three macho males and one downtrodden woman.

The classic comic formula features someone (usually pompous) who deviates from the social norm, and must be lugged back into it. But after the whimsical first few pages the book is not a comedy, but a utopian fantasy (complete with the noble narrative voices and extensive guided tour for the new initiate). Utopia does not laugh; in fact, utopia is quite ruthless. Beneath the froth are darker themes, concerning leadership, community responsibility, and what to do with those who reject and are rejected by Utopia. But they are not addressed.

It seems disproportionate to turn the full critical arsenal upon a book which is so unserious as to be nearly a parody of itself. It has also dropped through a time warp, having originally been published ten years ago, and arrived, perhaps unfortunately, during a period of fierce debate about gender issues. It is an escapist fantasy; one must accept it for what it is. Then read James Tiptree Jr.'s, 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', and Suzy McKee Charnas' sombre, fascinating, *A Walk to the End of the World*, and ponder.

**Christopher Fowler**  
**Darkest Day**

*Little Brown, 1993, 570pp, £10.99*  
 Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

The Whitstable family were of the merchant adventuring persuasion, robber barons except no-one ever seemed to have picked up the appropriate title (they were probably too snobbish to make donations to the correct political

party...) They are rich, and if they were once even richer that doesn't stop the good ones being good old English eccentrics and the nasty ones the sort you wouldn't unzip your fly for if they were on fire. One day, with Christmas approaching and the weather setting in for a real nasty spell, the Whitstables start dying unpleasantly. They explode on the tube. They have their throats cut to the bone while having a haircut in the Savoy Hotel. They are obscurely poisoned while attending a gala at the Savoy Theatre, in Savoyard costume, *mais naturellement*. They are kidnapped and cut up by a mad ice cream salesman. And it all couldn't happen to a nicer family.

The police are perplexed, and, the Whitstables being who they are, pressure is exerted from above in the form of a Minister for the Arts who is cut to the correct Patten. Even their teenage fruit and nutcase of an unofficial assistant is bewildered. She chases one of the assassins in a motorcycle (which she can't ride, naturally) and ends up sending him crashing down an embankment only to find that when the plods arrive he's been dead a week.

By now we are half way through the plot and you need a Kenwood Chef Major to stir it, and it gets more complex and more incredible from then on right to its literal *deus ex machina* ending.

I have to say that this book did not work for me in the way Fowler's recent *Red Bride* did. There are just too many impossible things to believe at any one time — the Metropolitan police just wouldn't let a seventeen year old girl assist them in their inquiries the way Jerry Gates is allowed to attach herself to this investigation. By the end I was left with the impression Fowler didn't really know what manner of book he was writing. What is *Darkest Day*? A comedy horror? A chiller? A spoof? I didn't know. Which is not to say that the book is not highly entertaining — the author has done his research, from the Savoy Operas to Difference Engines, and we get the full benefit — and Fowler writes with his customary crispness and precision.

Although *Darkest Day* does not quite succeed for me, it is a hell of a good read, and at £10.99 is good value.

**Charles L Grant**  
**Raven**

*NEL, 1993, 214pp, £14.99*  
 Reviewed by Martin R Webb

Neil MacClare is an ex-cop running an isolated motel with a restaurant/bar. He knew it would be "one of those nights" from the outset. There are only a few customers and a bar regular, Nester Brandt, in on this cold night. Julie Sanders is serving behind the bar. Willie Ennin is in the kitchen and Neil himself is overseeing things, chatting to the few diners.

Ken Havvick (a local farmer's son) and, Trish Avery, his fiancée share a booth, talking in hushed tones. Ken has just proposed to Trish and she has accepted. Neil supplies them with a free bottle of champagne.

The arrival of minor celebrity, Hugh Davis,

changes the whole mood of the evening. Even under such mediocre circumstances, the reader can feel something is not right. There is an unseen visitor out to make his unwelcome presence known.

The turning point comes when Trish sees a raven, standing outside in the snow watching them. It is after nine on a February night and the bird should be at roost with others of its kind.

Neil has been plagued by a couple of local troublemakers, the Holgate brothers, and when the lights strung out in the trees around his motel/diner start to go out, he immediately suspects them. He goes out into the snow to chase them off, but they're long gone — if it was them.

Soon, a stranger appears, and from the far side of the road, watches the drinkers and diners but makes no move to join them in the warmth. The raven returns, watches and disappears again.

Brandt, too drunk to cycle home and too stubborn to accept one of Neil's vacant rooms, decides to leave, only to be shot dead by the stranger across the road. His dying words are: "I know who he is".

Charles Grant has never struck me as a very effective horror writer, but with *Raven* he has proved his worth. The interaction between the restaurant staff and guests is well planned and keeps one reading. Not to be missed.

**Peter F Hamilton**  
**Mindstar Rising**

*Pan, 1993, 438pp, £4.99*  
 Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

It isn't unusual for characters to express unpopular or distasteful political views without the author being tainted by the same brush. Unfortunately, when several leading characters express identical views, often in identical language, one begins to suspect either a poverty of imagination on the part of the author, or a genuine adherence to these views. In either case, welcome to the New Right.

In 21st century Britain (or England, rather, this book is jingoistic in a very narrow sense) an extreme Socialist government has just been overthrown. As the new conservatives struggle with the mess left behind, a gung-ho industrialist sets out to make England top nation once more. In this he is aided by a psi-booster mercenary, a daughter with a computer-enhanced brain, and a rag-tag army of low-life freedom fighters. As they set out to unravel a series of sabotage attempts which grow into an all-out assault on their military-industrial empire, the book becomes more and more gripping. It is tightly told and dramatic, a real piece of page-turning action-adventure.

But everything around that is questionable to say the least. Every villain is a socialist or a wop. Or, to put it another way, every socialist or wop is a villain. Don't turn to this book to have your liberal sensibilities massaged, they'll be spat on and trampled underfoot. As for the women, even when the viewpoint character is another woman the first thing we are told about any new female character is the



size of her breasts. And despite Hamilton's obvious ability to create fast-paced action, his descriptive writing is lack lustre and at times downright embarrassing.

I have never come closer to throwing a book out of the window in disgust. If this is the brave new voice of British science fiction, I can only say Jerry Pournelle was there 20 years ago and it was pretty awful then.

## Harry Harrison Stainless Steel Visions

Legend, 1993, £14.99hb, £8.99pb  
Reviewed by Michael J Pont

In a recent letter to *Interzone*, a reader noted that, in 60-odd issues of the biggest selling SF magazine in the UK, there had never been a single story by Harry Harrison. In reply, David Pringle (*Interzone*'s editor) suggested that "as with many of the older SF writers he [Harrison] writes few short stories now, and concentrates instead on novels".

Enter *Stainless Steel Visions*, a collection of Harrison's short stories. According to the book's blurb, Harrison is one of the best-known science fiction writers in the world; the cover also reminds the prospective reader that Harrison is responsible for *Bill the Galactic Hero* (and co-author of numerous dreadful sequels): if that doesn't put you off then perhaps this collection is for you?

So what are the stories like? According to Harrison's own introduction: "These stories work. They entertain occasionally amuse, are didactic at times but never, I firmly believe, boring." Well, that's one way of looking at them. There are thirteen stories here, and most — the introduction implies — have previously appeared in old "pulp magazines", and/or in earlier anthologies. We aren't told in any detail when or where this might have been, which is a pity because such information would have added to the interest of what is essentially a reprint collection.

The book opens with 'The streets of Ashkelon', a good traditional SF story — about the disastrous effects of a naive alien culture "getting religion" — but one that will already be familiar to many of the BSFA membership. We also have 'The Mothballed Spaceship', featuring characters from Harrison's *Death-world* trilogy, and — inevitably, given the book's title — a rather predictable *Stainless Steel Rat* story. 'Roommates', a story about an over-populated planet in terminal decline, stands out as the best written entry, though it was spoilt for me by a rather open ending.

To cap it all, the book is illustrated. I can't often see the need for such illustrations, but what I really hate (in the story 'Portrait of the Artist', for example) is where the illustration early on in the story gives away the punch line... In two of the stories this isn't a problem: the illustrations for 'Survival Planet' and 'The Mothballed Space Ship' have been inadvertently switched around, which at least adds a little intrigue. *Stainless Steel Visions* isn't a bad collection of traditional SF stories to curl up with on a wet Sunday afternoon. Harrison's introduction makes interesting reading, and of

course you don't have to look at the illustrations. However, with a little more work on the editorial side, putting the stories in context, and perhaps showing Harrison's development as a writer over his long career, what is presently a jumble of old SF stories could have been made more interesting and appealing.

## Marc Laidlaw Kalifornia

St Martin's Press, 1993, 246pp, \$18.95  
Reviewed by Chris Amies

That's Kalifornia with a K. Baby Calafia gets an assisted birth by electronic *couvade* in a backstreet, is kidnapped by aliens (the Daughters of Kali, a sort of Bene Gesserit only not as pleasant, and who are quite alive enough for me, thanks), and tries to take over the world. The very weird, wired world.

Indeed... Laidlaw's latest is a Swiftian satire on California, cults, the advertising and entertainment industries... mainly of the degeneracy of a modern world that views everything in terms of entertainment and can't see beyond that to more important things. Everyone's wired for sound, vision and sensation, so there is no turning off (though the last action of the book is the turning off of a TV. Story over. Vote with your thumbs). Anyone who wants to break away from this overwrought nightmare has *really* to break away, like joining strange religious cults (I liked the Celestial Mechanics, a cross between *Zen* and *the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and the Church of the SubGenius. They're almost sane.) Even the animals aren't exempt: Cordwainer Smith would have recognised the humanimal hybrids, sealmen (leading to one *vile pun*), dogmen, human roosters, and so on.

In a world as cluttered with referents as that of *Kalifornia*, you have a hard time sorting the signal from the noise. This is *Scratch*: the science-fictional literature of referential excess. The savage bugger hasn't quite chucked in the kitchen sink, although I'm sure you'd find it if you looked through this totally tan tome a few more times, dude. There are more foul puns, strange moments, and just basic Golden State weirdness in here than you could ride your stick at. Earth is an alien planet; you know it makes sense... *not!*

## Ursula K Le Guin Earthsea Revisited

Green Bay, 1993, 266pp, £4.95  
Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Yes, that really is 26 pages for £4.95. Considered in terms of pence per page, this pamphlet is very expensive. It is also very special, both in appearance and content.

In 1992 a children's literature institute with the title 'Worlds apart' was held at Keble College, Oxford. The lecture which is reprinted here was delivered by Ursula Le Guin under the title of 'Children, Men and Dragons', and has now been published by Children's Literature New England, who sponsored the conference. The resulting pamphlet

is beautifully produced, on heavy laid paper with illustrations by Ruth Robbins from *A Wizard of Earthsea*. While it might seem irrelevant to talk about the quality of the paper in a book review, it's good to see a critical work in the fantasy genre being treated with the sort of dignity more often found in mainstream literature.

In her lecture, Ursula Le Guin looks back at the original *Earthsea* trilogy, which she wrote in the late sixties and early seventies, and considers its relation to the recent *Tehanu*. The difference, as far as she is concerned, arises from the growth of the feminist movement and her own developing awareness of it.

Heroic fantasy, she says, is male; the men take an active role, while such women as appear are passive. She considers the contrasting connotations of the words 'hero' and 'heroine'. With this in mind, she analyses the development of *Ged*, and how he has changed from the trilogy to *Tehanu*, in giving up the heroic power of the Archmage, and the corresponding change in Tenar, from the heroine of *the Tombs of Atuan* to her maturity when she becomes the protagonist of a novel whose core is the life of women and not men.

To my relief, Le Guin indulges in no breastbeating over the earlier books. She acknowledges the good things in them, while also acknowledging that her own consciousness and that of her readers has moved on. The result is *Tehanu*. She puts forward the feminist view of a fantasy world without stridency, without hatred, but with wit, elegance and humour. Lovers of the tetralogy should not miss this book, nor will they want to.

Grit your teeth and fork out the liver.

## Rosaleen Love Evolution Annie and Other Stories

Womens Press, 1993, 232pp, £6.99pb.  
Reviewed by Carol Ann Green

*Evolution Annie and Other Stories* is a collection of ten short stories and one novella. They cover a wide variety of subjects, from *Evolution*, Chernobyl, holiness, the mystery of the Piltdown skull and the Myths of the Ancients.

'*Evolution Annie*' is a witty tale told by a diminutive prosimian called Annie which tells the story of how it *really* was when "we first fell out of the trees". Whilst the men roam far and wide looking for adventure, the women stay at home learning "sewing, ropemaking, splicing, basketwork, the practical things of life" from Mother; who also "devised the first alphabet and developed tools and the skill of reasoning."

It is a tale told with a great deal of humour, but it has a serious side to it as well. The men are quick to appropriate Mother's inventions for themselves and claim the credit, echoing the real life situations where women's inventions have been claimed by their husbands, fathers, brothers as their own. 'Evolution Annie' throws a little light on how it *really* was in the beginning.

'Hovering Rock' is an intriguing tale of a rock formation in the Australian Outback, where the uppermost rock seems to float in mid air. Charlie returns to the formation to confirm a memory; it is a story of childhood innocence where strange phenomena are taken for granted, it evokes a strong atmosphere of a long ago innocence.

One of the themes running through the book, is that of holiness; not religion as such, but the actuality of holiness. 'The Heavenly City, Perhaps' is a tongue-in-cheek look at a soul trying to become re-united with its body; the Tootent Venus. The story is told from both points of view. Sarkey the body who knows that there is "one thing different from before, I lack a soul"; and the soul itself trying to find its way out of the Heavenly city; "The Heavenly city? Don't you believe it for one moment. Look at the cracks in the facade, and the places where the glitter is wearing off the streets." In the Heavenly City the souls wonder about the etiquette for talking about the "other place". The picture Love paints is that the Heaven of organised religion isn't all it's made out to be.

'Holiness' deals with two different kinds of faith. The priest Michel's faith in the First People and his belief that he will find their artefacts; and that of Laka the guardian of the First People. Michel believes it is his right to remove the artefacts from their resting place; Laka in the need to preserve the place intact. The priest is buoyed up by his belief in the three great truths — Buddhism, the Catholic Church and Evolution — "I know I am right and that there will be a point in time when these three truths will start their convergence towards the Omega point. It could be here, now, that it is starting to happen." When Michel's beliefs clash with those of the guardian, he finds that there is nothing at the centre but the void and holiness; "He had attained his heart's desire. He hated it."

Love conveys very different styles and themes in well wrought prose, with wit and satire, showing an often very different view of life that makes you look twice. This combined with a unique feminist insight into the world makes this a thoroughly enjoyable collection.

### Paul McAuley Red Dust

Gollancz, 1993, 315pp, £15.99  
Reviewed by Ian Sales

We all know that Mars is *in* this year, although none have treated the planet quite in the same way as McAuley. For one thing there's not an American or Russian in sight...

Five hundred years ago, the US tried to terraform Mars, and failed. The Chinese took over, using Tibetan transcripts, and now the terraforming is beginning to fail. The rulers of Mars are the Ten Thousand Years — a reference to their supposed lifespan, since they spend virtually all their time in virtual reality. In fact, much of Mars' Chinese population spends a lot of its time sleeping in order to construct avatars in a sectioned-off VR, oddly enough called Heaven, to carry their con-

sciousness after their corporeal death; indeed the figurehead Emperor of Mars is an AI in that reality. Meanwhile Earth has fully embraced virtual reality and become a single gestalt machine-based entity.

Wei Lee is an Elvis fan, and grandson of one of Mars' movers and shakers. Whilst working at a small agronomic community, he becomes involved in the rescue of a crashed pilot from the (US-dominated) Asteroid Belt. Suffice to say that this pilot is no mere unfortunate but an *agent provocateur*, and Wei Lee becomes sucked into a rebellion to destroy the Martian government. From there it's a helter-skelter chase across the planet. Along the way, he becomes trapped in a hidden Tibetan monastery that survived the government purges, escapes and joins a Tibetan yak herd as a cowboy, before arriving in Xin Beijing, Mars' capital. From Xin Beijing, Wei Lee heads by canal for Mount Olympus (here called Tiger Mountain), and meets the Free Yankee Nation on the Plain of Heaven dust sea, before *Red Dust's* final *dénouement*.

It comes as little surprise to find out that Wei Lee was deliberately chosen for the task he has been asked to undertake by Elvis, an avatar of an AI probe in Jupiter's atmosphere. It is equally unsurprising that all the characters he meets (bar a few) are also actively involved in, or against, the rebellion and know of Wei Lee's role.

What's original about *Red Dust*? Filtering the narrative through a Chinese world-view has certainly been done before. Having the population of Earth as a single gestalt mind has been done before. Putting government in the hands of AIs? Been done before. Certain portions of the book remind me of 2000AD's 'the ABC Warriors' comic strip (also set on Mars). But then there are no new ideas in SF... And McAuley has certainly put a spin on most of them.

On the plus side, McAuley is extremely good at ideas. His scientific background gives him the confidence and ability to play with

cutting edge science and technology. He's a dab hand at characterisation; his prose is polished without being pyrotechnic. If he has a fault it is that he's weak at evoking place — the Mars of *Red Dust* could just as easily have been an invented world (and yes, because of the changes he's wrought, it is in part). You expect the Red Planet to be a major character in the story and it isn't. But this is a minor criticism.

However, there is still plenty that is original and imaginative in *Red Dust*. Wei Lee runs across bizarre societies, interesting characters, and set pieces against a backdrop reeking of sensawunda during his adventures.

*Red Dust* is an imaginative Mars book. It's well-written, it's entertaining, it's even thought-provoking in parts. Recommended.

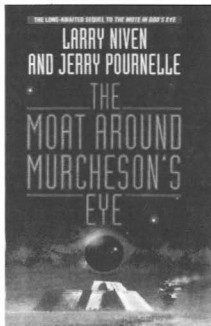
### Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle The Moat Around Murcheson's Eye

HarperCollins 1993, 401pp £14.99  
Reviewed by Alan Johnson

**The Moat around Murcheson's Eye** is the belated sequel to *The Mote in God's Eye*, published in 1974, which was one of the best thought-out first contact books written, portraying an *alien* race and slowly revealing their capabilities along with the science and sociology of this first sentient contact. The original closed with the Moties being blockaded inside their own star system by The Empire of Man because of their inability to control their own population, which threatened to overrun the galaxy should they escape.

*The Moat around Murcheson's Eye* (I much prefer the American title *The Gripping Hand*), begins nearly thirty years on; Horace Bury and Kevin Renner who have spent their time helping to stabilise the political status quo in the Empire, get an indication that the Moties may have broken out. This turns out to be mistaken, but starts a series of events which lead to an investigation of the blockade fleet. The result is an emergency expedition to block a new route from the Mote system, and re-establish contact with the Moties. The subsequent negotiations and conflicts lead to the resolution of the problem.

*The Mote in God's Eye* was one of my favourite novels when it appeared, and I looked forward to this sequel with anticipation. I was disappointed when I finished and was uncertain why. The book is a little slow at times and the writing functional rather than inspirational, but that was not the reason. The Moties were a brilliant creation nearly twenty years ago, but the expectations of a modern audience are higher. The depiction of a space faring species with such a grasp of physical science and technology, yet having such an apparent lack of significant biosciences appears to be a writers' whim rather than to have a logical basis. The other problem is that the attraction of *The Mote in God's Eye* was that it was a *First Contact* novel, Second Contact by definition, must lead to a degree of familiarity, and therefore remove some of the



sense of wonder. On the positive side, I enjoyed the book whilst I read it, but it reminded me of a Chinese takeaway, a pleasurable experience, but ultimately unsatisfying.

## Terry Pratchett Only You Can Save Mankind

*Doubleday, 1992, 173pp, £9.99*

Reviewed by Jessica Yates

This is not the first children's SF/Fantasy in which a youngster finds his computer game turning into reality, but it's only the second book Terry Pratchett has published where humans living in today's world share main character status with supernatural or alien beings (the first being *Good Omens*).

Pratchett has come to writing for children circuitously. After *The Carpet people*, his first book, which has affinities with *The Hobbit*, he wrote SF for adults, and then unintentionally developed a teenage audience of Discworld fans, finally, deliberately writing books for a children's publisher, the Trunkers trilogy.

**Only You Can Save Mankind** may be seen as a book for children younger than the Discworld fans; it is certainly an attempt to get down and write about real children, disadvantaged ones at that. Wobblers is a fat nerd and computer genius, Bigrac lives in "Rottweiler Heights", Yo-less is black and never says "Yo", and Kirsty is a computer whiz despite being a girl.

The hero is Johnny, whose parents are on the point of splitting up. Miserably he takes refuge in computer games. Absorbed in liquidating the alien fleet in a new game, he sees a message on the screen: "We do not wish to die! We wish to talk!" Next day it happens again, and he types in "OK yes" — but that was the easy bit. Copies of the game are in circulation, and the fleet is vulnerable to any game-player, while Johnny has now taken on the responsibility of protecting it.

At night Johnny dreams he is in a real space-ship, communicating with the aliens and defending them against Earthing attacks, while the female alien Captain insists that they have surrendered and must not fight back. Once Johnny's friends join him in the dream, but his strongest ally turns out to be a girl, whose fantasies about **Aliens** modify the form of the ship and the alien gamers from Johnny's original, fairly peaceful concept, especially when they confront the Gunner officer who rejects the Captain's authority and wants to go down fighting.

The book's message seemed obvious to me: don't confuse games about conflict with real conflict which is not a game. As the story proceeds there are occasional references to the Gulf War, which is being reported on television. Johnny asks, "How can you be the good guys if you're dropping clever bombs right down people's chimneys?" And blowing people up just because they're being bossed around by a loony? The adults around them confuse games and war by sitting down to watch the Gulf War on television as entertainment; Johnny saves Bigrac's life by stopping him from going "joyriding" in a stolen car.

To sum up, I felt that Terry Pratchett's preacher's hat was very firmly on while he wrote **Only You Can Save Mankind**. Young people might not notice this as much as adult readers, but I wonder if the pill has been sufficiently sugared.

## Bruce Sterling The Hacker Crackdown

*Viking, 1993, 328pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Ian Sales

On March 1 1990, the US Secret Service raided Steve Jackson Games, a middle-sized role-playing games publisher, and confiscated all their computers, software, and the data held on the computers. When Steve Jackson tried to find out why, he was told that the new supplement for their Generic Universal Role Playing System (GURPS), called 'Cyberpunk' and detailing gaming in that milieu, was "a manual for computer crime". Bruce Sterling knew Steve Jackson, and heard about this. The Secret Service were confiscating cyber-punk books? Perhaps he was next — Sterling is, after all, the author most often identified as the head of the cyberpunk "movement". The more Sterling found out about the raid on SJG, the more he realised that here was a story that needed to be told. **The Hacker Crackdown** is ostensibly that story.

I say "ostensibly", because Sterling has not just written a book about the so-called cyber-punk Bust. **The Hacker Crackdown** Springboards from the SJG raid through operation Sundevil (the Crackdown of the title) to the ethics of hacking, the constitutional rights involved in trading information electronically, and the US federal apparatus for controlling "cyberspace".

The book is organised into four sections. The first, 'Crashing The System', Focuses on the Martin Luther King Day (ie, Jan 15th) Crash of 1990 when a sizeable chunk of the US telephone network fell over as a result of a software bug. In much the same way as the trial of Paul Bedworth galvanised the media in this country, this event brought to light (once again) the very real threat of hackers and phone phreaks. Sterling gives us a brief history of the American telephone system to set the practice of phreaking and the Crash in context.

The next section, 'The Digital Underground', is about hackers — although it mostly details the depredations of the Legion of Doom. Some hackers Sterling obviously identifies with; others are petty, mean, and deserved everything they got. He also remarks on their tendency to boast, strut, brag, and sing like canaries when caught. Hackers do not come out smelling of roses by any means.

'Law and order' tells the other side of the story, is from the point of view of the federal bodies and law enforcement agencies involved in the Hacker Crackdown, and policing of the "electronic frontier". This section does exude a faint whiff of *Rosencrue*.

The final section is 'The Civil Libertarians', and this is where Sterling is at his most polemic. One of the most important events

discussed in the book is the trial of Knight Lightning, editor of the electronic magazine **Phrack**, for publishing a document stolen from Bell on administration of the 911 system — this document is reprinted in full and is remarkable for both its opaque bureaucratic and total uselessness to anyone wanting to crash the emergency phone network. That Sterling identifies with the aims of the civil libertarians he interviews is obvious: the book ends on adoring note when Bruce visits the 'Computers, Freedom and Privacy' conference and waxes lyrical about the movers and shakers present.

If there is one thing that comes across from this book is that it's so... American. And that's not meant as an insult. It's simply that the major players in the book exhibit attitudes that are foreign to British readers. The emphasis is also on the infrastructure and hardware of US IT and right of access to those facilities, rather than, as in this country, on the data held on computers and the threats posed by inaccuracy or misuse of that data. This American-ness is further heightened by Sterling's Yank hip street-smart reporting style.

On the whole, **The Hacker Crackdown** is entertaining and informative — Sterling has done his homework, and presents his findings in a readable manner. After reading around on the subject, I found little that was categorically inaccurate — although a quote from management guru Tom Peters that was taken out of context does make me a little suspicious... Highly recommended (although why does he insist on calling role playing games "simulation games"?)

## Roger Taylor Farnor

*Headline, 1993, 566pp, £5.99pb*

**Valderen**

*Headline, 1993, 343pp, £16.99hb*

These two books by a British author I had not come across before, together tell a story which other writers might have stretched into more volumes. Which is not to say that Taylor is sparing with his prose. The first volume is just under six hundred pages long.

The prosperous farming community in the valley is self-contained and has been so for generations. Every year at Dalmastide tithes are gathered in, only to be sold three days later as the King's men have yet again failed to collect. This year however, young Farnor Yarrance spots a troop of "soldiers", in fact beaten and dispirited mercenaries, who quarter in the disused castle on the edge of the valley to recuperate, and who cannot believe their luck when they are mistaken for the Dalmastide tax gatherers. Having recently lost their leader, a practitioner of Power, the bandits soon fall under the influence of the local black sheep, a novice Power wielder called Rannick, whose family is reputed to be "tainted". Unknown to him Farnor is also an undeveloped Power user and has been in rapport with the evil being that is savaging the sheep. And Farnor is a good guy — you can guess the rest.

Although best read together, the split between the two volumes is logical, with a pyrotechnical climax and flight from further danger at the end of **Farnor** and the introduction of completely new characters in **Valderen**. The development of the central character from callow youth through obsessive vengefulness to mature acceptance and forgiveness is well charted. The limited experience of self-sufficient communities is portrayed accurately and the clash of cultures when he flies north to the territory of the equally isolated Valderen is particularly well done. The attitudes of a tree-dwelling society have been carefully thought through, and there are some amusing scenes arising out of linguistic and behavioral misunderstandings.

Rannick, the bad boy who is going to show them all some day, is almost completely a stereotype. We see little in the way of redeeming features. Yet his vision is also realistically blinkered. Domination of the valley and its immediate environs is the limit of his ambitions.

The few women characters are strong and capable. Marna, whose mother died when she was young, is predictably a tomboy, but she has more gumption than many in the valley, and can fight effectively when cornered. Uldaneth, the mysterious old teacher who wanders Gandalf-like through the forest, can defend herself from a young man with a staff. And two of the four genuine soldiers who eventually come seeking the mercenaries are women.

The men are the usual mixture of stock characters, with a little something added. There is the widower whose life revolves around his daughter, the hen-pecked husband, the wise old village elder who has strange carvings on his door-knocker (we never do find out their significance), the mercenary captain who knows a golden opportunity when he sees it and also when to submit to a stronger leader. Yet we sympathise with their initial confusion, and admire their eventual bravery.

As is often the case in fantasy, I was disappointed in the final showdown. It takes place in a darkened cave and lacks a real sense of struggle. After all, Rannick had been practising. He had controlled an army of strong, fighting men and had subjugated a whole community. All Farnor had done was talk to trees. His fight with the death with the evil creature immediately beforehand was far more vivid and believable.

I would not normally spend money on this type of story, but I have to admit it was better than I expected, with some excellent twists. As you would expect from a European writer, the different communities have very different cultures. Fans of High fantasy will probably enjoy it. It certainly made a few train journeys pass quite pleasantly.

## Sheri S Tepper Sideshow

HarperCollins, 1993, 466pp, £8.99 pb  
Reviewed by Norman Beswick

Once a writer of children's stories and fantasies, Sheri Tepper has developed her own distinctive brand of socially aware adult

novels set on carefully imagined planets with well-populated plots. SF devices like transmitter cubes and Doors co-exist happily with quests and (if necessary) dragons. Her communities (and the churches within them) compete and clash, oppress and deceive, and individual characters struggle to make sense of their lives within or beyond them. Look again, she says, don't take it all for granted, be angry, be You: and she twists the plots about to nudge us into surprise.

No Tepper story lacks contemporary relevance and **Sideshow** actually begins on Earth, and very bizarrely, before propelling us and two of its characters several millennia forward (with quick hints at two of the author's other stories) to the planet Elsewhere, at the far end of the galaxy. Elsewhere when we see it was settled a thousand years previously, by humans whose one unifying principle was the maintenance of Diversity against the supposed threat of enslavement by the Hobbs Land Gods, dominant on other human planets. (Does that sound familiar?)

So each nation on Elsewhere has its own (often repellent) laws and customs, which for the sake of Diversity must never change; highly trained Enforcers stand by. From time to time, the Great Question about the destiny of mankind is ceremonially posed. Meanwhile the mind-patterns of the original founders remain secretly embedded in the core of a massive central computer which spies on everybody, gives orders and has begun to behave in an increasingly disturbed and violent manner.

A motley band of investigators, including Enforcers Danivon Luze and Fringe Owdark, and twentieth-century Siamese twins Nela and Bertram, are dispatched to investigate rumors of dragons, and perhaps the arrival of the dreaded Hobbs land Gods themselves. We follow their journeys, watch their reactions, share their bewilderment. They masquerade as travelling entertainers, they run into problems with chimi-hounds and Mother-dears, they quarrel and misunderstand one another. A mysterious aged couple, Jory and Asner, who intervened briefly at earlier points in the story, join them en route. At the same time, we are keeping up with many other plot-lines, concerning among others Boarmus the Provost, retired Enforcer Zasparr Enrigon, the box-like dinka-jins who have eschewed the flesh, and two sets of aliens: Celerians (so-called because they resemble a stick of celery), and the Arbai (who created the Doors and were thought to be long extinct).

The story builds up to an expected grand climax that (unlike heroic fantasies) never quite happens: Tepper has many plot lines going but sorts them out severely, using widely different individuals and groups, some of them quite minor, and although it all makes intellectual sense, after the exciting build-up I had an odd feeling of *cotus reservatus*. The likeable Fringe Owdark makes a surprising but acceptable decision; you can guess what happens to the founders in the core; most others come to terms with what transpires in appropriate ways; the Great Question is

resolved, and exchanged for a new one.

Readers of **Raising the Stones** will know what to expect of the Hobbs Land Gods, though readers of **Grass** may be surprised when they find out who Jory is. And that's it: I wished Tepper had taken another look at the last fifty pages.

See what you think. I still enjoyed the novel thoroughly: nothing routine, no boring old formulae, plenty of surprises and good fun and a sharp, satiric and of course feminist eye. I look forward to reading it again, very soon. It's that sort of book.

## Peter Tremayne Aisling: and Other Irish Tales of Terror

Brandon, 1993, 256pp, £12.99  
Reviewed by David V Barrett

Prostitution and espionage claim to be the oldest professions. Nonsense. Storytelling reduces both to mere infants. From the moment our most primitive ancestors came up with the idea of speech they told stories to each other. Stories of warning or instruction or encouragement; stories with a moral message; stories to make the Sun and Moon, the seasons and the weather, the death and rebirth of crops, and the death and rebirth of individual people, understandable and manageable and not quite so frightening.

Myths and legends, folktales and superstitions: all different levels of much the same thing. Gods, heroes and putting out milk and biscuits for the Little People. Each country, each region, each tribe, came up with its own stories, but at their heart they're the same everywhere, told by village elders, shamans, bards and *seanchaí* around the communal fire. By the last century many of these tales had been watered down into fairy stories, to be read by parents to their children as they tucked them in. Others transmuted into ghost stories. In this century they have spawned countless myth-based epic fantasy trilogies and tacky splatter-gore horror novels.

The best of the tales, told by a good storyteller, still have the power to awe their listeners, to send a shiver down their spines. It is no coincidence that fiction-writer Peter Tremayne is also historian Peter Berresford Ellis, that the author of these tales of terror not only writes fantasy novels but is also the author of **A Dictionary of Irish Mythology**. He knows his material.

Many of the tales in this volume are set in the present day, but Tremayne has woven into them aspects of Irish history, mythology and folklore still deep in the hearts of the Irish people. He uses all the familiar tropes and tricks of tale-telling; several, for example, contain a story within a story -- a letter discovered under a flagstone in a fireplace, a tale told to a priest in a confessional, or by an old and wizened local to a young visitor -- a traditional device to allow immediacy and authenticity.

These are 'tales of terror', and for the people trapped within them they are terrifying beyond all possibility: the mother losing her child's soul to the *Taibhse Dearg*, the red

bogeyman, at samhain; the priest caught between the rules of his calling and the lusts of his body, haunted by an *aisling*, a true vision, of a priest hanging himself; the unfaithful husband discovering that his *púca*, an imp-like good-luck charm, carries a curse on him; the re-enactment of evil from the past engulfing an innocent person from today, with the awful realisation that today is a pagan festival, or the exact anniversary of the last terrible occurrence.

But for the reader the tales are not so much frightening as frighteningly familiar; indeed, the reader often knows the ending long before realisation hits the hapless victim, but instead of this being disappointing, it heightens the atmosphere. We, the readers, are equally helpless to intervene, unable to help, impotent; we are trapped in the awe-full, ancient tale of terror just as much as the characters are. And this is all the worse because, even if we have never heard of the *Gallán na Maírbh*, the deathstone, or the *bean sídhe*, the banshee, or the *Daoine Dornhain*, the terrible Deep Ones of the sea, we know the stories, we recognise their truth, and we acknowledge that an ancient debt must be repaid, an ancient injustice calls for retribution, an ancient brutal, bloody murder demands its own satisfaction. We know that the ghosts of the dead will not lie still; we know that the fairfolk are not pretty gossamer-winged fairies but have their own cruel morality; and we know, deep inside, that the old gods are more powerful than the new, that they have not been destroyed, that they are waiting, waiting, waiting...

We know, for these are the tales told by our ancestors long ago; they are deep in our blood and bones. Whether you call them fairytales or ghost stories or folklore or mythology, Tremayne's stories will resonate for anyone with a drop of Irish blood in their veins.

### Paul Voermans The Weird Colonial Boy *Gollancz, 1993, 302pp, £15.99* Reviewed by K V Bailey

It would seem that Paul Voermans is attempting two things; to write a realistic story, involving brutality, torture and rape, set in a prison camp modelled on those of early colonial Australia; and to write a surrealist hallucinatory-psychological novel, sensitive in terms of empathic relationships and in overall temper upbeat. They are merged within a bizarrely science-fictional framework. Emotionally immature protagonist Nigel Donahoe, whose strongest passion is for tropical fish, follows a mutating and disappearing swordtail through 'the hole [it] had created in space' to pass from a Melbourne suburb into an alternative, yet contemporary, world where King Rupert rules in Britain and Botany Bay still receives its cargoes of convicts — Nigel soon finding himself among them. In what he comes to recognise as a 'two-way universe', he frequently has mirage-like glimpses of the parallel Melbourne he had left. His worst punishments are incurred by a growing love

for Catherine, the sister of Todd, his sadistic chief persecutor. This is all a toughening and transforming experience for Nigel, who eventually leads a bushranger rebellion to attempt the establishment of an anarchically liberated 'republic of silliness'. During a final showdown with Todd, 'two-universe' mirages increase and eventually draw him 'back' into 'real' Australia. Although he fails to take Catherine with him, he finds her *alter ego* in a Melbourne café and his strangely acquired purposiveness urges him towards possibilities, hedonistic and idealistic, in a world formerly seeming barren.

Thus, to some extent this is an initiatory or 'rite of passage' story, and a certain symbolism inheres in the two main characters who spur Nigel's progress and activations: Catherine as *eros* and the aptly named Todd as *thanatos*. My necessarily penny-plain plot outline can't convey how baroque — fashionable word — is its presentation. The rebels' raids, carried out by a kind of roadshow of the absurd, aim to overwhelm by shock and surprise, with inflatable suits and marshmallows guns. One fault of the novel is that this phantasmagoria is lengthily overplayed, though leavened by beautifully idyllic interludes in mountain hide-outs. Realism and the grotesque intertense even in less extravagant parts of the narrative — sometimes to almost Dickensian effect: 'The station doctor and priest [was] a bald bearded man shaped as much like a duck as it's possible to be and remain human'. Read it for such pleasures and to discover the humane face peering through masks of horror, horseplay and irony.

### Collin Webber Merlin and the Last Trump *Gollancz, 1993, 269pp, £14.99* Reviewed by Andy Mills

**Merlin and the Last Trump** was a semi-finalist in the BBC Radio 4 Bookshelf/Gollancz First Fantasy Competition.

I know this because it's written on the front of the dustjacket.

And on the back.

And on the inside back.

The dustjacket's zany cover painting tells me **Merlin and the Last Trump** is a Comic Novel. The dustjacket's blurb tells me the book is a 'colourful and chaotic romp through history'.

The dustjacket also has the obligatory Comic Novelist's biography.

So, you say, here we have a Comic Novel.

'Fraid not, folks. Here we have proof that there's truth in the old adage that one should not judge a book by its cover. And, on the evidence presented by it, have a suspicion that the aforementioned Competition may be the literary equivalent of the Zenith Data Systems Trophy rather than the FA Cup.

Collin Webber tries ever so hard to be Terry Pratchett. The scenario is a promising one, with Merlin and Sir Griswold travelling through time to find James Dimmot of the twentieth century, who is needed to save Mankind. Unfortunately the treatment gives

us a book which, to put it simply, isn't funny. Which, considering it's supposed to be a Comic Novel, is something of a handicap. To be fair, there is one genuinely witty episode. In Chapter 15 Griswold, Knight of the Round Table, opens a can of Ruddleds bitter. But that's more or less your lot. What we do get is a lot of twaddle about Wishing being a potent force in the universe and about how Merlin is trying to save Mankind from the Forces of Darkness — principally, it seems, through the medium of awful poetry. But just to demonstrate that it isn't only the poetry which can be awful, here's the part where Merlin is explaining to Dimmot why the poetry has to be programmed into Man:

"It is all down to programming. Man's destiny will finally be controlled by that which can control the Mind of Man by such programming. Even now the fight for supreme control over the Mind of Man has begun, and that Mind is the goal, the prize... and the battleground."

If you want humour, stick to reading the Conservative Party's election manifesto.

### Steven Weinberg Dreams of a Final Theory *Hutchinson Radius, 1993, 260pp, £16.99* Reviewed by Stephen Baxter

The Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) is taking shape under a wheat field in Ellis County, Texas. In a 53-mile-long-tunnel, protons will smash together with such high energies that fundamental forces will be unified.

That's the vision, anyway, pending Congressional approval; a snip at eight billion dollars, the SSC is among the Biggest of the current Big Science projects.

Nobel Prize Winner Steven Weinberg is heavily involved in the campaign to fund the SSC. In fact he got his Nobel Prize for studying the unification of the electromagnetic and weak forces, which is precisely what the SSC is about. So it's maybe no surprise that his new book **Dreams of a Final Theory** may as well be renamed 'Dreams of a Super Collider', so absorbed is it with the SSC case. But if you can put aside the feeling that you're being sold something you'll find this book a smooth and engaging read.

Weinberg opens by setting out the idea of a Final Theory. To see what this means, we first need to understand the limitations of that 'Final'. It turns out (only) to be about fundamental physics, and would not represent the End of Science — complexity phenomena, for example, would remain to fuel many a thesis and T-shirt. But a Final Theory should 'explain' all other theories of physics — much as Kepler's empirical laws of planetary motion were 'explained' by Newton's laws of gravitation.

Well, perhaps, but what do we mean by 'explain'?

Thanks to quantum mechanics and relativity (set out by Weinberg in clear and gripping language) matter has lost its central role in our scientific thinking, to be replaced by principles of symmetry. And these principles

are seen as the fundamental 'explanations' by modern scientists. It seems common sense, for instance, that there is a symmetry between one universe containing stationary stars and a rotating merry-go-round, and a second universe of circulating stars and a stationary merry-go-round. (Think about it. How could you tell the difference?) But in the second case, the feeling of centrifugal force for the merry-go-round riders would have to be provided by the gravity field of the rotating stars.

And yet you need General Relativity, just for this simple principle to work (matter currents generate magnetic fields). And so, (in Weinberg's words) 'the symmetry between different frames of reference requires the existence of gravitation'. (I love sentences like that.)

In the same way, Weinberg shows us, symmetry principles (some a bit more subtle) underlie modern theories of the other fundamental forces of physics, as well as theories of their unification into (perhaps) a single, underlying superforce.

The problem for particle physicists is that in our every day world, many of these symmetries are broken — unification only happens at immensely high energies. So, to study unification — and to winnow out the current crop of promising Final Theory candidates, such as string theory (of which there are so many plausible variants we can't even count them) — we have to study particles and collisions at very high energies.

Which is why we need the SSC. Isn't it?

Well, the SSC will unify the electromagnetic and weak forces. But the trouble is, as Weinberg is honest enough to admit, the Planck energy — at which all forces are unified — is a hundred trillion times higher than the energies available in the SSC. So, given these limitations, should we spend our money on the SSC?

Even self-confessed fans of Big Science (like me) find it reasonable to ask for cost-benefit justifications of projects like this. But the costs are much easier to assess than the benefits. After all, not even the physicists know what the answers provided by the SSC are going to be and where they will lead (in a way, that's the whole point). And, in the absence of hard fact, it's easy to let emotion sway the argument — for instance in at least two places Weinberg presents the frustration of people in the field as a justification for the project ('without the SSC we shall lose a generation of high-energy physicists who will have to do their research in Europe or Japan' (p219) - poor lambs!).

My own feeling is that it may be cosmology which leads us to the Final Theory. When it was just one ten-billionth of a second old, the universe was so small that particle physics and cosmology were the same subject. So it may be by studying the relics of the Big Bang, rather than by trying to recreate it in SSCs, that we will unearth the truth.

I'm glad, though, that I don't have to make the agonising decision about the SSC.

Among us fans of pop science, Weinberg

made his name with the legendary **The First Three Minutes** (Basic Books 1977), which opened the eyes of a generation to the wonders of the Big Bang and its immediate aftermath. Weinberg's style — based on pop historians, he says — mixes argument, background and personal anecdote in a pleasing mixture.

Weinberg has neither Hawking's eye for the Einsteinian phrase, nor does he provide us with the raw theoretical meat of (say) a Barrow. But on the other hand he does, enjoyably, say what he thinks — some anti-reductionists 'at the nuttiest extreme' have 'holistics in their heads' for instance.

'Dreams', then doesn't make an unanswerable case (for me) for the SSC; it isn't a definitive account of the quest for the Final Theory (try Barrow's **Theories of Everything** (OUP 1991) for comparison); and it isn't as good, in its subject area, as **The First Three Minutes**. But it's well-written, highly personal, and never less than readable and entertaining; and it contains plenty of nuggets of surprise.

### Tad Williams To Green Angel Tower *Legend, 1993, 1083pp, £16.99* Reviewed by Barbara Davies

Those who enjoyed the previous volumes of the **Memory, Sorrow and Thorn** fantasy trilogy will have been waiting avidly for the final volume. Here it is at last — all 60 chapters of it! Williams received over a quarter of a million pounds for the UK and Commonwealth rights to the trilogy, and he seems to have earned his money by the sheer word count alone!

**To Green Angel Tower** picks up where **Stone Of Farewell** left off. Once again we meet Simon, the 'mooncalf' kitchen boy, and Princess Miramele, daughter of the misguided High King Elias. Miramele is stranded in mid sea voyage, betrothed to a man she hates, and Simon and his friends are awaiting a huge battle at the Stone of Farewell. Characters introduced in the previous volume now come into their own: Tiamak the solitary marsh man, who always wanted to be a scrollbearer like his idol, Dr Morgenes, and the huge but strangely simple knight, Camaris.

The Storm King, Ineluki, and Norn Queen, Utuk'ku — aided by Elias and his sinister priest, Pryrates — are readying their forces for the final battle. Prince Josua and his allies are desperately trying to stop the Storm King, but are hampered by lack of knowledge since Pryrates had Dr Morgenes and his fellow Scrollbearers killed. Of the three swords of power, only Bright-Nail remains to be found. What is the significance of the swords and can they be used to defeat the Storm King, and who is Camaris really? In the seas the Kilpa — marine creatures — are attacking ships, and in the marshes the Ghants — chitinous live creatures — are attacking the marsh men. Are these attacks linked to Ineluki's attempts at world domination?

There are battles galore as Josua and his allies attempt to defeat Elias' forces, and to

return to the Hayholt for the final confrontation. Simon, Miramele and their friends go through numerous perils — being captured and escaping several times — before most of them, but not all, reach the happy ending.

Williams' prose is easy to read and makes you want to keep turning the pages. There is a cast of characters at the back in case you get lost — which I did once or twice. I found the consistent switching between plot threads and characters rather confusing at times, due to the sheer quantity of different things going on at once. In fact, I could have done with a little less plot. Was it really necessary or even credible for Simon and Miramele to be captured and then escape so many times?

Although in theory you don't have to read the two preceding volumes — because a synopsis of both **The Dragonbone Chair** and **The Stone of Farewell** is provided at the start of **To Green Angel Tower** — I would recommend that you do. Otherwise, it may be difficult to appreciate fully the culmination of this monster of a story (Williams himself refers to it as "the Bloated Epic" in his author's note!) In some ways, this is both the most and least satisfying volume of the trilogy — the most satisfying because at long last all of the dangling threads have been tied up, and the least satisfying precisely because there are so many protagonists and so many threads to follow. At times, the sheer immensity and complexity of the plot is overwhelming.

The author also says in his note that this is "The Story That Ate My Life". As far as I'm concerned this is **The Story That Ate Last Week And Left Me In A State Of Utter Exhaustion!** Recommended to fantasy lovers.



# BARBED WIRE Kisses

Edited by  
Maureen Speller

Every now and then, it is worth recalling that the novel is something of a Johnny-come-lately to the SF genre. The genre was founded on pulp magazines and the short story form, something we would do well to remember. Publishers may tell us that short stories don't sell, that novels are what people really want to read; whether or not this is true, I don't know, but I do know that to write novels and to write short stories involves two entirely different skills and that not all authors possess both. Some things are better said briefly and left to grow in the reader's imagination, rather than being spelt out in an orgy of descriptive riches. This is especially true of SF, a literature as much of ideas as of description. During the last three months, a couple of particularly striking illustrations of this fact have emerged from the US digest magazines.

Mary Rosenblum and Kristine Kathryn Rusch are both well-known as short story writers. Rosenblum has produced a remarkable series known as the Drylands stories, set in a near future, drought-stricken America. In almost Steinbeckian terms, she describes grinding poverty, the desperate struggle to afford the water necessary for irrigating crops, the perpetual worry for crops not yet harvested and sold, the constant fear that the water companies will raise their prices again. The stoicism of her characters can be terrifying in its passivity, as can be their rigid rejection of the new, the unknown, as though they aren't, for a single moment, divert their attention from survival, in case the fragile edifice of their world comes crashing down. Escape and failure are powerful themes within her stories, shot through with an appreciation of the need for a little magic in life.

I eagerly awaited Rosenblum's first novel, only to be deeply disappointed. Gone was the concise power of her writing, diluted by a trite Western plot about bad men stealing water,

laying false blame and being thwarted by the man in the white hat. However, her new novella, 'Stairway', in May's *Asimov's*, brings her back to something approaching top form as she explores another aspect of the Drylands milieu, joining an ocean-borne caravan of icebergs being towed up from Antarctica. While she once again catches the dilemma of ordinary people just struggling to survive, Zachary, who can foretell the future, and Escher, who has lost his memory, don't possess the same intense will to exist as do their inland counterparts, at least not yet. I also admit to having doubts about the feasibility of towing icebergs to America if the ice-caps are melting, but let us put that aside. Despite the views of a vocal minority I don't believe that a science fiction story stands and falls purely by its grasp of science. Rosenblum is writing about people..

So is Kristine Kathryn Rusch, another writer of wonderful short stories.. Again, she took the seemingly approved career path, from short story writer to novelist. Frankly, I found it difficult to believe that the writer of 'The Gallery of His Dreams', about Matthew Brady the American Civil War photographer, could have been the author of *White Mists of Power and Heart-readers*. These novels contain passages which it wouldn't have taxed the ingenuity of a clever ten-year-old to write while the plot, in places, was so thin as to be transparent. Occasional flashes of brilliance hinted that more might have been achieved but it was with relief that I read 'Sinner-Saints' in May's *Fantasy and Science Fiction* and found her also back on form, with a neat study of betrayal and compromise as Senator Lillian Alimony reviews her relationship with Dashiell Hammett and incidentally reflects on the Communist witch-hunt..

Having noted that Rosenblum and Rusch have not lost their ability to turn out a solid, well-written story, their latest offerings, though enjoyable, still seem a little tame. Rosenblum has ventured outside the Drylands, though with less

success, but there is surely only so much to be said about drought diluted with magic realism. She will be contributing a non-Drylands story to the next issue of *F&SF*, so let us wait and judge. By the same token, much as I sometimes enjoy SF which uses historical figures, it seems as if half the SF community is currently plundering every available biographical dictionary, looking for suitable icons. The results are shall we say, variable.

Take, for example, Mike Resnick's 'Mwalimu in the Squared Circle' (March, *Asimov's*). Based on a true incident, when Idi Amin offered to fight Tanzania's Julius Nyerere in the ring to settle an escalating boundary dispute, Resnick attempts to show what? The story is a meditation, from Nyerere's point of view, as he prepares himself to be pisted by the younger man. Much mouthing of platitudes goes on but all I can see is a premise so fragile it should have remained a jotting in the writer's notebook. What makes the story more laughable is that in the very next issue of *Asimov's*, Lucius Shepard turns in a story about boxing and the fear of loss, 'Beast of the Heartland', and does get to the heart of what it is to recognise failure in oneself and to summon that final effort.

Lisa Goldstein and R Garcia y Robertson also resort to the historical, Garcia y Robertson with a harrowing but over-long story, 'The Other Maggie', about a Native American girl who is supposed to defend her brother's death but spends a lot of time looking for George Custer. Goldstein tackles Sir Walter Raleigh, on his last journey to look for El Dorado. Scholars will know that Wait, whatever Bob Newhart may think, did not have a good time after Elizabeth died and Goldstein's Raleigh confronts his failure and forthcoming death with the dignity of the aging courtier. Pat Murphy disappears into the historical Wild West again with another of her series of werewolf stories. It's a good story, I won't deny it, but how much mileage is there in Western werewolves? I don't think I'm sticking my neck out especially if I predict that werewolves are the coming thing in fiction, now that the glut of vampires is starting to clot.

In the May issue of *F&SF*, it's noted that *often* science fiction takes a larger-than-life view of changes that may occur in the future when some of the most vast changes could occur in *ordinary circumstances*. The story to which this grammatically cakewalk statement is appended is Mark W Tiedemann's 'The Playground Door', an examination of the consequences of an older man's decision to put himself into suspended animation for thirty years. Much has been written about the opportunities afforded by the rapidly developing cryonic sciences; remedies for incurable diseases, a crack at immortality, but little has been written about the human angle. If we are honest, more than one of us has heaved a sigh of relief when a demanding or cantankerous relative has finally died, at last giving us the opportunity to square up to life on our own terms. The son in this story can't do that. Instead, he knows that for thirty years he will be waiting for the moment when he has to offer up his life for inspection

once again, all the time living in his father's house, stripped of his own identity. The ultimate tragedy is in his inability to express this apprehension, and its effect on his family.

Nancy Kress attempted to do something similar in 'Martin on a Wednesday' (March, Asimov's) but missed the mark. Her premise was ingenious. In cases of multiple personalities, it is known that the likes, dislikes, allergies even, of one personality, are not always manifested in the other personalities, in which case, wouldn't it be possible to induce another character to cure a person of, say, cancer. This is what has happened to Martin. His new dominant personality is a psychotic and on to this character are layered other, gentler personalities. The story explores Martin's turmoil as the psychotic character re-emerges. Nice idea but it doesn't quite work, perhaps because one doesn't trust the motives of the characters. Or perhaps it is because the artist chose, for unfathomable reasons, to illustrate the story with pictures of David Byrne of Talking Heads, perhaps in homage to his White Suit persona, but it's very distracting.

'The Playground Door' was, however, one of the few which seemed to address an issue rather than simply describe it. Sage Walker's 'Roadkill', while recognising the state of America's health system, then extrapolating to the limit, pay or die, then gets lost in a mish-mash of sentiment which cocoons the reader against the raw terror of the issue. Likewise, William John Watkins' 'The Beggar in the Living Room' begged many questions. It describes the development of holograms so realistic as to be indistinguishable from the real thing. The inventor takes images from the news, which appeals the child narrator but, as the story unfolds, it seems that he running from his own discomfort not from the thought that refugees are being exploited as entertainment. Clearly, this story is intended to carry a huge moral dimension but if the narrator denies this to himself the story is already weakened. This story, though, is unusual in that, throughout I was convinced that the narrator was a girl. In fact, evidence suggests that it is a boy who is speaking but the feeling hasn't left me. However, I don't propose to rehearse the Tiptree argument, not when I believe that any writer worth his or her salt can place his or her self into any persona they like.

**A**m I asking for a moral in my fiction? If so, this would seem to lead me into **Analogue** territory. One letter in April's issue, however, compliments the magazine on its 'up-beat, we-can-solve-this nature', precisely the thing that generally irritates me so much about it. Walker's 'Roadkill' would not, I think, have featured in here, not without a more life-affirming but less believable ending. Mind you, they did let slip a delicious little piece from Jerry Ottion, 'Hit and Run' (April) in which a remote-control vehicle accidentally mows down the first recorded Martian, only for them to realise that other Mars landings have done the same. Not very life-enhancing, but much nearer the truth, and even the military conclusion, preparation for war because

the Martians are coming and they're looking mean, actually kept within context. I was reminded of the recent race riots in New York, involving Jews and African-Americans, not, I suspect, the magazine's intention.

This is unusual for **Analogue**, whose style is more that of Stephen L Burns' 'White Room', in which a habitual mugger is encouraged to see the error of his ways by confronting him with a 'victim', computer generated. I found something rather tacky about this, though the prisoner is apparently not to know that a computer generation has been used, and the whole thing read like a fictionalised psychological case-study. Doug Larsen's 'The Alcoa Conspiracy' (March) is a tear-jerking story of bereavement therapy as a chap is distracted from his wife's death by helping to save an African village from starvation, then discovers she set it up because she knew he'd pine.

By contrast, Maya Kathryn Bohnhoff's 'Squatter's Rights' pivots on a neat moral dilemma — suppose you settle a planet, only to have the original inhabitants come to reclaim it — but loses the impetus in a series of stock portrayals of people under pressure. However, it's stronger than her first novel, a fantasy of such pallor I wondered how anyone could make out the words.

**Analogue's** Jeffrey D Kooistra, apart from having a taste for the kind of fifties-style sexist, jingoistic fiction I hoped we had said goodbye to — 'Sunshine, Genius and Rust' culminates in the eponymous Sunshine agreeing to work for the military because those big, bad aliens killed her husband, and now she's going to make the world a better place; can you believe this? He also seems to be an admirer of Golden Age fiction. He devotes an entire story to two pilots rekindling the American nation's dream of space travel by hijacking a space shuttle and going off to the Moon to lay a memorial to Heinlein. I dislike self-referential SF anyway, but this piece really takes the biscuit.

**T**hinking of the Golden Age, I should just note the publication of Isaac Asimov's last Foundation novella. Having ploughed my way through this wooden tale of geriatric derring-do, a muttered "thank god there's no more" was heard. In fairness though, I have worked out what Asimov's appeal is to so many of his readers. Assuming that they are the teenage boys we believe them to be, I suspect that it is that Asimov wrote fiction like he wrote his scientific articles, in clear, uncluttered statements, which tends to make for great science writing and rotten fiction. However, I'll say no more about the story. Asimov's admirers will delight in the tidiness of it all, his detractors will groan for much the same reason. All will be satisfied.

**S**o far, I've said little about the fiction in **F&SF**. Perhaps this is because I've been seduced by John Kessel's on-going and robust deconstruction of that beast called 'academic criticism', or else because Rusch has assembled as fine a group of columnists as you could hope to find anywhere, with Card (in his

less gung-ho moments) also writing about books, while Sterling and Benford tackle scientific matters and Kathe Maio does an excellent hatchet job on the composites of film. On the other hand, it may be that the stories aren't that exciting at the moment or don't supply what I'm looking for right now. **F&SF** has always ploughed a slightly skew furrow, providing an ideal retreat for anyone sick of rivet-counting rust-buckets but not in search of full-blown heroic fantasy. Yet at present, too much of the material here is so soft as to be marshmallow and it clogs the brain. How much of this can be attributed to Rusch's editing and how much to the state of Ferman's remaining back inventory, I don't know and wouldn't care to hazard a guess. Either way, too much of the material looks like experiments which should have been put in a drawer until greater wisdom prevailed, or else throwaway trivialities. Take Esther Friesner's 'One Quiet Day in the Suburbs' (May), a down-home tale of biblical fables, vying to cap one another's stories of plagues they've survived. An appetizer, perhaps, but nowhere near as substantial as her 'Runyonesque Lowlives' (May, Asimov's), a jewel among homages to that author. 'Schrodinger's Cathouse' from Kit Johnson doesn't progress far beyond its title.

If my readers are by now suspecting that I'm a humourless jerk who doesn't appreciate a joke, then rest assured this isn't true. I don't like joke after joke, after joke, culminating in one of Ron Goulart's tiresomely humorous pieces (April). I did enjoy John Morrissey's 'Working Stiffs', which featured a businessman with some interesting notions on side-stepping union labour, as might be inferred from the title. To give Morrissey further credit, he avoids that curious nudge-nudge style which pervades so much SF humour writing.

That apart, we have a genuine shaggy Jesus story on Bridget McKenna's 'The Good Pup' (March); another aliens delving into history story from Barry Malzberg, not to mention yet another occult rock-music horror story, 'Terror's Biggest Fan', from Marc Laidlaw from whom one would have hoped for better. By far and away the best story over the last three months in **F&SF** has been David Brin's 'Detritus Affected' (March). Brin is not an author whose work I usually enjoy but this is somewhat off his normal beat. It discusses the relationship between humans and their rubbish. There is something haunting and powerful in his use of images as he sets the work of future archaeologists working through twentieth century rubbish against their stranger discoveries, of bodies laid out among the rubbish. This is a story which repays careful rereading and is all too rare and precious when so much of the material I've reviewed so far borders on the ephemeral.

**A**s I moved on to the next batch of magazine titles, I was aware of several prevailing currents of authorial interest — the historical figure in sf; mood writing to evoke a future world without especially doing much with it and self-referential SF — as well as a sense of malaise, a lack of new ideas, fresh



approaches, startling new insights. Could it be that an over-use of history and too much self-reference indicates the rise of pre-millennial decadence as the genre motif circles ever closer to the mainstream flame before plunging in a cloud of smoke and ash? This was a question I asked as I turned to **Amazing**, another of my favourite magazines as you'll perhaps recall.

**Amazing** did little to reassure me. A second shaggy Jesus story, though not so obviously canine, in R Dunn's 'Men of Good Will', retells the betrayal of Jesus in Jerusalem, at great length, so we know that Dunn has at least researched his Bible assiduously. The twist is to set the story in an alternative universe, thus giving Dunn an opportunity to lavishly describe the Roman-style military hardware. True, he did attempt to draw parallels with modern massacres, in his descriptions of the rioting in the streets after the betrayal of Vietnam and Amritsar sprang to mind, but finally, this story is little more than an exercise in style. The original story was faithfully retold with few embellishments. If I wanted this I could read the Bible.

As if that weren't enough, Albert Einstein, my second favourite historical *bête noire* (after Marilyn Monroe, though Elvis Presley is coming up fast on the inside) pops up, though Paul Levinson's 'Cat's Cradle' (February) does open up the quantum can of worms in a fashion that even this non-scientist could grasp. By comparison, the retrieval of General Patton by time travellers in 'Dark Glass', by Steve Gross and Sasha Miller (also February) seemed pointless, especially when he admitted himself that they had the wrong man. Just to put the icing on the cat, this issue of **Amazing** also featured Greg Benford's time-travel story, 'The Dark Backward', in which a time traveller goes back to tell William Shakespeare and Ernest Hemingway that, guys, it's okay, we really loved you after you were dead.

I was beginning to wonder how much more of this I could cope with, and was not pleased to discover Arlen Andrews Sr's 'A Little Waltz Music' (March) in which a group of skiffy authors are shot into space to live their imaginings; you know, Jerry, Larry, Harry, Arthur, a space shuttle and a Ringworld — and not a sick-bag in sight alas. Michael McCollum's 'Dream World' (April) featured a megalomaniac SF author who claimed he was rewriting the future as he went along, to exact revenge on this and that person, while Bruce Bethke had an ingenious but ultimately fatuous thought on how the Dave Clarke Five came into existence. Given Mr Clarke's penchant for litigation, I would tread carefully. Just to round things off, Barrington Bayley's 'This Way Into the Wendy House' (May, **Interzone**) has the narrator, a science fiction author meet a science fiction fan called Alan who, in a curious time shift, reveals that he is Barrington Bayley. Puh-lease! None of this did much to diminish my growing conviction that SF is in imminent danger of disappearing up its own backside.

Paul Morley recently announced the death of SF, apparently on the grounds that they don't write it like they did in his day, a view which did not initially earn him much sympathy from me. On the other hand, having staggered through a landscape constructed on derivative stories, trite moral fables, and a surfeit of quantum universes, I'm willing to concede that he might have a point. Is there an oasis in this desert of lost inspirations? Am I wrong in believing that SF shouldn't be reduced entirely to a diet of fluff. Let us have some entertainment but I think SF is also a form of experimental sociology, exploring the 'what ifs' and 'maybes' of this universe, what philosophers call thought-experiments.

Mark Rich's excellent 'With Love From the Plague Territories' (February, **Amazing**) did a good deal to restore my flagging faith. Set in a plague-devastated future country, probably America, Rich's story addresses the survival of hope and humanity in a world dedicated to the basics of physical survival. It explores the choices people have to make in times of crisis, and also reneging of promises. Nevertheless, in this harsh environment, the likes of Increase Olds can survive on their own moral terms.

Is it my imagination or is the amount of fiction in **Interzone** shrinking? This time last year, the magazine featured an average of seven stories. Now it's down to five stories and seven features including review columns and two interviews per issue. In its own way, **Interzone** is as eclectic as **Amazing** and **F&SF** though not as interesting to me at least. There is very little I could honestly describe, as cutting-edge SF but there are a few well-written stories which left this mind refreshed. Astrid Julian's 'Irene's Song' (March), coming in the wake of the current popularity of Gorecki's third Symphony, is a poignant discussion of the power of music and its potential to bring life. And I've finally found a Stephen Baxter story I can understand, one that doesn't suffer from incomprehensible science and a prose style which seems to have come out of a random word generator. Its title, 'The Sun Person', does not thrill, but it stands as an honest admission that most exploiters of seemingly barren planets won't give a toss about checking for non-carbon-based lifeforms, just as we always feared. Don Webb's 'Castalia', less SF, less fantasy, more an unholy alliance between Thorne Smith and Algernon Blackwood is typically off-beat, though when compared to some of his earlier flights of fancy, his more recent fiction seems a little staid by comparison.

Last, but by no means least, in fact in a league of its own, comes **Aurealis**, 'the Australian Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction'. Much as Australian fauna has gone its own way over the millennia, so **Aurealis** marches to a rhythm dictated by the comparative isolation of the Australian SF community. There is a handful of small press and semi-professional magazines but few people, *pace* Greg Egan, have broken through into

other world markets. Likewise, with the exception of A F Kidd, known over here as a ghost story writer and editor of **Picatrix**, no non-Australian seems to have appeared in **Aurealis**.

The letter columns congratulate the editors on their Australian perspective. As I commented in a letter myself, I'm not sure whether outsiders can actually perceive this specifically Australian standpoint. In certain stories, most notably those of Terry Dowling, it would be difficult to miss the Australian character. Dowling writes with almost visionary fervour of a future Australia, partitioned by aborigines, with freedom to travel granted to only a handful of white men, who sail their sandships through the interior deserts. Tom Tyson is a man with a mission, moving inexorably through three books of short stories towards discovering the truth about himself. 'The Final Voyage of Captain Gelse' is another fragment of that tale. Dowling's work, the Rynnosseros stories especially, reminds me strongly of Ballard in his Vermilion Sands period, but infused with a deep appreciation of environment. The fingerprint is uniquely Dowling's.

That apart, no other story in issues 9 and 10 seems to possess that sense of environment which characterises certain stories from Australian writers. If anything marks these two issues of **Aurealis**, it's a hideous fascination with the uses to which information will be put and ways of mechanically augmenting human beings. These are themes which have cropped up throughout all the issues of **Aurealis**. This time, a John Wallace in 'Pocket Hostage', shows a nicety of distinction between theft and kidnapping when a small-time crook discovers that the data-package he's been commissioned to steal contains the complete body record of a man who can be re-activated in a new body. Sadly, the story concentrated far too much on chasing the thief round the building and a lot too little on why this facility should be needed. Martin J Living's 'Shifter' deals with the mental stresses on an augmented human being.

The nature of the potential Australian market being what it is, **Aurealis** doesn't tend to specialise in the way that British and American magazines do. Thus horror and fantasy mix comfortably with all shades of science fiction. The fantasy ranges from the predictable, with Sophie Peters having one more go at the Scheherazade story in 'One Final Story', while A F Kidd's 'Saint Sebastian and the Mona Lisa' is an unusual story about a lama. On the whole, however, I think the science fiction is stronger than the fantasy in these magazines; it does vary.

So, the temperature has been taken and found to be tepid. The patient is a couch potato in serious need of exercise but not yet completely beyond redemption. Next issue I'll take a look at the current crop of small press magazines. If anyone would like to submit review copies of their magazines, please send them to Maureen Speller at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ

# Paperback

## Graffiti

Edited by Stephen Payne

### Signposts

**Greg Bear**  
**Anvil Of Stars**

A sense of wonder is not easily invoked by modern SF, but I suspect it's what most of us who read hard SF are after and *Anvil Of Stars* provides ample measure.  
Colin Bird

**James P. Blaylock**  
**The Paper Grail**

...if you've had your fill of dragons and magic swords and need a rest from hard science, this could be a literate and civilised entertainment you'll welcome for a couple of hours.  
Norman Beswick

**Samuel R. Delany**  
**Driftglass/Starshards**

It is clear...Delany views writing as a powerful means of liberation, a fact borne out by this remarkable and varied collection of stories.  
Andrew Seaman

**Phil Rickman**  
**Candlenight**

Altogether an excellent read for devotees of the horror novel and yet another author to the reader is drunk with wonder. And that's true magic.  
John Newsinger

**Michael Swanwick**  
**Stations Of The Tide**

Swanwick...layers illusion upon illusion until the reader is drunk with wonder. And that's true magic.  
Jim Steel

### Novels

**Piers Anthony**  
**Mercycle**

*Grafton, 1993, 343pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed By Susan Badham

Piers Anthony started his career writing SF, but is now better known for his light fantasy. This is a revised version of a novel he wrote several years ago and failed to get published. Unfortunately it wasn't worth the wait.

The book has one potentially interesting idea — the characters are on a secret under-sea expedition and are treated so that they are "out of phase" with the environment and thus able to travel deep underwater without protection. However the details of this process are never explored and it remains as a plot device and no more.

The characters do not know who's sent them on the expedition and why — they only have a route to follow. When they do find the answer, it's implausible. This general weakness extends through all aspects of the book (for example, the characterisation is weak, based more on the neuroses of the characters than anything else). The book's faults overcome it, because Piers Anthony is determined to push a moral message of co-operation at the expense of a coherent plot, good characterisation and plausibility.

**Greg Bear**  
**Anvil Of Stars**

*Legend, 1993, 499pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed By Colin Bird

The first thing to say is that this is a much better book than *The Forge Of God*, published 6 years ago and to which *Anvil Of*

*Stars* is the sequel. The first book was good hard SF, but it dealt with the all-too-prevalent scenario of aliens threatening to destroy the Earth, albeit with some original ideas, in particular the spectacular demise itself. The sequel offers better characterisation, more interesting speculation and a far less predictable plot.

You may remember that *The Forge Of God* ends with the Earth destroyed by alien machines and a handful of humans rescued by other, more amenable alien robots. The humans are put into a Central Ark while Mars is terraformed. They are informed by their hosts, the Benefactors, that civilisations surviving the planet-killers have formed The Law. This code states that the Killers must be tracked down and destroyed. Several of the younger occupants of the Central Ark volunteer to carry out this punishment. The novel follows 82 young people as they travel in a Benefactor manufactured ship, cruising the galaxy searching for the star system from which the Killers originate.

The set-up allows for some fascinating speculation on particle physics, some of which is crucial to the plot, although to Bear's credit this is dealt with clearly without sinking into a dense quagmire of quantum mechanics. The story also features something rare in fiction this wide in scope; real narrative tension. The interactions between the young people under the enormous pressure that develops as they close in on their goal, is credible and involving.

A sense of wonder is not easily invoked by modern SF, but I suspect it's what most of us who read hard SF are after and *Anvil Of Stars* provides ample measure.

**James P. Blaylock**  
**The Paper Grail**

*Grafton, 1993, 371pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed By Norman Beswick

If you've read a Blaylock novel before, you know what to expect: fantasy in the *Little, Big* mode, set in a moderately realistic context, with quirky, slightly bizarre characters and an eventual point of historical reference. And that, as readable as ever, is what you get in *The Paper Grail*.

We are on the northern coast of contemporary California and Howard Barton, assistant director of a small museum, has come to collect a paper woodcut sketch, possibly by Hokusai. But all is not what it seems. We meet many intriguing people: among them his Uncle Roy, founder of the Museum of Modern Mysteries and builder of haunted houses; Mrs Heloise Lamey, who waters her garden with blood and is anxious to purchase the skeleton of John Ruskin; Mr Jimmers, whose garden shed contains a machine reputed to raise ghosts; and the Gluers, who...Well, you'll find out. And we follow the developing relationship between the well-meaning Howard and the young woman he believes is his cousin Sylvia.

After some 200 pages of eccentricity and undertones of obscure menace, we begin to sense patterns underneath it all. We discover

what the Paper Grail is (more or less), who's on which side, and why, and the story builds to a rollicking climax which I mustn't reveal, not that it would matter much to your enjoyment.

Along the way the cognoscenti will enjoy picking up the in-jokes and references, and the literary style is a delight, as befits a Professor of English. Don't look for deep significance, don't ask too many questions: but if you've had your fill of dragons and magic swords and need a rest from hard science, this could be a literate and civilised entertainment you'll welcome for a couple of hours.

### Marion Zimmer Bradley The Mists of Avalon

Penguin, 1993, 1009pp, £5.99

Reviewed By Sue Thomason

Reissue of a book first published in 1983 (complete with the original silly cover art). A reworking of the Matter of Britain, closely following the events of Malory, but retelling from the viewpoint of Morgaine (Morgan Le Fay). The Arthurian story is seen in terms of conflict between the ancient religion of the Goddess, whose cult centre is Avalon, and the new (to Britain) religion of Christianity. The adherents of both religious viewpoints are shown to be blinkered by their world-views. The followers of the Goddess too easily believe that their ambitions, hopes, and political plans are "the will of the Goddess" incarnate in Her Priestesses (Viviane, Morgaine, Nianine, Nimue). The Christians are too quick to deny and denigrate religious expression and insight outside the narrow tenets of their own faith.

The book encompasses Morgaine's life from her earliest childhood memories to the reflections of her old age. Events outside Morgaine's experiences are told as perceived by her through "the sight": an awareness of non-present events cultivated by the Goddess's priestesses and druids. The other magic (as opposed to symbolic) events in the book are, for me, its main weakness. Avalon of the Goddess has been withdrawn from the world (where it would co-exist with Glastonbury of the Christians), and travel to and from it involves a magical transition from world to world, which is presented as (basically) a Hollywood special effect. That, and the typical Bradley sex scenes, were the only things that left me wincing.

The book's great strengths are its faithfulness to the original material, its thoughtful, thorough and original reworking of that material, and its recasting of a story by, for and about men, into one retold from a woman's point of view and centred on the realities of women's lives and experiences.

### Joe Donnelly Still Life

Century, 1992, 554pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

Caitlin Brook was a police nurse until she was shot in the back while trying to rescue a

woman and her baby in a violent household incident in a bad neighbourhood of Glasgow: the shot threw her from a balcony and she broke her back, paralysing her from the waist down. Martin Thornton as the reporter on the scene, who in a telepathic vision saw the incident just before it happened, and tried to get to Caitlin and warn her: he was just too late. After getting out of hospital, Caitlin 'retired' to Linnvale, a small isolated farming village. Now, a year later, Martin visits Caitlin again with the proposition of doing a follow-up story to the piece he wrote after the incident. She turns him down, but they have dinner, become closer friends, talk, and all that. In the meantime, strange things have been happening in Fasach Wood. People have been going missing (they have been killed by the Wood itself in several gruesome incidents that no-one but the reader knows about), people have been seeing things and people (most notably Caitlin and Martin themselves) have been attacked by a huge black animal-thing that might be a prize black boar that escaped from one of the local farms a few months ago, but which is probably something more sinister. In the village, a strange woman is desperately trying to protect and preserve the wood from holiday cottages. The group is run behind the scenes by Sheila Garvie, a druid-type who may or may not be behind all the evil doings beyond the drystone dyke that holds within it the shady sanctuary of Fasach Wood...

If this sounds like standard horror material, that's because it is. Donnelly is a very good writer, but he doesn't add anything 'new' or 'different' in this book. *Still Life* is a great read, top-of-the-range horror (don't expect to put it down once you've started it) but in the end it stays firmly within the boundaries of standard horror. My advice: wait for the standard paperback edition.

### Alan Dean Foster Codgerspace

Orbit, 1993, 309pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey

Alan Dean Foster has long been a favourite of mine, a prolific author of many a long-toothed, humorous yarn, the latest of which is aptly named: *Codgerspace*. Having valiantly tried, but alas long since given up trying to unravel the convoluted workings of Foster's magnificently warped imagination, I am forced to accept that he has outdone himself this time around. If you thought that *Glory Lane*, or his *Flinx* series were inherently funny, then you're in for quite a few chuckles with *Codgerspace*. Only Foster has the sheer *gall* to attempt to weave together such diverse topics as Artificial Intelligence (the self-aware domestic variety, hell-bent on seeking out its human equivalent of 'God' in its own inept fashion, causing much mayhem, mishap and misery the while), with over-the-hill, tired and retired geriatric old-age pensioners, flamboyantly typecast as his main characters. Then mix-in a generous dollop of non-humanoid extra-terrestrial life and technology and you have *Codgerspace*. Not so much an olden-

day "wagon-train to the stars" as a two-step, zimmer frame dance to exhaustion. Although I found *Codgerspace* an acceptable day's read it suffers slightly from being written to cater for the SFF reader of younger years, which led to oversimplified, repetitive text, particularly in the first chapter. Another flaw lay in Foster's use of OAPs as his main characters. This is, of course, perfectly acceptable, but I felt that the characters could have done with a bit more "energy", thereby giving the story as a whole a faster, smoother feel.

### Christopher Fowler Red Bride

Little, Brown, 1993, 424pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

Christopher Fowler is a rising (risen?) star among British horror writers, with a reputation for offbeat stories hadn't read anything before *Red Bride*, and was impressed. The book reads well and if Fowler's style doesn't set the Thames on fire, the story compelled me to stay up until 2:00 am two nights in a row!

John Chapel was in insurance before striking out into movieband PR at the age of 30. He is John Major without the charisma, has a dutiful wife, a not too rebellious son and a mortgage in Richmond. His first client is Ixora, a Caribbean model/actress with knock 'em dead looks. Why he lusts for her is obvious, why she falls in love with him at first sight isn't so clear. Shortly after their meeting, the body-count starts to rise, but the only connection seems to be Ixora and it couldn't be her. The corpses have all been given the Ripper treatment by someone of inhuman strength.

By the end all is revealed. Chapel has lost everything up to, but not including, his life, and love has conquered death. Maybe the scaffolding shows sometimes, but what the hell? I enjoyed it and if you fancy some late night reading, I recommend it.

### J. V. Gallagher Gameworld

Headline, 1993, 374pp, £4.99

Reviewed By Steven Tew

Gawain Grant is a successful business man, where "success" means making a lot of money, commuting to meetings on the continent via the Channel Tunnel, founding an international paper at the drop of a hat, and, of course, being a complete and utter ruthless shit. It would not be a surprise if such a man indulged in some illegal habit; but the snorting of coke is not for our hero. He's into something far more risky, far more illegal: he's a boardgame addict, and boardgaming is a hanging offence. One day he is cornered in an illegal gaming den; as the cops gather outside, he agrees to play *Gameworld* with Mehemet Confucius — he pops a hallucinatory pill and wakes up in a world outside the laws of time and space, where he must roll the dice and play "uncertainty cards" to move from square to square and ultimately defeat the Forces of Evil and rescue the Princess Ruda

from the Dragoon (sic).

I'm not quite sure what to make of **Gameworld**. In many ways it's an amusing read, if not the hilarious fantasy the publishers would have you believe, and its characters and settings are interesting to those soaked in popular culture and popularised myth: there's Norse gods, Lawrence of Arabia, a Poirot like Belgian detective, the Loch Tabernacle Monster, and places like a fantasy Irish 'Empire' peopled with creatures of varying dimensions (losing a dimension or two would be their equivalent of a traffic offence), Lost Vegas, Atlantis and so on. But characters and settings, and an amusing turn of phrase are not enough to make a novel work, even as entertainment. **Gameworld** seems to lack a sense of direction and Gallagher's fertile imagination reigns unchecked. I finally lost interest just over halfway through and struggled to finish it. I'd like to be generous and think that there's something worthwhile and meaningful in there, but, to paraphrase one of his characters, perhaps its all just to break the ice at parties.

**Carol Hill**  
**Amanda and the Eleven**  
**Million Mile High Dancer**  
*Bloomshury, 1993, 443pp, £6.99*  
 Reviewed By Sue Badham

**T**his book is only peripherally SF. Although it's set at NASA and has a female astronaut as a main character, it's really a fable about ecological breakdown and the kinds of thinking that cause it. The main character, Amanda Jaworski, represents both kinds of thinking, as seen by Carol Hill. She is at once a trained particle physicist who is a competent scientist and a woman who relies on her intuition to guide most aspects of her life. Because this is her main function in the novel she's more an icon than a character. Unfortunately she sets the tone of the book; all the other people in the story are also two dimensional, which makes it difficult to care about what happens to them.

Like all fables, this story deals in exaggeration and generalisations and this is where it falls down. By trying to explain complex issues in terms of good guys (the intuitive thinkers) and bad guys (the either/or scientific dualists) and then suggesting the bad guys are controlled by extraterrestrial forces, it succeeds in dehumanising the people the author doesn't approve of. Of course, there is a certain level of irony in the book. It's not like a fifties SF story where the mind controlling aliens were allegories for the communists. Carol Hill is serious in another way — she can't imagine how people can be polluters if they are fully human and so she's forced to another explanation. The fact that she suggests this while writing on her word processor in her air conditioned apartment, probably with a gas guzzling car outside, shows the source of her blindness. She is unable to see the polluters point of view, however wrong headed, and to dismiss them out of hand is to abandon persuasion and give in to despair.

This novel fails, not just because of its

woolly thinking or because of its unsympathetic characters. It fails because it's an extremely difficult read. I found it hard going and would have given up halfway through because it takes forever to reach any resolution. This might be excusable if the end of the book were especially impressive, but it isn't. Unless you have a high tolerance for whimsicality you will probably find the same thing.

## Tom Holt

### Ye Gods!

*Orbit, 1993, 296pp, £4.99*  
 Reviewed By Jan Malique

**P**icture this — a quiet street somewhere in suburbia, zero in on a garden, like any other, except for the corpses of numerous wild animals. Go inside the house, a dead gorilla is being used as a coat-rack; what is so different about this household? Jason Derry (who he?), semi-divine, semi-detached young man waiting for his Purpose in life to creep up and surprise him, lives here. That is what is so different about this house. It suddenly comes upon him, dragging several apathetic Gods behind it. Ancient Greece will never be the same, not after what Tom Holt has done to it.

Picture this — a Mars who hates violence, an Apollo saddled with a converted VW (quick job from Vulcan) chariot, a somewhat confused Sybil of Delphi, Cerberus impersonating a demented domestic pet and so on. Said characters, with a cast of thousands, take up cudgels in a tremendous battle between humankind (our hero Jason) and the Gods of yore (or Olympus, sacred mountain — not sacred sports shop). Why are they fighting? Good question, I know but I am not telling. Oh, okay, it involves a joke and the fear of an ancient race being vanquished to the far reaches of memory and space and time, it is about the fickleness of human nature. Alternatively, you could make up your own mind about the intricacies of this book. I laughed and laughed, it was funny. A very good reason for reading **Ye Gods!**

**Jenny Jones**  
**Lies and Flames**  
*Headline, 1993, 562pp, £5.99*  
 Reviewed by Alan Fraser

**Lies and Flames** is the third book of Jenny Jones' trilogy **Flight Over Fire** set on the world of Chorolon, the focus of an intense struggle between the Sun God, Lycias, and the Moon Goddess, Astarte. In the first book, Eleanor Knight, an English woman, was brought to Chorolon by Matthias Marling, a Mage who is a follower of Astarte. Chorolon was caught in the grip of the Stasis, a freezing of time and the seasons, which was caused by Lucien Lefevre, a Priest of the Sun God. Eleanor managed to break the Stasis by freeing the Benu Bird, a phoenix-like creature whose flight governs the passage of day and night in Chorolon. At the beginning of this book, Chorolon has been freed, but Eleanor has lost her lover, Lukas Marling (brother of

Matthias), who has married Felicia Westray, Countess of Shelt, now pregnant with his child, and become Earl of this northern city.

Her past actions have shown her to be determined, resourceful and courageous, but Eleanor can see no place for herself in Chorolon without Lukas. In despair she returns to Earth, but Chorolon finds her again...

The defeated Mage and Sun Priest, Lucien Lefevre, has now assumed a new incarnation and threatens the world again by taking control of the southern Empire of Peraldor, while another evil Mage also thought defeated, Gawne of Aquile, revives in the north and attacks Shelt directly with weapons of ice. To complicate matters, a third Mage, Dion Gillet, another Priest of the Sun, causes chaos and destruction in Peraldor by challenging Lefevre. Eleanor acts this time as an onlooker rather than a protagonist, being there at centre stage when the battle between Sun and Moon is finally settled, torn between her new love for the bereaved Phinian Blythe, and her old love for Lukas.

As a new reader, I found **Lies and Flames** very difficult to get into, because Jones very creditably does not indulge in the usual trilogy writer's practice of giving a lengthy recap at the start of the book, and also because there are so many principal characters and so many apparently unrelated plot lines. However, there came a time, when I was caught up in it, and finished the book eagerly.

It is difficult to recommend a third book in a series to new readers, but I am sure those who have followed the **Flight Over Fire** series will find this an exciting read and a fitting end. Jenny Jones is an excellent story teller who has created a fascinating world and characters with which you identify, and I want to read more by her.

**Liane Jones**  
**The Dreamstone**  
*Mandarin, 1993, 488pp, £7.99*  
 Reviewed By Maureen Speller

**S**ometimes it is salutary to remind oneself that the literary tropes we consider hackneyed may not seem unusual to readers of other types of fiction. Yet, even this does not explain why **The Dreamstone** is hailed as "highly accomplished". The time-slips at the heart of this novel form a staple of children's books, as well as featuring in romantic fiction by Anya Seton and Daphne Du Maurier. The medieval setting is now almost *de rigueur* in crime as well as romantic fiction. Jones seems to recognize that she is not so original and observes that her novel is really about sex, by which she means several anatomically correct encounters which are, she assures the reader, very passionate. This is probably true if you happen to be one of those involved, but on the page they are clinically and unconvincingly executed, though unusually explicit for romantic fiction. However, this is not a novel which discusses sex.

Jones' novel, set in two different historical periods, now and Wales circa 1168, weaves together the twin love affairs of Jane and

Gwyn, respectively academic and stereotypical drunken Welsh poet; and Madoc and Ceinwen, the one a possibly historical figure, the other a figment of Jones' imagination. As the story develops, all too slowly and with far too many descriptive passages, it becomes clear that not only do Gwyn and Jane experience the lives of Madoc and Ceinwen, but that each relationship is triangular. The other people involved suddenly appear, to the detriment of the plot structure, and Jones fastens finally on that old Maboginog tragedy of Bloduwedd, Gorony and Lluw Llaw Gyffes, most familiar to us in its stunning reworking by Alan Garner *The Owl Service*. Jones neither acknowledges its original source nor contributes anything new in her treatment of the story.

Frankly, I was bored by this novel. While obviously thoroughly researched, maybe too much so, it exudes an air of having been bolted together, section by section. Too little happens over too many pages and the descriptive passages have a distinctly mauvish tinge. The plot itself is broken-back, only becoming animated when Jones finally tackles the legend in the last quarter of the book. Only one mystery remains: if this won the 1992 Betty Trask Prize, what on earth was the competition like?

### Paul J. McAuley Eternal Light

*Orbit, 1993, 463pp, £5.99*  
Reviewed By Chris Amies

Things that go fast and explode...**Eternal Light** is a space opera on the grand scale, where titanic forces have been pushing bits of the Universe around for their own benefit for the last few million years. A renegade group of the galaxy-spanning Alea race have got hold of the angels' prime moving kit and are planning to use it to heat up the Universe for their own benefit, with the side-effect of rendering it unsuitable for any kind of life and bringing about its much accelerated destruction.

Dorothy Yoshida, Japanese-Australian scientist and psi-Talent with an Alea female riding personality shotgun inside her head, is shanghaied into attempting to save the world, in the company of a dissatisfied immortal, a fighter pilot, and situationalist artist who brings along his own personal brand of split personality (half his head given over to an AI). And a lot happens in this novel: kidnappings, insurrections, fundamentalist backlash, space battles and long equations. A lot of people (myself included) won't understand the science, but it doesn't stop the novel moving along and being paced and exciting. Dorothy's journey takes her beyond the Yellow Brick Road, but not just back to Kansas, and Robot/Machine achieves both heart and brain. The best stories involve change, and change we get, here for once entropy is defeated.

### Anne McCaffrey Damia

*Corgi, 1993, 380pp, £4.99*

### Damia's Children Bantam, 1993, 264pp, £14.99 Reviewed By Lynne Bispham

Anne McCaffrey's many fans will not be disappointed by **Damia and Damia's Children**, for they are typical of this prolific author's particular brand of SF, and continue the story told in **The Rowan**. I have not read **The Rowan**, but having tracked down a review, it seems to me that the first half of **Damia** covers the same time and some of the same events as the previous book, but from a different perspective which gives new readers the opportunity to catch up on what has gone before. The basic premise of the books is that some people are psychically Talented, and their telepathic and telekinetic abilities are utilised by Federal Telepathic and Telepathic, for communication and transport of people and spaceships between the stars. The Rowan, her daughter Damia and Damia's children are Prime Talents, people with exceptional mental abilities who occupy the most responsible positions in FT & T. The books are partly a family saga, telling the story of three generations of the Gwyn-Raven-Lyon 'clan', their involvement in the battle against the alien Hivers and, in **Damia's Children**, their relationships with the furry one-eyed Mdrins, aliens who have allied with humans against the common enemy.

The eponymous heroine of **Damia** is not born until half-way through the book. The early chapters are taken up with the story of Afra who becomes the Rowan's highly valued colleague. Less talented than the Rowan, Afra needs endless patience to deal with the Prime's volatile temper. Damia herself is like her mother, highly Talented, but unpredictable and often unreasonable. She also finds that being a Prime Talent can be extremely lonely. Underneath, however, all the main characters are really nice people who selflessly give of themselves for the good of the Nine Star League. They are in fact so nice that they are at times insufferable.

Both books are episodic, and each episode follows a similar pattern. There is some crisis — the Nine Star League is threatened by aliens — the Talented character solves the problem and is congratulated by his peers. It is, however, difficult to fear for characters whose mental resources are so great that their method of commuting to work is to be teleported between planets, even if some of their relatives do get killed off during the course of the story. In **Damia's Children**, for example, Damia's teenage son Thian meets with resentment from the non-Talented crew of a spaceship, but he proves himself such a capable fellow that he soon wins them around and receives the approbation of the most important Talents (most of whom are members of his own family), just as we expected.

**Damia and Damia's Children** are science fiction at its safest. Readers looking for startling new concepts will not find them here. Instead we have spaceships and telepathy, hostile insectoid aliens and furry, friendly aliens with names like Mrg and Dlp. However,

there are obviously many readers who like their SF cosy and familiar, for cCaffrey's books continue to sell in very respectable numbers. McCaffrey fans, you know who you are, these books are for you.

### Christopher Moore Practical Demonkeeping Mandarin, 1993, 248pp, £4.99 Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is not the sort of book I normally go out looking for. Lovers of categories would call it comic horror. I surprised myself by enjoying — moderately.

Seventy years before the story opens, the hero, Travis, accidentally called up a demon. Since then it has preserved his youth, but has proved difficult to control and impossible to get rid of. The novel describes their arrival in a small American town, and then builds up a network of relationships between the people who finally combine to destroy the demon.

There are three distinct strands in **Practical Demonkeeping**: the horror of the demon's activities, which the writer tries to link into a serious theological framework; the more realistic portrayal of the characters, their strengths and their hang-ups; and the humour, which consists principally of a macabre verbal wit. All of these strands have something to offer — I remember with affection the appearance of H. P. Lovecraft and the bar called 'The Head of the Slug', but sometimes I wasn't sure what sort of novel I was reading.

Still, if you're looking for a lively, undemanding read, this could be it. The Pratchett/Asprin style cover does nothing for it. Try the book inside

### Larry Niven & Steven Barnes Achilles' Choice Legend, 1993, 214pp, £8.99 Reviewed By Ian Sales

In the future the world will still be ruled by a Council composed of corporate and national councillors. In order to pick the cream of humanity for the Council, the Olympics have been widened to include aesthetic and academic events. All olympians have to compete in these and two physical events. However, future science allows the athletes to develop their bodies to an incredible extent, and a further operation, the Boost, can take them further both physically and mentally. Unfortunately, there is a drawback to the Boost: you die 7 years later. The only way to survive longer than that is to win a gold medal and become linked (ie, join the council).

**Achilles' Choice** is the story of Jillian Shomer (USA), judoist, fell runner and fractal sociologist, and it follows her training for the Olympics, the competition itself, and her subsequent uncovering of the truth behind the Council.

It's a straightforward story, competently written and impressively researched. But,

ultimately, it's meaningless — when the main villain was revealed as a computer nerd, I started laughing. The book is illustrated by Boris Vallejo - nice drawings, but extremely dated in style.

A lightweight (but expensive) piece of SF bunkum that whiles away an hour or so.

### Christopher Pike Die Softly

Hodder & Stoughton, 1993, 208pp,  
£3.99

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Christopher Pike is billed as the bridge between Nancy Drew and Stephen King, writing mystery/horror stories for teenagers. **Die Softly** is a thriller set in Manville, California, the sort of middle American small town beloved by David Lynch, which reveals undercurrents of evil beneath the supposedly quiet surface of the town's life. Herb Trasker is a loner at Alamo High, known for his skilled photography. One of the other students, a girl who also isn't one of the popular clique at the school, persuades Herb to set up a camera on a timer to photograph the cheerleaders in their changing room showers. The next day one of the girls, Lisa Barnscull, is tragically killed in a car accident, so Herb isn't thrilled to collect his camera and develop the film. However, when he does, one of the pictures shows Lisa on her own in the showers being attacked. Herb therefore realises that Lisa was dead long before the accident, but doesn't consider that the murderer might also know of the picture.

For most of the book I thought that Pike had given far too much away by the way he constructed his story (told in flashback by Herb to a policeman), but I must confess to have been surprised by the final outcome.

Pike introduces adult themes of drugs and sex into what seems initially a standard American High School story, as Herb Trasker's enquiries uncover a secret life of Lisa Barnscull not unlike that of Laura Palmer of Twin Peaks, the "cheerleader from hell". Herb soon realises that several fatal car crashes involving college students have not been accidents, and that something very bad is going on in Manville.

Although I felt Pike had cheated, my 16 year old son also read the book, and enjoyed it, being quite happy with Pike's plot construction. He did, however, think that Herb was unreasonably stupid in not realising that whoever was doing the killing now had a very good reason to kill him. I therefore can recommend the book to its intended audience only with reservations.

### Phil Rickman Candlelight

Pan, 1993, 429pp, £4.99

Reviewed By John Newsinger

With this impressive first novel, Phil Rickman's name can be added to the pantheon of contemporary British horror novelists. He joins the three Stephens (Laws, Gallagher



and Harris) and Mark Morris in the reserve, with first team places still being occupied by Ramsey Campbell and Clive Barker.

What starts out as a somewhat contrived, overly self-conscious story, quickly turns into an effective thriller that eventually reaches a satisfyingly grisly climax. The tale is largely set in Wales and explores the hostility of Welsh-speaking inhabitants to English interlopers. This hostility ranges from the comparatively good-natured through to drunken violence. Much more ominous, however, is the supernatural threat that seems to emanate from the Welsh-speaking village of Y Groes, a village where the English seem to have a habit of dying, invariably by accident, suicide or natural causes.

A novel that at times seems poised to spill over into anti-Welsh prejudice does, in this reader's judgement, manage to avoid the pitfall. The evil that possesses Y Groes is challenged, not by any English adversary, but by a Welsh schoolteacher, the local Plaid parliamentary candidate and an Italian-American journalist.

Altogether an excellent read for devotees of the horror novel and yet another author to watch out for.

### Dan Simmons Children Of The Night

Headline, 1993, 408pp, £4.99

Reviewed By Jon Wallace

This book has an incredibly bleak opening section. The conditions in Romania after the fall of the Ceausescu regime are graphically described. Once through that though, the novel develops into a fast paced thriller.

An American doctor working in Romania develops a bond of affection with one of the infants in her care. She realizes that the child is very sick, but could probably be saved by the facilities that her base (Boulder Communicable Disease Centre in Colorado) can offer. Encouraged by an American priest, she decides to adopt the child and take him home with her. Then the trouble starts...

The action switches scene and pace from

the medical mysteries of the child's illness and its cause and probable cure, to the mayhem caused when he is kidnapped by virtually indestructible Romanians and taken back to Europe.

The setting being Romania, it comes as no surprise that vampires are involved, and with this novel, Simmons throws his ideas regarding vampirism and its cause into the pot. The mixture is both fast and fascinating, the action scenes being well balanced by the historical content. And Simmons has done his research well, both the history and medical aspects have the ring of truth about them. What more could you ask for?

### Michael Slade Cutthroat

NEL, 1993, 397pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

According to New English Library's publicity bumph, 'Michael Slade' is the pseudonym for Messrs Jay Clarke and John Banks - two Canadian lawyers who specialize in criminal insanity (as lawyers!) **Cutthroat** was first published by the New American Library in 1992, following **Headhunter** and **Ghoul**.

Whoever wrote the back-cover blurb put the basic situation in a nutshell:

"In 1876...naturalist Francis Parker makes an extraordinary discovery before losing his life — and the evidence — in the horrific carnage of the Little Big Horn." In 1987...Judge Hutton Murdoch is addressing the American Bar Association when his brain is blown apart by a high-velocity bullet. Two days later a second judge is pondering a complex point of law when a masked intruder slits his throat from ear to ear. "The hunt...for an ingenious and brutal killer soon becomes a desperate search for the missing link between these apparently unconnected events. A search that will lead to a company engaged in bizarre genetic experiments, a sinister Chinese family with a centuries-old obsession — and ultimately to the horrifying secrets of man's earliest beginnings".

And there's more: Mounties, DNA, supergenes, Hong Kong, *Gigantopithecus blacki*, THE YELLOW EMPEROR'S CANON OF INTERNAL MEDECINE, Fankuang Tzu (The Sons of Reflected Light), DECO (Decreasing Oxygen Consumption Hormone), and Alma ("...a strange species between ape and man" p. 318). These info-dumps are scattered along the narrative route like base camps for a mountaineering expedition, decked out with Ed McBain-type diagrams/documentation. Nevertheless, even people whose eyes usually glaze over at such downloading (me, for one) should find something of interest.

Chief Superintendent Robert DeClerq, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (from **Headhunter**) is the forceful man-in-charge, but it's Inspector Zinc Chandler (from **Ghoul**) who finds himself at the cutting edge. Forensic scientist Joseph Avocemovitch has got to be moonlighting from **Police Squad**!...Glass is made by mixing sand and soda-lime. The amount of soda-lime determines the angle at

which a piece of glass bends light" (p. 218).

The titular Cutthroat is — aargh!

**Cutthroat** is that snowball-in-hell — a literate slasher novel. Daft as a brush, of course, but great fun (especially for those people who compile pub quizzes). Joseph Conrad might well have enjoyed it: "The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary. Men alone are quite capable of every wickedness" (quoted on p. 161).

### Brian Stableford The Angel Of Pain

*Pan, 1993, 246pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed by John D. Owen

**The Angel Of Pain** is the sequel to Stableford's **The Werewolves Of London**, picking up the story twenty years on from TWOL, in the 1890s. It has a similar character list (including some presumed to have met their demise in the earlier book). The 'angels' from the first story (beings with god-like powers) are back, interfering in the lives of David Lydyard and his family after a prolonged period of observation. Eventually, they plunge Lydyard into a conflict that brings together an unlikely conspiracy of angels, werewolves and humans.

The story is interesting, but heavy on the metaphysics and light on the kind of all-action plotting that most writers in this genre would indulge in. This is no bad thing, as Stableford takes the time to dwell on the nature of the angels, and on the changes that the universe has undergone since they were last fully awake, thousands of years before. This meta-physical debate ripples through the whole book, and carries within it the story's *raison d'être*, as well as its partial resolution. The writing takes some getting used to, pitched as it is in a modernised Victorian didactic prose style that readers of Verne and the early Wells would certainly recognise, slowing down readers used to more frenetic modern styles, but ensuring consideration of the various intricate details of the philosophy behind the story. Not a book to be rushed, but nibbled slowly, savouring its differences.

### Allen Steele Labyrinth Of Night

*Legend, 1993, 353pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed by Ian Sales

**A** multinational group of scientists are investigating an alien city on Mars. It becomes a political issue as nations fight over who gets the technological goodies when the alien puzzle is deciphered.

The plot is okay, the writing is pedestrian, but the following sample errors destroy any worth the book may have had:

Robert Johnson's career is alive and well in 2030 (quick question: who was the biggest selling songwriter in 1893? if you don't know the answer, don't worry: Steele is a hack). It's the return of the Allen Steele patented cultural anachronism (like the deadhead orbital engineers in **Orbital decay**).

See if you can spot the mistake in this sentence: "Kawakami was already down-loading the data collected in the computer hard-drives into a CD-ROM" (p121). Yup, you can't write to Read Only Memory.

Steele needed villains so he could show off his 2030 military hardware, so he ignores recent history and has the Russians return to their nasty evil ways.

This book is complete bollocks. Avoid.

### Michael Swanwick Stations Of The Tide

*Legend, 1993, 252pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed by Jim Steel

**T**he nameless bureaucrat who functions as the reader's camera arrives on Miranda and catches an airship. Throughout the first chapter he is infodumped, initially by his superior and then by his assistant. He finds that Gregorian, the man he seeks, is a magician who uses charisma, chicanery and proscribed technology to gain whatever ends he has in mind. Then, at the chapter's conclusion, the bureaucrat finds that he has been tricked by an imposter, when his real assistant arrives.

This sets the tone for the rest of the novel as Swanwick weaves a hypnotic web of illusions around the plot, very little is what it seems in this world, as the obvious fakes — such as the human surrogates — compete with the deceptions of the characters. Even the planet is capable of trickery; every century or so a complex tidal arrangement covers most of Miranda's only continent and the indigenous life-forms swiftly adapt themselves to an underwater existence. During the previous cycle, the colonists had been responsible for nearly wiping out the haunts, Miranda's sentient life-form, which in turn resulted in an embargo on advanced technology. The Bureaucrat arrives just as the Jubilee tides are about to return and things are even more chaotic than normal. Everyone seems to be trying to run a scam or settle old scores, and the Bureaucrat gradually finds that corruption is not merely limited to Miranda. He is not a hero; he is in his middle years, a bit overweight, and is only trying to do his job. He makes mistakes, but they are genuine, not subservient to the plot. And, just as the reader starts to feel that he knows this man, Swanwick begins to hint that he too may have a secret agenda.

A conjuror succeeds by distracting his audience from his real actions. Swanwick, however, layers illusion upon illusion until the reader is drunk with wonder. And that's true magic.

### Paul Voermans And Disregard The Rest

*Gollancz, 1993, 256pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed by Matt Coward

**I**n this Australian-set, near-future, fortan tale of mass hallucination, alien contact and disinformation, Voermans plays a modern tune on that old "what is reality" fiddle.

Eleven years ago, Kevin and Martin were involved in a revolutionary production of **The Tempest** in an isolated desert location. The play ended in disaster, with most of the cast being killed. Now, Martin is an in-patient at a mental hospital, while Kevin lives a lonely life out in the wilds. At the time of the tragedy, Martin tried to tell what he thought was the truth about what he thought had happened, but no one would believe him.

As the story opens, Kevin's blood seems to have turned blue (even when exposed to oxygen, that is) and he is hearing childish voices in his head, which taunt him for trying to escape his past. Meanwhile, mystery voices and strange visions are becoming commonplace around the world; some think they are caused by CIA experiments, some suspect a late bout of millenium madness, and some are convinced that the aliens are coming. Kevin at last decides that he must discover, and broadcast, the whole truth about **The Tempest** and its aftermath.

Voermans is a lively and entertaining writer, his book is full of movement, character and playful dialogue, and he demonstrates a healthy degree of literary ambition and imagination. All that makes this a good read, but also — at least the first time around — a confusing and slightly frustrating one. The author fails to maintain complete control over the different strands of the novel (some of which, in the end, don't seem to have had a lot of point), and it lacks the relentless drive which might have made it really compelling.

I think perhaps he was just trying to do too much with his first book; even so, it's more than worth a look.

### Ian Watson The Martian Inca

*Gollancz, 1993, 203pp, £3.99*  
**Space Marine**  
*Boxtree, 1993, 264pp, £3.99*  
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

**W**atson's third novel and his most recent. If they were taken to plot the vector of his career it would be seen as a plummeting descent. The one is brisk, afire with sparkling ideas, richly imagined and stunningly original. The other is turgid, choking upon every hackneyed cliché that the worst of SF put behind it decades ago, dully written and so unoriginal that each lazy turn of moribund plot can be guessed in advance. But **Space Marine** is part of the **Warhammer 40,000** universe and presumably written in short order at a rate per word; you can see where scenes suffocate under the weight of too many words. As to the plot: aristocratic youth fallen on hard times is taken up by mysterious religio-military order and discovers strange talents, it moves from A to B with stodgy disregard of such notions as sub-plot or variety or change of pace. It's hard to imagine that the same person could be responsible for both these books. In fact, for the sake of our sanity, let us suppose that he did not, let us ignore **Space Marine** as if it does not exist. Let us re-read instead **The Martian Inca**

and celebrate the full flowering of an original and daring talent. The day Watson finished writing *Space Marine* it would have already felt old, 16 years after it first saw the light of day. **The Martian Inca** can still surprise. An unmanned Russian Mars probe crashes into the Andes and the dust it carried makes Julio believe he is a reborn Inca. At the same time an American manned expedition to Mars approaches the red planet amid personality clashes and the unknown threat of the red dust. As these two dramas weave about each other, a gripping tale is spiced with challenging notions about evolution, human potential and the nature of life. For all the blood, guts and bravado of the **Warhammer** universe, this is still the more exciting and adventurous story.

**Tad Williams**  
**Tailchaser's Song**  
*Legend, 1992, 290pp, £4.99*  
 Reviewed By Jessica Yates

The sub-genre of animal quest fantasies, an early example being Walter De La Mere's **The Three Royal Monkeys**, received a massive boost from *Waterhip Down* which was, like **Lord Of The Rings**, a hard act to follow. Employing the same basic idea of animals driven from their natural habitat by Man, Colin Dann has written a series about the animals of Farthing Wood and W. J. Corbett a series about pentecost the mouse: both authors aiming at a youthful audience. On a more epic scale we find Horwood's **Dunclon** series about moles, and Jacque's **Redwall** series about mice, both on the theme of defence of territory against aggression.

Tad Williams **Tailchaser's Song**, however, is a one-off and despite the publishers attempts to disguise the fact, it's original date of publication was 1986 in the UK, and probably a little earlier in the USA; for this animal fantasy, unique in the tradition I have outlined, was written by an American and republished to concur with William's current trilogy (about humans).

Tailchaser is a cat whose family has been destroyed by a gang of men. He plans to mate with Hushpad, who lives in a M'an dwelling, but finds the house empty and Hushpad gone. On his quest to find her he discovers a mighty threat to the tribes of wild cats living in forests and plays a vital part in ending that threat. But then he finds Hushpad again...

I could well describe this as "in the tradition of *Waterhip Down*". Occasional words of cat-speak such as "fela" for female, "Rikchikchik" for squirrel, are employed, and some characters retell myths of the earliest cat-heroes, including a creation myth. Tailchaser's quest takes him first to the Queen of the Cats and her effete court who are dependent on M'an — as in *Waterhip Down* there is a warren of rabbits who live and die dependent on man. Then Tailchaser discovers a totalitarian régime run by vicious cats known as the Clawguard, but as this is animal fantasy it includes supernatural events, and the ruler of this vast underground

kingdom is a feline Dark Lord who has turned from good, to evil and darkness.

Echoes of Tolkien are apparent: the Clawguard who welcome Night, like the goblins and trolls; the warning "the lands you are walking into bear an evil name these days"; and a deformed cat who lisp, "Not far from here, oh yesss, very clossse". However, there is enough originality to carry the tale and I must especially praise the care taken in coining the compound catnames, from Bitefast to Wavetail. If you collect animal fantasy, or are curious on how Tolkien might have improved Richard Adams, this is your book; however, I am sure that neither of those genre masters would have been so imprecise about the level of human technology. A poorly printed map reveals the extent of Tailchaser's world with two whole forests the domain of animals and M'an encroaching only at the edges; yet man advanced enough to construct a lighthouse (run by electricity?) would not have left so large a territory in what appears to be a temperate climate, unsettled and unarmed.

**Philip G. Williamson**  
**The Legend of Shadd's Torment**

*Grafton, 1993, 496pp, £5.99*  
 Reviewed By Sue Thomason

His second volume of 'The First World Chronicles' continues the story begun in **Dinbig of Khimmur**. Readers should have no difficulty in picking up the narrative thread of **Legend** without having read **Dinbig** and will experience the usual sense of frustration upon reaching a typical inconclusive "ending" which promises at least one further book in the series.

The two main viewpoint characters are Ronbas Dinbig and Duke Shadd. When the story opens, Dinbig is incarnate in the body of a vazz (dog-man); a despised subhuman race) after the presumed death of his original human body in battle. Struggling to come to terms with vazz sensibility, he learns his true body lives and seeks to find and reinhabit it. Shadd is clearly one of those heroes who, initially apparently subhuman, develop into superhuman or quasi-deities. At the start of **Legend** he is living as a wild man, but sets off in search of an ancient spell-manuscript, which might (or might not) release his beloved from a Semblance of Death spell (assuming she is in fact under one) and further the Fight Against The Bad Guys.

The narrative is strongly suggestive of standard fantasy role-playing game formats. Named spells (in Proper Noun Capitals), a substantial booby-trapped dungeon-clearing sequence, an emphasis on clear descriptions of campaign strategy rather than character development, casual slaughter of NPC bystanders and baddies, and plot progression by random or casual encounter all suggest this. The book obviously aims to divert and entertain the reader, rather than to provoke any serious reflection on "big questions", and within this framework it is clearly and compet-

ently written. In particular, Williamson has a nicely-balanced sense of how much descriptive detail to include. In short, **Legend** is better-than-average of its kind, though not outstanding; I'd recommend it to those caught bookless on station platforms or in airport terminals.

**Colin Wilson**  
**Spider World: The Magician**  
*Grafton, 1993, 395pp, £4.99*  
 Reviewed By L. J. Hurst

I read this book in an evening, as I felt sure that I would, not really wanting to put it down. I'm now vaguely anxious about the appearance of the next in the series. Five centuries hence, Niall will lead a revolt of humans against their Death Spider masters and force the arachnids to accept human equality. Then something will happen to threaten this peace. The book ends with Niall, the hero, about to set off in search of the Magician of the title; so I've got to know what happens.

This third volume owes most to Tolkien, and a lot of it describes Wilson's version of Minas Tirith and Moria, but they are only in the distance so far. Now Niall's brain-power detects the presence of the Magician and the threat he poses to the co-habitation of man and Death Spider. The people discover medicine, the benefits of thought and, oddly, a lot about daily life in medieval Florence. The first part, in which Niall plays detective, is gripping, then scene after scene, in different ways, re-enforce that grip.

Those who enjoy this easy science fantasy ought to try Wilson's two or three science fiction novels. They contain the same blend of invention and philosophy.

**David Wiltse**  
**Prayer For The Dead**  
*Grafton, 1993, 304pp, £4.99*  
 Reviewed By Simon Lake

Set in small town America, **Prayer For The Dead** is an excellent blend of psychological drama and horror. Roger Dyce is the seemingly innocuous insurance salesman engaged in a series of bizarre murders. Using his work connections to lure away young men, Dyce employs a course of slow acting but lethal drugs to help act out his sinister fantasies. Although he goes to elaborate lengths to cover his tracks, the increase in missing persons eventually comes to the attention of the local police chief who enlists the enigmatic Becker, an old friend and former FBI agent. Becker is the novel's other key character, an investigator whose unorthodox methods involve getting deep into the psyche of his adversaries. Burdened by the traumas of previous investigations, Becker is at first reluctant to help out, but as the search for Dyce intensifies he finds himself inescapably drawn ever deeper into the case.

**Prayer For The Dead** is an addictive novel, subtly plotted and brimming with an array of well drawn characters, both major and



minor. The writing is sharp and the descriptions of Dyce's methods particularly vivid. Throughout the book Wiltse cleverly sets off the two main characters against each other. As the story develops Becker is revealed to be just as obsessive as Dyce. Refreshingly there is no simple delineation between good and evil.

Wiltse may not be a household name yet, but on the strength of this book he could soon become one.

## Serials

### David Bishoff Star Trek The Next Generation: Grounded

*Titan, 1993, 273pp, £3.99*  
Reviewed By Chris C. Bailey

Having read thousands of SF/F novels over the last 25 years or so, I thought that I had become familiar with the majority of the wacky, way-out themes both major and minor, used by various authors. Until now, that is. Here we have David Bishoff, a competent and consistent writer, bravely trying to convince us that there is such a thing as 'sentient, mobile, inorganic clay', with a bit of a twist in its metaphorical tail! I kid you not. As with most Next Generation *Star Trek* novels I have read, the plot of this one meanders strategically between the Federation planet in question, Phaedra, where the inimically orientated and seemingly indestructible sentient clay resides bent on universal armageddon if it can only take over Picard's ship, and the USS Enterprise and crew, who battle against the foe in their usual, heroically stoic way, thereby attempting to save their skins in the nick of time before all is lost.

So what else is new? David Bishoff's *Grounded* is a much more aggressively penned *Star Trek* novel as compared to the others, giving this reviewer more of that 'seat-of-the-pants', 'cliff-hanger' suspense, as the ultimate fate of the USS Enterprise slowly, but surely, reaches its undeniable, ultimate conclusion...

### Melissa Crandall Star Trek: Shell Game

*Titan, 1993, 277pp, £3.99*  
Reviewed By Jim Steel

*Star Trek* is no worse than any other shared world, and better than most. Blish, Bear, Haldeman and others have worked here, doing their best within the obvious restraints. I'm no bigot; some of my best friends are trekkers. Melissa Crandall, however, is no Greg Bear.

*Shell Game* has the Enterprise encountering a derelict Romulan space station. Spock, McCoy, Chekov and assorted red-shirted cannon fodder beam down to find out what has happened and, incidentally, reveal why security guards have such a high mortality

rate. These guys are the worst combat troops of all time; one is scared of ghosts (I kid you not), another can't stand the sight of dead bodies and has an inability to follow orders, and so on. McCoy — for we are seeing this from his point of view — is obviously quite aware that he survives every episode and is therefore more concerned about Spock being an asshole than he is about the imminent destruction of both the Enterprise and himself.

The quality of the writing matches up to the plot and Crandall is lucky the readers can fill in the characterisation for themselves. The readers, unfortunately, will not be quite so lucky. Save yourself some suffering by not being a completist.

### Gary Gyax Dangerous Journeys: The Samarkand Solution

*ROC, 1993, 284pp, £4.99*  
**Michael Moorcock  
The Shores of Death**  
*ROC, 1993, 156pp, £4.50*  
Reviewed By Sally-Ann Melia

As a voracious reader and obsessive writer, I sometime suffer pangs of guilt as to the numbers of trees felled to make the pulp that makes the paper without which I could neither read nor write. This subconscious concern for trees only gushes forth, when (1) my printer goes mad and spews out pages of rubbish or (2) I come across garbage paperbacks.

First Michael Moorcock's *The Shores of Death*. I have not read much Moorcock, so I was delighted to receive this. Modest in its presentation, slim and narrow with a black and blue cover, this ROC novel is a far cry from the elegant marble and black ink of the re-issued Moorcock books from Millennium. I didn't think much of this until page 15, I discovered the concept of 'space ache' — a combination of mental and physical agony — which comes soon after your ship has passed the half-way point on the journey to Mars. Pardon? I checked the front page to discover *The Shores of Death* was first published by Compact books in 1966. Ah-ha, this explains a lot: outdated concepts such as 'space-ache', an utopian future Earth where the garden of Surrey has spread over seven continents, dreadful characterisation, dubious plot, awful awful writing. One of Michael Moorcock's early works, promising maybe...I'm pretty sure there's a lot better stuff in most editor's slush piles. So unless you are a Moorcock nut, this book is not worth the trees.

From a disappointing Michael Moorcock onto Gary Gyax. This is one of those novels pumped out to support, wait for it, the Gary Gyax game system, computer game and Nintendo game. As books go, it is truly appalling. Based in Egypt on Yarth (see Egypt 2000 BC on Earth), *Dangerous Journeys: The Samarkand Solution* has a cast of cardboard cut-outs, a boring opening, a tedious finale, totally unpronounceable names: Absobek-khaibet, Inhetep, Tuphopsis,

and a heavy dose of male chauvinism: "Girl? Well, Inhetep thought of her thus, although he realized she was a mature and beautiful woman." Inhetep, the hero, and the author, then proceed to call every female 'girl' for the remainder of the book. Dreadful, absolutely dreadful.

As I said earlier, I weep for the trees.

### Sondra Marshak & Myrna Culbreath (Eds) Star Trek: The New Voyages 2 *Titan, 1993, 279pp, £3.99* Reviewed By Julie Atkin

This collection, which was originally gathered in the late 1970s, including short stories and poems, of varying quality, inspired by the original *Star Trek* series. There is also an unused script written for the animated series, and numerous introductions. Every piece has been written by fans and this is both the strength and the weakness of the book. The authors' and editors' love and knowledge of the series and its characters are obvious. However this detailed knowledge sometimes works against the casual viewer and reader like myself, with references being made to characters of whom I have never heard.

The editors and mainly female authors, bring the female characters — always in the background in the TV series — to the fore. Marshak and Culbreath explore the innate sexism of sixties *Star Trek* in an amusing, but rather superficial manner in 'The Procruetean Petard'. Uhura stars in 'Surprise', written by Michelle Nichols, Marshak and Culbreath, and Connie Faddis' 'Snake Pit' features Nurse Chapel as a strong, believable character.

Highlights include Jane Peyton's 'Cave-in', a dialogue between Spock and an unknown character, and 'In The Maze' by Jennifer Guttridge, demonstrating the relationship between Kirk, Spock and McCoy.

One for the real fans only.

### Fred V. Saberhagan & James V. Hart Bram Stoker's Dracula *Pan, 1993, 301pp, £4.99* Reviewed By Julie Atkin

James Hart, author of the film's screenplay, researched the historical Dracula — Vlad the Impaler — and it is his story that forms the basis of this version.

In 1462, Dracula is a holy knight, fighting against the Turks. His wife, tricked into believing that he was killed in battle, commits suicide, and hence is not permitted a church burial. Raging at this, Dracula denounces God and gives himself to the powers of darkness. Centuries later, seeing a photograph of his solicitor's fiancé, he recognizes in her the reincarnation of his lost love, and on arriving in London, sets out to regain the love they shared.

This novelization is unlikely to add very much to the film. Although fleshed out from

the basic screenplay, there is little characterization and at times the writing operates in an 'X did this, Y did that' manner. There is also a loss of impetus in the approach to the final confrontation. However, where this book scores is in the extra dimension it gives to Dracula's character and actions, adding a romantic edge to the eroticism of the vampire legend.

**Carl Sargent  
& Marc Gascoigne**  
**Shadowrun:  
Streets of Blood**  
*ROC, 1993, 278pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed by Andy Mills

The title page of this book indicates this is Volume 8 of Secrets of Power, whatever that may be. Shadowrun (I gather) is a role-playing game; I have no idea what the relationship of this book to the game is, so I can only judge it on its own merits. Since it hasn't all that many, this won't take long.

The future setting is a fairly promising one: much of humanity has metamorphosed into various protean forms whilst technology has blurred the distinction between man and machine. The execution is, however, uninspired. In this tale, the hunt is on for a reincarnation of Jack the Ripper. Apart from the 'stalk and slash' sub-genre the authors cheerfully borrow from cyberpunk and stock fantasy to create a world which, in the end, is neither convincing nor even interesting. There's plenty of action (ie lots of people end up dead), sloppy writing and a plot so tortuous that at the end of the novel the bad guys have to kidnap the lead character just to explain to him and us what it was all about. Avoid.

**Jordan K. Weisman (Ed)**  
**Shadowrun:  
Into The Streets**  
*ROC, 1993, 291pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed By Susan Badham

This book of stories is set in the universe of 'Shadowrun', a role playing game where magic and magical creatures have re-emerged against a cyberpunk background. It's part of a series of books and advertises the game on the inside back cover. Not so much a book, as part of a leisure concept.

Despite this, the linked stories are reasonably well written, though the authors are inevitably limited by having to work within the game background, and the quality of the pieces varies. The setting is very derivative, a collection of ideas from different books and films. The feel of the stories is predictable, all of them striving for the same *noir* effect, some more successfully than others. The worst fault of this book is the lack of characterisation, which is understandable given that the protagonists are more collections of abilities than anything else.

Books that are tied to role playing games often sell well because they have their marketing done for them. This is not always a re-

flection of their quality. This collection forms an undemanding adventure story, probably not worth reading unless you happen to play 'Shadowrun'.

**Timothy Zahn**  
**Star Wars:  
Dark Force Rising**  
*Bantam, 1993, 406pp, £3.99*  
Reviewed By Mat Coward

I approached this review at a disadvantage, having never seen a *Star Wars* film and thus not knowing a Jedi from an AT-AT. I did read the Marvel comic, half a lifetime ago, but all I remember from that are a big hairy creature and a woman who looked like an unmarried maths teacher. Despite my ignorance, I much enjoyed this second volume in 'the authorized sequel to the most popular series in movie history'.

Five years on from *The Return of The Jedi*, the New Republic which resulted from the rebellion against the Empire is under threat: from traitors and from the last Imperial Grand Admiral — a thoroughly nasty chap called Thrawn (that's how you know he isn't an alien; no apostrophes in his name).

Han Solo and the gang are therefore required once again to make the galaxy safe for democracy. This they do with great gusto, in outer space and on a variety of interesting planets. The politics of the civil war are subtly presented, the action is active, there's plenty of light humour, ('What if they spot us? Skulking behind asteroids is the oldest trick on the list'), and Hugo-winner Zahn exploits the series' sense of its own history very well. Even a reviewer who doesn't know any of the history can see that.

## Shorts

**Samuel R. Delany**  
**Driftglass/Starshards**  
*Grafton, 1993, 535pp, £5.99*  
Reviewed By Andrew Seaman

*Driftglass/Starshards* brings together virtually all the short stories Delany has written in the course of his 30 year career, reprinting the text of his 1971 collection, *Driftglass*, along with a handful of stories/autobiographical pieces written since then. The author describes them as tales of "...memory, madness and imagination as they manifest the varieties of love and loneliness on the canvases of the future", but perhaps above all else, they are stories of physical, emotional and spiritual entrapment and the possibility of escape.

The protagonist of 'Cage of Brass' finds himself physically and morally imprisoned as a result of the crime he has committed, entombed miles below ground in an automated life-sustaining coffin. Though, through his knowledge of architecture, he enables two of his fellow prisoners to escape, he chooses to remain, unable to evade the consequences of

what he has done. In 'The Star Pit' a psychic and physiological barrier prevents humanity's expansion beyond the rim of the galaxy, trapping a representative group of humans like animals in the ecogarium that forms a recurrent image in the story. Even the golden — traumatised post-humans who pilot starships between the galaxies — are like the humans who envy their freedom, trapped both by circumstance and their own greed and folly in an emotional adolescence. Delany's theme that, trapped as we are most grow up or die, is bleakly and cleverly developed.

Even in the rich and dazzling bohemian futures of stories like 'Aye, and Gomarrah...', or 'Time Considered...' a Helix of Semi-Pre-cious Stones' humanity remains captive to old prejudices and desires. The genetically altered spacers of 'Aye, and Gomarrah...' who prostitute their bodies to gratify the sexual whims of earth-bound humans are just as much prisoners of their desires as their clients, while the anti-heroic master criminal of 'Time Considered...' finds his fate caught between the forces of law and order and those of the future criminal underworld to which he belongs, twin strands of a helix in which he has become entangled.

Elsewhere, though, Delany offers us hope of release. Amos the hero of 'Prismatica', his slight, but witty *homage* to the Half Fantastic Quest, colourfully avoids the grey doom planned for him by his mysterious employer: Spyros the fisherman and his lover, Katina, plan to escape the superstitious ways of old Greece after the death of his brother in 'Dog in a Fisherman's Net', while 'Among the Blobs' celebrates sexual freedom in an unsympathetic world by surrealistically juxtaposing space opera with a naturalistic tale of cottaging among New York's gay community. It is clear, both from his lively and informative introduction on the pleasures and pitfalls of writing and from the autobiographical piece on his artistic and sexual education ('Erik, Gwen, and D. H. Lawrence's Esthetic if Unrectified Feeling') that Delany writes as a powerful means of liberation, a fact borne out by this remarkable and varied collection of stories.

**Peter Haining (Ed)**  
**Vampires at Midnight**  
*Warner, 1993, 255pp, £4.99*  
Reviewed By Max Sexton

The flavour of the month is vampires; coincidentally, a vampire anthology edited by Peter Haining has been re-issued. Haining is well-known and his eclecticism is admirable, unfortunately, I felt the traditions of the atmospheric English ghost story, the lurid Penny Dreadful, and modern writing from Ray Bradbury and Fritz Leiber in one book, were too diverse. Good for completists or vampire bores, but less good for the average reader.

The stories are more or less chronologically arranged. The 19th century stories of Dr. Poldori and Thomas Prest are only interesting from an historical point of view. Poldori simply piles incident on top of incident without a motif. Prest of *Varney the*

**Vampyr** fame, on the other hand, milks the sexual motif of vampirism for all it's worth, but as the sex is only there to titillate repressed Victorian readers, the story remains an historical curiosity. M. R. James, whose literary skills should have stopped at writing guide books on English churches, is included and so is E. F. Benson, whose stories are as defunct as the 1930s country house set. August Derleth's story is pure, if rather good, juvenilia.

Ray Bradbury is on top form. His story explores themes about the self and its efforts to survive, that make it fertile for black humour. Fritz Leiber explores the motif of the femme fatale to critique male sexual fears, which is both fascinating and repulsive. Two other Americans, Richard Matheson and Robert Bloch have stories that are so typical of them that anyone who enjoys either writer will enjoy their contributions.

I wish I could tear this book in half and keep the half with Bradbury and Bloch. As it stands, completists everywhere, buy it. Everybody else, read after Manly Wade Wellman.

### Brian Lumley Fruiting Bodies and Other Fungi

ROC, 1993, 278pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

In this collection of stories, Brian Lumley sticks to the time-honoured horror tradition of ending short tales with a terrifying revelation rather than a complete resolution of all the plot lines. Many of these stories are almost photographic in their impact: they build up slowly to an intense image of dread, and leave an afterimage like a camera's flash. And like a camera's flash you know exactly what's coming, but that doesn't stop you from blinking your eyes when it actually happens. 'The Cyprus Shell' and 'The Mirror of Nitocris' are perhaps the best examples of this style. Only one real 'twist in the tail' story ('Necros') is included here (though with some imagination one could also add 'Recognition' to this category), but I get the impression that Lumley is more comfortable with the former type of tale; he gives away too many clues for a complete surprise at the end to be truly effective. Although it contains its fair share of Lumley's Lovecraftian Mythos-oriented stories ('Born of the Winds', 'Recognition', and others), this collection consists of more than just standard horror: 'The Viaduct', 'The Pit-Yakker', and 'The Man Who Photographed Beardsley' contain no supernatural elements, but rather concentrate on exposing gruesome deeds of the human psyche; and 'The Man Who Felt Pain' is straight 'what if' SF, but 'what if' with disturbing consequences.

These stories range from the very good title story 'Fruiting Bodies' (which won the World Fantasy Award in 1989) and even better 'Born of the Winds' (nominated for same in 1976) to the distinctly mediocre 'No Way Home'. There is no question that they are scary, but I'm not sure if I can see anyone but die-hard Brian Lumley fans getting more than mildly enthusiastic about this anthology.

### Michael Moorcock Casablanca

Gollancz, 1993, 267pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Brendan Wignall

Michael Moorcock is the writer responsible for my interest in science fiction and fantasy. I can still remember the buzz I got from reading **The Knight of Swords** as a fourteen-year-old a full eighteen years on.

Older, if not wiser, I can now see the limitations of his high-output period, but the early Eternal Champion novels were strong on character and plot (and, OK, weak on atmosphere) and they worked; I'm not sure that the same can be said of his later, **Laughter Of Carthage** series.

In this context, then, it's nice to see **Casablanca**, a collection of fiction and non-fiction pieces. The pieces date from 1977 through to 1988 and there are very few squibs. The fictional highlight is clearly the revised version of Moorcock's **The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle**, 'Gold Diggers of 1977' featuring the immortal Jerry Cornelius, Jesus Christ, Dylan Thomas and Sid Vicious, to name but a few. 'The Murderer's Song' is another Jerry Cornelius piece worth the price of admission, and 'The Frozen Cardinal' is one of the best science fictional pieces Moorcock has written.

The non-fiction covers 'People', 'Places' and 'Pornography & Politics'. The 'People' section covers five individuals, the most interesting of which — both in himself and as a piece of writing — is Mervyn Peake. The other four are Harlan Ellison, Angus Wilson, Andrea Dworkin (whose influence looms large in the 'Pornography' section) and artist Maeve Gilmore.

The 'Places' section is of no great interest unless the subject matter happens to appeal to you (London/Vienna/the Middle East), although it is interesting to see the cuts made to a piece on London's poor and Islam by the 'Daily Telegraph'. Really, it's more than interesting: it's shocking. Although the politics of the **Telegraph** may not be to the taste of the civilised, I had thought that it was above such dubious editorial tampering.

'Pornography & Politics' takes us into a more contentious area, but all the pieces here are strong and persuasive: the best are 'The Case Against Pornography' which presents the issue as one of sex discrimination rather than free speech (an important distinction for old-fashioned liberals), 'Caught Up in Reality' about child abuse, and 'Anti-Personnel Capability' about the relationship between certain types of technology and pornography.

Moorcock may have lost his way as a novelist, but it's nice to see him still producing work of the quality of **Casablanca**.

## Graphics

Michael Jan Friedman, Peter

### Kraus & Pablo Marcos The Star Lost

Titan, 1993, 140pp, £7.99

Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey

Caught reading comics at my age? Well, only technically. **The Star Lost** is one of several large format, graphic novels which seem to have appeared intermittently with mixed results over the last few years. I suppose you could equally argue that the "logical" evolution of the pulp-comic of yesteryear is the graphic novel of today, the visual action is very much the same, albeit more colourfully and professionally produced, except that it has been repackaged into modern day expectations. Interesting, yes, but I'm still not sure I like them all that much, perhaps because I started reading conventional comics from an early age and have conservative views. Having said that though, I must agree that **The Star Lost** contains some stunning illustrations, artfully created by a team of professionally dedicated people who have striven hard to give the reader that little extra something that other comics don't always have. **The Star Lost** is a *Trek* graphic novel, the story situated within the same universe as the USS Enterprise, as conned by Captain Jean-Luc Picard and crew. One final point, at £7.99 for 140 pages plus a fancy cover, I'm still not entirely convinced that it's worth the money. Perhaps this is one reason why graphic novels are not as popular as they could be...

### John Wagner, Alan Grant & Simon Bisley Judge Dredd:

#### Heavy Metal Dredd

Mandarin, 1993, u/p, £4.99

#### John Wagner, Alan

#### Grant, Garth Ennis, Colin

#### Macneil & John Burns

#### Judge Dredd: Top Dog

Mandarin, 1993, u/p, £5.99

#### John Smith & Sean Phillips

#### Devlin Waugh:

#### Swimming in Blood

Mandarin, 1993, u/p, £6.99

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

None of these are comics as Really Serious Social Comment, but as Mega-City One is increasingly taking place in the world around us, we remember Aristotle's words about the catharsis of art. First, **Heavy Metal Dredd**. If you fuse **Iron Maiden** and Dredd this is what you get — a collection of cartoon mayhem stamped 'for adult readers only'. Either that's part of the joke or someone got cold feet on re-reading 'The Great Arsol' in which all is revealed about where stage conjurers hide the rabbit. Other stories have Dredd zapping Father Christmas, stomping cute Disney characters or tackling the resurrection of a heavy metal singer. Like most Metal this is ultra-violence in Cuddly-mode; one stage on from Dennis the Menace. Staid old duffer that I am, I had great fun reading it.

The title story of **Top Dog** is less successful than these cute nihilistic subversions, being the obligatory conflict between 2000AD heroes, this time Dredd and Johnny Alpha (Strontium Dog). It's OK, but the creakingly obvious climax makes me think that no-one's heart was in it. Better is 'The Art of Geomancy' which has Dredd bound and tortured by Dragon Daughter in a sequel to the Martial-arts 'Deathfist' saga. It's JD in ironic mode. 'Geomancy is harmony with the environment', but Dredd's environment is the harsh brutal world of the Mega-Cities. His victory is a defeat for human values and the 'natural flow'; the only hope is precisely that the reader is shocked.

Smith's Devlin Waugh is a new and unusual hero, described as a cross between Noel Coward and **The Terminator**, but I'd describe him as the ultimate Scout Leader. Mega-City One's worst killers and lonies are breaking out from Aquatraz and becoming vampires. Vatican envoy Waugh offers high camp and extreme violence as he gives the undead the thrashings they deserve. Beneath the set-piece hack-and-slash is a vein of very decadent humour, but Philip's art captures the murky side of the horror as well. Personally, I can do without faces being ripped off and other such episodes which make this essential reading for kids whose mummies won't let them see **Silence of The Lambs**. But Smith has come up with a real winner of a character: Schwarzenegger with a passion for beauty and bright young things; Oscar Wilde with a vicious streak. Now his team-up with Dredd is something I've just got to see.

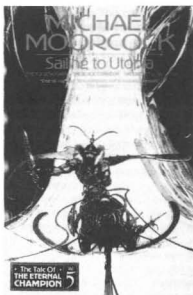
Oh, and remembering Aristotle. Actually in classical tragedy, the violence was reported from off-stage, but then it was a long time ago...

## Eternal Champion

**Michael Moorcock**  
**Sailing to Utopia**  
*Millennium, 1993, 463pp, £10.99*  
**A Nomad of the Time Streams**

*Millennium, 1993, 457pp, £10.99*  
Reviewed By K. V. Bailey

The comprehensive title for this ongoing Moorcock omnibus, of which these are volumes 5 and 6 respectively, is **The Tale of The Eternal Champion**: the 'champion' being a figure of many roles and guises. In the tetra-miscellany of volume 5, the 'champion' is always one seeking some kind of utopia; in the volume 6 trilogy, Oswald Bastable battles endlessly with issues of fate, guilt and responsibility. Moorcock's talent for slyly witty pastiche and allusive irony is evident throughout. **The Ice Schmeer** (1966), the first novel of **Sailing to Utopia** is set at the end of a post-catastrophe ice age. The schooner sails



(skates) to the Matto Grosso to the mythical utopia of New York, which turns out to be a surviving technological enclave. The hunting of mutated whales *en route* is evocative of Melville, and there are echoes of both Conrad and early Ballard. **The Black Corridor** (1969), with material from Hilary Bailey, is a quest for a planetary utopia. The scene (with earth-side flashbacks) is a family/colony ship in flight from their deteriorating world. The psychoses destroying Earth reenact themselves in the consciousness of the protagonist, Ryan, who has contrived the escape and who controls the ship while his entourage hibernates — each one in some way traumatically related to his past. The paranoia and guilt that obsess Ryan infect his dreams, his hallucinations and his exchanges with the ship's computer. Routine, hope and the neutrality of space seem the only available therapies.

In **The Distant Suns**, a 1979 collaboration with James Cawthorne, Jerry Cornelius (but not *the one*) leads a 'save the Earth' mission to discover a hospitable planet. Golden Age parody at take-off shifts to Wellsian pastiche on landing. There are discovered inhabitants with both Morlock and Eloi-like characteristics — there is even a kind of Weena named Lae-Penu. The planet proves to have been first colonised by an ancient Asiatic civilisation. The novel draws on Hindu mythology and has action, lots of it, plus some ecological implications. The tailpiece to this volume is another collaboration (Barrington Bayley), **Flux** is a 1962 novelette of travel into the future to bring back guidance for the present. The machinery is tongue-in-cheek Wellsian, but the weirdness of its several futures and 'lost-in-time' action proclaim a happily inventive collaboration. The spacetime flux encountered involves and anticipates chaos theory as it was about to be developed. The story's denouement is unexpected, acceptable and funny.

**A Nomad of the Time Streams** contains **The Warlord of the Air** (1971), **The Land Leviathan** (1973) and **The Iron Tsar** (1981), all ironically flavoured adventure stories, described in the blurb as primal 'steam punk'.



In them, technologies of about the time of Wolf's **The War in the Air** are extrapolated into alternate future histories where WWI and II don't happen, but where impulses toward anarchical/democratic freedom conflict with several brands — tyrannical, paternalistic — of imperialist. Captain Oswald Bastable is now a version of the 'eternal champion'.

**Warlord** tells of how in an earthquake of 1903 he is propelled into 1973. The loyalties and prejudices of 'a simple soldier' are variously tested. He serves under a revolutionary General O. T. Shaw, eventually commanding an airship which drops a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, the blast sending him back to 1903, endowed with an enduring sense of guilt.

Time-wandering continues. **Leviathan** is located in an early 20th century where, in a turbulent world, Ghandi presides over a peaceful South African republic, while from New Ashanti the black Atilla launches an invasion of the USA, to reverse bloody white over black dominance. In the 1941 alternate world of the **Tsar**, Japan bombs Singapore to start a war, one consequence of which is a Russian civil conflict resolved by a concordat between a limited monarchy and the democratic anarchists. These alternative versions of our century are all recorded in Bastable manuscripts mediated by metafictional Moorcock *grandpère* and editorial *petit-fils* Michael. They are populated by such pseudo-identities as alternative Reagan, Hoover, Lenin, etc. and by such temporally mobile members of Moorcock's time-travelling league as Colonel von Bek and Una Persson - a company into which Bastable is finally recruited. In **Tsar** Moorcock's concern for 'anarchical' personal responsibility and his ontological speculations are most fully and sophisticatedly explored. At one level the books can be read as richly allusive 'tall stories'; at another as narratives of metaphysical fantasy; and at yet another as contemporary relevant tragic-comic insights into the nature of history and of the individual's place therein. At all levels they fascinate and entertain.