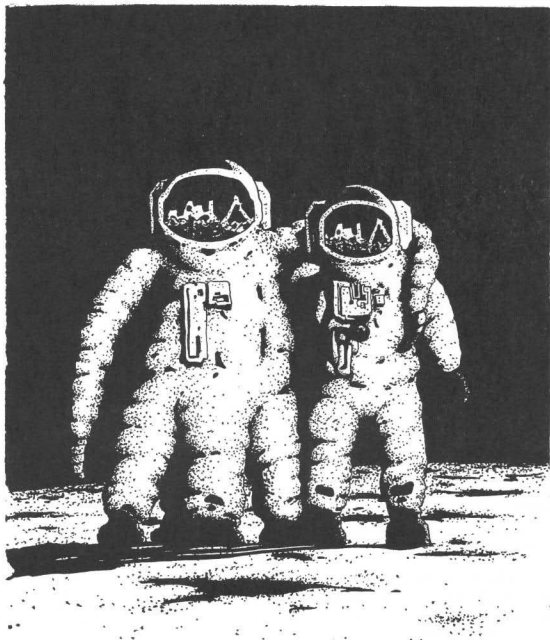


Vector 176

December/January 1994

£2.25

The Critical Journal of the BSFA



Václav Cechura

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Passage, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4AP

Vector is printed bimonthly by the BSFA ©1993

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Contributions: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS should be typed doubles spaced on one side of

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Nuts & Bolts

It seems as though this issue has been jinxed. One problem has followed another, culminating in an injury to my right arm (quite a problem to the right-handed mouse and keyboard operator) and the discovery that I'd left half of the texts I'd prepared on disc in Derby. I've tried really hard to see all these problems as opportunities, and to rise above them to produce the best magazine possible, but it's impossible to pretend that there are not visible glitches in this issue. Be forbearing and enjoy the content which offers a veritable cornucopia of delights.

Kim Stanley Robinson's **Mars** sequence is attracting a growing following as it progresses; on page 5 he explains to Kev McVeigh the inspiration behind the sequence.

Learn how to feast in style with Dave Langford's **Foodies of the Gods**. (The squeamish are advised to wait till after Christmas dinner)

If you still have stocking fillers to buy, turn to Jessica Yates' round-up of the best in Children's SF for help, and if like me, you've ever sat at the back of a wardrobe and wept you are bound to find fascination in Cherith Baldry's exploration of **Magic in Narnia**.

Carol Ann Green investigates the work of Octavia Butler, and Paul Kincaid sounds the death knell for British SF. (Surely not!)

All this and a wealth of reviews, I hope you find much to stimulate and interest you and will write and tell me about it in the New Year.

My apologies to those contributors whose work has been held over.

Happy Christmas



the page. Submissions may also be accepted as ASCII text files on IBM, Atari ST or Mac 3.5" discs.

Maximum preferred length is 5000 words; exceptions can and will be made. A preliminary letter is advisable but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned without an SAE.

Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books should first write to the appropriate editor.

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

Foundation Library
From Mike Cobley, Irvine

Front Line Dispatches Readers Letters

Frankenstein Tendency from Edward St Boniface, London

I read with interest Mike Sullivan's letter 'Shelley Syndrome' in *Vector* 174, and would like to take up the subject of the Frankenstein Tendency, which is a strong undertow in the currents of speculative literature. Mr Sullivan is aggrieved at the persistency of this theme; the arrogant creator being turned on by or defeated in the consequences of his/her invention. The Christian parable of Genesis and the Original Sin is invoked as a precursor, and its influence on subsequent narratives like **Frankenstein** that deal with incautious perversions of Nature; science abused is Sin.

As much as Mr Sullivan, I deplore such a cliché, along with the Mad Scientist and Weirdo Boffin stereotypes that popular culture loves. But nevertheless, a moral and ethical dimension connected to scientific achievements is not to be ignored. Mr Sullivan points out that our lives, far more comfortable, hygienic and potentially rewarding than in any previous time are so because of the many scientists who have spent their lives advancing and refining human knowledge. We inhabit a civilisation that has been fantastically transformed by the discoveries of these dedicated humane individuals.

But the evil scientists exist. Dr Josef Mengele never paid for his inhuman crimes. Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project gave the human race's heaviest burden, the atomic bomb, which is even more of a menace today as it proliferates into the hands of terrorist regimes than the darkest days of the Cold War. Teams of chemists knowingly prepared poison gas for use on the soldiers of the WWI trenches, and the death chambers of the Nazi Belsen and Dachau. Today, there are research laboratories in England, the USA, France, Russia, China and innumerable other countries under military jurisdiction that study and invent biological/chemical weapons of

terrifying potency. Our world has to accept the intolerable pressure of these unacceptable realities. It has no choice.

The future, if amoral in the application of genetic engineering, biomechanical adaptations, resource exploitation and the privileges of supercorporate finance, has far more of a Frankenstein's Monster nightmare quality than the original book itself. Technology is a tool that can be malevolent or benign according to how it is wielded, but it can and does turn on us where no real malice is intended. Our pollution of the natural environment is the most obvious -- the West is unfortunate, but look at the horrendous plight of Russia! -- but there are even more sinister ones. The psyche of the human race has been blasted and brutalised by mechanised warfare, mass slaughter and the chaos of the twentieth century. Societies, economies and identity are in flux, with ever more headlong pace. The capacity to do evil has been hellishly amplified, and a harsh voyeurism of the possible extremes of the future in fiction and cinema is one result. Not just Future Shock, but a fear of technologically-assisted cruelty as dark as the medieval phobia of the Devil has evolved. The work of the Swiss painter Hans Ruedi Giger vividly captures the most macabre side of this apprehension. Our potential Devil -- or Angel -- is real. The Shelley Syndrome is real. We are living through its echoes.

Let us not be seduced by the paranoia of uncontrollable science perceived as a disease, but let us also not forget that this century has already seen the most fearsome wars and weapons ever endured by our race, and that our destructive abilities are escalating continuously. Science fiction tries to mark the way ahead, to comprehend the shape of Tomorrow, to illuminate the mirages and shadows on the frontier towards which we are hurtling. There is room here and there for a little moralising, in the era of Chernobyl and Torture Videos. We live in the Age of Surprises!

I wonder if any BSFA members saw the article on the SF Foundation's library in the October 11th edition of **The Independent**. As an example of patronising ignorance it was outstanding, and I thought I'd share with Association members the considered letter which I sent to the article's author, one Robert Hanks.

Dear Mr Hanks,

After reading your piece on the relocation of the SF Foundation Collection, I decided to write to you personally so that I could express my feelings without the concision necessary for a letter to the letters page.

Well, as you might guess, I found your article, 'A Library, Jim, but not as we know it' (a masterly title, that), aggravatingly shallow. Within the space of a fifth of a page you successfully pigeonholed Science Fiction as the shabby preserve of geeks and semi-literate nerds fixated on stories about "cowboys with spaceships"; in other words, it was the usual wretched job of misrepresentation and ridicule that many SF writers and readers have come to expect from the broadsheet press.

Personally, I would have hoped for something better from **The Independent**, perhaps some kind of overview of the true state of SF in the Nineties, with some mention of the best that the field has to offer, like Dan Simmons, Ian McDonald, Kim Stanley Robinson, William Gibson, David Wingrove, Bruce Sterling...but sadly all we got were the same tired old mentions of Stapledon and Wells and **Journey into Space**, the stock 'acceptable' faces of SF. And for your information, Stapledon and Wells are in no way the most influential figures in British SF today -- that honour goes to the new American writers like Gibson, Sterling, and Simmons. And it is in SF (note how I refrain from using the juvenile term 'sci-fi') that vigorous and relevant fiction is being written, not in the enervated region of mainstream with all its mutual bootlicking backslapping.

And before you point to the likes of **Star Trek** novels, cod fantasy trilogies, and militaristic SF (the war bores, as they're known), just pause for a moment of reflection; are John Le Carré's novels judged in the light of the **James Bond** movies? Well, no, of course they aren't, so why should the best of what SF has to offer be dismissed as being in the vein of "Leather-Clad Astronaut Cheerleaders From Galaxy 666"? Why should the likes of Martin Amis or Brett Easton Ellis be tirelessly and repeatedly reviewed, in the **Independent**/**Guardian**/**Observer**, when Dan Simmons or Ian McDonald are never mentioned?

It's not the approval or adulation of the establishment that SF wants, it's a slice of the media profile, a chance to speak out for itself and prove its worth. Your article did nothing but 'prove' how unattractive you find SF, speaking volumes about your attitudes and knee-jerk response to the leaflet advertising the Liverpool - U MA course -- giant spaceships, big planets, women in

4 Vector

skintight spacesuits. Of course, I see it now -- you know *nothing* about contemporary SF and have no appreciation of it. How foolish of me to expect anything else than what was published.

Bearded

From Philip Muldowney, Plymouth

I would love to know where the two photos of Robert Holdstock were taken. The cover one is all beard au naturel, when you put the clippers over it about a month ago. The inside one is all smarted and tarted, bears the hallmarks of the aftermath of the whispered threat, "I am going nowhere with you, with your beard looking like THAT!" As a long time beard wearer, I have great sympathy with him. Why is it that so many SF writers are or have been beard wearers? Is this anything to do with the creative process? Or congenital laziness? Or wistful hippiedom? It was a great disappointment when Stephen King first appeared beardless on his backcovers. From this mysterious, somewhat malevolent looking visage, suddenly appeared a plain round-jawed nobody, that was not the face of the great horror story writer! Just Mr Ordinary, perhaps that's it, all those writers want a final domino to disguise their true nature!

The interview, followed by critical appreciation, seems to be one of your standard editorial gambits. It's just as well that you are not Nigel Short... However cornucopia of interviews does start to pall just a little. Or perhaps it is just that you are not asking the questions that I want to ask? The Robert Holdstock one was fascinating in bits, yet yawn-inducing in others. He is an author who I have read very little of. Perhaps it is the way that his books have been marketed, the HORROR with the fantasy element buried under the gruel. A bit like the way that Wingroves's **Chung-Kuo** books have been repackaged as a cross between **Tai-Pan** and a martial arts movie. Now if there was ever a case for the trades description act... To get back to the point. I wonder if Robert Holdstock is satisfied by the way he has been marketed. I note that the dust-jacket of the trade edition of **The Howling**, has a subtle change, the marketing is now like that of Barbara Vine.

What the article did do, is make sure that I will seek a Robert Holdstock book out, and go beyond the curtain of gibberish book jacket blurbs. It is another interesting point, how the careers of Robert Holdstock and Brian Stableford are paralleling each other, to a vague extent. Both of that generation of authors who started in the sixties, did their fair share of SF potboilers, and in their mature years are flourishing in different areas of the fantasy/horror areas. Does this say something about the English process or market forces?

So those are spaceships are they? Well, from another perspective they look like a rather big fat bomb! I disagree with your categorisations slightly, you are not taking Sturgeons's law into account. I think you need another category for the poorish book -- it might be worth borrowing, but is it worth reading? Will this system encourage people to skip through and read only the reviews that have the best ratings? I must admit to doing

this myself.

I can't say that I'm surprised by the inconsistencies in the WH Smiths fantasy books campaign. There is no great mystery of fantasy/SF definition here, just another example of the rather slapdash way that Smiths go about their book selling now. Have you had a look at the Fantasy/SF display in any WH Smiths lately? Generally loaded with old reissues of Heinlein/Asimov/Herbert/Clarke with a leavening of newer bestsellers. Terry Pratchett mixed in with a smorgasbord of fantasy and horror. In other words, a complete mess. This is sad, as they are the biggest bookseller in the country; in many towns the only one. Their displays all have the same air of no-one caring. Why? Have all the book-lovers on Smiths staff emigrated to Waterstones or Sherratt & Hughes?

No 174 seems like half a lifetime away now, or does it? John Clute seems to not get a good press. Well, that is the peril of being a critic.

The Geoff Ryman interview suffers from being opaque. I always find interviews interesting when the author gives some glimpses of his personal self. This one is the complete opposite, the school of interview as author lit crit expostulation. Kevin McVeigh is never clear which cap he is wearing, interviewer or literary critic. By trying to be partially both, he ends up being neither. Interviews are a peculiar mirage-like thing. Like riding a bicycle, or driving a car, it seems easy, but doing a good interview is a complicated thing. Sitting down with a tape recorder and chatting away is not enough. One needs some very careful questions and a good idea of what is wanted out of the interview. A lot of interviews seem to be of the up and chat 'em variety.

As a foot note to the Clarke award, and the

non-SF publicity given to **Body of Glass**. Is there a danger of the words Science fiction again becoming Politically Incorrect? A close perusal of the jacket of William Gibson's **Virtual Light** failed to find any mention of science fiction. A long review of the same book on BBC Radio 4's **Kaleidoscope**, fell over its own over-sophisticated tongue, trying to avoid any mention of the dread term. Has PC spread beyond academe and feminism to invade publishing?

Honour Satisfied

From John Madracki, Bolton

I can appreciate the umbrage taken by Scott Willis over Maureen Speller's remark that she thought it surprising to find an ex-cop who was also a decent sort of man -- but we mustn't let this be the thin edge of the wedge.

If we are expected to treat all professions with equal respect then it will only be a matter of time before estate agents and sellers of double-glazing demand that they too be regarded as being almost human.

And then where will we be?

Surely -- all that is required is for someone to make the statement:

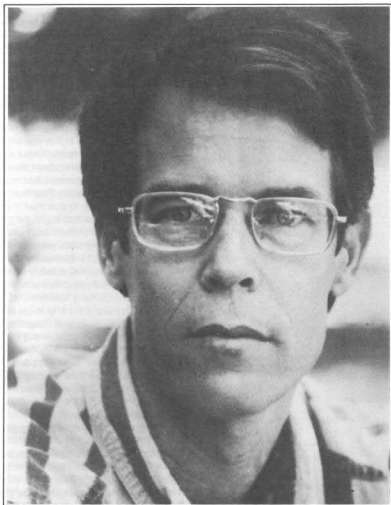
"For a book reviewer she was a surprisingly fair-minded woman..." and honour is satisfied.

As for Stephen Rothwell's request that contributed articles carry a warning from the editor -- I am sure that I'm not the only one who would like to remind him that a disclaimer, such as the one he suggests, is always printed on page 2 of every **Vector**.

(Well, almost. It seems to have slipped a few in the process of redesign. However take it as read -- we are not a schizophrenic. Catie)

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THE RED PROPHET

An Interview with

by
KEV McVEIGH

KIM
STANLEY
ROBINSON

Ten years ago, when Terry Carr's Ace Specials series of first novels was launched the authors chosen to head the list were all newcomers with just a handful of stories behind them. Each had already demonstrated considerable ability and originality in that time, and Terry Carr expected great things of all of them. The second and third authors on that list were Lucius Shepard and William Gibson, both of whom have more than fulfilled early promise. Ahead of them was Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore*, a novel as different from *Green Eyes* or *Neuromancer* as they were from each other, but equally full of potential and achievement. Since then Kim Stanley Robinson has published another five novels, each one distinct and original, and over thirty short stories collected in three anthologies. Now his latest project is attracting attention from everybody and anybody remotely interested in Science Fiction.

It begins with *Red Mars*, an epic, widescreen account of early terraforming attempts on Mars, and continues through *Green Mars* and finally, *Blue Mars*. The whole project will be complete sometime in 1995, but Robinson has been thinking about Mars for over a decade already.

"I started to do a bit of reading about Mars for short story ideas, standard short story research. I liked the look of the landscape that was in the books of photographs that were coming out after the Viking landers. The US Government puts out coffee-table size books for about \$5. I got lost in them immediately, imagining walking around them. So that was the first part of it.

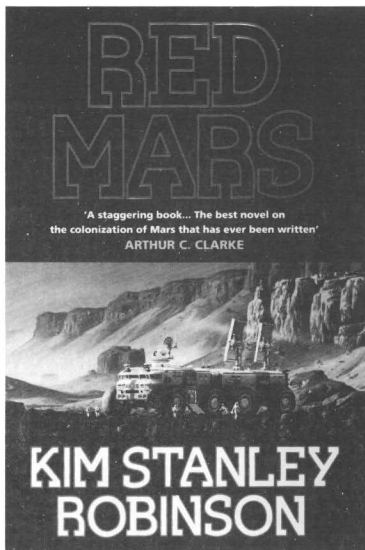
I had written the first and third parts of *Icehege*, and had gotten an offer to turn in the novel, and I knew the middle story would take place on Mars. So at that point, I had the books, I had the interest and suddenly I had a story that had to be on Mars. This must have been about '83 or so, and it's been with me ever since

Red Mars took about two-and-a-half years to write, during which time I was taking care of my toddler son full-time so I was only going at about 50% speed. It was a scattered process, especially the first year-and-a-half. Actually all the way up to the last 90 days or so. It was hard to get any regular writing schedule, but two-and-a-half years was fairly rapid given the circumstances"

We meet in the bar of a London hotel immediately after an interview for The Daily Mail. Serious, quality SF in the tabloids? Amongst the reasons why *Red Mars* is receiving so much attention is the curious coincidence of several other high-profile Mars novels appearing around the same time. Another newspaper, The Guardian, reminds us today of George Bush's pledge to put a man on Mars by the fiftieth anniversary of the lunar landings in 2019. Robinson is sceptical, and doesn't see this as a factor in his book or anybody else's

"It would be much too quick a response, and that was all hot air anyway. There is no monetary backup in any sense to that statement. That was just PR, and he forgot it as soon as he said it, and so did everybody else.

I think that what this is, is a response,



somewhat delayed but that's the way these things work, in the way people have to assimilate information, to the Viking and Mariner missions. We're finally beginning to come to grips with the incredible landscape that we just learned about. When you think about a whole world being clarified for us only 15-20 years ago, well that's not very much time. You need that much lead time to collect your thoughts, to get intrigued, to write the books. It may be any odd coincidence but I wouldn't be surprised if some of these other Mars novelists had gone through a similar variation on the experience I had. And now here they all are in a row, there must be at least half a dozen, maybe ten, in this short period of time. Generally it is good for all of us, it creates as mass interest that hopefully will set readers off to go into all of them, maybe do a comparative thing, get a deeper insight into Mars. I think it's a good thing."

Writing about Mars may indeed be a good thing, but should we be considering a mission there? And if we should, can we do it? **Red Mars** is filled with the ethical debates on terraforming, and tremendous technical detail on how it might be achieved.

"It is a luxury project, isn't it. I think it could go either way. There isn't an absolute economic necessity for doing it, but we do have both the Russians and the Americans

with massive aerospace industries from the Cold War that no longer have any reason to be, but can't be just left to crash and burn, because we will have a major depression. They earned about \$300 billion a year for the US, you can't just cut off industries that are earning that much.

So I could conceive of a manned Mars mission as being the glamour project that the very best aerospace industries get in on, and the rest get set on other tasks like Rapid Transit, public transport, replacement for the automobile-type projects. I can see a scenario where it might happen without there being any necessity for it."

Robinson sees the practical side of these things with a clear vision. The early scenes of **Red Mars** which cover the voyage to Mars convey the nature of life in a confined artificial environment in terms of almost Soap Opera-style relationships.

"The Russians have done a lot more with this than we have. NASA likes to pretend that none of the Russian space data is worth a thing, they don't learn from it. That's one of the reasons why NASA is a crippled and incompetent agency right now. The Russians have really put a lot of study into this. They've put men and women up there for very long periods of time in these orbiting craters and surely if anyone were going to crack they

would. In fact, interpersonal relationships between cosmonauts have often been really strained. They've had fights, tantrums, refusal to talk to the ground crew for weeks on end — there's been some radical stuff out there amongst the cosmonauts and the Russians have faithfully kept records that are available to all, they haven't tried to make secrets out of it. Some of the cosmonauts have even written books saying "It's amazing how much I hated him, I wanted to murder him up there." What the Russians have said is that you need to create an environment that will have seasonal changes, daily biological rhythms and that you have to create an environment that will give the body a fair bit of gravity. This is why I think they are going to have to spin their ship or tether two ships, or something to get gravity. I don't think it can work weightless because the Russians have found that if you spend a long time weightless, you're useless for a good long time at the end of it, possibly even permanently. So I think if you create a little gravity, and a diurnal rhythms, a little wind, a park, some greenery and if the ship is big enough then I think they could hold it together.

People are so adaptable. And if they're goal directed they can make it. You know, 148 days and we're there... 147 days and we're there... You can bear strange conditions. Take the British in Antarctica, those were truly bizarre attenuated sensory-deprivation conditions on those expeditions. The classic one is Scott, and those guys were running Gilbert & Sullivan plays and getting along famously. They might have been bizarre British public school GA Henty types. I mean obviously these guys were crazy on some level but they were cordial to each other, they had great *esprit de corps*. With models like that and even sailing ship crews, I think they've proved that it can be done.

One of the many ironies in **Red Mars** comes when the psychiatrist, Michel, points out that crew for this mission need to be sufficiently eccentric to do the job without being too eccentric for others to live with. Then he is selected himself.

That was a little frivolousness which points up the fact that he is going to get much stranger as things go on.

I do think that the requirements for the people in this are in many ways a set of double-binds. Essentially they're asked to be absolutely extraordinary people but at the same time, as social creatures completely ordinary and unabrasive and really congenial. So you've got a whole list of things you can separate out — they have got to be very physically fit, and yet they need to have 35 years experience in their field so they're going to be a bit older, so maybe they're not so physically fit. All down the line if you array the demands for selection for this trip they tend to fall out into double-binds, mutually contradictory requirements, and I don't think they'll solve that. I think they'll send people who are pretty good at making certain parts of their nature. This was my working principle.

So all of them lied to the selectors, and I think some of that will happen. NASA in particular has been completely unrealistic about human relationships in space. They've got this married couple that went up in the Space Shuttle last week, the first time that's

happened, and they say "We've got them sleeping on opposite shifts, there's no way we want to talk about sexuality." This is so ridiculous, we finally have a married couple in space, why not finally break the record. I think the cosmonauts probably have done it, I think there has been sex in space, but the Americans are like "Oh God!" They have to make it clear in Press Conferences that it's the last thing they would consider. It's this ridiculous, really stupid puritan ethic in America.

If the Americans try to set up this project there's just going to be this artificial, pure, false scene that's just going to fall apart real badly when real people get up there alone."

In the book, when segregation is broken it does come from the Russian side.

"Well that seemed realistic to me.

Americans are extremely provincial and in their sense of being the imperial power of the world, their lack of other languages, they resemble the Brits of the 19th century."

There is a great deal of ideology espoused in *Red Mars* as in all Robinson's novels. He has a reputation as a 'leftist' writer, something he describes as 'fair', but his characters cover a wider range of viewpoints.

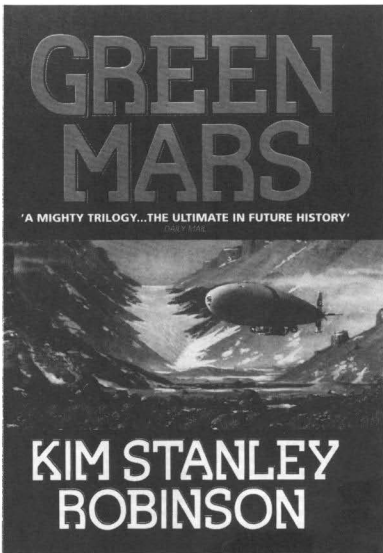
"One of the things that got me into writing novels is a really intense and ambivalence and a tendency to be Devil's Advocate. Any time I make any kind of categorical statement part of my mind will instantly object and ask 'isn't the opposite pretty much true or at least defensible?' In my own mind arguments are raging all of the time. If I can get then down on paper, I can do a plausible job of representing these different points of view that people hold.

I have some beliefs that are fundamentally deeply held and consistent and I suppose I am trying to push them in the novel as a whole, but I am also deeply committed to the notion as letting my characters have their say and become as real as I can. They have to be allowed their own viewpoints. My politics are fairly solid in the book, it's a statement which is relatively unambiguous, but I myself am really ambivalent about this notion of terraforming. In a way it's a desecration of a landscape that's already there, that's already fantastically beautiful. So I am completely in sympathy with the 'Reds' in the book who are opposed to terraforming as an act of desecration.

On the other hand there is a part of me that thinks that the terraforming project is just a spectacular and wonderful religious act, a kind of life-giving to another world. A Mars that will still be Mars and yet have this biosphere on it. And there will be the high altitude areas like all of the landscapes on Earth that I love super-represented by this product of terraforming.

So I really like both viewpoints and feel very strongly about them. This may be one of the driving impulses for writing this monster long thing. That I cannot plump down on one side or the other, that I feel all these things so strongly that I try to separate these views out into individual characters and let the battle commence."

Pacific Edge, Robinson's previous novel,



contains many scenes set inside the meetings of a Neighbourhood Association. Since then the author says he has become involved in that localised, micro-political activity in his own neighbourhood. Nevertheless, despite falling into what he describes as 'the most tedious scenes' from his own book, most of his political work and expressions is through his books. I ask him if he feels subversive.

"I would like to fancy myself so. I would like to advocate and influence people towards certain underlying standards. I make my best effort but we live in a historical moment where subversion is very difficult. Post-modern culture is essentially omnivorous and can digest any supposedly subversive and revolutionary act and turn it into just one more event, one more entertainment. To be truly subversive is now a challenge to bring pertinence to any one cultural act. I could stand on the parapets and scream bloody murder about how we have to bring down this ridiculous, unecological capitalist monster that we live within and you'd get 'Film at 11. Look at this there's a loony on the parapets, how interesting.' And then the next commercial would be for deodorant, and there I'll be, part of the entertainment machine. Has anybody changed one iota? Probably not. So I would want to be subversive. I do believe we live in a global, capitalist economy that is profoundly destructive to many parts of society, and I

think we're in severe trouble so I want to try to subvert the dominant order right now. But I must say that it is no longer obvious how to do that."

The way is to confront people's preconceptions, as Robinson does by reversing the conventional roles and usual symbology of Greens and Reds in *Red Mars*. In particular, the use of Reds as sympathetic characters from an American viewpoint is subversive.

"I really do what I can in an attempt to salvage what is left of the socialist project. I constantly reiterate in my public talks and whenever I get the chance, that to throw out baby socialism with the poisoned bathwater of Stalinism is a big mistake. There are some obvious principles of fair play and justice that are expressed in the socialist utopian dream that are being trampled badly by the looting and pillage of capitalism.

So I am a Red. At this moment in history it feels like a dangerously stubborn refusal to accept certain facts of history, but I'd just like to say that those stalinist territories, those totalitarian parts of the world which tried to impose parts of socialism — and not very many of those — were a disaster for socialism. Now any opponent of collective just distribution of the world's resources, and of human work, can easily say, well, remember

Stalin. Remember the disaster of the Soviet Union, it's all going to happen again, if you try to be fair, so let me continue to rape and pillage and abuse the human workers of the world.

So we're living in the shambles of a bad century here, and you just have to keep making those little attempts to reconnect. This is why I think working at the Neighbourhood level is useful. It's all you can do and I don't want to give up and do nothing."

Robinson's novels also contain little subversions of SF tropes and icons. **Pacific Edge** (and the whole Orange County trilogy) creates a Heinleinian Wise Old Man figure in Tom, but then he is killed off.

"Tom had been in all those three books and it seemed like he needed to have a good send off. He was very old and I felt that at that age a drowning was a happy way to go compared to many of the alternatives, so I thought I was doing him a favour at that point.

One of the ways that people attack utopia is to say that it would be boring, life will no longer be interesting because everything will be bland. From Huxley onward this has been one of the standard attacks on utopia, but my feeling is that there are still two things that can go wrong in an Oresteian sense. A can love B, B love C, C can love D, D can love A and this can be extremely painful for all four characters, and that this will happen even if social justice is achieved everywhere. And secondly, people are going to die, and then their loved ones are going to be left behind. So both for the person who dies, at least in their dying moments I imagine they're going to be pretty upset about it, no matter how much social justice there is, and their loved ones are going to be left behind are going to grieve their loss and this is about as much tragedy as human beings need.

You don't need five year olds dying of hunger to make human life dramatic and interesting. That's a degradation of life. I'm a utopian and I believe that utopia can still be utterly dramatic and having Tom down was one of many ways of making this ideological point. It is scary how much of the novel becomes political when you begin to analyse it at this level rather than just pure story."

It also fits in with the way Robinson's stories rarely have an absolute resolution which maybe the Wise Old Man could have offered. They are complete in themselves, but rather than end they tend to shift into a new phase. The author sees a structure in his work, but admits that others have reported differently, he has no interest in the sort of resolution where all things are neatly tied up and chopped off, seeing them as "less true to the way we really live".

"I did add that sentence at the end of **A Memory of Whiteness**' Back To Mars' which I now find is a very prescient thing for me to have finished that novel on. I wanted to imply that that story was also going to have its consequences after the death of Johannes. That he might turn into some kind of religious figure. And 'Back to Mars' has proved to be a very useful instruction to myself."

Indeed. And whilst Kim Stanley Robinson is not attempting to write any kind of cohesive Future History, there are connections between his works. Some are direct, the novella 'Green Mars' and short story 'Exploring Fossil Canyon' may be related to the **Red Mars** sequence through the character of Roger Claybourne (a descendant of Ann Claybourne of **Red Mars** First Unending?); others contain parallel scenes revealing recurrent interests of the author. I asked him about a few of these.

Green Mars: "The novella will not be in the novel, I might eventually include it in a volume of sidebar material. I think that would be a nice addition without being to much of an obvious commercial rip-off. Other than that it won't have much relation, and in fact some of the historical details in that novella are going to turn out to be really wrong, but that's life. I have no desire to achieve a consistent future history."

Mountains: "If you're someone who does climb, what I do is not quite climbing. I scramble, I walk, I backpack. I rarely, if ever, have been roped up. But I do love mountains. I have an irrational passion for being up amongst them, so I feel that it is important to try to get that in because it is so important to me. It's hard to figure out how. That's one of the attractions of this Mars scenario — it's one gigantic, above tree-line mountainous place. There aren't mountain ranges per se on Mars. There wasn't any tectonic action to speak of, but it a wild and mountainous place."

Sport: "It's important in my life, I do a lot of it. I just think that all of these activities of the body — climbing, swimming, sex — all ought to be written about more because we're not just our minds, our intellects. It's interesting to write about it, and I think it's interesting to read about it. So I stick it in."

Individual sports tend to be known only to one country so it's a little bit dangerous to write about specifics too much but I've thought it's been worth a try a couple of times because you can always understand the general emotions of the sporting activity even if you don't understand the particular rules of that sport. These things ought to be written about, especially in SF which started out as such over-rationalised intellectual exercises of the genre, it needs to be physicalised, and a lot of other writers are doing it and I think that it is a great addition to the genre."

To hear Kim Stanley Robinson talk, as to read his stories and his novels, is an experience which challenges and enthral at the same time. One is left full of wonder and made restless by the questions arising from that wonder. Already he is one of the most interesting writers that SF has ever seen, and speaking to him there is a strong sense that he has a lot left to say, that he relishes the prospect as much as we might, and that is going to be a great addition to the genre.

I'm here now to provide a soporific moment between the Helicon banquet and the extreme gastric excitement of the coming awards ceremony. As you recline bloated in your chairs, your eyelids are permitted to droop... I asked the committee if they could provide me with a witty opening anecdote, but all they'd offer was what they claimed to be an important announcement: FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE GENTLEMEN'S TOILETS.

Looking around at these appalling scenes of gluttony, I've been trying to think of resemblances to famous banquets in fantasy and science fiction. It's been more fun than in **Dune**, where noble desert people are liable to pop in and spit all over your floor as a sign of respect; or in **Titus Groan**, with a one-legged fanatic marching up and down the table stamping in the porridge — please don't anybody get ideas; and of course if this were a C.S. Lewis banquet the speeches would end with us all being torn apart by wild beasts as a punishment for approving of science and reading nasty agnostics like H.G. Wells.

And then there's the nostalgic memory of countless stories where that whole meal would have been a single compressed food pill, containing enough energy to give you the runs for a week. I've always meant to look into the physics of those high-energy pills... they must be so crammed with calories that if your spaceship's fuel ran low, you'd just chuck a day's rations into the propulsion chamber and zoom off again at 10¹⁰ acceleration. Some scientists believe those power pills must be chemically identical to baked beans. Anyway, this seems a much better emergency drive than in Poul Anderson's famous beer-powered spaceship, whose operation has always bothered the keen scientific intellects of sf fans. This is because it violates the First Law: 'A fan must not waste a pint of beer, nor through inaction allow beer to go to waste, unless of course there is a handy Scientologist to pour it over.'

Food is a wonderful subject, and there's not nearly enough about it in science fiction... although I remember that at one of the UK Milford writers' workshops, Josephine Saxton was bitterly accused of writing *food pornography*. We cosmic-minded sf people seem very conservative about our eats, which is why we were all so shocked by that terrible revelation in a certain movie with its famous line, 'Soylent Green is breakfast at the 1992 Eastercon hotel!'

You meet more interesting recipes in Jack Vance's books: a typical Vance hero remains totally cool when informed that item 3 in column B of the menu is 'parboiled night-fish, fresh from the bogs' [1]. Sometimes the Vance menu gets a trifle too interesting: I remember his inn where all the food, right down to the bread rolls and the HP sauce, has the same acid flavour. When asked about this, the waiter points to a large black

FOODIES OF THE GODS BY DAVE LANGFORD

*A brief after-dinner speech for the
1993 British Eastercon, Helicon
(Jersey, Channel Islands)*

insect scuttling across the floor and helpfully explains that since these creatures have a terrible stench and get into everything anyway, they are deliberately included in all the recipes to help you get used to the taste [2]. Try one when you get home.

Only Lloyd Biggle Jr seems to have investigated the awesome sf possibilities of typing in the wrong order codes at an alien fast-food outlet. After doing this, one of his characters ends up with "a segment of dinosaur bone, stuffed with what was obviously large insects and covered with a rubbery-looking sauce. Her vegetable dish was grass in an advanced state of decomposition." [3] After experience of British fast-food places, you may be wondering what is supposed to be so alien about this.

Some sf writers have tried to imagine new kinds of food. In one of William Tenn's futures, for example, a popular dish is this purple spaghetti-like stuff which actively squirms up from the plate towards your mouth and wriggles about cosily once it's inside. As an gourmet explains: "... In addition to flavour, texture and aroma, you'd experience *motility*. Think of it: food not just lying there limp and lifeless in your mouth, but food expressing eloquently its desire to be eaten." [4]

Robert Sheekley had a vaguely similar thought in 'Untouched by Human Hands', the one whose unfortunate heroes are starving to death in an alien warehouse, surrounded by tins covered in slogans like Vigroom! Fill all your stomachs and fill them right! and Vomitash — good as it sounds! In desperation they decide to try Valkorin's universal taste treat, for all digestive capacities, but in the end can't bring themselves to take a bite because, as one of

them definitively states, "I don't eat anything that giggles."

I distinctly heard a giggle from our own good taste expert Iain M. Banks as he explained the future etiquette of cutlery, whereby you put on a special set of steel teeth for stripping the meat off a nice snack of tasty raw finger-on-the-bone. The Banks Guide to Social Deportment explains that it's very bad manners for the owner of the finger to scream while this is happening. Gives a whole new meaning to those Indian menus that offer Meat and Ladies' Fingers.

But speaking of haute cuisine mutilation, there's a Maurice Richardson story which points out a little-known advantage of one notorious sf situation — being a decapitated head connected by lots of tubes to a life-support system. The great thing is that *you never get full up*. I quote: "On shellfish day, last [Gourmet] Club Meet, I scoffed a hundred-weight of assorted Dublin Bay prawns, scampi, langoustes, crivisses, durian-fed Venusian landcrabs, and those delicious giant Martian lobsters." [5] This sort of snack goes on for a month or so, washed down with several whole crates of wine, until everyone's jaw muscles finally need a rest. The only snag about this utopia of endless throughput is the decapitees' constant suspicion that they may sometimes be getting food they've already eaten.

Which brings me at once to Samuel R. Delany's idyllic notion of taste as an artform, in *Stars in My Pockets like Grains of Sand* [6]. Here, instead of just looking at ancient, historic carvings, you go right up to them and experience their taste with a long, succulent lick. And sure enough, as the author points out, you can just detect this faint, haunting flavour of cinnamon and sandalwood through the thick layers of slime and dribbling mucus left by all

the alien-reptile tourists who were in the queue ahead of you. This is called sharing the experience.

After which, the only possible dessert is the "monster slobby yellow cheese" described by Brian Aldiss in *The Eighty-Minute Hour* [7], which he tells us "tasted as if it had been whipped together from hippopotamus smegma". Few other sf authors would have taken the trouble to carry out the necessary research at Jersey Zoo.

At this stage in my foodie reminiscences I think it's time for a little Robert Lionel Fanthorpe, who summed up all our feelings after the long trip to a convention when he very nearly wrote in his famous novel *Restaurant 666* ... "Food. He needed food. Food was his need, for he was hungry, empty and famished, desirous of sustenance, and avid for nutrition. Yes, he felt esurient and voracious, ravenous, insatiable of appetite, eager for aliments, edibles, foodstuffs, comestibles, victuals, viands, provender and nosh."

All right, I'm lying. But here is a genuine Fanthorpe food simile which beautifully sums up the feeling of excitement that must be already throbbing through your veins at the thought of the coming award presentations:

"[His] strangely treated blood rose like the aroma of ancient Chinese culinary eggs." [8]

And I'm sure we all feel the same. Thank you all.

Scholarly References:

- 1 *The Face*, 1979.
- 2 *The Dirdir*, 1969.
- 3 *Watchers of the Dark*, 1966.
- 4 'Winthrop Was Stubborn', 1957.
- 5 'Way Out in the Continuum', date not to hand; collected in Richardson's *Fits and Starts*, 1979.
- 6 1984.
- 7 1974 ... my thanks to Steve Rothman for reminding me of this essential pivot in any account of sf delicacies.
- 8 *Nemesis*, 1964.



SF for Children

The Best Current Paperbacks Rounded up by

Jessica Yates

In these occasional roundups of children's SF and fantasy in paperback, I propose to test whether these axioms are as true now as they used to be: that children's SF is generally of poorer quality than children's fantasy; and that the best children's SF is written by non-genre authors - authors who don't specialise in writing SF for children or adults. Until recently children's fantasy has not had 'adult fantasy' to look up to, and has developed as a multi-layered genre for all ages. There has also been some truly dire children's fantasy by authors who forgot to write for the adult reading over the child's shoulder. Children's SF, however, started out as watered-down adult SF, space opera in the tradition of Jules Verne, with Robert Heinlein the first important children's SF author. There wasn't a demanding teenage audience to write for; literary readers moved straight onto adult SF at age 12. Only from the late 1970s onwards, with the maturity of some children's SF writers who have devoted a lifetime to their art, can we establish a Hall of Fame and welcome Louise Lawrence, Nicholas Fisk, H. M. Hoover and Monica Hughes to join Andre Norton and John Christopher as writers with a sizeable body of excellence in the genre.

This, my first roundup, is comprised entirely of children's SF — no fantasy this time. My first title sets high standards for the others: it is by Louise Lawrence, the leading British woman writer of children's SF. As most of her books have been set on Earth, its moon or other planets, it's welcome to find her new book set in deep space; her poetic prose depicting such scenes as a gorgeous rainbow nebula and an earthly paradise created by the guardians of the universe. **Ben-Harran's Castle** is a novel of intellectual argument. Ben-Harran is the Galactic Controller in charge of our galaxy. He flouts the policy of other Controllers that the intelligent natives of each planet should be kept mildly tranquilised by devices housed on satellites, to control their innate violence, eliminate crime and stop them destroying their

planets. The planet Zeeda has just exploded in nuclear conflagration and Earth may be next. Ben-Harran kidnaps 3 natives of different planets, including a teenage boy from Earth, to debate the value of free will and artistic creativity, and to bear witness at his trial by the High Council for culpable negligence, if not genocide.

The text suggests that Ben-Harran is the original 'Lucifer' of Biblical legend. Both he and the High Council give allegiance to God, but have no more direct contact with him than we have, while natives under planetary control — most sentient beings in the universe — are denied knowledge of God altogether. Will Earth be allowed to go on choosing good or evil, or will the Council destroy our free will to save us from the nuclear war? Louise Lawrence is on top form here.

Theological matters also lie behind the plot of **Hoverlight**, sequel to **Dark is a Colour** which I reviewed in PI 93. It is set on the planet Clytie, now revealed as lying between Jupiter and Saturn (!), where scientists are examining its strange ecology. Clytie does not fully revolve and thus has a permanent Dark Side. The main characters, a group of teenagers, have Christian parents and are a minority on Earth, where organised religion has died out and believers are regarded as unusual and often subversive. Our teenage heroes have come through the life-or-death experience of fighting Clytie's killer-natives, the lumies, and ascribe their rescue to God. In **Hoverlight** the heroine Caro sets out to stop the community exploiting, and nearly exterminating, the carapias, Clytie's native turtles with a dolphin-like disposition. Returning to the Dark Side, she and her friends are captured by more lumies, which have been further tampered with by a renegade scientist. Religious references have been toned down, so we can concentrate on the fast moving story and the argument over

whether Earth's scientists have the right to experiment on Clytie's native creatures.

I still question the stance of an avowed Christian writer who portrays irredeemably evil aliens: for the lumies are more than animals and communicate telepathically. God's purpose for the lumies is still not revealed, apart from providing temptation for the humans who play God by trying to improve on their nature, first by giving them full site, then by binding them so that they can 'colonise' the Dark Side.

SF for teenagers has certainly become highly intellectual and no more thought-provoking than Jean Ure's **Come Lucky April**, sequel to **Plague 99**. Jean Ure is the only non-genre author in this roundup, being known for her backstage romances for adults, teenage love stories and school stories. Her concerns about the arms race suddenly pushed her into writing **Plague 99**, a Wyndhamesque novel about the accidental destruction of 20th century civilisation world wide. In **Come Lucky April 2** descendants of the 3 teenagers in **Plague 99** confront one another 100 years after the plague. Daniel, brought up in a traditional male-dominated community in Cornwall, meet April from Croydon, a girl who has never seen a 'real' man before. Woman scientists run the Croydon Community and teenage boys submit to a small operation at the age of 15 after donating some sperm. The novel is a passionate debate between the two ways of life, with two possible dramatic outcomes: will the Croydon Community castrate Daniel too? Will April leave her quasi-lesbian set-up to be Daniel's mate, but in a society where he will have no political power? Then David appears: April's former childhood friend, he has spent the last 5 years in the boy's house and has lost his manhood.

Apart from Wyndham's **Consider Her Ways**, Ms Ure has read no sex war SF and certainly no feminist SF apart from **The Handmaid's Tale**; her future society was conceived independently of recent genre writings and she was fascinated with Tepper's **The Gate to Woman's Country** which I sent her. Ure knows how to pitch her story at the intelligent teenager, with plenty of dialogue and little description; the teenage characters are strong and the concept of a future without heterosexual love will surely fascinate and shock teenage readers. There is not much sympathy for the castrated males: effeminate, given menial tasks like cooking, not encouraged to work with the high-flying woman scientists. The issue of lesbianism is side-stepped: the women do pair off, sometimes for life. If they know sexual love, they must wonder about making love with men; has the castration of men also affected the female hormones so that their partnerships are affectionate and non-sexual? I look forward to the conclusion when, it appears, April chooses to bear David's children by I.V.F. and they try to end the compulsory castration policy.

Now leave the realms of intellect for some kids' SF aimed at younger readers or reluctant teenagers, starting with a space

opera in the **Dan Dare** tradition. **Killer Planet** is Bob Shaw's first children's SF novel:

nothing too original, but in Shaw's creative use of cliché, as with Douglas Hill before him, we find a stylistic feature which moves young readers quickly down the page, while providing amusement for the well versed adult. Let's try a few phrases: Jan, the hero, has "the muscular frame of a natural athlete" and is in "superb physical condition", his male friend has "a rare talent for all forms of electrical engineering" and when the heroine Petra first appears on the starship deck she is "wearing a tangerine one-piece suit" and soon "the friendly affection (Jan) had always felt for Petra was being displaced by a more powerful emotion". Wow! The old '50s spaceship science has been updated with starships operating at warp-drive and Earthmen engaged in "terraforming", but both Jan and Petra are required to navigate their little rocket-ship by the seat of their pants, as the saying goes.

Jan's mission, not approved by the "Council of Empire", is to transport his rocket-ship inside a starship to the planet Verdia, to discover why his brother disappeared with the rest of the Stellar Expeditionary Force. There is a lethal intelligence loose on Verdia and soon after Jan and Petra land they are attacked by two native carnivores, then the alien itself, which has the power to animate machines left by previous Earth expeditions, first bulldozers, then tanks. The chase scenes are totally involved and last for several chapters with little respite for our heroes. Jan's idea of getting the Council to blast the alien with a nuclear bomb is a bit casual — wouldn't this contaminate part of the planet and sabotage the terraforming and mining plans? It's lucky that Jan finds another way to demolish the monster.

From Bob Shaw's first children's book, to a lifelong specialist in the field, Nicholas Fisk. I am not his greatest fan, being averse to his exclamatory style and quick-flip narrative.

Anyway, here is **A Hole in The Head**, about the hole in the ozone layer. In the near future a hole has developed over the Arctic as well as the Antarctic and the consequences are efficiently summarised "more skin cancer among humans", etc. Oil is running out, wind-farming is booming, along with solar panels and bobbing ducks. The polar ice cap is melting and East Anglia is underwater.

Two children living with their scientist mother at the Ozone-layer Research Base in the Arctic discover — a talking dog! They

learn the close-guarded secret that the ultraviolet radiation is altering the nature of animals — mutating them. Rats are becoming more intelligent and the talking dog has been further "improved" by laboratory experiments. They rescue the dog from sentence of death passed to keep the experiments secret, and the dog saves the ozone, via a chain of events I need not explain — and wins the Nobel prize! This totally ridiculous plot is redeemed by the useful warnings about the present dangers and near-future trends scattered through the story, which one hopes youngsters will absorb and follow up later.

Robert Swindells is another children's specialist. He hit the jackpot with **Brother in The Land** (1984), post-holocaust teenage novel, and now writes more for 8 to 13s, with popular themes such as Dracula. His new paperback **Hydra** tells how two village children investigating Wiltshire corn circles discover they are caused by aliens! A ruthless woman scientist has kidnapped the jellyfish-like floating aliens from NASA's expedition to Jupiter and keeps them in a tank in a farm barn to study them in secret and receive the kudos when she goes public.

The book is basically a thriller, with the scientist and her henchmen threatening violence to the children, and the floaters maturing into savage carnivores, dangerous if they escape from the tank. It's a bit like **Quatermass II**. It's a good read for children, but SF fans will feel that there is too much about the children's family lives and not enough SFnal content. It's also not fully worked out, for example, nobody apart from the villains and NASA would know where the aliens originate (Jupiter), but the farmer accuses them of harbouring "dragons from Jupiter" and the heroine refers to "a creature from Jupiter" at the conclusion when the aliens have been destroyed and their existence hushed up.

Ann Halam began writing for children as Gwyneth Jones (her real name) in 1977. A change of publisher brought about the dual-name policy, thus fooling children's librarians who had appreciated her first children's books and didn't realise "Ann Halam's" fantasies for Allen and Unwin were by the same author! All was revealed when "Ann Halam" switched again to Orchard and produced the wonderful "Daymaker" trilogy. **Dinosaur Junction** moves down the age-range to 8 to 13s; and by chance Halam has hit on the most topical subject: excavating for dinosaurs and the

possibility of cloning them from DNA - in a book two years in the making and published a few months before **Jurassic Park** hit town.

Ben, a studious boy bullied by his elder sister Rowan, has been exploring a cave by some roadworks and finds a dinosaur claw. He wants to find the whole skeleton: his sister involves him in fossil trading "under the counter" at a local museum, which becomes dangerous when an unscrupulous collector hears about it. The plot so far looks fairly traditional, but the young man whom Ben asks for advice is a modern character — an eco-scientist and genetic engineer. The SFnal content is reserved for the climax, when Ben is somehow thrown back through time to the days when dinosaurs ruled the Earth and SF fans will note the allusion to 'A sound of thunder'.

Dinosaur Junction has the edge on the other yarns reviewed here, by Shaw, Fisk and Swindells, because Ann Halam's prose style extends the reader. Words and phrases are carefully chosen and this apparently effortless way with language doesn't exclude an exciting plot as well. It is somewhat criminal then, to make it harder for children to choose this excellent book, by lumbering it with a disastrous jacket: the phantom dinosaur is fine, but Ben and Rowan look so ugly that children won't want to read about them: a great pity. Gwyneth Jones' admirers, however, will need no further encouragement to seek out **Dinosaur Junction**.

Louise Lawrence
Ben-Harran's Castle
Bodley Head, 1992, 228pp, 7.99

Fay S. Lapka
Hoverlight
Hodder Gold Books, 1992, 285pp, 3.50

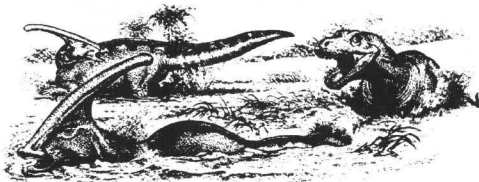
Jean Ure
Come lucky April
Methuen Teens, 1993, 200pp 2.99

Bob Shaw
Killer Planet
Pan Piper, 1992, 105pp, 2.99

Nicholas Fisk
A Hole in the Head
Walker, 1992, 139pp 2.99

Robert Swindells
Hydra
Doubleday Yearling, 1993, 208pp, 2.99

Ann Halam
Dinosaur Junction
Orchard, 1992, 188pp, 4.99



British SF An Obituary

by
Paul
Kincaid

J.G. Ballard's celebrated dictum, that science fiction is the only way to write about the present, was taken as a manifesto for the importance of sf in our rapidly changing world. In fact, though, it says more than that. It says on the one hand that sf is the supreme medium for satire, one of the main reasons that writers choose to address the here and now; and on the other hand that sf is indistinguishable in its concerns from the fiction of the mainstream.

In proposing this Ballard, undoubtedly a seminal figure in British science fiction, was touching on one of the key areas in which

British sf differed from its American counterpart.

The nature, and indeed the existence, of such a distinction is something that has long been debated. **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction** devoted a special issue to British sf in 1978, which suggests they at least thought there was some difference from the normal run of (American) sf. The Editors of the **Encyclopedia** chose to have separate articles on sf in Australia, Canada, Russia and elsewhere, but not on Britain and America.

For them, sf is a primarily Anglo-American enterprise and it is not worth drawing a distinction between the two. Nevertheless, undefined though it may be, there is a popular view that the two are different, usually to the detriment of the British version. British sf is commonly seen as gloomy and doom-laden.

Now the Canadian academic Nicholas Ruddick has entered the fray. After his masterful chronology of British sf which appeared last year, he has written as a companion piece this argumentative and lively study. It is, I must say from the outset, one of the most readable and entertaining works of criticism I have ever encountered. There is no jargon, but there is a sense of humour, and his argument is well constructed, presenting what he sees as the defining characteristics of British sf in a convincing manner.

So far as I am aware, no-one before has attempted to get so close to the heart of the national character of British sf. He finds this defining characteristic, crucially, in a critical attitude, a recurring motif, and a distinctive subject matter.

The critical attitude comes first, if only to lay the groundwork for what follows. The British, Ruddick claims, have tended to see sf as a "field", which is inclusive rather than exclusive, with movable boundaries which allow us to draw sf where we want. The Americans, on the other hand, see it as a "genre" which is exclusive rather than inclusive, with narrowly defined borders to keep out anything which might pollute the purity of the product. When Judith Merril's anthology of British new wave sf, **England Swings SF**, was published by Ace in 1968 it carried a blurb and a press quotation which were, at best, half-hearted, there was a two-page disclaimer by Donald Wollheim which suggested the book was being published because of a commitment to free speech not because they thought there was anything of value in the book, and there was a statement by Isaac Asimov hoping for a return to solid, traditional science fiction. Such defensiveness does indeed illustrate the narrowness of the genre perspective, though I am not convinced that Britain has escaped it as wholeheartedly as Ruddick would suggest. Nevertheless, the new edition of the **Encyclopedia**, a largely British enterprise, contains an article on "Genre SF" which, as just one among a number of such broad topics, suggests that the editors recognise sf outside the genre.

The looser view of science fiction as a field is reflected in the ease with which British writers from what we might term the "mainstream" have appropriated tropes and devices from science fiction, have in fact written science fiction. The list is an honourable catalogue of 20th century British literature, from Huxley and Orwell to C.S. Lewis and William Golding and on to Fay Weldon, Maggie Gee, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan. Similarly, writers such as Ballard, Aldiss, Priest and M. John Harrison have found it possible to be taken seriously by the literary establishment. With the exception of contemporary postmodernists (and they might be considered a special case) there is virtually no similar reciprocity between

American literature and American science fiction. Ruddick suggests that classic American literature, from Poe and Twain to Hemingway and Faulkner, is deeply unAmerican; American sf has rushed in 'to defend and promote the values that American literature seems only interested in subverting' (p11). In other words, as has been noted on a number of occasions, American science fiction is very conservative; British sf, as a corollary, is as subversive as its mainstream cousins.

Which brings us neatly to the recurring motif. This is the motif of the island, hence Ruddick's title, and as exemplars he considers Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Golding's *The Inheritors* and Ballard's *Concrete Island*. He might have chosen any number of other works, for the island really has appeared frequently in both mainstream literature and science fiction in this country, from Robinson Crusoe onwards. Other recent examples in sf have included Richard Cowper's 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn' sequence and Christopher Priest's *Dream Archipelago* stories. Other than the island-like isolation of Ryhope Wood in Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* sequence, however, the island has been absent from contemporary British science fiction. As we will see, this is significant.

There are, in fact, several islands, most notably the island of desire and escape, as the island in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* starts out to be, and the island of insularity and evolutionary threat, as that same island turns into. The island is, of course, a satirical mirror for Britain, and also a physical manifestation of the mental landscape of the protagonist (as it is, for instance, in Golding's *Pincher Martin* or Ballard's *Concrete Island*). It shows someone cut off, physically, ideologically, or by announcing, from the mainland and so allows the author to show the truth of John Donne's assertion: 'No man is an island.'

Above all, the island is ripe for invasion. This is precisely what the catastrophe, the distinctive subject matter of British sf, is. (As with the island motif, Ruddick claims that British sf is here paralleling British mainstream literature, but once he gets past the time of H.G. Wells he forgets to provide the examples and analysis which would support this assertion.) The catastrophe can take many forms, from the volcanic eruption of Grant Allen's 'The Thames Valley Catastrophe' to John Christopher's eponymous *The Death of Grass* to the automotive and sexual armageddon of Ballard's *Crash*. All, however, have one thing in common: an irruption of something violently disruptive into the insularity of a cosy existence. From *The War of the Worlds* onwards, British science fiction has dealt overwhelmingly with an invasion of our local or inner space. America, with its expansionist history, has tended to deal more with expansion into space. Certainly the cold, distanced perspectives of the Martian astronomers in Wells's 'The Star', or the time traveller looking out from the terminal beach in his *The Time Machine*, or even the vast narrative sweep of Olaf Stapledon's *First and*

Last Men, seem alien to anything in American sf.

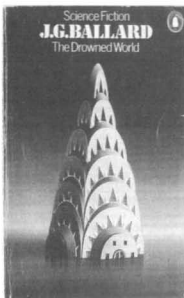
The familiar notion that the British disaster novel reflects our loss of empire is quickly dealt with. As Ruddick points out, there were science fictional catastrophes in the latter years of the last century, as the empire was still approaching its peak. Certainly there is some post-imperial element in catastrophe fiction, particularly John Wyndham's 'cosy' variety where the threat is constantly wrapped around with consolation, but it is not the main impetus behind it. This is more likely to be subversion, unsettling settled notions has been a staple of British sf almost to the present. At times it has acquired an overtly political tone (as in Christopher Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island*, which seems to bring together all of Ruddick's archetypes in one slim volume), though generally the attack is more oblique. Nevertheless, the extinction of humanity in H.G. Wells's 'The Star', the dark comedy of R.C. Sherriff's *The Hopkins Manuscript*, the devastation of John Christopher's *A Wrinkle in the Skin* and the bleak psychological insights of J.G. Ballard's *High Rise* all in their different way have the power to disturb our views of ourselves and our relationship with the world around us. Other than John Wyndham (whom Ruddick doesn't hold in high regard) British disaster fiction has not been particularly flattering about the British, or about mankind in general. But then, subversive literature isn't supposed to be flattering.

Although he deals fleetingly with science fiction of the last decade, Ruddick's book really comes to an end with the close of the 1970s. Here is a watershed he identifies with the disappearance of *New Worlds*, the 1979 Worldcon in Britain, and the publication by Christopher Priest of a series of articles announcing his withdrawal from 'genre' sf. It is easy to see why Ruddick hasn't pursued his argument further.

Whether it was due to the shifting of the field boundaries which made it easy to move from sf into the mainstream, or the outflitting literary experimentalism of *New Worlds*, or the lack of any other market, the 1970s certainly saw a dearth of new British sf writers. By the time *Interzone* emerged in the early 1980s there wasn't much of a British tradition left for new writers to draw on. At the same time, America hit us with cyberpunk, the most vital new development in sf since the New Wave and clearly something to attract new talents. As a result, the island motif, the catastrophe and subversion have all just about disappeared from British sf. (Look at a story like Lucius Shepard's 'Nomans Land' to see that these are by no means worn out tropes, maybe we have to look to Americans like Shepard to continue the traditions of British sf?)

If contemporary British sf now seems to be American in all but name, Ruddick's excellent book at least shows us what was distinctive about the tradition, and how diverse and exciting it could be.

Ultimate Island: on the nature of British Science Fiction — Nicholas Ruddick
[Greenwood Press, 1993, 202pp, £43.50]



Women of Colour

the Female Protagonists

in the novels of Octavia Butler

by Carol Ann Green

Octavia Butler's fiction contains many traditional science fiction elements, such as space travel, telepathic powers, mutants, and contact with Alien species. At the same time she abandons tradition in her use of the non-white female protagonist, using African, Afro-American, and Afro-Asian women as heroines, — "whose racial diversity Butler celebrates". Her concerns about racism and sexism are reflected in her novels and stem from her own reading of science fiction — "When I began reading science fiction, I was disappointed at how little ... creativity and freedom was used to portray the many racial, ethnic, and class variations. Also, I could not help noticing how few significant woman characters there were in science fiction. Fortunately all this has been changing over the past few years."

Butler's work differs from that of other feminist science fiction authors in that she consistently foregrounds her non-white heroines in prominent roles — investigating the racial and sexual oppressions faced by them in their own societies. All of her heroines are strong willed, determined women who yearn for independence and autonomy — they are prepared to fight desperate battles to save themselves and their people from enslavement. In *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu agrees to go to America, with Doro, only if he will leave her children in peace; Alanna, in *Survivor* fights three warring peoples so that the Missionaries can be free from Mekkah addiction and the Garkohn; Mary — the culmination of Doro's breeding programme kills her father in *Mind of My Mind* to save her fledgling community and Lilith in *Dawn* takes on the traitor's role in a vain effort to save humanity.

Slavery is a predominant theme in all of Butler's novels, and takes many forms, from the psychic enslavement of the mutants in *Mind of My Mind*, to the chemically induced slavery of the humans by the Oankali in *Dawn*. Hand in hand with this slavery goes seduction, love

of the captor, and forced reproduction.

Humans in *Dawn* are forced into reproduction only through their Oankali Ooloi mates, who bind them chemically and make it impossible for them to touch each other normally and sexually without the mediation of an Ooloi. Yet the humans come to love their Oankali mates as Anyanwu comes to love Doro's son, Isaac, whom she is forced to marry for Doro's breeding experiments.

Doro has been enslaving people and forcing them to breed for centuries in the hope that he will produce someone like himself. He finally succeeds after four thousand years with his daughter, Mary, who is a 'complete version of him. ... a symbiont, a being living in partnership with her people. She gave them unity, they fed her, and both thrived. She was not a parasite, ... And though she had great power, she was not naturally, instinctively, a killer.' Doro is. A parasite and a killer. He has been feeding on his people for centuries using them for his own purposes, breeding them to each other then at the slightest whim killing them and taking over their bodies for his own use. In this way, he has been able to survive for thousands of years.

In *Wild Seed*, he is drawn across the continent of Africa to Anyanwu, an Igbo woman who can change her shape at will and heal herself. A woman who hasn't aged in over three hundred years. Unlike Doro, Anyanwu uses her healing powers to keep herself alive, becoming intimately aware of the minutest features of her body in order to survive. She is able to take on the form of other creatures, change sex and age at will.

Doro threatens the lives of her children whilst at the same time offering her the bribe of a future, with children who will live as she does, to make her accompany him to America. He sees in her only her capacity for breeding and the children she will give him. He values her only for the special abilities she could pass on to her children on her own and

when mated with some of his other people. He refuses to acknowledge that she has value in her own right, as the only other immortal he has found in four thousand years, she could offer him a touchstone with his own humanity. His son Isaac points out to him, that "as long as both of you are alive, neither of you will be alone." But Doro refuses to listen to him. Anyanwu is wild seed with too much power of her own, he cannot control her, like he can his own people and if he cannot control her he will kill her.

Unlike Doro, Butler's heroines only kill if they, or their families, are threatened. When Lale Sachs, one of Doro's "latent telepath" sons, tries to control Anyanwu's thoughts and then rape her she attacks him in the form of a leopard — "With a snarl, she tore out the throat of the being under her feet." Mary in *Mind of My Mind* is reluctant to attack any of her patternists in case she kills them, like Doro would. But when Jesse attacks her, "I didn't have time to think about reacting. What happened, happened automatically. ... He was mine. His strength was mine. His body was worthless to me, but the force that animated it was literally my ambrosia — power, sustenance, life itself." And she realises that she doesn't have to kill Jesse, that "He could live, if I let him, if I wasn't too greedy. He could live and grow strong and feed me again."

With her successful transition from latent to active telepath, Mary has to come to terms with being one of the owners instead of the owned. In completing her transition she has drawn six more actives to her enmeshing them in a pattern, including her white husband, Karl. None of them are willing captives, Mary has enslaved them unconsciously and when she realises that she cannot let them go she recognises as Anyanwu had done hundreds of years ago that "Sometimes one must become a master to avoid becoming a slave." To escape her slavery to Doro, Mary must learn to become a leader and control her people; and learn fast, Doro won't tolerate a rival. She must prove to him that she isn't out to take his empire away from him — but in building her pattern, she automatically becomes his enemy and in the end has to take control from him, killing him in the process, to save her fledgling community.

Lilith, in *Dawn*, is faced with an impossible task. She must persuade the humans she Awakens that she is not a traitor to humanity and that their best chance for survival is to work with the Oankali, if they are to have any chance of returning to Earth. She is faced with a moral dilemma, whether to tell the Awakened humans "these survivors of war, ... that unless they could escape the Oankali, their children would not be human." Or whether to keep the facts of the Oankali gene trade a secret from them "until she had some idea how to help them, how not to betray them, how to get them to accept their captivity, accept the Oankali, accept anything until they were sent to Earth. Then to run like hell at the first opportunity."

Humanity has been saved from the ruins of the Earth after a nuclear holocaust, by the

Oankali an alien race. Who have not done so for any altruistic reasons, but to satisfy their own drive to trade genes with each new species they come across. As Jdahya explains to Lilith, "we are powerfully acquisitive. We acquire new life — seek it, investigate it, manipulate it, sort it, use it."¹ The Oankali are drawn to the humans because of their contradictory impulses towards intelligence and hierarchical behaviour — what the Oankali term the Human Contradiction. It is this combination, they say that led humanity to attempt to destroy itself, and if left alone they will finish what they started in less than one generation. The Oankali have no intention of leaving humankind alone no matter what the humans demand of them.

Butler herself believes that it is humanity's contradictory impulses towards hierarchy and intelligence that are the origins of violence. Her view of human nature is essentialist, she holds out for the notion that men are inherently more violent than women. Thus, Doro is a killer pure and simple with no regard for human life, whereas Butler's female characters Anyanwu and Mary commit violence only for survival or defence. Butler also hypothesises that it is this contradiction combined with humanity's inability to tolerate differences in people, i.e. race and gender differences, that leads to the need to create Others. For Butler, "the human propensity to create the Other can never be transcended: the end of racial discrimination must coincide with the rise of some kind of similar discrimination based upon biological differences, which accordingly continue to play a role in future social orders." Butler illustrates this inability to tolerate differences in the second novel in the Xenogenesis trilogy, *Adulthood Rites*. Akin, Lilith's construct son is kidnapped by resisters and sold to the community at Phoenix. There he is accepted because of his human appearance, he has no visible Oankali sensory tentacles, though he does have some sensory spots — he is as human looking as any child born before the war. In contrast is the intolerance shown to the two construct girls Amma and Shkai who have visible tentacles and are obviously alien. When they too are captured some of the humans plot to cut off their tentacles to make

them look more human, "It was criminal to allow little girls to be afflicted with such things. Girl children who might someday be the mothers of a new Human race ought to look Human — ought to see Human features when they looked in the mirror..."² The resisters have created their Other in the Oankali, unable to accept the trade they continue to live with their fear of the alien.

In *Survivor* a group of Missionaries charged with preserving the Sacred Image of God, sets up a colony on the alien world they name Canaan. There is already an indigenous life form on the planet but the colonists are unable to accept the Kohn as human, seeing them as primitive, inferior and tractable because of the differences in their culture, colour etc. The colonists' Christian religion and their ethnocentricity allows one of the warring tribes, the Garkohn, to effectively enslave them and addict them to Meklah. They let their limited concept of humanity jeopardise their survival as human beings.

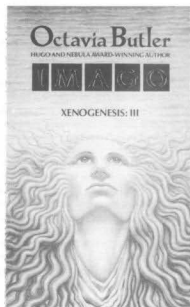
Alanna, Butler's Afro-Asian heroine, is adopted on Earth by the colony's white leaders Jules and Neila Verrick — a wild human surviving on her wits Alanna soon learns to mimic the Missionary way of life and fit in with the colonists. When she is taken by the Tehkohn she is the only captive to survive Meklah withdrawal and the Tehkohn decide to teach her their ways. Alanna believed that "it would be only the Missionary experience again then. In exchange for food, shelter, and safety, I would learn to say the right words and observe the right customs — change my cultural 'coloring' again and fade into Tehkohn society as much as I could."³

Unlike the colonists, Alanna has no difficulty in accepting the Kohn as human. She had learnt to survive in a hostile environment, then to merge into the Missionary way of life, but as she begins to learn Tehkohn ways she realises that she belongs there with people who can become her family and when the time comes bears a child to the Tehkohn Blue Hao, Diut. It is Alanna who fights for the survival of the Missionaries. To free them from their Meklah addiction and slavery to the Garkohn. She walks a thin line between the humans, Garkohn and Tehkohn, yet with the help of the latter she enables her people to

leave the valley. At the end of the novel her foster father, Jules, is still of the belief that the Kohn are animals because of their lack of spiritual belief. He is unable to accept his daughter's marriage to Diut, even though he had once defended her against his people when they tried to condemn her because of her differences. He has created a new Other in the Kohn.

Hodi M. Zaki points out that the reason why Butler's work differs from that of other feminist st authors is that her novels "contain an implicit and internal critique of and rebuke to one aspect of liberal feminist ideology: its claim to speak for all women, regardless of class or color — a claim founded upon the assumption of a transhistorical and transcultural, *engendered* unity of all women."⁴ Through her use of the non-white female protagonist and her exploration of the essentialist nature of humanity Butler offers an alternative to the all-Anglo societies depicted by some of her fellow feminist science fiction writers. In giving us strong minded, determined women of colour doing things normally reserved for white males Butler is criticising visions of the future that do not anticipate a future society "which would arrest the wrongs of a fundamental social, political and economic injustice."⁵

- Butler, Octavia, *Mind of My Mind*, London, Sphere, 1980
 - *Survivor*, London, Sphere, 1981
 - *Wild Seed*, New York, Timescape, 1981
 - *Dawn*, Xenogenesis: I, London, VGFS, 1988
 - *Adulthood Rites*, Xenogenesis: II, London, VGFS, 1989
 - *Imago*, Xenogenesis: III, London, VGFS, 1990
 1) Hodi M. Zaki, 'Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler', *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol 17, 1990, p247
 2) Frances S. Foster, 'Octavia Butler's Black Female Future Fiction: *Extrapolation*, Vol 23, 1982, p38
 3) Octavia Butler, *Mind of My Mind*, 1977, London, Sphere, 1980, p217
 4) Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed*, 1980, New York, Timescape, 1981, p167
 5) *Ibid*, p71
 6) Butler, *Mind of My Mind*, p133
 7) *Ibid*, p133
 8) Butler, *Wild Seed*, p14
 9) Octavia Butler, *Dawn*, 1987, London, VGFS, 1988, p123
 10) *Ibid*, p123
 11) *Ibid*, p41
 12) Zaki, *op cit*, p241
 13) Octavia Butler, *Adulthood Rites*, 1988, London, VGFS, 1989, p146
 14) Octavia Butler, *Survivor*, 1978, London, Sphere, 1981, p49
 15) Zaki, *op cit*, p246
 16) *Ibid*, p247



Magic in Narnia by Cherith Baldry

Critics of fantasy as a genre often say that the introduction of magic into a story makes everything too easy: "Wave a magic wand, and all your troubles are over." And it would be useless to pretend that there are no writers who use magic as an easy way of solving problems, particularly in children's books, where rigorous logic is often seen as less important than a showy effect. Yet there are children's writers who use magic as a precise and coherent system; the example that immediately springs to mind is Ursula Le Guin in her *Earthsea* books.

While I am convinced that Ursula Le Guin planned the magic of *Earthsea* and particularly the concept of equilibrium with some care, I am equally convinced that C S Lewis, in his *Narnia* sequence, did no such thing. However, I believe that a system of magic does emerge in his books, which, although it may show some ambiguities and contradictions, still hangs together, perhaps because Lewis was a man of such profound and strong convictions. I should like to look at some of the characteristics of this system.

Aslan the lion is the most powerful user of magic in *Narnia*, yet he is not a magician in any accepted sense of the word. He has no need of spells or strange brews in crucibles. The magic he uses is inherent in what he is.

"Polly was finding the song more and more interesting because she thought she was beginning to see the connexion between the music and the things that were happening. When a line of dark firs sprang up on a ridge about a hundred yards away she felt that they were connected with a series of deep prolonged notes which the lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of lighter notes she was not surprised to see primroses suddenly appearing in every direction. Thus, with an unspeakable thrill, she felt quite certain that all the things were coming (as she said) 'out of the Lion's head'. When you listened to his song you heard the things

he was making up: when you looked round you, you saw them." (*The Magician's Nephew*, Ch.9)

This seems to me much the same kind of magic as we see in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when Aslan restores the statues to life by breathing on them (Ch.16). The power he uses is part of his nature; he needs no magic equipment. Lesser magicians may use wands, magical books or rings, but Aslan never does.

"Polly knew at once that it was the cabby's wife, fetched out of our world not by any tiresome magic rings, but quickly, simply and sweetly as a bird flies to its nest." (*The Magician's Nephew*, Ch.11)

Later in the same book, Aslan says, 'You need no rings when I am with you.' (Ch.15) This is the only book, and the rings are the only device, where people from our world get into Narnia independently of the will of Aslan. The rings are, as Polly says, 'tiresome', clumsy and under imperfect control. They are buried and never used again; even when a plan is made to recover and use them, in *The Last Battle*, it is never carried out.

"Aslan did it all for us in his own way without any Rings." (Ch.5)

The other entries into Narnia, ultimately directed by Aslan if not initiated by him, are much simpler. To walk through the back of a wardrobe, through a picture, through hitherto locked door. More straightforward, and also more frightening, because now the travellers have no control at all. Sometimes the wardrobe is only a wardrobe; the way is not always open.

Not all the magical events in Narnia are part of Aslan's magic; some are clearly evil, perpetrated by his enemies, and others are deliberately irrational or unexplained, like the strange attributes of the various islands in *The Voyage of the Dawn-Treader*. But the uses of magic which are the responsibility of

Aslan are not only natural in the sense of spontaneous, but also affirm the natural order, and reveal otherwise hidden truth. The transformation of Rabadash into a donkey in *The Horse and his Boy*, (Ch.15) is like this: he has been a donkey all along in everything but his outward shape. In *Prince Caspian*, the piggy schoolboys "were never seen again, but ... There were a lot of very fine little pigs in that part of the country which had never been there before." (Ch.14) It's not clear whether the turning of Eustace into a dragon (*The Voyage of the Dawn-Treader*, h.6) has anything to do with Aslan, but he carries out the re-transformation when the dragon has seen the error of its ways.

Another aspect of Aslan's magic is that it works only on a receptive mind. Uncle Andrew, because he hates the song of Aslan, convinces himself that it is only the roaring of a lion, and before very long he can hear nothing but roaring, and cannot understand the talking beasts. (*The Magician's Nephew*, Ch.10) In *The Last Battle*, the dwarfs who have entered the stable and come into Aslan's country still believe themselves to be in a stable, and think that the feast Aslan provides for them is the sort of filth they might expect to find there.

"They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out." (Ch.13)

It is possible to cut yourself off from Aslan's magic, and Aslan does not force acceptance on those who make that choice. Aslan's magic might be spontaneous, but it is not arbitrary. It works by rules, even when the rules might be painful or inconvenient.

The complex consequences of these rules are shown in the sequence of the magic apples from *The Magician's nephew*. The apples confer endless youth; when the Witch steals one, Polly assumes, wrongly, that the magic will not work because the apple was stolen. Aslan explains:

"Things always work according to their nature. She has won her heart's desire: she has unwearied strength and endless days like a goddess. But length of days with an evil heart is only length of misery, and already she begins to know it." (*The Magician's Nephew*, Ch.14)

In the same way, a stolen apple would have protected Narnia, by making it a powerful and cruel empire; a stolen apple would have healed Digory's mother, but not to your joy and hers." (Ch.14) Aslan's magic obeys its rules, but not always in the ways that its users or its beneficiaries might expect.

Aslan himself is bound by these rules just like anyone else. He says to Lucy, 'Do you think I wouldn't obey my own rules?' (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Ch.10) The most obvious example of this is in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when Aslan gives himself up to the Witch to be killed rather than break the rules of the Emperor's magic. He suffers death rather than subvert the system he has set up.

The lesser magicians of the books are

always related in some way to the magic of Aslan, by their acceptance or rejection of it. The magical or legendary elements of *Narnia* itself, the land of Aslan's creation, such as fauns, nymphs, dryads and talking animals, are not magical there, but simply part of the natural order of things. The contrast is clear when Reepicheep the mouse is forbidden to pass from Narnia into our world.

"They would do dreadful things to you in that world. They would show you at fairs."

(*Prince Caspian*, Ch.15)

Some of these beings, like Coriakin the exiled star in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and bacchus in *Prince Caspian*, use magic, but only in Aslan's presence or with his permission. Even in these characters there is a suggestion of ambiguity; they may not be entirely safe.

Other magical beings, like the hags and werewolves and other nasties in the train of the Witch, demonstrate the evil use of magic. Among these, the snake enchantress of *The Silver Chair* uses her power to deny the existence of Aslan and to subvert his rule by setting up the enchanted Rilian as a puppet king of Narnia under her control. The fullest portrayals of evil magic are those of Jadis the White Witch and Digory's Uncle Andrew, neither of whom are Narnian in origin, and unlike Aslan have no inherent magic of their own.

While Jadis is an epic figure, and Uncle Andrew is comic, they have a lot in common. Although there is the implication that a magician is born with at least the potential for power, both have had to work for their magic. Both refer to the terrible experiences they have undergone for the sake of power. Both make use of those they think of as their inferiors. Jadis allows all her people to die for the sake of her victory when she speaks the Deplorable Word (*The Magician's Nephew*, Ch.5). Uncle Andrew sends Polly out of her own world, and blackmails Digory into going to look for her. (Ch.2) Even more effectively, for Lewis's child audience, he is nasty to guinea-pigs, which he uses in his experiments.

"That's what the creatures were there for. I bought them myself." (Ch.2)

Far from respecting the ordinary rules of moral behaviour — and we might take a side glance here at the incident where Aslan punishes Aravis for not caring about what happened to her serving-maid (*The Horse and his Boy*, Ch.14) — Jadis and Uncle Andrew both assume that the rules do not apply to them.

"Men like me, who possess hidden wisdom, are freed from common rules just as we are cut off from common pleasures. Ours, my boy, is a high and lonely destiny." (Ch.2)

"...What would be wrong for you or for any of the common people is not wrong in a great Queen such as I. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. We must be freed from all rules. Ours is a high and lonely destiny." (Ch.5)

Instead, they try to impose their own unnatural rules on the natural order, as when Jadis tries to keep all Narnia in the grip of winter, or try to twist the rules to their own advantage. Jadis steals and eats the apple; Uncle Andrew fantasises about the great wealth he will accumulate by growing things — as the lamp-post has grown — in the soil of Narnia.

For all their willingness to do anything for power, this pair are remarkably inefficient. The clumsiness of Uncle Andrew's rings has already been pointed out. Later in the book, he loses all control over events in Narnia. Jadis in destroying her own world created a situation where she had to wait to be released from her own spell; at the end of the book she is driven out of Narnia; in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* her power has already given way by the time she is killed. She does not know enough magic to realise that Aslan's death will not be final. She also needs magical equipment to work her spells, like the wand which turns creatures to stone; when the wand is smashed, she is vulnerable.

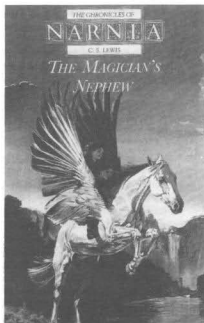
It seems to me that C S Lewis is making certain points about magic in the way he depicts its use. Magic used by Aslan himself, or with his permission, is a positive force. Magic used outside his will is negative. The equipment used by a magician is neutral, good or evil according to its use. The Witch's stone knife is preserved in honour on Ramandu's island. (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Ch.13). In the same novel, Coriakin's book of spells is used in the right way by Lucy when she takes off the spell of invisibility, but in the wrong way when she is tempted to make herself beautiful, and when she eavesdrops on her friend. In the first case, she is only saved from unleashing war and ruin by the appearance of Aslan; in the second, she wrecks what could have been a lifelong friendship (Ch.10). The Monopods, making use of the same book to become invisible, have also become aggressive — comically so, but still aggressive, and potentially dangerous. You and I, Lewis seems to be saying, had better be very careful if we mess with magic.

Aslan's privileged position with regard to magic is best understood by looking at the

deeper meaning of the books. Lewis himself did not regard Aslan as an 'allegory' of Christ, but rather as an attempt to answer the question of what it would be like if God were to become incarnate and suffer death in a world completely different from ours. The distinction is not particularly important here. Aslan is the Narnian Christ, and as such his 'magic' could easily be referred to as 'miracle'. In Christian belief, Christ's followers have also been able to perform miracles in his name, as Aslan's followers can perform magic in Narnia. 'Magic' in a Christian system of thought has always implied the acquisition of a power independent of God; at its worst, a power conferred by the Devil.

This is the reason why fantasy as a genre is opposed by some Christian fundamentalists; the extreme position can be seen in some parts of the US where *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has been banned on the grounds that there is a witch in it. Let us not waste time demolishing this shaky edifice of logic. As a Christian, I find it distressing, not least because I have a strong suspicion that those who have banned the book have not read it, or at best have not understood it. The statement which Lewis is making about magic, that power rests in God and that any attempt to appropriate that power is stupid, dangerous or evil, is in keeping with Christian ethics, as we might expect from a man who was profoundly and openly Christian.

The system of magic, then, which Lewis creates in the Narnia books, is not just a convenient plot device. It has a coherent logic. Aslan does not use magic to make everything easy for the characters, even those he is helping. In just about every book, the central characters are thrown on their own resources, to take risks and face difficulties: some of these tasks are laid on them by Aslan himself. That is what Lewis sees as part of growing up, of being fully human. Equally, he would not expect Christ to smooth away all problems in the real world. To imply anything else would be, for Lewis, a dishonesty as writer and as Christian.





First Impressions

Reviews of Hardback & Paperback Originals

Edited by Catie Cary

Roger MacBride Allen Caliban

Millennium, 1993, 312pp, £8.99
Reviewed by Michael J Pont

The front cover and spine of this book are emblazoned "Isaac Asimov's Caliban, by Roger MacBride Allen", in order, presumably, to cash-in on Asimov's famous name. However, the degree of Asimov's involvement in the writing of the novel is never made completely clear. The blurb on the cover claims that, in 1990, Asimov discussed the subject of the book with Roger MacBride Allen and went as far as naming the robot at the centre of the story. Certainly the 'Three Laws of Robotics' are very much in evidence throughout but, curiously, the acknowledgements page makes no mention of Asimov at all.

Perhaps we'll never know the whole story, but I've never been a great fan of Asimov's fiction, so all this name-dropping felt rather flat with me. The book itself is set in a far-future "Spacer" society, a society that revolves around the use of "Three Laws" robots as virtual slaves. The plot concerns the attempt of Sheriff Alver Kresh (a human) to investigate the brutal attack on robotics researcher Freda Leving, an attack which, it appears, can only have been carried out by an experimental robot named Caliban -- a robot who has no laws hard-wired into his head...

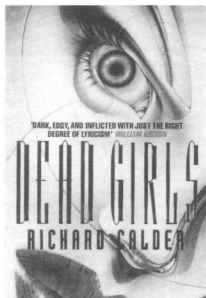
Sometimes *Caliban* reads like some kind of complex word game aimed at using the word "robot" the maximum possible number of times on a quasi-grammatical page. Central to the plot is the idea of two opposing societies, Spacer and Settler, forced -- temporarily -- to share the same planet. In Spacer society, the citizens go as far as having robots dress them in the morning, and brush their teeth at night; Settlers by contrast, consider robots an unnecessary evil and have nothing to do with the machines. Sadly, I found the explanation for this division largely unconvincing and felt that this weakened the book.

Such grumbles aside, *Caliban* is competently enough written, and -- to my surprise -- had me reading well into the night. I'd recommend this book if you're "into" Asimov-type robots, and looking for an undemanding read for a wet winter weekend.



Richard Calder Dead Girls

HarperCollins, 1993, 206pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Andy Mills



Dolls have always held a fascination for horror writers. They are the playthings of innocent children, yet at the same time there exists the potential for evil, the possibility that the pseudo-life which the children invest in them might actually take some perverted hold. In *Dead Girls* Richard Calder takes this possibility and realises it in a grotesque fashion. The dead girls, or dolls, or Lilim of the

title are girls metamorphosed by a virus. The original dolls were automata, "a synthesis between the world of classic physics and the submicroscopic quantum world."; Now a virus recombines the DNA of pubescent girls, reorganising their body chemistry at the atomic level. The 'dead girls' are doomed, gifted, short-lived and deadly: unable to have children themselves, they can infect humans to spread the doll-plague:

"And what is your fate?"

"To make children in my mother's image, so that the sons of Adam make way for the daughters of Lilith..."

"And then?"

"To die, and... And to take the world with me!"

One such doll is Primavera, "Bangkok's prima donna of assassins", who uses her talents not to infect but to kill; it is Ignatz Zwakh, her human paramour, who tells her story. If you've come across Calder's short fiction, you will have met some of the characters and concepts in this novel before; indeed, part of 'the Lilim', which appeared in *Interzone* in 1990, is to be found within the narrative. For those of you who haven't, be prepared: *Dead Girls* is not an easy read, nor is it exactly pleasant. It's a novel about power, of men over women, and First World over Third:

"It'll be humans next year," thought Primavera.

"Yeah?"

"Sure. Everything'll come full circle.

Gynoids are going out of fashion. A doll may do the weird on you, but she's got no free will. A trick's got no real power over her. But a human... A human you can really humiliate."

"Is that what it's all about?"

"You know it..."

Of course, the novel is also about fear -- of scientific tampering (best represented by the wonderfully named Dr Toxicophilous), of the Other, of infection, and (by men) of women -- Primavera's deadliness extends to her tooth-filled vagina! But it isn't all as dark as I've so far intimated. Calder's baroque prose (and cast) is firmly in the tradition of Angela Carter; the pace of the story is unrelenting. More, there's a quietly subversive humour within the book, which occasionally Calder allows free reign:

"A click, click, click was emanating from the Pikadons; they were pulling the triggers of their particle weapons to no effect; and now Kito covered them. 'Stop it!' Said Kito, as if she were scolding two small children. 'I wake up first. Take Duracell from gun.' The Twins swapped embarrassed stares. 'Bad day for you when Smith and Wesson merge with Mattel...' "

Buy this book!



Charles deLint
The Little Country
Pan, 1993, 636pp, £8.99
Reviewed by K V Bailey

A metatext of sorts: two books, one framing the other. In the framing book, author 'mad' Bill Dunthorn of the Cornish village of Mousehole, has left behind a clandestinely printed edition, one unique volume, of his third

and posthumous novel, "The Little People". It is in the sacred and secret care of trustworthy old Gaffer, Janey Little's grandfather and surrogate parent. Janey, a successful folk musician, finds it and reads it. This lets loose its magic energy which attracts the avaricious attention of the Order of the Grey Dove, a power-hungry 'illuminati' kind of organisation, headed by the hypnotically/magically coercive Canadian, John Madden. He launches an offensive to obtain the book, using Janey's mother (long gone to the bad on the streets of new York) as agent. The framing novel's plot is the story of these machinations.

Chapters or groups of chapters of this framing novel are alternated with chapters of "The Little People". Dunthorn had written that fantasy using the locale of Penzance as it was at the beginning of this century. His heroine, the girl Jodi, lives with her brothel-keeping aunt but spends most of her time with Denzil Gossip, a crazy old inventor/experimenter and his family of animals. Curiosity leads her to poke into the affairs of an evil witch with the result that she is ensorcelled into a minim; and the plot of the framed novel is the story of her rescue and of how this tiny embodiment of herself travels between her everyday "Iron World" and the faerie "Harrow World" of the little people.

There is between the two plots a certain parallelism. The focus-switching effected by those alternated chapters at first irritates, but later, as characters and sequences of action are established, it becomes a mechanism for contemplating the framed and framing worlds each in the light of the other. The landscape around Mounts Bay is common to both novels and, one of several archaeological features, the standing-stone Men-an-Tol, a huge menhir, is a shared gateway between worlds, at the vortical eye of converging climax. Music, too (the author himself is a musician) is a common ingredient, in both books and in all worlds a channel of ecstasy and revelation.

Charles De Lint's most usual novelistic background is Canada. He spent several months in Cornwall researching this novel, with mixed results. The 'Cornishness' is at times laid on too thickly, yet his topography is concise and his scenery authentic. As for plotting, in the 'main' novel the succession of characters -- suitors, gangsters, idealists, agents, entrepreneurs, catching trains at Victoria and ending up in intrigue and Violence at Mousehole, can strain credulity.

Paradoxically, in the 'framed' book, "The Little People", the children turned to stone (and back again). The spells and counter-spells or iron and salt-water, strain it less, a work of unambiguous fantasy being there of the convention. The defeat of villainy and the redemption of the not wholly bad, while courting sentimentality, are acceptable outcomes and make overall for a happily optimistic novel. De Lint has plausibly been likened to Laycock, but this is a chameleon of a book, at one moment almost a Graham Greene thriller, at another a little in the vein not only of George MacDonald but of Ian MacDonald, and in one metaphysical aspect even evocative of that rhythmically reverberant old classic *A Voyage to Arcturus*. Yet it is entirely itself, distinctive in its treatment of a 'double-structure', the fictive

book(s) in the two stories being identified as one and interchangeable, and the nature of the tale(s) told relatively dependant on which fictional character is reading them.



David Eddings
The Shining Ones
HarperCollins, 1993, 472 pp, £14.99
 Reviewed by Vikki Lee

The second book of Eddings' Tamuli series, which follows on from the three books of the Elenium series and The Domes of Fire, sees Sparhawk's wife, Queen Ehlana, continue the education of the Tamul Emperor, Sarabian. Surrounded by a plethora of good guys, how could she possibly fail to turn the one-time puppet ruler into a force to be reckoned with? Sparhawk and his merry band leap around the various continents, with the help of 'Bhelliom' (a being more powerful than the Gods themselves trapped in a sapphire shaped like a rose by the malicious and unsavoury Troll Gods), and his daughter Princess Danae (the child-Goddess Aphrael in her untempered incarnation), trying to keep ahead of the various 'bad guys'.

It is not until Sparhawk's party reach Atan that the Shining Ones from the title make their first appearance, the Shining Ones, or the 'Cursed Ones' as they are more commonly known, are a race of people who have cut themselves off from the world because of something that happened so long ago that nobody really knows the truth of it. Aphrael and the other Gods know of course, but they're not telling, the very presence of the Shining Ones is enough to unhinge the usually calm and dependable Sophrenia and she has a battle all of her own trying to exorcise the not so savory past of the Styric race, of which she is a member. A shadow already hangs over Sophrenia with the possibility that a Styric renegade is in league with the enemy, Sparhawk and the rest of his party however are unaffected by this age-old enmity and find yet another useful ally to their cause.

The whole novel is essential Eddings, and one either loves or hates his style of writing. One could gripe about the 'sameness' of *The Belgariad*, *The Mallorean*, *The Elenium*, and *The Tamuli* -- with their interchangeable characters, their similar and often predictable plotlines, but you can't put the damn things down once you start reading them. One thing that did niggle me in *The Shining Ones* is the inherent 'niceness' and jokiness of all the characters. The stock phrase "be nice (dear)" when someone is having a bit of a go, appears so often it begins to jar, especially when there is a scene involving the villains of the piece plotting and scheming their next move; one wouldn't really expect real villains to tell each other to "be nice" to each other. The anti 'three' and 'thou' brigade will also have a field day with this book, but in truth, although not really accurate, Eddings' use of a form of formal speech is fun and endearing.

To sum up, Eddings again delivers a feast for his fans. An absolute, unputdownable page-turner. Regular readers of his work will know exactly where this novel is going to end, and what the third and final book of the series

is going to be all about -- after all, it happened exactly the same in all the other series, but what the hell -- I'm already looking forward to it.



David Garnett (Ed)
New Worlds 3
Gollancz, 1993, 223pp £6.99
 Reviewed by Ian Sales



I'm not going to explain what *New Worlds* is because if you don't know by now then you must have been living on another planet. Suffice it to say that this is the third of its new incarnation. And after three outings, a definite character is starting to become apparent -- although there is a *slight* feel of the *Interzone*-clone about it. But this may simply be because both *Interzone* and *NW* seem to draw from the same stable of writers. And even within *NW* itself, certain names appear to crop up with suspicious regularity: Peter Hamilton (who will also appear in *NW4*), Brian Aldiss, Jack Deighton, Paul di Filippo (also in *NW1*) and Simon Ings (also in *NW1*) are both in *NW2* and this issue.

The other point to note about *NW3* is that because it's British, it's (of course) all very grim. The stories cover a multitude of themes such as death, futility, more death, and more futility. Nothing life-affirming in here. Not, I hasten to add, that I'm complaining. The stories themselves are all of a very high quality.

Peter Hamilton seems determined to get Peterborough on the SF map with 'Spore Capacity', another of his bioware tales. Graham Joyce proves he's still into weird shit with 'Gap Sickness', a story about people who trance out so it's not a good idea to get involved with -- oops, where was I? Brian Aldiss' story is the second in a trilogy that will be later be fixed up into a novel that, on the strength of this episode, I am looking forward to seeing. Gwyneth Jones contributes one of her trademark thoughtful stories, which I have to admit, I liked the first time I read it. Ings & Stross (re-united again after Ings' solo effort in *NW2*) contribute 'Tolkowsky's Cut', a far future

story stripped of the soul it purports to be about. This is possibly the best of the bunch.

If there are weak stories in **NW3**, they would have to be those by Jack Deighton and Graham Charnock -- which is odd since Deighton's was one of the strongest in **NW2**. Paul di Filippo just takes the piss. Again, 'Streetlife' is such a thin tale, it doesn't seem to do anything. But you read it, you enjoy it, because he's such an inventive writer. The fiction is rounded off with Jack McAuley's novelette, 'Children Of The Revolution'. This is written as some sort of post-cyberpunk euro-ambient mix, but the title gives it all away; Sixties flashback in slick polished Nineties drag.

All of the above are sandwiched between a lengthy trade on the depredations of big businesses by David Garnett and John Clute's 'Science Fiction Novels Of The Year' column. I find it ironic that in attempting to boost the sf genre, a US invention and still dominated by that country, Garnett begins by attacking the financial short-termist attitude prevalent in the UK industry that is itself imported from the States. There's no denying that Garnett has a point; accountants make poor CEOs, but I'm not convinced that **NW** is the place for such arguments -- people will buy it for the fiction, not the ideologically sound political position. Having said that, the editorial nicely sets the mood for the stories...

Clute's column on the other hand, is typically sharp, typically indulgent, but it's not very often that what he writes strikes you as a Great Truth. This one does.

You want to buy an anthology of cutting edge British sf, there's no argument about it; you buy **NW3**. Enough said.



Keren Gilfoyle
A Shadow on the Skin
Headline, 1993, 534pp, £16.99
 Reviewed by Catie Cary



This is a Celtic fantasy by a first time novelist, which feature a telepathic super race whose name begins with a 'D'. If you can tell the difference between Dervery and Deryni, you may now add to that list Desaignes. I'll admit, I

thought twice about reading this book, but I liked the cover and the book is dedicated to the Irish rock band Horslips, whom I admired greatly in my teens; so I took the plunge. And emerged surprised. This is a very good book.

We follow the career of Tobias, half human half Desaignes, brought up by his human mother to fear and despise the telepathic super race. The scenario is not particularly original; rape, torture, incest and murder are commonplace in the typical Desaignes family residence, Tobias and his siblings are barely tolerated, regarded as misbegotten mongrels. Tobias finds escape through his love for his horse, and through the relationships he builds within a human settlement on the Fens.

And it is when we move out into the fenland that the originality and power of Gilfoyle's writing become evident. The settlement ekes out a subsistence in the shadow of the master race; tolerated because unimportant. Gilfoyle describes the bleak lives of the little community, laying bare the compromises with humanity required by the focus on survival. The community is ruled by a shamanistic matriarch, the Old Woman, who has fostered a relationship between Tobias and her daughter in order to raise a child capable of resisting the Desaignes.

A contrast is painted between the corrupt and decadent Desaignes, their powers waning as a result of inbreeding, and the feisty determination of the fenfolk, biding their time beneath a cowed exterior. The descriptions are both politically and emotionally complex, ridden with ambiguity and question. The author is not afraid to ask stern sacrifice of her characters in pursuit of their goals, or to examine the moral dilemmas that arise.

The externals of the plot involve Tobias' escape from the Desaignes, his coming to maturity marked by confrontation with various supernatural entities, as he gradually comes to understand and to accept the truth about himself. Internally, the story revolves around power; its nature and use, how it should be contained, how it may corrupt, how some desire and chase it, while others flee its responsibilities.

The climax is bloody and intense, havoc is wreaked on all concerned. Tobias survives at considerable cost to himself and to those he loves. We are left in uneasy peace, the lull after the storm, not certain that the threat has truly passed. While the story has completed, a sequel would not be unexpected.

A different kind of Celtic fantasy; intelligent, moral, with an intrinsic notion of power and place. A shame then that the writing sags in places, where better editing could have raised the book to excellence. However, it's a very encouraging start for a new author, whose work I shall look out for in future. I'd very much like to see a sequel.



Simon Green
Down Among the Dead Men
Gollancz, 1993, 221pp
 Reviewed by Colin Bird

A pleasingly slight fantasy tale makes this a refreshing change from more heavyweight tomes. This novel tells the story of a band of

rangers sent to investigate a border fort on the edge of Darkwood. All communication with the outpost ceased after its last consignment of gold was delivered. The Forest King sends Duncan MacNeil, heroic leader of the party, together with young Constable and warriors Jessica Flint and Giles Dancer. The four rangers are to investigate the fort before the arrival of a full complement of guards who would take over. The characters of the four are quickly established as the plot switches from mystery thriller to a conventional sword and sorcery affair.

Another dimension is added when three bandits arrive to take the missing gold for themselves. Again these characters are well defined in Green's spare prose, and the narrative develops at a brisk pace. A malevolent force is detected in the fort and soon the rangers and bandits start having realistic but revisionist dreams, the story reaches a satisfying, if predictable climax, inevitably losing atmosphere when the swords and spells start flying.

A highly readable book, not quite sustaining its intriguing opening. Some of the story elements are a shade derivative, particularly the possessed sword, Wolfsbane, heavily reminiscent of a certain albino's weapon. Otherwise a good mix of horror and fantasy devoid of any unwelcome padding.



Peter Haining (Ed)
Great Irish Stories of the Supernatural
Pan, 1993, 378pp, £5.99
 Reviewed by David Barrett

The Irish are amongst the greatest storytellers in the world, and when it comes to the supernatural, whether ghosts, hauntings and banshees or retellings of the great legends, they are without equal. This collection of stories of the supernatural is welcome above all else for the sheer enjoyment of reading good well crafted stories.

There's something almost soothing about an old-fashioned ghost story. The careful build-up of atmosphere and tension, the slow awakening of the protagonist's awareness that something supernatural is happening, the subtle drawing of fear or disquiet or just *strangeness* -- all these are so often lost in today's more heavy-handed blood-splattered horror stories.

There is so much excellent material available that this anthology doesn't simply serve up the same old well-loved stories that previous editors have collected together. There are stories by Lord Dunsany, WB Yeats, James Joyce and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, but they're not the ones you might expect. There are also stories by living writers, including Peter Tremayne's chilling 'Aisling'. Haining's division of his material into Ghosts, Hauntings, Faerie, Leprechauns, Deviry and Revenants at times seem a little arbitrary, but no matter; his introduction to each section, giving background on the authors, is informative, and anyway, it's the stories themselves that count, not their categorisation.

Irish storytelling is not something to be

treated with false reverence; it's an ongoing process, and thankfully as irrelevant as ever; the Irish have never been afraid to laugh at themselves. Greed, laziness, pride, religion, politics, all come in for a tongue-lashing. In William Carleton's early 19th century 'The Three Wishes', Bill is dealing with a very formal Old Nick:

"Devil a much myself hears of late," says Bill; "is there anything *fresh* below?"

"I can't exactly say, Bill; I spend so little of my time down now; the Tories are in office, and my hands are consequently too full of business here to pay much attention to anything else."

The Devil is the exception; the Irish voice is part of the beauty of these stories; they cry out to be read aloud. A splendid collection.



Stephen Marley Shadow Sisters

Legend, 1993, 432pp, £8.99
Reviewed by Tom A Jones

"A dark fantasy of ancient China" that's what the blurb says but just what does that mean?

Let's take the China bit first. After a short opening in Rome most of the story takes place somewhere the author calls China. There are Chinese names, Chinese trappings and for all I know the history could be right. But they are not important to the story, it could be set in any feudalistic society. The use of China seems to be shorthand for establishing an alien, exotic setting, there's a framework already established in our minds so the author doesn't have to create it.

Now to 'dark fantasy' which seems to be another way of saying sword and sorcery. Perhaps 'dark fantasy' signals more 'adult', by which I mean the violence is more explicit, there's a particularly nasty killing of a Jewish family on pages 6 & 7. Also the sex is more up front but not explicit. Sword and sorcery has always had overtones of Sado-masochism and that's true of this book; part of the violence on page 6 is the rape of a child. Even the 'heroine', Chia, a lesbian, requires a level of violence in the sex act with a touch of bondage.

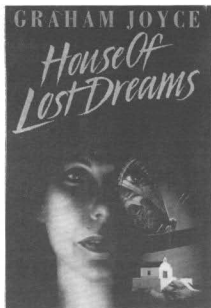
As for that heroine, Chia Black Dragon, she fits the sword and sorcery mould; warrior, some magic powers, self-centred but with redeeming features. Added to this she has a human mother and god-like father which makes her almost immortal and has vampire tendencies (kept largely under control).

The plot's about saving the world from monsters such as Chia's father and brother. If you've read any sword and sorcery/dark fantasy you'll know the gist of the plot and if you want a few more details the back cover blurb isn't a bad synopsis.

There's clearly an audience for this type of book, but it's not me.



Graham Joyce House of Lost Dreams Headline, 1993, 310pp £15.99 Reviewed by Norman Beswick



If you find classification helps (and sometimes it does), then fix in your mind that this book is a good example of Magic Realism. It is set on a Greek island in today's world, the characters are believable, contemporary, well-observed and carefully described, and the focus is on personal relationships; but interwoven with all of this are mysterious, occult forces and events.

Mike and Kim Hanson give up everything and come to idyllic Mavros, where Mike hopes to paint. From a shifty taxi-driver, they rent a two-roomed house with few facilities but a superb view; they swim, make love, live the simple life... And bit by bit things go disturbingly wrong. The house is strangely oppressive; local people make unsettling remarks; odd things happen. Kim's feminist friend Nikkie arrives, followed shortly after by her abandoned husband Chris, unsettling the relationship of all four of them. Mike is romantically in search of influences from ancient Greek myth; Orpheus, Eurydice, Artemis, the oracles - and certainly they 'hear' inner voices. But who is the solitary figure walking to and fro in the shadow of the ruined monastery? What of Saint Mikalis, the angel militant in metal shoes, of whom legend tells stories and whose insistent image Mike angrily defaces? What should they make of the shepherd, Manoussos, who at first watches shyly from afar and appears strangely protective of them? And what really happened to Eva, previous occupant of their house?

The story is beautifully written, with a sharp eye and a keen ear, and builds disquietingly to a tense and cleverly-woven (though not horrific) climax. The occult elements keep their mystery: this is neither hard-SF, where everything is explainable, nor standard fantasy, where Good and Evil are obvious, taken for granted and sharply opposed. One gets a hint that the orthodox religious establishment may be deceitfully usurping the domain of the earlier gods, but the point is not

laboured.

Graham Joyce has given us an elegant 'good read', to my mind well above the standard of average genre fiction. Whether, on later re-reading, the images of snakes, butterflies, dancing, oracles, scorpions and dreams will be found to match and gel properly with the vividness of the naturalistic descriptions (cheating, loving, getting drunk, vomiting, quarrelling) we shall have to see. I wonder if they have been fully *thought* as well as felt; maybe they have. One thing's for sure; it makes no sense at the end to ask 'And what did Mike and Kim do next?' The book rounds off, complete in itself, a self-sufficient jewel.



Garry D Kilworth Angel

Gollancz Horror, 1993, 275pp, £14.99
Reviewed by Kev McVeigh

The distinguishing feature of Kilworth's fiction has always been the strength of characterisation, rather than the originality of his ideas. In his first official Horror novel (complete with Banksian pseudonym) this trend continues.

It is the end of the millennium and arson is a growing problem. Two cops, Dave Peters and Danny Spitz are assigned to investigate. The fireraiser uses a white fire which leaves nothing unscathed; Dave's wife and son are victims of one such fire in a superstore. Hundreds die in similar incidents. The cause of these fires is discovered to be an angel who hunts down and destroys demons regardless of any human victims who may get in the way. Dave and Danny need to find a way to stop an angel...

Angel is a complex variation on the buddy novel; the two cops are long-time partners and close friends despite great differences. Dave is married with a son, Danny single and an habitu  of prostitutes. Dave is a lapsed Presbyterian, Danny means to be a devout Catholic. Throughout the novel the actions of the two men are related to the women in their lives. Danny begins seeing Vanessa after she is paroled for arson, she sees him only as a friend and becomes Dave's lover in one of those unplanned twists. Her parole officer also wants her, but she complains about his harassment and both Dave and Danny warn him off, after which he swears vengeance. This detailed and honest exposition of male attitudes towards women from a male viewpoint is a recurrent aspect of Garry Kilworth's writing, and one of the factors which make his characterisation so real. In Angel he puts his characters through great traumas, and their women suffer badly, yet we continue to empathise with them. They make mistakes, but it isn't all their fault, and they suffer too.

Angel is also Kilworth's most theologically explicit novel yet. Vanessa is a lecturer in theology, allowing her to advise and explain, whilst Danny's regular trips to confession unveil some of his own doubts about his relationships.

I usually prefer Kilworth's mainstream work, with its powerful sense of place backing up the characterisation. This novel is set in San Francisco, and whilst the inner-city

settings are well-depicted, it could be any city in the USA. Dave and Danny are gripping, moving characters whose story fascinates throughout. The earlier appearances of the angel and the demon, Malloch, are intrusive and distracting, but towards the end their presence is essential and the pressure builds inexorably to a potential apocalypse.

Is it horror? It doesn't scare but it might haunt, and a more telling depiction of men under stress would be hard to find anywhere.



**Anne McCaffrey &
Jody Lynn Nye
Crisis on Doona**

Orbit, 1993, 476pp, £15.99
Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

This novel sees a return to the planet Doona, where 25 years ago, a treaty between humans and the cat-like alien Hrrubans enabled both races to share this unspoilt, agricultural world, a situation unknown in the rest of the galaxy. However great or small Anne McCaffrey's actual contribution, the book, sequel to **Decision at Doona**, sits comfortably enough amongst the rest of her prodigious output. Co-author Jody Lynn Nye certainly seems to have no objection to McCaffrey's propensity to give her aliens unpronounceable names -- Hrriss, Nrrna, Hrrestan and Nrrva feature, as do institutions with abbreviated titles like Codep and Poldep, again typical of McCaffrey. Fans can be assured that the familiar Mccaffreyesque plot where her characters (young and extremely nice) save their society from some dire threat -- here certain humans and Hrrubans attempt to destroy the Doona experiment by preventing the renewal of the treaty -- is narrated in McCaffreyesque style. For the rest of us, this may not be a recommendation. "Her mother and father pumped her for data about her life" or "No one who knows you and Hrriss will believe this vile canard", are just two examples of how this style can irritate.

As to the characters, Todd Reeve, who was a child in the earlier novel, and whose actions were crucial in bringing about the original treaty. And his friend Hrriss, are now in their thirties, and yet their youth is emphasised almost as much as their cringe-making friendship. "I have missed you, too," Hrriss said, giving Todd a rib-crushing hug. "Half of my life was severed from my heart, my mind, my soul." "On Earth they are admired, while Doona's inhabitants view them with indulgent affection. As expected, by the end of the novel, these two young heroes are suitably paired off with two extremely nice young females who are also extremely brave. When, as part of the villainous Admiral Landreau's machinations to destroy Doona, Hrriss and Todd are framed for various crimes, it is the girls who save their menfolk and ensure that Landreau's plans are thwarted. But we readers knew all along that all would be well, for no evil-doers could possibly prevail against the sheer niceness and decency of Doona's inhabitants. To inject a science fiction novel with the amount of sentimentality found in this book is something of an achievement. To expect people to

actually buy this stuff only goes to prove that you can fool some of the people some of the time.



**Anne McCaffrey &
Elizabeth Ann Scarborough
Powers That Be**

Bantam Press, 1993, 312pp, £14.99
Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

The planet Petaybee was terraformed in the recent past by the Company who now wish to exploit its resources. Unfortunately, their survey team disappear, and those who survive seem to have lost their minds, reporting sightings of strange and impossible creatures.

Into this scenario comes Major Yanaba Maddock, a senior Company officer, retiring to Petaybee as its cold climate is suitable for her injured lungs. She is invited to take on an undercover mission, to discover the truth about the planet, but instead finds herself drawn to its inhabitants and suspected of treachery by her own people.

There is plenty to appeal to readers about this book, but I found myself turned off by its relentless political correctness. The female protagonist, tough but gentle, discovering her man, also tough but gentle, with whom she has fantastic sex. The adolescent couple, with the girl taking the lead. Two gay partnerships, one of each sex. A community of primitive, but wonderfully caring people, clustered around their earth mother. An ecology which demands that animals be killed for food, but ever so humanely. The underlying 'green' theme, of co-operation with the planet instead of its exploitation. The baddies, all hi-tech, sophisticated Company men, incapable of understanding the symbiosis of the planet and its people. I apologise if I am doing the writers an injustice, but I have the sense that instead of trying to convey their own unique vision, they are offering a package of currently acceptable opinions.

The rights and wrongs of the situation are too clearly drawn from the beginning. Readers are left in no doubt of where their sympathies should lie. Opportunities for displaying moral ambiguity or divided loyalties are rudimentary and left unexplored. Although the true nature of the planet and its inhabitants is skillfully revealed as the story progresses, there is little sense of true discovery and none at all of danger.

Both the writers have considerable reputations in SF, and a loyal following of readers who will no doubt find the book very enjoyable. The writing has pace and variety. The principal characters are attractive, depicted with warmth and humour, and it is very easy for the reader to slip into and identify with the little community of local people. Altogether, **Powers That Be** is a very readable book. But it is cosy. And I have the feeling that SF ought not to be cosy.



**Robert F Rankin
The Book of Ultimate Truths
Doubleday, 1993, 271pp, £14.99**
Reviewed by Chris Amies

We were on the M56 south of Runcorn when the curse began to take hold. I remember saying something like "I feel a bit lightheaded. Maybe you should drive...". When suddenly the windshield was black and there were these tree branches all over the place. The Cadillac was off the road and we couldn't see where the hell we were going. My dwarf research assistant had taken off in his pyjamas and was pouring Hugo Rune's Snake Oil on his chest to facilitate the growth hormones...

Well... Yes. After the **Armageddon Trilogy**, Rankin pounces back with a story to rival the heady days of his **Brentford Quartet**. The quest is for the Hugo Rune (last quoted in the shorter **Brentford Book of Verse**: see under 'goldfish' and the unexpurgated version of **Rune's Book of Ultimate Truths**).

Cornelius Murphy, a youth whose main talent is for impersonation, is employed by a mysterious antiquarian to recover the chapters of the **Book** that were suppressed by the publishers for fear of unleashing vile knowledge upon a hapless world. With his dwarf assistant Tuppe, an unlimited budget and quantities of Jim Beam, he sets off through a surreal landscape of kilted warriors, alluring violet-eyed bairns, fast driving in a Cadillac Eldorado, bodybuilding monks with a weapons cache, and the hideous eldritch gibbering of Max Bygraves. It all has the quality of a very strange acid dream; crowds suddenly occur and vanish, the travellers lock themselves in their hotel room and are visited by the televised ghost of Hugo Rune... We learn why biros vanish and small screws multiply... And so on.

Robert Rankin not only delivers this speedball stuff like a hit of the finest LSD-25, he also does what he did in the **Brentford Trilogy**; that is, to present a half-idealised, half-caricatured landscape and populate it. This is a world where (quite probably) Goddess-worshippers complain about a creeping influx of Christianity in the media; where the answer to 'is that true?' Really is 'Well, it's a good story'. You're dealing with the occult here, and who needs Science when you can have Pseudo-Science and more fun while you're doing it? **The Book of Ultimate Truths** is an epic quest, along the lines of **Lord of the Rings** or **Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas**. All it needs now is illustrations by Ralph Steadman.



**Brian Rayfield
Topaz Fire**

Legend, 1993, £9.99
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

Is it unreasonable to expect an element of imagination in a fantasy novel? I would have not thought so. If I want to read ideas and stories which have been done before I can go

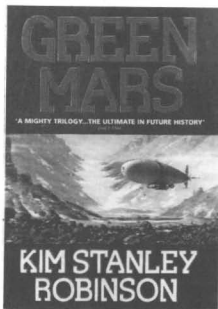
back to the books which have done them well and read them again. That is the virtue of books – they do not self destruct five minutes after you have finished them, it is possible to reread them. To read a new book therefore, instead of an old one, implies (to me at any rate) that you are looking for something new, a different twist, a spark of originality. If none of these things are present, if all the ideas have been used by others, if all the situations are copies, only masterful writing and beauty of style can redeem the book. Without style, without originality, what is left?

'Topaz Fire' takes place on Earth with the countries given different names. Chaw is China, the Warchaw are westerners, the geography is Earth with the maps and the history books relabelled. I'm not sure why the author has bothered to rename them, maybe I am not meant to notice, perhaps it was to make the introduction of magic more convincing, but I found it irritating. Why couldn't he either have invented his own world (lack of imagination perhaps)? Or else had an Earth where magic exists?

The hero, Curos, is a Chaw leader who recruits the help of the Dryads to combat Warchaw invaders, the Dryads (surprise, surprise) live in the forest and look after it, and have some magic powers, which are what Curos needs to help fight the magic powers of the western sorcerers. The book follows Curos and Xante, the Dryad, as they find some people with magic abilities, train them and the army to repel the invasion, enlist the aid of the nomad tribes, all leading to the confrontation of the two armies and the two types of magic. In the process many characters are introduced but none are developed, many situations arising but lead to few conclusions, and the fragmentary nature of the narrative is unsatisfying. The confrontation happens. The Chaw win. They say to each other that though they won that battle they cannot win the war. Then the book stops. It doesn't end. It stops. Probably volume 2 is in the pipeline. I felt completely cheated, having ploughed through the whole book to be just dropped like that.

This book annoyed me because it uses elements of fantasy devised by others in a calculating way. I didn't feel that it was a sincere but incompetent book, one written by a man who was writing his own version of what he enjoyed in other books, there wasn't enough emotion in it for that. It felt contrived. There were other things which annoyed me -- loose ends like the topaz stone which Curos wears which has strong magic that no one attempts to understand or exploit, which considering the lengths they go to to exploit other less powerful things is inconsistent. The characters and the writing are dull and uninvolved, and the editing is very poor, for instance one character appears variously as Quinn or Qurin. I can't find anything in this book to recommend and hope fervently that I don't get volume 2 to read.

**Kim Stanley Robinson
Green Mars
Harper Collins, 1993, 571pp
Reviewed by Alan Johnson**



The second volume of Kim Stanley Robinson's Martian epic arrives and the signs are, that like the Martian landscape of the story, he is warning to his task. **Red Mars** closed with the chaos of attempted revolution, and widespread destruction designed to accelerate the terraforming process by releasing large quantities of gases and water into the atmosphere. After the revolution is crushed with huge casualties on both sides, we start several years later in **Green Mars**.

The remnants of The First Hundred are mostly in hiding, in various colonies spread around the southern hemisphere, acting covertly to resist the United Nations Transitional Authority, a rubber stamp for the ambitions of various transnational corporations on Earth. Mars is seen by these corporations as another potential market, another source of revenue, and it is this underlying conflict between the faceless powermongers on Earth and the resistance on Mars which underpins most of the action in **Green Mars**. However, this is not to say that the lines of conflict are strictly black and white. Both sides are split into various factions and sub-factions who at length will debate the various pros and cons of the degree of terraforming required on Mars, with the Reds wanting the landscape to be left as close to the original as possible whereas various other factions want as close to Earth-like conditions as possible. This, along with a variation in response from the Earth based transcorporations means that there are only shades of grey and no absolute positions. It is this strong political edge, that although present in the first volume is far more prevalent in **Green Mars**, and adds to the depth of the characters present in the novel. Robinson seems determined to act, through his characters, as a mediator, presenting all possible viewpoints, and leaves the reader to pick sides. This is fine as long as your side ends up on top, but it can also lead to the equivalent of questioning the referee's

eyesight at a football match!

The story progresses through various viewpoints, featuring characters from **Red Mars**, but also characters like Nirgal, who is a product of ectogenic research by Hiroko, and a first generation product of Martian settlers but also Art Randolph who is an ambassador from one of the less repressive transcorps. This multi-viewpoint approach enables Robinson to give snapshots on the process of colonisation and terraforming of Mars, allowing at least some grasp of the vast scale of the novel. It is this scale however, that also provides some of the down sides of this work. Robinson at times is prone to vast 'infodumps' about things like the future colour of the sky under Martian conditions, to the various possibilities of the terraforming processes. This does add to the scientific credibility of the work, but at times can get a little wearing. Robinson's obvious dislike of the capitalist ethos is also a little heavy handed, but he carefully walks a tightrope between the various viewpoints as the story progresses towards its inevitable conflict.

The middle section of a trilogy is always a difficult beast. It relies heavily on what has gone before, but must enthrall the reader enough to encourage them to progress to the next volume. I felt that **Red Mars** was not the great story that many people have claimed, but the continuation of the story in **Green Mars** has raised my expectations for **Blue Mars**. I can't wait.



**John Shirley
New Noir**

*Black Ice Books, 1993, 115pp \$7.00
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid.*

John Shirley comes from the wild side with these six short stories from the experience of crack and violence. An awkward mix of gritty documentary realism and bleak romantic fantasy, they take the whores, pimps, losers and living dead of our urban underworlds and cast them into a neverneverland where the grimy streets have a vague, dreamlike appearance.

Jody and Annie in 'Jody and Annie on TV'



appearance.

Jody and Annie in 'Jody and Annie on TV' resort to casual violence then motiveless murder for the sexual thrill of seeing their crimes reported on the TV news. It means they are somebody. The crack addict who answers the newspaper ad to marry the world's smallest man is after the same thing. But his claims to be a film star are as empty as her dreams, ends in violence. The link between sex, violence, crack and theft runs like an unbreakable chain through Shirley's work. 'Skeeter Junkie' has a dying addict seeing through the eyes of a mosquito as it explores the naked body of his female neighbour; 'Equilibrium' features a sickly violent revenge for the sickly indifference of a middle class family to their son; while 'Recurrent Dreams of Nuclear War' lead B.T. Quizenbaum into Moral Dissolution' doesn't actually say anything more in the story which isn't there already in the title. Finally 'Just like Suzie' concerns an encounter between an addict and the whore who caused the break-

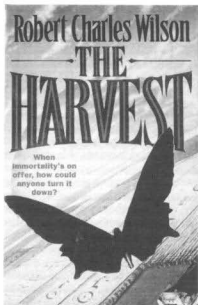
up of his marriage. The whore dies in the middle of fellatio, and her teeth lock around the protagonist's penis, so that he ends up sawing her head off and walking around with her head dangling from him like a bizarre concretisation of the monkey on his back.

These stories aren't really crime fiction, though they usually involve crime. They aren't really fantasy, though they usually involve some departure from reality. And they aren't really well written, though they do have a rough energy and a sense of conviction which makes them as powerful as anything else you are likely to read this year.



Robert Charles Wilson
The Harvest
 NEL, 1993, 489pp, £4.99
 Reviewed by Alan Johnson

One of the themes of modern science fiction is that of large scale events as seen from the

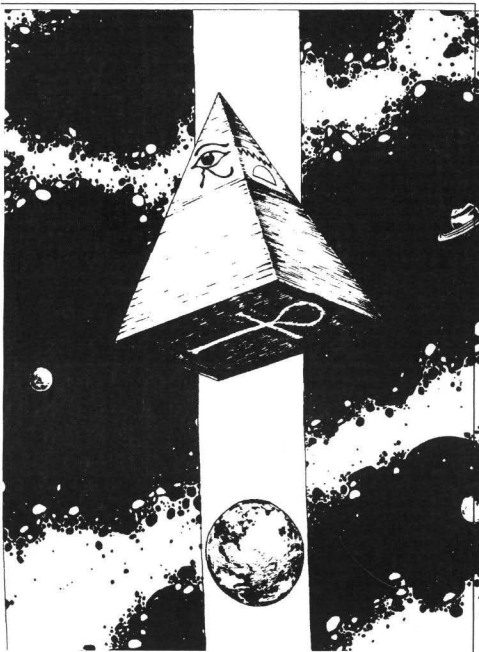


viewpoint of Mr Everyman. In the case of **The Harvest**, the theme is 'the end of the world as we know it'. An alien vessel arrives in the near future and takes up orbit around the Earth. The shock of First Contact causes unrest across the world, but after initial convulsions, the world settles back into expectation as the alien apparently ignores the world below. After a year in orbit, with no apparent contact, the entire population of the world falls asleep. During this period, everyone is offered, in a dream, the option for immortality, and the chance for the Earth, relieved of the pressures of human activities, to regenerate. They would join the aliens in a disembodied virtual reality, free of bodily constraints. Upon waking, it is found that no more than one in ten thousand have refused this option.

The Harvest is not a story about alien contact. It is instead a story of alien avoidance. The major characters of the story are those who have for one reason or another rejected the offer from the aliens. The result is depopulation of the world through a nanotechnological metamorphosis, to join the aliens. This, along with gross modifications of the Earth's biosphere in an attempt to repair the depredations of mankind, causes major problems for those remaining.

Wilson's story is a real surprise. The characters are well drawn, and totally believable in what is an extraordinary situation. Despite the world collapsing around them, they continue to live their lives much as small-town Americans have for countless years. As society breaks down however, they are forced to leave home and seek a coalescing community of the remainder of humanity in continental USA. The journey provides further views of the result of this evolution of the human race, whilst still challenging their survival skills.

Wilson's scenario is pure hokum, but the level of characterisation and the quality of writing is of a consistent high standard and lifts this story above the level of the ordinary. Recommended.



BARBED WIRE Kisses

Edited by
Maureen Speller

"I write for moments ... when my story communicates directly to a reader" says Kristine Kathryn Rusch, describing her role as a writer in **Fantasy and Science Fiction** August 1993. "As an editor," she goes on, "I realise that such communication is often imperfect. Readers react to stories differently. As an editor, I try to keep the table of contents of this magazine diverse, so that each reader will find at least one story gem in each issue." Have recent issues of **F&SF** measured up to this statement of intent? Did I find a story gem in each issue?

August's issue did not sparkle. Stories from Nina Kiriki Hoffman and Charles de Lint came close to satisfying my desire for fantastical tales but they stumbled at the final fence. De Lint, as ever, allows a welter of referential detail to obscure the core of 'The Bone Woman' as his unearthly creation pursues her mission "to preserve the things that are in danger of being lost to the world." Hoffman's 'The Skeleton Key', an unusual story of pursuit and revenge from beyond the grave is weakened by the presence of the eponymous key which, while it conveniently enables Tess to talk to the living, reduces the process to a mundane level of keeping with the enormity of Hoffman's subject.

Similarly, Marina Fitch's 'The Silent Treatment' loses its power as a description of a doomed marriage because she portrays it in such obvious terms. The tragedy of the situation is lost in the feeling that we have seen this marriage played out a hundred times before in novels and on the screen. While the wife is alerted to her husband's danger by a remarkable circumstance this is given equal weight with her conflict over whether or not to walk out of the marriage. Had I just seen a large number of ants resolve themselves into a human figure divorce would not be foremost in my mind.

Other stories include an offering from R Garcia y Robertson who unwisely ventures into space opera with a mystery about an insufferable galactic prince. A more fundamental issue, the annihilation of a space colony by aliens who reproduce without the need of males so can't see their use, remains discreetly in the background. Would that Grania Davis's 'Chroncorp' had remained in the slush pile. We need time travellers wandering around Galilee like we need ghostly Jewish mothers supplying food in times of crisis, this latter being the latest piece of "wacky humour" from Ron Goulart.

In September, matters improved immensely with a stunning collaboration between Marc Laidlaw and Paul Di Filippo. 'Sleep is Where You Find It' centres on the work of Weegee, the photographer who roamed the night-time streets of New York, recording its low-life. The story concentrates less on the man himself, more on what it means to be possessed by the camera and the need to record. Indeed, the camera is the character, possessing those who hold it. as much as those portrayed by it. We have no guarantee even that the human protagonist is Weegee himself rather than a construct of the camera and are left wondering even after the story finishes.

Other stories were inevitably overshadowed, especially Lynn S Hightower's 'Point Man', a surprisingly claustrophobic study of a woman's obsession with her family's safety and her encounter with a man whose similar obsession has transcended temporal barriers. It is too neatly counterpointed by Rand B Lee's description of perpetual pregnancy as a punishment for carrying out abortions, a story sadly lacking ethical dimension, and Julia Ecklar's 'Promised Lives', almost unique for its premise that not every woman who escapes overcrowding for space and the chance to have children, leaps at the opportunity to do so.

Sadly, Mike Conner's novella, 'East of the

Moon', is not a patch on his earlier stories concerning Guide Dog and the fliers. Supposedly a stand-alone novella, it relied heavily on the reader knowing what had already happened and ground on interminably as the close proximity of a large number of these fliers caused the passengers on a space ship to behave in very peculiar ways. In between, much discussion on the nature of fiction, life and meta-fiction did not conceal the fact that this story was boring.

The 44th anniversary issue, a double for October and November, ought to contain the very best stories and the editorial indicates that Rusch sets great store by Walter Jon Williams' homage to Mary Shelley, the progenitor of our genre according to Rusch and many others. Alternative history is, at best, a worn literary device; at worst it is little more than an excuse for manoeuvring historical figures through a scenario of the author's choosing. Too often, it contributes nothing to a greater understanding of the real people while the fiction relies too much on us knowing about the real thing. Well crafted though 'Wall, Stone, Craft' may be, I fail to understand what Williams wants to tell me. Am I to assume that Mary Shelley would have written **Frankenstein** whether or not she told ghost stories with Polidori and Byron, that it was her destiny to do so? If so, so what?

The other stories while rarely less than competent do not excite. Allen Steele's 'Lost in the Shopping Mall' falls back on the old, old story of a neglected child looking for love, this time running away into a virtual shopping arcade, and the jaded but warm-hearted shrink on a mission from the cyber company. Jane Yolen had, I thought, hit paydirt with an unusual story drawing on Jewish history, only to give away the denouement almost before she'd begun, an unforgivable handling of what might otherwise have been a fine, dramatic story.

Jonathan Lethem's stories always make me uneasy. He digs around in the more troublesome areas of the human psyche but I wonder if I'm the only one who questions his motives. Sincerity jostles with the cheap thrill and I can't decide if he is making a deeply significant point or just likes writing sex scenes. 'Hugh Merrow' is, crudely, about the relationship between sex



and art, but as though following this discussion wasn't enough, we suddenly discover that our eponymous protagonist is bisexual but refusing to acknowledge the fact. What a neat idea to have him screwing a male alien under the impression it's female. That the aliens' presence in the story seems to be solely for this misunderstanding to occur is a further weakness.

By contrast, Carrie Richerson's 'The Light at the End of the Day' comes as a revelation. The return from the grave is a standard theme but rarely is it handled with such delicacy and humour. Tina Westphall returns not as a body but as a skeleton and Richerson's description as she heaves her bone out of the grave is a masterpiece of detail, even to her turning a cricket out of her eye-socket. Her return is taken much for granted by her erstwhile lover and the two take up their former relationship, accompanied by Hayden their dog, also dead. Richerson paints a delightful picture of domestic harmony, of the perils of living with a skeleton, in a style which reminds me strongly of Peter S Beagle's **A Fine and Private Place**, high praise indeed.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch can be reassured that I have discovered at least one jewel in each issue of the magazine she edits, but what about some of the other titles? Her dictum is a good rule of thumb for any magazine, on the understanding that none of them is being edited specifically for my benefit and has to cater for a very broad range of tastes.

The last four issues of **Asimov's Science Fiction** have yielded several exceptional stories but too often Gardner Dozois seems willing to settle for a neat but well-worn idea. How else to explain the plethora of stories set somewhere in the past, the Cretaceous and 19th century America being favoured locations. First, the latest instalment in the continued use of historical figures in alternative timelines. August's issue of **Asimov's** included not one but two stories about Fidel Castro and baseball. It is, we are assured, a total coincidence. John Kessel further tells us that, for his story at least, the lives of his characters are depicted accurately "up through 1948", which seems to imply that Castro did indeed play baseball in the States at one point... I've been trying to confirm this fact ever since I read 'The Franchise' and Bruce McAllister's 'Southpaw' but without success, and even knowing that this much was true is not going to improve my opinion of the stories. Not that they aren't well written, but what on earth is the point of writing them? "You can't step twice into the same stream," goes the old saying. Fiction, especially science fiction, is inclined to say "Oh yes you can!" but I feel you should decide which bit of the stream you want to jump into. I still nurse this fantasy of Kessel and McAllister discovering a few neat baseball facts about Fidel, thinking "hey, wouldn't that make a great story?" and then being stuck for something to do. Kessel has Castro meet George Bush while McAllister has him meet Desi Arnaz.

The prime story of the issue is, of course,



Bruce Sterling's 'Deep Eddy'. I've discovered that this story generates passionate responses in readers, some for, others against. When I first read it, I considered it a waste of space. Sterling has once again fallen into the 'Difference Engine' trap and downloaded the results of research in the mistaken belief that this is fiction. The plot is fragile to the point of invisibility and I took a violent dislike to Deep Eddy. Others saw it differently, like a flow of raw data, sparking off masses of ideas, the sort of thing I always complain that stories don't do any more. I've now read the story four times and am prepared to concede that some of us find it harder work than others. I'm still wearied by the inexhaustible stream of ideas about what part computers will play in our lives in the future, but I've become fascinated with the Wende, the huge popular gathering at the centre of the story, like a carnival on speed. Deep Eddy has to negotiate his way through this outbreak of communal madness to make a delivery to the Cultural Critic and he is out of his depth. In a way, I think Sterling is also out of his depth. People are a problem and he hides, much as Eddy does, behind the spexware so that we, as readers, never really get to grips with what it is that drives this upwelling of raw emotions.

The rest of August's selection was lacklustre, including an utterly pointless story of academic theft and revenge which seems to qualify as SF because it's about a sophisticated form of virtual reality. Well, hey, that's okay then. The fact that the story could as easily have been about the discovery of a new manuscript or a lost continent diminished it significantly in my eyes. Surprisingly, Philip C Jennings, not one of my favourite writers, managed to come up with a story which did not wallow in his usual sentimental syrup, focusing on the dilemma of an old man who is about to undergo euthanasia and is uncertain what to do with his memory, which we are left with downloaded. For the rest, we are left with talking animals and cheap attempts at "coming to terms".

September brought with it more attempts to come to terms with things, with an elegant story from Brian Stableford which neatly juxtaposes a teenage boy's complete understanding of the miniature world he's created with mutacly and his inability to

understand that his parents' marriage is falling apart. Terry Bisson's character is coming to terms with the fact that alien contact is not quite all it's supposed to be. 'The Shadow Knows' is not quite as offbeat as we've come to expect of Bisson in the last few years, although his perverse humour does surface in the way the alien messenger chooses to contact humans. Instead, he infuses his story with an unexpectedly tender and elegiac quality, tinged with disappointment.

Jamil Nasir's 'The Dakna' is muddled in its plotting — we switch rapidly from a search for the inspiration behind a famous piece of music to illegal cloning — but there is no doubt that Nasir sustains the narrative throughout, writing powerfully. Kathleen Ann Goonan's 'Kamehameha's Bones' is also a fine piece of writing, delving into the myths and history of Hawaii as well as providing a very poignant love story across the ages as Cen explores his attachment to his country. By contrast, the short stories from Nancy Kress and Connie Willis are both weak, the Willis particularly so. So Connie's been in hospital and dreamed she was taken over by aliens. We need to know this?

Having commented on R Garcia y Robertson's ill-advised excursion into space opera, September's **Asimov's** saw him on a surer footing, navigating his heroes Jake and Peg, still trying to get home, through North America just prior to the Civil War. It's an enjoyable romp which manages to provide a strong historical commentary without succumbing too often to the need for real historical characters, though Ulysses S Grant and Samuel Clemens get walk-on parts. I suppose this is inevitable in time-travel stories, to lend a certain veracity, like a watermark in good quality paper. Garcia y Robertson handles this sort of thing so well. The story itself is a good old-fashioned adventure, with the goodies saving each other from the baddies, over and over again, maybe a little too frequently, and perhaps the portrayals of the slaves are a little sentimental but it was that all — too-rare thing, a good piece of entertainment.

Ian R McLeod's novelette, 'Papa', provides yet another reminder of how well this man writes. This a meditation on the nature of old age in the future when, so the pundits tell us, enhanced longevity will be the norm. McLeod delves into the ramifications of this offering a scenario where adolescence extends well beyond what we are accustomed to and where children still worry about their parents in old age, no matter how long their lives now are. There is no explicit criticism of this artificially prolonged life but I was strongly reminded of Jonathan Swift's miserable immortals in **Gulliver's Travels**, dwindling away slowly and painfully in their never-ending lives, and this same observation lies at the heart of McLeod's story.

Steven Utley offers a slight but satisfying little story in which an archaeological dig reveals that something is very wrong in a small country community and gives a whole new slant on the notion of genetic inbreeding.

William Tenn provides, by contrast, a most obnoxious though supposedly light-hearted little time travel story in which a man ends up committing incest with his great great granddaughter who has travelled back in time to study him, as the only failure in the entire family. His story is that he can't ignore a challenge, even if it is family. My contention is that Gardner Dozois could surely have found something better to do with the space.

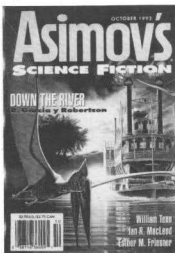
Asimov's November issue is a double issue, supposedly including lots and lots of goodies. There is an excerpt from Michael Swanwick's new novel, **The Iron Dragon's Daughter**, though the magazine gives the impression that this is a stand-alone novella. It's the first part of the novel, the most comprehensible part in my opinion, and it works well on its own. It's difficult to characterise except perhaps as Charles Dickens meets Sylvia Townsend Warner, with dragons, as Swanwick explores the bizarre idea of the fairies stealing children to work in their dragon factories.

Robert Reed's 'Sister Alice' falls back on more familiar themes, with a highly controlled future society where childhood fighting has become stylised in intricate wargames and the families are all clone products. Inevitably, into this carefully generated and well-regulated world, a loose cannon is discharged. Reed seems fascinated with this theme, exploring it over and over. This version though, while heavy on words, seems lighter on concept than some.

Avram Davidson, as I've said before, is an acquired taste and people seem to love him or loathe him. 'A Far Country', set in British Hidalgo, which may or may not be lurking on the fringes of Central America, brilliantly evokes the plain weirdness of expatriate life, as people struggle to maintain the values of good old Blighty in the face of a completely alien culture. For Limekiller, the discoveries he is to make about himself may come as a shock but they also confirm his deep attachment to the territory.

The other outstanding story is Neal Barrett, Jr's 'Cush'. Barrett has come a long way these last few years, developing a cult following for books such as **The Hereafter Gang and Pink Vodka Blues**. His story shows him at his off-beat best. He takes a simple theme, that of the misbegotten, misshapen child who has a more obscure mission to the world, and fits it out with a memorable range of characters, especially Aunt Alma Cree who, as observer, chronicles the strange goings-on on the family farm.

Sadly, few other stories live up to this. Yet more shenanigans in the Mesozoic are matched by the startling discovery of time-travellers in the Antarctic. Why is every female scientist obliged to set off after the time-traveller of her choice, and why does every male scientist seem to have a preoccupation with his groin? Is any work being done on these expeditions? I think we should be told!



Whether or not *Interzone* subscribes to Rusch's 'gem per reader per issue' theory, I cannot say but when I read it, I'm aware that while the stories in the American magazines are always 'readable' if not necessarily memorable, the material in *Interzone* swings wildly between the classic, long-remembered and the utterly forgettable. Sadly far too many stories in the meagre selection available fall straight into the second category. As I've said before, for a magazine which is supposedly devoted to publishing fiction, *Interzone* contains an awful lot of non-fiction..

In the issues between August and November, the outstanding story has to be the collaboration between Robert Holdstock and Garry Kilworth. It's always invidious to try to determine who wrote what but the theme itself strikes me as quintessential Holdstock. The narrator, Alexander, has devoted his life to discovering the secrets of resurrection, concealed by veiled references in the literatures of the world though, and some might argue conveniently, in manuscripts and literary works which are supposedly missing in our real world. The narrator is following in the footsteps of his own uncle who, it seems, has come very close to finding the source of immortality. Alexander discovers the secret of the strange tree growing on his land and aims to succeed where his uncle failed.

Powerfully written, the story evokes a dark and dangerous world, lurking under the surface of the one we know, symbolised most effectively in Alexander's realisation that his own cottage is permeated by the roots of that eponymous tree. Yet there is also a joy and pleasure in the way the authors set about tantalising us with mentions of works known to antiquity but now lost, of variants on familiar ancient classics, on **Hamlet**, and **The Iliad**. The clues are assembled logically, impeccably; we're left thinking 'well, it might just be like that...'

Other recent stories, alas, aren't in the same class, although Graham Joyce's 'The Apprentice' and Nicolas Royle's 'Flying Into Naples' come close. One is an uncomfortable study of an alienated boy who may or may not be a magician's apprentice while the other chronicles the unwise rekindling of an old love affair. I'll suspend judgement on Paul Di

Filippo's 'Walt and Emily' until I've read the second part, though so far I'm impressed. I always enjoy Di Filippo's off-beat style. Mostly, the diet seems to be one of gloom, doom and a very strange notion of what the future holds, mixed in with stories which I are, I guess, supposed to provide light relief.

Take, for instance, Kim Newman's 'The Big Fish' (*Interzone* 76) Set in the USA, just after it's gone into the Second World War, we have the ubiquitous world-weary private eye narrator. Very cutting edge. He's looking for someone, someone whose erstwhile associates have started turning up murdered. Just when he thinks he has a lead, our hero discovers a body face down in the bath and has a brush with a bunch of foreign agents. They mention the word *Innsmouth* and I sit down to watch the rest of the story unfurl to its inevitable and obvious conclusion. Excuse me while I die of excitement from the novelty of it all.

Among the stories of more serious intent, John Meaney's 'Timeslice' postulates a world which is so grossly overcrowded, you only get one day in four at the existence game — a notion you might find all too familiar from Philip Jose Farmer's 'The Sliced-Crosswise Only-on-Tuesday World'. Peter Duval discovers though that he is intimately linked, through his parents to the process that brought this about and that he is the one to undo the damage. It's actually a nicely studied piece and I look forward to seeing what else Meaney can achieve but, having read several over-population stories in recent months, I've begun to question that overcrowding can ever reach these epidemic proportions. Maybe thirty years ago, this was a legitimate 'what if?' but I'm no longer convinced and wonder why writers still think it is. Or is it just an easy hook on which to hang an SF plot?

Chris Beckett's 'The Welfare Man' focusses on another problem with the 'what if?' scenario, its very plausibility. Set far enough into the future for genetically recovered dinosaurs to be commonplace at the zoo, the story assumes that the poor and socially deprived have literally become aliens in their own country, interned or 'categorised' into special areas, council estates on a vast scale. With weaselling words aplenty to make it seem that they have chosen to remain in the special category, these people stand no chance of breaking out of the poverty trap. Assuming that SF really is holding up a mirror to our own time, then this is undoubtedly an accurate depiction of how many people believe life is with a Tory government which drips honeyed words about family values and a classless society. But will this situation persist to the point where vast swathes of the country are given over to these estates? Beckett clearly thinks so and his fiction confirms this with not one scrap of hope offered. On pessimistic days, I'm inclined to agree but surely, if one use of science fiction is to point up how not to proceed, can he not offer any indication of change?

I'm similarly baffled by Peter F Hamilton's 'Adam's Gene' (*Interzone* 74). Adam is

genetically engineered but manages to escape from his minders. Supported by the lovely Charlotte, he is intent on "peopling" the world with his wonderful genetic creations which can do so much to help mankind. Clearly, for many of the characters, he has an alternative agenda but neither they nor I are very clear on what this might be. Neither, I suspect, is Hamilton though I would guess that he believes Adam's intentions are honourable, and they probably are but 'a better life' is a very woolly concept, especially in the hands of a messiah, self-proclaimed or otherwise, and I don't think we've got anywhere near the heart of this story.

In the classic, dour style we tend to expect of *Interzone*, Brian Ruckley's 'Farm Animal' (*Interzone* 74) gives us another future scenario in which a woman is prepared to sacrifice her daughter's body to a vagrant, if it means he will dig a well and do some farm work for them. I disliked this story on several counts, not least that I found it difficult to believe that the woman was not prepared to work the land herself, or to encourage her daughter to do so. Inherent sexism means starvation, I'd have said, which tends to undermine the story before we've even begun.

Greg Egan's 'Transition Dreams' (76) is, as might be expected, an odd story. What is it about Egan? You think you've got a handle on his fiction and he promptly throws you off balance again. This time however I think the story itself is unbalanced. Having spent a large portion of the action wittering about being scanned and transplanted into a robot body, worrying about transition dreams that no-one can actually remember, the protagonist is then revealed as the classic unreliable narrator, probably a transition dream himself. At which point you realise that the entire story has been nothing but a set-up for this pay-off. Not very satisfying at all.

The problem with *Interzone* is that when the stories are good, they're excellent but whereas *F&SF* and *Asimov's* do at least guarantee a readable product every time *Interzone* is just as likely to plunge into the depths of unreadability and remain there for stories on end. Nevertheless I persevere as a reader, hoping that the editors will lighten up.

Likewise, I persevere with *Analog*. Too often, though, a great idea is bogged down with ideology or the need to dump as many facts as possible during the story. Time and again, this kills any chance of the story blossoming as a piece of fiction. The didactic and dogmatic imperatives move remorselessly on leaving the creative impulse gasping for life.

Analog is undoubtedly the last bastion of the most conservative forms of SF. Thus, even in this day and age, we find stories about spacemen doomed to destruction then having a bright idea to save themselves at the last moment, having touchingly said goodbye to the wife and kids, Gregory Bennett's 'Swan Song' being an all too typical example (August 93). Or else the gentle hick from the sticks comes up with a great idea to help the local



scientist, as in Bud Sparhawk's 'Jake's Gift' (September 93). That slightly patronising, old-fashioned attitude still persists.

Otherwise, the author lays down a series of great ideas which he or she, but usually he, then proceeds to ignore completely. Grey Rollins' 'Darwin's Children' (October 93) is a prime example of this. A woman starves to death in a lunar city, a situation which causes a huge outcry because the moon's population is wealthy and no-one should die for lack of anything, especially food. Set this against a simmering resentment on the part of both Earth and Moon populations, the one despising the other for its arrogance, while the other despises the former for its complacency and lack of ambition. Instead, the author settles on doctors as the prime villains because they won't let people die peacefully. The woman has hidden herself away in order to die with dignity. Now I'm not disputing that this is a perfectly reasonable resolution to the story but why lay down all the other antagonism with such emphasis if you're only going to use it as background padding? Similarly, Tom Ligon's 'The Gardener' (November 93) is bogged down in religious exegesis to a degree that beggars belief, doing absolutely nothing to move the plot forward. Daniel Hatch's 'Senator Space Cadet', in the same issue, is also stuffed with detail to the point of inertia. Dealing with a theme close to the hearts of regular *Analog* readers, it chronicles efforts to get the space programme back on target, or rather it chronicles endless promotional tours round the USA. All very touching, I'm sure, but I think we know how this is done, whether or not the senator supports the space programme.

You may wonder why I continue to read *Analog* when I obviously despise the majority of its contents. I read it for two reasons, one of which is that no matter how much I dislike this sort of fiction it's important to keep up with what these writers are thinking, just as much as the rest, and argue from an informed position. Secondly, I read *Analog* because occasionally there is a story that catches my fancy. Two such came my way this session, both in the September issue. Duncan Lunan's 'With Time Comes Concord' is a well-constructed mix of alternative universe, time slip and hard SF detective story. An air

accidents inspector is sent to investigate a mysterious crash and gradually determines that the airplane is not from our time at all. Waiting patiently for years, he finally solves his problem but perhaps not how one would expect. I normally find Lunan's fiction too overtly scientific for my taste but for once he has blended science and suspense to the perfect degree.

W R Thompson's 'The Plot to Save Hitler' is not the sort of story I would expect to find in *Analog*. A magazine so obviously dedicated to righting wrongs doesn't seem to be the place to advocate that time travellers shouldn't try to eliminate the young Adolf, even sticking to the inviolate rule that time travellers should never meddle. As Thompson's narrator recognises, it's an odd thing to be doing, protecting one psychopath from another, as he pursues a would-be temporal murderer through early twentieth century Austria. I didn't care nearly as much for Thompson's other story, in *Analog* for October but his versatility is encouraging.

In the next issue I shall be catching up on issues of *Amazing* as well as a variety of other magazines, while Paul Kincald will be reviewing critical magazines. Now, K V Bailey brings us up to date on the SF poetry magazine scene.

Poetry Slips The Stream by K.V. Bailey

It is now becoming a critical commonplace to indicate blurrings of the line between mainstream fiction and SF. While there is a quite recognisable genre of SF verse (the acronym often umbrella to speculative and to some forms of fantasy verse), the same kind of blurring is evident on the poetry front. In *Vector* 172 I noted chiefly SF magazines publishing distinctively SF verse. Here I describe some non-genre magazines where that blurring can be observed, first mentioning, however, one further specifically SF magazine which features poetry.

The Lyre, No.2, Summer 1993

Edited by Ian Sales and Nicholas Mahoney, it continues its policy of publishing a small amount of discerningly chosen and well-displayed verse. In this number that amounts to just two poems: a short, sardonic genetic fantasy by Cactus Lizard in dispraise of a certain ex-prime minister; and a long spacer-bar/space-operaic poem from Steve Sneyd, which sustains a racy narrative despite, or perhaps actually powered by, an absence of punctuation throughout its 100-plus lines.

Memes, No.7, 1993

This is edited by Norman Jope from Plymouth, and contains poems, prose-poems, comment, short-short stories, reviews and news. Several poems (Peter Redgrove's 'Rites of Spring'; Alex Warner's 'Hippenhop') have the flavour of myth and anthropology. Elisabeth Blotsee ('Eart Station') finds the Goonhilly geodesic domes "casual as

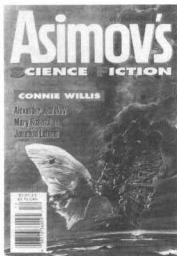
thistledown'; A C Evans's 'Alchemical Cybernetics' are 'A melodrama of night / A dragon for the day'. The most accomplished poem is by Rupert M Loydell. Written in regular unrhymed five-line stanzas, it meditates sombrely on a visit to the Lascaux simulation cave: 'At night I dream of antelope and bison, / dark shapes dancing among the concrete mixers / and the tools of deceit'. In all a magazine of very considerable imaginative vitality.

Ore, No.45, Spring 1993; No.46, Summer 1993

Essentially a mainstream magazine of poetry, articles and reviews. Its poetry, eschewing the egocentric suburban, the kitchen-sink and the political-polemical, often reflects the vision of its poet-editor Eric Ratcliffe, who in an earlier editorial has stated as a goal the representation of poets' understandings and intuitions in face of the cosmos of contemporary physics and particle science. In No.46 I particularly like the biologically observant articulation of Gwyn Jones's 'Red Kite in Autumn' — 'old head swivelling on / young shoulders, mechanically / quartering the battleground'. And there is a dicey 'quantum' feel to Paul Newman's 'The Pathos of Not Knowing', where a view from a train opens up vistas of choice, chance and regret: 'What is it about transience / that leaves a mark? / is it (perhaps) a potential for wonder unexplored, / a future abandoned or left unopened?' No poem better exemplifies the strong 'elemental' vein suffusing *Ore* than the poem 'St. Pirans, Cornwall' (No.45) by Sue Thomason (whose poetry deserves to be as well known as her SF criticism and stories). Entering barefoot the enclosure she senses its being founded on four powers — 'stone walls / a floor of shining water, / sunbeams ribbed the roof, / and the door was clear air'. Both No.45 and No.46 are decorated/illustrated over signatures familiar in transatlantic genre circles — Cathy Buburuz and Marge Simon.

Terrible Work, No.1, Spring 1993

It has a porcupine on the cover and the caption 'Poetry, Politics and other Prickly Stuff', an apt description for a vigorous and eclectic new magazine edited (like *Meme*) from Plymouth, with international ambitions but also 'inclined towards giving adventurous poets within the South-West a platform'. The poetry content (filling much of its fifty pages) is a mixture of the radical, the ecologically green, the anarchical and the neo-romantic. There is the taut downbeat realism of Margot K Juby's 'On the Council Estate': 'I wonder what it feels like, safety? / I used to know, but I can't remember'; but then there's the far out imagery of Andy Darlington's lines 'mythic skies where strange / fish pursue the ram into eternity'. A tour de force, at once classical and romantic, is from Bill Wyatt — a sequence of flower haiku interspersing a Bulgarian mountain travel diary, and this counterpointed with passages from Basho's 17th century *Sarashina Kiko*. Elisabeth Bletsoe contributes a beautiful hermetic poem 'The Leafy Speaker' (now collected in her *The Regardians: A Book of Angels*); and Peter Redgrove's prose-poem 'Thunder Factory' is a resounding meteorological fantasy. The non-verse content includes a review-article by



editor Tim Allen on Jack Kerouac's recently released *Pomes All Sizes* and a perceptive interpretation of the 'authorial' role in P K Dick's *Radio Free Albemuth* from Steve Sneyd (who also has a poem — a wicked little cross-generation irony). A magazine to be watched — it's alive.

Acumen Magazine, No.16, October 1992; No.17, April 1993

This journal ('Poetry — Prose — Reviews') edited by Patricia and William Oxley, also from a South Devon base (Brixham), is well-established and widely recognised for the variety and excellence of its verse. A stated editorial criterion is a poem where form and content are in harmony. The magazine's policy and content have nothing overtly to do with fantasy or science fiction; so why do I include it? Because I so often find in it poems which illustrate perfectly the zeitgeist/slipstream suggestion I voiced earlier. Take, for example, (in No.17) Margaret Toms's 'Aurora Borealis'. Confronted unexpectedly with the eponymous phenomenon, '...this being the century it is / the first reaction was fear, incredible light / having such connotations'. *Acumen* No.16 is an especially rich number in these respects. What may seem a slight, playful image, opening Penelope Shuttle's 'Wish', is yet entirely of our space-oriented time: 'The sky gift-wraps the world / in blue, / with cloud-ribbons and tags / marked, Asia, America'. Mary Hodgson's 'Costliness' and Rebecca A W Elson's 'Devonian Days' draw imagery respectively from cosmology and from morphic resonance; while the gem of that issue, John Heath Stubbs's 'A Cockroach Point of View', is a vividly descriptive and witty descant on evolutionary survival, redolent of Don Marquis, Darwin and apocalypse: 'A bit of a come-down surely, for Archie the cockroach, / To scrounge a vicarious living from / An upstart naked ape, whose tenacity / Of this green world may shortly terminate'.

Sphinx, No.4, 1992; No.5, 1993

Defined as 'A Journal for Archetypal Psychology and the Arts', it is edited by David Cobb and Eva Loewe and published by the London Convivium for Archetypal Studies. The ethic and philosophy marking its prose, art and poetry is in every way opposed to the reductionism impressed on one of SF's Janus faces, but not to the metaphorical and

mythopoetic features of its other face. Here is a fragment from Robert Bly's prose poem (No.5) 'A Chunk of Amethyst': 'Its exterior is jagged, but in the inner house all is in order. Its corridors become ledges, solidified thoughts that pass each other.' Noel Cobb's poem of alienation and fulfilment, 'Postcard to a Fellow Extra-terrestrial', begins: 'Because our eyes are irises, / Our skin is blue, and our speech / Is keyed to starlight'. In the same issue Alan Ginsburg's 'Plutonian Ode' in Whitmanesque measures addresses the element: 'I salute your dreadful presence lasting majestic as the Gods', but finishes: '...I set this verse prophetic on your mausoleum walls to seal you up Eternally with Diamond Truth! / O doomed Plutonium!'. *Sphinx* 4 is thematic of Decay and Renaissance — Hades and Aphrodite — and offers many fine things, including a delicate erotic fantasy ('My Night with L'Anie') by Russell Hoban, in which a shape-changing, elusive but variously accommodating Aphrodite is a stone sphinx on the terrace of the Jardin des Tuileries. Many of the poems have distinctly the slipstream quality, particularly a group by Jeremy Reed, where are to be found such images and metaphors as 'Words which were building crazy in the head / pour from the throat as a cloudburst of bees' ('Pre-Equinox') and (from 'There's a Place') 'I call it Diamond Nebula; / a light within another light; a point / that's vanishing as soon as seen'. The superb presentation and the quality of their art reproductions fully justify the price of each of these circa 300 page publications.

Endpiece

It is of interest that the Summer 1993 number of *The Poetry Review* (quarterly magazine of the Poetry Society) contains David Kennedy's article/symposium ('The Poetry Lab') on the relationship between poetry and science. In it the suggestion is made that a nineties update of the magazine's influential 1987 'Poetry and Science' number is overdue. In the course of the symposium there is discussion of four poets whose work certainly has relevance to my theme, the first-named particularly — Miroslav Holub, Hugh MacDiarmid, J H Prynne and Peter Reading. The article also gives news of a conference and/or anthology on poetry and science currently being planned.

The Lyre: £2.50 from Nicholas Mahoney, 275 Lonsdale Avenue, Inke, Doncaster, S. Yorks DN2 6HJ

Memes: £2. Subscriptions (£5/10/20/PCs) for three issues post paid. Cheques to MEMES at 38 Molesworth Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 4NT

Ore: £1.85 post free from Eric Ratcliffe, 7 The Towers, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1HE. Issued two or three times a year. Copies may be paid for on receipt or by advance payment of £5 or more to cover many issues.

Terrible Work: £2.50. Three issues £7.50. Post paid Cheques, etc. payable to TERRIBLE WORK, 21 Overton Gardens, Marnamend, Plymouth, Devon PL3 9BX

Acumen Magazine: £3 plus 45p postage. Subscription rates (£2 issues: April and October, post free) £15.00 (£30 Europe of USA)

Sphinx: Each of these two books £11.95 plus £2 postage. Published annually at adjusted prices. Cheques payable to SPHINX, PO Box 417, London NW3 6YE

Poetry Review: £4.50 plus 60p postage. Subscriptions, surface mail paid (four issues) £18, overseas £26, USA \$45

Paperback Graffiti

Edited by Stephen Payne

Signposts

Ramsey Campbell
Waking Nightmares

"Whatever your taste in horror, you'll probably find something in this collection's nineteen stories to satisfy and chill you...Highly recommended."

Andrew Seaman

Michael Moorcock
The Brothel in Rosenstrasse

"It is all too easy to lose oneself in the moments of *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*. They are intense, languorous, beautiful, painful, transient and fragile. But from a distance they form an intricate, impressionistic and impressive whole."

Martin Sutherland

Bob Shaw
Who Goes Here?

"...A lightly satirical, often very funny adventure, with plenty of well thought out time travel paradoxes: a testament to Bob Shaw's extraordinary versatility, and one of the very few SF comedies ever likely to be called a classic."

Mat Coward

Vernor Vinge
Across Realtime

"good, solid, traditional SF...Recommended."

Andy Mills

Freda Warrington
A Taste of Blood Wine

"A love story which is atmospherically icy and torrid by turns.... probably Warrington's best novel so far."

Andy Sawyer

Reviews

Piers Anthony
Demons Don't Dream
NEL, 1993, 344pp, 15.99
Reviewed by Julie Atkin

The plot of Anthony's latest Xanth novel concerns two sixteen-year olds playing a role-playing game. After they have each chosen a Companion, they set off on their competing quests for the Prize, each eventually suspending their disbelief and being drawn physically into the world of Xanth. Facing and overcoming various challenges along the way, they finally realize that the Prize is not as important as Fair Play, and although princesses and mermen are OK to lust over, what they really want is each other.

Xanth is crammed with visual puns; for example, a stool pigeon is a pigeon on a stool made of - stools. I found these intensely irritating, particularly when explaining in an extremely heavy-handed manner. In his Author's Note, Anthony credits literally dozens of people with puns and ideas used in the book. Presumably after 15 of them he's run out of inspiration. I found the coy attitude to sex embarrassing - the greatest taboo is for a male to see a female's "panties", and the boy Dug's greatest desire during the first part of his quest, is to get as far as possible romantically with his beautiful Companion - presumably Anthony is aiming at an American teenage audience. However, at times, he insults even their intelligence - at one point a character is upset at her dog being referred to as a bitch, until remembering "this was what a female dog was called: a bitch. Just as a female horse was called a mare and a female pig a sow." However, a hundred pages later, her vocabulary has so increased she can use words like "necrotic" and "catalytic".

Not wishing to jump on the anti-Anthony

bandwagon, I approached this novel with an open mind, but I found the whole thing mindless, puerile crap.

Piers Anthony
Fractal Mode
Grafton, 1993, 414pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Chris Amies

A lot of Piers Anthony's efforts these days have to do with Notes at the end of his books, which end up squeezing the whole into a ball and rolling it towards an overwhelming question. You've had the tale, now listen up, here is the Moral, and the Deconstruction, and what your author did while he was writing it. (It's that HI-PIERS twoness again like renaming the months. Enough, dammit!) Having been told what a nice, caring, lovely bloke our Piers is, dare we butt horns with the tale told?

Fractal Mode is the second in a trilogy after **Virtual Mode**, and both titles sounds more bandwagon than a carnival float with a jazz quartet on it. Piers Anthony is an accomplished writer; even a good one. The **Battle Circle** series suggested that, and **Firefly** and **Mercy** even more so. But there is a strange semi-lost sensibility to the book such that this magical quest story leaves an awful odd flavour, like haddock ice cream. Who is he writing for? Late teens is my guess, but the near obsession with sexual and bodily detail is OTT even for the sixteen-year olds. Bits of the tale are excellent, especially those closer to 'real' experience or SFnal ideas, and other bits (the magic and oh puh-leaze kings and magical flying giants, do me a favour) aren't. Bird with one wing don't fly, no matter how strong that wing may be.

Robert Asprin
Catwoman

Millennium, 1993, 196pp, 3.99
Reviewed by Max Sexton

Catwoman is thin stuff, so much so that I could safely skip pages. Bessarabian nationalists are selling their antique icons to raise money to buy weapons in order to fight the Russians and unite Bessarabia with Romania. Batman vows to put a stop to these iniquitous goings-on. Meanwhile, Catwoman collaborates with her arch costumed rival because a member of the gang has murderous feelings for cats, particularly tigers. Despite the cover blurb, Robert Asprin's abilities to convey atmosphere and create characters are, like the plot, thin on the ground. Batman and Catwoman are psychologically complex characters, but Asprin seems indifferent to them, although he uses clichés that he must think are profundities to disguise his failings.

Clive Barker, Stewart Stanyard
and Hector Gomez
The Life Of Death
Eclipse, 1993, 6.99
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Barker's flair for the grotesque is emphasised in this adaptation (by Fred Burke and Steve Niles) of two more of his short stories. In fact, the title story moves slowly

towards its inevitable end; propelled so slowly by Stanyard's deliberately and effectively murky art that we are arguably not in the "shock" field at all, but a more lyrical vein of horror. Recovering from an operation, Elaine meets Kavanagh outside a demolished church where the newly opened crypt turns out to be a plague pit. Elaine enters it, to dramatic effect. The story is clearly about Elaine's rendezvous who so nearly took her on the operation table, but is she right about Kavanagh? Several levels of irony underlie the conclusion of a story which is almost medieval in its implications.

Elaine's dance with death is ambiguous. Lewis, in 'New Murders on The Rue Morgue' likewise finds himself in an ambiguous situation. It was his grandfather's relation of a real event to "a melancholy young man called Eddy" which resulted in the original story, and now Lewis has to recreate the role of C. Auguste Dupin as events seem to repeat themselves. On one level, the visual nightmare of this medium works against this story based on disguise and role-playing; on another, the point is that the nature of the killer has no surprise for us, is merely part of a greater and more grotesque reversal.

Once more, both are high-quality stories of the unsettling and macabre, and these adaptations emphasise their essential qualities. Fans of Barker should appreciate this volume as a worthwhile extraction of essence.

Eric Brown
Meridian Days
Pan, 1993, 165pp, 3.99
Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

This is Eric Brown's second book and first novel. Set on a remote planet in a resort of artists and those who would rather forget, in a spur of the galaxy by-passed by trade, here the furies work themselves out as sculptors in the new multimedia display their artistry in bizarre corollary of incredible destructive bichery.

To this planet Bob Benedict has brought himself to forget: Bob is not as the other residents, he is a failed star pilot who has come to seek solace in the "frost", a khat-like plant which grows on the scalding littoral between habitable islands and the remaining desert-like majority of the planet where sand-lions live to eat stray humans. Then Bob meets Tamara Trevellon and her lost daughter, Fire. Tamara is an artist who will sacrifice everything to her art, and probably has already chopped up her eldest daughter to that end. (Bob was the pilot of the crashed shuttle in which Tamara's husband died). Bob, quite reasonably, wants to take Fire away from all this, but does not quite achieve his aim.

Unfortunately, this sort of intensity mixed with artistic advance or degeneration is not new, and some of Eric Brown's pastimes, like "smoke-sculpting", give away the origin of Meridian: J. G. Ballard's *Vermillion Sands*. Ballard was copied with acknowledgement in Lee Kilgough's 1974 collection *Aventine*, but Eric Brown does not pay that tribute, and in a way I don't mind because Brown does not achieve the level of the original. It is okay to read *Meridian Days* or *Aventine* (if you can

find it), but you should read Ballard, the real thing.

Ramsey Campbell
Waking Nightmares
Warner, 1993, 273pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

As one of the best writers in the field of horror, Ramsey Campbell knows that true terror is often born of the mundane. Almost all of the stories in this fine collection of Campbell's fiction, spanning the entire eighties, have their roots in our everyday waking world, magnifying the ordinary until it becomes something quite monstrous. Childhood, or childhood fears translated into the adult world, feature prominently. In 'The Trick' two girls pay a terrible price for their treatment of an elderly lady on Halloween, while innocent childhood games are imbued with horrible significance in 'The Old School' and 'Playing The Game'. Campbell's power as a writer, evident throughout this collection, lies in his lucid prose style and his ability to pinpoint hidden traumas, like the memory of a frightening book which haunts the protagonist in the chilling 'Meeting The Author', or the wartime terror tragically relived in 'Second Sight'. It also comes from his minute observation of the genuine horrors of urban life in stories like 'The Other Side' and an unerring talent for taking us inside the minds of the unbalanced and the psychotic, whether it be the emotionally stifled son of a fanatical evangelist in 'Another World' or the vengeful frustrated author of 'next Time You'll Know Me'.

Whatever your taste in horror, you'll probably find something in this collection's nineteen stories to satisfy and chill you, from the explicitly Jamesian 'The Guide', to the humorous autobiographical piece 'Watch The Birdie' and the psychological horror of 'Beyond Words'. Highly recommended.

Peter David, Tom Sutton & Ricardo Villagay
Star Trek: Who Killed Captain Kirk?
Titan, 1993, 176pp, 8.99
Reviewed by Chris Hart

Superman is dead. Batman has gone weird and Robin has shuffled off this mortal coil. It was inevitable that Captain Kirk's day would come - not before time for some of us - but for others, the Trekkies, I have a warning. For don't be beguiled by the deliberately sensational title - nothing is quite as it seems in this Star Trek adventure and Peter David pulls the rug from underneath the reader so many times during the strip you begin to wonder if it is worthwhile standing again.

Judged by the standards of today's graphic novels this looks visually impressive - rather than a blast of lurid colours and dynamic use of frames, this is a pastel pointillist of repetitious face-to-face conversations. The writing tries to break this with a progressive Star Trek story dealing with multi-race sexual relationships, rivalry, practical jokes, a journey through the nine circles of Hell and the assassination of the "Keptin" - but it all seems too much at once. What could have been interesting themes are belittled by the need to

provide a thrill-a-minute, ephemeral comic book - which would have been alright - if it was at a throwaway price.

Gordon R. J. Dickson
Young Bleys
Orbit, 1993, 456pp, 5.99
Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

This is the latest book to appear in **The Child Cycle**. As the publishing sequence of the cycle does not follow their internal chronology I have an idea that I should be able to jump in quite easily and know what has happened and why. But I did not feel at ease and was never quite sure whether a previous book held information that I needed to know now, or whether Dickson has always written in this inferential style, leaving me doubting. If you've read him you'll probably know what you're buying, but I read on and on wondering why.

Young Bleys is a rite of passage novel, setting Young Bleys Ahrens down on a dust-bowl planet, mainly farmed by midwestern bible-bashers, to board with his Calvinist uncle. The boy is almost a super-hero in waiting, but so uncertain of himself that he is prepared to fast, hoping to see religious visions like his neighbours, before discovering the inefficacy of this is a reasonable man.

Sometimes his half-brother comes to take him to town, where they visit exclusive clothes shops and classy restaurants, where, in turn the brother receives his clients, just like Don Corleone.

Is Bleys' family also a Family like Don Corleone's? No, this is the founding of a galaxy wide conspiracy to rival the military Dorsai.

Before we know it, but after a life mainly spent in education or out with his cousins and their goats, Bleys is sent around the known planets, improving the machinations of the Association. That he is also skilled in martial arts and can handle a needle gun and void pistol (skills he apparently learned before the book begins, i.e. before he is 12), is, of course something one would expect of a superman, but perhaps we should also have been ready for the care and thought he will show when he leaves two of his victims in a deep freeze so that they can be given decent burials undecomposed.

If you know and enjoy Grodon R. Dickson perhaps you will feel my response is unjust; if you don't, I advise not checking.

John Farris
Nightfall
NEL, 1993, 311pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Steven Tew

Angel is a psychopathic killer who, on emergence from a catatonic trance, wastes no time in despatching a nurse, an orderly and two beefy guards at the high security mental institution where he is being held. He sets off to find his wife, Anita, and his son, Tony, who are held up under assumed names in Mississippi. He has little difficulty in finding them, nor in leaving behind himself a trail of dead bodies. With ease he despatches over-muscled, over-tall and over-armed off-duty policemen and cuts Anita's Mafia bodyguard

to size with no problem. With similar ease, his small son, Tony, and the visually handicapped ex-flyer, Clay Tomlin, dispose of Angel in the book's climax. Normally I'd apologise for giving away the plot, but, to be honest, this is so predictable, I don't think anyone would have been in any doubt as to the conclusion.

Nightfall is emblazoned with adulation for its author from such giants of the horror genre as Stephen King and Peter Straub. If this blend of formulaic plotting, stock character and phoney tough-guy machismo is the best "America's premier novelist of terror" can do, I'd advise you to stay away from American novels of terror.

Neil Gaiman

(with David K. Dickson)

Don't Panic:

Douglas Adams & The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy

Titan, 1993, 225pp, 3.99

Reviewed by Mat Coward

I'll tell you how good this book is. I'm one of those people who heard **Hitch-Hiker's** first radio broadcast, and spent months thinking I was the only ape-descendant on Earth to have done so (mere paranoia; there were, in fact, dozens of us).

Like all cultists I became less keen on the phenomenon the more famous it grew, until, by the time it hit TV, I could hardly bear to hear the theme tune. Gaiman's book has to be bloody good to break through such prejudice, and it is - I loved every page of it. It even made me want to buy the computer game, and I haven't got a computer.

Don't Panic originally appeared in 1988 as **The Official Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy Companion**. This attractively priced paperback edition cunningly has the words "Revised & Updated" printed in big tempting letters on the back cover, thus making it irresistible to all Towlies and other completists.

As is not the case with most conventional biographies, Gaiman's investigations seem really to have uncovered the man in the boy, and to show without any irritating amateur psychology, how Adams' childhood shaped his writing.

It's written as a story - with a beginning, a middle and a man with two penises* - and is as absorbing as a novel. It's worthy of **Hitch-Hiker's** and **Hitch-Hiker's** is worthy of it; it reminds us just what an extraordinary piece of apparently *sui generis*, genius-level creation the whole thing was.

The expanse of inside info are fascinating: Peter Jones was cast because Adams wanted someone with a "Peter Jonesy voice." Eventually a secretary suggested Peter Jones, which Adams agreed might be one way of achieving the desired effect; the famous computer graphics in the TV series were not computer graphics at all; amazingly, having first thought of HHG for TV, before realising that radio was its perfect medium, Adams went through the same process of surprise with **Last Chance to See**; the US version of **Life, The Universe and Everything** included an extra 400 words to avoid using the word "fuck"; Adams doesn't mean to write SF, "I just exaggerate a lot."

As a conscientious reviewer, I have

searched for any faults in this book that are big enough to be worth mentioning. The best I can manage is to point out that there is a small misprint on page 212.

(*In the TV series, Zaphod Beeblebrox has two penises; ah yes, I remember - one of them's on his shoulder's, isn't it?)

Stephen Gallagher

Nightmare, With Angel

Coronet, 1993, 306pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Nightmare, With Angel is a taut thriller set in England and Europe which affirms Stephen Gallagher's place as one of the best of the current crop of British thriller writers. Marianne lives with her father in a cold desolate cottage by the sea. One day she is saved from drowning by Ryan O'Donnell, a strange lonely man who seems to Marianne to be preferable to the cold stranger that her father has become. But Ryan has a past and a reputation that makes him seem the worst possible candidate for a ten-year old's affections. Marianne falls out badly with her father and Ryan has a brush with the police that makes him agree to go with Marianne to find her mother in Germany, and they go on the run.

Gallagher's characters are his strength. Ryan is obviously intelligent, but he has a naiveté born of his past that makes him easily manipulated by Marianne. She in her turn is street-wise and aware of what she wants, but she is ten and her understanding of the situation is not as complete as she thinks it is.

As we follow the pair across Europe, with her father and the police in pursuit, our understanding of Ryan and the predicament he has allowed himself to be dragged into increases. The situation presented to us is intensely believable, Gallagher's Hamburg and Düsseldorf are gritty real, the players' frustrations and joys are experienced with them keeping us riveted until the final pages.

Although this is something of a departure from the SF/horror that we usually see here, it is a logical progression of the kind of psychological thriller that was **The Boat House**, and a worthy successor to it.

Mary Gentle

Grunts!

Corgi, 1993, 480pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Ian Sales

Mary Gentle has no shame. Why? Because she's written a novel based around a premise that is younger than the entire sub-genre of sword & sorcery RPG spin-offs by a matter of mere minutes. In 1974, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published their first Dungeons & Dragons rule set and role-playing games were invented. The ink had hardly dried when someone said: hey, let's mix match modern military hardware and stock sword & sorcery characters and see what happens. In the world of **Grunts!**, this would translate as: what would happen if a bunch of orcs stole a cache of modern military hardware from a dragon, cursed so that they ("they") become what (they) steal, and turn into the US Marine Corps.

Grunts! is not a one joke novel by any

means. There's plenty of other jokes in it: scatological jokes, graphically violent jokes, marine jokes, sword & sorcery jokes, slapstick, surreal jokes, witty allusions to other comedies, comic situations, absurd situations - you name it. Some of them are even funny. But the humour in **Grunts!** has all the finesse of carpet bombing. Brian Jay Fowler may advise that a writer should "give the reader small surprises: moments of humour, delightful metaphors, something that jolts, about two a page" (emphasis mine), but there's a serious danger of funny bone overkill in this book.

The plot itself is simple: after the marine orcs survive the Great Battle, they go into arms manufacturing (bankrolled by a halfing duchess) and introduce modern warfare to the rest of the world. Soon after, alien beings appear and begin wiping everyone out. It's up to the marines to stop them. And oh yes, the Dark Lord decides to run for World President in the new era of democracy introduced by the marines.

Some of the supporting cast seem suspiciously close to RPG inversions' attempts at creating funny characters: a halfling madam who's really a Duchess, an elvish war correspondent who's into S&M and an army of dim but noble paladins. Others pay homage to characters from other great comedies and war films - for example, the transvestite assassin who ends up marrying a high-up on the side of light whilst in drag (the groov even gives the same reply as in **Some Like It Hot** when Jack Lemmon reveals that he is in fact male).

There's no denying that Mary Gentle is very, very good at the stuff without the jokes in it. And whilst there's no faulting the writing in **Grunts!**... I have to admit I'm no fan of **Beavis & Butthead** humour - even in orcsish marine drag. True, there are some effective parodies in **Grunts!** - especially in the fantasy genre - but then, anybody can carpet bomb a sitting duck.

Laugh? I nearly paid my BSFA membership fee...

Sheila Gilluly

The Emperor of Earth-Above

Headline, 1993, 314pp, 16.99

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

I'm sure there must be a sub-genre of fantasy called 'unremarkable'. Sheila Gilluly's **The Emperor of Earth-Above** would fit into such a category easily; neither compelling nor awful, it is one of those okay books that you could read, but on the other hand could put down if there was something good on telly. Sure enough it's part of a trilogy, **The Book of The Painter Part 3**.

In a nutshell, the following happens. After two dreams - not the most exciting start to a novel, despite their importance later on - our hero Aengus wakes up surf-soaked on a mysterious seashore, not unlike the tropical landscape depicted on the cover. Taken in by the local tribe, he learns their language and accustoms himself to their culture. Not much has happened yet. Discovering that he resembles a redemptive character of old, now named Pel Kinv, he journeys with a local mage, a giant and other sundries, to the city of the forest, where he begins to realise his true

nature. Heard it all before? Me too. The company then travels to the subterranean city of the Umlis people, where Pel Kinv must repair an old prism with his magic and confront his arch enemy. With the spirit later trapped in crystal prism by the dreaded evil Emperor, the climax proceeds as expected, with the twist (which I didn't spot, actually) duly appearing about five pages from the end. Oh yes, and there's a vital ring, too, set tantalisingly on the Emperor's finger.

This is by no means a bad book. It's a nice book. Parts of it are well written and engaging; on the other hand, the speech and thoughts are jarringly 20th century, all 'piss off' and 'damn'. But overall it's simply ordinary, like buying a bottle of fizzy water and discovering it to be entirely flat. The characters are all as they should be — the ruthless Emperor; the tough-but-wise (and yet pitiable) giant, a personality not unknown to Thomas Covenant it could be argued; the reef dwelling natives. The hero Aengus is at once worthy and vulnerable, as expected, and is telepathic to boot. The setting bears a striking resemblance to Mexico.

An unremarkable novel, then.

Martin Greenberg (ed) New Stories From The Twilight Zone

Warner, 1993, 419pp, 4.99
Reviewed by John D. Owen

This book collects stories used in the mid-eighties remake of *The Twilight Zone*. It's a patchy work, but contains a number of stories worth revisiting, as well as an introduction from Alan Brennert, writer and producer on the series.

The stories which fare well are, predictably, those which were written as shorts, rather than directly for the series. Chief among the good stuff are two of the three Harlan Ellison contributions ('Shatterday' and 'Paladin of the Lost Hour'), plus William F. Wu's 'Wong's Lost & Found Emporium', William Lee's 'A Message From Charity', and Theodore Sturgeon's 'Yesterday was Monday'. Among those that have worn less well are Clarke's now hoary 'The Star' and Bradbury's 'The Burning Man'.

The collection is unbalanced, however, by some real duff material, especially the short shorts, like Henry Slesar's 1957 story 'Examination Day' which should never have been exhumed from the slushpile. This example illustrates the basic problem of the collection: the stories range from work written in the forties through to mid-eighties material, and its very diversity means the collection has no cohesion, no unifying thread — remove the link to *The Twilight Zone* and the book has little reason for existing. For dead keen media fans only.

Edward Gross & Mark A. Altham Captain's Logs:

The Complete Trek Voyages

Boxtree, 1993, 269pp, 12.99
Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey

My previous encounter with Edward Gross and Mark A. Altham was when they published their large format *The Next Generation Guidebook: The First 100 Episodes* (Image

Publishing, 1991), which dealt in reasonable detail with the first five seasons of *The Next Generation*. What did irritate me, however, and still does, was its too-spaced-out text (it could have been fitted into a much smaller book with ease), its complete lack of an index, plus the lack of any proper StarDates to help illustrate each individual episode (although it does show the correct US airdates). My final disappointment with it was also its lack of a proper listing of crew member appearances, both regular and cameo, for each episode, which is important in such a reference work. In contrast, their latest *Star Trek* collaboration, in my opinion their best effort to date, appears to have gone some way to address these problems. Firstly, *Captain's Logs*, although also a large format book, has been tastefully arranged into readily available chapters, making full use of a typeface suitable to, and pleasing on the eye. It makes sensible use of three column text, with an assortment of relevant b/w photographs throughout the book. There are also full colour photographs from each of the series. *Captain's Logs* includes substantial referential information concerning the early classic years, as well as the animated episodes, the six films, plus the first five seasons of *The Next Generation* and, finally, a look-see into the latest addition to Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* universe: *Deep Space Nine*. It is the most current, information packed, collective reference book to date.

Barbara Hambly Dog Wizards

HarperCollins, 1993, 389pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Colin Bird

Unhelpful packaging fails to identify this book as a volume in a series featuring at least one previous novel, *The Silent Tower*. Generous references in the text to earlier events and characters make it a tad harder to follow the story if you have not read the preceding book; but not that hard. This author has a light touch and her translucent story telling and welcome humour soon involve you in the plot.

Antry is a wizard in exile from a world where magic works, to living in LA with Joanna, a computer programmer. When Joanna disappears Antry is drawn back to the Citadel of Wizards to track her down. In his magic realm someone has unlocked the door to another dimension from where unspeakable monsters emerge to cause havoc. The council of Wizards wish to use Antry's knowledge to find the malefactor before the fabric of the Void is destroyed. Antry's powers are stripped from him and he is exposed to danger as he searches for Joanna and for the solution to the Citadel's impending doom.

A nice line in sassy dialogue makes Antry a unique and likeable character as he wanders the Vaults bemoaning the lack of technological wonders such as cable TV, peanut butter and Chinese takeaways. Indeed, the wizard in LA seemed a more interesting story to me, but it features just as a taster for Hambly's more conventional sword and sorcery yarn. The entry of a particle physicist in the guise of a monstrosity from beyond the abyss makes the cast of

characters a little too eccentric to sit comfortably in this setting. The marriage of computers, infrared targeting systems and magic spells is awkward, but a noble attempt to enliven a sagging sub-genre of fantasy.

Worth checking out if you like this sort of thing, if only for the excellent characters and bountiful invention. Any book where the lead character seeks ultimate knowledge through rubbings of tortoise shells has to be ok!

Harry Harrison & David Bischoff Bill, The Galactic Hero... On The Planet Of The Hippies From Hell

Gollancz, 1993, 214pp, 3.99

Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

Bill, The Galactic Hero... On The Planet Of The Hippies From Hell (henceforth abbreviated to *Bill*, etc.) is the 8th book in the continuing saga of Trooper Bill. At the start of this book, he is sent on a mission to Barworld to stop the evil Chingers from using a space-time disturbance to further their war efforts, but a hippie from Hellworld gets there first, jumps into the Time/Space plumbing system, and changes history so that the Nazis rule the galaxy. Bill and his partner Elliott Methadrine with the help of the sentient time portal Sir Dudley then chase the hippie through space and time to try and undo the hideous changes.

The chase is shambolic and gives the impression of having been made up as Harrison and Bischoff went along: only the part where Bill meets himself going back and forth in time seems adequately plotted. The jokes are forced and unfunny, the writing is lacklustre and simplistic.

But is this due to a lack of talent and/or effort by the authors, or did they very carefully craft *Bill*, etc. to just appear like a rather dismal adolescent novel? It is just possible that *Bill*, etc. is not a parody of militaristic SF like the original *Bill*, *The Galactic Hero* but rather a parody of parodies themselves; certain hints in the final few chapters could indeed suggest this notion.

So is this really a subtle masterpiece of satire, taking the mickey out of the mickey-takers, or is it just a sad piece of juvenile pulp? Call me a cynic, but I'm afraid that I tend towards the latter opinion.

Douglas Hill The Lightless Dome

Pan, 1993, 304pp, 8.99

Reviewed by Graham Andrews.

Douglas Hill made his initial mark as a nifty anthologist: *Window On The Future*, *Way Of The Werewolf* (both 1966), and *The Devil His Due* (1967). Then he wrote several juvenile sf/fantasy novels, e.g. *The Last Legionary Quartet*. All very schematic and ho-hum at best — in my opinion.

The Lightless Dome — Book 1 of the *Apotheosis Trilogy* — is trumpeted as being Hill's

'first full-length fantasy novel for adults' (publicity blumph). I tried to forgive and forget the blurb:

'In the shadowed swamps far from Prince Phaodran's capital of Quamar, a sorcerer tests the fabric of the universe. At his

command something stirs in the emptiness beyond the stars. It is incalculably evil, immeasurably old, completely inhuman. It is summoned by the promise of fresh human souls!...

Meanwhile in a 20th Century film studio, Red Cordell takes another cheap part in another cheap sword and sorcery movie: guarding Thagor the Invincible and dying on cue. A beautiful neglected sword he finds in props is his only satisfaction.

But in Quamarr the enchantress Aurilia is in danger of her life. When she calls on the magic sword of Corodel, Red finds himself at her side, fighting for her life in the fabulous kingdom of Quamarr, where magic is real, chivalry the code of law, and women fairer than virtue itself....

After a long read, however, I found the above 'teaser' to have been all-too-horribly descriptive. This is better written than heroic fantasy novels by the likes of Terry Brooks (more grammatical) and Stephen R. Donaldson (more sensible). It's just... schematic and ho-hum at best — in my opinion.

Anyway, I see no need for yet another **Lord Of The Rings** rehash (except, perhaps, to keep authors in beer money). Story idea: Time-travelling book reviewer kills Tolkien before he can write **The Hobbit**. Hmm. Dear Mr Pringle...

Tom Holt Overtime

Orbit, 1993, 312, 4.99

Reviewed by Max Sexton

What makes one person laugh can make another cry and **Overtime**, a new fantasy comedy, was as funny as washing a hankie. However, fans of its particular brand of humour will probably chuckle when they learn that the absurdist plot is based on a mysterious firm that uses time travel to go back and invest their clients' money, so that their investments will have mushroomed by the present. Meanwhile the central character, Guy, is involved when he is thrown back in time and sings to raise money for the crusades in a parody of **Live Aid**. To keep things moving along there are jokes about rock music in the middle ages and the daunting prospect of the largest gig in history failing and wiping out the world's financial structure. I found it dreadfully tedious with little of, for example, the originality of **Hitch-Hikers Guide to the Galaxy**.

Mike Jeffries Hidden Echoes

HarperCollins, 1993 336pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Max Sexton

Hidden Echoes is very good on eloquent description of exotic landscapes and the creatures that inhabit them, but his characters are 2-D. From the start, they are psychologically rounded and complete, and therefore impossible to develop. There is little substance to the book despite its use of portentous names for some of the characters, the Clockmaster of Eternity for instance, but this is an occupational hazard in fantasy fiction. Similarly, the book's use of Nostradamus' prediction of the End of Time, and its echoes of **Revelations**,

is froth with nothing solid beneath it. In short, the book is a sort of Burrough's pastiche, competently written but only that, to create a sense of wonder, magic and some mystery.

Harry Adam Knight Bedlam

Gollancz, 1993, 215pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Jim Steel

First of all, the obligatory plot synopsis.

The Bone Man is a particularly sadistic serial killer who is receiving radical hormone treatment at a clinic near Detective Sergeant Hamilton's home. Given that Gilmore destroyed Hamilton's family and turned him into an alcoholic, Hamilton is obviously a bit worried. An increasingly weirder avalanche of deaths, nightmares and hallucinations eventually throw Hamilton and psychologist Stephanie Lyell into an alternative reality created by Gilmore's drug enhanced psyche. Unlike the other victims, Hamilton and Gilmore have a limited protection due to their own supply of the drug, but they only have enough for 12 hours.

The plot is handled competently enough, the character — especially Hamilton — are nicely rounded, the prose is smoothly delivered and some of the situations that arise within Gilmore's world are beautifully executed — Hamilton's dead wife is guaranteed to induce discomfort in most people. All in all, this is better than your average potboiler.

However, the author doesn't trust his readers enough. Anytime that there is a cultural reference — **A Clockwork Orange**, for example — then one of the characters explains it to another in sufficient detail that it's context won't be lost on the reader. Then there's the solution at the climax, which seems to be pulled out of thin air with no prior warning. These, and a few other clues, give hints that this is a talented author writing down to a market and not bothering to break sweat while he does so. Harry Adam Knight? Neat acronym. Thanks, John Brosnan.

Harry Adam Knight Carnosaur

Gollancz, 1993, 214pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Simon Lake

Dinosaurs, far from being extinct, seem to be popping up everywhere nowadays. First we had **Jurassic Park**, with all the surrounding hype, and now this. Originally published in 1984, **Carnosaur** is back in print again to tie in with a film version due to be released this autumn. However, don't be misled, this is not another blockbuster in the making.

On the contrary, **Carnosaur** is a rather ludicrous horror story in which cranky naturalist Sir Darren Penward decides it's time the dinosaur regained their rightful place as the dominant species on the planet. Working their frozen cells from dinosaur fossils, he sets about breeding his own set of prehistoric monsters. Everything is fine until one of these escapes from his fortified estate and causes havoc in a nearby village. Although Penfield manages to cover up what has happened, it is not enough to deter the interest of local journalist David Pascal.

From this point on, Knight tests the

credulity of the reader with nearly every turn of the page. When Pascal finds his investigations blocked by Penfield's vigilant security guards, he takes a short cut and starts sleeping with his wife! Later he miraculously fights off a dinosaur with a billiard cue. Any pretence at realism is regularly sacrificed in order to keep the plot moving.

If you're thinking that a story this over the top might actually be quite amusing, you're wrong. There are one or two humorous moments, but it's poor compensation for 200 pages of cartoon caricature.

Ben Leech The Community

Pan, 1993, 244pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Susan Badham

This novel is described as horror, but is in fact fantasy of the Clive Barker school. I say this because, in my opinion, horror must define its heroes and villains, whoever they are and then stick to that definition. This author, like Clive Barker, changes his mind several times, but finds it more difficult to carry off the moral ambiguity. His debt is obvious and in places the book reads almost like a pastiche of Barker's style and ideas.

Set mostly in the urban wasteland of a decaying industrial town, the book concentrates on a struggle for survival by shape-shifting aliens. They have interbred with humanity and one of their crossbreeds has taken against his heritage and decided to eradicate them once and for all.

The book contains many familiar themes. The police are bewildered and battered, always one step behind the plot, until the end of the book. Then they become the equivalent of peasants with pitchforks and torches descending on Baron Frankenstein's castle. The serial killer believes in hacking his victim to death and then burning them afterwards (presumably to give the special effects men something to do when the book is filmed). Most of the action is played out against a town which is itself slowly dying, its core eaten out by recession and hopelessness.

The characters are weakly written and have no depth, to the extent that when the hero agrees to surrender his humanity, it isn't believable. The whole book is a pleasant read, though it's not very involving because it lacks a strong moral resonance, a sense of the reality of the transformations involved. It is the written equivalent of a cheap Friday night horror video and on that level it works well enough.

Charles de Lint Yarrow

Pan, 1993, 244pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Martin H. Brice

Although Canada is the location of — and influence behind — a number of SF and fantasy films, it is still not familiar territory to many British genre readers. This is especially so of the administrative capital, Ottawa, setting of this novel, which demonstrates that fantasy is alive and well and living in Ontario. Indeed, the author emphasises that the book is not a portrait of such circles there.

I felt rather irritated at first by the principal

character Caitlin Midhir, an author suffering from 'writer's block'. I wanted to tell her either to get on with it or take a break.

However, she does have a unique and apparently insurmountable problem; her Celtic fantasy novels are inspired by her dreams — and she has stopped dreaming. Worse, someone — or something — is stealing her dreams and, judging by a spate of local murders, it may have a particular taste for the final dreams of the dying.

The novel relates how Cat Midhir's other-world characters co-operate with her friends and acquaintances from the 1980's to defeat Lysistratus, who has been pursuing this homicidal activity since the days of ancient myth.

There is a lot in this book; I think I shall need to read it again to get everything out of it.

Brian Lumley
Vampire World 2: The Last Aerie
Roc, 1993, 747pp, 5.99
 Reviewed by John Newsinger

Brian Lumley has got to be stopped. His remorseless production of huge (the latest is a mere 747 pages of text) thriller/fantasy horror novels shows no sign of letting up. What damage is this man actually doing those poor fools who read and, hard to imagine I know, actually enjoy this tripe.

First we had the appalling *Necroscope* series and now the even more appalling *Vampire World*. This in turn will inevitably be followed by other series, trilogies without end. One example of Lumley's matchless prose will do:

"She was an artless shad at best, this Glina, yet apparently there was one art which she had mastered: the pleasuring of the necromancer Lord Nestor Lichloathe of the Wamphyri; mastered it to such an extent that Suckscar's new Lord even required her to instruct his other women in order that they, too, might satisfy him. Except they were mainly incapable of instruction, for they had long since lost what Glina retained: that very artlessness which Wrath so despised."

Se what I mean? Now imagine over seven hundred pages of this.

Read it and weep!

Anne McCaffrey
The Chronicles of Pern: First Fall
Bantam, 1993, 256pp, 14.99
 Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This book contains five short episodes from the early history of the Planet Pern's human colonisation. 'The P.E.R.N. Survey' (14 pages) describes the planet's discovery and classification as "parallel Earth, resources negligible." 'The Dolphins' Bell' (52pp) tells how the early settlement on the South Continent was evacuated, following a volcanic eruption, by a flotilla of small boats guided and assisted by dolphins. 'The Ford of Red Hanrahan' (44pp) covers the founding and naming Ruatha Hold and 'The Second Weyr' (58pp) the founding and naming of Benden Weyr. 'Rescue Run' (77pp) tells the story of Pern's interdiction from the rest of civilisation after a Federation starship discovers the presence of Thread in the system, rescues the last desperate survivors from the South Continent, but fails to

notice the developing dragon-based society in the north.

All five pieces have the feeling of being based on out-take episodes from a longer narrative, rather than having been conceived as independent short stories. They would be confusing, if not incomprehensible, to readers without a good background knowledge of McCaffrey's previous Pern books, particularly *Dragonsdown*. To lovers of the series they will provide a pleasant and undemanding read, but I don't recommend the book as an introduction to this universe (start with *Dragonflight*).

Neil McAleer
Odyssey: The Authorised Biography of Arthur C. Clarke
Gollancz, 1993, 430pp, 5.99
 Reviewed by Chris Hart

It is easy to underestimate the achievements of Arthur C. Clarke, but flicking through a daily newspaper begins to make them clear; Melvin Harris, researcher of *A. C. Clarke's World of Strange Powers* is trying to expose the Ripper diaries as fakes; Ryan Southall, a student of Britain's first degree dedicated to space, was inspired by reading Clarke's fiction as a child; a feature on America's Strategic Defence Initiative mentions Clarke's vociferous technical and moral doubts of the policy. And of course it need not stop there; the paper's Art Section could feature the ground-breaking film 2001: *A Space Odyssey*; or the International Section could mention Clarke's contribution to the culture, education and economy of Sri Lanka; and, Clarke's presence is implicit in all modern mass communications, as he was the first to speculate of the possibilities of Geo-Stationary orbiting satellites. Neil McAleer had an Herculean task trying to encapsulate the life of this renaissance man.

The biography is a thorough 'scrapbook' of Clarke's campaigning contribution to knowledge. McAleer has attempted to remove himself as much as possible from the text, acting as an invisible mediator, piecing together his sources (meticulously referenced in the appendices). He does intervene, however, to support Clarke when events may lose the sympathy of the reader, particularly during moments when Clarke's self-confessed egotism gets the better of him, or during runs with Kurt Vonnegut, who questioned the value of exploring space.

The strength of the biography, and the fun, is attempting to find the man behind the genius. Clarke is very coy about expressing himself emotionally, he has developed a keen wit to deflect any questions that try to get beneath his cool scientist exterior. An interview with *Playboy* magazine (one of the keenest makers for his short stories) tried to press him on the subject of his sexuality; he evaded the question by considering humans as a bisexual race. In many aspects the biography of Clarke suffers from lack of characterisation — a criticism that has been constantly levelled at Clarke's writing. McAleer has plenty of material about Clarke's undersea adventures, his conference tours and meetings with world leaders — but very little about Clarke's feelings towards being the smelly class nerd, or of his brief impulsive

marriage to Marilyn Torgenson. Clarke seems to have been dogged by financial problems, which are constantly eluded to, but not really explained.

Despite his best efforts Clarke emerges as a fallible human being AND a genius. Both his enthusiasm for life and his wisdom are evident on every single page of this book. In a modest moment he said that his contribution to the 20th Century would merely be a footnote. Maybe so, but as this biography proves, that footnote will be 430 pages long.

Julian May
Jack The Bodiless
Pan, 1993, 495pp, 4.99
 Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Sometimes a publisher's categorisation makes sense. *Jack The Bodiless* is part of a massive saga featuring the development of humanity towards membership of the "Galactic Milieu", in which the development of the paranormal powers leads (so it's suggested) towards a climax similar to that of Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*. Yet turn the book over and you'll see that someone has decided to label it "Fantasy".

But so it is. At least, it's at the softest end of the SF spectrum, where the touchstones are New Age astralism, the religious evolutionary networks of Teilhard de Chardin, and the kind of future revealed by those who have been abducted by aliens. True, fantasy trilogies have maps and this doesn't, but it possesses a family tree, which is the next best thing. May is a best-selling author. Nevertheless, there is a solid melodrama beneath the info-dumping and the characters explaining the necessary plot background to each other or the reader. We are introduced to the impending birth of Jack, perhaps the most powerful psychic yet born to humanity, and his fateful genetic heritage. Jack is saved by young Marc, whose own powers are second only to Jack's, and the occasional narrator Rogi, whose own powers are humble, but who is the historian and conscience of the Remillard clan. Meanwhile, something called 'Fury' is murdering Remillards for reasons of its own, aided by a multi-minded link called 'Hydra'.

Readers of the *Saga of the Exiles* sequence and *Intervention* (with all of which this novel is linked) will know more about the Galactic Milieu than I do. Like much such narrative, it's serious and uplifting in tone without, however, reaching that magnetically obsessive stage where you suddenly realise that the author believes every word of it. Surprisingly, perhaps, it's no ill read. Rogi's viewpoint offers a more down-to-earth stance and those who can swallow the words "metapsychic operant" without flinching can confidently investigate this odd, but rewarding, fusion of best-selling Family saga, murder thriller, spaced-out spirituality, and SF.

Julian May
Blood Trillium
HarperCollins, 1993, 336pp, 8.99
 Reviewed by Maureen Speller

Blood Trillium is Julian May's sequel to *Blood Trillium* written in conjunction with

Andre Norton and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Twelve years on, of the three petals of the Living Trillium, Kadiya has lost her talisman in the ocean. Anigef's family has been kidnapped and Haramis is worried that Portolanus, who engineered the abduction, is her former lover. Orogastus, believed dead after a previous magical conflict. The three girls have fallen out with one another, so their black Trillium talismans have turned red, but you know it will turn out alright in the end.

It's that kind of book. One moment the girls are scratching each other's eyes out, the next they are virtuously acknowledging their faults in the hope their trilliums will turn black again. Haramis, after twelve years of struggling unhelpfully as Archmage of the Land, suddenly thinks to ask her talisman if there are any other Archmagi. Surprise, surprise, there are, and while she is in training with one of them, her sisters create even more mayhem, but you know she will become invincible and save everyone.

In the face of so trite a plot, one wonders what else can possibly go wrong. Just about everything, it seems. May's prose style is nothing more than stilted dialogue, lists of actions performed and detailed descriptions of women's clothing. Her information-dumping technique are remarkable. "Others (questions) demand lengthy responses, and I must postpone them until later. Let me answer your question first..." by telling you the story of the Vanished Ones", which quick reply lasts five pages. And May cannot so much as refer to an object without assigning its full name and function, leading to some jaw-breaking conversations. She also has trouble in deciding what sort of tone to take, veering from high epic, through down-home folksy to downright embarrassing.

I was not impressed with *Blood Trillium*. It's a slim story, over-extended and very badly written. May postpones answering the only important question, the nature of the Trillium talismans, because clearly, at least one more volume is intended. Instead, the reader is treated to over three hundred pages of inconsequential chatter and padding. This is not good enough.

Michael Moorcock
The Brothel in Rosenstrasse
Phoenix 1993, 191pp, 5.99
Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

The Brothel in Rosenstrasse was first published in 1982, and judging by the critical praise on the back of the cover it was well received by at least the Sunday sections of the literary establishment.

"The moment is all that matters," writes Count Richard von Bek, whose tale this is. As he lies in bed, his life drawing to a close in a haze of pain and medication, his mind rolls back to the city of Mirenborg in 1897. He recalls the dream he lived then, how he lived for the exquisite moments, soaking up the atmosphere of one of Europe's most beautiful cities, and feasting on the sexuality of his sixteen-year old mistress Alexandra. But who is devouring whom? After having led her to the water of eroticism, Von Bek cannot help but follow when Alexandra wishes to explore every nook and cranny of sensuality. As she

drags him out of his depth, he attempts to restrain her, telling himself that he wishes to save her from emotional ruin and sexual burn-out, but knowing deep down that all he really wants to do is preserve the dream as it was.

As they mingle in the brothel, Mirenborg is slowly engulfed by war. Bit by bit both the city and Von Bek are destroyed by lust and torn by their lovers. Loss and betrayal make for a harsh reality, one that Von Bek tries his hardest to deny, continually searching for the lost reality of his dream world. Yet the moment is all that matters to him — perhaps the quest is more important than the Grail?

It is all too easy to lose oneself in the moments of *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*. They are intense, languorous, beautiful, painful, transient and fragile. But from a distance they form an intricate, impressionistic and impressive whole.

Rebecca Neason
Star Trek TNG:
Guises of The Mind
Titan, 1993, 277pp, 3.99
Reviewed by Ian Sales

The King of Capulon IV, Joakel I'Lium, wants his world to join the Federation and has sent for The Enterprise to do the diplomatic niceties. He has also requested the help of the Little Sisters, an order of nuns dedicated to looking after orphans and homeless children. Capulon IV has some bizarre laws: the one which is directly relevant to the plot is that only one of twins is allowed to live; the other must die soon after birth. Unfortunately, the King has a twin brother who was spirited away before he could be killed and has grown to a bitter and twisted man (of course). This twin brother has now taken the King's place, imprisoning the rightful sovereign in the dungeon. The impostor does not want the Federation or the Little Sisters, so he drugs and imprisons Picard, Deanna Troi and Mother Veronica of the nuns along with the true King. Then they escape and save the day.

Since this book is based on the universe of a TV series, regular viewers will be familiar with the major characters. As a result, Neason spends little time sketching them out, but this result suffers when it comes to the nuns. We don't know then from TV. For instance, the cover art shows Picard, Troi and an attractive woman in a futuristic setting — obviously Mother Veronica. Yet nowhere in the book is there a description of her; even her age is not mentioned.

I was not impressed with *Guises of The Mind*. The writing is perfunctory, background is assumed and not described, and there's something horribly PC about it all. There is a coyness when discussing the Capulon religion that suggests Neason is either religious herself, or is trying hard not to offend die-hard Christians. The Capulon deity is referred to throughout as "the God", for example. *Guises of The Mind* is so inoffensive, it's banal.

I've been told by a reader of *Star Trek* books that this novel is better than average. Go figure.

Christopher Pike
Whisper of Death
Hodder & Stoughton 1993, 175pp, 3.99
Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

Girl meets boy; girl falls in love with boy; girl and boy have sex; girl becomes pregnant; girl and boy decide to drive a hundred miles from their small Midwestern home town to an abortion clinic. And that's just the first chapter.

The power of Christopher Pike's writing lies in its lucidity. He matter-of-factly sets up immediately gripping plots with rounded, interesting and usually teenage characters; then gets on with the story. And because of the straightforwardness of his style, his characters instantly ring true. For example, when his words draw the outline of -shy teenager in love, but too afraid to say so; anyone who has been through (or is going through) puberty colours in the rest of the picture from their own experience and recognizes someone very like themselves. Likewise with -beautiful girl/hunky guy who is going out with the person that the teenage character has a crush on, but apart from that is a real bitch/fork. The stories he writes are horror/dystopian, but the themes he explores are uniquely young adult - and this is why his books sell like newspapers.

Back to the story, though: the boy and girl are called Pepper and Rox, and when they return from the abortion clinic, they discover that they are mysteriously alone in the world. Everyone has gone, except for three other kids from their school. They are trapped in their town, and apparently trapped in a set of stories that Betty Sue — dead Betty Sue — had written about them before her flaming suicide. Trapped like butterflies in a glass jar, and at the end of the stories they all come to horrible ends...

But just as important as the plot is the sheer "experience" of reading a Christopher Pike novel. Be a teenager and read it; or read it and be a teenager again. Good stuff.

Leah Rewolinski
Star Wreck II:
The Attack of The Jargonites
Bantam, 1993, 118pp, 2.99
Reviewed by Chris C. Bailey

Serious health warning: Read no further if you take yourself too seriously!

Generally speaking, taking the piss out of an overly sensitive persons favourite religion, author, book, TV film or TV soap can, at best, invite all sorts of physical mayhem. In some cases it can even lead to premeditated murder, but we don't need to go that far (I hope) when we consider Leah Rewolinski's latest helping of *Star Trek* parody. Leah Rewolinski's wicked sense of humour, which I fortunately identify with, has led to an ingeniously funny combination of the characters from both the original (Captain James T. Smirk) and Next generation (Captain Jean-Luc Ricardo) Starship crews, together with the ultimate in bureaucratic devilmay, the dreaded Government Civil Servant (alias StarFreak Command), to produce an hilariously funny book. In order to help create a more believable (in my opinion) atmosphere in humour, she has, naturally,

had to change the names of the characters somewhat, with some more embarrassing than others, I might add. Although there is not much of a credible story-line to this book, it does manage to leave you with an aftertaste for more of the same.

Kim Stanley Robinson Red Mars

HarperCollins, 1993, 671pp, 5.99
Reviewed by Simon Lake

Now out in consumer-friendly paperback format, this is the book everybody has been talking about this year. Two pages of glowing press reviews are a testament to the excitement generated by the first part of Kim Stanley Robinson's Martian trilogy. And the praise is deserved, because this is a book that offers storytelling on a grand scale and has the scope and breadth of imagination to match it.

Red Mars is a vivid account of the colonization of Mars, skilfully pieced together from the viewpoints of several major characters, that blends hard science with politics and social comment, and puts them all into the framework of a compelling narrative. Over nearly 700 pages of text, Kim Stanley Robinson constructs a complex and well thought out future history, drawing on a strong cast of characters to put the large scale themes of the novel into perspective. Events unfold with a slow, but measured intensity, taking in the arrival of the first hundred colonists and building to a dramatic climax as conflict grows between those who want to exploit the planet's resources for commercial gain, and those who seek a more balanced coexistence with their new environment.

Few books these days can actually inspire a sense of wonder in the reader, but **Red Mars** does. And don't be surprised if you find yourself staring up at the night sky wondering what might be out there. It's that kind of book.

John Saul Darkness

Bantam, 1993, 373pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Graham Andrews

A novel should be judged for what it is - not what the reviewer thinks it ought to have been. Good/bad science fiction/fantasy/horror/whatever novel.

Now.

Darkness, by John Saul.

Snappy title.

"THE CHILLING NEW YORK TIMES

BEST-SELLER" (it says here).

The plot? It is to laugh.

Something about the Dark man...

Enough.

I'd sooner watch paint dry.

The style? —

"Tomorrow.

Tomorrow he'd figure out a way.

He moved back towards the mirror, and felt a strange burning in his hips and knees.

Breathing hard, feeling exhaustion simply from the effort of crossing the room, he peered once more into the mirror.

Old.

He looked, and he felt old.

But he'd live through the night.

He'd rest, and in the morning he'd find a

new source for Warren Philips.

And Philips would restore **Judd Duval's** youth.

Life in Villejeune would go on — eternally"

Beefs up the jolly old page count, what?

GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

But it isn't all like that. There's a seven-line paragraph on page 35 and a fifteen-line one on page 68. Phew! The effort has one cream-crackered John ("I'll head for Damascus tomorrow") Saul.

Characterisation? — "Don't push your luck!"

Most of the time, I wouldn't say "Boo!" to a goose. Meek, mid-mannered reporter. Rick Moranis once kicked sand in my face. Why, I've even said nice things about Niven/Pournelle (not recently, though).

But **Darkness** is a special case.

A basket case.

A wastebasket case.

To put it more kindly (and why not?):

Darkness is a bad horror novel.

Bob Shaw Who Goes Here?

Gollancz, 1993, 219pp, 3.99
Reviewed by Mat Coward

It's sixteen years since this novel was first published — reprinted in paperback now to coincide with the new sequel **Warren Peace** — and seven years since I first read it. It reads just as well as it did then.

In the 24th century, **Warren Peace** enlists in the space equivalent of the Foreign Legion. The deal is that, since people join up "to forget", in exchange for a lifetime's service, the Legion removes the offending memory, backed up by a device to make disobeying orders impossible. The catch, of course, is that having forgotten whatever it was that made him so desperate that he was willing to take the dreadful step of enrolling, the recruit is left wondering, in Warren's horrified words, "Why should I do anything as crazy as joining the Legion?"

Warren's case is even worse: he's had his entire memory erased and so sets about escaping from the service to solve the mystery of his identity. What follows is a lightly satirical, often very funny adventure, with plenty of well thought out time travel paradoxes; a testament to Bob Shaw's extraordinary versatility, and one of the very few SF comedies ever likely to be called a classic.

Joan D. Vinge Catspaw

Pan, 1993, 454pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Steven Tew

Cat is a telepath, a psion, in a galaxy where telepaths are non-persons, persecuted, exploited as slaves, a natural target for genocide. But they also have their uses. Centauri Transport, one of the most powerful of the corporations which run the galaxy, kidnap him and take him to Earth. He is assigned as bodyguard to Lady Elnear, one of their ruling family and candidate for a place on the mysterious Security Council. The Security Council holds the balance of power, preventing any one corporation becoming all powerful. After preventing an attempt on

Elnear's life, Cat realized he is no more than a spy and discovers something rotten in the state of NYuk (New York, I guess).

As a psion, Cat inhabits a tough and violent world: he has had to be a criminal to survive. Elnear's life is one of luxury, free from want, full of prejudice and suspicion of telepaths. Stryger, a media evangelist and Elnear's rival for the Council position, has a pathological hatred of psions and epitomises the worst of this bigotry. Elnear, whilst a product of privilege, and suspicious of psions, is more enlightened. Through her association with Cat, begins to realize her naiveté and the evil that is done to support her privilege.

First published in 1988, **Catspaw** is an entertaining SF thriller. Its traditional SF themes, with a dash of contemporary cyberpunk, mixed with elements of romance, erotica, political intrigue, violent action and moral commentary, makes it tough, but optimistic, in tone, rather than cynical. Vinge's ability to draw convincing, interesting and engaging characters, and to involve the interest of the reader makes this a worthwhile read.

Vernor Vinge Across Realtime

Millennium, 1993, 533pp, 14.99
Reviewed by Andy Mills

This handsome book is the omnibus edition of two of Vinge's novels, **The Peace War** (1984) and its sequel, **Marooned in Realtime** (1986). Vinge follows the classic SF precept of taking one central scientific breakthrough and building a story around its ramifications. In the case of these linked novels the breakthrough is the "bobble", a sphere which when generated holds its contents in stasis.

The Peace War is set fifty years after Paul Hoehler's invention of the bobble. Hoehler's theoretical work was hijacked and used, by what became the "Peace Authority", to dispose of mankind's nuclear arsenals. Nation states collapse as the Authority establishes a hegemony over a world almost wiped clean of humanity by post-bobble plagues, blamed on the scientists of the old order. The new dictatorship is opposed by a loose association of scientists called the Tinkers, one of whom is Hoehler. The novel erupts into action and melodrama as Paul is reunited with his old lover, encapsulated by the first bobble. (The bobble has decayed, to the surprise of the world: everyone had believed that the spheres merely enclosed the space within, and that the people inside them were dead. Not so. Time is frozen for the bobbled). Meanwhile Paul and his apprentice discover how to generate bobbles without high-energy usage, thus ending the Authority's monopoly of bobble production. War breaks out between the Authority and the Tinkers. The ending is climactic.

Marooned in Realtime concentrates on the bobble's time-travelling capabilities (bobbles can last from seconds to thousands of years). Ambitiously, the sequel is set half a million centuries in the future, where Marta and Yeln Korolev are attempting to restart the human race; humanity, apart from those "bobbed", by themselves or by others, disappeared from the Earth in the 23rd century. But Marta is murdered — left behind when the

group jump forward in time, she survives on her own for forty years. It is left to a detective to track down her murderer from the slight but deliberate clues Marta leaves behind her, and to uncover a series of bizarre plots and motivations. This too has a noisy ending.

Across Realtime is good, solid, traditional SF. Vinge's handling of the pivotal notion is adroit; his characterisation somewhat less so, whilst I feel that the social and economic structures in **The Peace War** could not have sustained the Tinkers.

The sequel is actually the better novel, with Marta's situation particularly well-drawn; I also liked the way that Vinge, in both novels, refuses to explain everything. Recommended.

Karl Edward Wagner

Darkness Weaves

Roc, 1993, 192pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

Etfel, Empress of Perrin, mutilated, hideous and insane, enlists the services of immortal swordsman Kane to help her armies wreak vengeance on Netiston Maril, Emperor of the Throvsosian Empire. Kane, whom we first meet hiding at the far end of a gruesome burial-cave with his collection of ancient grimoires, agrees. There follows an unrelieved narrative of slaughter, conspiracy, torture, sorcery, betrayal and two ghostly set-piece sea battles. The effects of almost every sword thrust and axe-cleaving are forced before our glibbing attention, as the story rushes headlong towards the final mass destruction.

I said 'unrelieved' Well, there are two or three short scenes of tender love between Lages and M'Cori: out of place and totally unconvincing, the kind that used to bring shrieks of derision from Saturday matinee cinema audiences in my boyhood. I should in fairness add that although some pretty hideous sex clearly takes place at various points, none of it is ever described.

According to Roc, Wagner is the author of over 45 books and has been described as a 'thinking man's Conan' and as 'Sam Peckinpah's approach to heroic fantasy.' Before becoming a magazine editor and full-time writer, he was 'trained as a psychiatrist.' I refrain from comment.

Freda Warrington

A Taste of Blood Wine

Pan, 1993, 581pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Half way through the novel, Karl, an Austrian vampire who has joined the scientist George Neville in the hope of discovering the physical and ethical truth about his state, says to Neville's daughter, 'I do not generally feed on people to whom I have been introduced.'

The reader caught in a gripping and macabre metaphysical, suddenly thinks of Alice and the leg of mutton and all is (almost) lost.

But not quite. Fascination is soon regained because **A Taste of Blood Wine** has that authentic mixture of decadent imagery and existential fantasy which creates a true vampire story — i.e. one which is about more than biting people's necks until they die. Warrington's vampires walk the interface between matter and dream. They are

predators, but they can love and make moral decisions. We first meet Karl striding through the wastelands of the First World War and experience his duel with the dominant vampire Kristian which sets the conflict for most of the story, but the motion of the plot is as much based upon Charlotte Neville's commitment to her own identity. Both strands form a narrative which ranks with those of Tanith Lee or Ann Rice. A love story which is atmospherically icy and torrid by turns, **Blood Wine** is probably Warrington's best novel so far.

Ian Watson

Alien Embassy

Gollancz, 1993, 204pp, 4.99

Reviewed by Chris Amies

The novel of alien invasion meets Tantric sex and global conspiracy. In **Alien Embassy**, Lila Makindi is selected for what she believes to be astrally-guided spaceflight to engage in philosophical discourse with other worlds. But nothing is that simple. There aren't any alien friends out in space; reality is a lot more complex, and the aliens much closer to home. Is Bardo, the supposed agency for interstellar mindlight, simply a breeding programme? And if so, breeding what?

Alien Embassy is early Watson, from the mid-1970s, but there is already the complexity and the fascination and the concern with ideas, without ever losing sight of the importance of personality and the individual. It is both entertaining and rewarding. Watson addresses the subject of the nature of consciousness and rejects the idea that language stands apart from those who use it; and at the same time gives us a story of a young girl in a post-industrial world discovering its limits, and her own. As an introduction to Watson's work, leading to ideas developed later in **The Book of Being** and **Lucky's Harvest**, it is well worth investigating.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman

Serpent Mage: Death Gate Cycle 4

Bantam, 1993, 468pp, 4.99, 468pp

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Long ago in the history of the universe of this series of seven books, a world (now revealed to be our own) was divided by a race of magicians called Sartans into four realms of air, fire, stone and sea, linked only by the normally impassable Death Gate. The series' main character, Haplo, is a member of another race of magicians called Patryns who are historic enemies of the Sartan.

Haplo has now become the servant of the Lord of the Nexus, the most powerful Patryn and has been ordered by his master to journey through the Death Gate to each of the four realms to stir up dissension, so that the Nexus Lord can become overall ruler.

Serpent Mage tells the story of his fourth voyage to Chelestra, the Realm of Water.

Chelestra is a fascinating invention. It is a totally enclosed water-filled spheroid, with a 'season' at its heart providing heat and light THROUGH the water. The Chelestrans live on orbiting seamounts, which have caverns in their surfaces with entrapped bubbles of air and which are huge enough to have their own

climates.

The inhabitants of one seamount are threatened by evil dragon-snakes, who, in a replay of the Andromeda legend, require the Kings of the human, elf and dwarf Chelestrans to send their daughters to be sacrificed.

Haplo journeys to Chelestra in his elvish ship, but it smashes as he hits the Chelestran water. This water also has the unfortunate property of bleaching out the magic tattoos which cover Haplo's body, making his powers unusable. Haplo therefore arrives in Chelestra as a castaway.

Serpent Mage tells us more about Haplo, Alfred and their linked fates, which now seems to be heading towards an ending completely at variance with Haplo's original mission. The bumbling Alfred is revealed as the Serpent Mage, a man of great (if intermittent) power, with the occasional ability to control and thwart the dragon-snakes. The book ends on a cliff-hanger, with the story being continued in **The Hand of Chaos**.

Weiss and Hickman are really finding their feet with a much more hard-edged and inventive fantasy than they have been hitherto known for, and they deserve success with this series. **Serpent Mage** contains an eight-page preview of the fifth book in the series, **The Hand of Chaos**, which had the intended effect of whetting my appetite strongly.

John Whitbourn

A Dangerous Energy

Gollancz, 1993, 317pp, 4.99

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Now here's a curiosity. An 'alternative history' much in the vein of Keith Roberts' excellent **Pavane**, winner of the BBC Bookshelf/Gollancz First Fantasy Novel competition, much praised by critics, and yet I found John Whitbourn's **A Dangerous Energy** lacking in the one essential element in a fantasy — it didn't encourage a willing suspension of disbelief.

The reason for this failure is that Whitbourn has chosen to write the book at a distance: you never get closer to the central character Tobias Oakley than armslength. This gives the story, excellently imagined though it is, with some superbly inventive elements, an air of dry biography rather than of a potentially very exciting fiction. Tobias may be a fairly repellent character, but that's no excuse for the distancing involved with the story of Oakley's life as a priest-magician within the Catholic Empire (an empire which successfully fought off the Reformation and is therefore all-encompassing). One could quibble endlessly about how the 'alternate future' turns out (set between 1967 and 2026, the story constantly trips you into thinking more in terms of a medieval setting), but that's the stall Whitbourn sets out, whether one accepts it or not. An interesting but cold book.

Philip G. Williamson

The Firstworld Chronicles 3:

From Enchantry

HarperCollins, 1993, 353pp, 4.99
Reviewed by Norman Beswick

This is the third volume in a long tale, with no immediate end in sight, but despite not having read the previous books I found my bearing well enough to follow the story.

The long prophesied Beast of Rull is incarnate in the body of King Oshaaln 1 of Kimmur; his armies dominate neighbouring lands and move ever outwards. Those seeking to halt him include Duke Shadd, Commander of the Mystophian Nine Hundred Paladins; Shimeril his arms-master; Yzwul, soroma-Lord of Tiancz; and the Zan-Chassin, sorcerer-priests.

Most of the story is told in first person from

the documents of Ronbas Dinbig, though chapters are added on the third person to describe scenes he could not have witnessed.

In book 3, the Beast's opponents re-group to assess developments, and Dinbig journeys perilously to join them. Duke Shadd has the Pandect Fragment, essential for the rescue of the Princess Seruhl from the Semblance of Death, but no-one can translate the contents. The beast can only be defeated by the possessor of a mysterious object which can summon creatures from the underworld of Gneth. How they tackle these problems is the burden of the book, which takes us only part of the way.

The writing is literate and the narrative is refreshed by continual invention: new minor hazards, new kinds of magic, new twists to the

story. If you enjoyed books 1 and 2, you will probably want to follow the story further; if not, and if a big, sprawling fantasy epic with neatly divided goodies and baddies is your favourite tittle, then the series can be commended to you as good of its kind.

But life is not quite as unambiguous as that, and I hope Philip Williamson will turn his talent to a story with a little more moral complexity: that's when (if?) he has tidied *The Firstworld Chronicles* to an ultimate conclusion.

Connie Willis

Doomsday Book

NEL, 1993, 650pp, 5.99

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Some people do have problems. When Kivrin, a student historian, decides to check out history in the flesh by time-machining back to the year 1348, little does she realise how closely the events she is forced to witness mirror those in the year from which she came: 2054. The event of 1348 was, of course, the black (bubonic) plague; the event that Willis fashions for 2054 is a similarly destructive (if less photogenic) strain of flu and the whole lot takes place in past and future Oxford.

Willis' Oxford is peopled with the usual dotty professors and whiz-kids (straight from Enid Blyton) that do jar slightly as the pages turn. But there is a problem with the location Willis has chosen; though perhaps to English eyes Oxford can never be more than a Morse coded theme park dedicated to our romantic notions of academia. Anyway, all the *Nerves* type shenanigans in the future pale to insignificance with the stark reality of the events that Kivrin is experiencing in the past. Here the book becomes quite emotive and Willis' description of medieval England and it's people are both genuinely interesting and involving. It is unfortunate, then, that ultimately this curious mixture of the past and the future simply served to confuse me.

