

June/July  
1994

# Vector

179

£2.25

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

## Science Fiction on TV



## Contents

- 3 Front Line Dispatches  
Readers' Letters
- 5 Best Books of 1993  
Reviewers' Poll
- 12 Horribly Real  
William Gibson interview
- 18 Children's Fantasy  
A Roundup Review
- 23 Compass Points 10  
The Memory of Whiteness
- 24 Compass Points 11  
The Last Spaceship from Earth
- 26 Future Histories in SF  
Stephen Baxter
- 28 Twilight's Last Gleaming  
A Historical Survey of TV SF
- 36 First Impressions  
Reviews edited by Catie Cary
- 45 Paperback Graffiti  
Reviews edited by Stephen Payne

Front Cover Artwork by Claire Willoughby

Editor & Hardback Reviews  
Catie Cary

224 Southway, Park Barn, Guildford,  
Surrey, GU2 6DN  
Phone: 0483 502349

Paperback Reviews Editor  
Stephen Payne

24 Malvern Rd, Stoneygate, Leicester, LE2 2BH

Magazine Reviews Editor  
Maureen Speller

60 Bournemouth Rd, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ

Editorial Assistants  
Alan Johnson, Camilla Pomeroy

Printed by PDC Copyprint,  
11 Jefferies Passage, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4

Vector is printed bimonthly by the BSFA © 1994

All opinions are those of the individual contributors and should not be taken necessarily to be those of the Editor or the BSFA.

### Contributions:

**Good articles are always wanted. All MSS should be typed double spaced on one side of the page. Submissions may also be accepted as ASCII text files on IBM, Atari ST or Mac 3.5" discs.**

**Maximum preferred length is 6000 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.**

**The British Science Fiction Association Ltd. — Company Limited by Guarantee — Company No 921500 — Registered Address — 60 Bournemouth Rd, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ**

## Nuts & Bolts

**Just room for a couple of notes:**

**We have here the bumper issue promised to make up for last issues shortfall. You may notice that I've been redesigning again — this is because I have finally abandoned my trusty Atari ST in favour of a PC in the interests of better productivity. We shall see...**

**There is plenty of interest, in this issue, I look forward to seeing your response to John Madracki's contentious and opinionated history of SF on TV...**

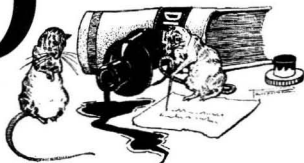
**Arthur C Clarke award winner Jeff Noon is seen here with his trophy at the award ceremony. Next issue will carry a detailed report on this year's award.**

## Remember

**Check the address Label on your mailing to see if you need to renew your subscription**



# Front Line Dispatches



## Diatribal Warfare From John Madracki

**Catie Cary**, in her article 'Cyberpunk is Dead' (**Vector** 177), referred to the "PC explosion" as a "phenomenon of the Eighties", but while it may be true that the term 'political correctness' has come to attention of the media only within the last ten years or so, the roots of this canker go back much further. (*Erm, I was talking about Personal Computers, but hey, don't let a little thing like that get in your way!* — *Catie*)

**When the title of Agatha Christie's classic novel, *Ten Little Niggers*, was changed to *Ten Little Indians*** the reason for doing so was born simply out of respect for the feelings of others and was regarded as being no more than an act of common courtesy. In those days, good sense and, dare I say it, good manners were considered adequate safeguards against indelicate language and deliberate offensiveness. It was only when we had the technology to become a 'global village' that the manipulative power of mass communications was fully appreciated; words came to be seen not as tools for personal expression but as weapons in diatribal warfare and semantics was reduced to a political issue. Pressure groups, motivated only by self-interest, sprang up like toadstools and their orchestrated propaganda impinged upon not only on the academic world but also popular culture.

Like all indoctrination it was at its most effective when instilled surreptitiously and both primary education and mass entertainment were particularly suited to this backdoor approach.

**The amended title of Christie's mystery thriller was now deemed offensive to aboriginal North Americans and replaced by *And Then There Were None*.**

**PC had arrived.**

**By the Sixties, a whole new generation of word-police had been spawned and were cutting their teeth on everything from nursery rhymes to pop songs.** "Here comes SuperSpade, he really gets it on," was a line contained within the innocuous little ditty, 'The Greta Garbo Home for Wayward Boys and Girls', when it was first recorded. But even this harmless colloquialism had to be neutralised, and 'Superman' substituted for the offending word, before it could be 'covered' by the chart-topping Manfred Mann. An inconsequential action one may of thought at the time — but it was the thin end of the wedge.

**Television comedy and drama have long been a target for the verbal-sanitization squad, and when ITV recently decided to re-show the first episode of the popular series *Minder*, the company found itself forced to excise certain scenes, including a couple which featured the term 'coon', before the show could be transmitted.**

**Which may not sound too unreasonable until one notes that**

while the use of the word 'coon' may now be taboo, other four-letter words which are equally offensive to many people can apparently be trotted out with impunity.

**But then, double standards and hypocrisy have always be part and parcel of ideological soundness.**

**Debasement of the English language by an unending flood of grotesque neologisms is something that we will always have to actively resist, but the insidious depletion of our vocabulary must not be tolerated under any circumstances. Already, America's Anti-Defamation League has succeeded in having up to 100 potentially offensive words removed from The Official Scrabble Players Dictionaries, and one can only wonder how long it will be before standard dictionaries bow to outside pressure and tentatively follows suit.**

**In 1990, issue 5 of Shipyard Blues (produced by sometimes **Vector** book reviewer, John D. Owen) sported on its cover the picture of a warrior princess who was quite clearly seen to possess breasts. Very politically incorrect.** The cover of the following issue featured a depiction of I. K. Brunel, complete with stovepipe hat and a large cigar. This could have only angered the Friends of Isambard who are trying to re-write history and eliminate all references to the famous engineer's smoking habits, and would have compounded the felony. That Shipyard Blues now appears to be defunct may well be just a coincidence, but we ignore the power of PC intimidation only at our peril.

## A Sense Of Wonder From Richard Carrington

**About 1976, I started collecting SF paperbacks and other like books. I used to go to a second-hand bookshops in the town where I live, sometimes with my brother and sometimes on my own. It was the ideal place to go on a Saturday afternoon. You went downstairs and waded through piles of books which were to be found lying about in clumps on the basement floor. There was a shelf about seven feet long, packed with *First Lensman*, *Rocketship Galileo* and dozens of American ACE pocket books, all at reasonable prices for the time. I**

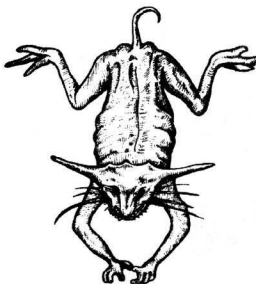
## Vector 4

bought the entire shelf-load over the course of the next 18 months. They were an eye-opener. No chance of **Lord of The Rings** for me. I spent hours down there until the smell of 5000 books at close hand got too much and I beat a quick retreat to the till to haggle with the owner over how much he'd sell the books I'd found for. In retrospect it was an education as in most cases I hadn't a clue if a book by, say, Robert Heinlein was any good. (Incidentally this was the shop I bought **Stranger In A Strange Land** from). The curious thing was that all of the books were at least ten to fifteen or more years old. So I found I could pick up a garish covered book for fifty pence published in 1957 and *know* it would be worth reading. Nowadays I am more careful.

**Nowadays there doesn't** seem to be much difference between SF and Fantasy, e.g. "Encounters" prints both sorts usually at stiff prices which was why I left the book club. Maybe as you get older you get more choosy over what you spend your money on. I don't buy contemporary SF that often as I cannot afford it. The last book I bought was by Patrick Moore on Fiction and Science Fiction and it cost me thirty-five pence in my local library. It had been withdrawn. I would like to see a mainstream publisher start printing SF from before 1960 and then sell it for two quid or less. I understand that copyright matters mean that more recent SF cannot have the same treatment, although I recollect that Venture SF did quite well with their series of classics. I bought everyone I could find.

**However, my main concern** is that the current teenage generation have no time to read good SF, they are too busy playing computer thing like Nintendo and Sega. This worries me as I believe they are missing out on something. Its to do with imagination and a sense of wonder. In ten years or sooner the next generation of SF writers should be up and about. But where are they going to come from?

**P.S. To illustrate my point**, my cousin's fifteen year old son has never read Jules Verne, H.G. Wells or even Alice In Wonderland / Looking Glass.



## Correction

**Mat Coward's review of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand* in Vector 178** should have read "most other contemporary *anglophones*" rather than "anglophiles" as printed. Our apologies.

The deadline for letters in the next issue is

August 1st 1994

Please send your letters of comment to

Catie Cary

Vector

224 Southway

Park Barn

Guildford

Surrey

GU2 6DN

## TERRITORIES

*the sf magazine journal*

David Wingrove	Kim Stanley
Hunter S.	Robinson
Thompson	Ted Mooney
Paul McAuley	The Shamen
Ian McDonald	Fergus Bannion
Mike Cobley	Russell Hoban
Ganymedeon	Eric Brown
Slime Mould	Roky Enks on
Jayne Ann	Radio Birdman
Phillips	

*Need we say more?*

**Territories** has as its central focus the genre of science fiction, but nevertheless *goes beyond* the self-imposed limitations of the genre for its subject matters. **Territories** features criticism, reviews, interviews, fiction and writing from the edge.

"...its contents are light-years ahead in giving satisfaction." - **Vector**

"**Territories** is the critical magazine that British SF has needed for a long time, and is wholeheartedly recommended." - **BBR**

"I'm having to restrict myself to raving about magazines that can actually cut it ... Joy of joys, **Territories** is just such a critter." - **SF Eye**

"Without exception, all the articles and interviews are brilliant, the reviews opinionated and the politics 'right-on' - it could become essential." - **REM**

"The potential to be a winner." - **Exuberance**

Subscriptions: £6.00 for three issues, £2.00 for a single issue. Cheques/P.O.s payable to **Territories**, c/o McNair, 65 Niddrie Rd, Strathbungo, Glasgow G42 8PT.

**SPECIAL OFFER:** New subscribers will also receive a copy of **Territories** #1 free upon subscribing.

**#4 out now!**



# Reviewers' Poll 1993

**Time once again for the Vector Reviewers' guide to the best reading around.** All our regular reviewers are asked to vote for their favourite five books, and although most stick to listing novels within the genres of SF, Fantasy & Horror, they are free to choose any books they have read in the last year, whether they be novels or short stories, fiction or non-fiction, within the genre or without. Nor do they have to have been published in the last year. In this way we feel that we more accurately reflect the best of what people are *actually* reading.

**It is noticeable that some of last year's top titles are present again in paperback editions.** I wonder if this is an example of positive feedback in action, as reviewers try the books they find they have missed. At any rate, I hope *you* will find something in this list, that whets your appetite to try something new.

**Speaking of new things, this year's winner, as announced last issue, is *Vurt* by Jeff Noon.** This is a first novel, not just for its author, but also for the dynamic new Manchester publishing house, Ringpull, who are promising to continue to publish innovative and exciting new SF. Although I like the book and voted for it myself, I'll admit that I was surprised when it won, as back in January when the poll was taken it had not yet seen many reviews. This is a book whose praises spread almost entirely by word of mouth, but threatens to grow in popularity as a mass market paperback is now imminent from Pan.

**Another publisher with reason for self-congratulation is HarperCollins who published nearly half of the chosen books, at 14 out of 30 entries —** this speaks both of a commitment to quality and the fact that they offer the largest list of SF and Fantasy titles in this country. Gollancz is their closest rival with 4 entries, followed by Headline and Millennium with 3 apiece. Millennium are also to be congratulated for the commitment they have demonstrated in their repackaged reissue of the works of Michael Moorcock. This has been an enormous project; but they have consistently delivered a beautifully designed and carefully prepared product that will enhance the bookshelves of those who can afford to keep up.

**The most important publication of the year was of course, *The SF Encyclopedia*,** and I am delighted both that the BSFA were able to honour this essential work of reference with a special award, and that a sufficient number of reviewers were thrilled with the book to vote it on to this list, which as I mentioned earlier is generally dominated by novels. *Excellent.*

**Finally, I'll let you in on my own choices:**

- 1 *The SF Encyclopedia* — John Clute, Peter Nicholls, Brian Stableford (Orbit)
- 2 *Nightside the Long Sun* — Gene Wolfe (NEL)
- 3 *Vurt* — Jeff Noon (Ringpull)
- 4 *The Hollowing* — Robert Holdstock (HarperCollins)
- 5 *Flicker* — Theodore Roszak (Bantam, 1992)



## 1 Vurt

"Vurt is Science Fiction at its satirical best... it deserves to be read by the SF community"

**Chris Hart**

"Genuinely unputdownable"

**Maureen Speller**

"A hardcore remix of cyberpunk, SF, drug culture, Orphic myth and indie music subcultures by a new writer from new publishing house Ringpull press. A virtual reality rollercoaster that is fast, funny, sad, squalid and horrific in places."

**Steve Jeffery**

"A grunge fairytale with elements of both Sleeping Beauty and Snow White"

**Tanya Brown**

**Jeff Noon**

**Ringpull**

## 2 Snowcrash

"The most inventive cyberpunk novel I've read. It uses the familiar tropes and devices, but used in a fresh way with the underlying metaphor of the book working to drive the plot"

**Paul Kincaid**

"Excellent, the characters were well-written, and the Metaverse very believable"

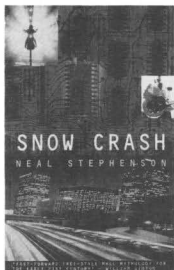
**Carol Ann Green**

"A surrealistic satire vision of America gone mad where couriers armoured like Judge Dredd deliver pizzas for the Mafia and a deranged TV evangelist looses a killer virus into a virtual reality Metaverse"

**Steve Jeffery**

"This book hasn't been on my shelf for more than two days at a time — people are queuing up to read it"

**Tanya Brown**



**Neal Stephenson**

**ROC**

## 3 The Iron Dragon's Daughter

"This is 'the right stuff', from the Dickensian elves with an eye on the market economy to the strange, almost inexplicable ending"

**Maureen Speller**

**Michael Swanwick**

**Millennium**

## 4 Green Mars

"The trilogy looks set to be the major work of SF of the decade"

**Paul Kincaid**

"Wonderful how continuity & change, human, technological & planetary, are steered across the generations. So very skilfully done"

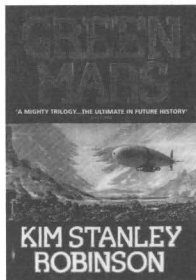
**KV Bailey**

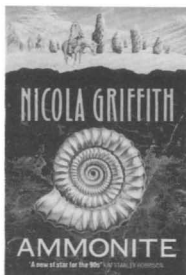
"Each detail is woven skilfully into the most believable colonisation novel I have read. Great stuff."

**Colin Bird**

**Kim Stanley Robinson**

**HarperCollins**





## 5 The Hollowing

"The sense of mystery he has created in and around the wood continues to fascinate me. He has the ability to take the reader into his world by appealing in great detail to the senses"

**Cherith Baldry**

"Holdstock's fantasy vision of the mythic potency that lies in the land around Ryhope Wood is unique. Stark and powerfully affecting"

**Steve Jeffery**

"Holdstock's intuitions about the basis of myth go from strength to strength"

**Tanya Brown**

## 6 Ammonite

"I got completely caught up in the struggles of the characters"

**Carol Ann Green**

"Marghe's attempt to solve the biological puzzle of the planet Jeep makes compelling reading, not least because of the audacious plotting which renders men completely unnecessary (and unmissed)"

**Barbara Davies**

## 7 Virtual Light

"Captures the impending grip of the 21st Century magnificently"

**Chris Hart**

"An eye-opening portrayal of near-future America when even the ground you walk on has been privatised"

**Maureen Speller**

"One of the most thought-provoking and fun reads of the year."

**Andrew Seaman**

## 8 Nightside the Long Sun

"I never stop being amazed at the sheer quantity of detail Wolfe can muster when he's describing an alien world and culture"

**Cherith Baldry**

## 9 The SF Encyclopedia

"Obviously supreme for reference, but no less for enjoyable, wide ranging and intriguing reading."

**KV Bailey**

## 10 Men at Arms

"Excessively funny, but terribly clever"

**John D Owen**

## 11 Sideshow

"Adventure, satire, wonders, and a disconcerting re-examination of religious tolerance"

**Norman Beswick**

"Tepper's gift for characterisation is at its peak"

**Tanya Brown**

**Robert Holdstock**  
HarperCollins

**Nicola Griffith**  
HarperCollins

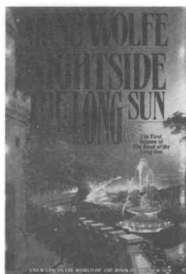
**William Gibson**  
Viking

**Gene Wolfe**  
NEL

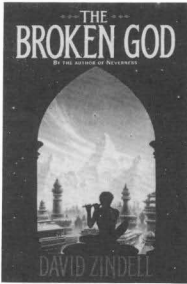
**John Clute, Peter Nicholls, Brian Stableford (Eds)**  
Orbit

**Terry Pratchett**  
Gollancz

**Sheri Tepper**  
HarperCollins



## Vector 8



### 11 Sign for the Sacred

"Constantine at play, romping in a bleak world of dogmas and repression. Poison in jest"

Norman Beswick

### 13 The Broken God

"A deely philosophical work, stuffed with ideas... this is what SF should be about"

Maureen Speller

### 14 Aztec Century

"... took Evans' interest in alternate consciousness and gave it a new twist."

LJ Hurst

### 15 Fools

"A cyberpunk tour de force of fractured multiple personalities and narrative voices, played out in a mental hall of mirrors"

Steve Jeffery

"A mesmerising story of interweaving personality implants. Poetic cyberpunk at its best"

Colin Bird

"Cadigan's style is sassy and smart... but this novel examines memory loss, psychosis and the nature of personality in depth"

Tanya Brown

### 16 The Eternal Champion Series

"A joy to read."

Chris Hart

### 17 Doomsday Book

"Powerful, emotionally charged... a superbly different time travel story"

John D Owen

### 18 Red Mars

"A fascinating observation of 100 people living and working very closely together"

Carol Ann Green

### 19 A Dangerous Energy

"A most distinctive & ingenious magically Faustian alternative history."

KV Bailey

"An impressive first novel of magic and politics, and a chronicle of the rise to power and moral disintegration of Tobias Oakley, a protagonist with almost no redeeming features. Bleak and compelling"

Steve Jeffery

### 20 Harm's Way

"A brilliant fantasy"

Carol Ann Green

"Romp of the year, making all the other steam-punk offerings look like twerps"

John D Owen

**Storm Constantine**  
Headline

**David Zindell**  
HarperCollins

**Christopher Evans**  
Gollancz

**Pat Cadigan**  
HarperCollins

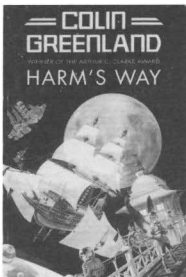
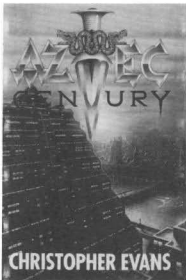
**Michael Moorcock**  
Millennium

**Connie Willis**  
HarperCollins

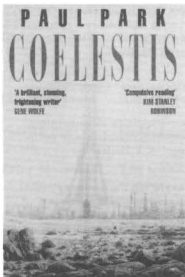
**Kim Stanley Robinson**  
HarperCollins

**John Whitbourn**  
Gollancz

**Colin Greenland**  
HarperCollins



## Vector 9



### 21 Timelike Infinity

"Mind-blowing concepts, sheer sensawunda. Baxter gets better every time"

Norman Beswick

### 22 A Shadow on the Skin

"Reminds me why I like fantasy"

Lynne Bispham

### 23 Dead Girls

"A futuristic horror story about power and fear, the Lilim or dead girls of the title are children cruelly metamorphosed by a virus"

Andy Mills

### 24 The Crow Road

"Banks writes with the intensity and vigour usually only found in American novels"

Martyn Taylor

### 25 Coelestis

"This novel works both as Science Fiction and as uncompromising social comment"

Lynne Bispham

"A wonderfully imagined world"

Norman Beswick

### 26 Traitors

"Covered a whole gamut of emotions and feelings"

Carol Ann Green

### 27 Lords and Ladies

"Pratchett has the right idea about elves. And too much empathy and integrity to make his characters laughing-stocks"

Sue Thomasson

### 28 The House of Lost Dreams

"Vivid characters, intense dreamlike imagery, a pungent picture of a nightmare interlude in Greece"

Alan Johnson

### 29 Suckers

"A delicious black comedy which also serves as a wicked satire on the values of Thatcherite Britain"

Andy Mills

### 30 A Song for Arbonne

"Kay has a knack of making you want to know what happens next."

Martyn Taylor

**Stephen Baxter**  
HarperCollins

**Keren Gilfoyle**  
Headline

**Richard Calder**  
HarperCollins

**Iain Banks**  
Orbit

**Paul Park**  
HarperCollins

**Kristine Kathryn  
Rusch**  
Millennium

**Terry Pratchett**  
Gollancz

**Graham Joyce**  
Headline

**Anne Billson**  
Pan

**Guy Gavriel Kay**  
HarperCollins

## Other Recommendations

Gill Alderman	<b>The Land Beyond</b>	"A singularly beautiful book, both in its imaginings & in their expression" KV Bailey
Isaac Asimov & Robert Silverberg	<b>Child Of Time</b> <b>The Positronic Man</b>	"These two books are a good read for anyone interested in science and humanity, and to anyone who wants to be made to <i>think</i> " Martin H Brice
Iain Banks	<b>Complicity</b>	"Banks' savage modern morality tale neatly excises the rotten heart of 80's Britain and holds it up on a stick for all to see" Andrew Seaman
Iain M Banks	<b>The Bridge</b>	"glorious innovative stuff" Martyn Taylor
Iain M Banks	<b>The State Of The Art</b>	"tremendous wit and style" Cherith Baldry
Hans Bemman	<b>The Broken Goddess</b>	"The story slips back and forth between fantasy and reality. It's very densely allusive, to fairytale, classical myth and medieval romance; I found this exhilarating and suspect that someone more scholarly would have enjoyed it even more" Cherith Baldry
Marion Zimmer Bradley	<b>Vernemeton</b>	"convinces because it builds upon historical fact" Lynne Bispham
A S Byatt	<b>Morpho Eugenia</b> One of the two novels contained in <b>Angels And Insects</b>	"focussed on Darwin's world which it extrapolates cleverly into many ecological & philosophical dimensions, complete with sociological, romantic, and literary trimmings" K V Bailey
Pat Cadigan	<b>Dirty Work</b>	"Why waste time and sanity actually exploring the more unpleasant aspects of relationships when Pat Cadigan has already gone and done it for you in this genre-defying collection of short stories?" Andrew Seaman
Charles De Lint	<b>The Little Country</b>	"Powerfully told, with great humour, and a wonderful sense of place" John D Owen
David Eddings	<b>The Shining Ones</b>	"Eddings sucks you in, wraps you up in safeness and predictability, then spits you out again craving for the next chunk of the same" Vikki Lee
Steve Erickson	<b>Arc D' X</b>	"intriguing, thought-provoking, and full of such vividly fresh perspectives that all you can do is sit back and admire" Paul Kincaid
John M Ford	<b>Casting Fortune</b>	"has a lot to say about... the similarities of comedy and tragedy, truth and fiction" Sue Thomason
James Gleick	<b>Chaos</b>	"a well-written book covering both the concepts of chaos theory" Tom A Jones
Lisa Goldstein	<b>Strange Devices Of The Sun And Moon</b>	"This tale of Christopher Marlowe and the realm of faerie, is complex, beautiful and very satisfying" Paul Kincaid
Alasdair Gray	<b>Ten Tales Tall And True</b>	"...shows him at his opinionated and didactic best" Paul Kincaid
Graham Hancock	<b>The Sign And The Seal</b>	"A historical detective tale... about the author's search for the Ark of the Covenant" Tom A Jones

## Vector 11

Barbara Hamblly	Dog Wizard	"Superior stuff" Lynne Bispham
Mike Jefferies	Stone Angels	"Murder, mystery and suspense in ample proportions" Vikki Lee
Stephen Jones	The Illustrated Dinosaur Movie Guide	"...features dinosaurs and related monsters from <i>Une Nuit Terrible</i> of 1896 to <i>Carnosaur</i> and <i>Jurassic Park</i> of 1993; it combines catalogue, nostalgia, and lots of pictures" Martin H Brice
Guy Gavriel Kay	The Fionavar Tapestry: The Summer Tree The Wandering Fire The Darkest Road	"This is Fantasy with a capital F. While it makes use of devices which have long been staples of the genre, it's not just another Tolkien imitation. This is genuine, oak-matured Fantasy, with real emotions, pain and consequences" Barbara Davies
Brian Keenan	An Evil Cradling	"Upholds the values of empathy, compassion, love of life, honesty, strength, integrity. Beautifully written. True." Sue Thomason
Ken Kesey	Sailor Song	"A compelling story populated by vibrant characters told by a man whose mastery of the language, both formal and vernacular, makes for scintillating reading" Martyn Taylor
Stephen Laws	Dark Fall	"A phantastically plausible explanation of why sometimes people <i>disappear</i> " Martin H Brice
Ursula Le Guin	Earthsea Revised	"A reprint of a lecture, illuminating the way her thinking changed between the first <i>Earthsea</i> books and <i>Tehanu</i> . Written with great warmth and elegance" Cherith Baldry
Ian Macdonald	Hearts, Hands & Voices	"Read it and weep for humanity" John D Owen
Patrick Mc Grath	Dr Haggard's Disease	"A brilliantly perverse and perversely brilliant Gothic tale of medical and erotic obsession" Andrew Seaman
Peter Morwood	The Golden Horde	"This fantasy set in a historically accurate thirteenth century Russia would have been interesting reading anyway, if only for its authentic portrayal of the Mongol way of life. But the sympathetic central character of Tsar Ivan Khorlovsky, family man, not always able to keep up with his boisterous wife and kids, and struggling to hold onto his kingdom against a huge, unstoppable force, makes it a winner" Barbara Davies
Paul Park	The Cult Of Loving Kindness	"A wonderfully imagined world" Norman Beswick
Richard Powers	The Goldbug Variations	"A dense and elusive tale of modern science and its interaction with the fallible world of human emotion" Andrew Seaman
Terry Pratchett	Johnny & The Dead	"...the best 'kids writer' working today, his stories having all the character and wit of his adult books with added serious passion" Martyn Taylor
R A Salvatore	Starless Night	"A rare dip into <i>Forgotten Realms</i> — dark and spooky — with plenty of laughs along the way" Vikki Lee
Norman Spinrad	Deus X	"Polluted earth is choked and dying, and the Pope must rule whether computer duplicates have souls. What will she decide? Startling and logical." Norman Beswick
Judith Tarr	Lord Of The Two Lands	"excellent historical fantasy" Vikki Lee
Sheri Tepper	A Plague Of Angels	"essential Tepper" Vikki Lee

# Horribly Real

## A Conversation with William Gibson by Maureen Speller

William Gibson's most recent novel, *Virtual Light*, drew a mixed reception. Some readers were disappointed by the absence of computer hacking, while others claimed that it was no more than a near-future thriller, with Gibson's name lending more cachet than was truly deserved. Gibson has not sold his readers short in not rerunning *Neuromancer*, any more than *Virtual Light* is really about the privatization of public space, a subject already widely discussed in the United States and certain to become a contentious issue in this country.

Those in authority have always sought to control land and the way people use it. The Enclosures Act in the 18th century resulted in the control of people's movement round the country. The mass trespass of Kinder Scout, over fifty years ago, was the first major attempt in this country this century to open up vast tracts of land to walkers escaping city slums. Even now, fenced communal gardens, 'No Ball Games Allowed' notices, banning of satellite dishes or, on some modern estates, the statutory ban on washing being hung in back gardens are all a sort of environmental apartheid. The house I'm writing in is still subject to the control of the Folkestone Estate, should I decide to alter its exterior appearance, over thirty years after the freehold

was sold by the estate. Restrictions exist everywhere.

More recently, the shopping mall has overtaken this country and with it we have seen the rise of private security forces who exercise a right to bar anyone who does not conform to the behavioural criteria laid down by the properties' owners. Research has shown, for example, that shoppers are deeply distressed by the sight of old people sitting down, so seats are few and far between in some malls, or else deliberately designed to be too uncomfortable to sit on for long. In Los Angeles, this has been taken to a logical conclusion at bus stops, with a seat shaped like a barrel, against which you can lean uncomfortably, but on which it is impossible to sleep. Security men have a theoretical right to ban anyone they don't like the look of from their malls, and their criteria might be very arbitrary. The threat exists.

This kind of threat is at the heart of *Virtual Light*, with its contrasting portraits of near-future San Francisco and Los Angeles. Lance Olsen notes in *William Gibson* (Starmont Reader's Guide #58), (1992), "Most of his science fiction comes from simply paying attention to the world around him. As his friend and fellow SF writer Tom Maddox explains: "Gibson claims not to invent anything". This might at first seem a strange statement coming from a leading

SF writer. But on reflection it becomes less so. Gibson doesn't invent. He extrapolates." Gibson himself says, "People have to live with things far grimmer and stranger than what's found in most science fiction. This is the future." In conversation with Gibson last September, he further commented "I like to set it up so that some of the things you're getting your SF kicks from, that pleasant sense of anxiety in the book, are actually real things. Horrible but real."

The heart of the novel, the story 'Skinner's Room' came about from Gibson's involvement with an exhibition which speculated on the future of San Francisco, *Visionary San Francisco*. When I met William Gibson, I asked him about this exhibition.

"Oh it was a wonderfully weird affair. Paolo Polledri, Curator of Architecture and Design for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I think it was his first show, and what he wound up with was quite controversial in San Francisco, and no-one could quite figure out why he had done it. The portion I worked on with Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung was the only part which really dealt with the city but it absolutely horrified the architecture critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He was particularly angry about what we'd done to his beautiful city.

It's the only city in America that makes immediate sense to Europeans. If I had to introduce a European to North America with the least shock and most delight, in most cases I would make sure that they went to San Francisco first and used it as a sort of cultural airlock, because if you put them in Los Angeles or New York first it just doesn't make sense and sometimes the culture shock is lasting. I've noticed that for people who come in through San Francisco, there's no problem to get it. It's a wonderful city.

Los Angeles is completely different. My theory is that everyone who goes into Los Angeles goes into culture shock. It doesn't matter; you can be from Arizona or Leningrad. It's such a different place that it takes some getting used to. I'm quite fond of it now but it's so different from San Francisco — the split in the book, it's already there. They might as well be different countries, different planets.



I mentioned the scene in *Virtual Light* when Rydell goes for an interview at Nightmare Art, and he's walking along the street, and you realise that he just doesn't know what the street looks like from the street. He's only ever seen it from Gunhead, the security vehicle he used to drive.

"I didn't realise until I went back to Los Angeles a couple of weeks ago that I had written that from the actual experience of walking along that particular stretch of street because one of the book-shops that I always sign at is right there. I was quite proud of myself when I went and walked again by the shops that are the shops, except that more of them are empty and there was more graffiti on them.

Do you know there's a really, really excellent subway/light rail system in Los Angeles now? No-one knows. It's one of the weirdest examples of something that's so peculiar that it couldn't happen anywhere else in the world. It's the biggest public works project in the United States in 50 years. It was completely paid for by the city of Los Angeles, billions of dollars, it's going to continue to be under construction for years and years, it's probably the most advanced subway system in the world. It just is beautifully designed, looking at every system in the world and picking the best bits, and no-one knows it's there. People mostly in the middle class, the white folks that I know in Los Angeles, are totally in denial of the fact of its existence. And I say "well, have you been on it?" and they say just look at me and say "no!"

I asked if he thought they would eventually use it. Neither of us realised that the Los Angeles earthquake, a few months later, would oblige people to use it when the freeway was seriously damaged. Watching the film clips of people being issued with leaflets explaining how to use the subway, I couldn't help recalling this conversation.

"It's being used a lot but it's not being used by those people. It's just so incredibly strange. You start on the subway, you go down quite deep, not quite as deep as the deepest stations here, and you go down in these beautiful, spacious, super-modern, incredibly secure stations; they're sort of

mugging-proof, the elevators are all glass and everything's transparent, so if anyone does anything to you in an elevator, they'll be seen from outside. They've managed to do it all without corners or alcoves, nothing to hide around, very open; very, very high ceilings, very brightly lit but gently lit, brightly lit with indirect lighting. You get on the train, you go underground for only one or two stations then you come up on street level and then you run on what used to be in the 1920s the street car tracks, which they've simply dug out, cleaned up and they have traffic signals set up so you're actually going quite quickly in the train through the traffic.

I was surprised that no-one had noticed it was there, considering that in Manchester, for example, it's difficult to avoid seeing, or hearing, the new trams, and the local residents are very proud of them.

"No, people don't want to, people who live in Los Angeles in the way that they have always lived in Los Angeles don't want to know about this because in the end it will change everything. In 50 years I think it will do more to alter what the city is, and probably do more to make it a place, a real place — that Gertrude Stein line about there's no there, there. I believe she was actually talking about Oakland, but Oakland has considerable "there" compared to Greater Los Angeles. One of the eerie things about Los Angeles is it's like you're moving through a series of virtual realities. There is a very strong sense of neighbourhood for people who live there; you go from one place to another and you're in a different place and it has something fairly distinctive about it and that helps keep you from going quite as crazy as you might go otherwise but there's that feeling that it's all interchangeable. You could put Venice Beach here or you could invent some sort of ethnic neighbourhood that would just appear one day. But now they have this system in and people can actually go as pedestrians through this space, it's going to change it. It's like putting in arteries, even a rudimentary skeleton into what would feel, particularly for someone from Europe, like a bowl of undifferentiated cells.

I'd heard a correspondent on Radio 4 describe how he had no idea how the neighbourhoods of Los Angeles related to one

another, because he moved between them by driving onto the freeway then off again at the appropriate interchange. In fact, as Mike Davis shows in his *City of Quartz* (Vintage, 1992), a fascinating and highly recommended study of Los Angeles, many neighbourhoods are already seeking to cut themselves off from the rest of Los Angeles, much as portrayed in *Virtual Light*. "Fortress LA" is acknowledged by Gibson as having crystallised his thoughts on his first three books, but whereas these talked tacitly about the privatisation of cyberspace, with *Virtual Light* he has moved into more familiar environmental space.

In *City of Quartz* Davis paints a bleak description of walled neighbourhoods into which only residents are allowed. Houses and neighbourhoods are heavily fortified — Davis speaks of the cult of "mansionising", in which houses are demolished and rebuilt, often with secret, terrorist-proof rooms not included on architects' plans. Visitors must produce proof of invitation as well as identification. Local amenities, previously available to all, are also sectioned off for the use of residents. In one case, it has been acknowledged that a park has been made private in order to stop local Black and Chicano families using it at weekends. Indeed, for all the protestations to the contrary, it is clear that at least one motive in this constant re-division and evaluation of areas is racial segregation. Los Angelenos live in fear of black gang warfare although, Davis claims, the picture of gangs running out of control is as much fuelled by the Los Angeles Police Department who, in the period running up to the book's original publication, had arrested and released, mostly without charge, over half the young black population of LA.

By contrast, life in San Francisco seems very different, with a vibrant street life, and those bicycle couriers. I found it a little difficult to believe that San Francisco, with all those hills, could provide a home to cycle couriers.

"Well, they do it. The bicycle courier culture in San Francisco is such a distinct and amazing thing. I don't think I knew what Chevette did for a living when I wrote the short story 'Skinner's Room' but on subsequent visits to San Francisco, San Francisco bicycle

messengers are just so striking and, in fact, are watched by American designers. They just have the best radical style of any group of young people. They have their own cafes, their own bands, their own fanzines.

**It sounds like gay culture, or even science fiction culture, I suggested.**

**"Yeah, it is in a way. San Francisco** is fascinating that way; any alternative culture, anything you want, any form of alternative sexuality, it's right there and it's totally out. Somewhere there's a coffee house that's filled with people who are into whatever you're into. It's very strange. I don't quite know any other place that's quite like it. But these bike messengers were so striking and particularly when you see them working in the financial district. In a sea of suits and Ralph Lauren tweed skirt things, these kids with these amazing haircuts are zipping around on these really, really expensive but strangely turned around hi-tech bicycles. You probably see more total graphic bicycles in that situation than you'd see anywhere else.

**I was really taken with the idea** that after all this computer culture we're now back at the stage where the one safe place to put a message is in someone's hand, in a bag and put it on a bike and send it.

**"Well, that's pretty serious.** There are lots of things that have to be conveyed by hand. Everything, all the tales of Chevette's work-place, were built up from twelve back issues of *Mercury Rising*, a little lap-top-published fanzine that they do for one another; it's not really addressed to the outside world.

**I suggested to Gibson that** he was actually talking about what happens to people when people try to screw up their space and take it and do things with it. In Los Angeles, everyone is bunkering down whereas in SF they're still fighting to keep the space for themselves, and if they're moved from one bit, they'll go on, and if necessary they'll take the bridge. And it becomes necessary and they take the bridge. It's quite pertinent; if you look here, people have moved out into the subways because they've got nowhere else to live. You feel that sooner or



later, they're going to take back, even with anti-squatter legislation.

**"Yeah, I kind of wondered** why that hasn't — well, you know, that has happened to a certain extent. There's no American equivalent of the squatters' movement. That's completely foreign to American culture. There are squatters in NY, I think it's the only place, but NY is sort of an exception to all rules. It's a strange, strange place unto itself and always has been. So there are people in NY living in lots of condemned and abandoned buildings in Manhattan, particularly in the Lower East Side, and people do go in and turn the power back on but it's actually a much more secretive sort of thing. It seems very radical, I think, to North Americans to do that. The native impulse there to go and build these cardboard cities, to go to the waste ground and start erecting log cabins. You go to the edge and throw up a shanty town so one of the things that satisfied me about what I did with the bridge in the book, I thought well maybe I'm kind of introducing a subversive idea here. Maybe in twenty years some kid who's read this book will say "oh yeah, we could go and live on — whatever. We could just go and live there, why don't we? Let's not just sleep in the streets." Yeah, that would make me very happy. It's a much less radical concept for Europeans than Americans who just go "wow, look what they've done to our bridge."

**"Any sort of retrofitting is** very very radical for Americans but here everything is retrofitted. I really liked driving from Gatwick

the other day, that IKEA had taken over the power station and had their colours around the top. If you did that in North America, that would just be wild but here, it's just what you do. You recycle the infrastructure.

**Is it just, I suggested, that they haven't run out of space over there yet?**

**"Yeah, except in NY where** there has never been any space at all, just this tiny little island, but yeah, it's a very radical idea there. I am not sure why it appeals to me so much except that the results for me are invariably more satisfying than building something new. It's actually very important for people in North America to reuse the old bits of their city. If they don't, it's never going to get any better. There is no texture. They'll always build this new thing and it's always absolutely free of memory. I'm actually much happier in older structures. I'm always much happier in North America in vernacular structures, in places not built by architects, in places just built by the builders, but to get that you have to go back to the 1900s because after that everything was built by architects or to an architect's drawing. I don't know, it's just a strange quirk of mine.

**To me, there's a very strong theme** of organic growth in *Virtual Light*, the kicking against the redevelopment of San Francisco, something that people ought to identify with, particularly over here. We did a lot of ripping out in the late 50s, early 1960s, the post-war Brave New World. It was ghastly, it was badly built and it's all coming down now.

**"Yeah, it's very surreal.** Around Notting Hill, there's that one weird really terrifying tower block that sticks up, I don't know whether it's in Notting Hill, you can see it from various points in Notting Hill and you can see it sticking up above all this period stuff. It's a really grim-looking, super-grim-looking thing, and I think that has a sixties look. Although you didn't do it to the extent it can be done, if you look at the workers' high-rise housing that Franco built on the outskirts of Barcelona. Those are the most creepy Orwellian structures. If you really wanted to shoot Brave New World that would be the place to do it, but to get that it took fascism to get that done to that extent.

We moved on to talk about the eponymous Skinner and his place in *Virtual Light*

"I'm not sure how old

Skinner is. I'm not very good with numbers. Skinner is meant to be the last baby-boomer. Skinner is the age that I will be then, so he's meant to be the last survivor of the pre-Generation X folks. Or at least the only one you get to see.

I commented on the seeming lack of old people in the novel because Skinner is the oldest person who appears. Where did all the old people go? Were they all snowbirds? Do they go south and set up in their Airstream trailers?

"A lot of them, in the world of *Virtual Light*, the more affluent ones, have moved to the gated residential communities, that Rydell refuses to go and do sentry duty for, and lots of them are committing mass ritual suicides in the background as members of the Cease Upon the Midnight movement but it is mostly young people.

I started writing really in my early thirties, or maybe late twenties, and it seems to me now that when I started, I wrote the stuff I would have written as an adolescent if I'd been able to. With *Neuromancer*, I very consciously gave free rein to my inner adolescent, and let him do exactly what he wanted to do with this book but I think, since, I've sort of played catch-up with myself so now the characters have parents. Pretty soon they'll start to have children and then they'll wind up being old. It's taken me a decade to get up to this point.

Rereading the books, it had struck me as surprising that Case and Turner went off and got married and had kids. It seemed so strange looking at what else they'd done, it seemed so conventional.

"That was a deliberate thing. There's a big shift. One of the ways you can tell there's been a change with *Virtual Light* is to look at Loveless, the psycho hit man, who in the context of *Virtual Light* is obviously horribly, horribly crazy, but if he were in *Count Zero* he would just be one of these guys Turner would just kill and stuff under a car in a parking lot. It's like *Count Zero* is a world completely populated by people like Loveless and completely populated by these



flaming psychopaths and no-one ever comments on it and the protagonist is just as crazy. So when you look at it this way, this is a very different sort of book. I deliberately wanted to, particularly with *Loveless*, to make that very, very clear, that he's bonkers, dangerously so. That he's really horribly crazy. There are people like that in the world unfortunately but I wanted to show you this character from the viewpoint of people who think 'ah, he's crazy.' He's not romanticised at all.

This had struck me about the other characters in *Virtual Light*. It was the first time I had felt a proper sense of community in Gibson's books. Sammy Sal looks out for Chevette, taking care of her, and she in turn takes care of Skinner. Scooter, the Japanese anthropologist, comes into the middle of this and, while trying to treat the situation as a study, finds himself sucked in because it is the only way to find out what's going on. Gibson observed:

"It's always good, in a science fiction novel, to have one character who is a total stranger, because he can wander around thinking 'what is going on in this community?' Gives you an excuse to explain it to the reader otherwise you're left putting in huge lumps of exposition. That's always a mistake in a science fiction novel, so like the *Blade Runner* voice-over. It's something they actually tell people when they're training to be a science fiction writer, they warn you about what they call the expository lump. Avoid the expository lump at all costs.

Reading *Virtual Light*, I'd developed a sense that the morality had shifted. In the three earlier, overtly cyberspace novels, everyone had out there for their own good, but it seemed now that the people had begun to work together and believed, in San Francisco at least, that the world wasn't such a bad place. Sammy Sal can say 'hey, if we give it back, everything will be alright'. There was a stronger sense that the bad guys were more hidden, that the ordinary Joes were running the story.

"When *The Difference Engine* came out, I was in New York with Bruce Sterling, signing, and Bruce had already started writing a non-fiction book called *The Hacker Crackdown*, a book about computer criminals and computer cops, and he'd started to meet the actual hackers, and some of them turned up at one of our signings. They wouldn't actually come in but were lurking out on the street, and Bruce said 'hey man, Fiberoptic and his friend are outside and they're about to be indicted before a federal grand jury and they'd like to meet you and they might be doing some heavy time.' I sort of went out expecting, not exactly sure what, but expecting young men in their early twenties, with black leather jackets and there were these two apparently fifteen year old skinny little hip-hop boys from Brooklyn. They weren't really fifteen but they could have passed, and with the baseball hats on backwards, and I thought 'oh my god, these are children'.

When Bruce was researching that book, we met Gail Thackeray, Assistant Attorney General of Arizona, Organised Crime and Racketeering. Gail Thackeray is a woman with a mission to bring law and order to cyberspace. And when Bruce met her initially, we were all in this really adversarial position with her, and we thought she's the heat. This woman is definitely the heat. And she thought we were very bad, and we got into this dialogue with her, and she said what you're doing is the equivalent of teaching children how to make pipe bombs and we said 'no, wait a minute, that's not true.' And it wasn't. We wound up having this dialogue, and I sort of saw her point. And she started off by saying 'you know, when we bust these guys, we can always tell when we've got bad ones because they've always got a copy of your book alongside the computer.' Our

argument was that people don't learn how to be contract killers by reading Elmore Leonard books but it worried me a bit.

**"When I wrote Neuromancer** the world hadn't had too much experience of hacking as a social phenomenon. It had no negative connotation. Hackers were people who could make home computers jump through hoops. They were very clever guys, they were computer boffins. It was a term of honour, the guy's a real hacker. Look what he can do with a computer. People weren't doing this sort of random terrorism and I'm totally not in favour of.

**I wondered what it must be** like to be a hero to a large number of people who go out and commit what are theoretically illegal acts.

**"It's a funny thing. It keeps** me off the Internet, I'll tell you that. I don't have a modem connected to my computer. Sometimes late at night I hear people trying to do strange things to my fax machine. I suspect that those are some of my dark side admirers trying to figure out if that's a modem or what.

**It must be strange to be al-**most at the mercy of these people who've taken him on board, whether or not he wants it.

**"Everyone is now, it's not** just me. Actually, the Republic of Desire in *Virtual Light* is what I think the worst of those people will become. By and large, what's happening now, is as they grow up and as the law and the railroad come to cyberspace — cyberspace for a while was like Wyoming, wide open anything goes, there was nobody there but a bunch of outlaws and a few settlers, but now the railroad's coming, and the sheriff is in there, and most of those kids, the first generation of them, as they hit their twenties and have to make a living, and realise that they are going to go to jail if they keep doing it, what they become is computer security professionals. They start working for the telephone companies, and they become the cops. That really is like Wyoming in the 1890s; you deputise the gunmen and get it organised. The ones who don't become the cops are the ones who are going to wind up becoming organised criminals. I wanted to make it very clear that the Republic of Desire is not nice and I wanted it to



not be something that people would say "ooh, I want to be in this. I'd like to be those faceless info-terrorists who are totally motivated by self-interest." They only help Rydell out of self-interest. It's only when he tells them that if they don't help him there's going to be considerably less slack in the infrastructure, less room for them to operate, they say "okay, let's do it."

**Reading about the Republic of** Desire, I'd been struck by the contrast with Pat Cadigan's *Synners*, where generations of computer hackers are still out there trying to control themselves, the reconstructed hippies who still see the social benefits of the Net while the next generation down are like the Thatcherite yuppies, out there to make a fast buck in cyberspace, with an inevitable clash between the two. In the end, it's the reformed hippies who have to come in and clean up. There is this clear black and white morality whereas Gibson shows that it's the grey fuzz inbetween that's really important. People are obliged to do illegal things, but if you take squatting as an analogy, if you want a roof over your head, you go out and take it if there's no other way.

**Did he, I asked, consider** himself to be a romantic writer? I've read Skinner's description about how they took the bridge so many times and every time I read it, I still get this little prickle at the back of my neck; it's like watching the Berlin Wall come down or Ceausescu fall. Other people had agreed that there really is that

great romantic moment — gosh, if we could only do that!

**"I suppose so. I am to the** extent, I mean, someone who's a bit more organised politically would say yes, terribly romantic and quite useless. I suppose I am. I wish I were more practical in a way. If I sit down and rationally try to work out what we should do next, even what I'd like to see happen, I wind up weeping. When I wrote the short story, I don't really know where that came from. I had the bridge, I had the situation of the inhabited bridge at the beginning of the story, that was the image I began with, and I suppose I thought, how could this happen, how could this come about and one afternoon in the course of working on it, that bridge scene emerged from nowhere, and I thought that's strange, that's very strange, though it's not terribly likely but it feels right so I'll go back and go through it again, and from that it became pretty much what it is in the book. I felt a bit guilty in that I wish that I believed a little more strongly that it's possible to do. I have my doubts about it. It is possible to do but I don't know if would be quite as wonderfully cosy as Chevette feels it to be.

**I suggested that it must be** the same for people who'd watched the demolition of the Berlin Wall on television, thinking "I wish I'd been there."

**"I wish I'd been there too. I'd** never been to Berlin prior to the wall coming down but I've been to Berlin since it's all been torn down, and the wonderful moment was the tearing down, and the aftermath is very, very creepy and strange, and rather tragic. God it's weird.

**Perhaps these moments are** more potent in the imagination than they are in actuality?

**"You want to talk to West** Germans. What I found was that the West Germans had all gone over for a drink and a stroll when it came down and had never gone back. I said well, why don't you go back and look around, it must be very interesting, and they sort of made excuses; I've been too busy. They actually don't want to go. There is an American writer named Steve Erickson, he's got a book called *Arc d'X*, and there's a scene in the book where a character named Steve Erickson is in Berlin after the wall's been torn down, and he wakes in the middle of the

night and goes out and sees this massed army of people rebuilding the wall. It's a very powerful image. It almost feels like that, like they miss it.

**Towards the end of Virtual Light** someone defines what's going to happen. Change has got to happen but people want it to be little changes and they're proposing this awfully large change; people just can't handle that at all. For instance, people ask "why don't you get this government out?", but for so many people the concept of changing from something they've had for twenty years, they can't begin to imagine what it's going to be like, they don't want to imagine. They've grown up in it, they don't like it but it's what they know.

**"Any sort of change, even from something that is so obviously not working, — the thing that most amazes me about that, the most horrifying thing, is that some countries are just now starting to implement those policies — Canada to a nasty extent, New Zealand even more so. In the last couple of years they've started saying, 'it's not working, what shall we do? Let's do what Margaret Thatcher's doing.'**

**Gibson's work has been compared to that of Thomas Pynchon, especially *Vineland*, which also contains many references to TV culture.**

**"I don't think I've been particularly influenced by *Vineland*. I have to admit to a suspicion that you might infer from bits of *Vineland* that Pynchon reads William Gibson because of the school for lady ninjas. I'm pretty sure that Pynchon hasn't been to Tokyo but I bet that I could identify his reference material. I think we had used some of the same books. I forget what the gap was but this book had obviously not taken seventeen years to write. When I finished it, I thought 'good, I hope he writes some more. Please Tom, write some more books.'**

**"The Reverend Falton thing came from American television; there is so much big-ticket Christian fundamentalist television in the States. It is really strange. I don't know how many channels I get on cable in Vancouver, maybe 20, not many by North American standards, but thee of them, 24 hours a day, are fundamentalist Christian**



TV. 24 hours a day, non-stop, mostly pretty high production values. A lot of money goes into it. I go to Los Angeles and it's 60 channels of stuff, 24 hours a day, and I always spend a hour, spaced out, clicking through, trying to figure out what it is. It's like this vast amount of space. When Americans talk about the vast sea of information and how are we going to navigate it, they mean it. One of the things I always enjoy about coming to England is that the media is so very very coherent, it has to be, because there's not so much of it. All of it pretty much makes a kind of sense. You don't get this sense of thrashing around, trying to find something that has a bit of meaning to it.

**I wondered if a religious video TV cult was more likely to arise in America than in the United Kingdom. I also wondered whether the TV cult was in Gibson's imagination, or whether it already existed.**

**"Oh well, there isn't — my satirical move there is to suggest that the television itself will become, through this process, the object of worship. But it is their primary mode of operation, it's their main medium, and has been for quite a while. If you're not into it, you forget it's there. I can't stand to watch this stuff so I just click by it but every time I'm changing channels, I click by three of these channels and there's always someone there, talking rather persuasively, and I sometimes think of all the lost lonely people who might not be able to click past. And there is always a political agenda attached,**

and it is usually highly reactionary. If you wanted, you could have all the other channels taken off, they have their own news shows, and you can live in that world.

**Lastly, I asked William Gibson, what sort of science fiction he was reading at the moment, or if not science fiction what was he reading that we should all be looking at at. His first response was a little surprising.**

**"Actually my favourite current English writer is Iain Sinclair. I've read *Downriver* about five times. I found out about Iain Sinclair quite a while ago. A friend of mine here knew about him and I wound up buying *Lud Heat*, his first book and I thought 'this is great' because I read *Hawksmoor*, and that's the thing *Hawksmoor*'s based on. But then I missed all the others, which aren't available in North America, and it wasn't until I stumbled on a copy of *Downriver* a couple of years ago. He's my big favourite on this side.**

**In SF the guy that I'm most taken with is Jack Womack, an American writer. It's a case of simultaneous evolution because Jack didn't know that cyberpunk existed and in fact had no background in SF at all. He totally invented it himself, and was three novels into doing it before he discovered, I'm sure to his bemusement, that what he was doing was being taken as sort of example of something that already existed but he did it completely independently and much more effectively. If you want to look at someone who is writing science fiction with a nasty, nasty socio-political edge, I don't think you can do much better than Womack. I forget which of his books it was but a couple of books back, I asked him "how are you doing on your new novel?" and he said "well you know, this one's in English."**

**In the promotional material that accompanied my copy of *Virtual Light*, William Gibson says "My real business has less to do with predicting technological change than making evident its excesses." This, I believe, is what he accomplished with *Virtual Light*, examining the way in which we allow our own living space to be twisted and distorted, and snatched from our grasp.**

# Children's Fantasy

—oOo—

## A Roundup Review by Jessica Yates

For young readers and adult collectors, the field of children's fantasy is rich in original stories displayed in attractive covers. Addicts should be advised that today's hardbacks have short print runs and sell out quickly, but publishers try to keep their paperbacks in print. Often the paperback cover illustrations are superior to the hardback covers, though the typeface may be tiresomely small, especially if reduced from the hardback. In this review of children's and teenage fantasy published in paperback over the last 19 months, I shall be

looking at matters of presentation as well as the quality of the text.

I open with a celebration of the writing of Diana Wynne Jones, whose second hardback publisher, Methuen, is acquiring the rights of her early paperbacks published by Puffin and Beaver in the 1970s. As far as I know hardback reissues are not planned, but the aim is to provide a complete paperback run of her novels. Nearly all are now in print with exciting new cover illustrations, mainly by Alan Fraser, who usually selects an important image symbolising the whole story and attractive to young readers.

**Eight days of Luke** (formerly in Puffin) uses the hardback typesetting: unfortunately this perpetuates a misprint on the last page which Puffin corrected. The text should read "David was rather surprised that she should be sad". The cover shows Luke, aka Loki, against a background of fiery snakes and runes. **Dogsbody** (formerly Puffin and Methuen teens) reprints the Teens typesetting: in place of the 1988 cover with its close-up of a dog's head, we see the opening Judgement scene when the three Judges sentence the raging Sirius to banishment.

**The Magicians of Caprona** (formerly Beaver), part of the Chrestomanci sequence, has a cover stressing the Renais-

sance Italianate culture that pervades the book, including the Angel on the dome, Mr Punch's stall, the leading child characters and an important cat. It also reprints the Macmillan typesetting and pagination as does **The Homeward Bounders**, now in Methuen's third try at paperbacking this science fantasy of wargaming and alternate worlds. The original 1983 cover was diabolical; the second (an earlier Alan Fraser version) was very good, combining several plot elements in one collage; this new design shows Jamie travelling through the worlds, Magritte style.

**Fire and Hemlock** also has an evocative new cover, this time showing the fire, hemlock and a copse in the distance, but no figure of Polly. Sadly, it still retains the typesetting of the 1987 paperback, which had been reduced twice, first from the American to the British hardback, then from British hardback to paperback. Look out for the Berkley American paperback in newsagents' dumpbins for about £1. The cover shows Laurel riding the horse, the caption is "Beauty is her magic. Forever is her spell...", and by pushing the reset text out to the margins, Berkley have presented this unique teen fantasy in a readable 280 pages, whereas the British edition runs to 341 pages. **Charmed Life, Witch Week and The Lives of Christopher Chant** have also been reissued with new covers.

**New in paperback is Black Maria.** After a decade in which Diana Wynne Jones seemed to have deserted the literary form in which she made her name — the one-off, pre-teen fantasy novel — for teenage love stories, sequels, short stories and adult fantasy — **Black Maria** is her first "one-off" since **A Tale of Time City** in 1987. Unusually for her, it has a heroine, who is also the first-person narrator. Mig (really Margaret), her elder brother Christian, and their mother, have been summoned to Aunt Maria's seaside house on a visit, and find themselves trapped into looking after this gorgon who at first seems wedded to a pre-war, silver-polishing lifestyle, but gradually becomes revealed as an evil genius who uses domesticity to ensnare her victims. This is a rich, ambiguous fantasy about, as it says in the blurb "the oldest struggle our world has ever known". The excellent paperback cover by Bruce Hogarth depicts Mig in writer's pose,



her brother as shape-shifted by Aunt Maria, and the mysterious green box which lies at the heart of the plot.

Interestingly and somewhat sadly, the title is vulnerable to PC thinking. We should know that, as Mig says on the first page, "Black Maria" is a card game where the object is not to end up with the Queen of Spades. The second meaning of a prison van may also be present, as Aunt Maria imprisons her relatives, but considering that many readers would be unfamiliar with these usages, the American publishers changed the title to **Aunt Maria**.

In the 1970s Diana Wynne Jones wrote three novels of high fantasy set in the imaginary world of Dalemark. Her admirers knew better than to call them a trilogy: although number two, **Drowned Ammet**, looked forward to a conclusion, number three, **The Spellcoats**, was a prequel set in Dalemark's prehistoric past; and so we have had to wait patiently for the final book, now published as **The Crown of Dalemark**, the hardback rights of the first three have reverted, so Mammoth has brought out all four in B format with superb matching covers by Geoff Taylor portraying the characters against fantastic landscapes and catching each book's theme exactly.

**Cart and Cwiddier, the first** title, is the story of Moril, son of a travelling musician, who discovers that his father is also a spy. When his father is murdered, Moril must fulfil his last dangerous assignment, to smuggle a Northern Earl's son back to the North. Dalemark, once a kingdom, is divided into North and South realms, each part subdivided into earldoms. The Northern Earls are fairly democratic, the Southern ones are tyrants.

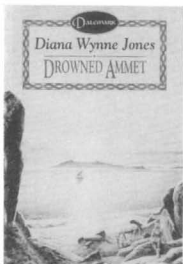
In **Drowned Ammet**, set at the same period, Nitt, growing up in the South, decides to be a revolutionary, gets involved in an assassination though not the actual murderer, and flees to the North, winning the favour of two of the "gods" of Dalemark. **The Spellcoats** goes back to the founding of Dalemark, which is under the favour of the river-god, the One, and menaced by the mage Kankredin. It is considered one of Jones's greatest books, along with **Fire and Hemlock**.

**The Crown of Dalemark** is the richly satisfying conclusion, uniting Mitt and Moril in the search for the Crown, which can only be

found when Moril plays his magic cwiddier in the right place, and for the King, who will take the Crown and unite North and South, though realistically this will take a long war when many innocents will die. Jones has devised an unusual and effective way of involving the reader in the plot, by drawing a modern girl back in time to share the adventure, and we are enthralled to find three magic-wielders from **The Spellcoats** still active in Nitt's time. The book also contains an alphabetical guide to Dalemark, and the 1993 reprint includes a map of Dalemark as well.

**Two other SF/fantasy** authors, known both for their writing for young people and adults, have recently adapted fantasy trilogies, complete in themselves, into quartets. Ursula Le Guin's **Tehanu** (reviewed in **Vector** April/May 1991 and February/March 1994) was welcomed by many, though some found it disappointing that Ged and Tenar could not defeat their worst enemy without help. Facing the challenge of feminists, that she had created a male-dominated society, Le Guin could not write about, say, women warriors or feisty princesses in Earthsea. She was committed to telling the rest of Tenar's story, and that meant writing about the women's view of dominant male power in Earthsea. Her lecture, **Earthsea Revisited**, was reviewed in **Vector** June/July 1993, and the small press publishers Green Bay have asked me to print their full address so that you may order direct: £5 post-paid in Britain or Europe from Green Bay, 72 Water Lane, Histon, Cambridge CB4 4LR.

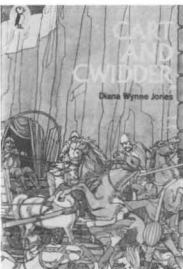
For those who haven't yet bought **Tehanu** or want a paperback for their collection, here is the choice: Puffin paperback with a lovely cover showing the dragon-child Therru, with clear but tiny print; one-volume Penguin Fantasy with the same cover (the four individual paperback covers quartered), different blurb on the back cover, same pagination and £2 more expensive; and the Penguin Roc edition which I haven't seen, but which has the same number of pages as the Puffin, and thus must be identical apart from the imprint details and price. But if you want a portable paperback which doesn't threaten eye-strain, look out for the US Bantam edition, around £4 from import shops, 252 pages to the British 204, with an embossed cover



showing the dragon and Tenar. The one-volume set would be a fine present for a teenager, but is too flimsy for library purchase: moreover, one can hardly recom-



mend that a clever nine-year-old who waltzes through the trilogy should go straight on to the adult discussions of sexuality contained in **Tehanu**!



**Diane Duane's Wizardry** trilogy did not demand a sequel, but I suppose that in tribute to her adopted home, Ireland, Diane could not resist the challenge of the "Celtic" fantasy in the Alan Garner mode, complete with Morrigan. It's actually unusual for a children's fantasy to be set in Ireland: usually it is the Cotswolds, Wales or Cornwall. I suspect Duane also pays a compliment to Anne McCaffrey in her portrait of Nita's Aunt Annie, who breeds horses in Ireland!

**A Wizard Abroad** shows Kit and Nita battling the Lone Power in the guise of Balor, the one-eyed evil god of Celtic legend, and raises certain issues in continuing the series beyond **High Wizardry**, its logical conclusion. The **Wizards' Oath** has been revised, and now includes references to "The One", presumably the same "One" as in Tolkien. I now understand why, in children's fantasy, children either travel to a secondary world or are granted magical tokens in this world which they give up at the end of the adventure. To keep your powers after the end of the story makes you super-powered: you can't go back to ordinary life.

**A Wizard Abroad** introduces a number of adult wizards sharing the adventure with Nita and Kit. They all have real-world jobs and responsibilities, but we never see them doing what we would do if, in effect, we had been turned into guardian angels. We would be forever intervening in road accidents curing folk of cancer, saving kidnapped children — and jettling off to trouble-spots worldwide. We couldn't call our lives our own. As a wizard's duty is to ease pain and avoid waste, one can't imagine these wizards passing by a major disaster or a civil war: yet Auschwitz — and Aberfan — happened. Thus wizards must be fictional and our suspension of disbelief is destroyed. Provocative and illogical if one ponders its premises, **A Wizard Abroad** is nevertheless an exciting read — and I have now come to terms with the Americanisms which affected my enjoyment of the trilogy.

For Tamora Pierce, on the other hand, the fantasy quartet is her natural form. Throughout the 1980's, instalments of the **Alanna** quartet appeared, with British fans sorely frustrated because the British editions lagged several years behind the American ones, with many delays for the paperbacks too. Fantasy was considered a minority taste, and wouldn't sell.

The **Alanna** quartet is now safe into paperback, though with unattractive covers of posed photographs. The series is exemplary feminist fantasy. Disguised as a boy, Alanna trains as a knight, and wins her knighthood before she is unmasked. She has love affairs, learns to control her magical Gift, and in the final volume returns to fight the evil Duke Roger and maybe choose her husband. The paperback editions retain the attractive typesetting of the hardbacks, and the titles are **Alanna: The First Adventure; In the Hand of The Goddess; The Girl who rides like a Man; and Lioness Rampant**.

The books' readability and sheer addictiveness stem from their origin as stories told to teenage girls "in care" when Pierce was a social worker; this accounts for their popularity, unexpected for fantasy, with inner-city teenage girls, who enjoy reading about a girl with magical and fighting skills who chooses her own lovers — that anti-pregnancy magic charm is handy too. Now a new series begins in Paperback Original, with a change of publisher, though it is the same editor who first bought the **Alanna** series for OUP, now working for Scholastic, who has bought the **Daine** series to Britain now.

Several years after **Lioness Rampant** and Alanna's marriage, a thirteen-year-old girl with the power to communicate with animals, birds and fish arrives at the court of King Jonathan and impresses him, and Sir Alanna, with her "wild magic". Daine now needs instruction to develop her craft, and secure friendship to heal wounds caused by emotional deprivation in youth. Having won her place in **Wild Magic**, she returns in **Wolf Speaker** to the wolf tribe which adopted her when bandits killed her mother, and help them fight against an evil mage who is polluting their habitat. Thus we have "Eco-fantasy" — though Tolkien got there first!

The rest of the fantasies for review are "one-offs" displaying the variety of children's fantasy today, though I would prefer to call them "universal" rather than "children's" stories. Terry Pratchett's **The Carpet People**, however naive the original edition may have been, is in its revised form a unique piece of high fantasy. In the 1960's, when most British children's fantasy was set to imitate Alan Garner rather than Tolkien, and have Celtic forces

irrupting into modern day, Pratchett looked back to Tolkien with his quest of small adults, guided by a shaman, journeying underground and threatened by ugly mounds riding on snags. I would also see parallels to Asterix in the struggle of small tribes to remain independent of the Empire, and in the personalities of the two brother-heroes, one big and tough, the other slightly built and intelligent. It is now very witty and politically aware in its revised version with the new ending, looking forward to a more peaceful way of settling inter-tribal differences.

Annie Dalton's first novel **Out of the Ordinary** created a sensation among my fellow reviewers, some of whom asked "Is this a pen-name for Diane Wynne Jones?" It wasn't; having a similar approach to fantasy writing, Dalton had the good sense to choose Jones's publisher, someone with an obvious affinity to fantasy which breaks into everyday life and transforms the hero/ine through an all-consuming supernatural confrontation. **Night Maze** updated the country-house setting of the traditional children's book, and showed two orphans (one Black) lifting a Family curse. Dalton is especially noteworthy for her poetic prose at moments of high fantasy, and her run-down inner-city settings which contrast with her fantasy worlds.

In **The Alpha Box Joss's** mother, an ex-Greenham Common woman, walks out on her husband and takes her children to a rickety house in Leicester. Teenage Joss is attracted to Asha at school, and each is separately drawn to a derelict junk shop where they acquire a gift: Asha, the mysterious Alpha Box; Joss, a supernatural guitar. Meanwhile a new rock group, the Hoarsemen, has started a cult of young people wearing black, nearly starving themselves in grief over the fate of the planet. The rich plot involves the Earthworks, which could be a sacred site or a UFO spaceport; the return of the Goddess; the sex role debate; and the Greenhouse Effect. Then into this fantastic brew irrupts a SFnal climax which appears to draw on the final Quatermass adventure, but improves on Kneale's gloomy scenario with a celebration of the Goddess's power at an outdoor rock concert.

Dalton's latest teenage paperback is **Naming The Dark**, and again she overwhelms her readers with her audacious blend of old and new, this time the



search for lost Atlantis in a 90's youth culture setting. Place and personal names are often significant. Owen Fisher (recalling the Grail legend) lives in Loxely (not Robin Hood's Loxely, but suggestive of something), and although he resolves to ignore strange messages such as "They are rising from the sea", he must eventually take up the quest, become a hero and heal the distressed lands. Underlying themes are: the conflict between men and women, death, and the disillusionment of unfulfilled adults. The tantalising hardback jacket illustration which shows Owen moving through different planes of existence on his quest, is also used for the paperback. If **The Alpha Box** is about saving the world, **Naming the Dark** is about saving your own part of it, and growing up to know yourself: what a brilliant pair of young adult fantasies.

**Annie Dalton** also writes for younger readers, and **The Witch Rose** and **The After-Dark Princess** have now been joined by **Swan Sister**, a poetic fantasy set on the East Suffolk marshes about a family under stress whose baby daughter is bewitched, then kidnapped, by the wild swans. Nature must take revenge on the father, who helped to design a power station which is polluting the marshes. But the swans relent...

**Celtic fantasy is represented** by two novels, one set in Celtic times, one in our times, and the otherworld. **Juniper** is the prequel to **Wise Child** by Monica Furlong. These two stories recreate the lives of wise women in post-Roman Britain when they practised not only herbal healing but also real magic, with powers won by study, memory and physical endurance. Juniper is the daughter of Marcus Cunomoros of Cornwall, and learns the arts from Euny, a dedicated but harsh wise woman. Furlong is not a specialist children's writer, but a journalist and theologian; the books are well constructed, but slow to get into their stride, and will probably not appeal to the average child, but might interest girls awakening to feminism.

**Fintan's Tower** by Catherine Fisher is Garnerian in its plundering of Celtic motifs. Jamie is reading in a public library when three men enter, one at a time, each uttering a curious password phrase about a Name in a Book. They make off behind the shelves to a secret door. Jamie also gives the password, goes through the

door, and finds *his own name* in a magic book. Soon he is on a quest to Fintan's Tower in the Summer Country where Gweir has been imprisoned ever since Arthur's quest to the otherworld in search of the Cauldron of Wisdom. Inspired by the Welsh poem 'The Spoils of Annwn', this is an excellent follow-up to Fisher's first Celtic fantasy **The Conjuror's Game** with the advantage, for today's child, that her books are a good deal shorter and easier to untangle than Garner's, but still a good way into Celtic myth for the young.

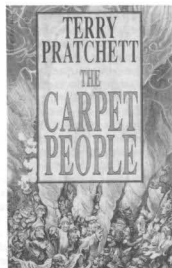
**Also drawing on folklore, Al-bion's Dream** is a "Saxon" rather than "Celtic" fantasy, and is an amazing first novel with an original plot but a traditional prep-school setting. Edward Yeoman discovers a board-game hidden in his uncle's farmhouse. It is a family heirloom, but has a curse on it: the course of the game affect real life in a distorted way. The game's tokens and locations combine the Tarot, legend, religion and Watkins' ley-line theories, and the author teases the reader by describing the course of the games, but never fully explaining the rules. It nearly ends in tragedy as the boys use the game to get revenge on their hated headmaster. This fantasy is a real find which must not sink without trace just because the author hasn't written anything else to boost his reputation.

**Finally, I am drawing attention** to a new series of fantasy titles for teenagers. Named after the best-selling 'Point Horror' series, as 'Point Fantasy', and created by the educational publishers Scholastic, they combine British and American titles, reprints and paperback originals. Can children's fantasy be composed by the yard, in front of the typewriter, instead of from the author's innermost being, often tried out on child listeners first? And can this commercial type of fantasy succeed with reluctant readers where middle-class, literary fantasy has failed? even with the aid of embossed titles on bright covers, and archaic chapter-heading lettering within??

**Dragonsbane** by Patricia C. Wrede is the retitled **Dealing with Dragons** (USA, 1980), and thus bought in, not commissioned. The author is a well known fantasy writer, and this story about a feminist princess who doesn't want to be married off, and runs away to keep a dragon's cave in order, is well enough, but the ironic



comments about a princess's proper role become tedious, and the Americanisms like "fixing dinner", "start over" and "snacking on" destroy the fantasy atmosphere. In



his book wizards are wicked, but the antidote to their power — a bucket of soapy water — is frankly preposterous.

**Doom Sword** by Peter Beere, is a British author who writes in his spare time, is like the



novelisation of a D&D game, so ought to appeal to the target readership. Adam, a boy from our world, searching among his dead grandfather's possessions, finds a magic sword bought here by a warrior fleeing a Dark Lord. The warrior was his grandfather, who crossed between worlds with the sword's power. Soon Adam is tracked down and drawn into the magic world, where he finds a huntress who teaches him the conditions laid down to wield or destroy the sword. She tells him that it may be destroyed by being plunged into "the Eternal Fire... which burns within the hills beyond the Bridge of Doom. But I cannot take the sword (says she), for it would claim my heart and sacrifice my soul". I've heard all this before somewhere! Actually I rather enjoyed Beere's unpretentious send-up of Tolkien and sword-and-sorcery.

**Healer's Quest** by Jessica Palmer is set in a world of Gods, wizards and elementals, and on several planes of existence, and describes the adventures of two half-breeds, a girl who is the offspring of an elemental and a human, and a half-elf. It comes with an appendix about the Renegades World and is probably too elaborate a work for the Point Fantasy series which aims for a mass readership. A sequel is promised; for myself, I found the mix of cultures plundered to write this book just plain confusing at first; it improved on second reading.

**Brog The Stoop** by Joe Boyle is mainly about non-humans. Brian Froud's cover drawing of Stoops reminds us of *The Dark Crystal*, as, coincidentally, does the plot. It is a tale of heroism against the dark, Stoop versus Gork with a little human aid, and has affinities with animal quest fantasy.

**The most accomplished** of the launch titles is the humorous **Foiling the Dragon** by Susan Price, a long established British writer in several genres. In a mediaeval fantasy world, an alternate to ours in which sorcery is a profession co-existing with Christianity and other faiths, and Cart-hage is a major city, Henry V has just become king of Angamark (England?). He desires to reconquer Dragonsheim, a breakaway state (the North of England or Scotland?) which pays tribute to its dragon provided that the dragon keeps the Angamark army away. The "tribute" is a succession of bards to sing its praises. When it gets bored with

the bard — chomp! Paul, a pun poet from our world, is bought into Dragonsheim by its sorceress, who has already snatched away and disposed of many of our poets, such as Marlowe and Coleridge. The tale is witty and told mainly through Paul's astonished experience, the rational and talking dragon truly unpleasant, and at the back lies the realistic issue of what a nation could do when faced with an unstoppable, implacable enemy: apparently the dragon is physically invulnerable.

**For both quality and readability, Foiling the Dragon** is worth collecting, and now that the Daine series by Tamora Pierce has joined the Point Fantasy list, its general quality is assured, though individual titles might still be dull or too complicated. Youth librarians may confidently buy a copy of everything on the list, if not as good books in their own right, as the bridge for something better, either other fantasy authors recommended in this piece, or on to adult fantasy, sword-and-sorcery, and even SF.

## Booklist

Diane Wynne Jones  
Eight Days of Luke, Mammoth, 1992, 165pp, £2.99  
Dogsbody, Mammoth, 1993, 202pp £3.50  
The Magicians of Caprona, Mammoth, 1992, 223pp, £2.99  
The Homeward Bounders, Mammoth, 1993, 224pp, £3.50  
Fire and Hemlock, Mammoth, 1993, 341pp, £3.50  
Fire and Hemlock, Berkley Books, New York, 1986, 280pp \$2.95 or secondhand  
Black Maria, Mammoth, 1992, 206pp, £2.99  
The Dalemard Quartet: Cart and Cwider, Mammoth, 1993, 214pp, £3.99  
Drowned Ammet, Mammoth, 1993, 312pp, £3.99  
The Spellcoats, Mammoth, 1993, 279pp, £3.99

The Crown of Dalemard, Mammoth, 1993, 493pp, £4.99

Ursula Le Guin  
Tehanu, Puffin, 1992, 204pp, £3.50; also Roc, 1993, 204pp, £4.99  
Tehanu, Santam, 1991, 252pp, \$4.95  
The Earthsea Quartet, Puffin, 1993, 691pp £6.99pp; also Penguin £8.99

Diane Duane  
A Wizard Abroad, Corgi, 1993, 285pp, £2.99

Tamora Pierce  
The Song of the Lioness (quartet): Alanna: the First Adventure, In the Hand of the Goddess, The Girl who rides like a man (original hardback title, The Woman who rides like a man); and Lioness Rampart. All Red Fox, 1992, £3.50; 241pp, 232pp, 253pp, 320pp  
Wild Magic, Scholastic, 1993, 344pp, £3.99  
Wolf Speaker, Scholastic Point Fantasy, 1994, 323pp, £3.99

Terry Pratchett  
The Carpet People, Corgi, 1993, 190pp, £3.99

Annie Dalton  
The Alpha Box, Mammoth, 1992, 192pp, £2.99  
Naming the Dark, Mammoth, 1994, 232pp, £2.99  
Swan Sister, Mammoth, 1993, 122pp, £2.99

Monica Furlong  
Juniper (Original hardback title A Year and a Day), Corgi, 1992, 189pp, £2.99

Catherine Fisher  
Fintans Tower, Red Fox, 1992, 120pp, £2.99

Roger Norman  
Albion's Dream, Faber, 1992, 184pp, £3.50

## Point Fantasy

Patricia C. Wrede  
Dragonsbane, Scholastic, 1993, 250pp, £3.50

Peter Beere  
Doom Sword, Scholastic, 1993, 227pp £3.50

Jessica Palmer  
Healer Quest, Scholastic, 298pp, £3.50

Joe Boyle  
Brog The Stoop, Scholastic, 1993, 295pp, £3.50

Susan Price  
Foiling The Dragon, Scholastic, 1994, 260pp, £3.50



# Remembering



## The Memory of Whiteness by Kim Stanley Robinson

### KV Bailey

P  
C o m p a s s  
i n t  
s 10

Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Memory Of Whiteness* has occupied my imagination often over the past decade. Its metaphors have helped link experiences of music to thoughts about the nature and structures of reality. Additionally its images of space-travel remain a delight.

One of Robert Browning's *Dramatis Personae* is a soliloquy spoken by the eighteenth-century organist Abt Vogler after, as Browning state, "extemporising on the instrument of his invention". The abbot builds palaces and universes of chords and transpositions which range the heights and depths, discords only serving to make precious the harmonies — "On earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round". Stan Robinson's archetypal figure, Arthur Holywelkin (mythic hero/holistic cosmos?), was such a future composer, improviser and scientist-inventor. Inheritor of his uniquely physics-based music, of his skills and of the electronically engineered Orchestra he created, is Johannes Wright, a name evocative of 'artificer' and of Bach, the "mathematical master". Johannes with his entourage of technicians and security personnel tours the Orchestra sunwards from Pluto to Mercury, performing on populated planets, moons and asteroids.

#### Why security personnel?

Holywelkin music can produce Dionysian audience surges. Moreover, there is a cloak-and-dagger thread — the discord element, if you like — counterpointing the epic symphonies and resounding codas. That strand of the story, involving both threats to and

Initiations of Johannes, is both melodramatic but significant. The Greys, responsible for these intrusive initiatives are a shadowy sect centred on Mercury and on Icarus, that asteroid having been terraformed to the likeness of a Persian landscape. With their Phrygian ritual bonnets, they are in the line of descent from ancient Persia's Mithraists. They are in communion with the sun, possessing that knowledge of necessity expressed by their "Father", Zervan, when he says: "Note follows note in Sol's eternal score, and all our destinies are written there." This knowledge was communicated to Arthur Holywelkin (so his diary records) on Icarus prior to a preternatural experience of the sun's "sound-fire", an illumination which supported the concept that everything that exists in time, every vibratory "glint", is eternally determined in each of its momentary configurations. Zervan also instructed Holywelkin to build his Orchestra to be an instrument of revelation — "the model of the voice of Sol" — when it passes

into the hands of a distantly succeeding Master (who will be Johannes).

In his turn, Johannes, having been led to discover his predecessor's diary, makes his way to Icarus, confronts Zervan, and is similarly indoctrinated, being persuaded that the quantum uncertainty principle is an artefact arising out of incomplete understanding of movements within "the absolutely predictable mesh of the ten forms of change of Holywelkin physics" — a dialectical shift such as determinism rules again and the universe is a representation of eternal recurrence Johannes then also undergoes a reinforcing visionary, (though ostensibly veridical) experience. His consciousness is temporarily liberated from time into eternity so that he perceives the helical 'long bodies' of the solar system and the galaxies as they exist in time. Ultimately he apprehends what is described as "the chrysanthemum universe", all possible universes beheld as a plenum of clustered white petals, fixed for ever, and recurrently "sparked in every patch of darkness" until there is no darkness, only an unchanging whiteness to be remembered.

Remember it Johannes does, and is overwhelmed by its implications. The memory makes him almost catatonically obsessive, persuading him at last to immolate himself and his Orchestra in one of the planet-sustaining singularities which Holywelkin technology has created at the sun's edge. It is these singularities that transmit by "whitelines" solar energy to "whitsuns", satellite mini-suns which have enabled colonisation of the system. The word "whitsun" carries a symbolic charge: it names the Christian festival celebrating a manifestation of the Holy Ghost as "tongues parting asunder like as of fire" alighting on the apostles. It is a symbolism underlying the words of one of Johannes' sorrowing followers when she says "Johannes is dead, and scattered through all the system. when the story of his death becomes known, all the worlds lit by those whitsuns will change." Seen in this aspect Johannes appears Apollonian, enacting the solar myth of a dying and reborn sun. He is also Faustian; and these two aspects are combined in the epitaph spoken by Ekern, his adversary and deceiver, Mephistopheles to

his Faust, Hermes to his Apollo. It is the opening lines of Marlowe's end-chorus from *Dr Faustus*: "Cut is the branch that might have grown full strong", continuing: "And burned is Apollo's laurel bough."

**Ernst Ekern's base** is a spaceship named *The Duke of Vienna*, recalling the clandestinely manipulative Duke of *Measure for Measure*. In his ambivalent relationship with the Greys, Ekern sees them, and also the whole Johannes circus, as actors in his "metadrama" where "all life is performance". "I am the Duke of Vienna," he fantasises, "in secret control of my kingdom. I rule these poor fearful fools above me." Like Shakespeare's original, he is a planner of tricks and deceptions. As reluctant giver of the Orchestra to Johannes, he echoes trickster Hermes passing the lyre to Apollo, god of music. As Mephistopheles deceived Faust by hallucinations and impersonations, so, to prompt Johannes, Ekern appears to have forged the Holywelkin diary (though it may yet have been true); and he has hidden in *The Duke of Vienna* a replica Orchestra.

The interpenetrative allusions in this novel are consonant with its many speculative branchings. It is so complex a fiction, on occasion switching person or tense, that there is a valid role for the stabilising auctorial voice

employed in direct "dear Reader" asides and exhortations. Oddly, this quaintly archaic convention, given such context, does not jar. It opens both Chapter One and the final paragraph, and appears regularly when some transformation or detached conspectus is required. The 'voice' commands time, monitors change, partners Einstein with Heraclitus, and throughout constitutes a kind of anchor of observing and appraising common-sense.

**I said at the outset** that the 'space travel' element was a delight. If the recurring universe is one great undifferentiated whiteness, that visualised condition is offset by an exhilarating variety of planetary homes. The "bubble-discontinuities" of the 'Floaring Worlds' sub-chapter, Sanadhi, Sappho, An-Athos (presented as macrocosmic analogues of the skull-enclosed discontinuities that are human lives) are as memorable as are the isolated communities and landscapes of the author's more recent *A Short Sharp Shock*. Mars in particular "the planet of promise", is seen in glowing environmental detail. It is a Mars of the year 3229; not the world of the *Red Mars* trilogy, but the tensions of that trilogy, between a Mars dependent on externally controlled technologies and a freely self-dependent Mars are clearly foreshadowed. In the elections pending at the time of the Orchestra's performance, such is the issue between the parties of *Red Mars* and *Green Mars*.

**This antithesis** corresponds symbolically to the ambiguous physic/metaphysics which pervade the novel. We are left uncertain whether Holywelkin music, when "played by full human orchestras" on the projected return to Mars, will inspire freedom, or whether, even so, that experienced freedom may be, metaphysically regarded, a masking trick — that is, whether the deterministic doctrine of the Greys is, after all, the unfaceable reality. The auctorial end paragraph suggests a message of both renewal and recurrence in its concluding words addressed to "dear Reader": "But now you have read [this tale], and in your brain a whitsun burns forever." True enough.

**At 51 it was his first SF** novel, published in 1968; and by common consent he never wrote a better in the brief ten years that followed, before he retired from the SF field. It is terse (my 1972 Pan paperback has 188 short pages) and the narrative pulls you through without effort; yet it leaves you with the fun of sorting out a mind-bogglingly complex tangle.

**That's how I remembered it.**

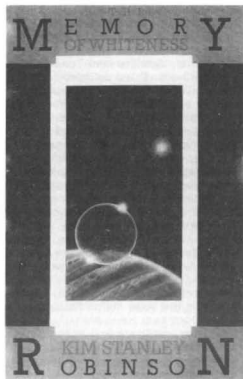
Confined indoors with the aftermath of flu, I took it down and read it again. It still held my fascinated attention to the end.

**The question with any SF** story as you start reading is, "Where and when are we?" In this book it's a key problem.

**On the first page we meet** Haldane IV, a Californian student, at the crucial moment when he takes a wrong turn and drives down "a lane to Hell", following the directions of his room-mate who is a student of "theological-cybernetics". Instead of arriving at the science museum, he finds himself at an art gallery, and sees ahead of him "the girl with the hips". Fascinated, he chats her up, and is hooked.

**Aspiring SF authors could** well study the next eighty pages, describing the intricacies of their affair and its dangers, for the deft way in which the author builds up an increasingly puzzling social picture, without indigestible info-dumps. Here is a puritanical, rigidly stratified society; Haldane IV's classification is M-5, which means he is a mathematician; alas, "the girl with the hips", Helix, is A-7, Poetry. Liaisons between the grades is illegal; marriages are within professions and arranged by geneticists; meanwhile young men (but not young women!) are expected to appease their "atavistic" needs in the houses of prostitution.

**Haldane IV as a** mathematician reveres the memory of the greatest of them all, Fairweather I, "the man who designed the Pope" (an infallible computer replacing the human variety). Helix reveals that the same man also wrote poetry, but nothing as good as Shelley's 'Ode to the South Wind' (eh?). Moreover, he also developed the Simultaneity Principle, masterminded the first space exploration and devised the starship — which were now used to take criminals and deviants to the planet Hell. And he did all this in the early nineteenth century,



although he was bought to trial and excommunicated in 1850.

#### So where and when are we?

Clearly we are on Earth, in an alternative time stream: where Lincoln brought about the triumph of the United Nations and delivered the Johannesburg Address; and where Jesus Christ lived to the age of seventy, establishing His church with its symbol of the crossbow (not the cross) and finally dying leading a successful war against the Romans.

#### Helix of course become

pregnant, their liaison is discovered and both are arrested for miscegenation. From here on, Haldane IV finds himself stumbling through successive layers of disillusion and bewilderment. After a weird trial (as part of which each of the jurors, representing different professions, interviews him privately) he and Helix are sent (drugged and unconscious) via starship to Hell, "riding a wave of simultaneity". The trip takes three months, "and every minute on the ship's clocks reversed a day on Earth". And wouldn't you know? Hell' too isn't how he expected it; it's the antithesis of his Earth.

#### In the astonishing

conclusion (and there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you this because it won't in the least spoil your enjoyment of the story) he uses the Simultaneity Principle to travel to Earth two millennia back in time... under the invented name of Judas Iscariot; he doesn't carry out his full instructions, but he certainly alters history. I was going to say he does so 'in spectacular fashion', but the adjective is wrong; Boyd wisely

# Remembering



## The Last Spaceship from Earth by John Boyd

# Norman Beswick

Compass  
Points  
11

makes us guess what happened without graphic description, apart from a reference to Haldane IV laying "the hissed-dragged body of Jesus into the one-seater right after the Crucifixion". (And guess where he sent Him? Hell.) An epilogue shows a secretly immortal "Hal Dane" in a twentieth century Earth where everything is changed, chatting up (once again) a pretty girl student.

**At this point, having picked** up most of the clues, we can start sorting out the tangle, which is full of pairs and parallels. Hell planet, where technology is less advanced, resembles Earth I, 355 years earlier. Its guiding principle is Love, whereas Earth I represented Justice; if Haldane IV had obeyed his instructions to the letter, the resulting society might have been a perfect fusion of the two, a world where Justice and Love combined and were equal. But the Earth of the epilogue is clearly less than perfect, because it was altered by a fallible human disobeying instructions.

**And what of the Simultaneity Principle?** Haldane IV says of it, "You understand Fairweather by a trick of the mind. You have to think in non human-concepts." It involves the idea that "time and light are... the same phenomena expressed in different media", and seems to imply that one solid object can exist in two places at the same time. One gets a hint of an implication, that humans

themselves can live "simultaneously" in both Earth and Hell. (I confess that I am unclear why the trip to Hell goes backwards in time, and yet the starships return from whence they came. Maybe one of you can explain.)

**Which was "the last starship from Earth"?** In one sense it must be Haldane IV's ship, taking the drugged Jesus away to his final destination. But Hell planet was established and set up by inhabitants of Earth I, which no longer exists. In the twentieth century Earth II of the Epilogue, it is clear that starships have not yet been invented; they remain a future possibility. So perhaps in Earth II the last starship, like the first, has not yet taken off.

**There's more if you like to** probe the humour, for instance: the descriptions of Earth I also read as tongue-in-cheek satire of our own times, and the novel manages to end on a very minor giggle.

**But somehow the text** manages to evade the questions which strict Christian believers might put: like "Do you really think that Jesus might have ended up fighting the Romans?" and other big, theological posers. It isn't that sort of book: complete entirely in itself, a complex entertaining world that keeps the reader alert and on the edge of his seat.

**Or so I think. See if you** agree.



# Cross-Reference and Context: Future Histories in SF

## Stephen Baxter

Robert Sawyer is quoted in *Matrix 110* as having no interest in trying to tie together his sf novels into a single *Future History*, after the fashion of Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein et al. "Frankly, I have no interest in doing that," he says. "Indeed I'm always surprised that any sf writer would want to do it. One of the great joys of writing sf is the building of new worlds and new histories. Limiting one's entire life's work to a single world seems a terrible constraint..."

That's a valid point of view. But in the same edition of *Matrix* there is announced the forthcoming UK publication of Asimov's *Forward The Foundation*, the seventh and concluding volume of his *Foundation* series. And in July, HarperCollins UK will be publishing my new novel *Ring*. This will be the fourth book set against the background of my own *Xeelee Sequence* *Future History* (the others were *Raft* (1991), *Timelike Infinity* (1992), and *Flux* (1993)), and my fifth novel overall (the other was *Anti-Ice* (1993), set in alternate 19th century).

So *Future Histories* are still being published, and can prove immensely successful; the original

*Foundation* trilogy has regularly been voted the most popular work ever in sf, and the late *Foundation/Robot* novels earned Isaac advances anyone would envy — and got him onto the best-seller lists.

Clearly not everyone agrees with Robert Sawyer.

What, then, do we mean by a *Future History* in sf? And what are its appeals and drawbacks for readers and writers?

Oddly, given that the *Future History* technique underpins some of sf's most popular and enduring works, you'll find no definition of the term in the Clute/Nichols *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* (though there are cross-references to other entries). A working definition of a *Future History* is: *a body of fiction (novels and/or short works) by a single hand (to distinguish the concept from sharecropping) set against a consistent background of events and characters, and spanning significant intervals of space and time*. Examples include Asimov's *Robot* and *Foundation* series, Heinlein's prototypical *Future History* and Niven's *Known Space* series.

If this seems a little vague (don't blame me, I'm no Clute) a

better definition may be the one pioneered in practice by Robert Heinlein, in the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1941: *if it has a timeline, it's a Future History*.

Generally a *Future History* provides an explanatory framework for the development of a consistent future, optionally starting from the present. Thus my own *Xeelee Sequence* follows the expansion of mankind across and out of the Solar System, man's interaction with a complex community of extrasolar alien species dominated by the enigmatic *Xeelee*, and finally the revelation of the universe's central conflict and the destiny of humankind.

Why are *Future Histories* so popular?

For the bookseller, of course, a timeline is a way to tie in the reader to the rest of an author's work. And in return, with the most successful *Histories*, cross-reference and context can provide a loyal reader with the magic of a glimpse *beyond* a single piece of fiction and into the fully integrated future: there is an element of security, perhaps, in the feeling that one is reading within a defined framework — the *Star Trek* syndrome — but I would argue that this is offset, for the reader of the better *Histories*, by a sense that one is participating in the unfolding of a major work-in-progress.

As for the writer, a *Future History* schema is a way of tying together ideas which are, perhaps, disparate — and it is also a framework which can stimulate new ideas. I suspect that the best *Histories* are grown organically — allowed to develop alongside the author's deepening exploration of his/her own subject matter. Niven is a good example of this: *Known Space* was initiated in Niven's first published story 'The Coldest Place' (1964), and has been added to ever since, most recently in his *Crashlander* collection, and including the memorable *Ringworld*.

Similarly my own first-published story, 'The Xeelee Flower' (*Interzone* 19, 1987), introduce the *Xeelee* universe — but almost as an afterthought. The plot of that story required powerful, off-stage aliens, and so the *Xeelee* were devised. Later I realised that fresh story ideas could be enhanced by being set against the background I'd already sketched, and so the *Xeelee*

universe slowly emerged — as much a revelation to me as to the reader. By 1991, I'd developed, in 70,000 words of short fiction, a consistent narrative spanning the evolution of the *Xeelee* universe. However — with the encouragement of Malcolm Edwards at HarperCollins — I've now reworked the spine of the *Sequence*: of the four novels, *Timelike Infinity* and *Ring* together provide the core of the narrative, while *Raft* and *Flux* are episodes set against the general background. In addition, there are to date around 15 short stories published, or to be published. (By the way, that lost 70,000 word version could probably be reconstructed from the *Xeelee* short material published to 1991. An exercise for the reader?... Or maybe not!).

**What about the constraints** a Future History places on a writer — constraints to which Sawyer alludes? Of course it's true that working within a unified background leads to problems of continuity — and, as Future Histories grow like coral, such limits tend to grow even tighter. Niven has admitted that fundamental revelations of his *Known Space* novel *Protector* (1973) made it difficult to maintain internal consistency afterwards, and Asimov described the difficulties of providing essential background detail for readers of later *Foundation* episodes — in one memorable example we are treated to several dozen pages of a teenage girl writing a historical essay as a school exercise... Some of my earlier stories have become invalidated by later development of the *Xeelee* material, or have been subsumed into the novels (the seed of *Raft* was a short story of the same name in *Interzone* 31).

**In fact, perhaps because** of the various constraints — and perhaps because an author's interests and grasp evolve — writers generally see to visit their Future Histories less and less as time goes on. (So Sawyer is wrong to say that a Future History has to be "an entire life's work".) And maybe this is just as well: as Sawyer was hinting, the examples we have of writers who *have* returned to the Histories of their youth aren't too encouraging.

**Heinlein had abandoned his** Future History by 1950, then returned to it at the end of his life with his bizarre Lazarus Long novels. Asimov had completed his

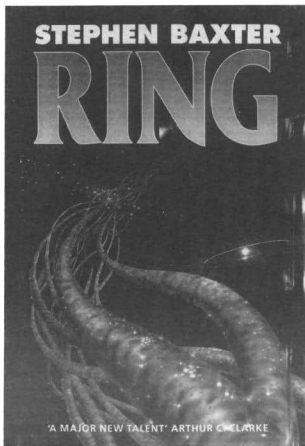
first cycle of *Foundation* and *Robot* books by 1958 — only to return two decades later, when he proceeded, with a new novel sequence, to unify the two seemingly incompatible series. These late novels, both by Heinlein and Asimov, achieved commercial success, but suffered near-universal critical panning. Older writers, for better or worse, have a different agenda to their younger selves. At best such exercises in reworking seem self-indulgent; at worst, they have the whiff of greed. There is something offensive about the reinterpretation — for major advances — of antique, perhaps well-loved material by an author whose eye is, perhaps jaundiced by time, or whose self-critical faculties have loosened...

**So there are pitfalls in the** Future History technique. But so fundamentally appealing is the Future History concept that sometime *Future Histories* seem to grow of their own accord, regardless of the author's intent: like an eye finding images in clouds, the reader's mind seems able, and willing, to conjure a consistent background from narrative fragments. Priest's *The Space Machine* (1976), is an enjoyable cross between Well's *The Time Machine* (1895) and

*The War Of The Worlds* (1898): we see Time Machine technology used against the Martians, in a unified history Wells certainly never intended. And, for readers of my generation, a first exposure to Future History was in the pages of *TV21*, in whose pages was constructed a consistent (more or less) 21st century world from elements of Gerry Anderson puppet series (cheerfully ignoring the fact that Anderson had no such overall design in mind). Watching Fireball spacecraft thundering to the aid of Captain Scarlet was, for me, an early example of the pleasures of context and cross-reference — although I mightn't have expressed it like that at the age of ten.

**So, overall, we've seen** plenty of evidence that Robert Sawyer's view isn't universally held: the judgement of readers and marketplace alike is that Future Histories have a great deal of appeal.

**And before you ask — yes,** *Ring* includes a timeline for the *Xeelee* sequence; and no, I've no plans to produce seven fat volumes linking the worlds of the *Xeelee* sequence and *Anti-Ice* — not without at least a seven-figure advance...



# TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING

A Historical Survey of

## TV SF

by John Madracki

Television has always had the potential to be a suitable medium for Science Fiction — being widely accessible and possessing not only the intimacy required for an intricate discourse but also the scope for illustrative visual effects — and its history is studded with brilliant examples of the genre.

Scanning the current programme listings, where evocative titles abound and descriptive terms such as "extra-terrestrial", "time-travelling" and "inter-planetary" are rife, would seem to indicate that the SF enthusiast is well served. But this is far from being the case; when the shows are viewed the sad truth unfolds.

The vast majority are no more than animated pap featuring everything from mutant turtles and galaxy rangers to toxic crusaders and killer tomatoes. Mainly produced in America for an international market, they are by necessity restricted to a bland universality, often sopped with fashionable environmentalism. While they may temporarily engage the attention of a restless toddler they are otherwise without merit.

The live action SF for youngsters is only marginally better. Innocuous shows like *Watt on Earth*, *Kappatoo*, *Wysiwig* and *Torch* may be perfectly acceptable forms of entertainment — strands of fantasy are frequently woven into fiction for children — but they are not SF.

Science Fiction is essentially concerned with conceptual exploration, and it takes more than sophisticated gadgetry, bizarre costumes and an overworked 'electronic paintbox' for a programme to be worthy of the term.

A prime example of this ersatz sci-fi is *Dark Season*, by Russell T Davies. An exercise in adolescent paranoia, it makes much use of neo-nazism and populist mythology to drive home its 'message' but succeeds only in coming across as a kind of sinister *Grange Hill*.

It is almost enough to make one yearn for the return of those tiresome *Tripods*, (BBC '84). This was a joint venture with Australia and America and although co-productions are now common they seldom work., (witness the recent rehash of *The Tomorrow People*), and it is little more usual for countries to offer 'home-grown'

gross in direct exchange. Unfortunately, this obligatory influx of antipodean awfulness and transatlantic trash accounts for much of the sci-fi on our screens today.

From 'down under' we have had *The Boy From Andromeda*, (the tale of a boy with 'magic rocks'), *The Girl From Tomorrow* and the execrable *Miraculous Mellops*.

From Stateside we are more likely to get series than serials, but these are equally feeble, lacking even the vestiges of originality and firmly rooted in previous successes. Out of this *World*, a show so derivative that even its title has been used twice before, is typical, based on the 'situation' of someone with supernormal powers, (in this case a cute half-breed alienette), living incognito in Middle American suburbia, it has many noteworthy predecessors: *My Living Doll* (a cute robot — CBS '64), *I Dream of Jeannie* (a cute genie — NBC '65), the enchanting *Bewitched* (inspired by the film *I Married a Witch* — ABC '64) and, in particular, the less charming sequel, *Tabitha* (ABC '77).

The anthropomorphic squasquatch that a hapless family find themselves lumbered with in *Harry and the Hendersons* owes much to the wisecracking horse that Wilbur Post was saddled with in *Mr Ed* (CBS '60) — a simple transition from Bigmouth to Bigfoot — while the obnoxious *Alf* is obviously degenerated from the avuncular alien that was *My Favorite Martian* (CBS '63).

It all amounts to 'robot entertainment' at its most sterile, and can only condition a child to expect nothing more from SF than "Treasure Island in Outer Space" and "Hard Times on Planet Earth".

But what of the more mature viewer?

Well, at the time of writing — if one disregards the numerous repeats, and the continuing saga of Capt. Picard and his intrepid band of social workers, still boldly patronising where no one has patronised before, in *Star Trek: The New Generation* — there are only two regular SF series aimed at an adult audience.

The first, from the US, is *Quantum Leap* — which completely wasted its potential when the clever device, used to facilitate the time-hopping hero, became nothing more than a hook on which to hang a string of



routine melodramas — while the UK continuation rests solely with the abysmal **Red Dwarf**.

**So what went wrong? What happened to all that early promise?**

In order to answer that, and put the whole history of TVSF into perspective, we have to go back to its inception — forty years ago.

**1953 was a memorable year;** not least for being a time of full employment. Hillary and Tensing scaled Everest, Elizabeth II ascended to the throne and myxomatosis arrived in Britain. John Christie was hanged, Stalin died and Russia tested her first H bomb. Picture-goers became acquainted with 3-D and Cinemascope, readers were introduced to James Bond and **Playboy**, and music lovers were treated to the first performance of Shostakovich's 10th Symphony, while the rest of us were singing along to 'How Much is that Doggy in the Window?'

It was also a significant year for Science Fiction. **War of the Worlds** and **Invaders from Mars** could be seen at the cinema, and there was a record number of UFO sightings throughout the Western world. Thirteen new SF magazines were launched and books published included Theodore Sturgeon's **More than Human** and Ray Bradbury's **Fahrenheit 451**. Hugos were awarded for the first time — the best novel being Alfred Bester's **The Demolished Man**, while the number one Fan was the redoubtable Forrest J Ackerman. And on the radio, Jet Morgan and his crew were preparing to **Journey into Space** to save **The World in Peril**.

Then on July 18, a television thriller, written by a Manx author and provisionally titled **Bring Something Back**, hit the small screen — and TVSF was born.

Of course, strictly speaking, this distinction should really go to America for their **Captain Video**, which began in 1949. But, despite the fact that it boasted scripts by Damon Knight and Robert Shekley, and undoubtedly inspired a whole generation of nascent SF writers and fans, it was essentially intended as a kiddishow, and as such it set the standard for virtually the entire output of US TVSF for the next ten years. Much of it was movie-matinee sensationalism — **Buck Rogers** ('50), **Flash Gordon** ('51), **Superman** ('53), **Captain**

**Midnight** ('54) and **Commander Cody** ('55) — while the rest was mainly made up of educational serials — **Tom Corbett, Space Cadet** ('50) and **Space Patrol** ('54) — and dramatise lectures, that were strong on science but short on fiction — **Out of this World** ('52) and **Science Fiction Theatre** ('55). Only **Tales of Tomorrow** ('52) made any real attempt at SF as we know it. An anthology series, it was an ambitious project but suffered badly from the restrictions of a live studio presentation, the decade closed with **World of Giants** ('59), which featured a six-inch high secret agent, and was only made possible by the producer having access to the props that were used in the film, **The Incredible Shrinking Man**, two years before.

No, the honour of the first ever real TVSF must go to the BBC, Nigel Kneale and the 'thriller' that emerged as **The Quatermass Experiment** in the summer of 1953. Starring Reginald Tate as the eponymous professor, this six part serial was an intelligent adult drama and it was the intention of Rudolph Cartier, the producer, to challenge Hollywood and 'lift this production above the level of strip cartoons and magazine thrillers.' There were two sequels — **Quatermass II** ('55), with John Robinson as the Prof., who was then replaced by Andre Morell in **Quatermass and the Pit** ('58). Unfortunately, only the first two episodes of **The Quatermass Experiment** have survived, and while the second two series in the trilogy remain intact they are, being of poor quality black & white, doomed to lie entombed in the Corporation's archives.

However, all three stories were later filmed by Hammer. The first two, despite the miscasting of Brian Donlevy who chose to portray the renegade scientist as a shambling, gruff voiced overcoat, are still terrific movies and succeed in capturing the spirit of the originals. The first was released as **The Quatermass Experiment** (aka **The Creeping Unknown** — '55), the second with its title untouched but also known as **Enemy from Space** ('57). **Quatermass and the Pit** (aka **Five Million Years to Earth**) didn't appear until 1968. It had Andrew Keir in the title role, ably supported by the ever beautiful Barbara Shelley, and is probably my favourite of the three.

Nigel Kneale has been a prolific writer for television and his consummate skill in combining science with the supernatural has provided us with some of the finest drama in the genre. In 1954 he penned a superb adaptation of Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, (which allowed Peter Cushing to reap a well deserved award for his Winston Smith), and made history for a second time. 1984 was later remade in 1965, from the same script, but was only a pale shadow of the original. In 1955, Kneale gave us **The Creature**; followed by **The Road** ('63), **The Year of the Sex Olympics** ('69) and the chilling **Stone Tape** ('72). Then came a six part series, **Beasts** ('76), before coming full circle with **The Quatermass Conclusion** ('79), starring Sir John Mills. But back to the fifties, when even the junior sci-fi was not without merit. In 1953 there was **The Stranger from Space**. A novel idea in that the storyline was directed by suggestions from the young viewers. It was scripted by Hazel Adair and Peter Ling, who were later responsible for **Crossroads**, (although Ling also contributed to Doctor Who). 1954 saw **The Lost Planet**, with a sequel, **Return to...**, the following year. And in 1956, **Space School**.

Encouraged by the success of **Quatermass**, two other television serials were adapted for the big screen. They were: **The Trollenberg Terror** (aka **The Crawling Eye**) and **The Strange World of Planet X** (aka **The Cosmic Monster**), both 1958.

Science Fiction on commercial TV took off in 1959 with **Pathfinders to the Moon**, an adult serial, and the series, **The Invisible Man**. The latter came close to being banned for its anti-communism, and this probably accounts for its huge popularity in America. The part of the invisible Peter Brady was credited only to a question mark, but this was more than just a publicity gimmick as the character was really an amalgam of stunt men and special effects. The voice, however, was provided by Jim Turner. If this series owed little to HG Wells' novel then a second version by NBC in 1975 owed nothing at all. It starred former UNCLE agent, David McCallum, and was taken off after just one season. It was replaced by **The Gemini Man**, (which was launched in the pilot movie — **Code Name: Minus One**), and

while Ben Murphy's invisibility was limited to only 15 minutes per day he did at least get to keep his clothes on.

**McCallum did far better over** here in 1979 when he starred opposite Joanna Lumley in **Sapphire and Steel**; and this ingenious story of "time-angels", travelling interdimensionally to correct various wrongs, is often underrated. While **The Invisible Man** got his best deal from the BBC with a straightforward serialisation in 1984.

**For TVSF, the Sixties were** both the best and the worst of times.

**There was, for instance, A for Andromeda** (BBC '61). The sheer quality of this legendary seven part serial is often overlooked, and its reputation rests largely on two points. Firstly it made a star of Julie Christie and, secondly, it is a 'lost' programme; with only three minutes of the original tape, and some recently discovered fragments of seven scenes from episode 2, still in existence. It was not uncommon for thrifty Auntie Beeb to wipe even the most popular shows immediately after their transmission, but the political sensitivity of **Andromeda**, and the unaccountable disappearance of *all* the programme files, has caused some people to wonder. It was also unusual for a film version not to have been made. However, in 1962, there was a lacklustre TV sequel, **The Andromeda Breakthrough**, and a novelisation by Fred Hoyle and John Elliot.

**Also, by now, American** TVSF had come of age and was giving us a run for our money. In 1958 **Desilu Playhouse** (CBS/Desilu) included among its presentations, two SF dramas: **The Time Element**, written by Rod Serling, and **Man in Orbit**, by Joseph Landon. The former play was so popular that it served as a pilot episode for a series, and in 1959 **The Twilight Zone** (CBS/Cayuga) was opened up for our enthusiastic delectation. Serling, already an Emmy winner, garnered several more awards; including best New Programme, Best TV Series and Best Filmed Series — not to mention, *three* Hugos! He was under contract to script 80% of the first two series himself but he was also aware of the unique suitability of Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont, and they soon became major

contributors to **The Twilight Zone** throughout its four-year run. With such topflight writers and the cream of accomplished actors almost every episode was a classic of ingenious premise, sharp dialogue and vivid characterisation. This was imaginative entertainment that TV can no longer offer. It was perhaps inevitable that sustaining such a high degree of quality for over 150 episodes would prove difficult and it has to be said that **The Twilight Zone** became a little repetitive towards the end. Nevertheless, while it may not always have been superlative, it was never less than excellent and remains an extraordinary example of the heights that could be reached by genre television.

**Serling tried to recreate this** success in 1969 with **Night Gallery** (NBC/Universal), a threees story TV Movie, followed by a 28 part series. Like its predecessor this was mainly Fantasy, but contained a number of SF episodes.

**But as good as this** programme was, the time was passed, the writing was on the wall and it was becoming apparent that the enormous popularity of **The Twilight Zone** lay not so much in the audience's genuine love of the genre but rather in the fact that it had grown weary of sci-fi that for ten years had consisted solely of either the juvenile derring-do of costumed superheroes or the prosaic stodginess of Science fiction — which was still going strong in 1959, as in Murray Leinster's **Men into Space** (UA). In 1985 CBS launched a new generation of the **Twilight Zone** — this time in colour. This was a very uneven series and could be quite run-of-the-mill. On the other hand, some episodes — 'A Matter of Minutes' (a superb adaptation of Theodore Sturgeon's 'Yesterday was Monday') and James Crocker's 'A Little Peace and Quiet' spring immediately to mind — were so remarkable that they alone qualified the show to bear the mantle of its namesake.

**In September 1963 television** audiences found themselves faces with a static-wrecked picture, strongly advised against touching the controls, and were promptly whisked off to **The Outer Limits** (working title **Please Stand By** — ABC/UA/Daystar). This brainchild of Leslie Stevens and Josef Stefano was seen at the time as a rival to **the Twilight Zone** but in

effect it was a worthy companion and complemented it perfectly. Unfortunately, unlike Serling's varied mix of Fantasy, this was wholly SF with the result that its appeal was restricted even further and poor ratings led to its cancellation halfway through its second season.

**Back here in Britain, SF** anthologies were also trying to establish themselves. In 1962, an adaptation of John Wyndham's 'The Dumb Martian', for **Armchair Theatre**, also served as a pilot for the series **Out of this World** (ABC/GB). created by the innovative Irene Shubik and hosted by Boris Karloff, this ambitious project featured stories by the likes of Isaac Asimov and Philip K Dick, but this high-level SF inevitably meant a short run and it lasted for only thirteen episodes. In 1965 Shubik returned with **Out of the Unknown** (BBC). It had excellent dramatisations of work by writers such as Shekley, Wyndham, Brunner, Simak, Ballard and Pohl — but despite its high standard it lacked mass popularity and switched from SF to the Supernatural — but it still ended after just two seasons. An occasional horror series, **Mystery and Imagination**, which also began in '65, ran much longer and in 1968 it included the first television adaptation of **Frankenstein**.

**Most people of a certain age** can remember exactly what they were doing on Friday November 22nd 1963, the day of Kennedy's assassination — I certainly can — but how many, I wonder, can recall what they were doing the day after. I for one was curled up on the sofa watching the first episode of a new children's serial. It seemed to be about a know-it-all schoolgirl who lived in a police telephone box with her mysterious uncle — even the show's title was intriguing — and like so many others, I soon became hooked on **Doctor Who** (BBC).

**And when, later, Terry** Nation introduced the Daleks, the audience figures almost tripled from 3 to 8 million, and the programme's success was ensured. The major factor that contributed to the show's long popularity were the virtually limitless scope for new storylines and the fluctuating nature of its production. The many varied writers, the frequent change of directors and continuous cast replacements, not only allowed it to keep in touch with the various



trends in populism, but also to cater to succeeding generations of sub-teen viewers. There were even eight incarnations of the Doctor himself. Just for the record, the first six TV Time Lords were: William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker, Peter Davison and Colin Baker — Peter Cushing took the role in the two movies. The series' decline may have been somewhat protracted, but deteriorate it did and, when the avuncular adventurer was reduced to a cowering grotesque, as portrayed by Sylvester McCoy, aided and abetted by his equally atrocious assistant, Ace, (Sophie Aldred), the show was mercifully exterminated in 1989. May it rest in peace. (The much hyped 30th Anniversary Special, scheduled for this Autumn, now seems highly improbable.)

**The American response to Dr Who** was made by Gene Roddenberry who, in 1964, launched his first trek into space for NBC with 'The Cage'. This was deemed a failed mission and the entire project looked like being shelved indefinitely. But Roddenberry persevered, a new ship's company was assembled — with only Spock being retained from the original crew — and on September 8th 1966 *Star Trek* embarked upon the first of 78 episodes. Depreciating *Star Trek* has become almost a manner of fannish chic in recent years; although this seems to be more for the audacity of the original cast to bear evidence of ageing and look older than they did 27 years ago, than for any qualitative judgement of the series itself. Nevertheless, it was an important programme and its part in the history of TVSF should not be

underestimated. Not only was it a valid bridge between SF and mainstream television, it was also, with its strong characters and first-rate scripts, *Space Opera* at its best. At least in the beginning. However there was always a tendency towards trite moralising and by the third season, thematic repetition and predictability of plot led to it palling considerably, with the result that audience interest flagged, ratings fell and the series ended on September 2nd 1968. There was always talk of the show returning, but all that emerged was a commonplace cartoon in 1973. Rumours began again in '77, but this only led to *Star Trek*:

**The Motion Picture** in 1979. This was not an immediate success and it took the sequels to prove themselves before *Star Trek: The Next Generation* appeared on television in 1987. Roddenberry, however had not been idle during these 20 years and had broached several other SF projects. He made *Genesis II* for CBS in '73, *Planet Earth* for ABC(US) and *The Questor Tapes* for NBC — both in '74 — but none of them got past the pilot film. ABC(US) made one last try for a successor to *Star Trek*, sans Roddenberry, with *Strange New World* in 1975, but this too was aborted after the pilot, and they called it a day.

**The lack of constraint** that so typified the Sixties pervaded all aspects of media culture, and TVSF was no exception. The traditional accoutrements of Science Fiction — rockets, robots, ray-guns, etc. — had long been hijacked by the makers of cartoons and commercials, but now they were being openly poached by all manner of hacks in order to spice up an otherwise standard drama, or to assist a completely non-genre series to limp from one season to the next. Two prime examples of the latter were: *The Man from UNCLE* (NBC/MGM/Arena '64) — spies — and *The Wild Wild West* (CBS '65) — spies and cowboys — while in Britain, this extra dimension was frequently used to give some dubious substance to the camp frothiness of *The Avengers* (ABC:GB '61). There was also *Adam Adamant Lives!* (BBC '66), in which a rudimentary form of suspended animation was utilised as a plot trigger,

thus enabling a Victorian dandy to flash his swordstick around Swinging London; and a trio of ESPowered secret agents in the *Champions* (ATV '67).

**This frivolous 'anything goes'** attitude soon became endemic and no one exploited it more successfully than Irwin Allen. In 1964 he brought his three-year old movie, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, to television and created a long-running series, with the same name, for ABC (US). But this was only the beginning and it was rapidly followed by: *Lost in Space* (CBS '65), *The Time Tunnel* (ABC '66) and *Land of the Giants* (ABC '68). They were all good clean family entertainments and as such are beyond reproach. But even this kind of show began to wane, and when *City beneath the Sea* (Warner/Kent/MPI '70) sank without trace, (although it was given a theatrical release in Britain under the title of: *One Hour to Doomsday*), Allen made a profitable return to the cinema with capsizing ocean liners and burning tower blocks. He made one last stab at TVSF in 1976 with *The Time Travellers* (ABC) but when this too failed to get past the pilot film it was back to the big screen and a swarm of killer bees.

**If Allen had a counterpart** in this country then it must surely have been in the American expatriate, Gerry Anderson. Working for ATV he made a humble but successful start with shows like *Torchy*, *The Battery Boy* and *Four-Feather-Falls* and consolidate his position as master of the television puppet-play, then





he went hi-tech, and his canon of supermarionation took off with **Supercar** in 1961; going from strength to strength with **Fireball XL5** ('62), **Stingray** ('65), **Thunderbirds** ('66), **Captain Scarlet** ('67), **Joe 90** ('68), and **Secret Service** ('69). Like Allen's shows, these were never designed to be anything more than pure hokum and thus disarm any serious criticism. Having used human actors in **Secret Service**, Anderson then went the whole hog and devised **UFO**, a wholly live-action show, in 1970. Unfortunately, the wooden acting, lurex jump-suits and nylon wigs made the changeover almost imperceptible and he tried again with **Space: 1999** ('75). This was a little better, but still failed to rise above the level of tolerable skiffy, and Anderson returned to his woodentops, in 1983, with **Terrahawks**, for LWT.

The **USS Enterprise** may have had warp-drive but it still took nearly three years for it to traverse the Atlantic Ocean; and when it arrived on July 18th 1969, it was initially greeted as part of some global hype by NASA — heralding, as it did, the first Apollo Moon landing, nine days later. Also, by then, we had another cult

show of our own. Evolving out of **Danger Man** (aka **Secret Agent** ATV 59), **The Prisoner** (ATV/ITC '67) was a triumph of style over sense. Created by its star, Patrick McGeehan, this enigmatic series offered itself to many (mis)interpretations — an oblique statement on Vietnam, the perils of excessive Democracy, pathological paranoia, etc. — and it not surprisingly drew many and varied epithets, such as Kafkaesque and surrealist. To be honest, I found the programme to be more confused than confusing, but having said that, I also found that with a goodly pinch of sodium chloride, (a shovelful in the case of the final episode — 'Fall Out'), it could be both entertaining and literate. Nevertheless, its flagrant Artiness and politically ambivalent undertones made it very unpopular not only with the mass audience but also the ITC management, and it was taken off after only seventeen weeks. Still, despite — or perhaps because of — its short run and the fact that there was no sequel or spin-off movie, it became in effect unassailable, like a fly in amber, it soon gathered a small but vocal following whose enthusiasm, even today, would rival that of the most devoted trekker.

1967 was also the year that the **Invaders** (ABC/US/QM) arrived. Eager to recreate the huge success of their **Fugitive** ('63) — in which Richard Kimble, a young doctor, scoured the country in search of a one-armed man while being pursued by a fanatical cop — Quinn Martin productions came up with the idea of a young architect, David Vincent, scouring the country in search of flying saucers while being pursued by fanatical aliens; but it didn't grip audiences in quite the same way. A few of its 43 episodes were worth watching, but on the whole the rigidity of its format made it very predictable, and when ratings fell the series was unceremoniously axed in mid-season. There was no attempt to resolve Vincent's plight, and this resulted in a minor uproar from some of the show's fans but, as was to be expected, their protests went unheeded.

The Seventies saw the bursting of many balloons. The party was over, and the cold light of dawn found Science Fiction, in general, with no home to go to. The demythicizing of the Moon by successive manned landings, and the imminent prospect of Mars too being robbed of its mystique, had effectively put a moratorium on fictional space travel; George Lucas had dealt a mortal blow to SF cinema with **Star Wars**; and the flagship of UK SF magazines, **New Worlds** with Michael Moorcock at the helm having strayed to far off course, eventually ran aground on the reefs of indulgent experimentalism, leaving only the lighter craft to struggle towards the disparate shores of Cyberpunk and Magic Realism. TVSF was also foundering.

The BBC, in an attempt to capitalise on the emergent anxieties for the environment, installed **Doomwatch** in 1970, and presented us with a group of scientific trouble-shooters who, for all their lofty moralising, were never faced with much more than a clichéd aspect of the 'mad-doctor' syndrome. There was one episode, dealing with Government censorship, that was itself banned from transmission but otherwise it ruffled few feathers and was far better viewed as traditional sci-fi. In contrast, **Moonbase 3** (BBC 1973) went all out for realism and as a result was just deadly dull. In 1975 Terry 'Dalek' Nation created The

**Survivors**, again for the BBC, and we found ourselves involved with the lives and loves of a collection of assorted misfits, who for some explained reason, (at least, in a logical sense) has endured the decimation of the world's population by a conveniently 'random' plague. This 'Back To Nature' series inevitably attracted (unfavourable) comparison to a concurrent sitcom **The Good Life**, and it is certainly true that **The Survivors** would have benefited greatly from a touch of levity. Nation produced a novelisation in '76, and while it may have gone some way in justifying his concept of self-sufficiency it also highlighted television's inability to tackle the theme in a serious manner.

It was also in '75 that Scottish TV joined the fray with **Star Maidens**. "Astronauts are marooned on a planet ruled by women". It should have been fun, but it wasn't (Too close to home, for some, perhaps). And then, in 1977, something very strange happened — a tangible blip in the acceptable space/time continuum of TVSF — and we were presented by **Alternative 3**. Originally intended to go out on April 1st, but then rescheduled so as to not give the game away too soon, this spoof documentary — from Anglia TV — purported to expose a Government conspiracy in which various high-IQ citizens were being transported to Mars in order to form a standby civilisation that would survive the impending holocaust here on Earth. The seemingly authentic 'World-In-Action' approach — together with the use of a well-known newscaster — made **Alternative 3** very convincing indeed, and many people were taken in. Even to this day there are, I am assured, those who steadfastly refuse to believe that the subsequent retraction was anything more than part of an Official Cover-Up. **A3** was creative television at its most imaginative, and it stands as one of the brighter stars in the firmament of TVSF.

In 1978, **Terry Nation** redeemed himself with **Blake's Seven** (BBC). This was a successful 'kiddult' series and it was rollicking Space Opera that rivalled even the best of **Star Trek**.

Meanwhile, back in the USA, there was virtually nothing at all until the mid-Seventies when there was a glut of mediocrity. It came

in two flavours. First, there was the return of the comic book superhero. So much a staple in the early days it took ABC (US), in 1965, to show how it should be done with their deliciously outrageous **Batman**. So richly satisfying was this series that the public had little room for **The Green Hornet** in '66, or **Mr Terrific** a year later, and it was another ten years before their appetite returned. The from 1976 to 1979, villainous American found themselves almost outnumbered a veritable horde of avenging crusaders — including: **WonderWoman**, **SpiderMan**, **The Flash**, **The Incredible Hulk**, **The Man From Atlantis** (a Sub-Mariner clone), **Captain America**, and **Buck Rogers**. Curiously, the 'superhuman' who sparked off this crop of corn, **The Six-Million Dollar Man**, was the only one to originate from a novel — Martin Caiden's **Cyborg** — rather than a comic strip and proved to be the most durable. He was so popular in fact that in 1976 he acquired a (slo-mo) running mate in the shape of **The Bionic Woman** (MCA).

In the UK it is customary for a television series to run its course on the box before being transferred to the big screen, but in the US this procedure is usually reversed, and during this period a number of movies found themselves spinning off into TVland. Among them: **Planet Of The Apes** (CBS '74), **Logan's Run** (CBS/MGM '77), **Battlestar Galactica** (ABC '78) and **Beyond WestWorld** (MGM '78). Two series to develop from TV movies were the multi-time-zoned **Fantastic Voyage** (NBC '76) and **The Night Stalker** (Aaron Spelling '72), the latter was ostensibly tongue-in-cheek Horror but there were two sci-fi tales: 'They Have Been, They Are, They Will Be...' (UFO's) and 'Mr Ring' (a robot). Unfortunately, these were two of the weaker episodes. For younger ids there was **Land Of The Lost** (NBC '74) and **The Lost Saucer** (TCF '75). The comedy (?) was supplied by **Quark** (NBC '78) — a garbage collector in outer space, and the non-fiction was supplied by Jack (Dragnet) Webb in a dull investigative series called **Project UFO** (NBC '78).

A brief footnote: It was in 1973 that Canada made its only notable contribution to TVSF with **The Starlost**. Reviled when it first appeared, I viewed it again

recently and found it to be at least watchable — which is more than I can say for many other shows. I also noticed that the Science Consultant was one Ben Bova.

All in all, with the exception of **Alternative 3**, **Blake 7** and some work by Nigel Kneale, the Seventies were barren years for TVSF and it seems quite apt that when the decade closed the most popular sci-fi show on US television was **Mork and Mindy** (aka Prat and Perky), while in the UK it was **Metal Mickey**.

To just what extent the television trend of the Eighties were influenced by the Thatcher-Reagan Alliance is a debatable point but there is no denying that TVSF, at least in the first years of the decade, came down to Earth with a bump and involved itself with the material world.

The BBC had never shied away from socio-political speculation, (witness their fondness for Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-Four**: '54, '65) but, alas, it is not always their strongest suit. Their scenario of a successful invasion by Hitler in 1940, in **If Britain Had Fallen** ('72), was a very ponderous exercise indeed and they would have done better to screen the Kevin Brownlow/Andrew Mollo film, 'It Happened Here', instead. It took commercial TV to produce the most effective Cautionary Tale to hit the small screen, and this had been done, ten years earlier, by Rediffusion with **When the Kissing Had to Stop** ('62). A first rate thriller, this depiction of a Russian take-over of Britain even excelled the novel — by Constantine FitzGibbon — from which it was taken.

**Quatermass 4 (The Conclusion)** was originally planned for the BBC, but they found it too costly and it was taken up by Thames TV instead. Screened in 1979, this too was a superior production — and Kneale's vision of the near-future, with its breakdown of law-and-order was far more perceptive, and much more disturbing, than the dreary propagandist view taken by Wilfred Greatorex on **1990** (BBC) two years earlier. In 1982, the BBC presented us with six **Plays For Tomorrow** and while the idea of commissioning individual dramatists to conjecture on life, 25 years ahead, carried enormous potential — nothing of note

emerged and the whole project was a huge disappointment.

**The American approach to Political SF** was made with *V* (NBC) in 1983. For all its pseudo-skiffiness this was nothing more than a thinly-veiled account of the Rise of Nazism — with its concomitant Resistance — and as a result it rather fell between two stools; it was too close to recent events to be enjoyed as escapist fiction and far too contrived to be taken seriously. Probably the best thing about the show was that it arrived in Britain just in time to provide alternative viewing to the Los Angeles Olympics.

**For some reason, the Eighties** were deemed a suitable period in which to reconsider the unthinkable, and the old thermonuclear war-horse was trotted out again for our mutual discomfort. The issue was first addressed by Granada TV in 1958 with the dramatisation of J.B. Priestley's *Doomsday For Dyson*. The BBC the commissioned Peter Watkins to make *The War Game* in 1965 but the resulting film was judged to grim (!) for transmission and it was given a limited theatrical release instead. In 1980, Yorkshire TV came up with the documentary *The Bomb* (with a follow-up four years later), to tie-in with the US Presidential election, and the nightmare was abroad once more.

**The American contribution to this universal dread** was made in 1982 with *World War III*, a two-parter from NBC. This was rapidly followed by *The Day After* ('83), a documentary drama from ABC (US) in which a nuclear strike on a small Kansas town was meticulously detailed. This show proved to be a great boost not only to international paranoia but also to audience viewing figures and the UK responded with *Z For Zachariah* in 1984. It is a little odd that the BBC should have chosen a modest American novella, written by Robert C. O'Brien, (in reality the late Robert C. Conly), for the opening shot in a British counter-strike, but it did and the result was two hours of tedium. Far more effective was their *Threads*, in the same year. This gruelling simulation of a nuclear attack and its aftermath was immediately followed by a discussion programme and a later documentary, *On The Eighth Day* — which were every bit as disturbing. So much so that *Threads* was shown again twelve months later. Obviously working

on the assumption that nothing succeeds like distress, the BBC dusted off *The War Game* and it was given its first television transmission within the same week. 1985 was also the year that gave us Troy Kennedy Martin's *The Edge Of Darkness*, a gripping thriller that not only encompassed the nuclear menace, but also had mystical undertones. But despite this 'overkill' of commercial exploitation, *The War Game* still stands supreme. Its logistical technology may have soon become outdated but its power, even twenty years on, remained undiminished and it will always be one of the scariest movies ever made.

**Not that it was all gloom and despondency** — and even apocalyptic revelations could be fun. John Wyndham's perambulatory plants stalked the small screen in *The Day Of The Triffids* (BBC '81) and the nation was threatened by an outbreak of rabies in *The Mad Death* (BBC Scotland '83) — and engagingly lurid mini-series that was every bit as good as the title suggests.

**The Flipside Of Dominic Hide** (BBC '80) was a witty time-travel drama that somehow managed to be also popular, and there was *Another Flip For Dominic* in 1982. But the highlight of the decade was *Artemis 81* (BBC '81) and, in effect, this bewildering blockbuster has proved to be an outstanding swan-song for TVSF in general.

**Writing comedy is not the easiest of tasks**, and it never more tricky than when trying to be humorous about science fiction. Even experienced masters can fail miserably, and charity dictates that I gloss over Nigel Kneale's *Kenvig* — but one writer can excel in this particular sub-genre is Douglas Adams, and while his *Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy* may have succeeded in making an adequate transition to BBC television in 1981 it is probably better remembered as a prime example of 'quality radio'.

**Juvenile sci-fi, in addition to the aforementioned Tripods**, was provided by John Wyndham's *Chocky's Children* (BBC) in 1984 — with two sequels in '85 and '86.

**For burgeoning New Agers** there was *The Mysterious World Of Arthur C. Clarke* (Trident TV '80), followed by his *World Of Strange Powers* in '85 — while for budding astronauts there was James A. Michener's epic *Space*

(CBS), also in 1985. **The Invisible Man** was not the only 'classic' character to be given a decent TV adaptation in the Eighties, and we also had *Doctor Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (ABC:GB '81) and *Frankenstein* (Yorkshire TV '84). The mad creator was also the subject of an 'Everyman' Special, *The True Story Of Frankenstein* (BBC) in 1986.

**American TV chose a more modern classic to focus on** and, with some assistance from the UK, *The Martian Chronicles* were brought to the small screen in 1980. Unfortunately, for all its good intentions, this extravaganza lacked the magic of Bradbury's 'Silver Locusts' and the author was better served by the *Ray Bradbury Theater*, (which was also known in the UK as *Twist in the Tale*, not to be confused with NBC's *Tales of the Unexpected* which shared the same alternative title).

**Other American sci-fi series included Otherworld** (CBS '84) — a 'Robinson' type family marooned on an island with a Forbidden Zone of differing time-planes, and *Tales from the Darkside* (Embassy '85) — an uneven anthology series in the vein of *The Twilight Zone*.

**By the closing years of the decade**, what little TVSF there was was almost unwatchable — as exemplified by *War of the Worlds* (Paramount '89). Based not on Wells' novel but the 1953 movie, this ludicrous show worked on the fundamental premise that the Martians, far from being annihilated by our humble microbes, had simply sloped off for a well-deserved nap and had lain, in their thousands, undiscovered and undisturbed until 1988 when they were rudely awakened by a group of gun-toting terrorists. Furthermore, it also postulated that the war with Mars had been so terrible that everyone on the face of the Earth had been so traumatised by the experience that no one, with the exception of the hero — a young Zen scientist, had any memory of the conflict. Just how this army of amnesiacs were able to explain the inevitable time-lapse, or account for the millions of dead and razed cities, was a point that wasn't gone into in detail. A suspension of disbelief is one thing — but this was just absurd.

**Meanwhile, in the UK**, the only SF programme of note was *First Born* in 1988 — a risible

dramatisation of Maureen Duffy's 'Gor Saga'.

**The Nineties opened to a** world of television that was virtually devoid of Science Fiction, other than for some selected repeats and a few old movies.

**What was once the clarion** voice of the future was now reduced to muted echoes of the past.

**Familiar faces, like those of** Brian Aldiss and J G Ballard, still popped up now and then to be interviewed on this and that; and there was a veritable plethora of pundits availing us of their opinions in the Channel 4 series **New Nightmares**. **Bookmark** devoted one entire edition to the great Stanislaw Lem, but at 50 minutes this programme was far too short; and Douglas Adams got the Bragg treatment in a **South Bank Show**, that was a little too long — but where was the Dream?

**In 1991 an attempt was made** to dramatise Stephen Gallagher's 'Chimera' but with little success. Given that it was scheduled for a primetime slot, and therefore aimed at the widest possible audience, most of whom would not understand, nor even care about, real Science Fiction, artistic compromise was inevitable and what emerged was little more than a gory thriller.

**A quartet of BBC plays,** under the umbrella title of **Encounters** — being a series of imaginary meetings between famous characters contained one drama, 'Beautiful Lies' (1992), that conjectured a confrontation between H G Wells and George

Orwell, that was both literate and entertaining; and Channel 4's **Next Stop Hollywood**, a year earlier, had included two very enjoyable short films — 'The Jogger', and the horror that he ran into, and the nightmarish '12.01', in which a man is trapped eternally in a time-hiccup — but that was it!

**And lovers of the fantastic** are now forced to settle for either the juvenilia of **Steven Spielberg's Amazing Stories**, **Erie, Indiana** or content themselves with the plodding of **Stephen King's Golden Years**. At least the posturing artiness of **David Lynch's Twin Peaks** is no longer an option.

**Even the proposed** programmes for later this year offer no grounds for optimism. **Seaqwest DSV** despite being the most expensive TV series ever made, sounds like a mundane mix of **Star Trek** and **Stingray**; while **Deep Space Nine** appears to have taken the political infrastructure of South Africa and ginged it up with holographic brothels and scantily-clad "lizard ladies".

**Of course, all things** considered, this current state of affairs was unavoidable. Science Fiction is, and always has been, a minority interest, and as TV, by its very nature, is concerned with majority tastes the role of TVSF has always been a conflicting one. The closer sci-fi moved towards SF, the less popular it became and the shorter its existence. At least there was a time when producers could be wooed into taking a chance, and we have been blessed with some magnificent failures, but the

domination of the balance sheet is now so absolute that even this is no longer possible.

**As for the repeats,** those with access to Satellite or Cable TV can still enjoy some of the better programmes mentioned here, but for those of us limited to the terrestrial networks, no such opportunity exists.

**We too have repeats of** course, but while they may at first glance appear to be all much of a muchness they are really of two distinct types. There is the American "popular sci-fi series of the Sixties", usually purchased as part of a package deal; and there are the British "another chance to see" shows. These also come from the Sixties, but arise primarily out of BBC Marketing.

**In the run-up to Christmas** we can expect an old **Dr Who** to emerge, invariably tied to the release of a new batch of BBC videos; and the highlighting of yet another **Gerry Anderson** puppet-play, also heavily linked to seasonal merchandising. Last year it was **Thunderbirds**, this year **Captain Scarlet**. But stocks of these shows are limited; how long will it be, I wonder before we see the resurrection of **Twizzle**.

**Only the erratic nocturnal,** glimmerings of **The Twilight Zone** now remain to remind us of what was once a dazzling beacon.

**It may be a depressing** thought, but as far as television is concerned, the light of science fiction is going out — and it may be gone some time.



Artwork by  
Claire  
Willoughby



First

# Impressions

Reviews of Hardback & Paperback Originals

Edited By Catie Cary

## Douglas Adams Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy.

Millennium, 1994, 198pp £4.99 hb

## The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe.

Millennium, 1994, 196pp, £4.99 hb

## Life, The Universe And Everything.

Millennium, 1994, 184pp, £4.99 hb

Reviewed by Alan Johnson

It is over 16 years since Douglas Adams first released *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to The Galaxy* on an unsuspecting Radio 4 audience (8th March 1978 for the pedantic). The subsequent success of the radio and television series, tee-shirts, records and spin-off books has been well documented, making Douglas Adams one of the most successful SF authors to date. Which is surprising, because science fiction has little to do with what Adams actually writes.

*The Hitch Hiker's trilogy* is satirical, farce-like at times, and ranges from mind numbingly inane to pure comic genius, sometimes on the same page, with only the occasional nod to various genre devices. I approached the job of reviewing this attractive new collectors edition from Millennium with some trepidation, for two reasons. Firstly, I was a fan of the

radio series, and less so of the television series, and I had given up about 50 pages into the second book, basically due to boredom. Secondly, so much has been written about these books, that anything that I might add has probably been said before.

What can be said about this collection? The format of a cheap, hardback collectors edition, is to be welcomed, although I was a little disappointed to find a large number of typos, in what is essentially a well known text. The text itself was a surprise. It is nearly ten years since I last dived in to Adams' written universe, and returning was a strange experience. I knew the radio shows almost word for word, and therefore expected to only have to skim the text, to produce this review. However, Adams has mutated, twisted and sometime bent out of shape entirely the original storyline, whilst retaining the essential feel of his universe. I remember a quote from a cosmological scientist, "The universe is not just weirder than we imagine, it's weirder than we can imagine." Pure Adams. The result of the revision of the stories is not dissimilar to a well known album of songs being reinterpreted for a live concert. The content is familiar, but remixing and reworking keep the interest going. So, after finishing

the first one and a half volumes, the interest returned, and the final result was a couple of days of real enjoyment.

Anyone who has well thumbed and dog-eared paperbacks of the original trilogy would be well served by picking up this more durable format to keep these books for posterity. A classic collection.

## Poppy Z Brite Lost Souls

Penguin, 1994, 359pp, £5.99  
Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Poppy Brite's debut novel fits firmly in the increasingly popular sub-genre of revisionist vampire fiction, splicing and dicing a whole host of variations on the vampire theme that could only have been written in the dwindling days of the millennium.

If that's damning with faint praise, then the novel does have much to recommend it, not least the sensuality and eroticism of Brite's prose, and her vivid evocation of the nihilistic "slacker" subculture of Middle-American youth. In fact, leaving aside the genre elements, the novel works best as a study of youthful disaffection, despair and the search for some kind of meaning in life. Nothing, bastard offspring of the vampire Zillah, sets out from his foster home in suburban Maryland unaware that he has, in reality, embarked on a quest to find his real father. Hundreds of miles away in New Orleans Zillah and his companions, Twig and Molochai, are themselves in search of their own father figure, the elusive vampire Christian, sublimating their own need and longing in a non-stop orgy of drugs, sex and blood. Bound by the act of Nothing's conception in New Orleans fifteen years earlier all are drawn by fate and circumstance to the town of Missing Mile in North Carolina where Ghost, local amateur musician and psychic, and his friend Steve attempt to save Nothing from his adopted family.

The plot of *Lost Souls* is driven by this explicitly homosexual family romance and the female characters that appear are, with the exception of Ghost's grandmother, remarkably unsympathetic. Squeamish readers will be relieved that the scenes of sex and bloodletting (gay and otherwise) are tastefully done, carrying a real erotic



charge. What does jar, perhaps inevitably given the long tradition of vampire fiction, is the annoying familiarity of some of the elements of this novel. The triumvirate of Zillah, Twig and Molochai echoes the dysfunctional family of the film *Near Dark*, while scenes set in New Orleans almost sink beneath the weight of their association with another female writer of vampire fiction. However, it is in its descriptions of the youth of Missing Mile and Maryland that Brite's novel comes alive with a sense of the characters' fervent longing for transcendence, a longing that powerfully illuminates the seductive nature of the vampire myth.

### Poppy Z. Brite *Drawing Blood*

Delacorte Press, 1993, 373pp,  
\$19.95

### Swamp Foetus

Borderlands Press, 1993, 193pp,  
\$50 limited edition, \$20 trade

Reviewed by Christopher J  
Fowler

The considerable promise of Poppy Z. Brite's first novel, *Lost Souls* (which I reviewed elsewhere), is now confirmed by her second, *Drawing Blood*, and *Swamp Foetus*, a collection of short stories originally published between 1986 and 1993. The talent for a particularly Southern States kind of horror, the richly sensual writing and the acute understanding of relationships between men, all apparent in her first novel, are well to the fore. Especially in *Drawing Blood* these are reinforced by a greater strength in the gradual development of character and plot, much improved structuring of her narrative, and heightened social observation of regional Southern types. Brite is obviously on a sharply upward learning curve as a writer, and if she keeps on like this she could become not only a major voice in contemporary horror writing — a status some would argue she has already achieved — but also, and much more intriguingly, an important delineator of Southern society.

*Swamp Foetus* contains 12 stories and an introduction by the author which provides insights into their writing. Two feature Steve and Ghost, the musicians from Missing Mile, North Carolina who are among the main characters of

*Lost Souls*. The more interesting of these stories is also the more recent, 'How to Get Ahead in New York', where the horror comes less from the incident which supports the pun in the title, than from the reaction of two small town Southerners to the machine hive of New York. Their feelings and experience in the Port Authority bus terminal, and later in the streets of the city, echo those of Garcia Lorca in the same city 70 years earlier, recorded in *Poeta en Nueva York*. The poetic sensibility of the Andalusian writer, from the backwards and simpler south, perhaps mirrors that of the Southerner Brite, so apparent in this short story and in *Drawing Blood*. Another particularly urban horror is found in 'The Ash of Memory, The Dust of Desire'. Here abandoned machinery exacts a grisly revenge on a woman, seemingly reading the mind of her betrayed lover. The best story in the collection is 'Calcutta, Lord of Nerves', where the dead return to a hideous zombie life in the Indian city. This is perhaps the finest example of Brite as a sensual writer, where one is intensely aware of the smells, the sounds, the sights and the tastes of the city. The story is a feast for the senses, and by itself would justify the price of the collection. The stories presented here are limited in length, but their compressed, concentrated and overpowering narratives show a writer with a great love and a deepening understanding of the form. Brite says she will continue with short stories, despite the lack of significant financial rewards, and threatens to call her next collection *Kudzu Embryo*. One can only hope she will keep both commitments.

*Drawing Blood* takes place in the familiar Brite territory of New Orleans and the imaginary town of Missing Mile. Although Steve and Ghost are absent on tour during the action of the novel, a number of the previous novel's subsidiary characters come into play. Brite also brings together from out of town two emotionally damaged young men, the computer hacker Zachary Bosch and the comic-book artist Trevor McGee. Here the narrative combines a new twist on the haunted house tale with an intense — and intensely physical — love story. As in *Lost Souls*, Brite is less interested in the male-female relationship between Bosch — a bisexual — and his woman friend,

the exotic dancer Eddy Sung, than in the homosexual one between the two men. The reasons for Brite's apparent failure as a woman writer to tackle male-female relationships remain unclear. Her treatment of Eddy, however, is a considerable improvement on that of the female characters in *Lost Souls*, and presents a fully rounded character.

Both Zach and Trevor are on the run, the one running away from, the other running towards an objective. Zach flees New Orleans to escape the US Secret Service, who have caught up with his illegal computer hacking, and ends up in Missing Mile by chance. Trevor, however, is there by an act of will, at a particular place and on a particular day, to confront the terrors that have ridden him for twenty years. As a child, he came to the town with his parents and younger brother, Didi. The father was an underground cartoonist, no longer able to draw. In an apparent fit of drunken desperation, he murdered his wife and Didi, leaving Trevor as the sole survivor. The young man, now himself a cartoonist, must confront the question of why his father let him live. He wants to do this alone, in the house where the killings occurred, so that if he also is overtaken by murder, no-one else will die. However, the arrival of Zach and their love complicate matters. They face the menace of the house, and whatever haunts it, together. They must overcome as one. They do this through out-of-body experience, entering the world of Birdland. This is both the cartoon world of Trevor's father and somehow the alternative world of the haunted house. Drawn from the pages of the comic books of Trevor's father, Birdland is a dark, nightmarish jazz underworld. It is populated not only by dead jazzmen like Charlie (Bird) Parker, but also the shades of Trevor's father and Zach's parents. Both young men meet their fathers and long-standing issues are resolved.

The excitement generated by this confrontation is paralleled by that of the Secret Service net closing around Zach, as he is tracked to Missing Mile. With USSS agents approaching, Eddy and a friend race to the town to warn Zach. Brite thus skilfully manipulates two parallel and converging climactic narratives. The slow and tense build-up to the initial scenes where Zach and

Trevor do battle with the haunted house shows the author's control of plot. This is demonstrated in the account of Zach's journey from New Orleans to North Carolina, his various encounters, and the sharply observed Southern types. This measured development allows the readers to familiarise themselves with the two main characters, to develop a feeling for them, and above all to begin to care about what happens to them. Involvement with people in peril is often lacking from genre work, but Brite provides it in her characterisation. Our sympathy with Zach and Trevor also helps to intensify the extremely physical love-making scenes which are crucial to the book, and to the resolution of Trevor's conflict with the fears of his past. Brite's writing abilities in these scenes are far superior to anything similar in her previous work. They have a positive intensity and a physicality which is unusual in horror fiction.

**Drawing Blood** is a well structured, cleverly and cautiously paced tale of suspense and terror. It is also a powerful love story. Poppy Z. Brite has made giant strides forward in the production of this novel. Whether her future is to be rosy with Southern sunsets, or tinged with blood, as a regional or a horror writer, she is definitely destined for great things.

Phil Farrand

# **The Nitpicker's Guide for Next Generation Treks**

Titan Books, 433pp, 1993, £7.99  
Reviewed by Alan Johnson.

What do trainspotter's do when the weather's too bad to stand out and spot trains? They stay in, watch reruns of **Star Trek : TNG** and pick out all the plot inconsistencies, that's what. Or so it seems if you read this book. The blurb on the front of this volume promises "Six seasons of Bloopers, Flubs, Technical Screw-ups and Plot Discrepancies for Discriminating Fans of Star Trek: The Next Generation", and it's certainly all of that. Each episode is given a brief plot synopsis, and this is the most useful part of this book. Regular viewers know that the quality of scripts and plot are extremely variable, and this at least enables one to avoid the truly awful. With the next run of TNG on BBC2 due in September, a judicial browse might indicate those episodes

worth recording, or at least watching. However, the main thrust of this book is not the stories, but the minute details of the working of the *Enterprise*, and the implied science and engineering revealed in the underlying structure. Now this can be a great game for about five minutes, but some of the detail to which the author has gone borders on the obsessive. For example, there is an almost fetishistic attention to how the turbolifts and communicators work, and the inconsistencies that the directors have inadmittantly introduced. For example in the fourth season episode "Brothers" this entry is given, "When Data falls into the trance, he rides a turbolift with the sick boy's worried brother. Moments later, Data reaches over to a panel on the wall of the turbolift — to the right of the door — and indicates his new destination. A panel on the *inside* wall of a turbolift? When did turbolifts get control panels on their walls? In the first three seasons of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** — filled with series of the crew entering and exiting turbolifts — there has never been a control panel on the inside of a turbolift". Actually there is quite a lot more of this, but I think the point is made. This book is for the dedicated only, but it can prove to be entertaining to the passing dilettante.

# **Laurell K Hamilton The Laughing Corpse**

NEL, 1994, 34pp, £4.99  
Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Summertime in St Louis, and the stench of undead flesh rises to a cloudless sky as Anita Blake, animator extraordinaire, hunts down a killer zombie with a taste for single-family homes. Anita has a few suspicions as to who may have raised the zombie. There's a murdered animator's goatee'd brother; a voodoo queen who raises the dead for fun, profit and sexual depravity; and a crippled millionaire who's offering Anita a million dollars to perform a human sacrifice (the only way, apparently, to raise corpses more than a century old).

**Anita is not without** problems of her own. Added to the inevitable occupational hazards such as villainous bodyguards, restrictive police procedures and far too many early morning crime scenes, there are those peculiarly

feminine quandaries — how to remove bloodstains from fluffy penguin toys, where to find a silk shirt that'll conceal a shoulder holster, and how to pick up a crippled prostitute without attracting undue attention. And Jean-Claude, the master vampire of St Louis who featured prominently in Hamilton's previous novel, **Guilty Pleasures**, is still sending flowers... It is to Anita's credit that often these problems seem to worry her more than the simplistic violence demanded by her job.

**Guilty Pleasures** was a fast-paced, gory thriller which presented Anita without explanation. In **The Laughing Corpse**, Hamilton gives us a few glimpses of Anita's childhood, which add considerably to our understanding of her rather repressed personality (although not of her fondness for fluffy penguins).

"I had a dog when I was little; like most kid's dogs, she died. We buried Jenny in the back yard. I woke up a week after Jenny died and found her curled up beside me. Thick black fur coated with grave-dirt. Dead brown eyes following my every movement, just like when she was alive... I know dead when I feel it. See it. Call it from the grave."

It's this affinity for the dead which makes Anita the best animator in town, in demand from the police department and the criminal fraternity alike. And she is grimly determined to use her supernatural powers for good rather than evil, facing down each moral dilemma as it appears. As a staunch Episcopalian (converted from the Catholic church when they excommunicated all animators), Anita practises judgement rather than forgiveness; despite the fear engendered by supernatural creatures, it's the human characters who are truly evil, and they who suffer at Anita's hands.

**Despite the title this isn't a** comedy, at least for the dead (though there's some sick farce as Anita and her Spook Squad colleagues attempt to come to terms with another increase in the body count). Hamilton however has a keen eye for goriness and shock value. **The Laughing Corpse** is entertaining and suspenseful, but not in the same league as **Guilty Pleasures**. Maybe zombies are more difficult to portray as appealing, positive role models; maybe they just don't

have the pulling power of vampires.

## Peter F Hamilton A Quantum Murder

Pan, 1994

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

Greg Mandel, the psi-boosted hero of *Mindstar Rising*, is back in Peter F Hamilton's second novel: part thriller, part locked room mystery, and part hard SF.

The setting is Rutland in the early 21st century, and global warming has arrived. England is recovering from ten catastrophic years of near-Marxism, the New Conservatives are in power, and the Event Horizon conglomerate control most of what industry there is.

Dr Edward Kitchener, double Nobel Laureate and regarded as the Newton of his Age, is found ritually murdered. Since he was doing research for Event Horizon, they want to know who did it, and why. Enter Greg Mandel, friend and former employee of Event Horizon's boss.

The murder took place in the restricted surroundings of Launde Abbey, so Kitchener's students in residence are prime suspects. But Greg's empathic facility says they didn't do it. His efforts to uncover the real murderer and motive result in some surprising plot twists, which along the way take us into the realms of alternate history and mind control.

There are plenty of plot hooks to keep the pages turning. And the author plays scrupulously fair with the clues. The SF elements are an integral part, not bolted on, but *A Quantum Murder* feels curiously old-fashioned given its futuristic setting. Perhaps it's the right wing politics, or perhaps it's names like Kitchener which evoke Imperialist resonances. Hamilton's England is isolated, the presence of the rest of the world barely acknowledged. The author has carefully thought through the effects of the Warming — floods, changes to vegetation, etc — so this isolation can hardly be an oversight. It is probably a consequence of the need to focus on a closed community of suspects — but it feels unconvincing.

The novel's style is different from that of Hamilton's taut short stories, and not always an improvement. The viewpoint changes between four main characters — Greg Mandel, his

wife Eleanor, Event Horizon's young boss, Julia Evans, and one of the Launde Abbey students, Nicholas Beswick — though Mandel is the prime focus, the men are reasonably well characterised — the women less so. Hamilton's stopped detailing all his female characters' breast sizes (see Paul Kincaid's earlier review of *Mindstar Rising*) but there is still a tendency to info dump descriptions, and we're told everyone's exact age eg "a forty-five year old with a round face...", "a twenty-five-year-old security division hard-liner..." etc. After a time this becomes rather irritating. And my attention tended to stray every time the author lovingly described the technology in minute detail.

But in spite of its flaws, *A Quantum Murder* held my interest right to the end. If you like hard SF murder mysteries, this one's for you.

## Simon Harding Streamskelter

Pan, 1994, 8/4/94, 248pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills  
A dense, dark, knowledgeable, (occasionally) funny, scary read, *Streamskelter* is an impressive, if flawed, first novel from Bristol newspaper editor Simon Harding. It certainly isn't easy to get into, with its twists and turns, its opaque, bitter first person present-day narrative, but perseverance is worth your while.

It's the early 1970s. David Roberts is twelve and is about to leave childhood somewhat painfully behind as he and his friend Rupert discover girls, in particular Samantha. The three children break into old Solomon's cottage and steal a picture, unleashing a chain of events and forces which have a calamitous effect on all their lives. Rupert goes missing, to reappear half-starved and brain-damaged. Solomon dies in a grotesque fashion, but not before he has recounted to David his life story — one of terror after being touched by the horrific, supernatural hand of the Lady Glastig, who lives in the stream where the children have been playing.

Back to the present day, and Glastig haunts David still: she is his Dream Bitch, who brings him nightmares and, by the end of the novel, more tragedy. It's up to the reader to decide whether she exists or whether she is the product of David's damaged mind.

It's by no means a perfect debut. As narrator, David's acrid opinions fail to build up a full picture of the other characters: whilst this is vital to the plot it does mean many of his cast are ciphers to the reader. More importantly, in an exceedingly tortuous narrative the author introduces a number of characters and elements whose significance is never made clear: the "goblins" which enter the story towards its end and which soon exeunt, dripping blood, are one example. Having said this, I repeat that *Streamskelter* is an impressive novel. Simon Harding's descriptions of growing up are highly evocative. For instance, when David sees Rupert riding himself of childish things:

"I noticed him in the back garden sticking all his old Johnny Sevens and Tommy guns into the dustbin. For a moment I contemplated sneaking in and stealing them back out again. I'd never had a Johnny Seven. Can you remember them? They were these great big green plastic multi-purpose heavy machine-gun flamethrower and missile-launcher jobs. The fucking things did everything ... Then the day before the dustbin men were due I saw Sam and her friend Lorraine Lamb walking up the lane with all their best clobber on, their make-up and their ear-rings. They noticed the stuff sticking up from the bin as if stuck there by a retreating army. I could see them sniggering and making comments ... After that there was no way I was going to trot out and touch them."

But what is most remarkable is the way in which Harding whisks the reader into a story which twists through time and back again and which invites said reader to constantly reevaluate what had occurred before — that the author keeps such a sure grip on this makes him a name to look out for.

## Gwyneth Jones Flowerdust

Headline, 1993, 249pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Ian Sales

"It was nearly a month now since the news from Gamartha ... And overcrowing was weighing heavily on [Ranganar's] resources." *Divine Endurance* (p155)

Between these two sentence, Gwyneth Jones has squeezed a novel: **Flowerdust** is set during the events narrated in her debut adult novel, **Divine Endurance**. That novel told the story of the Peninsula, the angel-doll Chosen Among The Beautiful, the eponymous cat, and the revolt of the Peninsulans against the offshore Rulers. Around two-thirds of the way through **Divine Endurance**, the two main Peninsular characters, Derveet and Prince Atoon, find themselves waiting in the Southern city of Ranganar for some sign of what their next move should be. And this is when the events of **Flowerdust** take place.

**Refugees have been flooding** to Ranganar and have been placed in a large camp. Whilst visiting this one day, Derveet and Atoon hear of a drug called **Flowerdust**, a drug they know to be both dangerous and extremely rare. With the help of Endang, an educated male, and Cycler Jhonni, a character who appeared in **Divine Endurance** (but only in a minor role), they set about uncovering the source of the drug. This leads them north into Timur and a reform camp run by an old Koperasi friend of Derveet's. The characters, however, soon realise they have stumbled across more than just a cache of the drug, and the last part of the novel leads up to the revelation of what *exactly* it is behind the reform camp.

**However, the story is just** as much about the characters — especially Cycler Jhonni and Endang. Their relationship forms one of the main major narrative threads of the book, centring around the strange "female" powers begins to manifest. This is particularly so during the trip north from Ranganar to Timur where his powers go into overload and affects the reality of those around him — shades of *Kairos*?

**The Peninsula has always** been one of the better-built fictional worlds, both interesting and sufficiently alien, and leaving the sure knowledge that it continued to live after the story was over. Gwyneth Jones has often been seen as a political writer, and it is this that adds depth to the world of **Divine Endurance** and **Flowerdust**. Matriarchal societies may be fairly common in SF, but successful ones are not and I would count the Peninsula with its *dapur* (an anagram of *purda*, coincidentally) as one of them.

It is always interesting to see how authors behave when they return to worlds they have built previously. So, if I've taken liberties in finding a place to slot **Flowerdust** into **Divine Endurance**'s narrative, then so has Gwyneth Jones in her return to the Peninsula. There are small details that don't tally across the two novels. Why such revisionism? These changes don't detract from the novel in any way, but then I'm not sure they add value either. Perhaps it's just Varleyism (see the Afterword to *John Varley's Steel Beach*).

**On the whole, I think** **Flowerdust** is a more coherent novel than **Divine Endurance** (and comparisons are inevitable). However, of the two, I'm not sure which I think is the better. Whilst **Divine Endurance** is a book that needs to be read carefully and savoured. I don't think this applies to **Flowerdust**. This is not to say it isn't an excellent read, but it is an *easier* one. It's a difficult judgement call: **Divine Endurance** did most of the hard work in setting up the background and (most of) the characters, after all.

**Overall, Flowerdust is a** highly readable, well-written and valid addition to both **Divine Endurance** and Gwyneth Jones oeuvre. Highly recommended.

**Robert Jordan**  
**The Shadow Rising**  
Orbit, 1031pp, £5.99  
Reviewed by Vikki Lee

**This is the fourth book in** Jordan's protracted 'The Wheel of Time Series', a series which looks as if it may well go on forever. The various plotlines continue from where they left at the end of book three.

**Rand al'Thor, The Dragon** Reborn, reaches Tear to claim Callandor, the legendary 'Sword That Is Not a Sword'. After using it to overcome a plethora of people who are trying to stop him from getting his hands on it, he sets off on the next part of his journey to Rhuidean, the sacred city of the Aiel desert warriors, to gain their support as the prophesied 'He Who Comes With The Dawn'. Mat, Egwene and Moraine all embark on this journey with him each for their own reasons.

**Perrin, Faile and Loial the** Ogier set off on their own journey back to the Two Rivers which have been invaded by Whitecloaks and Trollocs.

**Elayne and Nynaeve set off** for Tanchico to continue their search for the thirteen rebel Aes Sedai of the Black Ajah, the "good guys turned bad" of the story.

**If all these names confuse** you, fear not, there is a thirty-page glossary at the back of this book that not only tells you who's who, but what their relationship is to each other. Cecil B. DeJandor and his cast of thousands!

**While each group is off on** their respective quests, things continue to fall apart all over the place and the 'Shadow' continues to grow in strength, moving inexorably towards the great, final battle, even the invincible White Tower, powerbase of the Aes Sedai, begins to fall apart from within.

**This juggernaut of a story** rolls relentlessly on. Jordan continues to entertain with enough plots and subplots to keep the interest sparking. The pace has picked up a little more, and the feeling that events are pieces of a jigsaw that will eventually be completed becomes more and more apparent. Counterbalancing this feeling of progress, however, is an increasing exasperation at the rather juvenile interaction between the two sexes. Most of Jordan's female characters think men are really just large children and constantly succumb to treating them as such; feeling the need to 'mother' them. The men, on the other hand, universally think of women as some sort of alien species totally beyond understanding, and spend most of their time bemoaning the fact to each other. This was endearing several books ago, but is now becoming seriously irritating.

**This somewhat boring and** often lengthy interaction between the sexes is one of the main reasons the books are so long. Jordan seems to feel that endless variations of the same conversation between people are critical to the whole story. It's a shame that a style of dialogue that began so endearingly, should be overused to the point where the reader may skip pages of the book in order to escape serious mental shutdown.

**This irritation aside, Jordan** continues to create a world that is interesting, well drawn and populated by a wide variety of races. The whole journey into the Aiel Waste is fascinating and rewarding, the political intrigues, and struggle for power in the White Tower are riveting, and the

manipulations of the various forces for good and evil make the story well worth sticking with. It's obvious that good will triumph over evil at the end of all this, but more importantly, will men and women understand each other at least a little by then? I'll certainly read on for another book to find out.

**Tanith Lee.  
Darkness, I**

LittleBrown, 1994, 408pp, £15.99  
Reviewed by Martin Brice.

**'Tenebrae sum.**

**I am darkness. Darkness, I...'**

The declaration of Cain forms the title of this novel, the third in the 'Blood Opera' sequence which relates the doings of a vampire tribe, *The Scarabae*.

Murderous, firestarting Ruth ended her days at the close of the previous volume. Now, her mother Rachaela has a second daughter, Anna, fathered by the transsexual Althene. Soon Anna's development demonstrates that she too, has the power to outwit time and the aging process. Perhaps she is even Ruth reincarnated.

In due course, Anna is taken away by the agents of Cain/Cajanus, a character so evil that he is shunned and feared by other Scarabae. All over the world children and young people are being abducted — and not always unwillingly — for participation in his vampiric rituals. Based on Ancient Egyptian ceremonial, these take place in a luxurious palace beneath a frozen continent. Who will win the final confrontation: Cain, the Lord of Death... or Malach, emerging from self-imposed exile in a Dutch castle to punish all who transgress the Scarabae code?

Ritual inspired by ancient fertility religion is inevitably attended by sexual activity, while Scarabae vampirism obviously necessitates a certain amount of blood-letting. Yet for me, the most chilling sequence is Chapter Five, when the doctor examines Anna and learns she is not quite normal.

Then there are the formal ceremonies, the great processions, described in impressive — majestic — language, conveying something of the atmosphere of such ancient occasions. On quite a different level, are the sharp observations of families so dogmatically

anti-racist as to be as bigoted as any they condemn.

The opening Chapter, just three pages long, is a simple account of a flight by a freight-carrying aircraft, yet full of the adventure of flight itself.

But most of all, the writing I shall most remember consists of the two chapters with no fantasy in them at all: a description of the tribulations of a young, depressed mother with a compulsion-eating problem, whose marriage fails, whose son disappears, and who is faced with looking after her totally disabled husband. As a portrait of real people with real problems, of what 'caring in the community' really involves, Chapters Four and Twenty-Nine ought to find their way into any anthology of British social conditions at the close of the Second Millennium AD.

**Peter Morwood & Diane Duane**

**seaQuest DSV: The Novel**  
Millennium, 1994, 200pp, £9.99 hb  
Reviewed by Ian Sales

As I'm shore sure everyone is already aware, *seaQuest DSV* is a futuristic submarine, seen by many as Steven Spielberg's attempt to update that perennial Sunday afternoon favourite, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (which begs the question: why?). This book is the novelisation of the pilot episode.

For those of you that managed to miss *seaQuest DSV* on television, then the plot concerns the dragging out of retirement of Captain Nathan Bridger, ex-Navy and designer of the eponymous underwater vessel (Bridger is played by Roy Schneider, who should know better than to go back in the water...); the cast, um, crew, also includes a feisty female head of research, a kid genius and, since this is a Nineties television series, a talking dolphin.

*SeaQuest* was originally built as a warship, but with the creation of the United Earth/Oceans Organisation (UEO), its role seems to have become that of a soggy Enterprise. The previous captain of the *seaQuest*, Marilyn Stark, your average psychopathic television villain, has been cashiered from the Navy for, er, being psychopathic, and has fastened onto the sub as the target of her revenge — "if I can't captain it, no-one can..."

**Cue underwater**

hide-and-seek, exchange of torpedoes, underwater repairs, exchange of torpedoes, underwater rescues, exchange of torpedoes, and hero wins the day... Real edge-of-the-seat-by-the-numbers stuff.

To say that this book shows all the imagination of a prime-time television series may seem like an oxymoron — but you can't fault the authors for the remarkable lack of originality of the book's setting (they are after all tied tie to it). However it would not be unreasonable to expect a novelisation to cover the same ground (?) as the pilot episode, although in more, um, depth. Unfortunately Morwood and Duane's treatment is somewhat shallow...

This novel is almost impossible to follow without having seen the TV series. Certain areas of the sub — most notably Bridger's, er, Bridge — are so under described, the action seems to take place in a vacuum (?). Minor characters dive into the narrative without being introduced or described. Even the plot differs from what I remember of the actual programme: the evil industrialist responsible for bankrolling Stark's depredations has been written out for some reason I couldn't, er, fathom.

If there is such a thing as a fan of the TV series, then they may find this book of some worth. Otherwise, it should be deep-sixed...

**Stan Nicholls  
Wordsmiths of Wonder**

Orbit, 1993, 461pp, £8.99  
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

It is hard to explain the fascination of interviews. They can make one writer sound much the same as any other, they can serve as little more than puffs for a new book which actually tell us less than we would find in that book. But with the right interviewer they can reveal some hidden link between life and work, or put the subject on the spot enough to cast a fresh light on what, why and how they do their work.

Interviews are naturally at home in newspapers and magazines rather than books. This is partly because interviews need to be as current as reviews, and largely because it is rare to find one interviewer with the energy to

amass enough interviews within a sufficiently short time for it to be worth gathering them in book form. Usually it needs a particular purpose to pull the book together (Larry McCaffery had a clear agenda in compiling his book of interviews, **Across the Wounded Galaxies**) or a definite focus (as with Colin Greenland's extended and in-depth interviews with Michael Moorcock in **Death is no Obstacle**). Stan Nicholls' exhausting collection of 50 interviews with "Writers of the Fantastic" has neither purpose nor focus. It seems to be a random gathering of interviews done for a variety of magazines (mostly **Interzone**) and the way the subjects are bundled together under three basic categories (26 as Science Fiction, 13 as Fantasy, 11 as Horror) suggests there was never any clearly perceived theme to the collection other than the very broadest: "the Fantastic". certainly, reading the interviews doesn't reveal any common purpose; at times there is a welcome and revealing examination of what is "the Fantastic" or what a particular writer is attempting in their work, at other times it seems like no more than a cosy chat intended to make everyone feel good about the latest volume. few of the interviewees are really challenged to defend, explain or think about their work.

**As for focus, the** Acknowledgments suggest that the interviews have been expanded and updated from their original magazine appearance, yet there is little sign of updating and I would hazard a guess that "expansion" consists largely of replacing the inevitable cuts made because of a magazine's space considerations. At any rate, the length of each interview is about the mark you would expect of a typical magazine piece, perhaps 2,000 - 5,000 words, hardly room for a really searching interrogation. And in some instances the area covered by the interview seems curiously circumscribed. the interview with david gemmell, for instance, might lead you to suppose he had only ever written one book, his first, **Legend**, were it not for the long list of other titles given in the introduction. There are other cases where carelessness, either in research or in proofreading, leaves one feeling less than confident about the rest of the interview (Douglas Adams, for instance, has not written a

book called **The Long Dark Tea Time of Earth**).

**It doesn't help that Nicholls** has chosen to present these pieces in the format of the familiar celebrity interview: solid text within which the interviewee's remarks are distinguished only by the use of inverted commas. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this format; it is a style used by many of the best interviewers in the business (Lynne Barber, Hunter Davies), but it usually allows asides about the interviewee's appearance, body language, the setting of the interview or anything else which might colour or illuminate what is actually being said. Such extraneous material is missing from these interviews. We do get occasional comments on the subject's work, though often in a manner that is indistinguishable from what the interviewee says. For instance, in the interview with Brian Stableford we get: "**The Empire of Fear...** represents a trend toward genre crossovers. 'The book combines several genres...'. How does one distinguish the voice of Nicholls from that of Stableford in such instances? And what is the value of repetition rather than amplification?

**In fact, other than in such** comments, Nicholls is virtually absent from these interviews. We do not get his perceptions, we do not even (99 times out of 100) get any inkling of what he actually asked. This allows us no perspective from which to judge the interviewees. Are they responding well to the interview, are they actually answering the questions or are they carefully changing the subject? Are they even being asked questions which might get to the heart of their work?

**Which isn't to say that these** interviews are valueless. Far from it. the interview with Joe haldeman is a model, carefully revealing the opinions of a very thoughtful man who has clearly considered exactly what he is doing within SF. the interview with Ray Bradbury is interesting not for what is said, but for the arrogance with which Bradbury says it. the joint interview with Larry Niven and Steven Barnes throws a fascinating light on the way they collaborate. But other interviews (Frederik Pohl, Brian Aldiss, JG Ballard) tell us no more than we could discover in a dozen other places. These are the big names

who need to be on the cover to sell the book, but they have already been interviewed to within an inch of their lives and there seems precious little new to discover. With some of the subjects who are more interesting because there might be something fresh to unearth (Michael Swanwick, Howard Waldrop) Nicholls seems to approach the interview without a clear idea of where he wants the interview to go, and as a result the interview barely seems to dip below the surface.

**These, then, are interviews** which are fascinating only because of their subjects. If you hang on every word of David Brin, Dan Simmons, Greg Bear, Tanith Lee or Clive Barker, they are bound to be interesting. But if you want to explore a little deeper into what makes these people into the writers they are, the book falls short of the mark.

## Robert Rankin Raiders of the Lost Car Park

Doubleday, 1994, 253pp, £14.99  
Reviewed by Chris Amies

**HE'S BACK. And this time he's** brought his ocarina ...

**Cornelius Murphy, the Stuff** of Epics, must rescue Hugo Rune, author of the Book of Ultimate Truths. This is once more into Robert Rankin's peculiar universe where not only does magic really work, you can also buy ten Woodbines for 1/6 and the Tylwyth Teg are starting to seriously undermine life as we know it. Or don't. Anything can happen in a Robert Rankin novel, it sort of goes with the territory. Cornelius Murphy, being the Stuff of Epics, has to prevent the Hidden King of the World from unleashing nameless evil upon humankind, assisted by his dwarf sidekick Tuppe and his potential girlfriend Anna. Hugo Rune plans to kidnap the Queen at a concert by the world's best band, Gandhi's Hairdryer. Omally and Pooley stagger in from the earlier novels, creating a kind of barroom-temperature fusion between the Brentford Trilogy and the later Armageddon trilogy which made much of Elvis Presley. Well, there are no Elvises in this one. No sprouts, if I recall. There is a New Age Traveller called Bollocks, there is a car called the MacGregor Mathers that uses water for fuel (hence the title: Our

Heroes have stolen the motor from the King of the World's underground car pound). Star Hill and Gunnersbury Park are revealed as the mystical centre of the universe. Running jokes for this one include the use of incomprehensible architectural descriptions (okay wise guy, so what is an aurora in the tympanum of the central pediment?) and referring to sex as 'taking tea with the parson'. Don't try understanding this novel. Just buckle yourself into the green upholstery of the MacGregor Mathers and let Cornelius (no relation to a certain Michael Moorcock character who also liked big old cars) take you through the Forbidden Zones and out the other side.

**He's back. And this time he's** found his father.

### Lucius Shepard The Ends of the Earth

Millennium, 1994, 484pp,

£15.99hc, £8.99pb

Reviewed by Steve Jeffrey

Lucius Shepard entered the SF arena with the novel *Green Eyes* in 1984. A blend of science fiction and horror that mixes bioengineering with zombie revenants, it was an impressive debut that marked Shepard as someone to watch.

And indeed, for the rest of the decade Shepard was an almost permanent fixture in *Year's Best* collections for stories from Asimov's, *F&SF*, *Playboy* and *Omni*. Stories that marked two themes in particular as distinctive Shepard territory. The first of these was a fascination with South American settings; a dense, lush and dangerous tropical backdrop to stories of magic and love and terror. The second thread weaves through Shepard's fix-up second novel *Life During Wartime* (1987), expanded from the 1986 Nebula Award novella 'R and R'. More overtly SF, the setting is a near future war waged in Central American Free Guatemala by drug and cybernetically enhanced soldiers. A first collection of stories appeared in the same year as *The Jaguar Hunter*, winning the World Fantasy Award.

Two novellas saw publication as the magical realist fantasy *The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter* (Ziesing 1988) and *Kalimantan* (Legend 1990) before Shepard returned to the horror novel in 1993 with the

ambitious creation of the immense Castle Banat for the horror novel *The Golden*. Unfortunately the book, and the simple murder mystery plot are nearly too thin to adequately contain and convey the immensity of Shepard's Gormenghastian setting.

All these strands — of SF, horror and magic realist fantasy — come together in *The Ends of the Earth*. This second collection, fourteen stories and novellas covering the period 1986-1989, first saw publication by Arkham House in 1989. The contents of the Millennium edition are faithful to the original apart from the loss of the original J K Potter illustrations and the quality of the paper, which is sometimes disconcertingly transparent to the print on the next page.

For Shepard fans, and those who seek an introduction to his work, the collection is a joy. The stories are taken from what might be rightly regarded as Shepard's zenith as a story writer through the mid to late 1980s, and his prolific output in the pages of *Asimov's* and *F&SF* among others. There are four and three stories respectively from those sources, together with two, 'Shades' and 'Delta Sly Honey', from the anthology *Fields of Fire*. In addition, there are stories from *Omni*, *Whispers* and *Playboy*, plus the novella *The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter* originally published by Ziesing.

That last is worth the price of admission alone. A magical fantasy which takes place inside the sleeping body of the dragon Griaule, so vast and in such a millennia long sleep that it has become part of the landscape itself and home, outside and in, to whole communities and lifestyles. Despite its more exotic setting, there is a parallel to the sleeping power of the "dragon in the land" of *Excalibur*, where, in the dragon's slow heart, beats the blood and life of the land. But Griaule is not to be controlled or invoked by mere wizards, and can bend and shape whole generations of human lives and loves to a single momentary purpose.

The title story, again of novella length, concerns a rivalry between Ray, an American writer, and Carl Konwicks, a charlatan messiah and drug dealer, for the affections of Odille. An ancient Mayan game, played between Ray and Carl one drunken evening, becomes a bridge into a darker and coldly evil world, and a test of

sacrifice and pain. Konwicks already knows he has lost, but the terrible consequences of the game must still be played out in reality, with a price for both winner and loser. In the nightmare pursuit through the jungle there is a strong hint, as in other stories, of the synaesthetic hunt sequences in the movie *Predator*.

'Fire Zone Emerald' (the title taken from a section of *Life During Wartime*), is another story with this effect, and the cat and mouse jungle hunt between a downed cyborged soldier and Mathias's drug-fuelled and goddess-tripping group of renegades also recalls Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and its film incarnation *Apocalypse Now*.

'Delta Sly Honey' is a ghost story set in the weary, war-sapped craziness of the Vietnam war. Randall Garret is an introvert farmboy on the edge of cracking up under a brutal superior officer, who only comes alive in his spaced-out flights of invention at the camp's broadcast microphone. Spinning out calls to imagined lost patrols in the jungle, he is tolerated as 'good for morale'; until the day an answer comes crackling back through the static and Delta Sly Honey, a ghost patrol from Randall's lyrical imagining, claim him as their own. Randall is left stranded and terrified between the torture of the living and the promised freedom of the dead.

'Shades' is the second story taken from the anthology *Fields of Fire*. The ghost of an American soldier, Stoner, has been trapped in a Vietnamese experiment in a jungle clearing, and into a confrontation with a member of his old patrol. In contrast to Randall's confusion and fear in 'Delta Sly Honey', here the view from the other side holds only bitterness and a sense of waste.

Shepard takes us back to North America for 'Bound for Glory' and 'An Exercise of Faith'. The former involves a strange train journey across a blasted wasteland known as the Patch, and the passengers who make this desperate journey knowing the trip may change them forever.

A dubious gift leads the preacher Franklyn to attempt a bizarre form of salvation in 'An Exercise of Faith'. Franklyn can see all the sins of his congregation and that each of them has its exact and fitting match in another member of the congregation. There is a catamite

for every pederast, a slave for every dominatrix, a trio of eager boys for the nymphomaniac. Taking a sermon from the works of Artaud and Crowley, he resolves to save their souls from the twisting burden of repression and denial, and negate each member's sins by introducing it to its corresponding, cleansing opposite. An exposure that his congregation are unable and unwilling to accept as their price of their salvation.

**'Nomans Land' is not** recommended for anyone who has an unnatural horror of eight legged visitors from the bath. The sense of loss in this story, on an island that might be populated by something even more disturbing than its ghosts, is suggestive of vintage Ellison, although without some of the sometimes excess of sentimentality that Ellison could fall into. Shepard's hand is more assured and restrained. This, perhaps, is Shepard's own minor failing in some of these stories: that he is sometimes too controlled, too distanced, that in the midst of horrors, his characters can sometimes indulge in several yards of metaphysical speculation before they finally break and run.

**One of the earliest stories** 'Aymara', from 1986, sets up to become a fairly obvious time travel paradox story about a visitor from the future and an experiment gone wrong. Until Shepard jerks it sharply sideways, wrong-footing the obvious plot resolution. Despite the twist, and the way it finally resolves, this is perhaps one of the weaker stories in the collection.

**But then Shepard delivers** the small poignant gem of 'Life of Buddha'. Not exactly where you would think to look for a sad and bittersweet love story, among the small time drug dealers, addicts and pimps in a seedy urban ghetto. But like Taboo's final beautiful metamorphosis, it is perfectly and magically formed.

**'Surrender', which closes the** collection with a story of the callous political and economic manipulation of the South Americas by the North, is just plain angry. It ends with the narrator's (and are we far wrong to believe also Shepard's) bitter accusation of the smug complacency of an America which refuses to see or believe that the shit is already on the fan.

**The Ends of the Earth is** fourteen tales of love and magic

and war and terror from a master storyteller, who draws comparisons from both within and outside the genre to Conrad, Greene of Borges. Such comparisons are not often or lightly drawn, even in these days of excessive hype. In this case it is well deserved.

**Treat yourself. This** collection comes very highly recommended.

### Charles Sheffield (ed)

Future Quartet

Avonova/Morrow, 1994, 294pp

\$20.00

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

**This book is subtitled 'Earth in the Year 2042: a Four-Part Invention',** and grew from an initiative by the American magazine *The World and I*. Its framework is four different forecasts of how the world will be fifty years on, each followed by a story set in that future. The four authors are, says the blurb, "four of our most respected and prescient speculators on the future possible", "the award-winning giants in the field of science fiction": Ben Bova, Frederik Pohl, Charles Sheffield and Jerry Pournelle. Men, of course.

**The futures are graded as** cautiously-pessimistic, cautiously-optimistic, optimistic and downright pessimistic, but there is a sour tone about all four stories, as if the authors determined to show that they wrote without rose-tinted specs. Although three of the futures are carefully global in scope, the stories are set without exception in USA or in American space, an emphasis that left this reader with a dissatisfied feeling of promises only partly fulfilled.

**This is even more the case** with the contribution by Jerry Pournelle. His future projection has the limiting title, 'Democracy in America', and propounds the

far-right 'libertarian' thesis that democratic government is necessarily obstructive to the few powerful figures from whom all real progress supposedly derives. His story, 'Higher Education', written in collaboration with Charles Sheffield, is a one sided attack on what he perceives to be current policy in American schools. The story holds the attention well, like any skilled propaganda, but Pournelle's political views, strongly-held and obtrusive, are a severe limitation to his creative ability, in that he seems wholly incapable of understanding the feelings and motives of those whose views or tendencies he opposes. Life isn't that simple.

**The other stories are less** problematic. I enjoyed Ben Bova's 'Thy Kingdom', which nicely contrasts the world by a well-meaning international statesman and the limited and equally valid picture as seen by a young hustler from the underclass. Frederik Pohl's 'What Dreams Remain' expertly charts a young man's unscrupulous rise in a rigidly two-nations USA. Charles Sheffield's 'The Price of Civilisation' is ostensibly set in an optimistic future, but shows that heartbreak will still exist.

**The odd thing is that even so** I found the four possible futures more thought-provoking and memorable than the stories that flowed from them. I wanted more futures: the parochial limitation of male American thinking, of what Americans will allow themselves to think, are as real as they would be for any other society, and if we are trying to expand our understanding of possible futures, we need as wide a range of prophets as can be found, including women, and authors from the Third World. Which perhaps means spreading the sf method even wider than it has gone so far. That can't be bad, can it?





# Paperback Graffiti

edited by Stephen Payne

## Signposts

**Stephen Donaldson (ed.)  
Strange Dreams**

"The book brings together the rich diversity of fantasy storytelling and reveals Donaldson to be a master anthologist."

Max Sexton

**Esther M. Friesner  
Yesterday We Saw  
Mermaids**

"At around the 40,000 word mark I'm not sure that this qualifies as a novel, but by virtue of Friesner's accomplished intelligent yet humorous prose there is no doubt that this is a fine piece of storytelling."

Benedict S. Cullum

**Colin Greenland  
Harm's Way**

"As gripping as the plot is, the main strength of *Harm's Way* is Greenland's brilliant realisation of a 19th century that never was. In his London, whores, street urchins and circus performers intermingle with strange aliens from all parts of the solar system and beyond — but it is nonetheless reminiscent of Dickens or Conan Doyle. Mars and the other planets are like the fantasy visions of Rice Burroughs. An enthralling read."

Steven Tew

**Guy Gavriel Kay  
Tigana**

"*Tigana* is a rich and complex fantasy. Kay takes the basic elements and then surpasses the clichés of the genre. This fantasy is much more compelling than many that are currently being published."

Carol Ann Green

**Nancy Kress  
Beggars in Spain**

"The real problem with this book is that it's just too damned short. But I do recommend that you read it."

Andy Mills

**Rachel Pollack  
Unquenchable Fire**

"In the single reading I've so far given this book I have not fully understood it, or exhausted what it has to offer. I shall go back to it, and I recommend it."

Cherith Baldry

**Paul Voermans  
The Weird Colonial Boy**

"Voermans' second novel supplies what his first hinted that he was capable of... This time he's serious about telling us his story, demanding that we listen to every precisely chosen word, and the result is just plain wonderful."

Mat Coward

## Reviews

**Orson Scott Card  
The Call of Earth**

*Legend*, 7.4.94, 304pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Chris Amies

Here we go again. The cover with its Romanesque figures posing by a VDU; the odd names, the intrigue and romance among peoples on far flung worlds which nonetheless contrive to resemble Age-d'Or Paris and St Petersburg; a choking miasma of exoticism that sprawls unhealthy up from every page, and quite frankly m'dear I don't give a damn. The *Call of Earth* is set forty million years in the future on a planet guarded by a god-computer called the Oversoul. That's forty million years. That long ago there were dinosaurs, as any *Jurassic Park*-loving schoolboy will tell you. There's bound to be a tad of evolution in the next 40,000,000 too, unless you accept the religious idea that Man is some kind of special case, created as is and unchanging. Oh yes, and religion... that always gets a look in in these Science Fantasy worlds, too. The city of Basilica (subtle name) was founded in the middle of the desert and people have strange and prophetic dreams... hold on. Where have we heard that before? Joseph Smith, the Angel Moroni, the Book of Mormon... now, we know Orson Scott Card is a Mormon, but usually he doesn't lay it on this thick and sometimes he doesn't lay it on at all. This is, as I say, Book Two. *Homecoming* is described as a 'series'. Not even a trilogy. It's a soap opera. Among the many oddly named characters (Moozh, Rashgallivak, Dhelembuvex...) there is one called simply Plod. That sums up this book. Plod, plod, plod.

**Molly Cochran  
& Warren Murphy  
The Forever King**

*Millenium*, 16.12.93, 401pp, £4.99

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

It is virtually two novels: an inner historico-legendary one, enfolded by a bizarre, contemporary, framing one. The inner novel's stories, largely set in post-Roman

Britain, are those of the Dark Knight (later Saladin), since dynastic Egypt a semi-immortal thanks to possession of what was to become the Holy Grail; of Arthur and Merlin; and of Merlin and Nimue. The framing novel tells the tale of a red-haired small boy, Arthur Blessing, the Forever King reincarnated, who finds the stolen / lost Grail in a Chicago gutter and synchronously inherits the site of a ruinous Camelot in England's "Dorset County". He travels there in the company of a retired, ex-drunk FBI cop, Hal Wokznac, destined eventually to embody the spirit of Sir Galahad, and the eccentric Taliesin, who turns out to be Merlin. Saladin, now a murderous psychopath kidnaps Arthur as hostage for the grail he seeks. Everything moves hectically, magically, bloodily and improbably to a spectacular end, with Camelot manifesting and fading again, the Grail caught up in the skies, Excalibur back in its stone and little Arthur and his Galahadian minder headed back to Chicago. A curious, somewhat arbitrarily tacked-together tale, but for Arthurian devotees collectable, and certainly in parts (more particularly of the inner novel) enjoyable.

**Matthew J. Costello**  
**Fire Below**

*Millennium*, 3/3/94, 264pp, £14.99  
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

**This follow-up to Seaquest DSV: The Novel** continues the development of Captain Nathan Hale Bridger and the crew of the Seaquest DSV as they sail the seven underseas righting wrongs, seeking out new life and civilisations... sorry, wrong TV show.

**Novelisations like this** are really just souvenirs of the series / film that spawned them. Well written ones can expand on the original, having more space to develop the characters, more imaginative special effects. The rest just tell the story. This one tells the story. And the story shows every sign of being from the early episodes. The characters (human, non-human and mechanical) are still trying to find their feet (or fins), and new wonders are still being paraded before us. Perhaps when the whole thing settles down and the characters enter the popular mythos in their own right, then novels about them can be written that truly do expand on the

situations. But until then, if you want an aide-memoire, then read this.

**The book is two episodes** from the ill-fated TV show of the same name. The first concerns a bunch of terrorist / pirates who plant bombs all over an underwater holiday resort for the rich and famous. The setting, plot and action give just the right environment for the full potential of the SeaQuest and her personnel to be used to the full. So we are given a guided tour round the sub's capabilities, shown how great a team her crew are, we see the deployment of some serious surveillance devices (the WSKRS for example — the acronym is never explained) and the resident computer genius gets to hack into computers. All standard TV fare, I suppose, especially this early in the series.

**The second episode sees the** crew rushing to the rescue of a research station, whose personnel have bit off more than they can chew down a deep trench on the sea floor. A bit more SF, this half, but in the end it just sinks back down to TV level.

**Stephen Donaldson (ed.)**  
**Strange Dreams**

*HarperCollins*, 3/94, 704pp, £5.99  
Reviewed by Max Sexton

**Strange Dreams is a new anthology** of fantasy stories selected by Stephen Donaldson, the author of the celebrated *Thomas Covenant* novels. The diversity of the stories is striking. There is classic fantasy: Rudyard Kipling's tale of what happens when western, modern man is confronted by an eastern ancient diabolical evil is still evocative enough to remain frightening. Franz Kafka's suitably macabre tale of authority gone mad, but dealt with by the narrator as sane until the end of the story, becomes shockingly absurd.

**There are modern fairy tales;** Lucius Shepherd's brittle humour succeeds in creating a delightful story about a woman facing middle-age and meeting the challenge in a uniquely supernatural way. There is a story about man and his environment; Edward Bryant's monster tale repeats a pessimistic theme, almost reduced to banality but given a refreshing twist here, that man inevitably destroys his environment because it is his nature to do so. Theodore Sturgeon's grimly funny tale written in the fifties, snipes at the

literalness of what was then the new medium of television and its power to bring the world and its problems into the quiet, domesticated living room to rock the life of one quiet, domesticated and apparently domesticated fellow, but all is not well... This was my personal favourite. Harlan Ellison's tale is characteristically complex; the story he builds is felt by the reader to be intensely personal, as the boy grows into a man and loses innocence and wonder with the world, only to try and recapture the magic he left behind in his youth. However, I can't help thinking that this personal form of storytelling has been used to discuss the wider themes of America's loss of faith with progress since the sixties, and heroic science fiction. Orson Scott Card's tale moralises as his stories usually do and for sheer effect, the story is incredibly strong. Amoralism, typified by the impossibility of human relations inside the modern city is repaid by the ugliest creature since the gorgon.

**I could go on, but all the** stories retell their themes in new and imaginative ways. The book brings together the rich diversity of fantasy storytelling and reveals Donaldson to be a master anthologist.

**Christopher Evans**  
**Aztec Century**

*Gollancz*, 28/4/94, 352pp, £4.99  
Reviewed by Steve Palmer

**In Aztec Century the reader is** presented with an alternative world in which conquistador Cortes changes sides (of course!) and thus begins four centuries of global domination by Aztecs.

**Sounds unlikely? Doesn't** matter. This excellently written and jolly exciting SF thriller carries the reader along a series of events in Britain's late 20th Century, in which the Aztecs in their golden jet-ships have conquered Britain, and the novel's narrator, Princess Catherine, is just about the only one willing to put up a fight. Passing through an initial hideout in Wales, through capture and having to learn to live in London with the invaders (including dashing governor Extepan), then following events in Russia and finally in Mexico, this is one difficult book to put down.

**The author clearly has great** fun inventing "points of alternative history". Prime Minister under

occupation, Kenneth Parkhouse, is not dissimilar to John Major, and when he is assassinated by a bomb (there are lots of bombs in this book) his post is taken by "a strident woman in a dark blue suit": ahoy, Mrs Thatcher! Most delightful of all are global fast-food outfit MexTaco, with yellow double-arch symbol, and the leaders of New England (i.e. America) being President Vidal and Vice-President Wolfe (Gene, I fervently hope...).

Of course, it's not terribly profound. For that (and an equally terrific story) you have to read **The Empire of Fear**. And it's difficult not to mentally skip some of the Aztec words, such as Quipucamayoc, Iztacaxayah, Huahuantli, Tlatelolco, etc., and in doing so miss some of the feel of the book. It also must be said that for some reason an entirely unnecessary epilogue is added which, though packing quite an emotional punch, ultimately rather spoils the feel of the book, otherwise so well invented.

That apart, this comes highly recommended.

**Jack C. Haldeman**  
**Star Trek Adventures:**  
**Perry's Planet**

*Titan*, 24/3/94, 131pp, £4.50  
Reviewed by Max Sexton

Perry's Planet is another new Star Trek adventure, identical to countless others, so formulaic that a computer could have written it and whose writing is like a copy-righted ad. The story of a computer running a world, but getting into problems because computers and logic cannot replace humans and the spirit that make us free, is so outdated as to be prehistoric. The Klingons attack is incidental and not diverting enough to get in the way of the main storytelling. The twist and turns in an otherwise single-tracked plot culminates in the usual celebration of another utopian plan down the chute. I suppose the publishers will continue to pump this stuff out while there is demand for it, but surely after twenty years it could be more ambitious.

**Nigel Findley**  
**Shadowrun: Lone Wolf**  
*Roc*, 31/3/94, 287pp, £3.99  
Reviewed by Norman Beswick

**Lone Wolf is number 12 of the Shadowrun series**, linked to a game you can (if you choose) play. The novel itself is a tough-guy thriller, set in mid-twenty-first century Seattle. Gangs fight for territory with advanced weaponry, and policing is contracted out to the Lone Star organisation. It is also several decades after *The Awakening*, when magic returned (rather sourly) to the world and tight-lipped Elves form the minority populations with their own areas.

**Hard-bitten Rick Larson is an agent of Lone Star**, working undercover within the Cutters gang, but he quickly finds himself in trouble, his cover blown and Lone Star itself sending killer squads to get him. How he survives and what he discovers is the substance of the story.

**The story pulls you along** satisfactorily from bafflement to bafflement, and most of the humans have interesting cyberpunk-like enhancements. There's not, fortunately, very much magic, but like everything else in the book it is treated with hard-boiled matter-of-factness and never as an ex machina get-out for an author with a plot problem. *Argent* the shadowrunner unexpectedly reveals hidden depths, along among the otherwise one-dimensional cast of characters. Formula, but I've read much worse.

**Esther M. Friesner**  
**Yesterday We Saw**  
**Mermaids**

*SMP Pan*, 25/2/94, 155pp, £3.99  
Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum

**Employed to good effect in this work is the conceit that**, prior to Columbus' actual landing, the New World might perhaps have been a magical kingdom wherein dwell all manner of creatures under the benign stewardship of Prester John.

**Sanctuary from the barbaric strictures of the Inquisition** is threatened by the imminent arrival of Columbus by the Santa Maria unless Prester John can convince his faerie denizens of their own intrinsic worthiness. It is to this end that a motley party undertake a parallel journey across the Atlantic. As a side note, those

civilisations our own history shows as inhabiting that continent were protected by Prester John having installed them in their own discrete spheres of existence.

**The narration takes the form of a journal** inscribed by the likeable Sister Ana who well observes the venal, hypocritical actions of her co-religionists which contrast with the almost innocent non-humans.

**At around the 40,000 word mark** I'm not sure that this qualifies as a novel, but by virtue of Friesner's accomplished intelligent yet humorous prose there is no doubt that this is a fine piece of storytelling.

**Gregory Frost**  
**The Pure Cold Light**

*Roc*, 25/2/94, 242pp, £4.99  
Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum

**Hitherto best known for his fantasy**, with his first SFnal offering Frost confirm his knowledge of the genre via oblique references to Swanwick, Dick and Ballard although the obvious comparison to be made is with that 50's classic, **The Space Merchants**.

**As in Pohl & Kornbluth's tale**, an overcrowded world is dominated by unscrupulous mega-corporations although Frost's ScumberCorp has all but neutralised the competition. The figurehead US president and the unwittingly drugged population are familiar, as is the plan for off-world colonies of consumers: Pohl chose Venus whilst Frost plumps for Mars.

**As with Courtenay in Merchants**, Thomasina Lyell adopts an alter ego allowing her access to those at the bottom of the heap but as a freelance Private Investigative Journalist, or pijin, she is altogether more streetwise than Pohl's ad executive.

**Comparisons aside for now**, the novel is driven primarily by Lyell's search for the identity of Angel Rueda, whom she'd caught on tape during an earlier assignment, and for the reason why ruthless ScumberCorp agent Mingo is attempting to kill him. We learn what happens to Orbital addicts — whose bodies seem to disappear as their addiction deepens — and also the nature of those controlling ScumberCorps and the Xau Dau "terrorists".

**Taken in context with the rest of the novel**, which from

names and chapter headings must be adjudged to be a black comedy, the denouement is rather odd: Frost having polemicised against "sound bite" journalism he finishes with an unlikely wish fulfilling scenario with all the baddies exposed on live TV!

For harder edged or more convincing fiction I'd go respectively for Womack's *Elvissey* and Sterling's *Islands In The Net* and while this will do for starters Frost will need to try harder if he wished to retain my interest.

**W. Michael Gear  
& Kathleen O'Neal Gear**  
**People of the Fire**

*Tor, 1991*

reprinted in the U.K. by  
*Pan 22 4 94, 467pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

When this book first dropped through my letterbox, I thought, here we go, I've definitely pulled the short-straw this time around. Two lines of author names, Boris Vallejo male and female on a garish cover, 'TOR Historical' on the spine, just about all the ingredients that would generally stop me buying a book. So imagine my surprise at finding a regular little gem of a story between the covers.

The sequel to *People of the Wolf*, and second book in a series of four billed as The Prehistoric America Series, is a story about American Indians living off the land and their struggle to be at one with it.

It is hard to single out characters in this book, partly because there are so many of them, and partly because they are all so beautifully drawn that you want to mention them all. The interaction between members of this large cast is superbly handled and one really does care about what is happening to them. The problems faced by these tribes are almost surely historically authentic. The credentials of the authors as anthropologists and prehistorians clearly implies this. Living on the plains, the tribes are hunters and depend on the dwindling bison as their main source of food. They only kill enough for their needs, use every part of the slaughtered animals, wasting nothing, and sing the souls of their kills to The One In All. The shamanic magic was refreshingly more believable than

the usual 'rabbit out of a hat' wizardry employed in most modern sword and sorcery fantasy.

The cover blurb by Robert Jordan bills this as "A compelling recreation of a time before history when man and nature were linked." Compelling is certainly an apt word for a story that is full of interesting characters, vividly imagined landscapes and pace. I would recommend this to fantasy readers who enjoy something a little different and I'm looking forward to future books in the series, as well as catching up with the one I've missed.

**John Gideon**  
**Golden Eyes**

*Headline, 14 4 94, 568pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by Steven Tew

When history professor Mark Lansen is nearly flattened by a suicide plunging from the college roof and the corpse then speaks to him, he knows he's in for a run of bad luck. Sure enough, summer vacation in his home town of Oldenburg, Oregon, turns out to be a nightmare of vampires, witches and zombies. As the secrets of the town are revealed, Lansen makes horrifying discoveries about his own past and becomes the only person who can defeat the forces of evil.

Put like that, *Golden Eyes* sounds pretty banal. In fact, it is an entertaining and gripping read. Particularly effective is Gideon's skilful interweaving of the ordinary (Lansen's failing marriage, Tressa Downey's drug addiction) with the horrific and bizarre (vampires sucking blood and reading the future in the entrails of virgins). The horror scenes swing equally effectively from the nasty to the grimly humorous, with rotting ambulant corpses waving golf clubs with deadly intent. If I have a criticism it's that the scenes of sexual assault and rape are rather distasteful. Apart from that, Gideon writes with convincing atmosphere and tells an involving tale with plenty of surprises at the end. Good entertainment for horror fans.

**Colin Greenland**  
**Harm's Way**

*HarperCollins, 3 94, 378pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by Steven Tew

*Harm's Way* is set in a quasi-Victorian age in which Britannia rules the spaceways. Told in the first

person by Sophie Farthing, who lives with her father, a night-watchman at High Haven, a space-dock orbiting Earth. He wants her to stay 'out of harm's way', but she dreams of running away into space like Robinson Crusoe. After meeting a mysterious envoy who seems to know her dead mother, she follows her into space, a journey which takes her to the moon, London, Mars and Jupiter. She discovers that her mother was a prostitute who was murdered in a vicious attack and realises that she does not know who her real father is. The story of *Harm's Way* is the story of Sophie Farthing's discovery of who she is, and where her destiny lies.

As gripping as the plot is, the main strength of *Harm's Way* is Greenland's brilliant realisation of a 19th century that never was. In his London, whores, street urchins and circus performers intermingle with strange aliens from all parts of the solar system and beyond — but it is nonetheless reminiscent of Dickens or Conan Doyle. Mars and the other planets are like the fantasy visions of Rice Burroughs. An enthralling read: highly recommended.

**Harry Harrison**  
**The Stainless Steel Rat Sings The Blues**

*Bantam, 31 3 94, 230pp, £14.99*

Reviewed by Alan Fraser.

Harry Harrison's loveable space rogue James Bolivar "Slippery Jim" diGriz, the Stainless Steel Rat, first appeared in an [Astounding] story in August, 1957. Therefore this latest book marks a thirty-five year series of these enjoyable space adventures with a humorous flavour. This story actually comes early in the Rat chronology, with the still-teen-aged Jim being caught trying to rob the Mint of the planet Paskónjak.

Facing execution, Jim is offered a deal by the Galactic League if he goes to the planet Liokukae to rescue a missing alien artefact, the only one ever found by Man in thirty-two thousand years of galactic exploration. Liokukae is the kind of planet used frequently by authors from Robert Sheckley to Jack L. Chalker, a quarantined dumping-ground for all the Galaxy's recidivists, misfits and fanatics, in this case kept happy by a liberal supply of TV

sets and hundreds of satellite channels. Jim thinks up the perfect cover as a member of a blues / rock band busted and exiled to Liokukae for the possession of horrendously illegal substances, hence the title.

However, there are problems, the main one being that Jim has been given a thirty-day delayed action poison to make sure he doesn't consider NOT fulfilling his mission. As Jim's time runs out, his quest for the alien artefact turns into a mission to both stay alive and liberate the planet.

Even though Harrison finds lots of good things to joke about, I have always found these books raise smiles rather than laughs, and that his main priority always seems to be the telling of a good exciting tale (in which he succeeds), rather than the humour. For me this book is not, as the blurb and back cover quotes would have you believe, a sidesplitter. However, for Rat fans and other lovers of light-hearted space adventure, it's still a treat.

**Paul Hazel**

### **The Wealdwife's Tale**

*AvoNova*, 3 94, 295pp, \$4.99

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

Reviewers are fallible. This book comes decorated with snippets of high praise from all manner of prestigious journals and authors, and I settled down for an enjoyable read. Unexpectedly, I hated every page and had to force my way through it. I could well be wrong and I beg you at least to scan a few pages before taking my word for it.

*Locus* called it "a compellingly bleak, mysterious and timeless tale". It begins with the Eighth Duke of West Redding, mourning the death of his wife Elva and constructing a flying machine that will carry him into the unpenetrable heart of the nearby wood where he believes they will be reunited. It ends with the Ninth Duke marrying a strange girl he himself brought out of the wood, and unexpectedly beating her up in the marriage bed.

In the intervening pages, names and identities are often interchangeable and reversible, expeditions into the wood (the world of the dead?) find naught for anyone's comfort, and the locals shake their gossiping heads and are sure no good will come of it. I state this baldly and perhaps

unfairly; clearly their are meanings within meanings, and other people think Paul Hazel has triumphed. Perhaps they are right?

### **Alexander Jabokov A Deeper Sea**

*AvoNova*, 1993, 360pp, \$4.99

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

In 2015, Russian researchers on Sakhalin are studying dolphins. They believe, inspired by a Minoan myth, that dolphins and humans were in regular communication until the eruption of Thera in the 14th Century BCE, when the Mycenaeans - whom Jabokov appears to regard as successors, but whose civilisation in fact fell around the same time - began killing dolphins, and the dolphins stopped speaking to humans. To persuade the dolphins to resume communication, the researchers therefore recreate the sonic conditions of the ancient Aegean. Why there should be any connection between the two is never explained - nor, when the dolphins do start to talk, is it explained how they can speak languages without human vocal chords.

In 2020, Russia is at war with the USA. The war has been provoked by the dolphins, in revenge for their killing by the Mycenaeans - but in order to preserve their biosphere, the war is fought by conventional means, right down to implausible WW2-style amphibious assaults on Alaskan islands. Jabokov seems not to realise that the high cost and high destructive power of modern conventional weapons means that in any conflict between two evenly matched adversaries (in this novel, Russia and the USA) the rate of attrition would be so large that one or other would have to go nuclear within a few weeks simply to avoid capitulation.

The war ends eventually, Russia frees its dolphin forces to do as they like, and orcas - who have also begun speaking human again - announce that they are in communication with intelligent life-forms in the atmospheric depths of Jupiter. (How the two communicate is never explained.) So humans transplant the brain of a stranded whale into a spaceship and travel to Jupiter with some dolphins, where the whale is dropped into the Jovian

atmosphere and... eaten by a Jovian, actually, but who cares? By this stage, the novel has been overwhelmed by its accumulated silliness.

Apparently a shorter version first appeared in Asimov's. In expanding it, Jabokov has stretched it thin rather than add the material necessary to fill the glaringly obvious holes. Compared to Robert Merle's *The Day of The Dolphin* and Ted Mooney's *Easy Travel to Other Planets*, two other novels of dolphin-human communication, *A Deeper Sea* is just ridiculous.

**Gwyneth Jones**

### **Identifying The Object**

*Swan Press*, 1993, 86pp, \$3.75

Reviewed by Colin Bird

This small press anthology of stories by Gwyneth Jones was published in the U.S. last year. It contains four stories, two of which have appeared in *Interzone*, one from Asimov's and one from the anthology *In Dreams*.

'Bold As Love' is a brief slice of twenty-four-year-old Fiorinda's life as she wanders through the Insanitude, a sleazy night-club / city. She meets nihilistic youths on death trips to a backing of Trash metal. The title story, previously published as 'Forward Echo', is a confused tale of the hunt for an alien spacecraft. The story takes place in Africa and features two characters from her 1993 book [White Angel].

'Blue Clay Blues' is the most interesting story, by far. The photochemical clay of the title is used in hardware networks in a desolate future after some kind of nuclear exchange. Johnny is an eejay (Engineer-Journalist) on the hunt for a plant illegally manufacturing the powerful Coraline or blue clay. He travels with his daughter, Bella, across the wasteland until he meets some menacing bikers who control one of the plants. Caught in the boondocks, hundreds of miles from the walled city, Johnny has to negotiate his way to the story that he seeks.

Finally we have 'The Eastern Succession', a slight mood piece featuring characters from her book *Flowerdust*. The eastern peninsula of Timur, in 2022, requires a new prince and Endung goes to the debates to observe the process by which their new leader is chosen. But Endung is caught up in the matriarchal bureaucracy which surrounds the event.

An entertaining collection of stories, which seem unassuming on first read but there is hidden depth to the story telling which would be better realised in novel form.

(Identifying The Object is available in the UK for £2.50 from Cold Tonnage Books - SP)

### Guy Gavriel Kay Tigana

Roc, 24/2 94, 688pp, £5.99  
Reviewed by Carol Ann Green

**Tigana, one of the nine provinces of the Palm**, is wiped out of existence by the Sorcerer, Brandin of Ygrath. He casts a spell so that no one born outside of the province can remember, hear or speak the name. Then he destroys her cities and subjugates her people. All in the name of the dead son, Stevan, slain by Prince Valentin. Brandin allows only those born in Tigana to hear and remember the name of their province.

**Alessan di Tigana bar Valentin** is the son of the dead Prince of the province. Driven into hiding at the age of fifteen, he has been working ever since towards Brandin's destruction and Tigana's return. With the help of Devin, Catriona and Baerd from Tigana, and a band of men and women from the other provinces, he manoeuvres the two Tyrants of the Palm towards a climatic war. For Brandin controls the East and Alberico the West, a stalemate that has existed since Tigana fell. Only in destroying both Tyrants at the same time can Alessan release Tigana and free the Palm from the control of the Tyrants.

**Running parallel to Alessan's fight**, is the struggle of Dianora, one of the members of Brandin's saishan. Taken as a tribute to Chiara where Brandin has his Court, she harbours the secret of her birth in Tigana. Disguised, she has plotted her way into Brandin's bed, aiming to kill the man who destroyed her family; but she falls under Brandin's spell and falls deeply in love with the man responsible for so much heartache in her own land. Hers is a tale of sorrow, love and betrayal, as she struggles to come to terms with her life and love.

**Brandin, himself, is presented in the novel as a man of intense emotions set on a terrible revenge for Stevan's death**, even if it means the end of Tigana and everyone in it.

Tigana is a rich and complex fantasy. Kay takes the basic elements and then surpasses the clichés of the genre. This fantasy is much more compelling than many that are currently being published. It is highly recommended.

### Dean R Koontz The House of Thunder

Headline, 14/4 94, 438pp, £4.99  
Reviewed by Chris Amies

**I quite like some of Dean Koontz's novels**. I find he has a fairly admirable worldview. He is often good, sometimes very good, at sustaining interest and tension and drama. His publishers are also re-releasing his backlist; this one is an "as by Leigh Nichols" novel from 1982 when we were all a lot younger (the first paragraph of the book: "The year was 1980 — an ancient time, so long ago and far away"). In **The House of Thunder** there is much kicking around of the ideas that get used in Koontz's later novels, especially memory, paranoia, and illusion. But as far as I can make out this is an early five-finger exercise and not the sort of thing you want to remember a leading genre writer by. Things have come to a sorry pass when publishers reissue old stuff instead of trying out anything new. [The House of Thunder] seemed to me to be an unlikely piece of paranoid-conspiracy theory thriller-writing. That the scenario is out of date is neither here nor there; it's a novel, not a piece of political journalism. The point is that Dean Koontz has done much, much better and will probably continue to do so.

### Nancy Kress Beggars in Spain

Avon, 3 94, 438pp, \$4.99  
Reviewed by Andy Mills

**This novel is enjoyable and interesting**. It raises important questions about the relationships which develop between individuals and groups and the wider society in which they exist. It queries the obligations which rich may have to the poor. So Kress deals with issues which many other authors might shy away from. Why then am I somewhat disappointed with this expanded version of Kress's award winning novella?

**Partially because I've committed the reviewer's cardinal sin of berating the author for not writing the book I wanted to see. Beggars in Spain is about the creation of a new race of supermen who have been freed from the tyranny of sleep, and who are more intelligent and happier than Sleepers — and they are long-lived, maintained at their physical peak. The book charts their development over 83 years.**

**It's an intriguing notion, but we never really get to find out what it is like to be one of the Sleepless, forever awake in the small hours. And it takes a long time for these intelligent creatures to discover that their espoused philosophy — Yagaism — is flawed.**

**The real problem with this book is that Kress tries to cover too much. It's just too damned short. But I do recommend that you read it.**

### J. A. Lawrence Star Trek Adventures: Mudd's Angels

Titan Books, 4/94, 177pp, £4.50  
Reviewed by Chris Hart

**James T. Kirk is not satisfied that his painstakingly detailed report on The Mudd affair will be read by anyone**, so in his portly wisdom he commissions a novelization of the events — this is it. Quite why Kirk, or Titan Books, believe that producing a pulp novel with a painting of Uhura, circa. 1968, will attract people to read it, is not explained.

**Harcourt Fenton Mudd (a.k.a. Harry Mudd) is a boorish, obese and cantankerous pimp and master racketeer, infamous throughout the known galaxy for his canny schemes. He appeared in two of the Star Trek T.V. episodes, which are featured here, Lawrence taking over work left uncompleted by James Blish, along with a completely new tale. He is amusing because his crapulous activities seem out of place in the squeaky clean environs of The Enterprise. The scenes with Spock and the 'pleasure' androids are a hoot. As with most Star Trek tie-ins, and others for that matter, the novel is little more than dialogue with very little attempt to get beneath the cast iron skin of the crew. A must for completists, but of little interest to anyone else.**

## Tanith Lee Personal Darkness

Headline, 17.2.94, 435pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

This, the second novel in the Blood Opera sequence, finds Ruth, the illegitimate, Scarabae offspring of Rachaela, on the ramp. She's only 14, but — oh boy! — does she pack a punch. Like an out-take from some American stalk n' slash movie, she rips her way through the heart of England. Now this is not good publicity for the Scarabae who, being both incredibly rich and long-lived (not vampires though — some sort of ancient Egyptian connection is intimated), like their privacy. So they send out an agent, Malach, to recapture Ruth and, once caught, attempt to indoctrinate her in their own strange ways. But it's all to no avail. She doesn't understand a word and by the end it's all gone horribly, horribly wrong.

If you haven't read the first volume, *Dark Dance*, then all this won't mean much to you. If you have, then *Personal Darkness* is more of the same: more of Lee's rococo prose, more of her flamboyant descriptions, more of her bizarre, incestual sex. In that respect, we all know what to expect. It could, perhaps, have done with being a bit shorter and tighter, but — that said — it'll do.

## Graham Masterton Night Plague

Warner, 17.2.94, 310pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Ian Sales

Stanley Eisner is a concert violinist, sent to London is a swap arrangement between the San Francisco Baroque Ensemble and the Kensington Chamber Orchestra. No sooner has Stanley settled into his flat off the King's Road, when he is raped by a strange man who has been following him. Stanley then learns that the rapist has given him the Night Plague, a disease of the soul. This particular disease was thought to have been eradicated, but there seems to be a resurgence. The Night Plague's last outburst was in the seventeenth century and was eventually contained by the Night Warriors, who are responsible for patrolling dreams and fighting evil (evil in this case personified by Isabel Gowrie, a seventeenth century witch). Stanley is one of five Night

Warriors and it is up to them to find the witch and then kill her.

Night Plague is one of those books where an omniscient being (but not omnipotent — can't give the characters any real help, after all) explains the whole plot of the central characters. From that point on, it's by the numbers and the only suspense is how many time the Night Warriors will fail before finally saving the day.

The books begins well, its characters are reasonably interesting, and there are some good set-pieces. Judging by the use of American expressions, the book is obviously aimed at the US market, but Masterton has the British scenery down well. Unfortunately, the background on which the plot is built is all very silly and hard to take seriously: for example, the Night Warriors dream costumes sound like something from *Starlight Express*. And the ending is spoilt by a blatant *deus ex machina*, who pops up out of nowhere to save the day after the Night Warriors have failed.

Not the best horror novel I've read this year by any means.

## L. E. Modesitt Jr. The Magic of Recluse

Orbit, 17.2.94, 501pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Susan Badham

The problem with many fantasy novels is that the magic which they describe couldn't exist in the medieval world in which most of them are set. Let's face it, if you had unlimited magic in your society, you might not develop conventional technology at all. Most authors deal with this by having magical power a rare natural resource, or else by having magic as something that is very difficult to learn.

In this book, Modesitt makes magic much more organic by introducing the idea of order and chaos and gradually expanding the reader's understanding of them through the book. He comes up with an extremely interesting explanation of how you can have a world that combines the use of magic and traditional medieval crafts and even manages to convincingly show the main character maturing from disaffected apprentices to powerful mage.

However, despite this, the book has several faults. Modesitt introduces a group of characters and then allows at least three of

them to drop out of the narrative. As far as the reader is concerned they simply vanish, which is annoying. Overall there is a nagging sense that the societies described are only sketched in, and their mechanics not really explained. We concentrate so much on the progress of the protagonist and on what he sees and understands that other point of view are not really explained.

If Modesitt had spent as much effort and care on other aspects of the background and on the characterisation, as he had on the magical system, this book would have been a masterpiece. Unfortunately his concentration on that one aspect lets it down, so that it's merely a reasonable read with a rather slow start.

## Michael Moorcock A Cornelius Calendar

Millennium, 1993, 554pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Further excerpts from the Moorcock family album: *The Adventures of Una Persson* and *Catherine Cornelius in the Twentieth Century* (originally published in 1976) is just that: the couples' travels through various events, both real and imaginary, of the twentieth century. I could only describe *The Entropy Tango* (1981) as a sort of political fantasy (in the sense that a civil war is political) and *Gold Diggers of 1977* (1980) concerns the brief, but raucous, history of the pop group The Sex Pistols. The collection is completed with *The Alchemist's Question*, which is billed as 'The Final Episode in the career of The English Assassin' (i.e. Jerry Cornelius).

All these novels are part of a whole, chocabloc with all the usual Moorcock family characters: Mrs Cornelius, Jerry and Frank Cornelius, Major Nye, Colonel Pyatt, Bishop Beesley, Miss Brunner, and so on. Events are structured chronologically, but a plot, a story, is often difficult to discern — in fact, differences between the novels themselves are often difficult to discern. This doesn't matter. Literature does not have to be plot driven and the energy here is generated by Moorcock's unique vision. His fantasy is different from any other; it's distinct, and that's what makes reading these books a pleasure. They are a multimedia event; poetry, songs, illustrations, newspaper

cuttings are crammed into the pages. It's as if Moorcock has so much to say, so little time to say it (it seems).

But he does come unstuck. **Gold Diggers of 1977** doesn't really seem to cope with the phenomenon of the Sex Pistols at all. Moorcock is concerned at the manipulative music industry that surrounded their brief infamy, **The Great Rock N' Roll Swindle**, but the novel is not capable of relating to, nor does it convey, the influence they had on their audience at that time. His terms seem too quaint, too determined, for that.

All in all, it's all a bit like a soap opera really, not so much **Coronation Street** as a mutant cross between **Eastenders** (Moorcock is a professional Londoner) and **Twin Peaks** — with Jerry Cornelius as Bob, of course.

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

*HarperCollins, 4/94, 479pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

**Eighteen years on**, Niven and Pournelle have written a sequel to their first contact novel, **The Mote In God's Eye**. If anything, this sequel is a new experience of English style, rather than an introduction to xenobiology. Just looking at open pages of the two books shows differences: the original is written in long, reasonably continuous paragraphs; this one is written in short, jerky sentences, often without verbs. It does not read like a continuation.

**What the change in style** indicates is also an abandonment of the hard SF that helped to underpin the worlds of man and Motie, because this broken text cannot supply enough information about what is happening and why. For instance, there are no explanations of the quantum physics about changing stars which allow ships to find jump points to travel FTL, although this is essential to the plot, as the Moties may be attempting to leave their star-system. And there is no attempt to explain the encryption systems used to identify whether a message has been sent under duress. To be fair, though, the plot does revolve around an attempt to bring a contraceptive to the Moties that will relieve their population pressures and that is explained.

However, for a long book I'd say this lacks a satisfying underpinning of facts, and relies too much on the alleged tensions and emotions of its characters. They have been inherited from **Mote**, with all their titles and alleged nobility.

So there's the original and now there's a sequel. You might like, as examination papers say, to compare and contrast.

**Rich Parsons & Tony  
Keaveny  
Colin the Librarian**

*Michael O' Mara Books, 22/4/94,  
142pp, £3.99*

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

**Terry Pratchett has a lot to answer for.**

**Colin the Librarian's** humdrum life is blasted apart by the arrival of amusing stereotype Krap the Conqueror. An adventure follows.

This is described as a spoof of heroic fantasy, presumably in the tradition of Terry Pratchett, like all those books with Josh Kirby covers or Josh Kirby-type covers. I cannot imagine what sort of audience the publishers of this were aiming at. Mention of erections and homosexuality (all entirely gratuitous) means that younger readers would not be suitable, while older readers who know and love Terry Pratchett will find the book infantile in the extreme. It is the sort of book that somebody, one boozy lunch time, thought it would be a good idea to create; and I bet it was written in the pub too. Weighing in at a hefty 45,000 words, it boasts line drawings that try to emulate Spike Milligan's work, but which look like something a partially brain-damaged blindfold chimpanzee might come up with.

**The humour?** Let's just say that there are more jokes in [War and Peace]. Mind you, that's a longer work. Let's just say that during the 57 minutes it took to read this book, I laughed not once. And I've got quite a good sense of humour.

**With character names** such as Spasmo, Krap the Conqueror, the Thargs, and Yoof, you know this is going to be tough going. These authors probably think imagination is the name of a seventies pop group.

I suppose it's a bit harsh to say that Terry Pratchett has a lot

to answer for. But somebody certainly does.

**Diana L. Paxon &  
Adrienne Martine-Barnes  
The Shield Between The  
Worlds**

*AvoNova, 3/94, 317pp, \$22.00*

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

This splendid retelling of the heroic deeds of Fionn mac Cumhal brings the world of Celtic myth into vivid focus for a modern fantasy reader, whilst losing none of the original tales' exuberance and magic. The book continues the story begun in **Master of Earth and Water, The First Chronicle of Fionn mac Cumhal** which told of Fionn's early life. Now Fionn has grown to manhood, he is a trained warrior, hunter and poet, and is ready to fight for the leadership of his murdered father's fian, the fianna being the bands of warriors who serve Eriu's — Ireland's — high King. Like most Celtic heroes, Fionn has many encounters with magical beings, for in the Eriu of Celtic myth, the Otherworld is never far away; the land is scattered with the glowing mounds of the Sidhe, and on Samhain the Sidhe ride out and the souls of the dead return. Donnait, a Sidhe woman, summons Fionn to kill the dragon that threatens to destroy the Otherworld, and in doing so Fionn gains the Hazel Shield which, with Birga, his magical spear, will bring him victory against many foes, both Sidhe and human.

**Fionn is the Shield of Eriu**, protecting the land from invasion. His fane grows, young men flock to join his fian, yet he feels something is missing from his life — then he rescues a Sidhe woman transformed into a deer by his most powerful enemy, the dark druid Tadhg mac Nuada, who is also his grandfather. As Fionn's exploits follow one another in a fast-paced narrative, it is Tadhg's brooding presence that prevents the book from becoming episodic, and it is Tadhg's evil magic that is to cause Fionn much anguish.

**The success of the authors** in bringing to life the characters of ancient legend makes for an extraordinarily satisfying fantasy that leaves the reader looking forward to the next **Chronicle of Fionn mac Cumhal**.



**Rachel Pollack  
Unquenchable Fire**

*(Orbit, 7-4-94, 390pp, £5.99)*

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

**This future of small-town**

America is dominated by a religion new to the reader but fully accepted by the characters. Spiritual manifestations abound; technology is geared to the demands of religious observance; social customs assume conformity to an almost universally accepted belief.

At the opening of the novel, the Tellers, interpreters of the spiritual, have become arid, their storytelling art purely conventional. The central character, Jennie, becomes pregnant in a dream with a daughter who is to be a king of Messiah, the revitaliser of the faith.

Jennie's pregnancy is a spiritual journey in which she first becomes aware of the miraculous nature of her child, and then is reconciled to being used for a larger purpose. There is nothing unacceptably pious about this. Jennie is depicted with realism, sensitivity and wit. Her attitude to her faith — a delight in its supernatural aspects along with a rejection of the conventionally accepted ways of expressing it — contrasts with that of the other characters, for example her husband Mike, a lamentable prat who uses his religion as an adjunct of the upwardly mobile suburban lifestyle which he covets, yet who annuls the marriage because he cannot face the reality of Jennie's spiritual experience.

The style and content are both very rich and dense, the narrative being interspersed with extracts from the sacred literature of the religion. I'm sure that in the single reading I've so far given this book I have not fully understood it, or exhausted what it has to offer. I shall go back to it, and I recommend it.

**Terry Pratchett  
Strata**

*Doubleday, 28-4-94, 236pp, £14.99*

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

First published in 1981, *Strata* is (among other things) a parody of Larry Niven's *Ring World*. Pratchett's first exploration of a (later to become *The Discworld*, and a salutary reminder that Authoritative Scientific Theories (in this

case, Origin Theories of worlds and universes) are often (usually?) disproved within the lifetime of their formulators.

Kin Arad works for the Company. The Company builds worlds, and pays in lifetime extension. Kin and two aliens, Silver the Shand and Marco the Kung, are hired by the mysterious Jago Jalo to explore an artefact he has discovered... a Flat Earth, whose stars are fixed to a crystal vault above it. Their lander is damaged on approach, and the trio dutifully explore the Discworld, meeting and subverting a number of stock SF and fantasy situations while seeking a way back to their spaceship. The unique Pratchett blend of humour and philosophy is well-displayed, and the book's conclusion is both screamingly funny and a serious intellectual challenge. Highly recommended.

**Terry Pratchett  
The Dark Side of The Sun**

*Doubleday, 4-94, 191pp, £14.99*

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

The First time I acquired *The Dark Side of The Sun* it was from a remainder bin from a cash 'n' carry on the Isle of Man, shortly before *The Colour of Magic* altered life as we know it. My, how times change. Here it is again in Doubleday hardback printed on clean white paper in a legible typeface, doubtless to be received by an audience rather larger than the select few who caught it first time around.

Some things, however, don't change. Yes (weary sighs all round) I enjoyed it again.

The story concerns the search of a very lucky human, Dom Sabalos, hereditary administrator of the strange planet Widdershins, for the lost progenitors of all sapient life (anyone getting the idea that David Brin read this book?). Along the way he encounters a whole raft of characters and beings any reader will suspect they've met before, with the possible exception of Dom's godfather, the First Syrian Bank (don't ask, read the book, it makes perfect sense). Does he succeed? Well, this is Pratchett and he believes in the sacramental power of happy endings, although the finding proves to be what he needs rather than what he wants.

True pastiche can only emerge from vast knowledge and equal love of a genre. Terry

Pratchett has both, together with a talent which means he isn't good because he's successful, but rather successful because he's good. This book may not reap any awards but you'll probably enjoy it more.

**Robert Rankin  
The Book Of Ultimate Truths**

*(Corgi, 3-2-94, 347pp, £4.99)*

Reviewed by Colin Bird

For those who are interested in Gandhi's proclivities for female impersonation meet Hugo Rune, a man who has the answers to all the mysteries in life that you hadn't really considered before. Like why is there always a screw left when you put a toaster back together and why were H. G. Wells and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle never seen together?

This book concerns the hunt for Rune's eponymous work which leads seventeen-year-old Cornelius and his vertically challenged chum, Tuppe, on an ocarina-shaped (trust me) journey around the British Isles. Confused? I haven't told you about the karaoke machine from the future yet! And why do sprouts play such an important role in the fiction of Robert Rankin?

Comparisons with other humorous authors are invidious, but Rankin's cosy world of likeable characters and one-liners does invoke Douglas Adams. But Rankin is just as funny and has a nicely skewed view of the world. The book entertains all the way to its slightly overheated ending. And any book about a character that hates Bud Abbott must be OK.

**Michael Scott Rohan  
Chase The Morning**

*(Orbit, 7-4-94, 334pp, £4.99)*

Reviewed by Julie Atkin

Steve, the narrator and unlikely hero of *Chase The Morning*, is an import / export specialist, high-flier who, having sacrificed relationships to his career, is now feeling the hollowness of his existence, his career and ambition no longer able to satisfy him. One night he finds himself drawn to the old docks, and encounters strange people and situations there which intrude into his everyday life, resulting in the violent trashing of his offices and the kidnap of his secretary by a band of creatures

known as Wolves. Realising that he is dealing with a situation beyond his experience, he turns to his new friends — an eighteenth century ship's pilot and an Elizabethan swordswoman — and hires an ancient privateer and its crew to give chase.

It is at this point that I started to lose interest, as the tale then begins to slip into standard Boy's Own adventure fare. I found the first third of the novel unusual and exciting, enjoying the juxtaposition of historical seafarers, their ships and cargoes, with the modern offices, and Steve's state-of-the-art computer system. It's a shame that Rohan could not maintain this level of originality.

### Kristine Kathryn Rusch Heart Readers

*Millennium*, 3/3/94, 250pp, £4.99

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's *Heart Readers* is a slight fantasy novel, revolving around two sets of characters. The first set consists of the ruler of the desert kingdom Leanda, his twin sons and his advisor Tarne. The second a pair of 'heart readers', Stashie and Dasie, who together 'read' the hearts of people, advising them on their innermost problems. Years before, King Pardue murdered his twin brother to take the throne: now, fatally ill, he has to decide which of his two twin sons must take the throne, and which should die. The only way he can choose is for a heart reading, with the throne going to the brother with the purest heart. Unfortunately, Tarne (a soldier with a long history of blood-thirsty exploits) decides to 'influence' the choice of the heart readers, especially since he knows Stashie from the past, when he raped her and destroyed her family. Stashie is driven by a need for exacting revenge on Tarne.

A neat little fantasy, heavy on coincidence, light on the fantastic. Rusch writes well, creates engaging characters, but plots clumsily, with a number of unlikely twists in the tale.

### William Shatner Tek Vengeance

*Pan*, 8/4/94, 224pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This future detective / adventure story is the second of a series (the first is *Tek Lab*), in which Jake Cardigan and his partner Sid Gomez battle with the drug barons known as the Tek Lords.

The plotting is episodic and disconnected, the characters are one-dimensional, the dialogue is stilted and the background settings are simply a series of stage sets, with no feeling of realism or depth. If this book had not been written by the actor who played *Star Trek*'s Captain Kirk, I doubt whether it would ever have seen publication. Recommended for *Star Trek* completists only.

### S. P. Somtow Riverrun

*Orbit*, 17/2/94, 257pp, £4.99

Reviewed by John D. Owen

First in a new series by S. P. Somtow, *Riverrun* is a strange mixture, part fantasy, part horror, drawing from both genres in a slightly disquieting mixture.

The story revolves around the Etchison family, husband, wife and two sons. As the tale opens, they are driving to Mexico in a desperate attempt to find a cure for Mary Etchison's cancer. The family stop at a peculiar Chinese restaurant in the middle of the desert. The youngest son, Theo, disappears, and to Joshua's (the eldest son) amazement, his father seems to have forgotten Theo even existed.

Theo has been abducted by Thorn, a vampirical prince from a strange land which seems to interconnect with the whole universe. Thorn is locked in a struggle with his sister, Katastrofa (a weredragon), after their father (a mad King Lear lookalike) had divided his kingdom between them (a second brother, Ash, was disinherited). Thorn needs Theo to act as his Truthsayer, primarily to guide him through the tortuous dimensions of *Riverrun*, and to open up gates to worlds sealed by his father.

Soon Joshua is also drawn into this otherworld, this time by Katastrofa, and the two brothers are pitted against each other, while their parents shake off the spell cast on them and combine

with an Indian Shaman and Ash to make a third force in the conflict.

Involved and often quite confusing, *Riverrun* is the start of a series, and as such only tells part of the story. It looks to be a strong basis on which to build, and is certainly different.

### Sheri S. Tepper Sideshow

*HarperCollins*, 3/94, 482pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

This is a novel which starts off full of snake's legs. Bits of plot from widely different times and place intertwine, each segment complementing the others until, at last the picture sits reasonably whole in front of the reader.

One strand follows the fortunes of siamese twins Nela and Bertran as their destiny unfolds on Earth and later Elsewhere as they interact with Fringe, Zasper and Danivon in their quest to help the people there.

Another follows the Enforcers, Fringe, Zasper and Danivon as they search for the truth about the strange events that are overtaking Elsewhere and the corruption which emanates from its very centre...

Tepper writes with a confidence which takes an unusual group of characters and breathes life into them, making them real and, more significantly, important to the reader. We want to find out what's going to happen to them and their world. The telling of the tale helps this, the events move quickly, the suspense is held for just long enough then released as the plot unfolds.

The Universe and the societies that it has spawned Tepper has created is credible enough for us to believe in, but different enough to avoid being commonplace.

### Robert E. Vardeman The Accursed

*NEL*, 17/2/94, 538pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Steven Tew

The popularity of Swords and Sorcery fantasy shows no signs of abating, and if it's readership's apparent taste for bulk is anything to go by, *The Accursed* should help sate some small part of its appetite. The novel's storyline and characters plead to appeal to

fantasy fans: Brion Rouwen, Captain of the Intrepid Guard, sworn to defend the king's life, is betrayed by subterfuge and intrigue, set-up by greedy and power hungry usurpers to appear disloyal to his master. The king's wizard, Kuuway, curses him to suffer the agonies of mortal wounding without dying, and with the unhappy ability to kill those he loves with a touch. Brion sets off on a journey to find a wizard powerful enough to lift his curses, and swears to kill the king and those who seek to take over the country he is sworn to defend. Along the way, he meets up with soldiers, spies, thieves, wizards and their apprentices, poisonous talking birds, destructive tornadoes summoned up by a hunting horn.... Well, you get the picture.

In some ways, Vardeman has quite an interesting story going here. The conflict of a loyal guard betrayed by his master's tragic inability to trust him, and his consequent hatred and determination to avenge this betrayal is a tale worthy of telling. However, I found myself from the start unable to sympathise with a man whose control of his subordinates rests upon fear and the threat of a horrible death for the slightest dereliction of duty. When he disapproves of a king killing beggars to get rid of them, his quibbles seem a little hollow. The story is reasonably entertaining, but overlong; by halfway I felt as if I were eating sawdust.

### John Varley

#### The Ophiuchi Hotline

HarperCollins, 4/94, 247pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

I saw this for sale at a conference on "Virtual Futures" along with books by Pat Cadigan, Bruce Sterling, William Gibson and the latest [Mondo 2000] compilation. Whether *The Ophiuchi Hotline* ever was the cutting edge of cyberpunk is problematical (it was, after all, first published in 1977), but there is stunning new relevance in the scene where the human race, after freeloading on the information coming down the eponymous information channel for centuries, is presented with a bill for services rendered. Just like certain mutterings about the future of the Internet, in fact. And given the current interest in virtual realities and the post-Dickian nature

of the "real" experience, Varley's interpretation of this problem through the multi-viewpoints of his cloned heroine is equally timely.

**Proto-cyberpunk? Well,** hardly. Varley's solar system is one where the Earth has been depopulated by the first level of intelligent species to make a haven for the second level (whales and dolphins), while the third level (that's us) scatter about the moon and Saturn's rings, genetically and surgically adapted to exotic shapes. Lilo, sentenced to death for illegal experimenting with human DNA finds herself / herself heading towards a confrontation with the owners of the Hotline and the meaning of their message, which as best as can be translated reads "Please remit the balance due".

All this makes it a perfect late-1970s SF novel — a mixture of the old and the new looking backwards and forwards with wit and imagination. On one level Lilo admits that as well as being a top genetic engineer "I'm a pretty good cook" and we have a vending machine that won't give change but, as "an authorised branch of the Florida Planetary Bank", will accept deposits: on another the implications of her craft and the shadows of the Information Age are brought to the fore. While it's true that the novel suffers somewhat in its apocalyptic implications from being part of a future-history an from its rather too ham-fisted "get out of space or perish" moral, in other ways it hasn't worn badly at all.

### Paul Voermans

#### The Weird Colonial Boy

Gollancz, 31/3/94, 302pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Mat Coward

It's Melbourne, Australia, 1978, and young Nigel, a friendless, girl-friendless, spotty drongo, buys a Fool's Gold swordtail to add to his collection of tropical fish. And that changes his life.

The fish has swum in polluted waters, and somehow gained the ability to swim out of Nigel's Australia, into an alternative universe. Nigel, playing the lonely inventor, devises a method of following the swordtail - and then can't get back.

He soon wishes he could. Other-Oz is no place to end up: it's still a penal colony, complete with concentration camps, public executions and chain gangs.

Technologically, and politically, it's very backward, but in an unexpected way his frightening, romantic adventures bring Nigel forward, make of him the man he could never have been back home.

**Voermans's second novel** supplies what his first *And Disregard The Rest*, hinted that he was capable of. It has the same wild intensity, the same gloriously inventive comic darkness, but the difference is, this time it all makes sense. He has managed to discipline himself, without going straight. This time he's serious about telling us his story, demanding that we listen to every precisely chosen word, and the result is just plain wonderful.

### Bridget Wood Sorceress

Headline, 10/3/94, 442pp, £9.99

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

*Sorceress* is the fourth of Bridget Wood's fantasy novels to be set in long-ago Ireland that has its origins in Celtic myth, legend and folklore. Theo, six-year-old princess of the House of Amaranth, is stolen away by the Lord of Chaos. Her cousin, Rumour, a powerful sorceress, and Andrew, a young monk, undertake the perilous journey to the Dark Realm to save her. Their story is interwoven with the efforts of Maelduin, Prince of the Sidhe, to save his people and their magic, the evil Fisher King's attempts to regain his lost power, and the war between Chaos and the Crimson Lady, so-called because she bathes in blood. Meanwhile, the Amaranths face attack from the Fomoiré and treachery in their midst.

**Parts of *Sorceress* are undeniably imaginative and original.** Maelduin's transformation from a Sidhe, a creature of light, into a human weighed down with flesh and bone is splendid, as are Wood's depiction of the Sidhe's kingdom or the Sorcery Looms on which the Amaranths weave their spells. Less satisfactory, in fact downright irritating, is the whimsical humour that is used to describe the Amaranths' family squabbles and the activities of the denizens of the Dark Realm — as these activities include torture, cannibalism and rape, the whimsy seems out of place. Furthermore, Wood's descriptions of her evil characters' genitalia do get rather repetitive.

The novel rollicks along at a fair old pace, but so much is going on that the unwieldy narrative loses its way and the various storylines have to be tied up in double quick time before they overspill the page, or become submerged in a mire of mythic detail. Right at the end of the book a description of the Tapestry Enchantment is a reminder of the imagination that has gone into the writing of this fantasy. Unfortunately the imagination and the fantasy have run out of control.

**Jonathon Wylie**  
**The Last Augury**

*Corgi, 28.4.94, 384pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by Chris Hart.

This is the third novel in the Island and Empire Trilogy which begins with the end of Xantium; the capital of the once mighty Xantic Empire. The Empire was destabilised by the corruption of the chancellor Verkho. Now the economic and military might of the Empire has collapsed, Dsordas, Fen and the allies return to the island of Zaldys, and ask a question pertinent to contemporary European history — what will replace the tyrannical empire?

Verkho is consolidating his position as the self-appointed Emperor by raising a ghoulish army and wielding his fiery sorcery on the island. Meanwhile, the old order, Ifryn and Southan, the former Empress and Emperor, are

on the run and having to come to terms with their loss of power at the hands of the Red Dome, summoned by their former chancellor. Steadily, a deeper scheme begins to emerge, as it becomes clear that the characters are pawns in a power struggle between the gods.

Perhaps the downfall of the novel is that it has suspense and interesting reflections upon the aftermath of the events — however, the actual events are written in a pedestrian style. On the whole it is entertaining bunkum with clever plotting that sustains the tension throughout, but lacks the verve and inventiveness to be anything special.

**Timothy Zahn**  
**Star Wars: The Last Command**

*Bantam, 20.1.94, 428pp, £4.99*

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

This is the third and final volume in a trilogy — books in lieu of films never made — extending the Lucas epic. Timothy Zahn, author of all three, does a good job within the constraints natural to that kind of extrapolation; though here the constraints have a positive side in that many readers are likely to be fans of the films and thus predisposed not only to accept but to anticipate and enjoy familiar clichés of characterisation, repetitive situations and conventions of action. The plot in this volume

mirrors the Death Star scenario, with many back-illusions to it, but now in place of the Death Star the finalised weapon of a revived Empire is to be ultra-rapid cloning. While the New Republic's planet, Coroscant, is subjected to both siege and infiltration by the Empire's Grand Admiral Thrawn (he of the repeatedly observed "glowing red eyes"), Luke Skywalker with his usual entourage invades the obscure planet Wayland to defeat the mad Jedi clone-master C'baoth and destroy the cloning facility — all of which happens with some clever innovative twists to the cloning concept.

Zahn maintains the traditional characters well, and is particularly good at getting comic / dramatic effect, while avoiding tweekiness, when evoking the droids Artoo and Threepio. Equally good is his creation of a comity of opportunistic interplanetary smugglers and his dovetailing of their intrigues into the main plot. The chess-cum-poker strategies of opposed Imperial / New Republic commanders provide the story's dynamic and these are invariably attention holding. It is only in the complexities of battle action or in-fighting that what is the life-stuff of a movie blockbuster tends on paper to become confused or tedious, or both. That aside, an entertaining read.

