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The Critical Journal of the BSFA

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Nuts & Bolts

Okay, I promise. I will never set first lines in bold text again. I'm sorry it caused confusion for some of you. Hopefully those of you who wrote *and* those of you who suffered in silence will prefer the new layout. I've put a lot of work into it, and this has caused a delay in sending out the mailing. I hope you will think it was worth it. Now that I have completed the design, I will hopefully be able to recover lost time next issue and get back on schedule...

I'm still working away from home (Hemel Hempstead), and this continues to impact on my time. I have become resigned to continuing to produce the magazine myself, as no-one has offered to take this over – but I'd appreciate help from proficient typists,with access to PCs with 3.5" drives. Any volunteers?

I hope you enjoy this issue, I look forward to your comments!

Catie

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.
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From KV Bailey

Stephen Baxter's interesting survey of the Future History sub-genre (*Vector* 179) understandably concentrates on relatively recent works, though he does mention Wells in the context of Christopher Priest's utilising something of *The Time Machine*'s framework in *The Space Machine*. (KW Jeter, it's worth adding, ditto in *Morlock Night*). Wells, it is true, didn't himself again cash in on the Eloi future world, but there is a nearer-horizon future history scenario of his creation which he did introduce into several separate works. It is first delineated in the utopian/dystopian novella 'A Story of the Days to Come', collected in his 1899 volume *Tales of Space and Time*: London of the 22nd Century is roofed over, moving platforms provide transport, wind vanes supply power, luxury aircraft ply to the pleasure cities of the South. He depicts at greater length an identical static culture of uniformity, and then disrupts it by revolution and invasion, in his novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*, published that same year; and in *When the Sleeper Awakes*, the revised version published a decade later. In the interim there appeared, in *Twelve Stories and a Dream* (1903), 'A Dream of Armageddon': a dystopian vision where the action is centred, (within that same cultural framing) on the pleasure city of Capri. The stories share a coherent future ambience, technological and sociological, though plot-wise and character-wise each follows a separate track – which perhaps only half-qualifies them as constituting a future history, if Stephen Baxter's definition is to be strictly observed.

A master of the history of future worlds, and at his furthest imaginative reach of that of future universes, was Olaf Stapledon. The posthumously-published, incomplete *Nebula Maker* was actually part of an early discarded draft for *Star Maker* (1937). It fills out in more detail what is covered in the pivotal thirteenth chapter ('The Beginning and the End') of that book. *Star Maker* contains, in linear or circular chart form, three 'Time Scales', which between them engulf both the action of *Nebula Maker* and that of the seminal first book *Last and First Men* (1930) – a narrative which recounts the human story through to its termination on Neptune two billion years hence. Then following *Last and First Men*, and set in its historical frame, came *Last Men in London* (1932), in which a 'Last Man' on Neptune time-travels telepathically to experience twentieth century London. Thus, looking at this entire section of Stapledon's work, we find a kind of 'Chinese boxing' of future history, achieved through successive and various, but chronologically consistent, narratives. Stapledon in drafting worked all this out in great detail by means of a series of huge coloured master charts, of which those in the novels are merest summaries. the originals are part of the Stapledon archive held in the Sydney Jones Library at Liverpool University. They impressively exemplify a future historian's workshop.

I think Stephen Baxter's working definition of a 'future history' might be improved by some small amendment to make it clear that the fiction is not, as he puts it, "set against a consistent background of events and characters", but actually creates that consistent background against which the characters perform. That definition, and his article as a whole, contribute usefully to the 'taxonomy' of SF.

From Norman Beswick

My thanks to John Madracki for reassuring me that I'm not alone and there are others who find *Red Dwarf* increasingly unfunny and SF on TV generally disappointing. I thought perhaps it was just book-obsessed old me. I wait with trepidation for the day when some idiot tries to film *Neuromancer* for the small screen.

Jessica Yates' typically wide-ranging piece on children's fantasy contained several gems, especially when she noted that the adult wizards in Diane Duane's *A Wizard Abroad* never seem to get involved with real-world-type disasters like Auschwitz or Aberfan. Maybe Americans would find that "political" or something?

You yourself , dear editor, show unsuspected prophetic powers, in assigning my praise of Paul Park's *The Cult of Loving Kindness* (Reviewers Poll) to his *Coelestis* which I've only just read this month and also found admirable. How did you know? (Apologies! When working through adding reviewers comments to my chart of recommended books I accidentally added Norman's comment to both

books. This in no way affected the result. Oops! Catie)

But you spotted why some of us tend to come to some books later than first publication: we prefer the paperback format. Not only is it usually cheaper, which means we can buy more with our money: it is easier to handle, slip in a pocket, read on a bus or hold curled up in bed. Hardback books are, to my great alarm, growing bulkier by the month; I find that pretentious, wasteful, burdensome and uninviting — and not just for SF titles either. Do other readers agree?

From Martyn Taylor

I was interested in John Madracki's survey of TV SF, having hoed the same furrow myself ten odd years ago. Almost very complete (what about the adaptations of various Fay Weldon stories — 'The Cloning of Joanna May' is SF in anyone's book — Alan Plater's 'Middlemen' and Andrew Davies' 'A Peculiar Practice' and its sequel) and exhaustive, even if I feel he did undervalue the amount of SF pumped out on the cartoon channels (*X-Men*, *Power Rangers* [yes, it's awful, but my kids love it], etc etc etc) But that's only my opinion.

Where was his thesis, though, his explanation? As for his critical standards — "antipodean awfulness and transatlantic trash" may look good in a Chris Dunkley piece but *Vector* is supposed to be the "Critical Journal of the BSFA", and critical standards require more than cleverly expressed personal opinions. Evaluating *any* TV show without taking into account its target market is a fatuous exercise anyway (and almost by definition anyone reading this is not within any TV exec's target market) and bad critical practice. Damn something for being a bad airplane rather than a submarine it never pretended to be.

Which still leaves the question, why is so much TV SF so awful?

My thesis was that the British producing classes are shit scared of science and only appreciate SF if it is safely funny (these people love *Hitch Hiker's...* and Terry Pratchett even if they don't understand them...) since then I've done some writing for TV and would add that not only are the production values of most TV SF bad, the standards of writing are even worse. Why should this be the case? Well, most TV writers are the same people as the producers (only the names have been changed to protect the guilty) and have the same attitude towards SF, while most SF writers hold TV in such contempt they can't be bothered to learn the vocabulary of TV.

Then there is the budgetary consideration. Anything not in contemporary dress and setting automatically adds 30% to the budget, more if you have to make your own sets and costume rather than hiring them (even more if you're doing it on film which, until recently and the invention of those lovely video image manipulation toys, was de rigeur). Now, most TV SF is poorly received and has poor audiences. Allow a croak voiced Dalek in an Armani suit to feed all these factors into his spreadsheet and his answer will be the go ahead for two more series of real life crime programmes and a rerun of *The Best of It'll be Alright on the Night*.

TV by its nature is an intimate medium and our society appears incapable of understanding it unless it is realistic. I'm not talking your average SF idea here, you'll agree. And, I suggest, there's your explanation. TV isn't film and it isn't the written word (which is the best medium for SF – allow your audience to create their own special effects, if only you can write well enough...) Until SF people can be bothered to learn its vocabulary and understand its limitations (*and* its possibilities) I find myself agreeing with John. I'm not holding my breath for the next great TV SF programme.

One cavil, though. If memory serves, the eponymous heroine of *A for Andromeda* was played by Susan Hampshire rather than Julie Christie

A Conversation with Graham Joyce

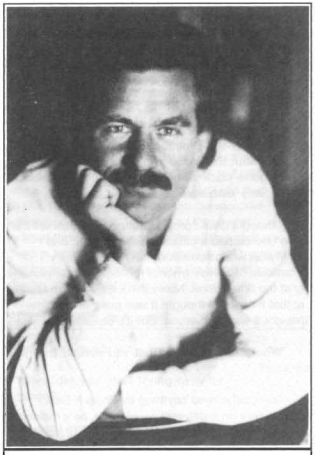
by Catie Cary

Graham Joyce gained a reputation as a writer to watch in 1991 with his first novel, *Dreamside*; this reputation was enhanced by the publication of *Dark Sister* in 1992 and *House of Lost Dreams* in 1993. *Dark Sister* won the British Fantasy Society award for best novel in 1992, and Graham has sold the option to film it to Metrodome (the company responsible for *Leon the Pig Farmer*). *Dreamside* has been bought by a French publisher, and a French edition will be published; it is out of print in this country. *Dark Sister* and *House of Lost Dreams* are both being translated into German. His short stories which have been published in *In Dreams*, *Interzone*, *New Worlds* and *Darklands 2* amongst others, have been well received.

His next novel will be published early next year under the new horror and dark fantasy imprint *Creed* from Penguin, and he will be the Guest of Honour at Novacon this year. Things would appear to be on the up for Graham Joyce. It was shortly after the publication of *House of Lost Dreams*, last summer, that I went to visit him at his home in Leicester.

Graham, who was born in 1954, comes from a local mining family with whom he maintains a close relationship; as I arrive his energetic parents are just leaving. They have spent the afternoon working in the garden. He introduces me to his wife Sue; she is a charming and lively solicitor and we get on well. When Graham goes down to the end of the garden to dig vegetables for our meal, he complains that the level of our laughter means that we have been talking about him behind his back. He's right of course, Sue has been telling me how much she dislikes the flattering photograph which is printed on the jacket of his books, which she refers to as the Tom Selleck pose, and she describes with relish the occasion on which she heard two ladies at a signing complain that he is not as goodlooking in real life.

During the evening there is a lot of laughter; the Joyces are excellent hosts, Graham is an excellent mimic and Sue has a lively wit, and after our meal we sit late in the kitchen talking over a candle lit table with an excellent bottle of wine. But earlier, when Sue went to have a bath before dinner, we retired to Graham's quiet study, to talk...



Graham Joyce - the "Tom Selleck" pose...

When did you start writing?

I started writing when I was about sixteen, I started writing a fantasy novel, and it was a way of trying to work out what was happening to me with all

these drugs I was taking. I reckon it was drugs that motivated me...

You reckon it was drugs?

Probably it was drugs. I stopped taking drugs after a while but somehow the writing carried on.

Did you read fantasy at that time?

I read Tolkien, I read Mervyn Peake, I gobbled all these up and I found that once you'd discovered Tolkien it triggered off associations with loads of other people. I read Mervyn Peake, I read E R Edison, everything I could get my hands on of E R Edison I read... and I thought it was wonderful I thought it was the height of literature Catie, honestly. And I've read it since I read it a year or two back and I thought it was *tripe*. Over-written drivel, and yet when I was seventeen and reading that, I thought "this is the way to write". And the only thing I've concluded from that is that there are books that are right for you at certain times of your life. And Edison's Memnison trilogy (do you know those?) I loved all those and now it just makes me laugh when I read it. It is so over-written!

The way the characters speak is incredible — I was about the same age when I read it and I haven't gone back since — but I can still remember the very elaborate and ornate language.

I thought it was great literature. It just shows that I hadn't developed a critical faculty actually, and I didn't know when somebody was being merely portentous, or merely lyrical. I mistook that for profundity at the time I think. Now I think it's silly. But I read it at that time and I thought it was great at that time — I thought it was marvellous. But it's unspeakably silly.

What are the books that you re-read that you still love?

I can still re-read anything by Philip K Dick, because he's on a different wavelength, he's making moral sense all the time. It's the best kind of science fiction because he is always trying to get to the moral crux of the issue; he's not interested in world-building, he's not interested in hard science — he's interested in how we live our lives. That's why you can go back time and time again to Philip K Dick. For me he's the most salutary science fiction writer.

Anyone else?

It's very difficult with Science Fiction. I've got the same experience with a lot of people that I had with Edison. I mean Heinlein, I was reading about that time — *A Stranger in a Strange Land* and stuff like that which at the time blew me head off. But now it just seems so silly, you know? And there are all these changes I've gone through — I mean I can't take Heinlein seriously — his attitude towards women makes me laugh...

Baby-chewed nipples...

Exactly.

Somebody once told me that I was a typical Heinlein woman — and meant it as a compliment. If he hadn't been so huge I'd have decked him...

Yeah. It's preposterous to think that a writer has got such a lack of sensitivity and insight that he can write in that way. Yet, and *yet*, when I was seventeen I just thought — this is great stuff. Now I've changed obviously but the book hasn't changed and I can't go back.

I think his juvenilia still bears re-reading — though I haven't tried recently — when he keeps away from sex and women and...

Yeah, like you say, " shut your gob up about women, Robert, and you're alright", but as soon as he starts to talk about real life and real relationships... this is where a lot of science fiction loses me because it's so bad on human relationships. It may be great on making imaginary worlds but what the fuck has it got to do with the way we live our lives? and our relationships with each other? And whether it's science fiction or whatever it is, that's what any kind of literature is really about... at bottom. The genre forms just happen to be the media that you're working in, it's the colour of the paper... really what it's about is how we live our lives, and if literature isn't touching that, then to me, it's not doing its job. And that's why I'm not interested in a lot of science fiction.

So who *do* you admire?

You mean contemporary, or?

Well, what you read now, read for pure pleasure... or read because it gives you something.

I always find this a really difficult question because every time I want to mention somebody, I want to qualify what I'm about to say, but I guess, it really is difficult with science fiction....

It doesn't have to be science fiction, don't limit yourself to that.

Right, I'm a great fan of Mike Harrison,

Course of the Heart **was amazing...**

Wonderful book... excellent, because Mike Harrison is writing about how we live our lives, you know? Okay he's using particular genre tropes and the things that signal genre in writing... I'm never happy with all these labels about mainstream and genre anyway... all the best stuff is on the edge, but I do like Mike Harrison, I do like Iain Banks, but I prefer his non-science fiction, I can't be bothered with the science fiction novels he writes but the other stuff is wonderful. So of contemporaries, I like what they're doing.

But for pleasure I can still pick up Dickens and that kind of stuff you see. I've got really eclectic reading habits... I keep re-reading Jonathan Swift, I'm a great fan of his. I love the Gulliver cycle, it's brilliant... prototype science fiction, I reckon. You know Brian Aldiss did this thing about Mary Shelley being the first science fiction writer. I don't really agree with that because I think that Jonathan Swift got there first... you only have to look at it... you've got flying islands and all the elements of science fiction and fantasy in that cycle, and there's a line that I've often adopted, that Homer's **Odyssey** is about being washed on Islands, and this motif is in Shakespeare and Jonathan Swift and all over the place, and the technological equivalent of it is a rocket landing on a planet, and it's the same motif, actually, which signals to the reader – right, let's just change the rules here, something magic has taken place and all the rules are suspended – and this is the proposition, what does this tell us about how we live our lives?

So, what I was going to say about Swift was that he does that, he uses that motif and he offers us prototype science fiction, there are these islands that defy gravity and they've got all these scientists working on them and they're involved in all kinds of explorations. Do you know the flying island?

Laputa? Yes, I've read it, but not recently...

They're trying to make sunbeams out of cucumbers, they're trying to restore the nutritional value to human shit, it's hilarious! It's brilliant satire, but it's prototype science fiction

And great fun to read.

Oh yeah, though it's quite dry masculine stuff, but...

I used to like his poetry...

Do you remember 'Celia Shits'?

I don't think I came across that one! (giggles)

It's a great one, I mean this is what he was at because he lived in the Augustan age, where everybody was trying to say that man is just a little lower than the angels, that was the presiding belief at the time, and he was trying to say "No, No", he was a very religious man, "No we were raised from the muck, actually". And he did this big satire of a lot of rather romantic poems that were around, and (I can't remember the last line, but) it goes something like:

...something something her befits
Celia Celia Celia shits

He's got this woman and it's all about idealising her, like from the neck up, but this guy is obsessed with what's happening with the lower parts... but this is Swift. And all that science fiction and fantasy stuff he was doing with Gulliver was so insightful about the human condition, about how we live our lives. Always the best stuff.

God knows how we got onto that...

That's alright, Does anybody consciously influence your work, stylewise or otherwise?

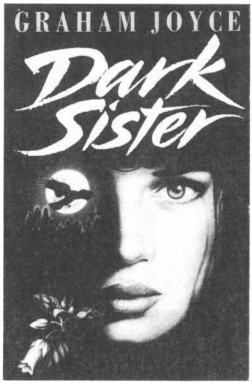
No, not consciously. I'm sure there's a lot of people that I've read over the years, that it's coming out, but you spend a lot of time trying to get your own voice and style, and in the early days of writing you spend a lot of time imitating I think, eventually you do feel your own voice coming through and I couldn't point my finger now at anybody who's particularly influenced me. There'd be a lot of voices in there. You've got to remember I've done an MA in English Literature. I studied English for a degree, and then I did an MA. I'm pretty well read in the classics, the mainstream greats. And I've admired these and appreciated those and at some point all that stuff is dissolved in what you're trying to say. I'm not trying to say that I'm in that mainstream, but I'm trying to say that they're down there, they...

Form a mulch as it were?

Yes, it's all mulch.

When did you start trying to write for publication?

I guess I made a serious stab at it when I was in my mid twenties, I used to send stories off, and they were always being rejected, but I guess I always sent them to the wrong places... I'd always start with *Granta* or something like that...**(wild laughter)** and wait for them to discover this manuscript but it never quite happened like that. Also I was a poet in those days and I won a couple of poetry awards and I got my poems published in various places, but I could never get my fiction published. Nobody was ever interested in what I was doing... I used to get letters back saying "Yes, this is very well written, but your subject matter's too weird". I was always told I was too weird, and this was before, remember, I was trying to write either science fiction, fantasy or horror. I didn't see it quite that way at the time, in fact I had some-



body around at that time who'd pointed me in that direction, saying "look, you've got a constituency for this kind of stuff, you're going to have to look at science fiction, horror, fantasy readers, because the literary mainstream, they thought it was all too wild". I was constantly up against that problem.

I wrote a novel in my mid twenties, it's still in the bottom drawer (best place for it, hope it stays there). But it had the same reaction any time that I sent it anywhere. You know, this well-written but...

So what was the nature of the weirdness?

I was always interested in exploring different levels of consciousness, whether it was dreams, drug-induced states, hypnotic states, shamanistic states; I was always interested in the idea of other realities and that people could be going through this world but having completely different realities to each other. I remember from college days getting hooked on this social construction of reality idea – that you inhabit the same world but don't inhabit the same reality – so I was trying to write stories about different realities and the way that people had access to different realities was either through sleep, drugs, magic, belief systems, religion.

So when you came to write *Dreamside*, that's really following on down the same path...

It was actually, It was very much. This was something I'd been writing about for several years. So when *Dreamside* came along and I did that thing of going off to Greece and writing that novel, when it sold, I was thinking, well why has this one worked where others haven't? And I guess it just came before an editor who saw it as a genre novel. And I'd never been thinking about genre, not because I didn't want to, but that just wasn't where my thinking was. Perhaps it was to do with this background of studying literature, I'd never really perhaps taken genre seriously enough. But an editor picked it up and said we want to publish this – is it science fiction, fantasy or horror? And I said, what? What do you mean? And she said, well we think it might be maybe science fiction or possibly fantasy. And I said, well I don't really care to be honest, like the idea that you're going to publish it – it's great, you know – do it. You decide what it is.

That's just the label on the back...

Yeah, I don't care, just publish it. I don't care if you call it Mills & Boon if you want – *publish* it. And after a lot of dithering, it came out as a fantasy novel. Although it seemed to be really well accepted by the science fiction community, as a science fiction novel. It's certainly doesn't conform to my idea of fantasy. Maybe it's around the area of dark fantasy, but it misses a long way from my definitions of fantasy. And yet it doesn't quite seem like science fiction, and it's certainly not a horror novel. I do have this problem with classification, it always seems to be on the edge. At least, I'm not sure if it's a problem.

I admit I've always read your books as mainstream, or at least mainstream with touches of the weird... Anyway what does it matter?

Oh I don't know, a lot of people do say that it's mainstream. Colin Greenland said I think your stuff is mainstream, various people have come up to me and said I think your stuff is mainstream, but it's got the weird, you know, it's got that factor X.

So is it Slipstream?

I don't know what that is Catie, it's a catchall

(laughs) ...the sort of stuff that SF fans would like only it isn't SF.

Yes, I guess so, if that's what slipstream means then maybe it is.

It puts you in there with John Fowles and..

I think that there's a huge problem with this discussion and that's that people have endless discussions defining science fiction, and what is published now under the title science fiction, it's crazy to try and string those things together and yet people

want to. Clearly here's a community who enjoy the same kind of literature, so we feel the need for some kind of definitions, yet it's an insane task because the whole range of those things just defies conceptualisation.

What there is in it, is factor X. Factor X, it's either a lazy way of saying that weirdness or (terrible cliché) sense of wonder thing that science fiction fans like, fantasy fans like, horror fans like, appreciators of slipstream enjoy very much. It's the element that says the rules are slightly suspended now let's see what happens when we change the rules.

This lust for a definition just drives me up the wall. Why bother? Librarians can do that, because they're paid to do it. That's their fucking job. They get enough money to do that. let *them* do that. They like doing it. Good. I'm glad. I'm very happy we've got librarians. They're good people. They do that for us. It saves me from having to do it. I don't want to have to worry about that.

But I do want to get factor X into my novels because it's what I enjoy when I'm reading and I find it in science fiction. I find it in some fantasy, and I find it in some horror. But factor X goes out of each of those genres when radical marketing takes over. Factor X disappears. When a horror novel becomes very visceral factor X is gone. When science fiction becomes very rational and schematic on the basis of Physics Chemistry or you know Hard Science, factor X is gone from that. Fantasy... loses factor X when you start having talking animals. I can't stand talking animals. The thing about talking animals is that they lose their animalness when they start talking. the beautiful thing about animals is that they don't talk. They behave and relate in this universe in a way which doesn't involve language and people keep wanting to write novels about talking animals. Factor X is gone. You know what I'm talking about with factor X because you know the sort of things that give you that feeling, when you get there.

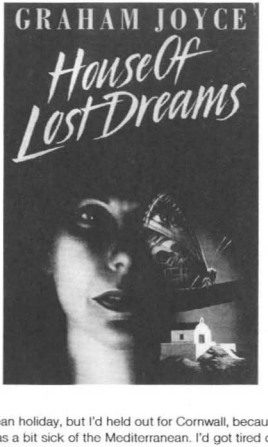
Yes. That altered state, the opening of the eyes to new ideas – it's all of that

It's the altered state thing again, which I was saying earlier I was trying to get into my novels. that is definitely factor X. That I think is the thing that strings these three genres together. But I really don't give a monkey's which genre it falls into as long as it's got factor X.

Good.

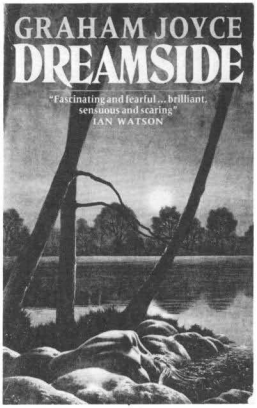
Where does the germ of your books come from. How do they start? Is it an idea? Character?

It's nearly always an idea. *Dreamside* came with the idea of somebody having a repeated awakening. Where that idea came from... I'd gone camping with Sue to Cornwall. She'd wanted to go on a Mediterranean holiday, but I'd held out for Cornwall, because I was a bit sick of the Mediterranean. I'd got tired of it, so I'd held out for a "discover Cornwall" sort of holiday. And it pissed down with rain, every bloody night. And so Sue was giving me hell, because I'd chosen this, and I was lying in the tent while she was giving me hell, and this idea came over me, and I said shut up and listen to this, and she said, "oh that is a good idea", so it started with that idea of somebody waking up again and again.



Which is really powerful. Right at the beginning of the book that sequence where Lee is trapped in his dreams.

See this is my theme again, reality, of not knowing what reality is. You couldn't distinguish dream from waking reality, because of the fact that the dream was banal and almost identical to waking reality. Your dream and my dream, we might always recognise instantly that we're dreaming because of change and the suspension of logic. But what if you have a dream where logic is not suspended. When everything appears to be as it is when you're awake. And that seemed to me a terrifying idea – dream and waking reality might be indistinguishable. It's like that idea from Jung. I was always impressed by that idea of Jung's which said that when you wake up your dream world continues but giant shutters have blocked off what's happening in your dream. You're still dreaming away but your consciousness is only vaguely aware of noises from behind this great barrier. It seemed wonderful that there was this reality going on, still, while you were awake, and that each could



have equal weight. Your dreaming reality could have more weight than your waking reality. A fascinating idea and the idea of people developing powers to become kind of amphibious creatures so they could live equally in both these environments. So that's what hatched out *Dreamside*. It was that idea.

Okay, but then *Dark Sister*, where did that start?

Dark Sister. My novels have come out differently, they all seem to have come out different. And I hope they continue to do that. I don't think that's a problem. I worry about it sometimes, because I look at other people's novels and they seem to me as if they've got a clear thing that they're trying to do, whereas mine are always hatching out different.

Isn't that because they have their own personality?

Yes, there is that too, but with a lot of people's novels you know where they're at and you know what they're doing and you know what they're exploring and I suppose I sometimes wonder if I don't know what I'm doing because ...

I thought *House of Lost Dreams* was closer to *Dark Sister* than *Dark Sister* was to *Dreamside*...

OK. That's fair enough. It seems to me ...

But I'm just a reader...

It seems to me to have come out differently. But that's alright. In some ways that makes me feel a bit better. But *Dark Sister*, what I wanted to do there was take another idea of altered states, in this case witchcraft, but couch it all in the reality of relationships between people and show that the altered state affects the ordinary state, and then the ordinary state begins to play on the altered state and things are cyclical and they're related to each other. That the altered states that we have are not hermetically sealed, but affects what we call reality.

See how we have problems with these words because it's very difficult to talk about the alternative realities and use language which gives them the same kind of credibility and bottom line as what we call the waking reality. but I wanted to show that once you start getting your head into an alternate reality, it affects your life and your life affects it and so on. And also to show that things like witchcraft don't grow out of a vacuum; they grow out of people's desires and frustrations and they have a very real emotional basis for people and also there is a very interesting subject matter to explore the question of women's relationships and what men do to them in the way that men can oppress them. And I wasn't writing it as a politically correct novel or anything like that, I was writing it as a novel to explore these different reality states. Because I wanted to show that in *Dark Sister* Maggie does all this witchcraft thing, but the most dangerous thing that happens to her is when her husband punches her.

She does all this exploration, but the real danger is from her life. So I was relating wife battering to the psychological dangers, but the real physical danger was not from demons or witches or spooks or anything like that it was from having her husband smack her in the gob.

Ok then what was the germ from which the *House of Lost Dreams* sprang?

There are certain experiences that everybody has which are dismissed as coincidences. We've all done it, and we've all had the one where you think about somebody and the phone rings, and there they are, and it's banal, it's clichéd, everyone has this kind of experience, so we have this dustbin word and it's called coincidence, and I wanted to explore that.

I'm interested in the way you address feminism in *Dark Sister* and also to an extent I think in *House of Lost Dreams*. It's a sort of psychological interpretation and not political at all...

Right. I think I'm partly working out my own ideas about feminism in that because I've spent quite a lot of years thinking about the subject and the issues, and I've met all kinds of feminists; I've met

inspiring feminists who've really turned me around, and I've met lunatics that called themselves feminists, who should be quietly put down. I think men have got to think about feminism now, and they shouldn't moan about it, they shouldn't whine about it, but they should be doing what needs to be done now. Feminists have said what they've got to say over the last twenty years, and there's some brilliant stuff there for men to think about. If men go around behaving like they haven't heard it, then they've missed an opportunity somewhere. I think the issue is far more complex, however, than a lot of feminists realise. As far as I'm concerned, feminism has been informed too much by the separatist feminist movement that's been in the van of feminism. I'd like to hear a lot more from the heterosexual vanguard of feminists, we've heard a lot from the separatists and it's a lot more complicated than that.

People have to live their lives...

People have to live their lives, and I remember reading magazines where men were agonising about this, you know, and what should they do... and there were these feminists arguing that the best thing they could do is not live with women. Gibberish!

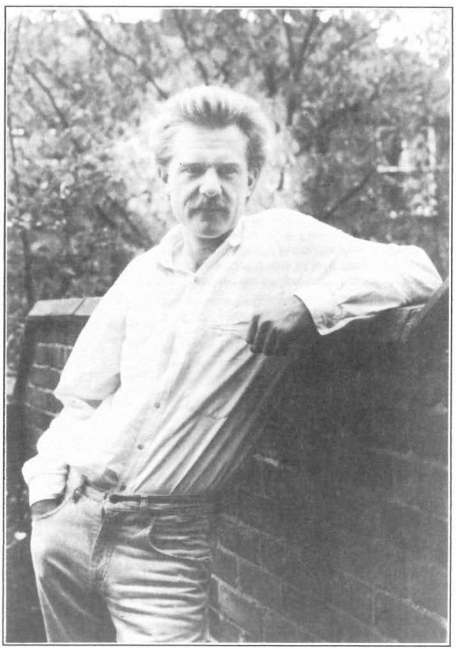
What a way to live your life! What have you won if you do that?

So what I'm quite interested in is seeing men trying to work it out, in the interests of being a better person. I don't think, on the subject of feminism, there's a lot left to be said. I really think men have got to do the work now for themselves. And I certainly don't think it's about letting women have their own way... I mean they can just fuck off if they think that's the answer... I don't trust women any more than I trust men

Yeah, I think you'd be extremely unwise

Yeah. What kind of idiot would? But that doesn't mean that I haven't been listening hard to what's been said over the last twenty years, although some writers seem not to have heard anything, and that seems to me appalling. And there's some people who claim to be writers who don't even reflect any of the talk or thinking that's been offered over the last twenty or thirty years. they behave as if nothing's happened, you know, where are they?

So a lot of what's in the books is exploration, because my books, you know, they may be science fiction, they may be fantasy, or whatever they are, they're actually much more concerned with human relationships than anything else, and it's about men and women and how they actually live together, and how they deal with each other, and that involves questions of sexuality, so it's an endless and fascinating subject for me



Hearing from the Ion Engineers

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A Quarter Century of SF Poetry by Steve Sneyd

Of "the making of anniversaries there is no end", to misquote a cliché – a process ever accreting as the "Heritage Industry" begins to seem this country's only real future source of occupation.

Still, Why shouldn't SF join in? 1995's 100th anniversary of the publication of H G Wells' *The Time Machine*, deserves the celebration it will doubtless receive, if any genre classic does.

In, naturally much less lavish style, SF poetry also has an anniversary worthy of some sort of recognition looming.

Easter 1994, is the 25th anniversary of the first poetry reading at a convention in this country (or at least the memory of fan speaketh not to the contrary, as far as I've been able with due diligence to discover.)

During the quarter century since, appearances of poetry at cons have been , to put it mildly, sporadic; indeed, in England, they include a gap of some fourteen years, or two thirds as long as the interval between the first and second world wars.

Nevertheless, since for the last few years there has been some sort of poetry event at at least one English convention every year, and since that English gap had no parallel breach-of-continuitywise in Scotland, here is a tradition of sort to celebrate in whatever fashion proves appropriate.

In the meantime, a brief account of what happened when in this particular specialised sphere of human activity, beginning at the beginning, or even slightly before, is possibly worth putting on the record with what accuracy information available permits.

Arthur C Clarke called for a poetry of science fiction as long ago as 1938, and poetry indeed appeared intermittently in fanzines and pulps down the years.

But any kind of real visibility had to wait till Michael Moorcock took over the editorship of *New Worlds* and alongside his many other innovations, introduced poetry to its pages – albeit a poetry far from the conventions of genre verse, freer in form, surrealistically experimental in many ways, and as concerned with "inner" space, the mind-blowing inward voyages of the late '60s, and the "soft sciences" that tracked their passing, as with the outer space journeys then busily moving from the realm of fiction to fact with the Moon Race between the USA and USSR.

Such a potted summary is necessary to explain what happened next – the pre-beginning of the beginning, as it were, in terms of the theme of this article.

John Brunner told the story in some detail in his 'Noise Level' column in Dick Geis' *Science Fiction Review* (No 5 of that column, subtitled 'Rhyme and, If You're Very Lucky, Reason', appearing in the March '71 issue, No 43).

Briefly, within the Brighton Arts Festival of 1968, a weekend conference on science fiction was organised, jointly chaired by the historian Asa Briggs and the poet and critic Edward Lucie-Smith.

As the closing item of the conference, Edward Lucie-Smith organised a science fiction poetry reading, with a 'cast list' from inside and outside what was generally seen as the SF world. Brunner notes that these included Adrian Henri and the Liverpool Scene, George MacBeth, D M Hart, D M Thomas (then connected with *New Worlds*, later a Booker prize-winning author), and Brunner himself.

To quote Brunner directly "Tickets were horribly overpriced, so the audience was small, but it was a very stimulating and enjoyable occasion". (He also notes that "Not all the material read was strictly SF – it shaded over into fantasy and surrealism – but a surprising amount of it was the pyre metal", particularly praising MacBeth's ' Bedtime Story' with its poetic account of the death of the last man.)

The success of this event encouraged Brunner to organise a reading at the 1969 Eastercon at Oxford, its theme being the recently published anthology, *Holding Your Right Hands*, in hindsight the most influential SF poetry yet published. The anthology's editor, the same Lucie-Smith who had brought about the Brighton reading, took part in this reading, almost certainly the first ever to form part of the programme at a British SF convention. (In the *Science Fiction Review* article, Brunner speaks of "inviting Ted to come along"; elsewhere he has said "he was kind enough to drop in – unpaid as I recall, and preside at a reading to which I and others contributed."

Lucie-Smith read exerpts from the anthology and gave indications of the thinking behind his choices. Brunner and others also read. Brunner, in the *Noise Level* account, says "Considering he (Lucie-Smith) had outright refused to rehearse our duet beforehand, it went off rather well and provoked a good reaction from the audience." (adding to this account, in the 1989 letter already quoted, "I can't remember all the people who read on that occasion, but I do recall that afterwards Ken Bulmer told me that he had been doubtful about the appeal of such an event but it had gone off unexpectedly well."

This encouraging response led Brunner to organise another for next year's Scicon in London.

This reading featured Jeni Couzyn, a South African poet then living in London, who used SF themes for poems meditating on Aldiss stories, and who read her recent black comedy "extract from an Alien cookery book", called ' Human Pie', which apparently had the audience in fits of laughter.

However, another aspect of the reading, a "storm in a glass", or rather caused by a glass, which is best remembered by those who were there. (Other readers included Brunner himself, Brian Aldiss, and Edward Lucie Smith, Michael Moorcock was present and George MacBeth may also have read.) A member of the audience, "incensed at the quality of the verse, or drunk" – Brian Aldiss) threw a glass at Brunner, Couzyn and Lucie-Smith, which hit the first named on the leg.

In reaction to "the SOB responsible, now dead", Brunner read for the first time in public his poem ' Flyting Against Mr X' (a "flyting" being a Scots term for a railing or scolding poem) and "with a real target in view", in his own words.

After that 1970 event, nothing seems to have happened till 1974, when Lisa Conesa, a poet herself and editor of the well known fanzine *Zimri*, which gave considerable space to poetry, organised a poetry reading (she called it a Poetry Soiree) for the 1974 Tynecon.

As a souvenir of this, she published an anthology, *The Purple Hours*, which contained a selection of poetry by well known SF writers and fanzine and little magazine poets, though in the event only a few of those included in the anthology actually took part in the Soiree.

However, those who did read included a notable trio, Brian Aldiss, Couzyn again, and Robert "Hawklord" Calvert, poet and lyricist with the SF-rock band Hawkwind.

This is probably the only occasion that Calvert, who died in 1988, read his poetry in a context other than a Hawkwind concert or on record.

Andrew Darlington says "the reading seems to have been a minor distraction [within the Convention] with confused and disappointing reactions, but the participants were well-pleased with their performance and a little self-congratulatory at leavening some culture on the event."

Duncan Lunan recalls John Brunner reading the 'Mustapha Sherif' poems which appear as chapter epigraphs in his novel *Web of Everywhere* and notes "we got into a discussion at the interval and became so absorbed that we forgot to go back into the hall."

There were plans for other such events, but Conesa got a disappointing response from the organisers of Seacon, and a Poetry Soiree, planned for the 1976 Mancon, aborted almost literally "at the eleventh hour", for reasons difficult at this late date to establish, beyond the level of unprovable guesswork.

Thereafter, these disappointments, and the death of a family member discouraged *Zimri*'s editor from further attempts. No one else took up the idea, and poetry at English Conventions began a long period of being conspicuous by its absence, certainly as an organised item.

There were occasionally SF poetry readings, though not in a convention environment – for example at the Sunderland 2000 festival in 1973, where the "Beyond This Horizon" SF event included a genre poetry reading organised by Chris Careell, with accompanying mini-anthology from Ceolfrith Press, with an Edward Lucie-Smith introduction updating his HY8H introductory text.

In 1979, as part of the "High Frontier" space exploration exhibition at Glasgow's Third Eye Centre, organised by Duncan Lunan, the same Chris Careell, by now Third Eye's director, invited Edwin Morgan to read his SFnal poetry, and Third Eye produced the work read as the outstanding "slim volume" Stargate.

In 1985, Lunan himself organised a reading at the Scottish Albacon, at which John Brunner read, as did Alasdair Gray, who also presented work by Edwin Morgan. In 1986, again with Lunan presiding, another convention reading featured Edwin Morgan himself and Diane Duane.

Subsequently, Lunan was to arrange a reading by Morgan and Brunner at the Edinburgh Science festival in 1989, and has since given readings of SF poetry to non-genre groups like the monthly Ayreshire "Poems and Pints" events.

In the meantime however, he played a major role in the poetry reading on the first night of the 1988 Lucon. As convention Guest of Honour, he took part in a discussion about the value of SF poetry, chaired by myself, during which he illustrated the genre's value in focusing understanding of scientific development, and illuminating and inspiring discovery, with extracts from his own book *Man and the Stars*. Confusion over event locations meant occasional irruptions of costumed Vikings and Spacemen, but a reasonable audience then heard a reading by Darlington, extracts from a tape of Dave Calder reading from his remarkable collection *Spaced*, and Pete Presford reading his own work, examples of SF poetry published in his zine *Barddoni*, and an unusual "unconscious SF" poem written by a resident at a hostel for the homeless.

Lunan's comment on convention audiences for poetry seems relevant here "not... large, but they've been interested." (Of his "Poems and Pints" experience he added "Some of them told me they were worried about what I was going to read, but to their relief they were able to understand it all!".

1989 saw an unprecedented run of SF poetry events at three English conventions.

At Eastercon in Jersey, K V Bailey organised a two-session workshop. The first included readings and discussions, using as focus a special publication, *Speculum*, edited by Bailey himself, which included discussions of genre poetry, suggestions for writing exercises, and instances of relevant poetry by the

winners of a Ver Poets speculative poetry competition and others. At the second session, participants produced and discussed poems themselves.

Mexicon III, at Nottingham that year, included a midnight reading, by invitation of the organisers, by Bailey of a selection of his own poems. Of this event he says "I was startled to find a fairish audience at that hour – it proved agreeably responsive, but I realised that a following reading by Iain Banks was what had really assembled it!".

Finally, in June, two SF poetry items were included in the programme of Iconoclasm, held at Leeds' then atmospherically gloomy (it has since been refurbished) Griffin Hotel.

The Friday evening included a reading which may have owed the size of audience to its being the only "main strand" programme item at the time. However, the majority returned after the interval, stayed till the end despite the attraction of a nearby bar, and Andrew Darlington got an unprecedented request to encore his poem `Hiroshima Mon Amour/ Radical Kisses' at the end. Others who read included Andrew M Butler, Pete "Cardinal" Cox (who has since organised at least two poetry evenings for Peterborough SF Club), John P Haines, *Works* editor Dave W Hughes, then *Dial 174* editor Terry "M'ranje" Moran, Krax editor Andy Robson (a humorous prose-poem from his *Life of a Star* collection, launched at Iconoclasm) and myself (I also compered). Work by a number of leading American genre poets, including past Rhysling winners read by themselves, was also played on tape.

Next day there was a workshop, which included various writing exercises, talks on editing and editors by Robson, on marketing work by Simon Clark and D F Lewis etc. Subsequently a mini-anthology of the work read on Friday and that from the workshop was produced, under the title Icons of *Starchasm*.

1990's sole representation seems to have been small-scale, almost "fringe", at Con2bile in Peterborough, with filk, in many ways a related genre, taking a higher profile.

In 1991, Bailey ran an evening "fringe reading", assisted by Chris Amies, work by Keith Allen Daniels, Dave Hughes, and others being read along with KVB's own.

George Hays Library Convention, Hasticon, in 1992 included a considerable representation of genre poetry. the Saturday morning reading included Bailey, Peter Garratt, and myself, while Hay read a poem of his own and a prose poem by Lord Dunsany. Later I gave brief talks on the history of genre poetry, particularly the work of early US SF poet Lilith Lorraine, and on publications using genre poetry.

Later in the summer, Clwydcon, held at the Welsh Agricultural College at Northop near Mold, had originally been intended by organiser Presford as the first all-SF poetry convention. However the collapse of plans to hold the annual "mainstream" Poets and Small Presses Convention on the National Garden Festival site at Ebbw Vale meant that Clwydcon had to assume that role also. However, SF poetry remained a part of the programme, with a debate on traditionally free verse in genre poetry between Haines and Sneyd, along with minireading and discussion; the latter brought interesting comment and fresh viewpoints from such "mainstream" poets and editors as Anthony Cooney of TOPS and Gerald England of *New Hope International*. (As a link across the years, the latter had been included in the 1974 Purple Hours anthology).

1993 brought an SF poetry item, organised by Peter Garratt, within Helicon at Jersey. Billed as predominantly a workshop, it became in the event mainly a reading, those taking part including John Brunner and past Rhysling SF poetry award-winner Joe Haldeman, as well as Garratt and Bailey.

Mexicon 5 at Scarborough programmed "Barsoom Ballads" for the Cornelian Suite at 11.15 pm on Saturday (details mentioned because not only did this mean competing with a band playing elsewhere, but the said suite proved to be a wormhole-type passage for conrunners and hotel staff.) Nevertheless, a smallish audience of 20 or so stayed to the end of the reading, organised by K V Bailey, which included predominantly poems, as the overall title indicates, with a Mars reference, and others which touched on diverse aspects of SF. Those who read included, as well as Bailey, Garratt and myself, and in addition work Darlington, Haines and Sue Thomason was read on their behalf. A short discussion followed, Lee Spinrad in particular posing pertinent but hard-to-answer questions. (It is hoped that a selection of the work read will appear in the 1994 Mexicon the first decade souvenir book).

In a brief, indeed, breakneck, skim through twenty-five years, it is difficult to convey except perhaps by implication the diverse "flavour" of events which may sound similar but "in real life" were no two the same, let alone "let the dog see the rabbit" in terms of instancing the poetry read. Some of the publications referred to are still in print, and SF poetry more generally can be found, with a little diligence, in anthologies available either through libraries or, for the more recent, mainly from America (though plans for new ones here, from Anchor Books and strange Adventures Press – the first of which may indeed have already appeared) shows a welcome revival of interest in the possibilities. My hope is that the revival of interest shown at conventions will likewise continue and indeed grow. After all poetry and SF are natural partners – or, as Edwin Morgan put it, in `A View of Things',

"What I love about poetry is its ion engine."

Acknowledgements

My thanks must go to many people, and in particular the following, for information without which the article would have been impossible.

Brian Aldiss, Kenneth V Bailey, John Brunner, Peter Cox, Andrew Darlington and Duncan Lunan. Remarks quoted from Duncan Lunan are extracted from an extensive interview with him which is scheduled to appear in Fantasy Commentator No 45, USA.

"We, old as history now..."

Henry Treece

by KV Bailey

Catie Cary contributed to the *Compass Points* feature of *Vector* 170 a recommendation of Treece's novel *The Golden Strangers*. Not all readers, it appeared, considered his work to have either fantasy or SFnal relevance. In correspondence with Catie I mentioned that I had known Henry Treece well, and agreed with what she had written of his talent to immerse his readers in both the reality and the strangeness of the past. (My title is taken from a poem in his collection *The Haunted Garden*.) She encouraged me to enlarge on this for *Vector* and in doing so to offer some personal recollection.

Henry, his wife Mary, and several lordly cats lived in a rambling mansion adjacent to the Saxon church of Barton-on-Humber, a village at the southern approach of that big bridge crossing over to Hull. We had common interests in the writing of books for children and in his plays for radio. My work in the '50s often took me from our then home near Nottingham into Lincolnshire; he was a frequent visitor to Nottingham, and so it came about that we were from time to time each others house guest. On one such occasion I recall that my wife baked a huge medieval pie for a party to round off the first night of his Edward II play, *Carnival King*, produced at the Nottingham playhouse (as was his later Viking play *Footsteps in the Sea*). Our friendship lasted through to his too early death in 1966. He was a good raconteur, a born teller of tales, ceaselessly trying out new plots and themes in conversation, avid for and meticulous as to detail, gathering and transmuting almost on the spot experiences of the day (a remote pub, an encountered eccentric) into his store of images for the past. For example, he gave us a first copy of *War Dog* with an inscribed dedication to our old bearded collie whose ways and character he had come to know almost as well as we did.

He was pre-eminently a historical novelist, writing for children and for adults, but he was also a poet and possessed the kind of insights which Rosemary Sutcliff discerned when she wrote in her introduction to *The Golden Strangers*: "He understood better than any other writer I have ever read, the appalling intricacy of life in a primitive society." It was this understanding which enabled him to portray so convincingly how the life and manners of one race, tribe or community might appear to be unbridgeably alien to another. He showed through the actions and interactions of his characters how this strangeness seems to have made inevitable the violent hostilities and cruelties of history, yet paradoxically could breed mutual tolerance and eventual peaceful fusions. In its simplest form this is seen in the early juvenile, *The Eagles Have Flown* in the transformation of Artos, the Celtic Bear of Britain, into Arturius "who rode in the service and not the destruction of the old Roman manners and government". It is also evidenced there (and personalised) in episodes of savagery and of healing between native Cwmry and Saxon sea-folk.

As Margery Fisher wrote (with reference to *The Bronze Sword*) in a *Bodley Head Monograph* (1969): "Though Treece had been heard to say that he 'hated the Romans', he could enter into their desire for law and order as intuitively as he could understand the doomed courage of the Celts." The opposition of the barley-growers and the invasive cattle-men of *The Golden Strangers* is echoed in his last work, a remarkable novella (strikingly illustrated by Charles Keeping) — *The Dream-Time* (Brockhampton Press, 1967). Here, however, Treece moves into what sometimes seems a timeless pre-history, or at any rate a scene in which the practices of corn growing, or herding and hunting, of cave art and metal smelting all coexist: a scene populated by proto-humans without language and by true humans with dawning languages. the constant themes of cruelty, courage and compassion, of aggression and reconciliation are rehearsed through the multi-landscapes of an ur-world. New concepts and physical potentialities are seen shaping within the human mind. This was the direction in which Treece's imagination was moving: a direction presaged by the opening lines of a poem he had written some twenty years earlier: "There is an ocean in my head that nightly sings, / Swings, sways and crawls about the mental globe..."

Without extensive quotation it is difficult to convey the 'planetary' sense which suffuses Treece's writings — both in his children's stories and especially in the mature adult novels such as *Red Queen, White Queen*, *Jason* and *Oedipus*. It may be channelled into

physical description of a clarity as sharp as Le Guin's, as here in *War Dog*: "... against contrary winds, three dark longships rowed only by a dozen oars and so low in the water that every wave seemed to smother them, came out of the swirling mists, the greedy gulls squawking and wheeling above them"; or it may be mythopoetic as in the imaging of a time "long before Crete came up like a great fish from under the green sea and reared her golden palaces for the god's approval" (*Oedipus*). He himself, in notes (appended to the Margery Fisher monograph mentioned above) for a lecture given at the Hull College of Art shortly before his death, wrote of a creative writer's vision being directed to "the seasons in their progression ...this ritual dance of the months". So sensitised, he continues, "he will know, without doubt that all years are one year, all pleasures one pleasure, all disasters trivial, and all heroes expendable". The perceptions which feed this vision, he says may then be ordered by a writer "into a cosmology, or imaginative system, so as to form an entire and self-sufficient environment for his writing".

Henry Treece was never a writer of science fiction nor strictly of fantasy, though in a man-into-tree apparent metamorphosis in his Beowulf novel, *The Green Man* (his only mention, I think, in the Clute-Nicholls encyclopedia), he comes near to the Holdstockian version. Yet the self-revelatory sentences just quoted suggest the extent to which his imagination and his imaginative work may be compared with those of many writers within our genre. Catie Cary wrote accurately of his "unique vision; bleakly poetic, violent and scary, grittily realistic". Such words might also be said of the vision of Ian McDonald in *Hearts, Hands and Voices*; of that informing the Times World chapters of Vernor Vinge's *A Fire Upon the Deep*; and perhaps also that of Suzy McKee Charnas in *Walk to the End of the World*. No direct comparisons, but, with all their differings,a certain common grounding in such a vision. Reading the opening chapter of *Hearts, Hands and Voices*, I was particularly reminded of some of Treece's adult fiction.

He wrote only one critical work, though a memorable one – *Dylan Thomas: dog among the fairies*. They were friends and, though unlike in poetic technique, not so far apart in poetic sensibility. They both had affinity with what was known as the 'Apocalyptic' movement. In one of Dylan Thomas's poems there is a line which I think might well be applied to Treece's understanding of humankind's planetary status and destiny. It is: "A process in the weather of the world" – provided always that this is complemented by another line, one which is also the title of that poem: " A process is the weather of the heart."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

REVIEWS OF HARDBACKS & PAPERBACK ORIGINALS EDITED BY CATIE CARY

John Barnes
Mother of Storms
Millennium 1994, 455 pages, £16.99
Steve Jeffery

This is one of those novels that, in a number of ways, more or less typifies hard SF. Three elements in particular are at work here: what Kaveney calls the 'Big Dumb Object' scenario, a threat or challenge on a vaster than human scale; the old pulp SF notion of the 'superbright'— here a transcendent immortality though a viral fusion of man and self replicating AI, and large dollops of scientific research delivered in meticulous detail at points throughout the text.

Happily, Barnes seems well aware of this heritage — there is a sly nod to Heinlein in both the name and personality of the AI controller of one character's car — and evades most of the inherent pitfalls.

It won't give away too much to reveal that *Mother of Storms* is an environmental disaster novel, and that humanity overcomes and survives a threat of its own making, albeit by the skin of its teeth. The eponymous storm, an immense hurricane, is spawned by the release of huge quantities of methane into the atmosphere when the UN nuke an illegal missile site near the North Pole. The warming of the oceans provides a fertile breeding ground for a monster hurricane in the Pacific.

Against this global disaster, Barnes plays a series of more human scale plots. Randy Householder is a father tracking down the man behind his daughter's murder for a 'snuff' XV wedge (a full sensory recording). Synthi Venture, wired and reshaped into a grotesque cartoon femininity, is an XV starlet for the Passionet porn channel. There is Jesse Callare's hormonally frustrated relationship with Naomi and her right-on, New Age psychobabble, and their counterpoint in ex-lovers Carla and Louie, both now in separate isolated retreat — Carla in her ocean going submersible boat, Louie in space as the last member of an orbiting space station.

All, of course, will come together in various ways as Hurricane Clem and its rapidly spawned daughters ravage the islands, coasts and eventually whole continents of the earth, clocking a final body-count in the billions. All will be transformed, in various ways, and some redeemed, by their ordeals.

Louie, as humanity's last hope, is transformed more than most. He absorbs himself into the Net as a vast, semi-autonomous army of self-replicating AI machines on a drive into deep space to salvage an ice asteroid, the world's biggest F factor sunblock.

This desperate solution is perhaps the novel's most unsatisfactory point. If such devastation can be unleashed from the side effects of the initial UN air strike, who knows what might result from Louie's even more grandiose deployment of a billion ton ice cube in the atmosphere? There are some other problems. Barnes occasionally loses track of a couple of his multiple sub plots, which turn up later to add a new twist to events. The sheer sense of carnage — Japan is disposed of in a couple of pages, Europe in as many paragraphs — is, apart from one particularly horrific image of a million bloated bodies washed up against the shore, almost too large to grasp. The disaster is more deeply felt when it impinges directly on individual lives.

For all that, its a solidly entertaining, and sometimes exhilarating read. And you get to learn more meteorology than you perhaps wanted to know. So the next time Michael Fish says "Don't worry, there isn't going to be any hurricane", just go out and check the barometer in case.

Stephen Baxter
Ring
Harper Collins 1994, 443pp, £15.99pp
Alan Johnson

In Stephen Baxter's latest novel, he takes us back to the future history so elegantly plugged in *Vector* 179. The scale of this work is immense, taking us from the heart of the Sun to the end of our Universe in just over 400 pages, and provides the capstone of the Xeelee cycle, but how does it stand up as a story?

The year is 3953AD and the quasi-religious cult, Superet has long term plans to preserve the human race, and to these ends sponsors projects which it feels will promote this aim. This story is about two diverse projects, a project to place a human intelligence inside the Sun, and a second to send a multi-generation ship on a relativistic trip five millions years into the future, although it will only be one thousand years subjective time, with the intention of creating a wormhole back in time to their point of origin. The reason for this massive undertaking is that Superet has gleaned information from this period that no trace of the human race exists at this point in time, and view the project as way to preserve humankind. The stellar project is designed to examine the interior of the Sun, and a force grown child, Lieserl, is brought up on Earth and experiences a lifetime of sensations in a few days before dying and her *essence* is incorporated into the probe to give a human experience to the data acquisition.

The multi-generation ship, *The Great Northern*, (named after Brunel's steamship, because the preserved remains are incorporated into the ship!) survives the relativistic voyage intact physically, but the crew polarises into various factions. On completion of the voyage they fail in their intended mission, but achieve a measure of success of its goals.

The way that Baxter weaves the two diverse strands of the story, the cosmic elements and the experience of people in increasingly bizarre and threatening situations is a tribute to his growing powers as storyteller. He conveys the most up-to-date theories of quantum mechanics and cosmology without losing sight of the ultimate goal, that of telling a story. The return to the Sol system, and Lieserl's experience of the destruction of the Earth, along with the revelation of the reason for the early death of the stars, provide some of the best hard SF I've read so far this year and is probably some of the best I've ever read. The complexity of some of the science may put off some, but if you are prepared to work a little you will be well rewarded.

Terry Bisson
Bears Discover Fire
Tor, $19.95, 254pp
Kev Mc Veigh

Terry Bisson's first collection of short stories is one of the most welcome volumes in recent SF, and one to be treasured in the future. Not only does the reprinting of these stories in one place save all the difficulty of trawling through magazines as divers as *Asimov's, Interzone, F&SF, Omni, Science Fiction Age* and even *Playboy* (though for stories as good as these it would certainly be worth the effort), but it allows a closer look at some of the things Bisson does which are so special by the magnifying effect of their close company.

Taking all of these stories together reveals that there isn't one particular aspect of Bisson's writing which gives this collection a degree of cohesiveness uncommon in such volumes: in pure dialogue stories such as 'Next' and 'Press ANN' his mastery of voices brings characters to life, the award-winning title story is remarkable for its sense of place, and this is even stronger in 'The Two Janets' where voice and tone bring a whole midwest town to full view; and then in complete contrast, 'England, Underway' has a timeless quality enhanced by an oddly artificial depiction of a Brighton that never quite existed, and mysteriously archetypal characters. the one common factor in almost all of these stories is a warmth and charm revealing a genuine love on the part of the author for these characters. Sometimes this is manifested in straight humour, the wisecracking 'Two Guys from the Future' would make a great comedy sketch, and often a gentle romanticism, ('Two Guys from the Future', 'Press ANN', 'The Two Janets' all invoke a wry wistfulness), but Bisson is also a writer with a point to make. Irony and satire are strong weapons in his hands, particularly in the ecological stories 'The Toxic Donut', 'By Permit Only' and 'Next' whilst 'Cancion Autentica de Old Earth' is both poignant and critical of cultural exploitation. 'Next' and 'The Coon Suit' attack racism, 'The Toxic Donut' and 'By Permit Only' demonstrate a contempt for sexist attitudes.

The ideas behind these stories aren't the raison d'être of Bisson's writing, they are frequently the sort of conceit that arise in the midst of a late night brainstorming session "Hey, what if...?" In this respect Bisson stands comparison to Howard Waldrop (particularly stories like 'The Ugly Chickens' and 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll), though his Southern Midwest townfolk are more like many of the writers who pass through 'The Two Janets' with a touch of Damon Runyan, maybe. His narrative is unobtrusive, understated and careful.

The least of these stories is the alien view of Earth 'They're made out of Meat' which is a mildly funny squib until an ironic last line upsets it all. The best? The riches here are many, but the title story, 'The Two Janets', 'Two Guys from the Future', 'Press ANN', 'The Toxic Donut' and 'England Underway' are all worth the entrance money on their own. And then there is 'Over The Mountain' about a truck driver and a hitchhiker driving over a huge mountain raised up above the atmosphere in Kentucky. (You get to know Kentucky pretty well, reading Bisson). Here Bisson wins me over with such true observations as the young hitchhiker slyly checking the ten-dollar bill in his pocket "to make sure that it hadn't turned into a flue"

Terry Bisson has emerged from nowhere as one of the best short story writers currently active, up there with sterling, Mc Donald, Connie Willis on her good days, and very few others. Humorous writing is generally joke driven, immediate and transient, shallow seem. These are stories you will remember, suddenly in a few years time with such rich completeness that you will search out this volume and re-immerse yourself in its depths. They will become old friends to you, and deserve to become classics not only of SF but beyond the genre.

The Forest House
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Michael Joseph, 417 pp, 1904
Tanya Brown

The Forest House is based on the plot of Bellini's screechy opera *Norma*, which may account for some of the grand gestures and dramatic agonies to which its characters are prone. Eilan, daughter of Druids, falls immediately and irrevocably in love with the half-Roman Gaius after meeting him in a boar-pit. To her father and foster-brother, however, Gaius' heritage makes him a symbol of the hated Roman empire, a threat to the British way of life and to Druidic traditions that have been passed down unchanged from their Atlantean ancestors. Eilan, in short, may not marry Gaius. Heartbroken, she accepts an invitation to enter the Forest House, a sanctuary for Druid priestesses. Embroiled in the internal politics to which even a feminist idyll is sometimes prey — and empowered by her experience of the Goddess — Eilan finds no more than a few moments to mourn the loss of her lover. She can't believe that they will never meet again — and neither, it must be said, can the reader.

Bradley's historical research seems impeccable; her Roman Britain may have fantastical elements, but it is rooted in fact — although there's a tendency to be either pedantically precise or mystically vague. For example, although no date is given for the events of the novel, it's relatively easy — given the references to people and events outside the scope of the narrative — to place it around 80 AD As a historical novel, however, *The Forest House* is not wholly successful. Perhaps this is because it is not entirely focussed within the Romano-British world which is its setting. There are many informative asides — two girls walking through 'the thick, uncleared forest that still covered much of the south of Britain'. And Bradley's characters occasionally appear to be no more than mouth-pieces for authorial comments on current concerns — deforestation, ethnic cleansing, female priests — which seem not only anachronistic but largely irrelevant to the events of the novel.

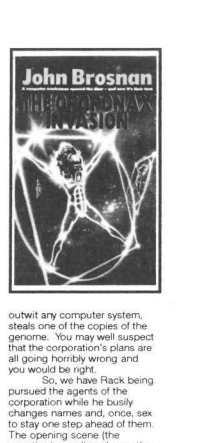
The flow of time in the novel is unsettlingly uneven — several years may pass in the space between chapters, unremarked until Eilan or her cousin Dieda begin to reminisce. It's a perfectly valid plot device; but in a novel focussed so closely on the emotions and reactions of its protagonists, it interrupts the empathy which is built up between the reader and the characters

Despite these flaws, though, *The Forest House* has its share of enchanting and mystical moments. Eilan's encounters with the Goddess, and her initiation, reflect a spiritual truth; they are neatly balanced by Gaius' initiation into the masculine art of battle. A tragic and romantic tale, which mounts to an oddly satisfying conclusion.

John Brosnan
The Opoponax Invasion
Gollancz, 1993, 223pp, £8.99
Mark Plummer

We're in the year 2248 and the earth is controlled by a few mega-corporations. Everybody goes through life fitted up with their own on-board bio-nanotechnology (bionantech), and you can go to a Body-Chop for a temporary sex-change if that's what you want. We are in fairly solid SF territory here.

An asteroid prospector, freelance but licensed by one of the corporations, discovers an alien artefact, the first indication of intelligent non-terrestrial life.Under laboratory examination, the centre of the artefact is found to contain a ball of amber-like resin "similar in chemical composition to the Earthly opoponax" and this in turn contains alien DNA. The corporation sets out to grow an alien, a process which has to be accelerated when Joster Rack, a thief with incredibly sophisticated bionantech that can



outwit any computer system, steals one of the copies of the genome. You may well suspect that the corporation's plans are all going horribly wrong and you would be right.

So, we have Rack being pursued the agents of the corporation while he busily changes names and, once, sex to stay one step ahead of them. The opening scene (the narrative is non-linear) sees the transformed Rack determined that his new outwardly female form will not change his fundamental masculinity. You may have some thoughts about how this plot strand is going to turn out as well.

This is a fast-paced novel ranging through a selection of traditional SF features. The action is conveyed in short bursts, stylistically similar (unsurprisingly) to the Skylords trilogy.

We get scenes set on Mars, we get a penal colony, we get space ships. The works. There are more than a few nods towards the genre's golden age: there's an Asimov City and a Clarke Elevator Terminal, spaceships called the Van Vogt and the Gully Foyle, and is it just co-incidence that one of Rack's pre-sex-change pseudonyms is Varley? There are comic touches, notably the Space Defence Fleet constructed in the days when earth thought it might need a space defence fleet and kept in mothballs for years just in case, a few nice riffs on religion.

Ultimately, it's a fun book. It doesn't do a great deal to advance the genre. It doesn't push back the boundaries. Then again, it's probably not trying. Given that this is the case, it's probably a bit much to expect people to shell out £8.99 for 223 C format pages but reading this book is not a bad way to spend two or three hours. And having said all that, it seems almost churlish to point out that the Shorter Oxford Dictionary seems to think that the word is spelt "opopanax". Oh well.

Storm Constantine
Gaienture
Headline, 1994, 340pp, £16.99
Norman Beswick

The arrival of her ninth book (not to mention umpteen stories in *Interzone* and elsewhere) proclaims Storm Constantine an established SF/F writer.

Right from the start, she managed to avoid other people's formulas. For better or for worse, her stories have always been recognisably her own. First (beginning in 1987) came the three Wraeththu books, with their elegantly mysterious titles, slow-paced and sprawling plots, enigmatic and androgynous characters: cult books to immerse yourself in, imaginatively teasing out and disturbing our concepts of gender. For a new writer (despite their untidy self-indulgence and a dismissive review in *Foundation*) they represented a considerable achievement.

the Monstrous Regiment and its sister volume, *Aleph*, set on a planet where feminist rule has gone disastrously wrong, had good things but were perhaps less successful, more obviously 'thought up' (she herself was dissatisfied with *Regiment* and one feels that she is happier with themes that avoid either/or). But *Hermetech* with its wandering hippie travellers, startling anatomical rearrangements and climax of erotic magic showed her back on conceptual course; critical reception was understandably somewhat mixed, but Constantine was at least using her imagination uncluttered by other people's argument. (*The Encyclopedia of SF* refers to her "gothic sensibility" which for all I know may be true so far.)

In the process she was learning the more prosaic elements of her trade, like plot tidiness and pace. *Burying the Shadow* was certainly well-made; it re-examined and gave a new slant to the vampire image, showed considerable research into angels and much else, and got away with quotations from *Paradise Lost* at the head of every chapter (not many SF writers have prompted me to reread Milton!). She was beginning to relax, and *Sign for the Sacred* was a romp. Constantine at play, with a tightly controlled structure, a hint of sexual ambiguity, and a central character or (to borrow an appropriate term from chaos maths) 'strange attractor' whose presence and random behaviour disorientates others.

Now we have *Calenture*, and although the tone is more sober than in *Sign* there is an element of play here too, giving her a particular technical problem to enjoy. The title means "fever, burning passion, glow" and is illustrated by a quote from John Donne; readers will make up their own minds how far, and where the term applies in this fabulation but a book has to be called *something*. Casmeer, last of his kind, lives in the deserted city of Thermidore among the mountains of Overhang. Compulsively he has written the history of his now crystalline people, and just as compulsively, he begins inventing, and writing down, stories of his own about the wider world of travelling cities, Terranauts, pilot stones and strange creatures beyond. We enter those stories, following the characters, their lives increasingly shadowed by interventions from a mysterious stranger who knows more about them than they do themselves. The conclusion is guaranteed to attract postmodernist critics but is also perfectly satisfying to ordinary no-nonsense readers.

Fine, you say, so that's the form: what about the content? Surely, for instance, we've heard of travelling cities before: Christopher Priest's *Inverted World*, or the flying cities in James Blish's *Cities in Flight*? But they were examples of hard SF; Constantine has no interest whatever in how her cities move, they just do, and she concentrates on the strangely differing people, customs and social structures in each. we know, in a way, why they move, but the answer only makes sense in that world, not in ours. How they get food is hinted at, but not in a way that encourages further questions. And the story is complete enough without them.

And this is characteristic of her work in general. Her worldbuilding is conceived to allow the story to happen, not to control it. Though by no means scientifically illiterate, she is no hard SF writer, building up a story on a scientific or technological what-if; nor is she a sociologist saying "By God, if this goes on..!" She is a spinner of stories, indulgent about loose threads and incomplete wholes.

The events are nicely various, the writing carries us happily along with plenty of felicities en route (her prose which was already interesting in its rhythms in the *Wraeththu* books, has got better and better since *Monstrous Regiment*) and the characters are distinct and involving but without tedious introspection (old softie that *I* am, I got quite attached to Leeth despite her unpromising start) Characteristically, there are occasional touches of sexual diverseness, and yes, several characters are on personal quests but they're all different and incidental, untrammelled by ponderous wizards and terminal cosmic battles against the forces of ritualised evil.

In other words, another Constantine goodie and well worth reading. As an attentive fan I'm delighted to see her unravel a technical tangle into a fantasy that almost (but happily not entirely) 'makes sense'. It has to be said, of course, that nothing she has written since the Wraeththu books has quite given the frisson, the little shiver of the unconscious, that those strange, mutated humans initially occasioned. She was wise to turn to other areas, before they got stale and the satirists turned on her, and if rumours of another Wraeththu book being on the stocks id true it is to be hoped she has turned the image another way to come at it with fresh authorial eyes.

I have to confess I'm waiting for the biggie: the novel that's not only technically brilliant but outs deep, that takes emotional risks, that says something new and startling — something that hurts to write. It's a lot to ask of a thirty-eight year old writer who after all has to keep the titles piling up and the rewards coming in, and maybe I'm mistaken and she'll never achieve it. But I'd love her to try when she feels ready or is forced to it by her talent.

The Hidden City
David Eddings
Harper Collins, 487pp, £15.99
Vikki Lee

This is the third and final volume of The Tamuli series, and possibly the last adventure for Sparhawk, his wife Queen Ehlana and their countless Gods and friends. After six books, for Sparhawk first appeared at the beginning of the previous series, The Elenium, it's time he hung up his adventuring spirit and settled down to produce an heir to take up the mantle of the next six books.

The story picks up where the last book left off. Ehlana has been taken hostage by the mad Lord Scarpa and the Styric magician, Zalasta, in a bid to get Sparhawk to surrender the all-powerful Sapphire Rose, Bhelliom, into their malicious hands. Sparhawk of course, is not going to give up easily, and gathers practically everyone else in the world, including a vast assortment of Gods, to aid in securing her safe return. That Sparhawk will succeed is beyond doubt for followers of the story so far, it's the way that he does it that entertains.

Although the outcome of this epic story is never in doubt, Eddings' inumerable plotlines continue to wander and wiggle around like Medusa's hairdo after a particularly bad perm. His machinations in not only keeping track of all these plotlines, but in bringing them all together for the predictable climactic ending, often borders on farcical. When Zalasta appears in Sephrenia's bedroom and stabs her through the heart, because he loves her and can't stand another man being the light of her life, she is 'magicked' back to full health because she is still needed to help pull the whole plot together. Although this is the final nail in Zalasta's coffin as far as the good guys are concerned, one can't help feeling a little sorry for him, his misguided and possessive love for Sephrenia proves to be the main reason for his downfall. It's all good clean fun, and the inclusion of the simple-minded trolls, usually the bad guys, on Sparhawk's side, was a masterstroke. The book is worth reading for the troll scenes alone.

Eddings' simplistic style of writing and 'rabbit out the hat' use of magic is often criticised as representative of all that is wrong in modern fantasy. But ask any Eddings fan, nobody does it like him or as well as him, and *The Hidden City* will keep Eddings at the top with the very best.

Andrew Harman
The Frogs of War
Legend, 1994, 295pp, £3.99
Ian Sales

Although you should never judge a book by its cover, with this one you could make a fairly accurate guess at its contents, even the title says it all, yep, *The Frogs of War* is a humorous fantasy novel. It's no blockbuster, by any means, even if it does seem to groan under the weight of the puns in it...

The plot is simple. At the secret thaumaturgical laboratory of Losa Llamas (ho, ho), a mad thaumaturgical physicist has created the eponymous *Rana Militaria*. Twenty five years later, Srydewinder (hee, hee) uncovers this secret, and heads for the aforementioned frogs in order to effect his planned dastardly deeds. Meanwhile, Firkin (ha, ha), Hogshead (stop it, you're killing me), Dawn (as in "Dawn rose slowly" — p20) and friends are looking for King Klayth's father. Firkin et al become embroiled in srydewinder's plot and, well, foil it.

Along the way, we have lots of dreadful puns, silly jokes, and a style of writing that insists on building up to ever more predicatble and mannered punchlines. A few samples: the book uses the Original Gravity calendar, as in OG1014 (I can't take any more); reference is made to thaumaturgical physicists such as Gren Idjmeen, Leweep Hastoor, or gods such as Ghyee-Hovass (it hurts, it hurts); and sample monsters include the gerund

E.L. Doctorow
The Waterworks
Macmillan, 1994, 246pp, £14.99
Paul Kincaid

What is it we are doing in science fiction? To Gernsback it was didactic, a dramatised lesson in the value of technology. As SF exploded beyond the Gernsbackian continuum it became a vast, intergalactic, romantic adventure. By the New Wave it had become a mode of literary experimentation, and now, if anything, it is a part of the postmodern feedback loop. In other words, SF is what we make it to be. But if one thing holds true throughout every metamorphosis of the literature, then it is a concern with change. SF celebrates, announces, decries, records but can never quite ignore the terrible clash between reality and potential, it hinges about that eternally spinning moment when the present becomes the future.

And if we accept that premise, then there is no doubt at all that *The Waterworks* is science fiction. It's setting is New York in the 1870s, a city grown prosperous on the sale of shoddy goods to the Union Army during the Civil War. Now, that prosperity is impelling the city into the future. Throughout the novel, Doctorow describes the city as a vast machine, clanking cogs, belching steam, the thrusting power of the new industry embodied. But in the approach of this "modern" world, there are new moralities to be forged, moral questions that have never had to be faced before. Boss Tweed heads the most corrupt city and state government ever known, men who have grown fat and rich and old cheating their government are now the powerful arbiters of social, cultural, political and economic life. And this corruption is spawning new horrors.

The impact of science upon society led to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* at one end of the 19th Century, fear of the darkness still lurking in the corners of the bright modern world gave rise to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* at the other end. It is no coincidence that Doctorow's novel, dealing with the same moment of impact, evokes echoes of both.

A young freelance writer for one of the New York newspapers, Martin Pemberton, reports seeing a carriage carrying his father through the streets of the city. But his father a dealer in shoddy and in slaves is dead. Though he doesn't quite believe in the ghost, Martin's editor, McIlvaine, starts to follow up the case when Martin disappears. With the help of a friendly policeman, he finds himself drawn deeper into a mysterious mire of moral corruption which echoes the political corruption then being exposed. Children are bought, or taken from the street but the orphanage this leads them to appears the very model of modern scientific enlightenment. A reputable doctor is implicated, but colleagues attack him for precisely the theories, approaches and attitudes we recognise as the glory of modern medicine.

In the end the true science fictional impact of the revelation that blood is being drained from children to keep wealthy old men alive beyond their natural span, is that it is a harbinger of a future we, with hindsight, know is unavoidable.

And so does McIlvaine, the narrator. Telling his story in old age, the 1920s, his every description of the beating mechanical heart of the city, the new lots already staked out north of the original narrow confines of New York, is redolent of the inevitability of the future and the moral crises his adventure has configured. His narrative is hesitant, ellipses are scattered across every page, but we sense that these are not pauses to recollect in peace or seek out the exact word, but a reluctance to accept the consequences of what is being told.

From *The Book of Daniel*, through *Ragtime*, *Loon Lake*, *World's Fair* and *Billy Bathgate*, E.L. Doctorow has blended the real and the fictional inextricably into a vision of history as cyclic, repetitive, of progress as a seductive belief. He paints the past with an attention to detail that gives his fictions the documentary texture and vivacity of a Ken Burns film, yet he mythologises it, and especially the city, so that the struggles of his characters trapped in the processes of history and progress become heroic almost by definition. It is a magic he repeats to telling effect in this wonderful new venture into the mythic landscape of the recent past.

(dangling of course), and the onomatopede (which is as daft as it sounds). Sentences tend to follow the pattern, "it sounded like a tape recording of an obscure religious mantra being played backwards, at half speed, while a cat was being cheerfully throttled", with a mind-numbing regularity. Highly amusing, indeed.

Unfortunately, Harman seems to have no sense of the ridiculous, nor of the absurd. A clever-clever prose style, dreadful puns (although admittedly none as moronic as Piers Anthony's) and a stock fantasy/D&D scenario do not make Harman a serious "rival [to Terry Pratchett]". Although to be fair, Harman does what he does well enough.

I do have one question: on the back of the book is a quote from *Critical Wave*: "if you like Pratchett, Gardner, or indeed Piers Anthony, I'm sure you'll find this... entertaining". What is the ellipsis covering for? "Marginally"? "Not in the slightest bit"?

There's too much missing to make this book genuinely funny. I mean, does Harman seriously think you're supposed to *groan* all the way through a "humorous" fantasy book?

Harry Harrison
Galactic Dreams
Legend, 1994, 188pp, £9.99
LJ Hurst

In his introduction Harry Harrison says that these stories were written over many years, and now reappear with their typos corrected and more maladroit phrases amended. There is also a new story, 'Bill, the Galactic hero's Happy Holiday'. I would like to have been able to date the stories more closely but there is no bibliography, and I don't recognise any of them – they don't include well-known stories such as 'Streets of Askelon'. These are action stories of an early writer, not the more thinking Harry Harrison of *Make Room, Make Room*.

An example of these different Harrisons can be seen in 'Down to Earth', in which astronauts return from a lunar disaster to find Nazis invading America, blast off again and land in another America which is a monarchy – all in twenty three pages (plus illustration, all the stories get an illo). It took the later Harrison three volumes to describe the reptilian alternate world of Eden.

"A Criminal Act' which deals with an overpopulated world in sixteen pages is slightly more ambiguous in its concept of morality. Benedict Vernall has become a father for the third time when the law allows no more than four members of a family, and Benedict refuses to commit suicide to bring the family numbers down again. In a shoot-out with the bailiff which includes a discussion of the morality of extreme population laws Benedict survives only to be told by his wife that she is pregnant again – "All he could do was look up at her, his mouth wide and gaping like some helpless fish cast up upon the shore". Benedict has spent the story calling the law Harsh, Sick, Warped and Mindless, that last sentence, I think suggests that he has recognised that there can be sociopathic motherhood as well.

"Mute Milton" is probably the most interesting story, even though the SF does not fit well into it, and I guess may have been added to get it published as SF. In the Deep South in the early sixties two men meet at a bus station, one teaches at a small black college, the other is a civil rights worker fearful that the Klansman sheriff won't let him leave town alive. The lecturer has a radio powered in a new way, but in his environment it will never be known. The sheriff shoots both and the radio is broken, too. This loss can be directly attributed to the evils of institutionalised racism.

On the other hand, a story like "The Pad – A Story of the Day After The Day After Tomorrow', is very much a groovy parable from the top shelves of the sixties, in which a girl is talked into bed by a man she knows is a rogue, and 'If', which follows it for no obvious reason, is one of those "intelligent aliens cross the universe to Earth and then get exterminated by an enthusiastic housewife who mistakes them for cockroaches" stories which looses its humour the second or third time you find yet another author has written it.

In a way, this volume left the impression that it was one of Harry Harrison's anthologies – there is no single voice. The only thing they seem to have in common is a sense of age.

Steve Holland
The Mushroom Jungle: A History of Post-War Paperback Publishing
Zeon Books, 1994, 196pp £14.95 pb
L.J. Hurst

Zeon Books is an imprint of Zardoz Books, who publish "Paperback, Pulp and Comic Collector". If you've ever read that magazine and revelled in the tacky interest of 40's and 50's paperbacks, you'll want to read *The Mushroom Jungle*. If you want to know about English social life after the War, and how cheap it was, this is the book for you.

Publishing, like every other aspect of life, was controlled by shortages and rationing and in that era many small publishers sprang up to issue original paperbacks in the genres — SF, pseudo-Tarzan adventures, Westerns, hard-boiled thrillers, and Parisian smut. Sometimes they overlapped. From what Steve Holland writes, publisher and spiv were pretty much synonymous. The books were cheap-ish, printed on any quality paper, had garishly painted (and usually misleading) covers and sold in tens of thousands, yet almost no-one made any money out of them, authors least of all. Some authors got a living by writing every day and producing one or two books a week; others only produced one book a fortnight in their evenings after coming home from the day job. In some cases the day job was running the publishing and printing companies selling the books. This was the case with Stephen Frances, whose company sold the Hank Janson novels he wrote. However, he turned to Hank after an SF novel by John Russell Fearn bombed.

Oddly enough, although everyone knows how dreadful Vargo Statten and Volstead Gridban were (don't they?), of all the hacks who wrote this trash, only the SF is remembered, and some of the authors like Kenneth Bulmer and E.C. Tubb went on to recognition, while any other SF author of the time (even Arthur C. Clarke) was bound to touch the edges. Even *New Worlds* went through the pulp-publishers hands. And somehow the Americans managed to avoid this dead hand: Frederick Brown managed to make his name as both a thriller and an SF author.

Almost certainly it can be attributed to the conservative clampdown on law and order of the early and mid-fifties which resulted in the pulps and horror comics being so fully eradicated, and Holland has a chapter on the terrible prosecutions of the Hank Janson books. People who want to burn books are keen on killing people: it is no coincidence that Goddard the judge who denied the Janson appeal was the judge who had sentenced Derek Bentley to hang eighteen months before.

The pulps were allowed little to say in their defense: Holland, fascinatingly, explores all their intricacies, and at last gives them voice.

Tom Holt
Faust Among Equals
Orbit, 2/6/94, 292pp, £14.99
Benedict S Cullum

Currently a solicitor by day, Holt was first published 20 years ago at the tender age of 13. Having eschewed writing for some time thereafter, he has subsequently produced a couple of historical novels and two sequels to EF Benson's *Lucia* series of mannered comedies. *Faust Among Equals* is the latest of his own humorous fantasies.

Effectively reversing *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, I gather that Holt's trademark is to cast historical &/or mythical characters into absurdly incongruous modern day settings. as can be seen, there is a fairly long tradition of humour in SF and Fantasy; arguably Holt has joined such well-mannered luminaries as, say, Adams and Pratchett who themselves contrive more profitably to mine the seam of modern humorous SF writing than did, say, the Sheckleys and Sladeks of yesteryear.

Heil Holdings plc is under (entirely) new management and is being reorganised along the lines of a theme park. EuroBosch, designed by Hieronymous of the ghastly paintings himself, is showing all the signs of matching the success of its Disney equivalent in the mundane world outside Paris. The ineptitude of the new management is to blame, however, and the plot is driven by their attempts to recapture one Lucky George aka Faustus: escaping from Hell is simply not on and certainly not when the auditors are in.

Since George is a personable chap, and ridiculously lucky to boot, recapture is not an easy task. those that try are destined to end up looking rather foolish; somewhat awkward for bounty hunter Kurt Lunqvist who will *not* give up but who *hates* to look a fool. Something of a romp, we are presented with all manner of oddballs from George's vast array of friends as the chase progresses before, finally, matters can be cleared up by the God — or General Operative (Dilapidations) "bit of

Neil Gaiman / various artists; introduction by Tori Amos
Death: The High Cost of Living
Titan Books, £7.99, 104pp, pb
Neil Gaiman / various artists; introduction by Gene Wolfe
Sandman: Fables and Reflections
Titan Books, £12.50, 264pp, pb

Tanya Brown

Death: the High Cost of Living is the tale of Didi, an orphaned teenager who befriends a suicidal geek and makes him see the value in life. It is also the tale of Death's day of mortality, one day in every century she must take on mortal flesh, "the better to comprehend what the lives she takes must feel like". Sexton (the geek — a peculiarly apt name for Death's mortal companion) thinks Didi's cute but unhinged. And Mad Hetty thinks Didi will help her find her heart — which she's hidden so well from Death that she can no longer remember where it is (but then, she is over two hundred years old).

Nowhere does Gaiman state that Didi really is Death, one of the seven Endless who are older than the gods. Sexton's suspicions could be perfectly valid. But Didi swans through New York, bathing in the life of the city, as though she owns the place; people give her things, let her into gigs for free, look after her. But life isn't all roses. There are people out there who know her for what she is, and want her power for themselves. This day of life is a hurried day - but still, it's life, and Sexton finds himself appreciating it again.

Didi gives Sexton the last of her cash — two pennies — and suddenly she is dead, her last words a plaintive, "No. Please. I ...' Later, she says "I wish it didn't have to end like that". And Death, her alter ego, says "It always ends. That's what gives it value". The artwork, particularly in the meeting between Didi and Death, is superlative, and uses strong but subtle symbolism to get inside the reader's head.

This volume also contains the piece 'Death Talks About Life'; Death presents a show about safe sex and AIDS, which is tastefully and wittily done, and may yet influence people who find Government health warnings meaningless and cold.

Sandmas: Fables and Reflections is a collection of single-issue stories, each illustrating a simple moral in an innovative and sometimes unsettling way. There's a lot of wisdom to be gained from dreams, and from Dream. Some of the tales are stronger than others, but each displays a quality of storytelling, mythmaking and symbolism (both graphic and verbal) which is rare.

'Three Septembers and a January' is based on the true story of Joshua Norton — Norton I , self-declared Emperor of the USA Here, he is a pawn in a family squabble between the Endless. But Norton's tale is also that of a dignified man of principle, whose dreams keep him alive — and, as Dream says of him, 'His madness keeps him sane'.

In 'Thermidor', Johanna Constantine (ancestress of the more famous John) is retained by Dream to recover the head of his son, Orpheus, from a crypt in Paris during the Terror. Robespierre wants this 'object of superstition' destroyed — but there is more to this myth than mere superstition. Orpheus becomes the nemesis of those who would destroy him.

'The Hunt' is a tale told by an old man to his impatient, modern granddaughter (who would rather being watching the television). Dream makes only a fleeting appearance in this tale, of a young man who earns a favour from Dream. But, as Dream knows, it is a double-edged boon — 'Wishes are sometimes best left ungranted'. There's an unexpected twist in this story which invites the reader to re-read with more understanding.

'It's mid-day. Only mad dogs, Britons and beggars stay out in this heat' says the dwarf Lycias to his companion, the disguised Emperor Octavius, who is hiding from the gods and planning the future of the Roman Empire. There are two possible futures for Rome — and in this tale, 'August', the reader learns — as the dwarf does not — why the Emperor has chosen one future rather than another. This is one of the more unsettling of the tales in 'Fables and Reflections'; Gaiman's view of history is intriguing and can't be faulted on historical grounds — and there is a disquieting ring of truth to the Sandman's actions.

'Soft Places' offers, almost as an aside, a glimpse into a part of the Dreamlord's history which is, as yet, undocumented. A young Marco Polo is lost in the desert, but he is also lost in dreams, and not all of them are his. The desert is a place where reality is thin, a 'soft place' , and Marco Polo, as an explorer, is to blame for the gradual loss of these places where a different reality can be glimpsed. Nevertheless, he is returned to his own place, rewarded for an act, the significance of which he will never understand.

'Orpheus' is the tale of the wedding of Dream's son to Eurydice, and the true tale of what happened afterwards. The wedding is a true family affair; all of the Endless make an appearance (including the first appearance of Death and Dream's missing brother...) and act according to archetype. Although this is Orpheus' tale, we learn a lot about Dream's character, the flaws that have often been apparent but have never been discussed. The Sandman is not without honour, but 'Orpheus' illustrates that honour is not always enough.

In 'The Parliament of Rooks', little Daniel (the son of a superhero) wanders into Dream's realm and is entertained by some of its older, and odder, denizens. Eve tells a tale of Adam's wives; Cain teases Abel — and the reader — with an invitation to 'tell the story of the lily that wanted to be an eye?' .. or the girl who could drink only tears, and how she fell in love with a woman who had never learnt to cry?" Abel ignores his brother (never a wise move). Instead he tells a charming tale of how he and Cain came to Dream's realm when Death and Dream were just children. 'Children?' They didn't even look remotely human. None of us did back then', Cain interrupts scornfully. Despite this possible inaccuracy, the pastel artwork is hilariously kitsch; it may not fit with 'dinosaurs and cavemen', but who ever said there could be only one truth?

The last story, 'Ramadan', is a tale drawn from the world, and the art, of the Arabian Nights. . Haroun al Raschid, wise and wealthy ruler of Baghdad, is uneasy. He fears the future, and summons Morpheus to preserve something of his city's present idyllic state. Morpheus is no man's servant, but perhaps a compromise may be reached ... Again, the twist in the tail throws a new light on the story; but this may be the weakest tale in 'Fables and Reflections'.

Like all myth, however, each tale in the volume can be read in several different ways. This is not comic art, but a book of stories set within their own illustrations; the quality of both text and artwork is high, and many readers may find these short, contemplative pieces more satisfying than the 'Sandman' graphic novels.

a mouthful... usually abbreviated" — who is found mending the machine that is the Universe.

The *deus ex machina* is an in-joke SF fans should certainly appreciate. Although there are several more to be found in this book, and I am sure that I missed a few allusions, I still find myself only half in agreement with David V Barrett who described Holt's work (in *Vector 177*) as "hilarious nonsense". A taste I am sure that many others will continue to acquire, I found Holt's writing to be "clever" rather than outstandingly amusing.

City of the Iron Fish
Simon Ings
Harper Collins, 1994
314 pp £4.99
Steve Jeffery

When young Thomas Kemp accompanies his mother on an expedition to feed the strange, artificial gulls at the summit lake of Baixa, and sees a man throw himself from the bridge that spans the twin peaks of the City, his father decrees certain observances:

For the first six days they are to wear nothing but blue. For the six days following, they shall wear nothing but yellow.

"Throughout this time,' my father continued,' we shall refrain from eating plaice."

Such strange rituals indeed become even stranger in the context of the City. A city that exists in almost total isolation, whose only river is a ribbon of black stone travelled by wheeled fishing vessels. Where, indeed, the whole City is maintained and renewed only by the magical *Ceremonies of Hanging and Stuffing* of the great Iron Fish.

We are in a fantasy world, a construct of an arcane symbolic and hermetic magic, but whose traditions have become increasingly diluted into rote superstition and forgotten ritual. The magic is fading in the years between Ceremonies and alarming gaps are beginning to show in the fabric of the City.

In its curious juxtaposition of the ceremonial and the mundane, railways and wheeled sailing vessels, cafes and whorehouses, the mores and manners of the City of the Iron Fish owe something to Vinconium, to the endless ritual observances of Gormenghast, and perhaps to Delany's Neveryona. And something to the baroque architectural inventions and distorted perspectives of Bosch, Esher or Ian Miller. It is, in several ways, a fabulous construct.

Its inhabitants are no less strange and fabulous, stamped with a kind of desperate fatalism or obsessive vision, or, dangerously, both. Thomas Kemp's lead him on a expedition with Blythe to the edge of the world around the city, whose terrifying finality drives him back to try and lose himself in the city whorehouses, and then as apprentice and catamite to his old tutor, both of which end in unheroic tragedy.

Blythe retreats into an obsession with her own art, and a fascination with the disturbing black clad women who inhabit the fringes of the city, burning its cast-off trappings and artworks.

While Blythe is commissioned to build the next Iron Fish, and Binns delves deeper into Kemp's father's books of ancient lore in preparation for the next great Ceremony of Hanging and Stuffing, the black women's ring of destructive siege encroaches inwards, openly attacking the artists and their works.

The coming Ceremony poises the City between the promise of fantastic rebirth and final, nihilistic destruction.

City of the Iron Fish is as often disconcerting as it is both funny and occasionally horrifying, a dark fantastic comedy of the baroque and burlesque. With it, Ings both keeps the considerable promise of his first SF novel *Hothead*, while branching off in a completely new direction. Whatever next?

Shaun Hutson
Deadhead
Warner, 1994, £4.99 pb

White Ghost
Little, Brown, 1994,
£15.99 hb
Tim Barton

Shaun Hutson is the bestselling author of many volumes of horror fiction, enthuses the blurb-writer. Indeed, the back-cover of his latest paperback, *Deadhead*, explicitly categorises the book as "Horror".

Well, neither of these titles are horror, to my mind.

In fact, they are both thrillers with horrid bits. Presumably a throwback to the days when Hutson wrote real horror novels, these splatter passages seem merely gratuitous in their new context. Across both volumes I lost count of the number of lungs that "collapsed like wet balloons", or "eye-sockets drilled out" when hit by bullets.

This inane and repetitive use of language is not limited to the periodic bursts of gore. The books are written in basic *Sun*-speak. Short words in short sentences are presented in short chapters. Perfectly styled for 4,000,000 plus tabloid readers to take to the beach. Excellent potential sales!

The characters and plots are as untaxing as the writing itself.

Deadhead features a hard-boiled (oh yes) detective, Ryan, whose penchant for working all hours has wrecked his marriage and a young Irish lad, Kiernan, looking for his sister (who may be living on the streets of London. Ludicrously badly hidden corpses of the homeless are regularly turned up by the police. Porn/snuff videos are being made. Of course, they are connected. Ryan's ex-wife has remarried, and her second husband, Finlay, is a bit of a git — therefore, he also has to be implicated. Surprise, surprise.

All the characterisation is as shallow and uncomplicated as this. You know who is the baddy and who is the goody right from the word go, which needn't be a negative way of presenting the story if the complexity and interest lies elsewhere. With Hutson, however, there are few levels of subtlety to contend with. Like the MTV movie *Kalifornia*, it is all surface gloss.

When Kelly, Ryan's daughter (who lives with his ex) is kidnapped and held to ransom because Finlay has got on the wrong side of the Mob, Ryan has to do the PI bit and save her.

Naturally, it all climaxes in one big and very gory shootout. Everyone bar Kelly is blown to hell. Ryan's death is not the shock it could be, as he is shown throughout to be a bit of an anti-hero, and to have a cancer-induced deathwish to boot. In the context of the finale, Kiernan's death does not surprise either, though he has not found his sister, leaving an unresolved element — the closest to interesting Hutson gets in this book.

Since the characters are portrayed in such a two-dimensional manner, the conclusion of the story is painfully predictable.

It is also sick, in a (presumably) unintended way. The fuck 'em 'n' snuff 'em passages are described with only marginally less obsessiveness than the maimings during fights. Despite this, Hutson fights shy of actually describing the experiences foisted upon the innocent Kelly. Here, perhaps rather hypocritically, Hutson merely hints at the fact that, while imprisoned, Kelly has been raped in all three orifices and forced to watch a new-born child as it is fucked and killed (it is a video of this that sets Ryan up for the mayhem of the finale). Yet no attempt is made to analyse Kelly's psychology even after this event. The frightening effects of this depraved butchery on an innocent youngster are just ignored.

Kelly then witnesses, at close range, several people — not least of whom, her own father — being shot to pieces. She is shown to be at least a little upset — she weeps, says "Don't die", and "I love you, Dad" as Ryan expires. But that's it. The girl is permanently fucked-up, but, as Hutson tells it, no-one would know. What is sicker than any of the violence portrayed is the failure to portray Kelly's mental violation.

White Ghost (no, there are none, I told you it ain't horror!) is only marginally better. The "hero" in this one is Sean Doyle, a character from the earlier novel *Renegades*. He is a ruthless and amoral (yeah, yeah) Counter Terrorist who infiltrates the IRA in order to track down some hijacked arms.

Since bullet holes, no matter how graphically described, soon pall, Hutson brings the Triads into the story. After all, they have nice big knives don't they? There really is little other reason to introduce the Chinese element, beyond the fact that their community seems to have marginally more honour than the republican community as it is presented by Hutson.

After the ritual bloodbath, this book ends with the central character actually alive, so I guess Hutson must like him. Doyle is, though, anything but likeable. His amorality and single-mindedness are signalled by a series of epigrams, from Keats (John), Nietzsche (Friedrich), Maiden (Iron) and Metallica. the most apposite is the one from Metallica (Hutson really is more at home in MTV/and than any literary realm), which reads;

"Gone insane from the pain they must surely know..."

Terrorist and Counter terrorist alike can be understood in the light of this quote, as Hutson obviously intends. Even more appropriate for Doyle, though not used, would have been "Whosoever fights monsters, take care lest ye become a monster".

The only person to emerge with any integrity is Triad-member Joey Chang (the reader is allowed to watch him "go insane" from "the pain". Naturally he doesn't survive — Doyle 'shot Chang twice in the face". Interestingly, it is only when the "hero" kills ambivalent characters, ones very like Doyle himself, that the slaughter is described do baldly, without the usual loving wallow. For example, when having sex with an IRA terrorist who has turned to violence in much the same way he has, Doyle merely breaks her neck as she comes — no frills. It is one thing to like your characters, but why describe their deaths, which are really no less awful than the ones that peripheral characters suffer, in so much less of a voyeuristic manner?

Deadhead raises, and fails to answer, the question "Why?". It is splatter for splatter's sake. *White Ghost* raises the same question in the mind of the reader, but this time Hutson at least begins to engage with it, however unsuccessfully.

Beautiful Soup
Harvey Jacobs
Ringpull Press, 1994, 263 pp,
£8.99
Steve Jeffery

Subtitled *A Novel for the 21st Century*, Harvey Jacobs' *Beautiful Soup* comes across as a collision course between Joseph Heller and John Sladek, as directed by Woody Allen.

There are no prizes, then, for guessing that this is a comedy of errors, verging between satire and broad farce.

In Jacobs' shiny, socially managed neo-Orwellian future everyone's status and Achievement Potential is stamped on their foreheads as a barcode. James Wanders, naturally, is happy in his A+ status. He has a beautiful wife and children, a good job and a rising career. He can afford to be benevolent and generous to those with lower Codings.

A freak accident at a supermarket checkout robs him of his prestige, status and even his humanity, and recodes him as a can of Vigor sodium-free pea soup.

At first everyone around him is supportive and sympathetic. But as he takes his case through the courts, he learns that the social stability of the Hoffenstein Codings rest on one absolute principle: You can never change your Code. Branded as a can of soup, James Wander must rise to be the best can of soup he can possibly be.

Unfortunately, he is lured into an illegal operation to change his code back and is arrested on the operating table. From there his continuing inability to function as an exemplary can of soup lands him first in prison, then in a mental hospital and finally as a trainee clown in a run-down travelling circus.

Pointing out that large elements of the plot don't quite add up is as beside the point as worrying over what K is actually accused of in Kafka's *The Trial*. Wander is on a one way ticket through the fringes of his society; a colourful selection of misfits, mavericks and discontents as ever flew over the Cuckoo's Nest. But Jacobs, unlike Kesey or Heller, and perhaps to the ultimate detriment of the novel, plays this strictly for laughs, with little hint of any underlying tragedy in Wander's plight. As such, *Beautiful Soup* is a funny, but probably minor, surrealistic romp.

Phil Janes
Fission Impossible
Millennium, 1993, 250pp, £13.99
Norman Beswick

If you read *The Galaxy Game*, you know what to expect. I hadn't, and I didn't. The blurb spoke of "Phil Janes' adrenalised, wacky and very, very funny new science fiction series", so I settled down and waited for it to make me laugh. It did, at first.

The plot, such as it is, has a band of not very bright Earth characters trapped into taking part in a series of interstellar challenges: the trials of Hercules meet Jeux Sans Frontieres, with the Arthurian Legend and *Alice in Wonderland* for good measure.

The Fission of the title is an abusive young woman from the future, whose favourite words are "fonk" and "fonking". this distinguishes her from the other young woman, Gloria, who specialises in very slow thought processes. There is an android, a dragon (guarding the Golden Fleas), the Gretin Bull, three-headed Cerberus and snake-haired Medusa, among other marvels.

Phil Janes' style is heavily loaded with self-referential gags that at first are moderately funny. Increasingly, they slow down the action and clog up the text; plot and characters being flimsy, the author frantically piles on the verbal humour to make up.

I'm trying to be fair. Only Reviewer's Duty got me through to the end. But I'm afraid that some people may like it.

Mercedes Lackey
& Larry Dixon
The Black Gryphon
Millennium, 1994, £15.99, 330pp
Tanya Brown

The Black Gryphon is set in the same world as Lackey's best-selling Valdemar series, but no previous experience is necessary; the action of this novel takes place fifteen hundred years before the events described in *The Heralds of Valdemar*. Urtho the Good, and those who espouse his cause, are locked in combat with the mage Ma'ar (implicitly the Bad) and his dark armies. The war, "like a creature with a huge appetite", has dragged on for years, and slowly but surely Ma'ar seems to be winning. This isn't that sort of book, though.

The novel centres on four characters, Skandranon, the eponymous black gryphon, is an aerial warrior with immense fighting and an ego to match. His friend Amberdrake is a kestra'chern, a kind of therapist who uses sensual massage, sexual healing and a generous dose of Empathy and Healing skills to soothe and heal the mental and physical wounds inflicted by the war. Both Skandranon and Amberdrake have their female counterparts. Zhaneel is a female gryphon who appears to be a mutant, an unwanted by-product of Urtho's magical genetics program. Winterhart is an emotionally repressed healer who remains in a dysfunctional relationship with the mage Corrin Levas, unable to accept that she is capable of more. Both must come to terms with who they are and accept their roles in the conflict. On one level this novel is a simple good-versus-evil fantasy, where the forces of good fight for what they believe in, and pledge their loyalty to Urtho, while the Makaar and other creatures of Ma'ar are motivated by fear and loathing, and demonstrate their moral repugnance by stooping to torture and foul play. On another level, Lackey and Dixon (her husband) deal with moral and ethical issues such as therapy, emotional dysfunction, betrayal, genetic engineering and child abuse. A light fantasy novel is not the best place for this; while the authors never trivialise these subjects, depth

Gwyneth Jones
North Wind
Gollancz, 1994, 281pp, £15.99
Paul Kincaid

During the opening scene of this novel only one place is named, a town in Thailand, but the scene actually takes place at Mycenae in Greece. This the reader works out some pages further on. It is a small but telling example of both the way Gwyneth Jones works, and the theme she pursues.

For this is a book about non-comprehension. Two languages feature in the book, normal spoken language and the "common tongue", a formalised mixture of facial expression and body language which is supposed to be more revealing and more honest. But throughout the book both languages are used, consciously or not, to obscure, confuse and disguise. From her first novel for adults, the densely structured *Divine Endurance*, and to exemplary effect in novels like *Kairos*, Jones has made her readers work for their supper. Both readers and characters alike have had to struggle through the contradictions between what people say and what they do, the inability to express experience precisely in language, the ease with which words lend themselves to disinformation. As a reader, the struggle is usually worth while, but at the expense of never quite trusting what we disinter from the novel.

Now, in *North Wind*, that struggle is brought to the fore. The new novel is a sequel to *White Queen* and is set a hundred years after the events in that novel. The alien Aleutians are still ensconced in their enclaves, but not so securely; while human society has disintegrated into the Gender Wars in which the forces of Males and Females fight, combine into short-term alliances, and fight again. In the midst of this uncertainty, we follow the adventures of two characters who are neither quite what they seem. Bella is an Aleutian "librarian" who is, in alien eyes, a cripple, though when she stops taking her medicine she grows stronger; she is also seen as male among the Aleutians, but as female by her human lover Sid. Sid in his turn is a half-caste, one of those humans who have mutilated themselves to varying degrees in order to emulate the aliens, except that Sid is not mutilated; he is also working for the Aleutians while acting as an agent for a shadowy "fat man". (The reference to *The Maltese Falcon* is presumably not coincidence, films are seen as a form of ancestor worship and Sid has taken his name, Sidney Carton, from the film of *A Tale of Two Cities*. There are other cultural references all though the book, including quotations from sources as varied as Magna Carta and Boney M's "Rasputin", while in one scene in a virtual casino figures appear from Egyptian myth and *The Story of O*.)

It is a world where who people are and what their allegiances are remain forever unsettled. Meanwhile, like a threnody forever in the background, is the inability of men to comprehend women and of women to comprehend men, and of the reincarnating aliens to comprehend the permanent death of humanity. Incomprehension rises like a wall between every character and every group of characters in the book. While, every so often, the plot is punctuated by moments of vivid dramatic action which, typically, is seen from the viewpoint of the character least likely to understand what is going on. Amidst this uncertainty, the relationship between Sid and Bella varies from love to enmity to wariness as they are caught up in the quest for Peenemunde Buonarotti's instantaneous travel device. This was what Johnny and Braemar used in their failed attempt to blow up the Aleutian mothership but the secret has been lost since then, while Johnny and Braemar have become mythic heroes to the Aleutians but have been forgotten by the humans.

Everything changes, allies one moment might appear opponents the next, even the eternal verities, good and bad, male and female, become fluid and uncertain. All we can do, as characters immersed in the plot, as readers, as human beings, is make what sense we can amid the confusion. By the end of the novel we have been on such a rollercoaster ride that our sympathies are turned upside down. Is Quest the compassion ate, one of the three great Aleutian pilots, really as good as he has been painted? Would the levelling of the Himalayas, presented throughout the novel as an ecological disaster of monumental proportions, really be such a bad thing? At its best, science fiction is a test of how we see the world, it is not comfortable or reassuring, but rather questions, changes, unnerves and challenges, even if things turn out right in the end we have been forced to consider another way that things might be. And in *North Wind*, science fiction is about as unsettling as it gets. Don't read it if you want an easy life, do read it if you want to see how far science fiction can take you.

has been sacrificed to simplification.

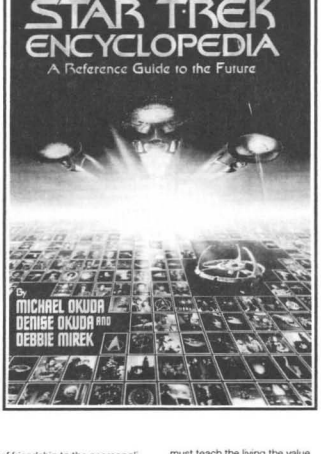
The Black Gryphon is a book which will appeal to anyone who enjoys Anne McCaffrey's later Dragon books. That is, it's good, positive, happy fantasy, where the images and ideas are drummed home in case you missed them the first time round. The style is occasionally marred by clumsy phrasing ["this plan didn't have the chances of a snowflake in a frying pan of working"), but it's readable enough and will no doubt please Lackey's existing fans.

Ian McDonald
Necroville
Gollancz, 1994, 317pp, £15.99
Andrew Seaman

Ian McDonald's work to date has often been characterised by his use of up-to-the-minute scientific speculation culled from the pages of popular science press married to a heady stew of myth, literary allusion and a seemingly limitless fascination with popular culture in all its many forms. It's a mix that, when successful, combines to produce distinctive and powerful prose but has the tendency to degenerate into irritating self-referentiality, undermining the effect it is designed to achieve. One of McDonald's most fertile sources of inspiration has, of course, been the SF genre itself, leading at least *this* reader of his work to pose the question: clever post-modern pastiche or redundant imitation? It's surely no coincidence that McDonald's second published collection of short stories is, rather cheekily, called *Speaking In Tongues*, but readers who in the past might have found themselves crying in despair: Will the real Ian McDonald please stand up? will be relieved to discover that his latest novel *Necroville*, shows the author making big advances in the quest to find a voice of his own. Certain sections of the novel aren't immune to the pernicious glossolalia which has infected his earlier work, but what is good about the novel more than compensates.

The scientific advance that powers the plot of *Necroville* is nanotechnology which, early in the next century, has enabled the dead to be resurrected. In a Los Angeles of twenty-two million inhabitants the reanimated dead are housed in ghettos, or necrovilles, providing a source of cheap labour for the living to whom they are in thrall. Only beyond earth orbit, where the Freedead have fought a war of liberation against the all-powerful corporations who rule earth and control the technology of resurrection, are the dead masters of their own fate. As the novel opens five characters are drawn by a vow of friendship to the cosmopolitan decadence of the Saint John necroville on the Mexican Day of the Dead. Santiago Columbar: a world-weary dabbler in designer-drugs, haunted by the death of a lover; Yo-Yo Mok: an ambitious and successful lawyer whose career is improbably ruined by the cybernetic ghost of a Carmen Miranda impersonator; Trinidad Malcopuelo: a rich dilettante, searching for something in the wake of a failed love affair; Toussaint Tesler: the estranged rebel son of the Tesler-Thanos *corporanda*, and Camguey Quintana: marine biologist, turned nanotech artist, doomed to die by his betrayal of the woman he loved. Each, in their own way, has nothing left to lose and in the course of that one night they all become involved, directly or indirectly, in the momentous events of a complex plot to liberate the enslaved dead and kick-start the emergence of a transhuman future.

No-one could accuse McDonald of lacking ambition. The ideation and conceptualisation of the novel are first-rate (if you're prepared to indulge the author's assessment of the possible effects of the widespread nanotechnology on society), but he grounds the science-fictional elements of the story firmly in an emotional reality. As their individual histories are revealed so we realise the paradox of the characters' position: that it is the dead who must teach the living the value of their lives and how to live them. Ruined in the world of the living beyond the gates of the necroville the five undergo, during the festival of the dead, a symbolic resurrection in the city of the dead. McDonald's power as a writer has never been in doubt, but in the past the layering of almost too much detail and that sometimes wearying self-referentiality has tended to obscure his strengths. *Necroville* has moments of real power and beauty. McDonald's forte may still largely lie in his handling of individual scenes and set-pieces, but the lovingly baroque touch he lends to the descriptions of the alien, but still recognisable, transformed L.A. of the quick and the dead linger in the mind long after any accusations of slavish imitation have faded. In some respects his struggle to find a true (rather than distinctive) voice in the clamour of late twentieth century SF may still not be over, but *Necroville* shouts powerfully enough to the reader to demand significant attention.



Michael Okuda, Denise Okuda and Debbie Mirak
The Star Trek Encyclopedia: A Reference Guide To The Future
Simon & Schuster, 1994, 396pp, £12.99 pb
Alan Johnson

This volume produced by two of the production staff (the Okuda's) in conjunction with a first time researcher aims to provide the definitive source guide to the *Star Trek* universe up to and including *Star Trek : The Next Generation* (series 6) and *Deep Space Nine* (series1). It is always difficult to review a reference text like this, but as a habitual viewer of the continual reruns on Sky One, I have trawled through the text, and find it to be as accurate as would be expected. The format is the conventional alphabetic cross-reference, but it is also liberally sprinkled with illustrations and images grabbed from the video footage. These screen grabs are of variable quality and let down the overall look of the volume which is of a high quality. The text lists all characters to appear in the 263 hours plus of Star Trek footage, along with medical conditions, foodstuffs, equipment — the list of categories is comprehensive. In addition special table entries include every spacecraft ever seen on the screen, and some only inferred by conversation, every planet and star base, every life form encountered, cross-referenced by episode in which they were encountered. The most interesting special piece is the extrapolated timeline for the universe, and gives approximate dates for all the major dramas in the Star Trek mythos to date. However, the main use of such a volume surely is as a source of trivia, and I would like to give as an example a short quiz based on material gleaned from this volume.

1) What is Geordi LaForge's favourite food?
2) What is IDIC?
3) What ancient Earth artifact was destroyed by the Klingons in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*?
4)What do Dr. Miranda Jones, Dr Ann Mulhall and Dr. Katherine Pulaski have in common?
5)What was Sulu's first name?

All in all, *The Star Trek Encyclopedia* comes across as exactly what it claims to be, but is probably for dedicated Trekkers only, (a guaranteed best seller).

Answers:
1) Pasta a fioreila
(Birthright Part 1, TNG)
2)An acronym for Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations, a cornerstone of Vulcan philosophy (is There in Truth no Beauty? Star Trek)
3) Pioneer X
4) They were all played by actress Diana Muldaur. (Ann Mulhall, Return to Tomorrow, Star Trek: Miranda Jones, Is There in Truth No Beauty? Star Trek: Kathrine Pulaski, Second season Star Trek: The Next Generation)
5)Hikaru. Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country.

Lance Olsen
Tonguing the Zeitgeist
Permeable Press, 1994, 192pp, $11.95
Paul Kincaid

Describe an archetype of cyberpunk: fast-paced fiction set in a grittily described and usually down-at-heel near future which touches on a human-information interface but which deals more directly with all aspects of popular culture, from rock music to brand names. That is a description of Lance Olsen's new novel. After the sensitive, romantic idyll of his first novel, *Live From Earth*, this book is a shock, a raw, rough-edged and relentless attack that takes fame as its subject and its metaphor.

Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame now looks like an extravagance, here the whole world goes through massive, rock-star-instigated style-fetishes three or four times a year. Some people get rich investing in the stockmarket of rock star fame, but even the biggest names are gone in an instant, trailing behind them an effluvia of tie-ins, t-shirts, merchandising and body-decoration far more important than their music. When the world's biggest rock star unknown a few months ago and already past her best is assassinated in the middle of a world-wide live TV extravaganza, the only real effect is to buoy up her shares for a few weeks longer.

But the wannabes are still there, seduced by the glamour, hammering out their basic chords in the garage, convinced they can make it, and make it last. People like Ben Tendo, who spends his days at a terminal selling computer porn and his nights leading a good but not great local band. Until he gets an e-mail from a woman he's never met before, Jessika, then TV preachers start speaking directly to him, and members of his band suffer bizarre, horrific accidents. Ben finds himself, willynilly, on an hallucinogenic odyssey into the foul and manipulative heart of fame.

At times the plot clunks the incredible complex under a secret island in the North Sea owes more to B-movies than C-word fiction. At times you see through the surface amorality to the very old-fashioned moral tale underneath an angry dissection of the instant, instantly disposable world of big business. But the pyrotechnic prose carries you through, just jump in and enjoy the swirl and the glitz of it all. This is a vigorous book from a small American publisher, and it deserves its own moment of rough, ragged fame.

Dennis O'Neil
Batman: Knightfall
Bantam Press, 25/8/94, 349pp, £9.99
Andy Mills

My picture of Batman has been moulded not from the comics but from the screen: re-runs of the 1940's serials, the spoof TV series, the recent blockbuster movies. There's a bit of each of these traditions in this book, which frankly is something of a mess.

In large part this is because O'Neil, a comics editor at DC, has tried to cobble together a variety of narratives produced by other people. "The original story," he acknowledges, "was a complex collaboration of editors, artists, and writers who often drew on work done by other editors, artists and writers who themselves borrowed elements from work by still other editors, artists and writers." The result is a mish-mash of sub-plots, a story-line which lurches through a succession of unsatisfactory climaxes, and poor handling of both pacing and character.

Thus all three of the traditions have their part to play, though obviously the intent, and to be fair the general feel, is that of the Dark Knight, driven by his past and emotionally crippled. But the serials get in there with the constant violence and cliffhanger endings, and the comedy appears too - probably unintentionally, as when Jean Paul Valley, a young replacement for Batman when Bruce Wayne is seriously injured, is described as being "dedicated to the Ancient Order of St Dumas, to a life of terror and violence ..." Unfortunately, having been schooled in Rankin's ancient art of Dimac, I couldn't take poor Jean Paul seriously hereafter. And, probably because of all the borrowing from other writers, the reader is faced with more than one clichéd situation. Anyone come across a psychopath with a gun and a bus full of kids before? Yep, it's here, along with such a subtle metamorphosis of Bruce Wayne to Batman as this:

> "Bruce straightened in the seat, and the muscles around his mouth and eyes tightened. It was the beginning of his transformation, from callow playboy to Batman."

A pity really, because *Batman: Knightfall* is an attempt to get behind the super-hero's mask, to question the role of Batman and his attitude to violence. But O'Neil's effort to melt down the strips into a novel fails. Perhaps we would have been better served had he told another story, one which was his own, instead.

Robert Silverberg
Thebes of the Hundred Gates
Harper Collins, 1994, £14.99 hb, £3.99pb
Kev McVeigh

Robert Silverberg's novella of Ancient Egypt bears a certain similarity to Connie Willis' acclaimed *Doomsday Book* in its depiction of a time traveller's experiences in the past. As with Willis' novel the best moments of *Thebes of the Hundred Gates* are the descriptions of the physical setting. Unlike Willis, Silverberg fails to truly bring Thebes to life for the reader though he does occasionally manage to distract attention from the inadequacies of the plotting.

Edward Davies is the time traveller sent back in search of two lost Time service agents whose mission to Rome went astray. What Davies finds shook him, though not the reader.

Initially there is great promise here. Despite the odd lapse into clumsy phrasing, Silverberg vividly describes the massive physical and psychological trauma suffered by Davies travelling back through the centuries. He collapses as a result and is taken into the care of a priestess of Isis, then the realism vanishes as the plot plummets into absurdity. As soon as he is recovered Davies tells the priestess Nefret his real name and that he comes from America — he has offered no cover story whatsoever. Then he embarks on an affair with the slave girl Eyaseyab which incorporates one of SF's most ridiculous sex scenes ever.

As for the mystery of the plot, the identities of the two agents are revealed to the reader within twenty pages. From here the novella becomes increasingly pedestrian and ultimately banal.

En route, Silverberg offers some reasonable travel writing on Thebes as it was, or might have been, since one of his points seems to be that for all Davies' preliminary research, he is surprised at every turn by the scale of the city. None of this, however, serves to make the conclusion of the novel remotely feasible, for all the predictability.

Robert Silverberg once wrote a whole slew of SF's finest novels and short stories. His evocation of the human impact of SF ideas in novels such as *Dying Inside* and *Up the Line* is vivid emotional and affecting. Now he writes these trite overlong squibs, which waste his ideas and waste his better writing, with feeble plotting, insipid characterisation and nothing which might be considered insight or revelation.

Paula Volsky
The Wolf of Winter
Bantam, 1994, 439pp, £4.99
Martin Brice

Varis, at least sixth — perhaps as distant as eighth — in line to the throne of Rhazaulle, murders most of those who stand in his way. Only Cerrov and Shalindra (brother and sister) escape, their very flight implying involvement in the assassinations. When these two return with an army, they have been gone and forgotten so long, that they can be branded usurping impostors, manipulated by a foreign aggressor.

If reminiscent of the story of Macbeth, that is not surprising, as the author is a Shakespearean scholar. Further pleasurable interest may be obtained by looking for other parallels and influences within the novel.

For example, in the northern kingdom (or Ulorate) of Rhazaulle, a picture of Tsarist Russia, icebound in winter, mud-engulfed in spring and autumn, and always beset by sinister enemies within, be they anarchists or apparitions. Could the Bruzhoi Mountains derive their name from the Abruzzo region in Italy, where lingering snowfields form phantom faces forever watching the mortals below? Is the location and description of Castle Hauptmann derived from Castle Hohenzollern, ancestral home of the German Kaisers?

Yet this novel is not a mere pastiche of scenes and themes. It is a work of literature which, if not set in a world phantastical, but in — say — a transatlantic business or political organisation of the 1990s, would be hailed as a modern novel of social observation and criticism... of the powerful, that is. Whether mortal soldiers or ghostly warriors, the underlings are regarded by their "superiors" as there simply to be moved and expended in furtherance of their rulers' ambitions, be they good or ill.

The author tackles the use — and misuse — of drugs for enhancing control over the invisible world. She enhances our sympathy for Varis at the outset, a sympathy replaced by abhorrence as his character develops, and then sympathy returned at the end — an ending which I certainly did not expect.

Yet is it the end? Will Shalindra repeat the cycle of depression, domination, drug dependence, defeat and despair?

Not that this possibility implies the inevitability of a sequel. It is rather that Paula Volsky has combined the traditions of British and American fiction. In English stories, the principal characters all live — if not happily ever after — at least conclusively; in American novels — there is always another day to come, the characters gone on into the future.

Terry Pratchett
Men at Arms
Gollancz, 1993, £14.99, 288pp
Soul Music
Gollancz, 1994, £14.99, 286pp
Tanya Brown

Since Terry Pratchett achieved glory as fantasy's answer to Douglas Adams, he's carried on producing novels at a stupendous rate ("more than two a year", to quote a recent feature). One could, however, occasionally be forgiven for thinking that having found a successful formula, he's stuck to it at the expense of original thought. Take one hero (or, less frequently, heroine) with plenty of personal flaws so that even the most pathetic reader can feel superior to him or her; immerse this character in a milieu of stereo/archetypes with a humorous dark side to them, and make a lot of jokes (ensuring that the really awful ones are signalled well in advance). Throw in a stock happy ending without anything too distressing happening to anyone important, and you're laughing. So are the readers. Why knock it? It works.

Recently, though, Pratchett's work has become more varied. His books seem to alternate between relatively light-weight retellings of myths old and new (the yokel who is actually heir to a kingdom, the detective who no one believes) and deeper, more philosophical works with an underlying darkness that's far closer to traditional fairytales.

Men at Arms and *Soul Music*, taken together, provide an excellent illustration of this trend. *Men at Arms* is another tale of the City Guards of Ankh-Morpork. Nothing is sacred these days; Lord Vetinari has decreed that the Watch must reflect the ethnic makeup of the city, and "affirmative action hiring procedures" have brought in some dubious new recruits. There's Corporal Detritus (token troll), Lance-Constable Cuddy (token dwarf) and Lance-Constable Angua (well, she must be the token woman, Corporal Carrot reasons. She's female.) A motley crew to track down the latest menace to society — a soon-to-be-serial killer who has left no clues behind him (or her), except for a small card with the word "Gonne" lettered on it ... Meanwhile, Captain Vimes is preparing to hang up his sword and badge and retire to a life of wedded bliss with Lady Sybil Ramkin, dragon-breeder, socialite and "a woman out for all she can give". Life is seldom that easy, however, and things will get worse before they get better.

Angua is introduced to the Dog Guild, in charge of scavenging rights, sunbathing spots and night-time barking duty, via Gaspode, a dog who has slept huddled up near the walls of Unseen University once too often and now is lumbered with the undoglike trait of rationality and speech. (Nobody listens, though. They hear his words as their thoughts). Angua is alarmed by the dog's interest in her, and it's getting around to that time of the month for her — full moon ... Just because you're tough and independent and know how to use a sword doesn't mean you can escape your nature.

And somewhere out in the city there is the Gonne. An invention, or discovery, of Leonard of Quirm — "I had this strange fancy I was merely assembling something that already existed" - the device has found itself a tame person and made it clear who's boss. This is the Discworld, after all, and the Gonne has ideas of its own — it is determined to reinstate the long-defunct monarchy of Ankh-Morpork, whether the monarchy likes it or not.

Hidden in the rollicking farce, there's a thoughtful side to this novel. Pratchett is, as usual, gleefully inventive; his ideas may be couched in flippant language, but they are not merely frivolous. For instance, ever wondered why trolls are so stupid? "Trolls evolved in cold places. Down on the muggy plains the heat build-up slowed them down and made them dull. It wasn't that only stupid trolls came to the city. Trolls who came down to the city were often quite smart — but they became stupid."

There's a few neat observations about the social life of gargoyles, the Fools' Guild, and landscape gardeners (Bloody Stupid Johnson, a man who had difficulty distinguishing inches from feet. Check out the Triumphal Arch some time. They keep it in a box.)

Men At Arms has an underlying theme of tolerance and acceptance, whether it's between troll and dwarf, dead or undead. It's never more than a theme, though; it never gets in the way of the entertainment.

Supercooled trolls and landscape gardening are all very well, but what happens when an anthropomorphic personification is smitten with existential angst? *Soul Music* sees Death with the blues, sloping off to get away from it all. Death's granddaughter Susan is enduring her education at the Quirm College for Young Ladies, her only peculiarity being an ability to escape attention — to the extent that she can sit and read philosophy books while economics lessons happen to other people. Susan's a rationalist, so naturally she doesn't believe that big white horses like Binky forget to come down when they jump, or that the nice young woman with the ladder and the pliers is really the Tooth Fairy. It's only a matter of time, however, before — as her grandfather's heir — she herself is being mistaken for the Tooth Fairy, and worse. Then, in the course of her Duty, she discovers Music with Rocks In.

Music with Rocks In? Take one troll (Lias), one dwarf (Glod), and one human (Imp), struggling musicians, with — respectively — a set of rocks, a horn, and a strange six-stringed instrument acquired in one of those shops that's been there for years, but wasn't there yesterday. Let them unite in the face of adversity and high Guild membership rates. Thus Music with Rocks In is born, and suddenly Ankh-Morpork is host to a new kind of music — music that's very definitely Live.

And, of course, Music with Rocks In has a disturbing effect on angst-ridden adolescents of all ages. Playing "Pathway to Paradise' and 'Sto Helit Lace' to the impressionable audience of the Mended Drum can only lead to trouble — people painting their bedrooms black, slicking back their hair with bacon grease and wearing modified leather coats with 'Born to Rune' picked out in silver studs ... and trying to build — 'no, I just put it together' — machines hitherto seen only in the notebooks of Leonard of Quirm (of Gonne fame). As Susan says of the guitar, "It's not supposed to be in our history." But the music doesn't mind. It's the heart beat, the back beat. It's alive again.

Meanwhile, Buddy (formerly known as Imp) has become a slave to the rhythm, a channel for something that's been around for a very long time. (What was the sound before the birth of the Universe? "One, two, three, four ...'). Nothing in Susan's sensible, practical upbringing has prepared her for this. At least she has help; the Death of Rats is accompanying her on her tours of Duty, proffering frequent informative SQUEAKS; there's a raven who refuses to do the 'N' word, and Death's assistant Albert is unwillingly broadening her world view no end. It's not a world view that Susan has much patience with, though. All the good dying horribly, and the bad living to a ripe old age — it's not fair. Now, of course, she has the power to interfere and change things for the better. Rules? Made to be broken. And while Death is behaving in an unnecessarily teenaged fashion — the ultimate rebel without a cause? — Susan has a career opportunity that any idealistic (if sensible) teenage girl would jump at — the chance to put the world and make the world a better place. Of course, the world may not want to be a better place ...

Both *Soul Music* and *Men at Arms* play with the idea of an anachronistic cultural artefact being dumped on the Discworld by an Act of God (or The Author) and promptly taking on a life of their own, the Discworld being what it is. *Soul Music* is the more serious book; its moral dilemmas (amusing as they may be) make the mean streets and ethnic conflict of *Men at Arms* look pleasantly simplistic. There's less of the farce, more of the tragedy, to *Soul Music* — perhaps because it cares less about people's inadequacies, and more about the Big Questions. To say that Pratchett treats those questions seriously in a comic novel may seem a contradiction in terms; but there's depth, and a sense of tragedy, to this novel.

Robert Charles Wilson
A Bridge of Years
New English Library, 1994, 333pp, £5.99
-Andy Mills

Okay, I know what you're thinking. You're not going to bother with this one. You picked it up whilst browsing in the bookshop. You saw the cover — depicting an armoured humanoid figure firing away, buildings ablaze behind it — and put it straight back onto the shelf. Trashy sci-fi you can do without.

Forget the cover, for though a golden-armoured future warrior plays a key role in all of this, and there is a fair amount of mayhem and murder, this isn't trash. Instead, it's thoughtful, exciting, *classic* sf.

The novel opens in dramatic fashion. Ben Collier is out in his garden when of a sudden the aforementioned warrior, one Billy Gargullo, brutally kills him and disappears as quickly as he came.

Years pass. The empty house is bought by Tom Winter, on the run from a failed marriage. Tom hears odd sounds in the house and is amazed to find that whilst he sleeps it is mysteriously cleaned. Eventually he discovers that the cleaners are metallic "insects", the house the entrance to a time tunnel which leads to 1962. For Tom it means a chance to start again with the added bonus of living in a less screwed up world which he knows won't collapse around him. But Billy knows someone has come through the tunnel, and he's not pleased, whilst in the meantime weird things are happening to the body of Ben Collier ...

I admit that I'm particularly fond of time travel stories, so might reasonably be expected to be well-disposed anyway to *A Bridge of Years*, but it *is* a fine novel. You can have great fun spotting echoes of past sfnal works: for instance, the house and its custodian are reminiscent of Simak's *Way Station*, the time ghost which stalks the time tunnels reminds one of the neutrino ghosts of Shaw's *A Wreath of Stars*, and there's a hint of *The Terminator* in the

ending. Wilson's characters are his own, however: rounded, real and — with one exception — sympathetically drawn. The exception isn't soldier Billy, as much a victim as the people he kills, it's Tom's pushy, materialistic brother. In one way or another the remaining characters are lonely, vulnerable individuals, all of whom have lost something and are looking for something, though they're not often sure of what. It infuses the novel with a hint of melancholy, as when Tom realises that he cannot treat living in the 1960s as though it were a rehearsed drama, and that whenever one lived people savoured the possibilities which existed:

"Everywhere the same, Tom thought. 1962 or 1862 or 2062. Every acre of the world littered with bones and hope."

It's perhaps not surprising, then, that whilst the story is a round and complete one, the end of the novel brings no endings for its players but new beginnings, and a universe of possibilities. Even for the unhappy Billy.

Ignore the cover. This is a good 'un.

David Wingrove
Beneath The Tree of Heaven
NEL, 1993, 409pp, £16.99
K. V. Bailey

Part 1 is yet another (and an interesting description) 'Mars book'. In *The Stone Within* we left Jelka Tolonen just ending her sequestration on Titan. Now on Mars, in transit earthwards, she is kidnapped, later to be released by a reformed Hans Ebert. She completes her journey, but Ebert's continued sojourn on Mars looks like being of future significance. Parts 2 and 3 are located in Cities North America, Europe and Africa. They are concerned with the future decimation of the Earth-ruling T'ang Seven and with the fall of cities.

There is in this, as throughout *Chung Kuo*, a micro and a macro scenario. The micro-scenario is that of endless plottings and manoeuvrings among hierarchies, bureaucracies and revolutionaries. Characters - such multitudes - tend to be two-dimensional. Of cardinal figures, Knut and Jelka Tolonen and leading protagonist Major Kau Chen are well-rounded. Others are personifications of malice (De Vore), vice (the monstrous T'ang of Africa), perennial wisdom (Master Tuan Ti Fo).

The macro-scenario within such a profusion of families and functionaries perform is one of opposed stasis and change. The Cities and the ruling Seven are in crises of decline. The symbolic title of Part 3 is 'The Path in The Twilight' and that of its pivotal chapter 18 'Cities in The Plain'. There is an engineered spreading of the plague from Africa into Europe, chaos in Alexandria, closure of ports and curfews in City Europe. Elsewhere, City North America has been destroyed by an errant orbiting asteroid and the imperial heart of City Europe is about to be blitzed. The false historical facade of the Middle Kingdom is being undermined by the release of the 'Aristotle File', disclosing the suppressed actual past. On Mars the domed Kang Kua City, monument to interplanetary transference of Chung Kuo ethos and technology, has been blasted open in the course of internecine strife.

At the same time a new element is active on Mars. The black men, the Osu, early hopeful colonists ousted from the cities, now live in the wild under 'Mother Sky', worshipping the night. Master Tuan, as hologram, appearing in the Martian desert, tells Hans Ebert that it is in the company of the Osu that he will come to understand the Tao. Wingrove seems to be indicating that they represent the Yin element, a dark tide rising to counter / complement Chung Kuo's Yang dominance.

While 'operatic' confrontational events, affecting great families and low-level dwellers alike, are such to make these 400 pages turn easily and stirringly, it is the revelation of deeper structures enfolding those happenings - the Tai Chi T'u - like macro-scenario - which registers most enduringly.

TWO RUSSIAN SF NOVELS - Geoff Cowie

At the Sou'Wester Eastercon I bought two books from a stall manned by Russian fans. These books, published in the USSR (sic) by Raduga Publishers, Moscow, and printed in English, looked like interesting mementoes of the Convention.

Both are by Alexei Tolstoy (1883-1945), a distant relative of the author of **War and Peace**. Alexei Tolstoy is one of the most widely read authors in Russia, highly regarded there both for his science fiction and for his epic historical works.

AELITA (1923), though not well known in the West, is a famous book in Russia and one of the Russian SF clubs is named after it. A movie version (scheduled for the Fifth Festival of Fantastic Films (Manchester 9-11 Sept)) was made in 1924.

At the opening of the novel, in Petrograd c. 1920, Archibald Skiles reads an advertisment posted by the engineer M.S.Los, asking for volunteers to fly with him to Mars. Skiles interviews Los, and sees the experimental space-craft, a complicated and hi-tech device by 1920's standards. While Skiles is at the workshop, a volunteer, Red Army soldier Gusev, introduces himself. Gusev, unlike the other two, is no intellectual, but a restless, practical sort, who is quite ready

to desert his wife for a new adventure. Los, a widower, is equally ready to go and face possible death.

Los's experiments are funded by the Soviet State, so the launch is attended by a group of officials and newspaper reporters. The ship makes a swift passage to Mars and lands safely. Their speed has been such that their watches record a passage of 19 hours, though 24 days have passed on Earth.

Los and Gusev find that Mars has breathable air, and the immediate surroundings are a desert with cacti. They find signs of cultivation, and realise that they are walking in the bottom of a dry canal. They soon make contact with the inhabitants, who have flying machines, and are captured and brought to first a city, then an isolated house. During the flight they see mostly ruins and desolation.

During their detention, Gusev talks of plunder and of annexing Mars to the Russian Federative Republic, while Los talks of gathering wisdom. Soon they are introduced to a graceful young Martian female, Aelita. With some Martian technology resembling video she starts teaching them the language, and is subsequently able to narrate them some Martian history; a history of conflict, of invasion from Earth by Atlanteans.

A love affair between Los and Aelita develops. They learn that a faction of the High Council, led by Aelita's father, means them no good. A revolution starts in the city, and Gusev, the man of action, escapes and joins in. Aelita's father, Tuscoob, escapes into an underground labyrinth and launches a destructive counter-attack. Los and Gusev escape. In the final scene, Los is back on Earth, listening to Aelita's voice calling to him by radio.

ENGINEER GARIN AND HIS DEATH RAY (1925), has a number of larger-than-life characters: glamorous femme fatale Zoya Montrose, Rolling, a rapacious American capitalist, and Garin, a mysterious engineer who soon displays ruthless tendencies. Following an unexplained murder of a man who turns out to be Garin's double, Garin is pursued to Paris by Sheiga, a Petrograd detective, and the nature of Garin's activities and his deal with Rolling and his ultimate aim is gradually revealed. Garin, in fact, has invented a heat ray powered by chemicals which burn to produce intense heat. The rays are focussed by a 'hyperboloid' to destructive effect. (Any physicists among you may object that it should have been a paraboloid; according to the foreword Tolstoy was well aware of this and used the hyperboloid as a symbol of artistic exaggeration.)

Garin uses the ray ruthlessly first to aid Rolling's capitalist schemes and then to further his own fascistic plan for world domination. Once he gains control of Rolling's wealth he uses it to occupy a small Pacific island and drill down to the magma belt in search of gold. When the gold, in huge quantities, is recovered to the surface, Garin uses it to destroy the economy of the United States.

The novel starts in Petrograd and the scene shifts to Paris, Germany, a yacht at sea, the Soviet Far East and other locations. The story is accompanied by technical details and sketches which even today seem quite plausible by popular SF standards and must have seemed more so in 1925 when our knowledge of physics and the earth's crust was less advanced. Tolstoy's education was engineering-based.

The hardbacked edition of GARIN which I obtained has unusual full-page colour illustrations, most of which are rather good, being painted in a vigorous modern and in one case decidedly art-deco style. (Artist unknown).

In contrast to Zamyatin's **WE** (1920), which most SF fans these days would find rather tough going, both Tolstoy's novels, despite their age, are highly readable, full of tension and spectacle, with larger than life characters and the kind of technical details that these days would be labelled as cyberpunk.

Though written in the 1920's, GARIN accurately foretold the rise of the likes of Hitler and Mussolini and the Japanese warlords. Reading this novel, one is reminded more than a little of Michael Moorcock's 'Byzantium' novels in which the characters and the ambience are not too dissimilar.

As befits Soviet novels of the 1920's they are written from a perspective which embraces socialism with enthusiasm and attacks capitalism and fascism. The socialist perspective is a novelty these days; but one should after all reflect that while socialism eventually failed in the East, capitalism has yet to show any success in improving the lot of ordinary Russians.

Unfortunately neither of these novels is currently in print in the UK. I have not been able to assertain if Raduga are still operating in Russia. Apparently GARIN was published in the USA as THE DEATH BOX and an out-of-print UK edition of AELITA exists. But anyone wanting to swap books with Eastern European fans might well enquire there.

AELITA, Raduga Publishers, 17 Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, CIS.,1991, ISBN 5-05-003454-X

Barbed Wire Kisses

Magazine Reviews Edited by Maureen Kincaid Speller

Barbed Wire Kisses makes a welcome return to Vector after a gap of two issues.
In the following pages, Mark Plummer examines the newly risen shade of Galaxy Magazine, and Maureen Speller explores the choices available in the small and alternative presses. But first, Paul Kincaid weighs up the glossy A4 magazines – and he's determined to be unfair...

Comparisons are odious.

Okay, let's be odious. Let's see how magazines treat their contributors. (As to how the contributors treat us ... I'll be getting round to the fiction later.)

These thoughts were prompted by Lawrence Dyer's 'Slugs and Snails and Puppy-Dogs' Tails' in *Interzone* #86 (or "Slugs and Snails..." , as the contents list would have it don't you just hate that habit in *Interzone*?). Now this is a reasonable story which would have been a lot better at about half the length. When you have only one isolated character and one premise (in this case, an old lag discovers the ability to regenerate parts of his body) it isn't easy to keep the ending a surprise. It would have been better if Dyer had gone at the thing full tilt in a much tighter, tauter story, rather than taking longer and longer over things the closer he gets to the end. Once I had worked out the ending (not exactly the most mind-bogglingly difficult of tasks) I got more and more irritated at the way Dyer delayed getting there. But at least he was trying to sustain a measure of suspense. So why did the editors include an illustration which gave away the ending two pages before the story actually finished? This is not just annoying for the reader, it is not simple carelessness on the part of the editors, it is actually insulting to the author.

This degree of stupidity is unusual. But it is symptomatic of the way too many magazines ignore the way the stories are presented. Too often, *Interzone* looks as if it doesn't care about the stories. Which makes it very hard for the reader to care about them. The look does not vary (which may be the biggest sin of all). The same typeface (readable but a little heavy), the same column width and leading (the space between the lines, in this case rather too close), always justified; the result is that the pages always look cramped, unappealing, hard to get into. It doesn't help that the artwork (when there is any only two of the six stories in *Interzone* #87 have any illustration) always fits exactly the same pattern, one full column when it is within a story, the top half of a two-page spread when it heads a story. There is no variation in this regime. There is a tendency also to use a rather coarse illustrative style, heavy lines, flat and lacking subtlety of shade or shape. It gives the pages an unwarying, amateurish look; as if a rigid format has been devised so that no-one involved in the magazine actually has to think about how it looks.

I am being a little harsh on *Interzone*, it is by no means the worst of the bunch. That honour belongs to *Tomorrow*, which is printed on poor quality paper with a reproductive technique that makes *Interzone* look slick. *Tomorrow* #7, actually dated February 1994, looks like it belongs to the pulp era even down to the arch headings for each pulp-era story. I was going to point to the exception of Keith Brooke's 'Jurassic and the Great Tree', until I realised it was reprinted from *Interzone*, even down to the accompanying illustrations.

Pulphouse #16 looks like a stable-mate for *Interzone*. It isn't printed on slick paper, but it has the same, uniform two-column grid, a similar (but not identical) typeface, the same paucity of internal illustration (other than the story headings). But if the feel is the same, *Interzone* comes out the winner in terms of the stories. None of the stories in this *Pulphouse* stand out. Mike Resnick's 'The Mummy' (one of his on-going Lucifer Jones adventures) was an amusingly lightweight Indiana Jones rip-off; Lawrence Watt-Evans's 'Monster Kidnaps Girl at Mad Scientist's Command' was as silly and inconsequential as the title; Carrie Richerson's 'Phases' was a neat but unexceptional play on vampirism, menstruation and lesbianism. The rest wouldn't even warrant that much attention, except for two

things worth noticing. Two of the stories, 'No Restrictions' by Billie Sue Mosiman and 'Close to the Bone' by Lucy Taylor are gritty, unpleasant stories of violence with absolutely no science fictional or fantastic content whatsoever. And, without making any song and dance about it, *Pulphouse* contains four stories out of seven written by women, and the stories deal seriously with subjects like menstruation, motherhood and lesbianism. In comparison, *Interzone* only has two stories by women among the 16 in the last three issues; and only Mary Gentle's nasty and inconsequential 'Human Waste' even touches on any subject which doesn't conform to *Interzone*'s usual "toys for the boys" scenario.

Science Fiction Age looks to be the exception. It is printed on glossy paper with full colour illustrations (most of them very good), and though it keeps to the same two justified columns, the type size is actually slightly smaller than *Interzone*'s, which conversely gives the impression that there is more space so making it easier to read. Odd lines picked out in large bold italic which break across the columns help, because the pages no longer look as if they are unrelieved blocks of text. Unfortunately, apart from a good story by Barry Malzberg ('Understanding Entropy', pity about the pat ending) and a reasonable joke by Geoffrey A. Landis ("What We Really Do at NASA'), the fiction doesn't begin to stand up to what's going on around it.

Then there is *Back Brain Recluse* #22, which pays its writers the respect of thinking about each story and presenting them in an individual and attractive way. The typeface is smaller than that used by *Interzone* and the leading is greater, so there is more white space on the page which makes the text look attractive. The layout doesn't follow the same format for any two stories (forming one, two or three columns, ragged or justified text, forming around illustrations which never conform to a standard shape). The variety in *BBR*, if carried to excess, could easily annoy the stories, like so many style magazines where tricksy typography make nonsense of what is included there. But here, the typography is at the service of the story. As an example, consider 'Flagellante's Search for the Exlgirl' by Lizbeth Rymland, one of those very short and poetic pieces which try to capture the incomprehensibility of the alien. It occupies just two pages of the magazine, in large-size, well-spaced, single column text. Yet it is printed over exactly the same story, reproduced in a medieval script in a pale grey which occupies the entire page space. The script face emphasises the oral-tradition, mythic feel of the story, and the format, which sets it apart from everything else in the magazine, clearly shows the work of someone who has thought sympathetically about what the author had set out to do. It is a good but not great story, but the format really makes it work.

If we are making comparisons (and we are, we are) the general run of story in *BBR* is better than the average *Interzone* story (*Interzone*, of course, has to fill more pages more often), but the best stories in *Interzone* tend to top the best in *BBR*. It is just that *BBR* looks so much better, is presented in a much more attractive and readable style, and appears to take the reader and the writer more seriously than *Interzone* does.

As for the stories (yes, I did say I would get round to this) let's start with *BBR*. Among the ten fictions included in this issue ('Body of Life' by David Kerekes and 'Marsfall' by Darick Chamberlin, while structurally interesting, hardly count as stories) there are two good tales from reliable sources and two excellent pieces by less well known writers. The good are Don Webb with 'The Way Out', a venture into the geography of dream which is eventually disappointing only because of the routine revenge plot entwined within it, and Paul di Filippo with 'Mud Puppy Goes Uptown'. Di Filippo has clearly become enraptured with Rupert Sheldrake's "morphic fields" and here presents a world where movement up a hill takes one through a morpho-logical evolution.

The excellent are 'Tooley's Root' by Tim Nickels, another in that odd SF sub-genre which attempts to express the incomprehensibility of the very far future. Here strange creatures scuttle about a curious, subterranean world until the appearance of something human (and hence totally alien to them) disrupts all their understanding of existence. It is a hard mood to capture, and Nickels's slightly overlong, fractionally too slow piece isn't totally successful, but it comes very close. The real stand out story, though, is 'The Shimmering Sands' by Stratford Kirby, in which a loner visits destruction on the mining towns of the American West in a strange search for the stability of something truly real. It is rich in atmosphere, genuinely weird in vision, and disturbingly convincing.

The vast majority of stories in the last three issues of *Interzone* don't come up to any of these four. Typical of the way they miss the mark are two of the stories from *Interzone* #87: Stewart Palmer's 'Get Hot and Dance!' presents the fall from fame of a Take That type pop group, but does absolutely nothing original or even interesting with the situation. While Julian Flood's 'Meditations of the Heart' has an interesting idea, our ignorance and downfall plotted by intelligences spawned by our own imaginations, but fails in the writing. Like too many *Interzone* writers, Flood will produce over-ripe, purple, mood-setting prose, then abruptly stop the flow to advance the plot one more notch with a very plain, unadorned sentence. The dissonance between the two tears the whole story apart.

The best writers don't have to shift gear between plot and description, each is smoothly a part of the other. As, for instance, Thomas Disch with 'The Man Who Read a Book' in *Interzone* #87, a beautifully judged story of a world in which reading is so endangered it is supported by government subsidy. The hero, a no-hoper drifting from one failed attempt to make a living to another, suddenly finds there is a career beckoning as a reader of books. Paul di Filippo's 'The Double Felix', also in *Interzone* #87, is another story that works like a well-oiled machine, every part fitting smoothly into every other. It is another tale exploiting Sheldrake's morphic fields, but here done in the form of one of Thorne Smith's comedies. Di Filippo cannot match Smith's mad conversations, but he has caught the headlong, lunatic plot perfectly, and this story of a mad scientist who has let himself be murdered by his wife so he can test his theories by reviving himself in the body of his dog, makes far better use of Sheldrake's ideas than his contribution to *BBR*.

The best story from any of this crop of recent magazines, however, has to be Stuart Falconer's 'Fugue and Variations' in *Interzone* #85, a finely judged examination of how Mozart, as an old man, influenced Wagner in the writing of his opera Frankenstein. The modern-day librarian hero researching this story among his grandfather's papers, also finds that the path which leads him to the discovery also leads him through secret paths in the nearby park to a place of childhood memories. It is a gentle piece which stands out all the more because it is at odds with the strident tone that so many *Interzone* contributors feel the need to adopt.

Paul Kincaid

Magazines reviewed:
Back Brain Recluse #22
Interzone: #85 (July 1994), #86 (August 1994) & #87 (September 1994)
Pulphouse #16
Science Fiction Age Vol 2 No 5
Tomorrow 7: February 1994

Galaxies Like Grains of Sand

The Legend Returns: we are reminded of this fact throughout the first four issues of the newly relaunched *Galaxy* magazine. In its heyday, *Galaxy* was one of the three most important SF magazines, the others being *Astounding* and *F&SF*. Under the editorship of Horace L. Gold, the early issues published classic stories by the likes of Sheckley and Knight alongside serialised novels from Bester (*The Demolished Man*, *The Stars my Destination*) and Pohl and Kornbluth (*Gladiator-at-Law*, *Wolfbane*). Pohl himself took over as editor in 1961, and under his regime writers such as Cordwainer Smith became regular contributors. By the '70s the magazine was generally less influential, quality and frequency of publication became variable, the last issue appearing in 1980.

Now it's back, fourteen years after its last issue and forty-four after its first. So, what's changed between volume 1 number 1(October 1950) and volume 1 number 1 (January/February 1994)? The magazine has got bigger, using the now conventional A4 format (or rather, that American equivalent that's slightly smaller) rather than the traditional digest and it's now E J rather than H L Gold at the helm. And, unsurprisingly, the cover-price has increased tenfold. Other than that, the intervening forty-plus years might not have happened. That red logo is still there. Many of the contributors to the new *Galaxy* will be familiar to readers of the old: there's former editors Gold and Pohl, plus Sheckley and Silverberg and that's just the first issue.

Look a bit

closer and maybe even some of the stories look familiar: the Pohl is a reprint from 1955 and the Silverberg comes from *F&SF* circa 1963. Sheckley contributes a serialised novel, *The City of the Dead*, its pages in no way enhanced by some rather basic "Photolllustrations" of a model town provided by E. J Gold. The serial was a staple of the original *Galaxy*, and indeed of other magazines of the era, because for many writers it was the only way to get novel length work into print. Many classic novels saw their first publication in its pages, but the need has now passed — indeed, serials have been all but abandoned by the other major magazines — and their continued use here again illustrates the nostalgic aspect of the relaunch. There are stories by new writers, at least new in the sense that they are not listed in the *Encyclopedia*, but all the stories in this first issue are unremarkable which may be in part because they are so short — several come in at less than two pages.

So the premier issue fails to impress. Perhaps things will improve in later issues.

They do not. By the second issue, adorned with a Freas cover (an artist generally associated with *Astounding* but at least he's got his roots in the right era), Sheckley, Silverberg and H L Gold are joined by such young turks as Evelyn E. Smith ("The Vilbar Party" c 1955), Chad Oliver ("Anachronism" c 1953) and L. Sprague de Camp ("None but Lucifer' in collaboration with Gold from *Unknown* c. good grief, 1939, which makes three serials running simultaneously).

Another one for the nostalgia buffs; we have a science column entitled "For your information", the title used for most of Willy Ley's science columns in the original *Galaxy*, but even E.J Gold baulks at reprinting old science articles so they do have a new writer.

Aside from the editorial and science article, the contents page lists 14 items in the magazine, including several writers from the first issue: Chuck Rothman, Jean Marie Stine (who is listed as a contributing editor) and Lawrence Schimel. The tendency remains towards short, inconsequential pieces — Rothman's contributions in this and the first issue amount to less than one page of text in total. Bjo Trimble tells us far more than all but the most ardent fanatic could ever want to know about the pilot episode of *Star Trek*.

We even get Harry Nilsson — yes, it is that Harry Nilsson — who always wanted to write for *Galaxy* as a kid and has now been able to achieve that ambition. Presumably this is because he happened to know Gold; it certainly isn't on the strength of the writing. It's debatable which is worse — writing a line like "He would always invariably say 'no'" or, as an editor, letting it stand. Strangely enough, lurking amongst all this very minor stuff, there's a story by Don Webb, but perhaps this was a mistake. Still, it's early days for a new magazine which will surely find its feet by issue 3.

Issue 3 sees *Galaxy* still footless, and young Freas providing the kind of cover which suggests to the reader that about the only thing binding this magazine to the 1990s is the cover date. The reprints have diminished (only part two of the de Camp/Gold collaboration) and the number of serials is back down to two (that and the Sheckley, which is still 'enhanced' by Gold photographs). The big-name veterans quota is also down — add to the above only Zelazny whose story runs to half a page, although it's a whole page if you count the artwork. Still, I'm sure it helps sales to have his name on the cover. On top of this, there are fifteen other stories, plus Trimble's second *Trek* excursion.

Schimel and Stine now seem well established as regulars and a few of the stories get beyond the second page yet there's nothing that really stands out. Take Laura Resnick's 'A Fleeting Wisp of Glory' (a whopping three and a-half pages long), which is a post-apocalypse story, set in an alternative world where the Cuban Missile Crisis turned into a nuclear war, and where the survivors mary generations hence remember the history of that time as a confused legend, intermingled with the Arthurian myths. That's about it really. As with nearly every story published here, it entirely lacks substance.

Apparently the volume of submissions for this, the new *Galaxy*, has been so great, 'over a thousand manuscripts in over the last two weeks', that Gold has had to employ twenty readers, 'friends', to help him process them. One wonders whether the standard has really been so low that he has had to rehash so many 'classic' works, but on the basis of what has been published so far one must regrettably conclude that it has been. Much of the interior artwork for this issue has been provided by Virgil Finlay, a young man (born 1914, died 1971) who shows much promise.

Number four does not have a Freas cover. No, this time we are treated to a series of photographs of the 'Alien Allstars', a bunch of baseball players in silly masks. These are part of a series of trading cards and represent the kind of image we sci-fi fans just love. Still, inside we're now down to the one serial (de Camp/Gold) and one other reprint: Simak's "Goodnight, Mr James", a mere 43 years young. Only seven other stories this time (with only Stine maintaining a hundred percent record). New names this time around include Jack Kirby, here co-authoring 'Shadow of the Falcon". One begins to get the impression E.J. Gold may be pursuing a policy of publishing stories by people who are not known as writers but who liked the old *Galaxy* and wanted to be published there, and are now dead. [Harry Nilsson, coincidentally, has since died — MKS] The boy Finlay provides yet more artwork.

When the first issue of the real *Galaxy* hit the stands in October 1950, it was an innovator. In that first editorial, Gold senior speaks proudly of the fact that the cover art has been reproduced using a revolutionary new engraving process on a high quality glossy paper. However, that was 'merely a beautiful and dignified vehicle for the science fiction itself", and in that first issue he assembled a content list boasting stories by many of the top names of the day: Simak, Sturgeon, MacLean, Matheson, Leiber, Brown and Asimov. The editorial was entitled 'For Adults Only'; Gold wanted to create 'a mature magazine for mature readers.' Granted, it doesn't really look that way now, but it must be viewed with regard to the genre as it was in 1950. E.J. Gold, with his new *Galaxy* doesn't seem to realise that the new magazine can't fulfil the role of the original by being like the original. Times have changed, but it seems that E.J. Gold has not. Where are the leading lights of modern short SF? Between the covers of *Asimov's*, *F&SF* and *Interzone*, certainly not here. Gold is publishing much new work by relative unknowns, and on one level this is commendable, but frankly the material isn't that great. It may seem unfair to dwell on the length of many of the stories — there's nothing intrinsically wrong with the short-short story, after all. Yet it is these stories that seem to typify the whole attitude of the magazine — minor, insignificant, inconsequential.

Thousands of fans wanted *Galaxy* back, E.J.Gold assures us in his first editorial. Those fans have probably got what they deserve and are probably happy. However, if anybody else feels tempted to buy a copy of this unnecessary and rather sad relaunch, resist the temptation, get down to your local second-hand store and pick up some copies of the original, the real *Galaxy*. Look for those from the '50s or perhaps the '60s; for the cost conscious, look for the much cheaper and more generally available British re-prints. It will be better value and probably more relevant to SF in the '90s.

Mark Plummer

The Alternative in Question

In a recent issue of Interzone, apropos of something entirely different, Christopher Priest observed that 'a science-fiction writer' traditionally raises questions, and does not present answers. The plot of a science-fiction story develops from the writer's exploration of the central question, the story's tension being generated by a rational wish to arrive at an answer."

This strikes me as a very workable definition of science fiction, a comfortable portmanteau-sized definition. Actually, it's a definition the size of a Narnian cupboard — plenty of room in there for everyone. "Traditionally" accommodates those of us who still express a regrettable tendency to wanting stories with a beginning, a middle and an end, but "the rational wish to arrive at an answer" covers a multitude of other approaches and yes, sometimes sins as well. There is more than one way to skin Schrödinger's cat.

I was thinking about the elasticity of this definition while catching up on my small press SF reading for this column. *Albedo 1* and *The Third Alternative* are both comparatively new kids on the block but approach the genre in entirely different ways, the one very traditional in its output, the other so slipstream at times as to be heading for *terra incognita* so far as the dyed-in-

the-wool skiffy reader is concerned.

Albedo 1 comes from Eire, a magazine distinguished by the verve and energy of its unidentified editors, though their enthusiasm is not always matched by expertise in the copy-editing department. As for the fiction, the range of ideas is not always matched by corresponding expertise in their development and sometimes, I have to say, I wonder why the editors made the choices they did. This is, of course, easy to say, not having seen their slush pile but do we, I wonder, want or even need yet another Arthurian mood piece? Robert Neilson's 'The Quest for the Perfect Knight' (*A1* #3), while competently written, provides an inane explanation for Galahad's quest for the Holy Grail and one, I think, which does not fit with the rest of the Matter of Britain. Speculative, yes, but hardly earth-shattering.

John Lee's 'September Thirtieth' (*A1* #4) promised so much in concept and yet delivered so little in practice. A man whose filmic special effect and personal obsession is James Dean is approached by a journalist with an eye to a certain anniversary – oh, I see you're ahead of me, and indeed you're ahead of the author, who took the long road round to the point of his story and totally sacrificed any chance of building any tension en route. Disappointing, as the central premise of the story promised a good deal, and judicious editorial control might have given us a more satisfying read.

Other stories are more successful. Adam White's 'Residuum' (*A1* #2) lifts those tacky little newspaper adverts about using your memory to its fullest extent into a whole new realm of fantasy by introducing us to Editcorp, which stores all those boring memories which take up space and exploring the problems which occur when the computer doesn't function properly. Having got to the stage where I feel my own memory is utterly overloaded, this story touched a chord with me, and probably with many other readers. Another brief but telling squib was John Kenny's 'Detritus' (*A1* #2), the ultimate threat to all children with unbearably untidy rooms. What actually happens is never entirely explained but the story is satisfyingly concluded, for the reader if not for the protagonist.

Other themes are more traditional: the space woman eaten by a terrible fungus; the evil scientist cloning supermen to take over the world, though this latter is given an interesting new spin with the involvement of the Pope. Actually, considering the ethical and spiritual ramifications of cloning for the Catholic church I was disappointed that the writer finally settled for cloning the protagonist in the usual way.

In some ways, the most disappointing story of those I read was Brian Stableford's 'The Requiem Masque', beautifully written yet no more than a stylish rehash of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death', an exercise which struck me as pointless considering that the original is still eminently readable. Nevertheless, it does show that interest in the Gothic tradition of SF and fantasy is alive and well and also living in the portmanteau.

Andrew Cox, introducing the first issue of his magazine, *The Third Alternative*, bemoans the lack of imagination of his local Arts Council who refused funding for his magazine, apparently on the grounds that they didn't like some of the material in the dummy issue. Cox decided that he wasn't prepared to sacrifice editorial integrity and thus has gone it alone, which probably comes as no surprise to any small press magazine editor who has already trodden this well-worn path.

His magazine's brief is "the slipstream" and by issue #2 the editorial is already becoming worryingly defensive about confusion between "slipstream", "stream-of-consciousness" and "plotlessness". The latter two being definitely not true, according to Cox. As an editor, while you may be clear in your own mind what you think you're publishing, the perceptions of fellow readers can be very different. Many people associate "slipstream" with some kind of post-cyberpunk, mechanistic, down-these-mean-streets, aggressively American-style fiction, in which case, boy are you going to be disappointed with *The Third Alternative*.

Instead, we seem to be going for a reprise of that old 1960s discussion about British SF and its very distinctive feel. But neither is *TTA* the New Wave regurgitated. The writing though is very literary, sometimes self-consciously so, a style I associate with certain sorts of creative writing classes, and not all of it is likely to appeal to SF readers with traditional tastes. Some of the stories seem, much like those in *Albedo 1* to head off without any real reference to where they're going. Joel Lane, a writer whose work I greatly admire for its low-key and haunting style, goes slightly off the rails with 'Take Me When You Go' (*TTA* #1), little more than a half-hearted memoir of a friend of the protagonist's who doesn't quite get his life together – not up to Lane's usual standards at all. And there are other stories which seem to be more exercises in arranging words on the page than actually saying something.

Of course, I'm old-fashioned enough to like a vaguely linear approach so Neil Williamson's 'Softly under Glass' (*TTA* #2), while deliciously ambivalent in its conclusion, at least gives me the impression that this story does flow chronologically even if my understanding of what's happening is suddenly called into question in the last few paragraphs. Williamson's sketch of Hugo, the too-perfect art gallery owner-turned-exhibit – yes but in whose gallery? – is masterly. At a time when preserved lambs, black and white, are being regarded as works of art, Williamson's exploration of what exactly does constitute a masterpiece plays fascinating tricks with the mind.

An old favourite, issue 12 of *Aureolis* let me down rather, its contents being very unsatisfying in a "been there, done that, got the t-shirt" sort of way. Another Vitellan story from Sean McMullen was less a cause of rejoicing, more a matter for sighing in exasperation as Vitellan and a medieval priest conducted an endless dialogue on whether Vitellan was going to relinquish his elixir in exchange for the life of a hostage, and so it went on.

Dirk Strasser's "The Tale of Valkyra and Verlinden' did not significantly promote the cause of fantasy writing with the tired revelation that the eponymous characters are twins on either side of a battle. Misha Kumashov's 'Ascension' owed a lot to that Australo-British preoccupation with a future cataclysm which leaves us poking around in the ruins, our language distorted beyond belief, and seeking a desperate relief in the sort of conformity which stifles all initiative. The only difference is that while the Brits head for the hills, the Australians head for the desert in sand yachts, in a Mad Max-ish haste; I was left thinking irreverently of the current series of Foster's Lager adverts, can't think why.

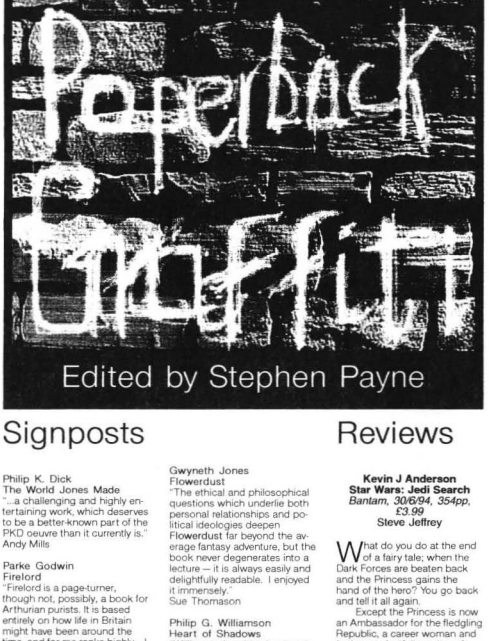
Meryl Thompson's 'Mural' self-consciously dropped its roots back into the 1950s, offering a strained comparison with the 'current' state of affairs in the distinctly bleak, quasi-totalitarian future she portrays and the old white picket fence notion of the suburban dream. It comes as no surprise when the leading female disappears into the mural which so attracts her, though quite why she thinks the suburban dream is going to be any better than a place where she is discouraged from driving alone is anyone's guess.

Lastly, something of a curiosity, an issue of *Yazzyk*, a magazine of writing from Eastern Europe, issue 3 of which is devoted to magic, madness and mysticism. The stories range from the overly literary ghost story, past a strange tale of families which wouldn't be out of place in a collection by Cortazar, not to mention the inevitable Kafkaesque pieces, including one man's struggle to rid himself of a meteorite which has landed on his property, to a strange but charming piece by Jakub Horak, 'The Freak', describing a civil servant's efforts to come to terms with a peculiar machine he has discovered in the course of his work.

Of particular interest is Carola Biedermann's "They', which apparently caused a furore when it first appeared in *Ikarie*, the leading Czech SF magazine. Going on what I've learned about the attitude of Czech and Slovak males, I'm frankly not surprised that it generated so much fuss. In a style reminiscent of Joanna Russ, who generated considerable animosity with her own work, Biedermann describes the lot of women, and not just Eastern European women. There can be no doubt about the rational wish at the heart of this story, to fathom out why women put up with the shit dished out to them, and why men never seem to learn any different.

Maureen Kincaid Speller

Albedo 1, #2, #3, #4 (available from the New SF Alliance, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY)
Aureolis #12 (available from the New SF Alliance, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY)
The Third Alternative #1,#2 (available from 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs, CB6 2LB. Four issue sub. £9.00)
Yazzyk (available from Blahoslavova 8, Zizkov, Praha 3, Czech Republic)



Signposts

Philip K. Dick
The World Jones Made
"...a challenging and highly entertaining work, which deserves to be a better-known part of the PKD oeuvre than it currently is."
Andy Mills

Parke Godwin
Firelord
"Firelord is a page-turner, though not, possibly, a book for Arthurian purists. It is based entirely on how life in Britain might have been around the time, and for me ranks highly... I would recommend it, particularly to historical fantasy buffs."
Vikki Lee

Simon R. Green
Down Among The Deadmen
"Here's a rarity: a sword and sorcery novel; written in grown-up language. Instead of the usual fey, adjective-laden passages of whimsy, Green's writing is sharp, almost plain, the plot carried by dialogue more than description... it's very readable; a superior blend of fantasy and horror."
Mat Coward

Dafydd Ab Hugh
Arthur War Lord
"Dafydd deserves full credit for not writing — say — a COMIC-CUT PROVO IN KING ARTHUR'S COURTYARD. The fifth-century scenes are so vivid that I resented being brought back to the Time-Tunnel-type efforts at intertemporal rescue / damage limitation."
Graham Andrews

Gwyneth Jones
Flowerdust
"The ethical and philosophical questions which underlie both personal relationships and political ideologies deepen. **Flowerdust** far beyond the average fantasy adventure, but the book never degenerates into a lecture — it is always easily and delightfully readable. I enjoyed it immensely."
Sue Thomason

Philip G. Williamson
Heart of Shadows
"Williamson's writing is, as ever, more than competent and he paces the novels with impressive skill to create a real sense of tension. **Heart of Shadows** like its predecessor **Moonblood** , may not be vastly ambitious, but as a rattlingly-good read may be (if you'll excuse the pun) heartily recommended."
Andrew Seaman

Reviews

Kevin J Anderson
Star Wars: Jedi Search
Bantam, 30/6/94, 354pp, £3.99
Steve Jeffrey

What do you do at the end of a fairy tale; when the Dark Forces are beaten back and the Princess gains the hand of the hero? You go back and tell it all again.

Except the Princess is now an Ambassador for the fledgling Republic, a career woman and (rather neglectful) mother of twins.

This is the fourth of the *Star Wars*® sequels, not counting the movie novelisations, and Volume 1 of the *Jedi Academy* trilogy. And it induces a large feeling of déjà vu, as if the sequence has long run out of original ideas and plots, and is retreading variants of the original movies. Here we have a Imperial fleet, complete with the most powerful weapon in the universe, the Sun Crusher, hidden inside a black hole cluster around a slave mining planet. The Jedi are lost and scattered, and Luke seeks to find and train of new order of Knights to protect the new Republic. Meanwhile Han Solo and Chewbacca have been captured on a diplomatic mission to the planet Kessel, and put into a slave gang in the spice mines. So when Luke battles a fire serpent in a lava filled underground cavern by closing his eyes and letting the Force guide his blade, or when Solo and friends escape in a stolen ship straight into the clutches of the Imperial fleet (and escape from there with the Sun Crusher by knocking out their guards and disguising themselves in Stormtrooper uniforms), the sense of déjà vu and quiet despair really come home to roost. Everything you either loved or hated about the original *Star Wars* is here, but at the same time all those nagging doubts and problems that were cheerfully glossed over by the spectacle and special effects of the big screen stand out far too boldly in print.

No surprises, but no prizes either.

George Beahm
The Stephen King Story
Warner Books, 7/4/94, 422pp, £5.99
Alan Fraser

I'm not really a King fan, and have only read his *Dark Tower* books (although I now realise that I've seen more films based on King stories than I'd thought) so everything in this book was new to me. The blurb makes an extravagant claim, that *The Stephen King Story* gives "the real story behind King and his phenomenal success". Inside, the author sets out a more modest aim: rather than a full biography, to provide a series of "impressionistic sketches" relating King's life and work, which he claims are inseparable.

A severe problem is that, although Beahm has had the co-operation of some people who know a lot about King, his book is completely unauthorised. He had no access to King or any of his closest family and friends, and there are no quotations from King's work in the book (presumably for copyright reasons). Any quotations from King himself are from published interviews or public speeches. Consequently we only learn the facts of King's life on public record, most of which are mundane, and we have to decide ourselves why this apparently happy and well-adjusted family man has become a prolific writer of tales that turn everyday American life into bloodcurdling horror.

Beahm, who is obviously a King collector, is comfortable when giving details of the various editions of King's works, such as print runs and paper quality, but his approach to the biographical side of his endeavour is uneven. Some important events in King's life are skated over or mentioned belatedly, and trivial incidents such as several 1990s public events attended by King (at which Beahm must have also been present) are described in exasperatingly minute detail (the "impressionistic sketches"?).

However, Beahm does give a convincing analysis of King's work and his popular success

in the final chapter, and the book provides a useful bibliography of all King and King-related works, marred by the fact that the original US 1992 edition has not been updated. On the plus side there are some excellent illustrations from King artist Kenny Ray Linkous. *The Stephen King Story* is in my opinion a curate's egg: not the ideal book to pick up to learn about King, although it does refer you to those that might be.

Ben Bova with Bill Pogue
The Trikon Deception
NEL, 7/7/94, 470pp, £5.99
Steve Palmer

This is a near future thriller set in a space station. Essentially, the novel relates events during 1998 on an orbiting scientific station; a station that is supposed to be researching a means of using microbes to eat pollution, but is actually the focus for international shenanigans.

Written with the orbital experience of Skylab man Bill Pogue, this is a mixed novel, simultaneously introducing a couple of interesting ideas yet remaining far too swamped with real-life detail from Bill Pogue to have any pace. By page 109 practically the only thing that's happened is that somebody's computer disc has been stolen.

It's mediocre. Pace is in places dreadfully slow, and the middle third of the book is a mess. The main difficulty I had was with the characters. All seem extreme, and it appears that the author has used these extremes to fashion a plot: there is the macho commander who doesn't realise he loves the pretty doctor; the terminally ill scientist who hates scientific progress, but is eventually saved by science; a lust-driven lackwit character; and other hunks of cardboard. From these the author constructs a flimsy mess of jealousy, grief, betrayal and murder. It's believable in places, yes, especially the sections set on Earth, but more often it descends into *Neighbours*-like hysteria.

On the other hand, there are extraordinary (and accidental, I'm sure) moments of déjà - vu; the sexually bizarre death of a top Conservative politician, and a European community vote where Britain votes against all eleven other members. As for the realism of the extrapolation, I think 1998 is a fraction optimistic for the setting, even granting that Ben Bova wrote the book in 1992. A final thumbs down must go to that great cliché, environmental disaster personified by dead whales. The blurb and the text both try to persuade the reader that the Earth is in danger of imminent ecological collapse, but you never believe it.

Disappointing, but not without some spark.

Terry Brooks
The Tangle Box
Legend, 19/5/94, 334pp, £15.99
Max Sexton

The Tangle Box by Terry Brooks is an easy way to spend a summer afternoon. The characters are uncomplicated and single-dimensional; they are either all good or all bad, and the book ends with a predictably Manichean climax. However, there are human interest themes in the book that make it a cut above pulp fiction. *The Tangle Box* is preoccupied with love between humans and non-humans; the responsibilities of kingship in a kingdom of diverse races and subjects; and the mystical relationship between woman, nature and magic. The novel is too slight to explore these themes albeit superficially. Instead, what Terry Brooks achieves with a high degree of certainty and deftness is a well paced plot, effortlessly transporting the reader using understated prose between the main characters, in which the security of the magical kingdom of Landover is disrupted by the arrival of an inter-dimensional confidence man. Having narrowly escaped perdition at the hands of irate creditors on Earth, Horris Kew, a native of Landover, soon becomes the willing accomplice in a conspiracy whose first step is to remove Landover's human king and any opposition that could prevent the conquest of Landover. Meanwhile, the king's non-human wife returns to her fairy roots to confront her fears about her impending motherhood and is then set on a quest that probably said something about her fears, but was is too incidental to mean very much.

Terry Brooks is capable of spinning a good yarn and approached in the right spirit he provides a diverting read but nothing more. *The Tangle Box* is sentimental, wholesome entertainment, almost Disney in its innocence and ends reassuringly with good restored and evil vanquished. Above all, it is escapist: comparing an urban Earth to an unspoilt Landover, Terry Brooks reveals his need to run away to a perfect world where a natural order exists and magic is a sign of that order. It is the secret of his success.

Lois McMaster Bujold
Barrayar
Pan, 6/5/94, 387pp, £4.99
Tanya Brown

Barrayar continues the story of Cordelia Naismith Vorsikgan (mother of the more famous Miles) which was begun in *Shards of Honour*. Cordelia has retired from her command in the Betan Expeditionary Force to marry Lord Aral Vorsikgan, commander of the opposing forces during the Betan-Barrayan wars; she has returned to Barrayar with him, and now she's homesick, frustrated and pregnant. Barrayar's society is primitive, almost feudal, compared to Beta Colony; medical science has a lot of catching up to do, and the weather isn't too great either.

Yet there is plenty to distract her. All is not well with the House of Vorsikgan. Lieutenant Koudelka, a nerve-mangled veteran, is finding it difficult to cope with the attraction between himself and Drou, Cordelia's bodyguard. Aral's father Piotr makes no secret of his contempt for his daughter-in-law's newfangled galactic notions. And Bothari is having bad dreams, a result of the heavy-handed therapy typical of Barrayan military medicine. Meanwhile, Aral has become Regent and is acquiring personal and political enemies on every side. It's only a matter of time before this begins to change Cordelia's life.

Bujold's competent, chatty style is not altogether suited to a plot as action-packed as this; she has a tendency to skip from in-depth characterisation to violent episodes so urgently described that the reader has to flip back to check they really happened. There are many unexplored allusions to events in the previous novel, which can be discouraging for the first-time reader; perhaps some of the apparent non sequiturs in the plot would make more sense if a little more of the background was explained.

Despite this, *Barrayar* is an entertaining read. Bujold's characters are deftly-drawn and sympathetic, and her space-age feudal culture rings true. A fast-paced, action-packed adventure novel suffused with wit and tinged with romance; great holiday reading.

James Buxton
Strange
Warner, 14/7/94, 332pp, £4.99
Martyn Taylor

Inmates are dying at Long Barrow prison and it isn't suicide, or other prisoners, or even the screws. So who is it?

Well, Long Barrow is haunted by the spirit of a militant Victorian weaver hanged for a murder he didn't commit. Jim Carroll, also inside for a killing he didn't do, eventually discovers the truth, although not before the inmates have done a Strangeways on the nick. At the same time his best friend's daughter has just managed to escape from a murder which is very much a carbon copy of the weaver's answer (the victim of which is haunting the girl).

Confused? You won't be.

The essence of 'good' horror is not just the relentless hounding of the protagonist, it is surprise. Once I found out about the weaver I knew exactly what was coming. Similarly, once the story began to be told from the viewpoint of the incipient murder victim, I knew everything was going to end happily. Spielberg doesn't off cute kids, so why should James Buxton? Everything was too neat, tidy and predictable in this very moral, black fairy story in which everyone gets their just deserts.

BUT... there were a few passages here which made my guts heave, descriptions I finished out of duty rather than desire. This man can turn a ghastly phrase with the very best. *Strange* is by no means a great book, but I fancy there is more and better to come from James Buxton. Watch out for him, especially in a dark street.

Joe Dever
The Skull of Agarash
Red Fox, 1994, £4.99
Steve Palmer

This is the first graphic treatment of the Lone Wolf saga and, although it's standard hack-and-slay fare, it's not awful – if you can cope with this sort of stuff and a plot that can be summarised in one sentence. (Lone Wolf discovers trouble afoot in the form of pirate baddie Khadro, does some detective work in taverns, leads an expedition to an island and then through a jungle, does a bit of telepathy to get the lay of the land, then zaps the baddies and destroys the Skull of Agarash which was the source of the evil.)

The standard of the artwork is good, though perhaps a little too perfect – it could have done with some flair – and adds much to what little plot there is. All the baddies are non-human, and all the goodies are tall chaps with long swords and names without the letters 'g' or 'z' in them. You get to see a couple of serving wenches and a girl with a sprog. Aimed fair and square at the young adolescent male market, it's not entirely rubbish, but it's not going to win any awards. I think five pounds is a bit steep though for something which, even if you slow down to admire the pen and ink work, takes no more than a lunch break to read.

Joe Dever & John Grant
The Secret of Kazan-oud
Red Fox, 1994, 288pp, £3.99
Julie Atkin

The sticker on the front proudly proclaims this to be "Lone Wolf 10th Anniversary. 10 Best-selling Years at the Top". At "the Top" of what, one wonders. This one is volume eleven of Joe Dever's *Legends of Lone Wolf*, based on a series of role-playing game books.

For this volume, Dever is joined by John Grant, author of *Albion* and *The World*. The result is an average quest fantasy. Lone Wolf, the hero, is travelling his realm, seeking lost sacred treasures. In this episode, his search is for the Lorestone of Herdos (not incidentally the

Lorestone of Varetta as told in the blurb on the back cover).

The town of Herdos is in the Magiocracy of Dessi, thus supplying plenty of scope for the sorcery side of the equation. Lone Wolf and his female companion Petra furnish the swordplay. There is not much characterisation provided, for either of these lead players, or of the many subsidiary characters who wander into the plot.

Not as safe and predictable as some of its kind, if it provides a bridge for young readers to their first fantasy novels, then I suppose it has a use.

Philip K. Dick
The World Jones Made
HarperCollins, 27/6/94, 192pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Andy Mills

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Earth is recovering from a war of "hard radiation and elaborate diseases". Among the masters is the haunted Jones, who can see events as they affect him in the future (this includes, in quite horrible fashion, his own death); he lives simultaneously in both the present and exactly one year in the future. Jones sees the coming of the drifters, seemingly harmless, huge single-celled creatures which come from the stars, and preaches a crusade against the invaders. In doing so he is opposed by such as Cussick, a world government secret service man dedicated to the preservation of Relativism, which belief grew up out of the desire to prevent the rise of ideologies which could once again lead to war.

This is an early Dick novel which contains many of the themes he would later develop in more highly acclaimed novels: personal breakdown, totalitarianism, predetermination, manipulation, messiahs. One might wish that Dick had explored in greater depth some of the fascinating ideas and characters in the novel (this especially applies to the unsympathetic yet tragic Jones, and the gnomic mutants who are bred for surviving on Venus). But this is a minor cavil; *The World Jones Made* is a challenging and highly entertaining work, which deserves to be a better-known part of the PKD oeuvre than it currently is.

Kate Elliot
Jaran
Pan, 6/5/94, 494pp, £4.99
Andrew Seaman

Kate Elliots' debut novel thrusts its heroine, Tess Soerensen, sister and heir of the man who lead a rebellion against the inscrutable alien occupiers of earth, the Chapalii, into a tale of far-future political intrigue. The Chapalii, with their quasi-Japanese style honorifics and rigid hierarchical society, provide a clear hint as to the structure of the novel which imposes stock SF trappings on a feudal societal framework straight out of genre fantasy fiction. Elliot's intent becomes explicit as Tess flees earth for the planet Rhui, part of her exiled brothers fiefdom, dominated by the Jaran, Slavic-style horse nomads. As a stranger in a strange land she must come to terms with being part of Jaran society, while simultaneously becoming increasingly embroiled in the complex machinations of the aliens, her brother and the rival factions of her adopted people.

The plot and literary scenery may not be terribly original, but the novel is well-written and Elliot's detailed description of Jaran society telling. Through the adventures of its resourceful and likeable heroine *Jaran* presents a complex and believable portrait of societies, both human and alien, in the throes of far-reaching change. From what is on offer here, Elliot may be a name to watch out for in the future.

Christopher Fowler
Darkest Day
Warner Books, 14/4/94, 570pp, £5.99
Graham Andrews

Darkest Day is one of those novels that make a book reviewer feel that life hasn't been so bad to him, after all. I'd bought the 1990 Ballantine edition of Christopher Fowler's *Roofworld*, assigning it a provisional read-date (c. 24th August 2003). My mistake – rectified at the earliest opportunity.

Newsday once called Christopher Fowler a "major new chiller writer" who "takes a chair about halfway between J. G. Ballard and Stephen King" – which the reviewer probably meant to be complimentary. Well, Fowler has always been the equal – at least – of King, while Ballard is really *sui generis* (as all pseuds write when they mean one of a kind.)

There's no future in my plot-outlining *Darkest Day*. The evening, if not life, is too short and *Vector* canna take it, Captain. But I will say that *Darkest Day* is a BIG NOVEL that reaches its natural length and then stops – unlike some / most. More's the pity. "The covers of this book are too close together" (misquoting Ambrose Bierce).

The evil doings begin when Ms Jerry Gates, a vocational receptionist, finds a corpse in the lobby of the Savoy hotel (London, England, European Union). "They did an autopsy on (Max Jacobs) last night and found his innards in a state of complete liquefaction" (p. 93). And "begin' is the operative word: Matchless detectives Arthur Bryant and John May take a hand / see it through / close the case.

It's as though *The Department of Queer Complaints* (Carter Dickson, not Mary Whitehouse) had been written by Gerald (*Night and The City*) H. Kersh: "Much of London still bears the stamp of a vanished empire; its grandeur, its obduracy – and, sometimes, its violence" (p. 22).

London should be listed in the *Dramatis Personae* – but there isn't one. Fowler expects his readership to have longer attention spans than their Niven / Pournelle counterparts. Idle thought: I wonder if he's related to Harry Fowler, the actor who played Sam Weller in the 1954 film version of *Pickwick Papers*?

Maggie Furey
Aurian
Legend, 26/5/94, 611pp, £4.99
Benedict S. Cullum

Press releases containing the words "Epic Fantasy" & / or "Book One of..." invariably announce the commencements of a along haul journey and a decision is required as to whether you wish even to climb aboard. Encouragingly Furey cites amongst her influences C. S. Lewis, Tolkein and Bradbury, but the blurb writer clouds the waters by appealing to fans of David Eddings and Terry Brooks.

Aurian is the heroine and, although it is related from various points of view, the book concerns her quest for the three remaining Artefacts of Power, relics from a time of war and dark sorcery. The Cauldron of Rebirth has already been appropriated by the corrupt Archmage, Miathan, formerly Aurian's confidante and tutor.

For this occasional reader of fantasy there were a disturbing number of weaknesses in the story. Ostensibly for reasons of sexual jealousy, Miathan at one point rescues Aurian and her companions from certain death, whereas prior to this all efforts had involved trying to thwart her. Elsewhere we witness the following: "Breathing underwater... so the legends were true... you couldn't drown a Mage". How would knowledge of this vital capability be lost? Likewise Aurian soon destroys a hitherto invincible age old magic-inhabiting bracelet. And surely the infodump of historical background halfway through the book would have been more suitable as a prologue?

This said, certain of the characters are engagingly drawn (if somewhat stereotyped) and the interaction of mortal, mage, half-breed and various other races is not without interest.

When one considers that even Robert Jordan's superior and altogether more sophisticated *Wheel of Time* series shows signs of flagging at volume five, and with at least two more books in *this* series, I believe that Furey has her work cut out to sustain the pace.

Parke Godwin
Firelord
Avonova, 5/94, 400pp, $5.50
Vikki Lee

Firelord is yet another retelling of the legend of King Arthur. I approached this with trepidation after reading the author's acknowledgements. At the end of these he states "That they didn't all live at the same time is beside the point. Very likely some of them did". It is true that characters such as Vortigern, Ambrosius and Arthur couldn't have all lived to meet each other, but having read the book, this actually is beside the point.

Set presumably somewhere around 500 - 600AD, this is the story of Artorious Uther Pendragon, a young Centurion who works his way up through the ranks and becomes the warrior-king who tried to unite Britain in the wake of Roman occupation. Although most of the Legend's characters are there, Guenevere, Lancelot, Gawain, Morgana, Mordred and Merlin, the flowerier parts of the legend are not. No Excalibur, no Round Table and knights in shining armour, and Camelot is more of a fort than a castle. Merlin appears seemingly only in Arthur's dreams as a sort of shamanistic guide through what, for Arthur and Britain, must be. Arthur has to learn to become a king who answers himself as well as to those who would support and serve him.

Godwin is a gifted storyteller who weaves the Arthurian and Faery legends with the beauty of a Celtic knot. Keeping just enough of the original tales, he deftly tweaks them from time to time, giving the reader a feeling of familiarity rather than predictability.

Firelord is a page-turner, though not, possibly, a book for Arthurian purists. It is based entirely on how life in Britain might have been around the time, and for me ranks highly with similar types of historical fantasy. I would recommend it, particularly to historical fantasy buffs.

Simon R. Green
Down Among The Deadmen
Gollancz, 23/6/94, 221pp, £4.99
Mat Coward

Ten years after the demon wars of *Blue Moon Rising*, Sergeant Duncan MacNeil takes his team of rangers - two fighters and a young witch – to investigate a border fort in the Darkwood on the edge of the Forest Kingdom. After taking delivery of a huge consignment of gold, the fort has fallen silent, the authorities unable to make contact with it by natural or magical means.

The Rangers find the remote place deserted, with evidence that something terrible has happened there. Meanwhile an *ad hoc* band of outlaws is after the gold; but

neither cops nor robbers will survive unless they can first identify and defeat the monster which is awakening beneath the fort's foundations.

Here's a rarity: a sword and sorcery novel; written in grown-up language. Instead of the usual fey, adjective-laden passages of whimsy, Green's writing is sharp, almost plain, the plot carried by dialogue more than description.

Indeed, the dialogue is often closer to an American action film than a traditional fantasy story – "Go ahead. Give it a try. Who knows; you might get lucky" – and there is an air of everyday reality about the small, well-defined list of characters, which sets off the supernatural elements of the book very well.

All the action takes place in and around the fort, and there's plenty of it; although the endless gushing of spooky blood does get a bit repetitive. But it's readable; a superior blend of fantasy and horror.

Barbara Hambly
Sorcerer's Ward
HarperCollins, 25/4/94, 348pp, £4.99
Susan Badham

In this book, which is set in the same world as *The Silent Tower* and *The Silicon Mage*, but does not use the same characters, Barbara Hambly explores the impact of magic on a coherent late-medieval world and the restrictions it imposes on those who practice it. Refreshingly, mages are not all powerful nor are they unconvincingly incorporated in society. Instead their possible influence, given their powers, is carefully worked out and the checks and balances which have evolved against them are detailed. This is particularly important for this story which shows a mage returning back to the family which has rejected her in order to prevent a tragedy.

Barbara Hambly's usual skill in characterisation and description makes this book a richly rewarding read, leading us skilfully into the heart of the family and craft politics that form the background of the story, as well as to the reasons why the main character wanted to leave the society even as we see how it formed her. Gradual revelations lead us deeper into the plot as we realise how the past is influencing the future and how the danger can come from areas we have always taken for granted.

This is a book about individual self-realisation and about the place of the individual within family and society. On these levels it is a good read. However it suffers from the weakness of many of Barbara Hambly's books, that the plot is not very strong. If you aren't content to be led by the narrative and to enjoy the characters and ambience you may not enjoy this book. Although the story of a desperate search, it is lacking in excitement and there is little doubt that the heroine will triumph in the end.

Harry Harrison
Stainless Steel Visions
Legend, 21/4/94, 254 pp, £4.99
Graham Andrews

Stainless Steel Visions (first published by Tor in 1993) is one of those retrospective collections that help Big Name Authors – hereinafter referred to as BNAs – eke out their reclining years. Random examples: *Dinosaur Tales* (Bradbury); *More Than One Universe* (Clarke); *Robot Dreams / Visions* (Asimov); *The Grand Adventure* (Farmer).

Old-timers tend to deprecate such jackdaw volumes, even if they do contain original / uncollected stories as a sweetener. After all, why can't people read / reread *Machineries of Joy* / *Reach For Tomorrow* / *Earth is Room Enough* / *Down in The Black Gang*?

Obvious answer: many people didn't buy these at first publication; perhaps because they were too busy getting born (excuses, excuses...). Even collections by BNAs can take an early bath, thanks to 'new' compilations. And not everybody likes pottering about in second-hand book shops – strange as that might seem.

Moreover, the books mentioned above – and others, far past listing – feature stories that represent their authors at a particular point, often with material selected only because nothing better was then available. Retrotomes (to coin a word) give fresh 'generations' the chance to read old / recent best work by BNAs. Stingy veterans can always scan the new (usually short) bits without buying the book.

Stainless Steel Visions is full of particularly welcome revenants. In order of appearance: 'The Streets of Ashkelon' (*New Worlds*, September 1962); 'Not Me, Not Amos Cabot!' (*New Worlds*, January 1965); 'Rescue Operation' (*Analog*, December 1964); 'Portrait of the Artist' (*F&SF*, November 1963). I envy anyone yet to read these stories – he has many treats in store.

Also rare (in my opinion): 'The Mothballed Spaceship' (*John W. Campbell Memorial Anthology*, 1973), a Deathworld hooley; 'The Repairman' (*Galaxy*, February 1958); 'Roommates' (*The Ruins of Earth*, 1971).

The golden Years of the Stainless Steel Rat' is – as they say – never before published. Slippery Wrinkly Jim diGriz ends up in Terminal Penitentiary ('THROUGH THIS GATE PASS THE ANTIQUATED CRIMINAL CROCKS OF THE GALAXY"), at the mercy of Warden Sukks. But Things Are Not What They Seem – as they also say.

"Writing short stories is good training for the novelist. Among other things, it teaches economy of language. Every word must count in the short story, must be important and essential. Or it must be thrown out. Writers who practice this dictum are Brian Aldiss, Thomas M. Disch, and Robert Sheckley" (Introduction, p. 11).

Harrison should have thrown gentlemanly forbearance to the winds and put himself on that select list. His own stories "... move and sing and captivate" (ibid.)

Stainless Steel Visions is almost, but not quite, *The Best of Harry Harrison* (the sadly out-of-print 1976 Pocket Book justified its title). I'd like to see 'Captain Honario Harpplayer' (*F&SF*, March 1963) in some future Harrison retrotome. N.B. *Galactic Dreams* was published by Tor in April 1994.

Harry Harrison & David Harris
Bill, The Galactic Hero: The Final Incoherent Adventure
Gollancz, 28/4/94, 215pp, £4.99
Joseph Nicholas

There are two immediate responses to this book, inspired by two of the words in the title: yes it is, and by God I hope so.

The original *Bill, The Galactic Hero* was published in 1965, and quickly became recognized as a clever satire of the tales of interstellar derring-do pushed out during the fifties by such writers as Poul Anderson and (particularly) Robert Heinlein. In retrospect, it has also become transformed into an easily pre-emptive critique of the unquestioning military adventurism that was shortly to meet its apotheosis in Vietnam.

There matters rested for twenty-four years, until sequilitis struck. The ostensible purpose of these sequels – including this one, there are six – is to fill the gap between the main story and the coda of *Bill, The Galactic Hero*; but the drawback is trying to found a series on a book written so long ago is the wholly different context in which they will be read. We no longer believe in the possibility of interstellar empires; we know that military intervention cannot resolve deeper-seated political questions; hence we no longer believe in the subject being satirised.

Perhaps the authors recognise as much, for what they offer instead of satire is knockabout slapstick. This book features characters named Captain Kadaffi and General Weissarse, and an enemy called the Eyerackians (whose true identity will become plonkingly obvious if the name is pronounced with an accent borrowed from Dr McCoy). If I laughed, it was at something other than the book.

For anyone still puzzling which if the words in the title inspired my opening two remarks, they are "final" and "incoherent". You can probably work out the order for yourselves.

Tom Holt
Grailblazers
Orbit, 2/6/94, 357pp, £4.99
Martin H. Brice

Hilarious! I laughed out loud! Reviewers' clichés I know, but true.

All the Arthurian ingredients are here: thunderstorms on mountain peaks; sleeping princesses; knights in shining armour; crafty dwarves; timeless magicians; damsels in distress; talking unicorns; Excalibur and the Quest for the Holy Grail.

But the way these ingredients are stirred together makes, not an epic, but a pizza... prepared by the Knights of the Round Table, who are now doing a motor-cycle delivery service.

Reconvened in the 1990s by the reawakened Sir Boamund, the Knights again set out on their Great Quest. They start at the Citizens Advice Bureau and follow the trail through motorway service stations, Atlantis, the Australian outback, and the North Magnetic Pole. En route, they encounter tax machines, Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer and a phantom William Shakespeare, now literally ghost-writing for *Coronation Street*... "Exit Ken Barlow pursued by a bear."

Yet there are also some serious moments, made even more poignant by the humour of the rest of the book.

Dafydd Ab Hugh
Arthur War Lord
AvoNova, 3/94, 300pp, $4.99
Graham Andrews

The use of historical mythology / mythological history in fantastic literature goes back to Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court* (and beyond – but that isn't my immediate concern). L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt well-nigh perfected the form with *The Complete Enchanter* (+ sequels) / *The Land Of Unreason*. De Camp's own-work classic, *Lest Darkness Fall*, is science fiction, not fantasy; despite what *he* says.

Arthur War Lord, by Dafydd Ab Hugh, is the best matter-of-Britain novel to appear in a coon's age (how does a coon live?). It's not in the T. H. White / Mary Stewart / Rosemary Sutcliffe / Henry Treece league. But that isn't a fair comparison – Marion Zimmer Bradley would be nearer the mark.

"A mind-altering blend of Arthurian, Merovingian, Masonic and modern-day spy suspense": Robert Anton Wilson (blurb). The 'Masonic' bit reminds me of James Mason playing Sir Brack in *Prince Val-*

iant; but that's my problem, not yours. I agree with Wilson – apart from the stupid 'mind-altering' bit.

Dafydd Ab ('son of') Hugh has done his Arthurian homework well. YOU ARE THERE, with mind / time-traveller Peter Smythe, in the "— three-story (*sic*) palace of Artus Dux Bellorum, Pan-Draconis, General of the Legions and architect of the Pax Brittanicus" (p.9). But things don't go according to Malory: "Wrong, wrong, wrong, not the cruise I signed up for! Romans, Masons, Queen Quinevere a drug addict? — Arthur, a Roman legionnaire? Campaigns in the Holy Land? — What mad rabbit hole have I fallen down?" (p.55).

Major Peter Smythe is a serving SAS officer who has been sent 1547 years into the past — and into the persona of yer actual Sir Lancelot. He's out to stop Selly Corwin, an IRA volunteer turned time-travelling terrorist: "— she'll murder Arthur or burn down Camelot or whatever she's planning, change history, and all of England will disappear" (p.103).

Let me see, now — is it likely that any self-respecting (?) IRA hallion would use time travel to kill King Arthur? I think not. The average Provo thinks that 'King Arthur' is a pub in Arthur Street, downtown Belfast. the above-average Provo might have seen *Excalibur* — no, *Prince Valiant* (cartoon version). I'd nominate Nicholas Breakspear (Adrian IV, the only English Pope), Oliver Cromwell, William III, Sir Edward Carson and Margaret Thatcher as more realistic targets for getting-retail-ion-in-first than anybody from Camelot.

The dubious historicity of Arthurian Britain can be put aside for the sake of the story. Dafydd's time-travel patter isn't new (the 'Law of Conservation of Reality' gets another airing) but it does the job. More importantly, his insightful analysis of the current Irish 'Troubles' makes a refreshing change from the usual Celtic-twilight balderdash. *Too Long A Sacrifice* and *The White Plague* spring – truthfully – to into the mind.

As for those (mainly American) authors who perpetrate 'retellings' of early Irish myths and legends — well, I'd need a lot more fighting room.

Dafydd deserves full credit for not writing – say – a COMIC-CUT PROVO IN KING ARTHUR'S COURTYARD. The fifth-century scenes are so vivid that I resented being brought back to the *Time-Tunnel*-type efforts at interttemporal rescue / damage limitation. Part II of *Arthur War Lord* appears / appeared in September 1994.

Gwyneth Jones
Flowerdust
Headline, 14/7/94, 312pp, £4.99
Sue Thomason

Flowerdust is set on the Penninsula, in the same south-east Asian future as Jones' earlier novel *Divine Endurance* (Although I don't feel an acquaintance with *Divine Endurance* is necessary to enjoy *Flowerdust*). The eponymous flowerdust is a drug with strange and powerful effects, and the overt plot motivator for most of the book's action (rebel leader Derveet learns that someone is distributing it, and sets off to destroy the drug cache she knows must exist). Derveet is a "failed woman", a childless (therefore presumed sterile) exile from the potent womens' magic of the dapur matriarchy. Her companions in the adventure are the beautiful Prince Atoon, the idealistic and inexperienced Cycler Jhonni Endang, a "surplus male" who, most unusually, has not been castrated to live his life as a "boy", and the two constructed beings Chosen Among the Beautiful and Divine Endurance.

The complex society of the Peninsula is well-realised and very-credible. Much of the book's richness lies in its detailed descriptions of the characters' surroundings, and in their relationships with each other. The ethical and philosophical questions which underlie both personal relationships and political ideologies deepen *Flowerdust* far beyond the average fantasy adventure, but the book never degenerates into a lecture – it is always easily and delightfully readable. I enjoyed it immensely (unlike *Divine Endurance* which I was unable to finish).

Paul Kearney
A Different Kingdom
Gollancz, 9/6/94, 310pp, £4.99
John D Owen

The best way to describe Paul Kearney's *A Different Kingdom*, would be as an Irish Charles De Lint, with harder edges. It has the same modus operandi as a De Lint novel, namely of people stepping out of this world and into another placed just alongside it. In Kearney's case, the 'different kingdom' comes to the appropriately named Michael Fay as a young boy, and haunts him for years until he finally steps through the crossing point and sets out upon a quest to find the castle of the mysterious Horseman, and rescue the soul of his Aunt Rose, which he believes has been stolen by the Horseman.

In the other kingdom, the land is covered in forest, and inhabited by all manner of fey and dangerous creatures, but, unlike the stories of the Sidhe, the time he spends in this other place does not cost him even more time in his home reality: quite the contrary, he can return almost to the very instant he left, so he can have a lifetime of adventure and yet return, as a boy, back to his home and live his life over again.

Around this premise, Kearney has woven a strong tale, full of both wonders and horror, with two excellent central characters in Michael and his love, Cat, a changeling in that other world. A *Different Kingdom* is a good, exciting, cunningly told tale.

Katherine Kerr
A Time of War
HarperCollins, 27/6/94, 485pp, £4.99
Norman Beswick

Suppose (if you can) that you are a typical non-BSFA reader; you like fantasy but lack the encyclopaedic knowledge so typical of fandom. You pick up this in a non-specialist shop, attracted by the splendid picture of a dragon on the cover. At bottom left are the words "Days of Blood and Fire", but mysteriously these are repeated nowhere else. The blurb at the back describes a simple story about a ratcatcher's son who must journey on a quest with an eyeless bard. If you look *very* carefully, you may see on a preliminary page a list of Katherine Kerr's books, including two whose titles begin "A Time of". In capitals on the back cover we do find the words, "the fantasy saga of the decade". But nothing actually warns that this is the middle volume in a longer sequence, that some knowledge of earlier volumes helps explain what happens, that we move on from the ratcatchers some halfway through, and that the volume ends with a cliffhanger. Hrm.

You, of course, are knowledgeable. You know that that Katherine Kerr's Deverry books are well-written, well-planned and plotted, and that this is the latest volume following immediately after ... well, I don't need to tell you. If you like long, multi-volume fantasies in a carefully worked-out world, with appendixes and glossaries: if you put up with comic dwarves and don't mind ladlefuls of dialect like, "Oh my lady, I do be sorry for the disturbing of you": then this is for you. I did boggle at the suddenness of the magic escape on page 429, but I'm probably wrong.

Christopher Kubasik
Earthdawn - Poisoned Memories
ROC, 28/4/94, 313pp, £3.99
Jon Wallace

This, although it doesn't actually say anywhere that I can see, is the second book of the Earthdawn Trilogy. The Earthdawn trilogy is a fantasy, and a strange one at that. *Poisoned Memories* starts with two hideously scarred brothers, Samael and Torran, debating whether to ignore or talk to their father J'role (who scarred them as children). Samael decides to search for him and when he finds J'role, discovers that J'role has a story to tell.

J'role's adventure takes him onto a bleak island in the middle of Death's Sea, into death itself, and back. Along the way he discovers that he is not the monster that he had always thought he was, and he makes the first tentative steps towards reconciliation with his family.

Kubasik's style is meticulous, the things which happen to J'role and the people that he meets are carefully documented, perhaps to the point of dwelling on them a bit too much. But in the end, J'role himself doesn't ring true as a character, and the rest of the cast are just there for him to play his life against, and a backdrop is all they are. This is fantasy reminiscent of Moorcock in the midst of his most prolific period, but without Moorcock's sheer exuberance to carry it off. A miss.

Phillip Mann
A Land Fit For Heroes
Volume 1: Escape To The Wild Wood
Gollancz, 28/4/94, 288pp, £4.99
Alan Fraser

I've always loved alternative history stories, and have been a fan of Phillip Mann's ever since reading *The Eye of The Queen*, so I opened this book with great anticipation. Set in Mann's native Yorkshire, this is a 1993 in which the Roman Empire never left Britain, and now rules almost the whole world. This is, however, a world with a vastly smaller population than ours, and in Britain the Roman settlements are islands in a still thickly forested country, while the native population leads a totally separate way of life in the "wild wood".

Although technology has advanced in some ways even further than in our world, the Empire has changed socially not at all in two thousand years, particularly the Games, which are as bloodthirsty and barbaric as ever, and play a very important role in this story. I'm not convinced that, even in a society as autocratic as depicted here, that the stasis would have been so absolute, as I think the development of the industrial infrastructure required to support this level of technology would have caused considerable social change. However, my misgivings were suspended by the power of Mann's narrative, as he takes his three young protagonists, one Roman aristocrat, and two British Roman Citizens, and sends them out of their fixed Roman world on a journey of discovery into the forest and the parallel "barbarian" society, which turns out to be much more sophisticated

socially, politically and technologically than we or the Romans had thought. I recommend the book to *Vector* readers, and am eager to get my hands on Volume 2, *Stand Alone Stan* (the name of both a standing stone and of a town of dissenters to which our heroes are headed).

Stephen Marley
Shadow Sisters
Legend, 16/6/94, 432pp, £4.99)
Cherith Baldry

A few pages into this book, coming across the graphic description of the ritual slaughter and violation of a small child, I wondered how far Stephen Marley would go. I found out; he demonstrates an obsession with crucifixion and with the degradation and death of women and young girls.

In the seventh century AD, Chia, a demonic being, failing to become Pope, returns to her native China. Accompanied by a group of women whose role model she has become, she battles against the mad monk Crucifer and the degenerate emperor. This plot is simply a peg on which to hang the nastiness.

There are three justifiable reasons for including offensive material in fiction: it is essential to expose evil; it is essential to depict reality; it is part of the book's artistic integrity. The claim that contemplating the horrors in *Shadow Sisters* serves any moral purpose would be pure hypocrisy. No-one expects everyday realism in fantasy, but it should convey the truth of the human condition. *Shadow Sisters* fails in this. As for artistic integrity, the book has none. No power of thought, characterisation or language counter the degradation. The tone veers from pornography to glutinous sentimentality and lamentably unsuccessful attempts at humour.

Unfortunately a review like this will encourage readers to find out what all the fuss is about. To anyone with the slightest claim to sensitivity I would say that the average bargepole is nowhere near long enough. It's a sad reflection on the publisher's estimate of our reading habits that the thing has seen print at all.

Michael Moorcock
Byzantium Endures
Phoenix, 14/4/94, 404pp, £6.99
Carol Ann Green

I am a child of my century and as old as the century.

Thus begins Moorcock's first novel following the adventures of "Colonel Pyat", a Ukranian of Cossack descent. This novel follows Pyat from the beginning of the Twentieth Century when he was born, until the culmination of the Russian Revolution and the bloody civil war that followed.

Moorcock states that the novel is based on papers left to him by Pyat. There is an elaborate introduction telling how Moorcock became acquainted with Pyat, a Russian émigré down on his luck and living in London. He impresses on the reader the difficulties he has had translating Pyat's writings. He even includes a copy of one of Pyat's manuscripts to authenticate his claim.

At the same time, he draws Pyat's tale into his fictional worlds by informing the reader of Pyat's relationship with Mrs Cornelius. Pyat claims to have been Mrs Cornelius' confidante and companion on her travels in her later years.

An intriguing mixture then of history, biography and fiction. The novel works well in the earlier parts, when Pyat is growing up, first under his mother's care in Kiev, and later, under the care of his rich uncle in Odessa. Pyat's father, a Cossack, had been executed during an earlier revolution, thus his mother's abhorrence of anything remotely revolutionary. Pyat himself has no interest in Revolution, preferring the more physical attractions of whores, alcohol and drugs.

The first of the Pyat series of novels, it touches on the decadence that lay at the heart of Tsarist Russia. Moorcock portrays an insightful picture of the place of the middle classes in the run up to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Peter Morwood
Greylady
Legend, 7/7/94, 230pp, £5.99
Peter Morwood
Widowmaker
Legend, 7/7/94, 236pp, £9.99
Lynne Bispham

Having been favourably impressed with Peter Morwood's last three books (*Prince Ivan, Firebird* and *Golden Horde*), I have to admit that *Greylady* and *Widowmaker* were disappointing – but then the *Prince Ivan* trilogy is a hard act to follow, and while these new epic fantasies, the first two books of the *Clan Wars* series, may not be the author's best work, they are still competently written and provide an enjoyable read.

The *Clan Wars* are set in the same world as, but five hundred years earlier than, Morwood's *Horse Lords* series, and tell how the Albans came to conquer Alba or "the Land". At the beginning of *Greylady*, the Albans are a people without a land of their own but with a rigid code of honour. They are mercenaries series of petty Kings. When their latest employer, King Daykin, tears up their contracts, Albanek, Overlord of the Alban Clans, steals Daykin's fleet and sail his entire people westwards to the provinces of Prytenon and Elthan. Lord Gelert of Prytenon is expecting to employ the Albans as mercenaries, but having landed, Albanek declares that they will take and hold the land for their own. Most of the Albans support him, but they are accustomed to obedience and have little choice once Albanek burns the fleet. Among the Albans is Bayrd ar'Talvlyn (ancestor of the *Horse Lord's* Aldric Talvalin), a low-clan warrior who "thinks too much", and is unfortunate enough to have magical powers — unfortunate because Albans regard any such powers with suspicion. *Greylady* tells how Bayrd becomes a high-clan Lord and acquires an Elthanek sorceress, Eskra, for a wife. He also acquires his own lands and fortress in a manner that brings him the enmity of other powerful Alban nobles. Bayrd is a likeable, well-drawn hero, although the characterisation of his fellow Albans appears, as in much epic fantasy, to have taken second place to the action. However, the Alban invasion of Prytenon is convincingly portrayed, with details such as the difficulty of securing provisions for invaders in hostile territory making the novel a well-realised fantasy.

Widowmaker takes up Bayrd's story several years later. By now, Bayrd and Eskra have two children and Bayrd's plans for the refurbishing of his fortress are near completion. Bayrd is, however, beset with difficulties; he still has enemies amongst the other Alban Lords, the heirs of the now deceased Albanek are demanding that he declare his support for their own factions, and while the Albans quarrel amongst themselves, their Prytenek and Elthanek enemies are growing stronger.

In many ways *Greylady* is the scene-setter for *Widowmaker*, introducing the Albans to those who have not read the *Horse Lord* books. *Widowmaker* is more complex than its predecessor, and the use of magic is more to the fore. The *Clan Wars* are not the greatest novels in the genre ever written, but readers who enjoy epic fantasy may well find Alba worth a visit.

Paul Park
Coelestis
HarperCollins, 23/5/94, 261pp, £4.99
Jon Wallace

Civilisation on Earth is in decline. The support to the colonies has been cut off. The colonies too are in trouble, the lack of contact with the homeworld has demoralised the human population, the aliens are getting restless...

Simon Mayaram is a local consular official, who has come into this unstable situation from Earth. Like the other Earthmen, he finds the natives of Coelestis disturbingly humanoid, but when he meets Katharine Styreme he finds her to the most perfect woman he has ever seen. But Katharine is only perfect because of a million dollars worth of surgery and mind-churning chemicals to transform her from alien to human.

Paul Parks shows us a planet where the local economy has been buoyed up by external investment, but which is now declining as contact with the outside disappears. A world where the invaders have tried to create a culture in their own image, and which is now failing rapidly as the native landscape and culture begin to reassert themselves.

According to the cover, Interzone think that "*Coelestis* is a Third World SF novel: it could be the first ever written". It is true that this is a Third World SF novel, but it's a fashionable Third World, almost clichéd. The earthmen are split into suave exploiters and rednecked racists, the natives into "Earthised" toadies and fanatical freedom fighters. Parks lost me here, if we were to point out there, why should we take these values with us, when the fall of the Berlin Wall, free elections in South Africa are pointing to the hope of change in our civilisation? The future, will have it's own problems, which we could be speculating about, why project something like this into the future when it is no longer even a new view of our own world?

That aside, Parks' does innovate when it comes to his fleeting depiction of the relationships between the two native races of Coelestis, their interdependence which was forged by the arrival of the Earthmen, and broken by the drugs of the Earthmen. To me, these fragments show what this novel could have been if Parks had resisted using such clichéd characters.

Steve Perry
Stellar Ranger
Avon Books, 5/94, 211pp, $4.99
John D. Owen

This book is so bad that after you get over wanting to throw it straight into the dustbin, you find yourself fascinated with it, laughing at cliches appropriated from many genres collide in this Sci-Fi (pejorative sense) novel.

Stellar Ranger takes the hoary western plot of the range war, sets it on a frontier world (with Texan scenery, plus larger lizards), mixes in some drug baron nonsense, adds a tall lawman riding into town (on a starship) to sort things out, and then proceeds to rampage around using every B-movie cliche in the book. You could use the plotline in any episode of *The A Team*, or western, or cop movie, or just about any other crap production line programme of the last thirty years.

Perry's added skiffy elements leave a lot to be desired, too. Apart from the fact that most of them seem tired rejects

from James Bond films, his imagination flags occasionally, leaving in bloopers like the CD-ROM jukebox in the town's bar (while using solid state recording devices elsewhere), or the Smith & Wesson handgun the ranger uses. If this piece of trash falls into your lap out of an empty sky, then read it for a laugh: but don't encourage the author by paying money for it – he might write some more!

Michael Scott Rohan
The Gates of Noon
Avon, 5/94, 318pp, $4.99
Steve Jeffrey

This is high adventure fantasy at its most stirring. Scott Rohan takes us back to the twin interpenetrating worlds of the Core and Spiral that were introduced in *Chase the Morning*. The Core is our own day to day world, the Spiral the wider, more colourful world of dreams and archetypes: a realm of heroes and adventurers, gods and demons. Quite which is more real, our own Core, or the magical, intense world of the Spiral, is an open question.

The Gates of Noon, though, stands complete as a story in itself, largely due the effective device of its hero's buried and repressed memories of his previous encounter with the Spiral.

Stephen Fisher is an agent for a shipping company. Rich, successful, he has pursued his career single-mindedly, and a little ruthlessly. When he takes on a seemingly altruistic job for an irrigation project destined for the island of Bali, he finds rather more than government bureaucracy ranged against him. Following an attack by mysterious creatures in a strange part of Bangkok, memories slowly begin to surface: memories of dangers, places and people far outside his normal life.

Slowly and inexorably he is pulled back into the world of the Spiral, as the forces for and against him, and the success of the Project, begin to align. Aided by the strange sorcerer, Ape, who has a destiny of his own waiting him in Bali, he resolves to break the blockade by bringing the shipment in by a series of improbable routes and vessels.

The battle over the Project is fought on a number of levels, within both Spiral and Core. At its heart is a culture clash between East and West and old and new; between the mixed blessings of western technological aid and the priestly *subak* traditions for the control over the water supply that is the lifeblood of the island.

On that level, perhaps, the answer it proposes is a little too pat for a satisfactory resolution of the dilemma. But it's high adventure all the way, and a damn good yarn, told with verve and style. Exhilarating stuff.

Nyx Smith
Shadowrun: Fade to Black
Roc, 30/6/94, 318pp, £3.99
Martyn Taylor

Every reviewer gets books which leave them asking, "why did they bother?" In this case it is obvious. The perpetrators of the *Shadowrun* RPG made Nyx Smith an offer he / she couldn't refuse. The author has turned in a solid piece of hackwork, well written (up to a point) bowling along merrily in its milieu of *Escape from New York* meets *Burning Chrome* with added magic.

Which is exactly why it doesn't work. The setting is second hand. The conniving megaCorporations are third hand at least. The orcs and elves and trolls are exactly like human beings. The protagonist – Rico & Piper & Bandit – are just collections of qualities (and failings) carved from best quality cardboard. They don't ever come alive. So the magic made (most of) 'em all live more or less happily ever after. Who cared? I certainly didn't. Neither did Nyx Smith.

Only when it came to weapons did the writing come alive, and we are talking loving detail which would make Jerry Pournelle blanche. You want pornography of violence? This ghastly piece fits the bill. Nasty, unpleasant, insidious, that it is one of a series about *Shadowrun* explains much about the present state of America, and it isn't good. Burn before reading.

Roger Stern
The Death and Life of Superman
Bantam, 16/5/94, 478pp, £4.99
Graham Andrews

Roger Stern's *The Death and Life of Superman* was adapted from the following DC comic books: *Superman: The Man of Steel* #17-26 (1992-93); *Superman* #73-82 (1992-93); *Adventures of Superman* #496-505 (1992-93); 1993). *Supergirl and Team Luthor* #1 (1993).

Additional material: *Man of Steel* #1-6 (limited series, 1986); *Justice League of America* #69 (1992); *Action Comics* # 650 (1990); *Star-Spangled Comics* #7 (1942).

Writers: Dan Jurgens; Karl Kesel; Jerry Ordway; Louise Simonson; John Byrne; Stern himself. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster get an obligatory nod as co-creators. Acknowledgement is also made to the varied contributions of Julius Schwartz, Gardner F. Fox, Mike Sekowsky, Edmond Hamilton – among others.

All of which should have gone to make up an obviously patchwork noveloid, but Stern welds the whole mad mélange into seamless unity.

Plot? Blurbman to the rescue: "... the story behind the story of the cataclysmic battle with Doomsday ...; of the mysterious Superman sightings in the skies above Metropolis, and of the fate of Clarke Kent, Lois Lane, Ma and Pa Kent (etc., etc.);... the four superbeings who simultaneously appeared ... to usher in the reign of Supermen ...".

Death / Life is probably the best all-reading novel about Supie yet written. (However, I haven't read George Lowther's *Superman*, published by Armed Services Editions during the Hitlerian war).

Whitley Streiber
The Forbidden Zone
NEL, 2/6/94, 390pp, £5.99
Julie Atkin

Whitley Streiber's latest horror novel has its feet firmly in the tradition of scientific experiments that misfire and open a "door that should not be opened". It is reminiscent of Stephen King's novella, *The Mist*, with the same premise of a group of people in a controlled area being attacked by increasingly nightmarish creatures from another dimension.

Streiber's participants are the inhabitants of an insignificant American town, and the narrative focuses on a small group of them. Brian Kelly, a former physicist, gave up work after the death of his wife and daughter. His second wife, Loi Kelly, is a French-Vietnamese refugee, a soldier and "tunnel rat" during the Vietnam war. Now heavily pregnant, she tries to control the under-the-surface friction that exists between herself and Brian's friend Bob, a Vietnam veteran who is the town sheriff. The other major character is a New York reporter who has bought the struggling local paper.

The novel begins with Brian and Loi hearing screams from beneath the Earth, and their dog killing itself in its digging efforts to reach their source. The screaming is followed by strange vibrations, which particularly effect Loi Kelly's pregnancy, and soon the characters encounter a mysterious purple light and strangely aggressive fireflies.

As the weird happening grow more horrific, so the inhabitants of the town dwindle, until we are following the fortunes of a small group. As they fail to stay alive, and attempt to escape the area, the y eventually realize that to stop the horrors they must enter the forbidden zone of the title.

I enjoyed this – although Streiber doesn't have Richard Laymon's gift of making us immediately sympathise with his characters, I was still interested to see who would make it to the last page. An exciting, but undemanding, page-turner, which is at time genuinely scary.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman
Into The Labyrinth (The Death Gate Cycle Book 6)
Bantam, 26/5/94, 440pp, £14.99
Alan Fraser

While reading *The Shining Ones* by David Eddings, I suddenly thought "Why AM I reading this crap?" I concluded that it must be because he has great maps. Well, Weis and Hickman have great maps in their books too (although not in this one), but they also have something else that keeps you reading, though they're never likely to win any literary prizes. The punters certainly like their stuff, in the English-speaking world and beyond. In Switzerland, I was surprised to find a paperback German translation of *Into The Labyrinth*, a month before hardback publication in the UK. The number of W&H fans there must justify the effort of getting a new book to them in their own language even before putting the original out here!

Unfortunately, if you're new to W&H or the *Death Gate* series, here's not the place to start. The first four books of this seven book series which started with *Dragon Wing*, about a universe where the Earth has been split into four enclosed worlds linked by the Death Gate, were to some extent self-contained, so you could read them out of order. However, Book 5, *The Hand Of Chaos*, was very much a direct sequel to Book 4, *The Serpent Mage*, and Book 6 is again a sequel to Book 5, itself ending on a cliff-hanger and sucking you Book 7 to see the series off. Consequently, Book 6 won't make much sense if you haven't read at least one of the previous ones in the series.

Into The Labyrinth continues the adventures of the Patryn wizard Haplo, as he battles through the Labyrinth and beyond, against the evil of the dragon-snakes and the ambition of his own Lord, Xar. Haplo is again accompanied by his dog (effectively a "familiar"), the Sartan Mage Alfred, and Hugh the Hand, the assassin from the air world of Arianus. A new character is introduced in the shape of Marit, Haplo's ex-lover and the mother of his long-lost daughter, who is sent by Xar to find and kill Haplo as a traitor to the Patryn race.

At the time of the sundering of the Earth, the rival Sartan sorcerers condemned their Patryn enemies to imprisonment in a deadly maze enclosing the Nexus of the four worlds, called the Labyrinth and full of vicious foes. Here the Patryns have suffered incredible hardships and few survive to old age. Haplo was rescued from the Labyrinth by Xar, Lord of the Nexus, and this book sees the party cast back there by Xar and the dragon-snakes, now working together. The bad

guys have now learned of "the Seventh Gate", the key to all power in this universe, and it is up to our heroes to escape from the Labyrinth and find it before them.

W&H's invention of the Death Gate universe is a novel setting, matched by the strength of the action plotting and even by the characterisation, not always a strength of "formula fantasy". In fact, it's the latter that makes this series, as the initially cold and detached Haplo, along with Alfred, Hugh and now Marit, have become people we feel for and care about. In conclusion then, a strong continuation of this saga for existing readers; if you start reading the series from *Dragon Wing*, you'll enjoy *Into The Labyrinth* when you finally get to it!

Philip G. Williamson
Moonblood
LEGEND, 16/6/94, 286pp, £4.99
Colin Bird

This book is in Williamson's *Firstworld Chronicles* series, which features Dinbig of Khimmur, merchant-adventurer, Zan-Chassin sorcerer, spy and philanthropist. I haven't read the other books but this sharp, highly readable fantasy tempts me to dip into his other genre efforts. Williamson sets the tale off at a fair clip and doesn't get bogged down in the florid prose beloved of many fantasy writers.

The character of Dinbig is soon established through his initiation into the shamanistic ritualised sorcery called Zan-Chassin and the ardour of his roguish vending. He arrives in Ravenscrag as a baby is born to the ruler, Lord Flarefist and Lady Sheerquine. Dinbig's activities are curtailed when the baby disappears and is replaced by a monster. Dinbig is forced to solve the mystery and find the boy just as Flarefist's teenage daughter, Moonblood, also vanishes. He finds the bane of a long dead magician has foreseen the tragedy and seems to indicate his own doom.

Moonblood employs its fair share of clichés – I could do without the drooling castle idiot who seems to know exactly what is going on all the time. But the mystery strand of the story deepens satisfyingly through the red herrings and heroic deductive reasoning from Dinbig. The unravelling of the bane of Ravenscrag, utilising the intriguing art of Zan-Chassin makes for a diverting few hours of reading.

Philip G. Williamson
Heart of Shadows
LEGEND, 16/6/94, 312pp, £9.99
Andrew Seaman

In *Heart Of Shadows* Philip Williamson returns to the universe of *Firstworld*, a venue already explored in earlier novels like *Dinbig of Khimmur* and *Moonblood*. In the southern desert of Firstworld's continent of Lur, a party of merchants lead by Master Frano Atturio stumble by accident on a mysterious gem of great antiquity the eponymous *Heart Of Shadows*. Joy at the discovery soon turns to terror as the gem's malefic powers become apparent. Two of Frano's employees are brutally murdered and the merchant himself is threatened by Skeletin, a mysterious stranger with an overriding interest in the stone.

However, by now the stone is in the possession of Frano's son, Sildemund, who has been dispatched to the city of Dharsoul to discover the provenance of their find. He is, in turn, pursued against her father's wishes by his fiercely independent sister, Meglan. The arrival of the Heart of Shadows in Dharsoul sets in motion a complex chain of events seemingly connected with the present-day politics of Firstworld, but in reality rooted in events that took place soon after the creation of the universe. Dogged by the evil Skeletin Sildemund and Meglan must face many adventures and perils, though they are aided by the timely arrival of Ronbas Dinbig, the *Zan-Chassin* sorcerer familiar from Williamson's previous Firstworld novels.

Once again, Williamson demonstrates his ability to create something fresh and interesting out as well-drawn and sympathetic characters and a convincing description of everyday life. The religion and myth so integral to the novel is, by and large, unobtrusively integrated into the storyline, serving to flesh out what details we already know about the universe of Firstworld. Williamson's writing is, as ever, more than competent and he paces the novels with impressive skill to create a real sense of tension. *Heart of Shadows* like its predecessor *Moonblood*, may not be vastly ambitious, but as a rattlingly-good read may be (if you'll excuse the pun) heartily recommended.

Dave Wolverton
Star Wars: The Courtship of Princess Leia
Bantam, 30/6/94, 327pp, £9.99
Andy Mills

Princess Leia is being courted by Prince Isolder of the wealthy and powerful Hapan cluster. We know Isolder must be a prince even before he is introduced:

"His deep-set eyes were a dark blue-gray, like the color of the sea on the horizon, and promised wit, humor, wisdom; his powerful shoulders and firm jawline were strong. Han realised this must be some high dignitary from the royal house of Hapes itself."

You'll be pleased to learn that stereotyping doesn't permeate the entire cast; after all, Princess Leia is a republican and a pacifist (watch the body-count...) Anyway, back to the story. Leia has to choose between Isolder (and hence an alliance which would benefit the New Republic) and Han Solo. Solo spirits Leia off to the planet Dathomir, which he happens to have won in a card game, to which Luke Skywalker also has to go to find the lost Jedi records, and where the evil Nightsisters and Warlord Zsinj are plotting to rule the galaxy. What a coincidence!

Will Leia choose Isolder instead of Han? Will the baddies win? Will a stormtrooper actually hit anyone? No prizes for guessing...

What puzzles me about this book is who its target audience is. I'd have said the younger teenager, but *Star Wars* the movie is seventeen years old, and fun though it was then, I can't imagine the video version having the same impact on today's youth. So I suppose it's aimed – like *Star Trek* spin-offs – at loyal, and adult, fans from days gone by. Well, if you're one of those *Star Wars* devotees, you might enjoy this inconsequential tosh. If not, you're hardly likely to buy it anyway, are you?

Roger Zelazny
A Night in The Lonesome October
Orbit, 19/5/94, 280pp, £4.99
Andrew Seaman

Snuff, the canine familiar of Jack the Ripper, narrates this essentially light-hearted tale of occult murder, mayhem and magic in a sketchily-realized Victorian London. In the month leading up to the night of the full moon on Halloween, sundry historical and literary characters and their animal familiars compete to assemble the requisite objects needed to take part in a magical contest of wills which will determine whether the Lovecraftian Elder Gods will return to this world.

Though slight, the story makes pleasurable reading. Zelazny's authorial presence as he chronicles the attendant skullduggery is as witty and engaging as ever, and the novel rattles along at a pace guaranteed to keep you turning the pages until the final confrontation between the rival groups of "openers" and "closers". All in all, a pleasing book, graced by some idiosyncratic illustrations from the twisted mind of cartoonist Gahan Wilson.

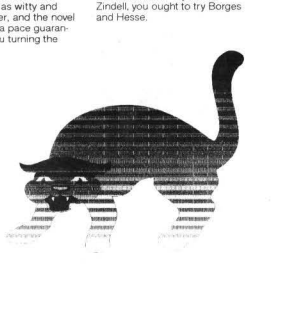
David Zindell
The Broken God
HarperCollins, 23/5/94, 862pp, £5.99
L. J. Hurst

Neverness was a book on its own. David Zindell has now begun a trilogy set in the city that appeared on that first book. It threatens to be one of the longest trilogies for some time.

Essentially, it is a rites of passage novel, describing the life of Danlo The Wild, from his childhood in a tribe of Neanderthals who live like Inuit, through his journey to the city when the tribe all die (their brains running out of their ears) – though not before his grandfather has had time to scarify his body, his being received by one of the benevolent giant aliens who reside in the city, education and entry into the long apprenticeship of the Guild of Pilots, and discovery that his father has sailed off into the distant stars become a god.

Like most rites of passage novels, this is no ordinary passage. In its way, you know much of what is going to happen – Tom Brown had Flashman, Danlo will have Pedar. Danlo spends a lot of time considering the rights and wrongs of life – even though on entry to the city he has undergone education downloading directly into the brain, still he judges a lot by the Neanderthals' standards, especially taboo, which he calls Shaida, as if he learn little about life after his upbringing in the ice cave.

This is very much a composite novel – I would say its biggest debt is to Hermen Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* and another big influence is the stories of Jorge Luis Borges (who is quoted unacknowledged). In other words, this is a popularisation of literary fantasy. If you like Hess, Zindell is not so different. If you like Zindell, you ought to try Borges and Hesse.



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Vector

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