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- Stephen Baxter on H G Wells
- Insight into Rave
- Reviews

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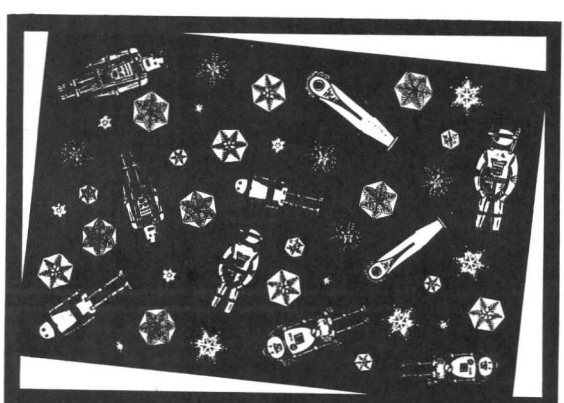

SEASONS GREETINGS

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Channel 4's 'Equinox science programme has long been a source of interesting watching, but the current season has excelled most others. One programme stood out recently

In 'Rave New World' the experience of rave music and the synthetic drug ecstasy was explored; a fascinating programme, this, helped along by the almost doomy tones of ex-Dr Who Tom Baker. Starting off with a resume of what rave music is exactly, it immediately drew the link between this stripped down music, the drug, and the computer technology that seems to accompany every cultural movement these days. Ecstasy was in fact discovered in 1911 (I had a mental image of staid Edwardians partying to the sounds of Stravinsky then chilling out with Webern, all beneath the multi-coloured canvasses of Picasso and Van Gogh...) but lay unexplored as a chemical until 1985. Unusually, this drug, by allowing brain neurons to produce cascades of the neurotransmitter serotonin — linked with empathic feelings — brings people together. Yet alongside the descriptions of great happiness came more sinister phrases, and soon it became clear that a kind of shrugging off of the capacity for thought was being produced by the drug and the rave atmosphere, much as was produced by tribal shaman and war-drunk berserkers. descriptions of losing the self, being blown away, getting lost in the pounding rhythm, letting the rhythms take over, making people lose control; all these are the metaphors of escaping the burdens of having to make choices in conscious life. It is for precisely this reason that rave music is content free: that is, with neither lyrics or melody — a unique and extraordinary development in Western pop music — there is no requirement for the listener to understand it. It exists purely as a rhythm overlaid with fragments of timbre and pitch.

This development is interesting enough, but the skulking existence of computer technology behind the techno scene makes it all the more chilling. Symptomatic of the music — rave, techno, even ambient to a certain extent — is a new anonymity that seems to me to be derived from the use of computers, for computer music composition neatly avoids the need to create melody and meaning. The new anonymity — it is uncool to be a 'character' in the new music — mirrors the facelessness of micro-technology, mirroring at the same time the lack of content, of meaning, that characterises rave music in particular. As one familiar with hi-tech music composition systems, I can vouch for the fact that, first of all, it is incredibly easy to produce a piece of music; but secondly, and more importantly, the very nature of computer systems forces the composer to think in terms of loops, blocks and fragments, for these are the main tools used. It is quite difficult to compose melodic songs on a computer because these systems force you to think non-holistically. Characteristic of rave music is its fragmented nature; small sections of rhythm and pitch that repeat simply, then vanish to be

Insight Award for Ravery by Steve Palmer

overtaken by another small section. These sections, as anybody who has been to a techno club or a rave will agree, can go on for hours on end, and this extension in time is another facet of the use of computers, since with gigabytes of memory available, and no need for meaning, no limit in time is required.

This content-free, repetitive nature was compared by the programme to the effects of the drug. Ecstasy encourages simple repetitive behaviour; this has been proven. but oddly enough experiments have been done that, though admittedly not featuring rigorous scientific restraints, show that taking ecstasy is not required to experience the highs and the happiness of the rave atmosphere. What is most important is that the raver keep going. Occasional raving, even with the use of ecstasy, is not enough to achieve the full effects.

Having raved, it was inevitable, given the action-and-reaction nature of popular culture, that clubbers chill out, hence the appearance of ambient music. Interestingly. ambient music can be both content-free and meaningless – swathes of synthesised sound – or deeply meaningful. Again, created in a cultural atmosphere of anonymous computers, much ambient music is faceless, produced by people who hide behind hi-tech names or even numbers (recently an ambient CD appeared with tracks titled after their length in digits; another had titles consisting of colour shades; while the first two Orbital albums had no title at all). The explosion of compilation albums, both of techno and ambient music is a symptom of this repression of the human character in favour of a particular sound or other form of category, for with compilation albums there is no need for an overall feeling, or creator: these fragmented albums mirror the fragmented music.

I personally find nineties popular culture quite frightening. It seems to me that the culture of the computer – of technology – is reducing human beings and their creations by a process of mathematical computation. we are being humanly creative in an ever more computational way, and this produces certain symptoms: coldness and lack of identity; fragmentation; emotional distance or even no emotional content at all; an inability to connect.

I wonder too whether the iconography of space travel, used by so many techno and ambient creators, is symptomatic of an unconscious 'escape' from Earth. the infinite cold starscapes epitomise computer music far better than anything produced, with sweat and dirt, by our planet. In space, you can float free forever and never meet anybody. there is no human content, no human meaning, in space since it is too large, whereas on Earth there is always the danger of having to become involved with others...

But there are some people recoiling from this popular computer culture. In America, the old sixties spirit is being revived, but this time via technology. Attempts are being made to recognise the dangers of submersing human culture in mathematics and perfectly sharp images and music. The new hippies – zippies, they are called – like to do silly things such as burn neon effigies of the Wicker Man and broadcast the results live over the InterNet; but this attempt to bring together the old and human with the new and inhuman is only a start (and a rather contrived start at that). Soon, in popular culture, there will be a new liberal reaction to the challenge of the computer. What it will be – how it will manifest itself – I do not know, but it will arrive, Popular culture mutates on an action-and-reaction principle, and often its effects seep into Western culture as a whole. The question is, can the liberal symptoms of the human being overcome the reactionary symptoms epitomised, at this time in history, by the icy grip of computer technology.

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Lightimg the Future

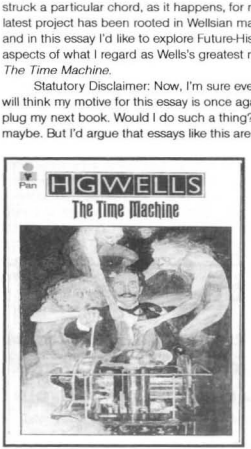
The Future History of Wells's The Time Machine

by Stephen Baxter

"To me the future is still black and blank – is a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of [the Time Traveller's] story..." HG Wells, *The Time Machine*, 1895.

I was intrigued – and flattered – by KV Bailey's response (in Front Line Dispatches, *Vector* 180) to my survey, in *Vector* 179, of the Future History sub-genre. KV Bailey's extensive remarks about Wells struck a particular chord, as it happens, for my own latest project has been rooted in Wellsian material; and in this essay I'd like to explore Future-Historical aspects of what I regard as Wells's greatest novel: *The Time Machine*.

Statutory Disclaimer: Now, I'm sure everyone will think my motive for this essay is once again to plug my next book. Would I do such a thing? Well... maybe. But I'd argue that essays like this are dispatches from my own 'front line', which is the material from within the genre and beyond I've been researching for my various current projects, and as a result the odd mention of my next book (to be called *The Time Ships*, incidentally, available in hardback from HarperCollins in April 1995, ISBN 0 00 224026 2, a snip at £15.99) may inevitably slip in...



The Time Machine remains a wholly remarkable book.

It was Wells's first novel, serialised during 1894 and appearing in book form in 1895 – 100 years ago – and it was immediately hailed as a work of genius. The book contains a prescient scientific premise, the disturbing and complex myth of Eloi and Morlock, and a startling vision of mankind's far-future decay – and all of this carried by a central human plot that is elemental and compelling.

At the end of the book the Time Traveller makes a second journey into time. But he never returns! – And Wells was never to tell us what became of him, or show us any more of the Eloi-Morlock universe.

To have such a glimpse of a possible Future History – and to have it closed off again, to remain "a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places" – is, of course, infuriating. And, like many readers, I've always longed to know what finally became of the Time Traveller. Now, unable to stand it any longer, I've written my own sequel to Wells's novel.

This isn't the first such sequel-by-other-hands (to use David Pringle's term) – or, indeed, prequel. What is there in *The Time Machine* that has impelled so many writers to revisit its implied Future History? And – what did happen to the Time Traveller?

A search for further glimpses of the Time Machine universe in Wells's other writings is of little help.

Early Time Machine drafts, such as *The Chronic Argonauts* (1888), featured a mad inventor called Dr Moses Nebogipfel, who seems to bear little relation to the Traveller of the final novel. (Wells never names his Traveller, incidentally; he was called 'George' in the 1960 film, perhaps after Wells himself.) In fragments published in the serialised form but not the novel, we are given more glimpses of the Traveller's first adventure. He visits the thirteenth millennium, for example, and makes an additional stop-over on his way to the end of the world, where he sees a rather pathetic kangaroo-like creature being preyed on by an immense centipede – there are hints that this is a further step in the devolution of Morlock and Eloi. But there is nothing of the second journey.

So there were no Wells sequels. But as KV Bailey notes, Wells did initiate what we might regard as a loose Future History in "A Story of the Days to Come" (1897) – a novella closely linked to his later dystopian novel *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899, revised 1910). In "Days to Come" we visit a near-future London transformed into an immense crystalline arcology. The upper levels are full of light and leisure, but the lower and underground levels are inhabited by blue-uniformed proles (prefiguring Orwell). And, as KV Bailey notes again, "A Dream of Armageddon" (1903) could be regarded as a glum vision of another corner of the same Future History.

But though there are clear thematic links between the world of "Days to Come" and *The Time Machine* – so that we could, with a little imagination, regard the London-arcology world as set in a Time Machine Future History, depicting a near-future intermediate stage in the development of the Morlock-Eloi duality – there seems no hint that Wells had such an explicit integration in mind.

So we have to rely on the works of other hands to give us further tentative glimpses of how Wells's Time Machine universe – even if, if I adhere strictly to my own definition of a History as being by a single hand, such works can never fully qualify as Future Histories in their own right.

As I noted in my first essay, one of the most enjoyable Wells homages was supplied by Christopher Priest. *The Space Machine* (1976) is a direct prequel to *The Time Machine*. Young commercial traveller Edward Turnbull visits the Time Traveller before the first voyage of the Machine, and rides it – together with Miss Amelia Fitzgibbons, the Traveller's amanuensis – across Space, to the hostile Mars of *The War of the Worlds*. We encounter a young Herbert George Wells, who constructs a flying bedstead from Time-Machine fragments and uses it to fight the Martian invaders. (Priest's Traveller, incidentally, rejoices in the moniker of Sir William Reynolds – my pick as the most right of Traveller names.)

As far as I can tell *The Space Machine* dovetails completely with the plots of both *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*, thus spinning a consistent near-Future History which contains the material of both books, and as such it is a delight for the fan – although the tone of Priest's prose perhaps does not quite match Wells's remarkably modern, matter-of-fact style. The book is gently nostalgic, and Priest devotes some attention to the preoccupations and prejudices of Wells's day – for example, parallels are drawn between the Martians' handling of their humanoid countrymen and Victorian Britain's colonial policy...

Yes, yes. But what happens to the Traveller?

Well, by the time Edward and Amelia return to Earth they have missed him: He went into futurity on that infernal Time Machine of his, and although he returned once he has not beenseen since his second journey. (*The Space Machine*, Chapter 20.)

Aargh!

So much for prequels. What about sequels?

The first sequel-by-another-hand to *The Time Machine* seems to have been by an anonymous "Disciple" (of Wells) who, in 1900, used the Time Machine to explore *The Coming Era, or Leeds Beatified*. (Leeds??) And the most recent sequel (before my own effort) seems to have been *The Man Who Loved Morlocks* by David Lake (1981) in which the Time Traveller is unable to return to the era of Morlock and Eloi, and moves further into the future where he finds a different, more vigorous society. Frustratingly, I've not been able to find a copy of Lake's book; according to the critics the work moves well, but his main concern is a fairly deep critique of Wells' preoccupations and perceptions.

Rather more fun than the Lake, probably, but a lot more superficial, is *Morlock Night* by KW Jeter (1979). 1890s London disappears into a sort of fog, and it emerges that not only are the Morlocks using the captured Time Machine to invade Victorian England, but time travelling is generating a Universe-threatening causal collapse.

A promising opening – but unfortunately, by page 40, we learn that only a reincarnated King Arthur can fight the Morlocks and save England, and

much of the rest of the book is occupied by a quest for clones of Excalibur created by the paradoxes of time travel. There are pleasant moments, and there are odd glimpses of the Morlock-Eloi Future History (such as the existence of highly intelligent 'Morlock Generals'), but the book is fatally let down, for me, by its essentially silly Arthurian central premise, and by its lazy handling of Wells's material and style.

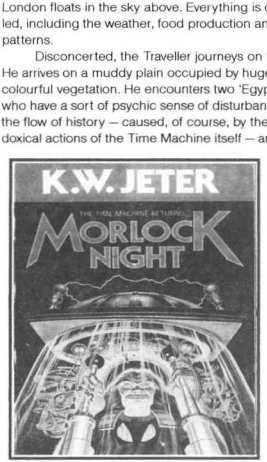
Interestingly this book has become famous as a prototype steampunk novel. It's odd to think that such a slim work can have had such influence!

And what of the Traveller? He is soon dismissed. The Morlock generals... are waiting for him the next time... and [his] bones are tossed into an open grave millions of years removed from the day of his birth! So says Merlin, in Chapter 1; and so much for *Morlock Night*.

Perhaps the most interesting, if oddest, of all the sequels is Egon Friedell's *Die Reise mit die Zeitmaschine* (*TheReturn of the Time Machine*) (1946). Friedell was a Viennese litterateur and dramatist who produced sweeping philosophical and historical studies, which vaguely paralleled some of Wells's output. *Die Reise* was first published in 1946, under a US Army occupation license, and in English by Donald Wollheim in 1972.

The book has a narrative frame reminiscent of the original, as the 'quiet, shy man with a beard' of the Traveller's dinner party provides Friedell with an account of the second journey into time. The Traveller (named as a Mr James Morton) travels forward to 1995. He finds himself on a glassy plain; the city of London floats in the sky above. Everything is controlled, including the weather, food production and sleep patterns.

Disconcerted, the Traveller journeys on to 2123. He arrives on a muddy plain occupied by huge and colourful vegetation. He encounters two 'Egyptians', who have a sort of psychic sense of disturbances in the flow of history – caused, of course, by the paradoxical actions of the Time Machine itself – and, with much double-talk, the Egyptians explain that the Eloi-Morlock world is so remote that the Traveller could not have reached it through time travel, and so his vision must have been of a parallel reality: that is, Friedell is positing a sort of Future super-History containing many possible reality versions.



The Time Traveller now resolves to penetrate the past, but when he attempts to do so, he is suspended in a single 'Groundhog Day'... until the Time Machine is invented! At last, disillusioned, he returns to his own time and sets off on a final journey: a honeymoon, with a girl of the near future.

The book is not easy to read. There is no plot and little action; essentially the Traveller meets a series of cicerones who are conveniently able to deliver the dirt on the nature of their worlds immediately. A greater contrast to Wells's own careful unravelling of his future visions is hard to imagine. Friedell's main preoccupation is to explore Wells's scientific conceit, but he throws out his extrapolations and paradoxes as dazzling suggestions, rather than use them to construct genuine fiction.

But Die Reise remains, nevertheless, an interesting and thought-provoking read, particularly in its exploration of the Future-Historical aspects of the original.

Many enigmas surround this little work. It is not clear when Friedell wrote it: perhaps as early as the 1920s. Although the book opens with a spoof correspondence between Friedell and Wells – with Friedell demanding a sequel! – it isn't clear, sadly, whether Wells himself ever heard of thebook.

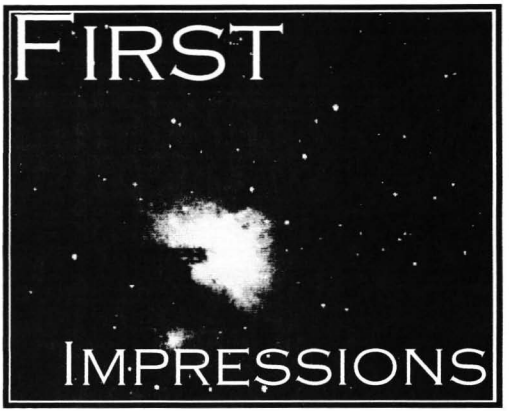
In 1938, after Austria was seized by the Nazis, Friedell – who had Jewish ancestry – committed suicide.

When I began to research my own sequel, my starting-point was Wells's science, and the glimpses he had given us of an intriguing Future History. But as I read on, like Priest and Lake, I grew more interested in the deeper layers of Wells's story – the politics, the preoccupations of Wells's time, what the book tells us about Wells's own inner state – and how they might be reevaluated in the light of another century of human experience.

But, in the end, after I had gone through all this, I came back to the central, engaging figure of the Time Traveller himself.

Perhaps the vigour and appeal of the Traveller character is one of the more underrated aspects of Wells's novel. The Traveller is cheerful, bourgeois, immensely likeable, and often absurd. He tends to think with his fists: an irresistible Captain Kirk for the 1890s. We want a sequel sobadly because we care so much about the Traveller.

And so, in the end, I was drawn to my own exploration of Wells's implied Future History by a need to answer that century-old reader's plea: whatever happened to the Time Traveller?



Reviews of Hardbacks and Paperback Originals edited by Catie Cary

Brian Aldiss
Somewhere East of Life
Flamingo, 1994, 391pp, £15.99
Cherith Baldry

On the title page of this novel, Brian Aldiss defines it as "Another European Fantasia"; it is the fourth in the sequence of novels which began with *Life in the West*.

The science fictional elements of the novel are unobtrusive; its future setting is intentionally close to the present day, both in time and social values. This does not mean that it fails to be science fiction at all, since these elements are essential to both the plot and the theme. Aldiss has invented the technique of e-mnemonicvision, by which someone's memory can be removed, edited and then sold as a 'bullet', either for instruction or entertainment, or — depending on the content of the bullet — as pornography.

Roy Burnell, an architectural historian, has ten years of his memory stolen. Since these ten years include his marriage, he is appalled to think of his intimacies with his wife being available for voyeurs, and he also becomes obsessed with the idea of finding a copy of the bullet so that he can recover his own memory and discover why his marriage broke up.

Burnell's work for World Antiquities and Cultural Heritage involves visiting and recording buildings — principally sacred buildings — which are at risk, and once the disorientation of his memory loss is over, he takes on two separate assignments to different areas of what was once the Soviet Union, now divided into independent states where the rule of law is unstable. His reasons for going are partly to find his bullet, partly because as he himself confesses he likes "the scruffy places". His encounters there are less important for advancing the plot than for exploring the novel's theme.

The idea of memory is central to the novel. When some memories can be excised and others implanted, reality itself is called into question. How does it affect the personality to lose a key memory, perhaps a memory of grief? What reliance can be placed on experience when the incident may not have happened, or not to the person who claims it?

Burnell's work itself, the recording of a building it may not be possible or worthwhile to preserve, may be valueless. Significantly, in one key sequence, he loses his cameras; what he records his purely dependant on his own perceptions. And those perceptions themselves are flawed, by Burnell's mild drug habit, but also by the inescapable fact that what he sees and feels is subjective, enmeshed in his own personality.

This failure to find certainty in human beings is set against the eternal truths of religion. Burnell's work in churches, which he would like to see simply as aesthetic objects, creates a tension, in the character and the book, between the reality of God (if He exists) and Burnell's professed atheism. there are times at which he may have undergone a religious experience. yet this too is called into question by being filtered through his personality.

Throughout the novel I felt a sense of decay and dissolution. Most obviously a decay in the physical surroundings, appearing equally in Burnell's journeys to Easter Europe, and in his own home when he returns to it. Besides this, there is a decay in personalities, most obviously in Burnell himself, in his fears of disintegration after the loss of ten years of his memory. As a contrast to this gradual dissolution are incidents of shocking violence, in England as well as in the war zones; nothing is secure.

The novel seemed to me to have an eighteenth century flavour in its style and structure. Burnell's journeyings and strange encounters are reminiscent of the picaresque, or even of the *conte philosophique*. Burnell is no Candide, but the excision of his memory, leaving his childhood as the most vivid part of his past, gives him a kind of naive quality, a fresh way of looking at the world. He is certainly on a voyage of discovery, in more senses than one, and the end of his searching, as often within this convention, takes him back to the beginning.

The prose style is lucid, highly descriptive, and witty. A complex and intellectual passage will be interrupted and enlivened by a sudden colloquialism or unexpected word. the speaking voices of the characters are individual and energetic. And in case I've made the book sound too rarefied, it's necessary to say that it is also, in character, incident and style, extremely funny.

There are strands in *Somewhere East of Life* which reach out to other books in the sequence, yet it stands on its own terms as a separate novel, not just a part of the whole. I found it a complex, demanding, and satisfying book.

Poppy Z Brite
Drawing Blood
Penguin 1994, 373 pages, £5.99
Steve Jeffery

This is very recognisably a Poppy Brite novel and a sort of sequel to *Lost Souls*.

It is set, again, between the exotic French Quarter of New Orleans and the small South Carolina town of Missing Mile. And, again, everything seems to be overgrown by the ubiquitous kudzu. This time, however, there are no Charteuse-swigging vampires, and it is the music of Charlie Parker rather than Bahaus and The Cure that forms the aural backdrop to the novel.

The novel opens in prologue through the eyes of Trevor, five year old son of a failing, alcoholic artist. Trevor idolises his father both for the sound of his jazz records and his comic strip, Birdland. As his father's talent wastes away in alcoholic despair, Trevor finds his own artistic gift, and comes to fear his father's frequent drunken bouts of resentment and depression.

Shortly after the family settle in Missing Mile, his father cracks, leaving Trevor as the terrified sole survivor of a bloody family slaughter.

Twenty years later, Trevor has inherited his father's talent, a head full of nightmares, and a complete hatred of alcohol, and finds himself drawn back to Missing Mile and the 'murder house'.

In New Orleans, Zachary Bosch has taken his skill at hacking too far and finds a warning message on his terminal. He loads his car and flees, randomly northward. Right into South Carolina and the nowhere town of Missing Mile.

After a patchy start (are five year olds *that* precocious?) and the improbability that these two will eventually encounter each other in a small one-horse town in the middle of nowhere, *Drawing Blood* picks up speed and strength. Brite is an unashamed romantic, and has an almost Pre-Raphaelite fascination for beautiful and tragic boys. Both guarded and mistrustful at first, Trev and Zach soon become entangled in each other's lives, and then bodies.

Both bring their own danger to the relationship. Zach has the FBI on his tail, but what stalks Trevor through the blood-soaked fabric of the house is of a different, and deadlier, order than Feds in sharp suits and mirrorshades. Zach brings things to a crisis when he scores a handful of mushrooms at the club, and Trevor decides the time has come to enter his father's nightmare realm and confront what he spent most of his life running away from. Tripping with a head full of bad dreams in haunted house might not seem the most sensible thing to do. Trev and Zach find themselves thrown back into the worst moments of their pasts, as the house comes alive in a murderous parody of Birdland.

While the gothic vampire chic of *Lost Souls* looked set to establish Brite as a cult author, *Drawing Blood* shows she can write with considerable power and evoke a strong sense of menace and horror. She is still hung up on romantic attachments between beautiful, androgynous boys, while her female characters are either victims or left on the sidelines in the face of true, boyish love. Maybe her next novel will show that she can also write strong female roles.

If she can bring it all together, and avoid typecasting herself as a goth horror author, then her next novel promises to be extremely good.

Jonathan Carroll
From the Teeth of Angels
Harper Collins, 1994, 223pp, £14.99
Mark Plummer

You might, if you were so inclined, waste several hours trying to impose genre classification on the fictions of Jonathan Carroll. You might classify some or all of his works as fantasy (of the pure or dark variety), perhaps magic realism, science fiction even. You might, like the blurb writer for this novel, view Carroll as "the most original, literate, compelling and sophisticated voice in contemporary horror". You might simply choose to group his work under a new sub-genre — Jonathan Carroll Novels — in the belief that their is something unclassifiable about his books. Ultimately, of course, it doesn't really matter. Jonathan Carroll writes books, damn good ones generally. Somehow this latest volume fails to live up to expectations.

Jesse Chapman writes to his sister, Sophie, of a holiday encounter in Sardinia. There he met Ian McGann, who dreams of meetings with Death in the guise of an old acquaintance. Death will answer his questions, but if he fails to understand the answers he must pay a penalty. In some respects this could be shaping up to be a straight horror novel.

Arlen ford is a Hollywood actress. After a few early, successful films, her career gets into a rut. She needs to get away and, as this is a Jonathan Carroll novel, it comes as no surprise that she chooses to flee to Vienna. Indeed the city acts as a magnet for the characters in the novel. When Jesse disappears from his (Viennese) home, Sophie travels to Austria with her friend Wyatt Leonard to hunt for her missing brother.

Characters familiar from earlier novels appear here and there: the Easterlings (*Sleeping in Flame*), Weber Gregston (*A Child Across the Sky*) and, all things considered, this seems to have all the ingredients of The Jonathan Carroll Novel.

Yet this novel seems less successful than Carroll's other works. For some reason the characters fail to engage, lack the quirk charm and general weirdness we've come to expect. And maybe this is where the problem lies — in the expectation. There is much common ground with the previous, related novels, yet this is not a rerun of *Bones of the Moon* or *After the Silence*. Carroll's previous novels have had a common feel, a feel that many believe places them in a category of their own. This book only contains occasional flashes of that familiar voice, most recognisable in the letters and tapes that pass from Arlen Ford to Rose, her friend and PA. The jacket blurb claims that this book "goes further and deeper than any of the author's previous work" and maybe this is so, if nothing else the novel has a satisfactory conclusion, something that was often felt to be missing from earlier works. If indeed Jonathan Carroll "defies neat classification" (*Sunday Times* review of *After the Silence*), then perhaps this is the book that seeks to defy the classification of Jonathan Carroll Novel. It seems to have been less than entirely successful but maybe it needs to be approached with an open mind.

C J Cherryh
Foreigner
Legend, 1994, 378pp, £9.99 tpb
K V Bailey

Described as "a novel of first contact", its title is judiciously chosen. Avoiding the already too many 'Alien's, it neatly signifies that its human protagonist is the alien introduced into the ways of a planetary culture which to those born into them are the norm. Accordingly, the word 'foreigner' conveys the xenophobia which such a civilisation as the Japanese experienced when European mores and technologies first impacted. Cherryh's indigenes, the atevi, are not modelled on ancient Japan, but there are certain near equivalences suggested by codes of duty, honorific addresses etcetera. Moreover, many traditional ways are destabilised or transformed as the stevi build on more advanced technologies gradually being made available to them.

The story starts in the vein of a typical Cherryh prospector-ship gravity-well novel, but its explorations soon go awry, the ship unaccountably space-slipping to some galactically remote sun-system where, lost, it orbits a habitable/inhabited planet. Opinion is divided on what to do. In the event, the ship goes searching for virgin worlds leaving a station in orbit, from this there is emigration to the stevi world. Time passes, war follows, ended by a treaty, the 'foreigners' being settled in a country-sized island off-shore the global continent, their tradings of know-how (towards developing space potential) brokered by a lone diplomat (Cherryh's protagonist) posted at the atevi capital.

Atevi civil and hierarchical stability is ordered by a complexity of feudings and contract assassinations. the diplomat-interpreter, Bren, finds himself half-exiled, half protected, in a backwoods 'gothic' fortress where manoeuvrings for possession of his person and his computer files are enacted by contending factions. Finally, after mayhem, torture and escape, he is instrumental in determining future accord between his own people, those of the newly returned ship, and the atevi — they now on the verge of space flight.

Greg Egan
Permutation City
Millenium, 1994, pp.310, £14.99
Maureen Speller

Three hundred years ago, Jonathan Swift recognised the futility of man's desire for immortality when he described the Struldbrugs in *Gulliver's Travels*. Condemned to everlasting life, they did not remain youthful but instead dwindled away in an existence made meaningless by the loss of their faculties and the inability to communicate.

Man has never lost his fascination with that dream of immortality. Reconstructive surgery, vitamin supplements, exercise programmes, cryogenic preservation; all play a part in promoting the dream of everlasting life. As computers come to dominate our lives, it is not unreasonable to believe that n the future, the human mind might be scanned into a computer and the essence of a person, the memory and identity, would be preserved intact. Thus, the problems inherent in Swift's gloomy view would be avoided and the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy could be taken to its logical conclusion. These scanned humans might even live lives which seem identical to those of their human counterparts. They might seem to eat, drink, excrete and make love in the same way as any true human but the vicissitudes of humanity would not befall them.

This is the supposition on which Greg Egan's *Permutation City* is founded. 'Copies', of course, are for rich people. You need to be rich to afford the computer power to carry out the complex recalculations of existence, millisecond by millisecond. At best, Copies live their lives seventeen times more slowly than humans but technology will improve and it is, surely, better than death or indeed life as a human. You have all the time in the world to study; you can do anything you want; be anywhere you want; even look the way you want, all thanks to Virtual Reality. What could go wrong?

If humans need food and water in order to survive, then Copies need processing capacity. As the human population increases, it puts pressure on food production worldwide. Poor harvests and bad weather lead to famine, starvation and death. As the population of Copies increases, it will stretch the processing capacity of the world's computer networks to breaking point – famine, starvation and 'death'. Rich people can arrange for their own processing clusters but what happens to the increasing population of 'Copies' living in the computer equivalent of the slums, victims of financial problems, doomed to be recalculated as and when money and available computing space permits. On the assumption that demand for computer space will outstrip the availability of of processing facilities, even wealthy Copies may eventually find themselves in danger of being 'frozen'.

This in itself would provide material for a novel but Egan, bubbling over with ideas, heaps existential dilemmas on top of practical considerations. Copies are vulnerable despite being supported and protected by carefully constructed legal entities. They're vulnerable to something as simple as the power being turned off, and they are vulnerable because their status is unclear. Are they really human? Are they any more than a complex set of algorithms? Are they truly living, once they've been scanned? Much as Swift's Struldbrugs are denied a legal existence once they've passed their eightieth year, so the status of Copies is questionable once the original body has died. Addressing the problem of Copies' continuing safety, Paul Durham conceives the idea of a sanctuary for Copies, a self-supporting haven where the need for processing power can never be a problem and where identity can never be called into question.

Durham's own view of his existence as Copy or human is complicated. Although human, he has experienced life as a Copy and has decided that his existence is one of endless reincarnation, for where does a Copy go when the machine is switched off? Each 'freezing', each baling-out that the Paul Durham Copy undergoes brings him into existence as a human in a parallel world. So complex is Egan's presentation of this metaphysics for the computer age, one can never be sure whether there ever was a Copy of Paul Durham or just a human striving to discover what it means to be a Copy.

But having addressed the existential dilemma of the computer-created 'life', Egan seems unable to explore the characters in anything but the most superficial manner. We are told that many Copies cannot come to terms with life in the computer and quickly bale out. Only Durham may have come close to understanding why this is and he seems uninclined to share that insight. Others, particularly those who embrace the philosophy of Solipsist Nation, a drama about life as a Copy, welcome a life apart from humans and other computer entities, at least in the beginning. Some people, such as Thomas Riemann, haunted by the accidental killing of his girlfriend, reiterate their lives, hunting for a salvation which they can never achieve. Egan offers tantalising glimpses of what it might be like to be a Copy but seems unable to approach the problem head on.

Instead, he throws another layer of plot at the story, as the sanctuary for Copies is revealed as an attempt to build a new self-supporting world. The creation of a self-generating world inside a virtual simulation would likewise make a novel in itself but ranged alongside the goods already on offer, it's almost a distraction. Egan himself is clearly in love with the Autoverse, a self-contained computer world with its own physics and chemistry, complete in every detail, so very different from Virtual Reality, where appearance is everything and nothing. He's so in love with it, he has one character whose sole task appears to be to provide us with chances to watch it at work. Maria Deluca, although the one to finally achieve viable bacterial life in the Autoverse, plays a surprisingly passive role in the novel, as indeed do most of the characters. They walk through their parts but, perhaps with the exception of the tortured Thomas Riemann, it is difficult to see them as Egan obviously wants us to, as complete, rounded characters. Instead, it is is far more tempting to regard them, humans and Copies alike, as two-dimensional constructs.

When he creates his new world, Durham takes a model of the Autoverse with him and the emphasis shifts from the experiences of the Copies as ersatz humans, to their role as would-be gods, watching over the creatures evolving on the newly created Planet Lambert. It's not clear what Egan is hoping to achieve by shifting perspective as he does. I feel that once he leaves behind the metaphysical speculations and concentrates on the plot, the novel begins to disintegrate, much like Durham's haven itself. What is to be achieved by observing Lambert's inhabitants coming to terms with their own existence, evolving their own cosmological awareness? Egan seems to be suggesting that this is related to the Copies' awareness of their existence within machines, but we see little indication of this. When we meet them within the haven, they are established in lives which are not unlike those they lived in reality, though raised to fantastic levels. Maybe Egan is suggesting critically that 'plus ca change, plus la meme-chose' but I sense approval of the situation and no effort to explore alternatives.

Permutation City is a frustrating novel, much less than the sum of its parts. Greg Egan has spilled the contents of the brick box on the table in front of us but some parts are missing, and there is far more than is needed of others. He hints enticingly at a world where Copies must struggle for full rights then shows the wealthy in full flight, running from one problem to another, with no chance of solution. It's possible, of course, that this is the point of the novel, to show that one can't run, but I find this implausible. We need a better solution than to jump from one world to another in an infinite regress of existence.

It's also frustrating for the way in which opportunities are wasted, or held out as being more than they eventually turn out to be. An early allusion to 'Operation Butterfly', an attempt to use chaos theory to control rather than predict weather, suggests that this will reappear later in the novel, only nothing is said again. Kate and Peer 's presence in Durham's city haven, lurking in the interstices in the software, is not entirely resolved. It is hinted that their presence may cause the disintegration of the new world but, again, this is not resolved. True, one doesn't always want to tie off every loose end, but this novel has more than its fair share flapping around.

Having said all this, Permutation City is fascinating for what it has to say about the nature of a computer-generated existence. Now he's sown the seed, I hope Egan will explore the implications of this novel in much greater depth.

The plot as so outlined would indicate pretty standard space opera – and much of the action is just that; but not so the inter-species, inter-cultural nuances which make the book so stimulating. Cherryh, ever expert in this line, here excels in representing the barriers to communication and rapport between two not wholly dissimilar, but differently 'wired' and culturally conditioned humanoid species. Atevi are gigantic, black skinned and yellow eyed, but it is they who experience shock on confrontation with the puny Caucasian. There is a delicious scene where camera-slung, autograph-hunting tourists accidentally, and at first cautiously, encounter Bren in the stately fortress of his exile. It is, however, less physical differences than emotional and logical impasses that fascinate – words and concepts which don't translate, human feelings of affection or caring which could be described as 'liking' but which are to atevi meaningless save in so far as they might chime with 'having respect for'. It is through such semantic ambiguities that a labyrinth of relationships and their consequences has to be negotiated. Appended pages of grammar and glossary are a helpful standby, but it is practical and certainly pleasurable to work things out as you go along.

Mary Gentle
Left to His Own Devices
Orbit 1994, 282 pp, £8.99
Steve Jeffery

With *Rats and Gargoyles*, its sequel *The Architecture of Desire*, and a number of short stories set in the same world (or worlds), Mary Gentle has carved herself a unique niche in fantasy, in the same way as Rob Holdstock or John Crowley (with whom she shares a similar, but rather more playful, enthusiasm for the philosophy of Renaissance Hermeticism).

None of the novels completely overlap, but are linked through the unlikely and often fractious relationship between scholar-soldier, Valentine, and the corpulent charm of architect genius Baltazar Casaubon.

Rather like Moorcock's movable Jerry Cornelius cast, Gentle time-slips Valentine and Casaubon yet again, this time into something resembling our own world, or a slightly more dishevelled version of it. Here Casaubon's genius at architecture takes on a new form, in the construction of hypermedia computer information structures in virtual reality. It seems an unlikely step from Vitruvius' *Twelve Books on Architecture* to Cobbs' rules for database structure. Casaubon, though, takes to the creation of his virtual Memory Gardens, across an improbable lash-up of Amstrads, PCs and Crays, like a duck to water.

When he links his system with Valentine's cracking of an algorithm for Direct Neural Input, everyone, from the military to government and business, starts to sit up and take notice. Unfortunately, when the first test is run using press reporter Miles Godric as a subject the system develops an unpredictable identity of its own. At this point you might be forgiven for groaning "Not the old emergent AI chestnut again". However, Gentle gives another playful twist to this one, as system-*Mephistophilis* turns out to be a highly unreliable authority.

Across all this are Gentle's tongue in cheek games in the playgrounds of virtual reality and her Child's Garden of Hermetics. A passing knowledge of either, and to the notion of the Art of Memory or the various references to Marlowe or *Tamburlaine*, might not be essential, but they add to the fun. It's also fun, though I'm never sure how appropriate, to try and disentangle the author from her own creation of Valentine. Maybe I'm just reading too much into the red hair and the serious interest in weaponry, but if Mary turns up at a future convention in mirrorshade contacts I shall have to re-think this one.

At just under 170 pages, the plot revolves, if not resolves, around the implications, and contest for control, of what Valentine and Casaubon have unwittingly created.

Those bitter power games are mirrored in the often impossibly tangled and flawed relationships between Valentine and her career-politician mother, and between Valentine, Casaubon and Miles. Quite how Gentle manages to make her main couple still retain our sympathy through all this is a trick I've never quite managed to fathom. Somehow it works, and you end up rooting for them even while frequently wanting to bang their heads together in exasperation.

The other 100-odd pages are made up of three stories, previously published elsewhere.

'Black Motley', first published in *Tales From The Forbidden Planet*, is another Art of Memory story set in the strange world of *Rats and Gargoyles*. It's almost worth it alone for Gentle's delightfully literal interpretation of the Royal 'we', and Ishanna's line 'Oh, I've met Her Majesty; they like me.'

'What God Abandoned' forges another link, this time to the shared world anthology *The Weerde*. Here, Miles Godric turns up in another incarnation, that of a homosexual shapechanger, fighting alongside a young Descartes and the Hermetic magus, Master Maier, in the sacking of Prague during the Hapsburg wars.

The bleakest story is 'The Road to Jerusalem', first in *Interzone*, and the only one here set entirely outside Gentle's loose-knit White Crow stories. Here, the Orders of the Knights Templar and the Hospitallers are brought into the present day where their rivalry erupts into bloody ambush and massacre, and place Lieutenant Hyacinthe Tadmartin in an impossible position before a resultant papal enquiry.

It's an odd trend, this patching of several short stories onto the back of a short novel or long novella (Holdstock does it with his recent *Merlin's Wood*). I'm not entirely convinced about it, but because Gentle's stories often share a loose allegiance of cast, settings and ideas it works reasonably well in this case. All three stories are strong enough to be among Gentle's best, up with 'Beggars in Satin' and 'The Knot Garden' from *Scholars and Soldiers*. A nice package. But where can she take Valentine and Casaubon next: *The Architects of Mars*, perhaps?

Elizabeth Hand
Waking the Moon
HarperCollins 1994, 589 pp, £5.99
Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Hang the boy and raise the girl was the refrain that ran throughout Hand's first novel *Winterlong*. The same might be equally appropriate for *Waking the Moon*.

Winterlong, Hand's tour de force debut, was loaded with the mythic imagery of gods and demons incarnate, of possession, multiple personalities, twins and disguises. Hand continued the sequence through two further novels, but never quite achieved the dense and rich lyrical effect of her first novel.

Waking the Moon shares some of the same territory of those earlier novels. The writing seems more confident, the earlier emphasis on imagery now tempered with a sharper edge of humour and a grittier realism.

The sleeping Moon of the title is the Eternal Goddess, Othiym Lunarsa. Her awakening has been watched for and feared by the ancient brotherhood of the Benandanti, and particularly by Balthazar Warnick, Professor of Magic, Witchcraft and Religion at the Divine – more formally, The University of the Archangels and St John the Divine.

Magda Kurtz, archaeologist, alumnus of the Divine and Benandanti renegade, uncovers an edged crescent pendant, the lunula of the Goddess, in a sacrificial site in the remote Balkans. When Magda comes under the influence of the lunula, the expedition ends in disaster and the first of another round of sacrifices.

Our heroine is Katherine Sweeney Cassidy, whose first day at the Divine and Balthalzar's class introduces her to the beautiful and crazed Oliver, the elegant Angelica and the slobbish, chain-smoking Little Joe. She finds herself immediately drawn into the deadly internal power struggles of the Benandanti at a faculty party for the Divine's 'special' students that ends in Magda Kurtz's murder and Angelica becoming the new owner of the lunula.

Sweeney avoids classes to accompany Oliver on a wild, self-destructive and impossibly charmed binge of drink, drugs and forays through the seamier quarters of the city. Angelica, in contrast, pours herself into study with increasing seriousness.

The whole thing comes apart at an end of term weekend retreat for Balthazar's students. A night-time party ends in a magical vision of Angelica as avenging Goddess, another death, and Oliver's horrific self-inflicted injury. The term ends in tragedy, in Sweeney leaving the Divine, and Oliver in hospital. Angelica disappears.

To resurface, many years later, as the leader of a new, disturbing, Goddess cult.

Hand treads a fine line throughout *Waking The Moon*. The magic of the Goddess is both powerful and seductive, even when wearing its dark face. Nor are the Benandanti clearly either the patriarchal villains of the piece or benign protectors. But what might have become a symbolic power play, with its images of magic, ritual sacrifice and

Katharine Kerr
A Time of War
Harper Collins, 485pp, £4.99
A Time of Justice
*Harper Collins, 375pp, £15.99*Vikki Lee

A Time Of War is the start of a new, but related, series from this well-known and successful fantasy author, and features several of the characters introduced in her previous *Deverry Series* and *Westlands Cycle*.

This story opens with Jahdo, the young son of a ratcatcher, witnessing a clandestine meeting between an important councilman and a very mysterious woman. Instead of killing the young intruder a spell of forgetfulness is placed on him. Jahdo is 'chosen' by Meer, an eyeless bard of the non-human Gel da'Thae (Horsekin), to act as his eyes on a dangerous quest of his own.

To the east at Cengarn, Rhodry, the 'Silver Dagger' and half-elven mercenary is employed by the lord of the Broch to track down raiders who are chillingly targetting pregnant women for slaughter. Jill, Dweomer-master and former lover of Rhodry, knows the reason for these attacks, and makes plans to protect the very woman the raiders are seeking. The Broch also has to prepare for the war that will surely come as a result of this protection. Jill also finally discovers the meaning of the inscription inside the ring that Rhodry has worn through most of Kerr's books to date. She sends Rhodry and some dwarven friends on a quest to the far north, a dangerous and seemingly impossible trip on which the whole future of the lands to west hangs.

So the plot sounds a little familiar eh? Well, maybe it does, but there's nothing wrong with this as long as it's well done, and Kerr is a master of her trade.

This book is a good place to start for folks who've not read any of Kerr's previous works. There are just enough explan-ations of events gone before, when necessary, to ease the story along. None of the "as you know Bob" info-dumps that are so tedious in many books today, particularly series books. And, for those of you who read Kerr regularly, Rhodry never once says "Ah, by the black hairy ass of the Lord of Hell" throughout!

The book is also only half of the story and ends rather suddenly, leaving the reader with a very acute sense of disappointment. For this reason, I would hesitate to recommend this to anyone who doesn't intend to purchase the sequel.

Subtitled '*Days of Air and Darkness*', *A Time Of Justice* is the second part of the story started in *A Time Of War* and picks up very neatly where the first book ended.

Rhodry the Silver Dagger, now Rohdry the Dragonlord, returns to the Dwarvenhold of Linn Serr on the back of his querulous new steed and ally, Arzosah. En route, already deeply disturbed by the mysterious disappearance of Haen Marn, a magical city that spirits itself away when threatened, Rhodry witnesses first-hand the horrors perpetrated by the invading Gel da'Thae (Horsekin) army that is laying siege to Cengarn.

In Cengarn, Jill, now joined by fellow dweomermaster Dallandra, seeks to outwit the renegade Goddess Alshandra and protect Elessario, the unborn child being carried by Gerra. Jill has not only to protect the child and mother, but also find a way to hold back the besieging army of Horsekin until aid can arrive from Deverry. In order to do this, Jill must watch more than one front, protecting the Broch from magical attack as well as denying the besieging army which is seeking a rapid victory before Cengarn can receive reinforcements.

On another plane, Evandar continues to manipulate mortal destinies in typical Godlike fashion without directly helping either side in the conflict. He seeks to confront Alshandra, his ex-wife, and destroy her for, among other reasons, trying to prevent the re-birth of his granddaughter Elessario.

In her eighth fantasy novel, Kerr once again delivers an engrossing story of love, war and magic. It sometimes takes a little time to get your head around her jumps from one time to another, Kerr's own way of filling in the gaps of what went before. Indeed, the start of this novel is somewhat frustrating for those who want to get on with the story, which was left disappointingly hanging at the end of *A Time Of War*. Kerr goes back many years to Rhodry and Jill's early days together on the Long Road as Silver Daggers, in order to fill in important background to the events in the future. These sections read like complete stories in themselves, and never fail to entertain as her characters credentials are mapped out to validate their roles in future events. It's a very neat trick, and one that Kerr is a master at.

Kerr continues to strengthen the inhumanity and brutality of the invading Horsekin, and at last presents an enemy that you really want to see defeated. There were one or two scenes describing horrors perpetrated by the Horsekin that really made my skin crawl. On the lighter side however, the horror is balanced by the growing bond between Rhodry and his sulky dragonsteed Arzosah. Kerr's treatment of magical Wormkind is reminiscent of all that was good in McCaffery's early Pern novels.

Although most of the issues in this story are finally concluded, there are enough obvious pointers at the end to leave the reader not only expecting more, but looking forward to it. Kerr, not known for shirking when a character's demise is imminent, can be relied upon to give us further episodes of their lives in future novels. She has created a world that might very well go on forever, and this is one reader that sincerely hopes it does.

Riding the Unicorn
Paul Kearney
Gollancz, £15.99, 254 pp
Tanya Brown

In the Iron World which constitutes our reality, John Willoby is going comprehensively mad. He hears voices and sees visions — things which have no place in the monotonous desperation of his life as a prison officer. Once a soldier, he chafes at the constrictions of civilian life, yearning for the easy camaraderie and simple truths of his army days. The hallucinatory glimpses of a rough, pioneering life in a green land beyond savage mountains seduce Willoby, and he finds it increasingly difficult to maintain his uneasy truce with his wife and daughter. The visions are becoming more regular and it's only a matter of time before his patronising psychiatrist locks him away in an asylum that will be as much a prison as the one he patrols daily.

Meanwhile, in the Green World, the unlikeable bastard prince Tallamon — 'a real Machiavelli' — is laying his plans for a king-slaying. The mage Aimon protests this abuse of his magic even as he redoubles his efforts to bring a man from another world to do the foul deed. Tallamon's icy ambition, however, knows no bounds; he will sacrifice all whom he holds dear to achieve the kingship. Even Merrin, the woman he loves, is made into part of the trap that Willoby should find impossible to resist ...

'Riding the Unicorn' describes the fulfillment, and the failure, of men's dreams; while the women in the tale are portrayed with clarity and even sympathy, their importance is primarily as tools or symbols. Merrin is an independent woman, but her actions are still driven — wittingly or not — by the men who surround her. This is a male world of warriors and politics, of masculine friendships and unity in the face of adversity, in which love and beauty are of secondary importance to the grim fight for survival, and dark, threatening angels, is firmly grounded by the pain, fear and confusion it brings to the lives of Sweeney and those around her.

Although it shares something in its mix of magical realism, Hand is less romantic here than Poppy Brite's *Lost Souls*, less preachy than Carroll. If she has a fault, it is one that started in *Winterlong*, in the piling on of names and invocations, (here to almost every known incarnation of the Eternal Goddess) which quickly becomes unwieldy and wearing. But, this aside, this is Hand right back on form with her strongest novel yet.

Definitely a novelist to watch.

honour is a luxury few can afford.

Kearney's style is harsh yet evocative; no long poetic descriptions here (and, indeed, no unicorns). He conveys a real sense of the unpleasant realities of a medieval warrior society. There are no heroes either; acts of heroism, perhaps, but only those demanded by the situation. And there is no neat resolution; the novel ends on a curiously inconclusive note (perhaps indicating a sequel). Not a nice sweet fantasy, but a powerfully-drawn conflict.

Paul J McAuley
Pasquale's Angel
Gollancz, 1994, 286pp, £15.99
Chris Amies

The Italians had the plague, civil war, and the Borgias for three hundred years, and what did they produce? The Renaissance. This Renaissance, however, is subtly shifted, from a point at which Lorenzo de'Medici, patron of Leonardo da Vinci, was assassinated, and Leonardo, instead of becoming predominantly a painter (though also architect and military engineer to Cesare Borgia), walled himself up in a tower in Firenze and became the Great Engineer. All that science and invention was there in theory waiting for the right minds to come along and unlock it; and the thirst for learning in 16th-century Italy made it the right place, and the right time. The rediscovery of the principle of Hero's Steam Engine drives the world into an acceleration of smoke, grime, overproduction and the massive clash of egos and cultures.

A couple of years ago we saw Sterling and Gibson's *The Difference Engine*, set in a nineteenth-century Britain where the information revolution happened simultaneously with the industrial revolution. Steven Baxter continued the Steampunk cycle with his Victorian fabulation *Anti-Ice*. Now Paul J McAuley has gone even further back up the timestream and placed the dawn of that same industrial revolution three hundred years further back. It certainly isn't paradise; factories belch stink into the atmosphere, people still die of the same old diseases and some new ones as well (how much impetus did industrialisation give to the development of medicine? Quite a lot, is my guess). And in the midst of all this the artists are still trying to behave as though nothing has really changed. Pasquale, apprentice to the painter Rosso, dreams of painting an angel such as has never been painted before. But this modest dream has to take a back seat when he is too close to the scene of a riotous incident in church followed fast by a locked-room murder.

In the company of investigative journalist Niccolo' Machiavelli (or *Machiavegli*, as McAuley insists; why the change? It's not as though we don't know who he is, nor is it any surprise when the man referred to throughout as The Great Engineer is revealed as Da Vinci), Pasquale is running for his life. *Pasquale's Angel* is a picaresque novel which ends as they habitually do, with the hero a little older and perhaps a tiny bit wiser and boarding a boat for the New World. The period that McAuley has chosen to change in his parallel universe was one of intensely complex political situations, assassination, invasions, shifting loyalties, treachery and imagination. His Firenze is an alluring world, no better than our own but perhaps no worse, as brawling and over the top as any swashbuckling movie, and with some good jokes and points prodded home for ironic effect. There are drugs, shamanism, sex, monkeys, exploding carts, and exploding language. There are no referents to "consensus" reality beyond the more and less obvious satiric parallels, which is as it should be. Alternative worlds don't exist by permission of our own, but by that of their creators.

Terry Pratchett & Stephen Briggs
The Discworld Companion
Gollancz, 1994, 288pp, £14.99
Sue Thomason

Well, what it is, is, it's a wossname, a dictionary-cum-encyclopaedia full of fascinating and funny alphabetical listings about Discworld people, places and events, from ABBYS, Bishop, Prophet of the Omnian Church, to ZWEIBLUMEN, Jack, the name of Twoflower's analogue in a dimensional-crossover world which has aircraft instead of dragons. Each listing cites the work(s) in which its subject appears, including a couple of little known short stories, there are line illustrations dotted through the text, and the endpapers reproduce part of the map of Ankh-Morpork. As well as the A-Z Listing, the book contains a couple of short introductory essays by Pratchett and Briggs, a brief history of Discworld, and an interview with Pratchett.

So who might enjoy reading *The Discworld Companion*? Serious Discworld fans. The kind of people who enjoy asking each other how many men Lord Monflathers led to a glorious defeat at the Battle of Quirm, or where one might expect to meet Nork the Impaler (and live). The book will also be invaluable to Mastermind and Convention panel question-setters.

And who is going to buy *The Discworld Companion*? I suspect it will be bought by libraries, sheepish affluent completist fans, and elderly relatives of archetypal 15-year-old Pratchett devotees ("I've got a *really good* Christmas present for young Nijel this year").

Why write a *Discworld Companion*? Well, to get paid for indulging in one's favourite pastime (Briggs), and to tidy-mindedly use up all those spare bits of Discworld one might have lying around from doing the novel (Pratchett). And to get paid for indulging in one's favourite pastime (Pratchett).

But the *really important* question about *the Discworld Companion* is, is it going to appear in the fiction bestseller list, or the non-fiction bestseller list?

There is no entry for WOSSNAME.

Robert Rankin
The Greatest Show Off Earth
Doubleday, 1994, 284pp, £14.99
Chris Amies

This is Robert Rankin's tenth novel. Brentford is a long way behind us now, and tired of the city life we have turned to UFOs over Ambridge. Raymond, he of the allotment, is kidnapped by a space pirate called Abdullah, then rescued by a travelling interstellar circus which plies the aether in a Victorian steamship. Meanwhile back on Earth Simon, he of the expensive dentistry, is suckered into fighting a shadowy cult representing an evil not so much squamous and rugose as feathered and squawking ...

And that is just the beginning. Rankin's inventiveness is in its usual manic flow, the jokes, puns and references bounce around as usual. This is a parallel world even without the Symmesian Hollow Earth stuff; the parallel world where old ideas go to die. There's a suspicion that the whole narrative is a novel being written by one Kilgore Sprout (!), and the residue of earlier books is what each new one is built upon. Eventually the sediments build up, push through the wavetops and you have a sweet little atoll with palmtrees and breadfruit and dusky maidens. Of its bones is coral made. The parallelness of the world suggests that in some way the real world (so-called) cannot contain the stories he wants to tell. Even the bio-graphical note on the endplate is a joke. Does Robert Rankin really exist? Might he himself not be, like Michael Slade, a construct formed of an indefinite number of lawyers, or in Rankin's case, publicans? But enough of all this.

The jokes are good although they range from the incomprehensible to the infantile, the bawdiness is bawdy and the aliens are fairly alien. Cosmic conspiracy fantasy along the lines of *Illuminatus* is always good for a laugh, even in a world where the Hermetic Order of the New Temple has just given itself over to what Anthony Burgess described as a "ghastly dissolution", and why not? Here the conspiracy has less roots in known mythology and is more entirely of Rankin's own invention, but complies with the standard Fortesque idea of "We Are Property". In this case, property several times over; the foodstock of an interplanetary empire which owes more to '50s pulp SF than to anything more recent. One of Rankin's earlier novels was called "They Came and Ate Us: Armageddon II, the B-movie", which title would really be more appropriate to this novel than to the one it actually adorns.

Ambridge was never like this. I don't see Clarrie Grundy being visited by masked aliens and suing people who say she wasn't. Around the back of the village, between the allotments, lies the Lane-that-dare-not-speak-its-name. You have been warned.

Kim Newman
The Quorum
Simon & Schuster, 1994, 311pp, £15.99
Andy Sawyer

Derek Leech is a media mogul whom we first see in 1961 rising from the murky waters of the Thames. Like — well, name your own version from today's rogues gallery of High capitalist newspaper/ brodcasting/recording industry — "most horror stories were, if anything, understated". Both the comedy and the horror of *The Quorum* stem from the way Newman plays with the literal and figurative meanings of that kind of statement. In doing so, he writes a horror novel which is perhaps the antithesis of the splatterpunk which was all over our pages a few years ago (the most violent action is a thump in the face) but which still holds a terrifying mirror up to human nature.

The Quorum is — as is suggested several times during the course of the novel — partly a reworking of the story of Faustus, who sold his soul for worldly power. Newman, however, adds a twist which is both his story's "heart of darkness" and its comic source. His Faust-figure is in fact a trinity — Mark, a style guru, Michael, a novelist and TV celebrity — and Mickey, a comics artist/writer-cum heavy metal keyboardist — and their pact does not involve the sacrifice of their own souls but that of their schoolfriend and fellow-member of the early talented "Forum", Neil Martin. their Deal with Leech gives them the success they crave at the cost of a catalogue of major and minor disasters for the hapless Neil.

This results in a series of slapstick scenes with Neil as the fall-guy, including a brilliantly complicated ploy which brings Neil down just as his friends' year of absence from the deal has made it seem that he has at last found a successful niche. The Faustian references become clearer as the "Quorum" succeed. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus damned his soul to receive a demon as his servant and spent his time playing silly tricks on the Pope and making Helen of Troy parade in front of him. Mark, Michael and Mickey are media-trash, all you ever loathed about tabloid-tv and trendies. "How did we get here from there?" wonders Mark: "... we used to hate people like us."

This insight — which comes early in the book — is only the first of many which reverse the apparent course of events and propel the book towards a sardonic ending. Are the Quorum sacrificers or sacrificed? Are they monsters, or would anyone — even Neil — have done the same? As we face these questions, we watch the Deal unravel and catch the reflections of other Deals in the circumstances and statements of some of the minor characters. Newman creates an ending which threatens to overbalance the novel's wonderfully effective fusion of satire and metaphysics (basically he over-actualises one particular metaphor), but another of his devices, the black pyramid which looms over London's dockland is so evidently there in real life (figuratively rather than concretely, but *there* nonetheless) that we are tempted to look for some of the characters next time we vicariously enter the media world. But that way confusion lies, and the moral murkiness of the novel is sublime enough already. Take it as a map of the past few decades. Just read, and smile, and shiver.

Notice

First Impressions will be changing hands as of the next issue of Vector. The new editor will be Paul Kincaid; long-term readers of Vector will remember that he has done this job before and will look forward to the return of his energy and experience.

I'd like to thank the reviewers and the publishers who have supported me in the production of this section, and to remind you that books for review and completed reviews should from now on be sent to Paul at the address below:

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Barbed Wire Kisses

Magazine Reviews Edited by Maureen Kincaid Speller

We are failing to imagine possible futures as writers and readers, we are satisfied with the comfortable ideas of those who formed our sf tastes instead of branching into new areas of the literature. I cringe when I hear a reader complain that an sf story explores biological and sociological change instead of "real hard sf," not realizing that many of the changes we face in our future happen to be in the areas of the "softer" sciences or even in the social sciences. Or when I hear a critic complain that stories dealt too much with changes in people, not understanding that the adventures of the future might occur within our own bodies and in our own minds. Kristine KathrynRusch

This extract comes from Kristine Kathryn Rusch's editorial to the October/November double issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. In the light of continuing discussion about definitions of SF, particularly the place of hard SF in the scheme of things, I take this as Rusch's statement of intent, and I naturally warm towards it. I'm growing concerned about the movement towards mo' better science in our science fiction, and the consequent disregard for other fictional components, like dialogue and characterisation; what one editor, Patrick Neilsen Hayden, so delightfully calls 'literary vitamins.'

Rusch argues fervently for imaginative new futures, and eschewal of the fantasy and SF which got us this far, and I was up there with her, cheering like mad, until I actually sat down to read that issue of *F&SF*. Just how much of its contents actually matched up to her stirring vision? Give me originality for god's sake. Robert Reed is a writer who sometimes comes out with wonderful ideas but 'The Shape of Everything' wasn't one of them. One man's sacrifice-cum-chance to zoom off across the universe seemed hackneyed. How many heroes have carried out a noble deed for their own benefit? On the fantasy side, Esther M Friesner's punnish titles are becoming ever more excruciating, and 'A Beltaine and Suspenders' lives down to its title, sadly. Susan Dexter's story of a wizard befriending an unwanted dog was sentimental, but there was nothing here that hadn't already been enacted in a hundred stories of backwoods America. As for Gardner Dozois' 'A Cat Horror Story', well two good editors ought to have known better.

I've been criticised before for my relentless cataloguing of the bad rather than the good but, rest assured, there is one story in this double issue, whose praises I fully intend to sing, from the rooftops if necessary, and all the more remarkably because alongside my other assorted prejudices in fiction, I normally hate rock'n'roll stories. If you really want to turn me off, put a dead rock star in your story, or worse still, a live but fictional folkie who's played with all the greats. I guarantee you will hear the sound of retching for miles.

So, Bradley Denton, with 'We Love Lydia Love,' you have achieved the almost impossible and pleased me. The first time I read this through, I thought 'yeah, but is it SF?' The second time, I was surprised I'd doubted myself. The eponymous Lydia is a young singer-songwriter, talented, reclusive but slow to produce. This we hear from Willie who, as we rapidly realise, is living a dual existence in the most complete sense of the word. He has been surgically altered and 'programmed' to appear as her most recent lover, Christopher Jennings, ostensibly returned to civilisation after being posted missing in an earthquake. Through Willie and Christopher's eyes and thoughts, we view the tragedy of a life where creativity can come only through loss and destruction. Lydia's demands and, based on what Christopher tells him, her predictability shock Willie. Equally disturbing is the way in which her manager, Danny, manipulates her emotionally in order to satisfy the demands of the business. The story is a powerful critique of an industry which is founded on the misery of others.

So where does the science fiction come into it? You may well ask, but think about it. What did we get from the race into space? Teflon. What have we gained so far from the wonders of virtual reality? Tacky arcade games. And what will the work on the human:computer interface give us? who can say, but I'd be prepared to put money on the fact that if scientists ever managed to download human personalities onto chips, the

motives of the people who use the invention won't all have purely altruistic motives. Bradley Denton is giving us a glimpse of the world that might come about.

The other big story of this issue of *F&SF* is Mike Resnick's 'Seven Views of Olduvai Gorge,' continuing his unflagging love affair with Africa. Mind you, the word 'overkill' keeps flashing in my mind's eye; I wonder if I'm the only one. With this story, we are at least back on Earth rather than on Kirinyaga, but once again Resnick is wearing his eco-archaeological heart on his sleeve. Less a novella, more a series of linked vignettes, we witness the history of Earth through the eyes of alien archaeologists, in particular 'He Who Views', who learns the stories of things by handling artefacts. Cute, but I can't help thinking that it's time Resnick found another culture to work to death. There is nothing new here; we all know that Earth is going to hell in a handbasket, and H G Wells has already done the death of the planet far more effectively.

Taking Rusch's statement as a touchstone for this column, I looked back to the September issue of *F&SF*. If it was only barely fulfilled in the double issue, I am not sure it was fulfilled at all in this. Which is not to say that the stories are all bad, but do they match this criterion?

One would hesitate to criticise the work of Ray Bradbury. I've been a fan of his work for years and a new story is always a pleasure, even if the ground is familiar. 'From the Dust Returned' is linked to Bradbury's Something Wicked This Way Comes, which has a link, I fancy, with James Blaylock's Land of Dreams and, curiously, with another story in this very issue. Fertile ground indeed. This story though, deals with the mummy of Nef, grandmother of Neferiti, and guardian somehow to the Dark family. It's a delight to revisit the strange delicate mystery of that world, one of those rare occasions when return does not mean disappointment.

But what of that other Bradburyesque story? Jack Cady's 'Our Ground and Every Fragrant Tree is Shaded' is a most curious study of the symbiotic relationship between a small town and the general story which acts as a focus for life. Very reminiscent of Bradbury with its eye to the details of small town life, Cady's story of lost hopes and dreams would brighten any magazine.

The novelette is David Gerrold's 'The Martian Child', a story that is, alas, badly flawed by the author's inability to keep himself out of his story. It is, I suppose, the problem with any first-person narrative. I have to admit that this story irritated me profoundly but whether it acts in the same way on people who don't know that Gerrold himself has recently adopted a child, I can't say. And you can't tell me now because I've spilled the beans. Such is life.

At the heart of the story is the logical progression of every UFO abduction story you've heard lately. 'I was made on Mars. I was a starpole. Then I was brought to Earth in a UFO and implanted in my Mummy's tummy. she didn't know. Then I was borned.' Thus the Martian child explains his existence. Given that UFO abduction is a hot topic, it's an obvious thing to speculate on: just suppose that aliens are really visiting Earth. This, surely, is the stuff of SF. And it's not even as though Gerrold is the first to wear his heart on his sleeve and write his family into his fiction. Orson Scott Card infamously did. Whatever one might think of Card's efforts, and it got a big thumbs-down round here, Gerrold's story is ten times worse: trust me. It's the knowingness of the author that's so irritating, that constant nudging of the reader to say that 'hey, this is me, David Gerrold, and my friends, and my kid, and we're in this great skiffy story'. Now far be it from me to stand between a proud new dad and his much-loved kid, and funnily enough, the one thing that does come from this is Gerrold's undoubted admiration of the real-life child, but does this make good fiction?

After I'd finished with *F&SF*, it was time to move on to *Asimov's Science Fiction*, in search of the Ruschian vision of perfection. Gardner Dozois, of course, is credited with inventing the term 'cyberpunk,' but it's always been difficult to decide where his SF sensibilities really lie. Even the annual 'Best of' collection gives no real clue to what Dozois himself likes, so scrupulously balanced is his view of things.

Mind you, if September's issue is anything to go by, angels and elementals are on the menu, along with yet another nod at Wells, Dr Moreau this time. Rather than looking forward, we seem to be looking back. Or perhaps not looking back so much as looking sideways to a parallel strand of the genre. Considering that 'fantasy' comes before 'science fiction' in the title of the very magazine she edits, it's perhaps surprising that Rusch overlooks this aspect of the genre, though obviously realise that she is pleading a particular case and I'm being perverse. Nevertheless, having spoken for one position then filled her magazine with material which better supports another, it's a pity that Rusch hasn't stopped to ask what the attraction might be of that mixture of the fantastic and the scientific which might well be called 'science fantasy', hearking back to Wells and even to some of Conan Doyle's Professor Challenger stories.

Brian Stableford's 'The Tree of Life' typifies this harking back to our literary roots. My feeling is that for every advance, there is a backward glance, as if to check where we're coming from. Stableford does it very well though one is inevitably obliged to ask whether we do actually need what amounts to pastiche. As if in answer to this, October's *Asimov's* contains another story by Stableford. "Les Fleurs du Mal' promises another backward glance to that wellspring of the decadent, Baudelaire. In fact, what we have is something altogether far more intriguing, as though 'The Tree of Life' was merely a sketch, a hint, a promise.

Admittedly, 'Les Fleurs du Mal' does start with a kind of gut seizure, as we learn our main character's name: Oscar Wilde. It's suggested several times through the story that it's not that Oscar Wilde, but given the fact that this Oscar Wilde has undergone three regenerations, one's thoughts stray, or ought to, towards The Picture of Dorian Gray. The story is filled with neat conceits and references to our fantastical ancestors. The villain of the piece is called Rappaccini — check your Nathaniel Hawthorne for that one — and the murder weapon ... oh, but why spoil it all for you. The detectives are Charlotte Holmes and Hal Watson, and does it come as a surprise that Hal's modus operandi relies on searching computer networks? Now, given that I have just lavished several paragraphs on criticising the knowingness of David Gerrold, shouldn't I be criticising this as well?

Perhaps I should but I would argue very strongly that Stableford takes apparently familiar ingredients and puts a spin on them. In this futuristic detective story, what we have is a tension between knowledge as instinct or else based on arcane knowledge and an ability to extrapolate, represented by Wilde (a wild card, if you like) and knowledge as pure fact, represented by Hal's obsessive trawling of the information superhighway. All the knowledge in the world is of no use if you can't do anything with it. Thus, while superficially seeming as dilettante as his character, Stableford launches a fierce attack on the dwindling role of humanity in a world ever more reliant on technology. And if that doesn't fit Rusch's criterion, I really don't know what is.

Michael Bishop's 'Cri de Coeur', the lead story, reverts however to a much more traditional gut-jerker concerning decisions to be made when a generation star ship reaches its goal. The hook here is that the narrator has custody of a retarded child, and he and the mother want to go their different ways when the ships in the fleet separate. The star ship background is all that makes this an SF story; poorly focused and uncertain where it's actually heading, the story is as confused as the motives of the people on the ships, and I still think it too much of a coincidence that a meteor destroys their new home just as they arrive there.

October's issue of *Asimov's* seems as much dedicated to scientific fantasy as the September issue. Quite apart from the aforementioned Stableford story, there is another rewrite of *The Island of Dr Moreau*, Wil McCarthy's 'The Blackery Dark', though this time we have fruiting fungi as the potential menace. Mary Rosenblum, still exploring the world she created with her Wetlands stories, has moved to downtown drowned Los Angeles, but whether she has found anything new is entirely open to discussion. A moment's compassion is almost certainly not enough to sustain a story which is little more than another sketch of her world. It's surely time to DO something with it.

The curiosity is a story by Tom Purdom. Superficially, it's a quasi-historical rerun of that ancient classic, the knight slaying the dragon, going all the way back to the Greek myth of Andromeda. Nevertheless, Purdom manages to put a neat spin on it, by lining artillery up against a monster which, as they acknowledge, shouldn't exist. Set in the eighteenth century Hapsburg, Purdom has astutely picked that moment in history when medieval superstition is dying as modern rationality gradually prevails. His metaphorical dragon marks the passing of an earlier time and one senses that Purdom regrets this.

Asimov's also has a double issue in November, and the plum in this issue surely ought to be the new Ursula Le Guin novella. Here, I am in a quandary. I am a great admirer of Le Guin's work. Only the other day I read her beautifully understated reworking of the Sleeping Beauty myth in Datlow and Windling's Seventh Annual Best of, so why does this story, 'Forgiveness Day' disappoint me so much. Maybe it really is that nothing happens. The familiar Le Guin preoccupations are all there, woman against man, restrictive society at odds with progressive individual, but this story just isn't speaking to me in the way I would hope.

Rudy Rucker and Bruce Sterling's latest wacky offering, 'Big Jelly', while amusing, is a few pages too long — cut the explanation guys, I want to read about the jelly fish, not set up a factory in my back yard. Kate Wilhelm fiddles with the predicament of telepaths without adding anything to the situation, which I regret as I feel she ought to be able to expand the dimension. Most disappointing of all is Eric Choi's 'Dedication'. Who Eric Choi, you ask? Eric Choi is the winner of the first Isaac Asimov Award for Undergraduate Excellence in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing. Catchy title, eh? And his story? Well, suppose you were part of a Mars landing party, and something goes horribly wrong with your vehicle, and by dint of sheer perspicacity you manage to programme a handy passing shuttle to land and rescue you, then you'd be up there with Eric Choi.

This is typical of a subset of the genre, the 'beyond all hope' story. I've read several of a similar nature in the last couple of years — the party which potholes right through Miranda, the girl who walks round the Moon — it's been done before. To some extent, given the author in whose name this award is given, we should perhaps not be surprised by the traditional choice, but then again, given the way that Dozois et al have made Asimov's eponymous magazine into a forum of excellence, perhaps we should be very, very worried. Not just about the choice, but also about the standard of the other stories submitted.

Now, if anywhere ought to be a bastion of 'real hard SF', it must surely be *Analog*. Mind you, these days it's getting very difficult to actually locate the fiction in the forest of articles about science, most of which are top-heavy on equations. New Scientist it ain't. And some of the fiction is not really that much better. Bud Sparhawk's 'Hurricane!' reads so like a handbook on how to parasail through hurricanes, I'm a little surprised it didn't carry a health warning — 'don't try this yourselves, kids!'. Okay, so brilliant hypothesis but is it fiction? Well, I learned a lot about how to go about this hypothetical parasailing but I learned very little about my character or his motivations, and the narrative seemed to drag as long as the hurricane itself.

Curiously, there was one story which, in a way, did follow the Ruschian dictat, at least in an apposite kind of way. G. David Nordley's 'His Father's Voice' concerns a man who inherits a bunch of records — those things we had before CDs — on which his father, whom he never knew, is singing. But how to play them? The problem occupies him for years and the solution is neat, very much in keeping with that good old *Analog* 'can do' philosophy but at the same time very close to the realistic vision of future science.

Another function of science fiction is, or ought to be, to point up the absurd in our own lives. Mark Rich's "To Hunt in Fields' (November) takes this to its logical conclusion and beyond, to a world where anything that is good for you is on prescription and otherwise unobtainable. Anything that's good for you, like walking, like chicken soup, like sex even. If it's good for you, then you need a prescription. The absurdity of it all is clear, even to the people of this world. In fact, the only real puzzle to me is how it happened in the first place, though these things have a habit of sneaking up on you.

It's clear that for all her protestations, even Rusch's own magazine doesn't entirely fulfil her belief concerning the ideal science fiction. And the other magazines certainly don't live up to it. Having said that, we have to be reasonable and accept that editing a magazine is not entirely about satisfying your own need for a particular variety of SF, but also about catering for your readers. Nevertheless, it's also clear that far too much SF and fantasy is still recycling the old familiar tropes. You may argue that there is only so much that can be done with a story, and this is also true, but in that case why not strive to do it as interestingly as possible instead of offering half-thought out stories? And shouldn't editors be doubly watchful to avoid this sort of thing, to foster the new, the innovative? As readers, don't we deserve the best?

Artwork by Andrew Cary

Signposts

Tanith Lee
Black Unicorn

"...has a surface simplicity which masks a subtle handling of themes which are just as important in the everyday world as they are in the world of Tanith Lee's imagination." Cherith Baldry

Charles de Lint
The Little Country

"This novel with its underlying and unifying themes of the meaning and importance of folk tales, folk music and old beliefs is very readable. It is recommended to readers looking for something different in contemporary fantasy." Lynne Bispham

Kim Newman
The Original Dr. Shade

"...his inventiveness, the strength of plot, and ability to pilot a story to a satisfying conclusion, should recommend this book to readers who wouldn't normally read horror." Max Sexton

Rudy Rucker
Software

"Whatever you do, buy this book." Steve Palmer

John Whitbourn
Popes and Phantoms

"Despite dealing with some fairly sombre events he manages to be witty and humorous and even to evoke sympathy for his main character." Sue Badham

Reviews

John Allen-Price
Mutant Chronicles: Frenzy
Roc, 1994, 266pp, £3.99
Norman Beswick

Humanity faces the onslaught of the Dark Invaders, whose military technology is backed up by magic. The invaders secretly begin to establish a base on Venus, which humans have long since terraformed to resemble "what their original Earth once looked like". Not all humans believe the Dark Invaders exist, and accuse instead one or other of the competing nations of humanity. But the Dark Invaders capture a key woman and make her the Receptacle of Visions. She must be rescued. Captain Hunter and his group, in disgrace with a senior military commander, are the lead group in the assault.

This is book two of what is more than mere reading matter: there is an associated role-playing game series, together with comics, video games, posters, models, feature films and more. Given this background, you might reasonably expect that the narrative would consist entirely of military manoeuvres, switching rapidly and sometimes confusingly between the various competing groups, with heavy concentration on weaponry (some of it surprisingly familiar — would you believe machine guns and napalm?). You would also predict that the writing would be workaday and undistinguished. As your reviewer I have doggedly read practically every word, and can confirm alas that this is so.

Kevin J. Anderson
Star Wars: Dark Apprentice
Bantam, 18/8/94, 354pp, £3.99
Graham Andrews

Once upon a time, in a cinema far, far away I saw a film called *Star Wars*. I enjoyed the special effects — while suspending my disbelief from the highest yardarm at Starbase Prime. Ditto the influence-spotting: *Scaramouche*, *Duck Soup*, *Foundation*, *Dune*, *The Dam Busters*, *633 Squadron*.... almost every movie and / or novel then known to George Lucas.

In my humble-but strongly-held opinion, *Star Wars* is a good see-once movie; it falls apart incrementally with each repeated viewing. Ditto the sequels (*The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*).

Ditto (useful word, that) the tie-in novelizations by: (a) George Lucas Alan Dean Foster; (b) Donald F. Glut; (c) James Kahn. Foster later turned out the 'associational' *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*. After that came the slew of cash-in bookoids that - thankfully - need not concern us here.

The book under review, Kevin J. Anderson's *Dark Apprentice*, can be summed up in one sentence: "Still greedy, after all these years". I'm referring to Lucasfilm, Ltd. — perhaps better known as *Star Wars* (registered trademark). *DA* is Vol. II of the Jedi Academy Trilogy. Anderson has also written Vol. I (*Jedi Search* and Vol. III (*Champions of the Force*).

"Breaking the Pax Republica, Admiral Daala uses her Imperial fleet to conduct guerrilla warfare on peaceful worlds" (blurb). A novel(?) like *DA* is unreviewable — apart from a notice-of-availability for insatiable Warries. Any sane person over the age of fourteen would get more intellectual stimulation by watching *Jake and the Fat Man* or *Beavis and Butthead*. I'm not joking.

Isaac Asimov
Forward the Foundation
Bantam, 8/10/94, 477pp, £4.99
John D. Owen.

Isaac Asimov's last published novel, and also the final piece in the Foundation puzzle. What a shame that the work is such a mess. I've never been all that impressed by the Good Doctor's attempts to weave his *Robot* and *Foundation* stories together: it seemed so pointless, demeaning both series by a convoluted amalgamation. But funnily enough, the faults of *Forward the Foundation* aren't due to a plot overly concerned with robots (though they do impinge on it in a couple of places), but rather to failings within the basic *Foundation* structure.

Asimov, under prompting from John Campbell, wrote the original *Foundation* stories as an analogue of the fall of the Roman Empire. So he used rather simplistic political machinations to make the plots work (and the *Foundation* series is, above all, about the way the politics of Empire behave). Because of this, Asimov has kept that same simplicity of political purpose in relation to Hari Seldon's efforts to establish psychohistory amid the turmoil of Trantor, ruling planet over twenty-eight million worlds. And it doesn't ring true: disbelief is not suspended at all willingly, because of the obvious fallacy of his reasoning. A planet such as Trantor would have a very sophisticated political structure, one that it would be very difficult to undercut, so two thirds of Asimov's plot goes out the window.

Add to this the obvious problems of writing a prequel (where the outcome is already known), and you come up with an annoying book, with no real plot tensions. Sad, but true.

Iain Banks
Complicity
Abacus, 8/10/94, 313pp, £6.99
Norman Beswick

Note the lack of a middle initial: this is mainstream Banks, the Banks of *The Wasp Factory*, *Walking on Glass*, and *Crow Road*. This is a thriller, and the technique, as ever, is chillingly superb. Cameron

Colley is a free-wheeling, hard-drinking, left-wing journalist on an Edinburgh newspaper in '992, addicted to sex and computer games with a little cocaine and marijuana on the side. He is pursuing a series of apparently unlinked and bizarre deaths, following up the tenuous hints of an elusively anonymous source.

Parallel with his first person narrative, we also follow a gruesome series of current killings undertaken by a mysterious character described only as "you". The police are able to link these killings with a fiery piece Colley wrote denouncing a list of villains of post-Thatcher days, and Colley finds himself under interrogation. Is he the mystery killer — or does he, unknown to himself, have the clue to who the real killer is?

The main narrative are intercut with recollections of Colley's earlier friendships and amours, giving a sufficiently convincing depth to the major characters. I have to say that the contemporary references, including Colley's political arguments with his friends and colleagues, are absolutely spot on, and Banks is quite superb in manoeuvring every sentence to increase the tension and our sense of fascinated horror.

No, it's not SF, but Banks also writes SF with the same technical brilliance. It's a corker of a tale which deserves careful attention by all aspiring young authors.

Ramsey Campbell
Alone With The Horrors
Headline, 15/9/94, 493pp, £5.99
Colin Bird

Subtitled — "The Great Short Fiction of Ramsey Campbell 1961-1991", this thirty nine story anthology is as comprehensive an overview as anyone could possibly need of Britain's finest horror writer. Beginning with his precocious Lovecraft pastiche, 'The Room in the Castle', written at the age of fifteen, this collection covers all the authors usual themes. There are stories in urban settings of banal domesticity, featuring alienated characters who must face the physical manifestation of their fears.

The stories range from atmospheric vignettes like the claustrophobic 'The Gap', to blackly comic short stories such as 'Heading Home'. There are even some uncharacteristically gory tales such as 'Again'. The common thread is Campbell's percipient eye for detail, which allows him to quickly enter a world where believable characters rub shoulders with the supernatural. The settings include churches, offices, fairgrounds, cinemas (a common location in modern horror) and alleyways. It usually doesn't take long for Campbell to maroon his characters in dark, enclosed spaces but the horror usually takes the form of psychological torment rather than physical agony.

Some of these stories, such as 'Mackintosh Willy', are like modern urban myths reworked into Gothic splendour. In the excellent 'Out of Copyright', one of several stories set around the periphery of the publishing world, a character says "they've lost the knack of proper Gothic writing", and this sentiment seems to come from the author's heart. But Campbell's style is far from dated, his stories are littered with realistic Merseyside locations and urban decay is another common thread through many of these stories. His writing style is precise and often contains shards of effectively poetic imagery, even in the early stories.

As in any collection of thirty nine stories there is a range in quality. Some of the more self-conscious Lovecraftian tales, like 'The Voice of the Beach', do tend to suffer from a surfeit of overheated prose. I prefer the epigrammatic storytelling of the five page "Call First" and the macabre humour of "Heading Home". The homogeneity of the stories does mean it is unwise to attempt this collection in anything other than small doses.

Alone With the Horrors also contains sixteen illustrations by J. K. Potter which perfectly complement Campbell's style. A fine collection to dip into to sample some of Ramsey Campbell's best work.

C. J. Cherryh
Faery in Shadow
Legend, 18/8/94, 249pp, £4.99
Tanya Brown

This is a world where the Sidhe walk; a dark, fantastic Celtic land through which Caith and his dark companion Dubhain hunt, and are hunted, through tangled wet woods at night. A Beast from the dark loch follows their trail and the sound of rattling bones, and rabbit skulls are nibbled to the bone in an instant by invisible teeth.

Caith's grim and shadowy past has left him labouring under a geas, a Necessity, which is not clearly stated but which he curses at every twist of fate. He doesn't understand the machinations of the Sidhe, or of the witch in her castle at the head of the loch. Nothing of Faery is ever quite what it seems; but there is a perverse logic, and even honour, to the game they are playing with Caith, their mortal pawn, although there is little of humanity about them.

Faery in Shadow partakes as much of horror as of fantasy; the sense of Celtic nightmare is well-sustained by Cherryh's occasionally unsubtle use of dialect and archaism, and the understated terror of old, malevolent powers lurking in the shadows and streams of a land that, for all its daytime beauty, is dark and threatening.

A. Cole & C. Bunch
The Far Kingdoms
Legend, 7/7/94, 561pp, £5.99
Chris Hart

It is a pretty shrewd opening gambit to start a hefty, swords and sorcery novel, with a prolonged sex scene in your first chapter. This sets the tone of *Far Kingdoms*, as it is a story about a wily adolescent, for an audience of teenies.

Cole and Bunch have a refreshing approach to the genre by ignoring many of the pitfalls of usual quest fantasy efforts and making a conscious effort to create characters which grab the attention. Amalric Emilie Antero is at an age when it is customary for a merchants son to find his "Trade Wind"; a journey to discover new markets in foreign lands. He forsakes the normal journeys, to the well worn paths of the East, for the promise of high adventure in the legendary Far Kingdoms. He is encouraged to embark on his journey by his father, who had the opportunity to explore the uncharted haven of the Far Kingdoms but preferred the conventional, easy option.

Janus, a soldier of some repute who lures the embryonic merchant to the possibilities of the mythical lands. Told in a reflective, conversational style, it is the developing bond between Janus and Amalric that is the pivotal interest of the novel, more than the trials and tribulations of the journey. The actual rite of passage for the merchant is the discovery of the nature of true friendship. Janus dabbles in magic much to the horror of Amalric, who has personal reasons to loath its uncertainties. The attention to military details and the magic - the swords and sorcery - are interesting, but marred by the incongruent use of modern idioms, such as "mad, bad and dangerous to know ", or , "bum boy". Although there is a sprinkling of the odd cringing phrase there are enough set pieces to entertain the S n' S fan, as well as the Nintendo attention span.

David Gemmell, Stan Nicholls / Fangorn, & Elitta Fell
Wolf In Shadow: The Graphic Novel
Legend, 15/9//94, 98pp, £9-99
Benedict S. Cullum

The tale concerns Jon Shannow, the Jerusalem Man's search for the mystical city of Jerusalem, following his eventful journey through a post apocalyptic fantasy world in which dark forces set community against community; brother against brother. There is redemption, after a fashion, but the setting is bleak and brutal — almost nightmarish in its intensity.

Gemmell is a successful writer of fantasy and it must be assumed that Legend are attempting to milk this particular cash cow by moving into the graphic novel market.

Although art and layout combine effectively, notwithstanding Stan Nicholls' work on previous adaptations this reader, admittedly unfamiliar with Gemmell's work, was left with the strong impression of drastic abridgement rather akin to a 3 hour film cut to fit a 90 minute television slot. One might be better advised to read Gemmell's original books in view of this apparent dilution when transferred to the graphic novel format.

John Gideon
Red Ball
Headline, 11/8/94, 314pp, £16.99
Martin Brice

In American steam railroad sig nalling, a red ball or disc denotes a non-stop train. Hence "The Red Ball Express" of World War II was a convoy of military vehicles which took precedence over all other traffic. I don't know whether this is why the author chose that particular symbol, but this book's "Red Ball" gives its possessor luck and power, gratification of every whim, and not just priority, but total dominion over all who stand in the way — indeed over the forces of law and nature itself. One of the intellectually disturbing arguments raised, is whether it is right or wrong to use evil to achieve healing miracles.

Serving in Vietnam, Lewis Kindred encounters an American sergeant whose fortune in the field and good fortune at cards seem to emanate from a palm-sized globe of bright red crystal. Soon afterwards Lewis loses both legs in action.

Twenty years later and confined to a wheelchair in Portland (Oregon, USA), Lewis has built up a dealership gambling business and perfected his poker skills. The two main characters in his life are his Aunt Juliet (an Evangelical Christian) and Josh (a student with journalistic ambitions). Josh's girlfriend is Nicole Tran, daughter of a Vietnamese ex-soldier, the latter now a member of an obscure Buddhist (?) sect. Into their lives the red ball comes again.

Gory horror is piled upon eerie menace and violent sex in the fantasy pages of this book, but it is the author's description of real-life war, social conflict, urban violence and drug abuse, which are the most horrific passages. If anything, this is an anti-war novel, a plea for the decent treatment of disabled ex-servicemen. And if, when watching film of relief workers bringing water

purification equipment into refugee camps, you have ever wondered: "How will they dispose of the excrement?" – this book will tell you.

Parke Godwin
Robin and The King
AvoNova, 7/94, 384pp, $5.50
Sue Badham

I'm at a disadvantage reviewing this book because it's a sequel to another book that I haven't read. It's also much more of a historical novel than a fantasy book and can only really be called fantasy because it's main character is someone who is a legend. Otherwise, this book is written very much in the style of a historical novel, and the author has obviously tried to make his background as accurate as possible. This is his except that in so doing he has failed to make his Robin special, failed to show why he became legendary.

This Robin is placed in the time of William the Conqueror and his son William Rufus. In this book he is pitted against the campaign of forest clearances which William instituted once he had conquered England and fought off the Earl's revolt. robin is shown as quite typically Anglo Saxon, with a stubborn respect for the law and custom of the country, fighting against a Norman king with a strong sense of divine right. This is historically accurate: William's main opinion of the democratic institutions he found in England were that they made it easier to collect taxes. Overall this book fails to rise much above the average and the plot, story-telling and characterisation remain pedestrian and uninspired throughout.

Sherry Gottlieb
Love Bite
Warner, 18/8/94, 277pp, £4.99
Julie Atkin

Jacob 'Jace' Levy and Liz Robinson are a pair of LAPD Homicide detectives, mismatched, but with a successful clean-up record. When they are called to the murder of a transient stable hand, they find clues that lead them to believe that this is the latest in an undiscovered sequence of serial murders. While one strand of the narrative follows these two characters through their police procedures, the other viewpoint observes Risha Cadigan – night-time photographer, and the vampire behind the killings. Having finally come to terms with the death of her lover and mentor, she places a lonely places a lonely-hearts ad in an attempt to attract a suitable mate to whom to bestow the gift of immortality.

Once I read past the first couple of chapters, which I felt read like an episode of *Quincy*, I found this a fast-moving and amusing horror novel. The plot rushes forward to the expected conclusion – but with a nice little twist in the Epilogue – and I enjoyed the characters of Levy and Cadigan. I found it slightly irritating that Gottlieb uses the names of her friends – Datlow also appears, as well as many of the people she thanks in the introduction. Hopefully she will now have got this out of her system. But that cover – tacky, tacky, tacky!

Sharon Green
Dark Mirror, Dark Dream
AvoNova, 7/94, 363pp, $4.99
L. J. Hurst

Sharon Green's career began with the *Jalav – Amazon Warrior* series, which aimed at the John Norman market. I went to check those against this new fantasy, but fortunately they seem to have disappeared from my shelves, where this latest novel will soon follow. This new volume is, though, nothing to do with the world of dominance and bondage, but a sequel in another series.

We are in a world of magic and shape changing – where pronces and princesses are warriors and lovers. The Parallelism of the title is some indication that this is actually the tale of two pairs – one magicians, the other shape changers.

What makes the whole thing ghastly is the construction on two levels – firstly, the fantastic is not epic, and secondly, the writing is mundane.

"Two glasses of wine appeared floating mid-air next to his right hand, and he took one and held it out to me.

"'For you, my lovely,' he murmured, his voice deepened to match the small, sexy smile he wore."

This is the bonding of a pair of leading magicians and it reads more like the script from a sixties television series. Surely, magic should be raised above the mundane – it is extra-ordinary. This writing does not portray magic as epic, as extra-ordinary, and does not suggest the speciality of the characters. it is, though, typical of this novel.

The whole thing was unpleasant to read and unpleasant to think about.

Andrew Harman
The Tome Tunnel
Legend, 18/8/94, 278pp, £4-99
Benedict S. Cullum

There is something of a reality glitch underway: a bookworm is eating its way through a magic book in the "real" world whilst a phoenix has regenerated on an equivalent volume in the Chapter Dimensions – a fictional continuum where the rules of fairy tales prevail. The resultant blurring and/or breakdown of realities is what is intended to drive the action in Harman's third "humorous" offering.

Call me old-fashioned, but I would have thought that in order to be marketed as humour a book might be expected to have a joke in it: silly contrived puns and needlessly convoluted sentences will not suffice.

The writing having signally failed to tickle my funny bone, I can't even say that either the characters or the plot piqued my interest and, consequently, am unable to recommend the work to anyone over twelve years of age.

Joanne Harris
Sleep, Pale Sister
Arrow, 15/9/94, 404 pp, £6.99
Steve Jeffery

Subtitled 'A Gothic Tale', the gorgeous cover detail, from the painting *The Child Enthroned* by Thomas Cooper Gotch, places the mood and setting of the novel more firmly in period of the Victorian Pre-Raphaelite artistic brotherhood than, say, the arch gothic of Poe or Stoker. Not that isn't a dark novel without its own ghosts, but the darkness here is of Victorian hypocrisy and repressed sexuality.

Henry Paul Chester is a painter with a particular, and unhealthy, taste for the wan and romantic virgins of a part of the Pre-Raphaelite vision. In the pale, dark eyed Effie he thinks he has found his perfect model. He paints her features through a series of portraits, from 'The Beggar Girl' to drowned 'Ophelia' and 'Sleeping Beauty'. Effie, though, is showing an unfortunate tendency of growing out of her girlhood. Henry eventually marries Effie at seventeen, but is terrified and revolted at her less than passive sexuality on their wedding night. He embarks on a systematic campaign of oppressive control and medication that will break her "evil" appetites and keep his bride forever in his ideal of the perfect model. But Henry's ambitions to be respected as a painter thwart his own plans when Effie meets the rakish Moses Harper at a private exhibition. An affair develops, tearing Effie between her sexual adventures with Moses and her role as Henry's compliant virgin bride. With the aid of Fanny Miller, witch and whorehouse madam whose establishment Henry is not above frequenting, Moses and Effie embark on dangerous deception to entrap and finally break Henry's domineering hold over Effie. The plan (culminating in a scene right out of *Romeo and Juliet*), of course, goes terribly wrong for all involved.

Sleep, Pale Sister is a very dark novel. Although told in a series of very short first viewpoint chapters, it's hard to develop a sympathy with almost anyone involved, who all operate from more or less selfish motives. However, if you're not addicted to happy endings and can ignore a few rather obvious 'continuity glitches', this is a otherwise strong and dark ghost story that does justify its Gothic tag.

Garry D. Kilworth
Angel
Gollancz, 28/7/94, 286pp, £4.99
Graham Andrews

H.G.Wells published two novels in 1895. *The Time Machine* was followed by *The Wonderful Visit*, his unjustly neglected account of an angelic visitation to country-life England. The winged humanoid might or might not be supernatural; e.g.; he knows nothing about life after death. Anyway, the *Angel* is a true innocent abroad who finally escapes into fiery death and possible Phoenix-hood.

Angel – Garry D(ouglas) Kilworth-It's first outright 'horror' novel – inverts the Wellsian fable to baleful effect. As Lisa Tuttle points out:

"Everybody on earth knows demons are dangerous; it takes Garry Kilworth to convince us that an angel would be more terrifying than any demon, and more dangerous, even to good guys... in *Angel* he has combined metaphysical speculation with very human horrors to produce a most unusual thriller." (publicity notice)

Angel is set in a near-future – 1997 – San Francisco plagued by inexplicable fire-raisings. (Wells' novella 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' features San Francisco and hell-fire – but not together.) "A year ago arson had been a big problem in European cities: London, Paris, Rome. They still had fires over there, but not nearly as many as American cities were getting. The whole scene seemed to have crossed the Atlantic to the USA" (p.19).

The flit-about firebug turns out to be Jophiel, an 'angel' bent upon terminating his 'demon' enemies in some half-explained 'Armageddon'. Malloch is the chief demon, who becomes something like a hero before The End: "Provided his whole body did not undergo some basic thorough molecular change, such as being subjected to great pressure or heat, he was safe from death" (p.46).

Detective sergeant Dave Peters takes the vengeance trail against Jophiel after his wife, Celia, and eight-year-old son, Jamie, are both killed in a 'firebombed' department store. Danny Spitz, his partner, also gets personally involved – also for good and sufficient reasons. Things.... hot up.... when Jophiel himself is reduced to the rank of demon (i.e. fallen angel), adopting the dad-attitude name Nethru.

Although *Angel* has been marketed as a 'horror' novel, Kilworth treats the supernatural with DARKER THAN YOU THINK-type scientific rigour (see pp. 145-6 for 'the three triads of angels' bit). There are more things in Jophiel-Nethru's heaven and earth, Clive Barker, than are dreamt of in your philosophy: "'The Ten Commandments were given to man, not to my kind... I am here to hunt. It is

not my concern if humans die in the process'" (p. 129.

Angel is the nearest print analogue I've seen to a virtual-reality version of *Fahrenheit 451*. Its 'rare sense of spiritual horror' (Ramsey Campbell) permeates almost every page. Pity about the ludicrous winged-angel cover, by Peter Mennim. He either didn't read the book or Had Orders From On High.

Tanith Lee
Black Unicorn
Orbit, 22/9/94, 188pp, £4.99
Cherith Baldry

Tanaquil, daughter of a powerful sorceress, feels lonely, frustrated and out of place in her mother's fortress. Her needs are neglected, and she finds consolation in the craft of mending things, and in the society of her pet, the idiosyncratic peeve. Her life begins to change when she creates from a cache of hidden bones the skeleton of a unicorn, which comes to life and draws her out into the desert.

This book must be known to many people through the hardback edition, but this paperback will rightly make it familiar to many more. The young protagonist, and the theme of relationships between parents and children, mean that the book works as a young adult novel, but it is satisfying enough not to stop there. There is a richness to the symbolism which asks for further readings.

The language is vivid and precise, with the quality of fable or fairy-tale. Everything is visualised clearly, from the settings and characters to details of clothes and jewels and weapons. There is a delight in colour and texture. At the same time there is down-to-earth humour, a counterpoint to the fantasy and the wonder, which is not just added for light relief, but is an integral part of the theme.

Black Unicorn has a surface simplicity which masks a very subtle handling of themes which are just as important in the everyday world as they are in the world of Tanith Lee's imagination. I enjoyed it very much and I recommend it.

Stephen Leigh
Ray Bradbury Presents
Dinosaur Warriors
AvoN ova, 7/94, 245pp , $4.99
Joseph Nicholas

As its title suggests, this is a sharecrop, part of a series loosely inspired by Ray Bradbury's famous story, 'A Sound of Thunder', of the man who accidentally treads on a butterfly while on a time safari in the past, and returns to an altered present. Like the novels in Roger Zelazny's *Amber* sequence, it does not stand alone, but begins where the previous book left off, and ends in mid-air; but if you've missed the previous books there's a synopsis of them at the front.

Matching this book against that synopsis, they seem to differ little from each other: there's much zipping up and down the timelines and dropping in and out of alternative universes, but nothing is explored in any depth. It might be argued that because the viewpoint characters are teenagers there is no scope for such exploration; but I rather suspect that, faced with the premise of dinosaurs which developed self-awareness, and thence civilisation, the average young adult reader would want rather more than a lot of action-adventure derring-do.

The book contains some sketches of the events it relates, purportedly drawn by one of the protagonists. For a series packaged by Byron Preiss Visual Publications, their quality is very poor.

Charles de Lint
The Little Country
Pan, 7/10/94, 630pp, £5.99
Lynne Bispham

Janey Little, a professional musician, was first inspired to play folk music by the writings of William Dunthorn, a friend of her grandfather's. In her grandfather's attic she discovers 'The Little Country', a previously unknown book of Dunthorn's, and a letter to her grandfather instructing him that the book must never be published. Janey opens the book and begins to read, and on the other side of the world and evil man feels its power awaken. Soon Janey is made aware that "The Little Country' is more than just a book, and that there are those who will stop at nothing, including murder, to obtain it for themselves. Janey realises that the people threatening her have immense wealth and influence, but she and her friends are eventually forced to admit that what they are facing can only be described as magic.

In *The Little Country*, de Lint display a highly individual voice. The background of the novel, a village in Cornwall and the folk music scene of which Janey is a part, is vividly brought to life, and the intrusion of the fantastical into this world is made credible by the reactions of the well-drawn characters who the reader really cares about. The faery tale elements in the novel never descend into whimsy — and there are many writers of horror who could take a lesson from de Lint as to how a short sharp scene of violence can be just as effective in creating a sense of terror or evil as a slow lingering over the gore.

This novel with its underlying and unifying themes of the meaning and importance of folk tales, folk music and old beliefs is very readable. It is recommended to readers looking for something a bit different in contemporary fantasy.

Bentley Little
The Mailman
Headline, 18/8/94, 440pp, £5.99
John D. Owen

Bentley Little's *The Mailman* is best described as being written to the Stephen King pattern. It is set in a small town (in Arizona, not New England), and features a small change in the town's routine that gradually begins to turn evil. Here, it is the arrival of a new mailman, who, after at first delivering only good mail (i.e., no bills or junk mail), gradually reveals his demonic nature: letters arrive from dead relatives, and dark secrets are exhumed. Before long, death visits the town, as horrible suicides, and then sadistic murder.

Naturally (this being the King standard), one family recognises the evil in the mailman, and becomes the focus for opposition and cause of his downfall, despite efforts to destroy them. In this case, it is a schoolteacher and his wife and young boy. The Albin family are about the only decently drawn characters in the book: the rest are medium quality cardboard, with stand-out characters certain victims of the mailman.

The whole book is fine, as an exemplar of horror a la King. The plot is nicely worked out, though there are no surprises along the way: given the starting point, almost any competent writer would have come up with a similar storyline without breaking sweat. And that's the trouble: after 440 pages, the story is resolved, the book put down and it's gone. There is nothing memorable here. Might find favour with a Stephen King fan with nothing better to do on a rainy afternoon, but that's about all.

Brian Lumley
Dagon's Bell and Other Discords
NEL, 4/8/94, 333pp, £4.99
Jon Wallace

This is Brian Lumley's second short story collection. It contains 12 stories published between 1971 and 1990. Anyone familiar with Lumley will be aware that a lot of his work is set in the mysterious world of the Cthulhu Mythos, and won't be disappointed to find that four of these stories show a heavy Lovecraftian influence. These stories tread an uneasy line between the 'dated' feel that Lovecraft's work has to modern eyes and a more modern style of storytelling that doesn't quite come off.

"And he too had done well, and would do even better. His studies had been in architecture and design, but within two short years of his return he had expanded these spheres... setting up a profitable business of his own and building himself an enviable reputation in his fields." *From 'Dagon's Bell'*

Others, like 'In the Glow Zone' and 'Big "C"' are SF. Almost naive, but chilling for all that. Lumley has the magic touch which can take a sort of straightforward, almost everyday tale and find the chill at its heart. Fans of horror writers like Ramsey Campbell or Charles Grant won't find that sort of style here. These are subtler stories, stories whose horror lies under their everyday exterior.

Anne McCaffrey
The Dolphins of Pern
Bantam, 8/12/94, 300pp, £14.99
Mat Coward

In this latest instalment of the Pern Chronicles, the occupants of a capsized fishing boat are rescued by what they take to be talking fish, but which are in fact dolphins ("Doll fins speak good"), brought to the new planet by early human colonists as aquatic guides, but forgotten by their descendants.

REadis, a boy sawed from the fishing vessel, becomes fascinated by the dolphins, and helped by T' Lion, a young dragonrider, sets out to become Pern's first dolphineer, despite the opposition of his elders.

It's a long time since I read, and loved, *The Ship Who Sang*, and I was disappointed to find this book hard going. Probably those readers who have followed McCaffrey's work over the years more faithfully than I, will continue to enjoy her friendly, soft-boiled tales of science-based fantasy, but to me *Dolphins* seemed to contain too many of the failings which the genre's detractors find so hilarious: back-to-front sentence structure, stock character, massive overuse of exclamation marks, pages stiff with Capital Initials, and a general air of bogus mediaevalism; all of which combines to drown out the wonderful sense of atmosphere on which this author's reputation once rested.

Anne McCaffrey &
Elizabeth Anne Scarborough
Powers That be
Corgi, 18/8/94, 353pp, £4.99
Jan Malique

Powers That be is a collaboration between Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Anne Scarborough, set on the terraformed Petaybee, a planet holding many secrets within its icy heart. Major Yanaba Maddock is sent to Kilcoole to recuperate from a near fatal accident. Unfortunately her sick leave is hijacked by the intelligence services who want her to go undercover to find out what has happened to their missing exploratory teams (there's gold in them thaar hills...). Hampered by meagre resources and inhospitable environment she has no choice but to comply. The reluctant agent is drawn into the lives of the residents of Kilcoole, deviated day by day from the unpleasant task assigned to her until finally the true facts of the relationship between the colo-

nists and the planet are revealed to her.

It is quite a thoughtful book, with a subject matter which could be equally applied to Earth and its motley group of citizens. We have a situation here where greed for land and resources involves the transportation of people to an almost lifeless planet. They are dispossessed without the slightest thought about their wishes, participants in a global genetic experiment which finally ends with the sentient being which is Petaybee revolting against the mutilation which is being inflicted upon it. If only Mother Earth could fight back so spectacularly...

There is rhythm to the lives of the people of Kilcoole, at one with the moods and nuances of the seasons (in more ways than I found out). The songs they offered as gifts of celebration and thanks were highly evocative pieces, reminders of a people in harmony with themselves and nature, and capable of great powers of healing (a result of the symbiotic relationship with the planet).

L. E. Modesitt, Jr
The Towers of the Sunset
Orbit, 22/9/94, 538pp, £5.99
Alan Fraser

The Towers of the Sunset is set in the same world as Modesitt's earlier *The Magic of Recluse*. It is a prequel, telling the story of the founding of the island realm of Recluse, so it is not necessary to have read the earlier book.

In this world not only are women the dominant sex, but Black magic is good, and White magic is bad. This allows Modesitt a few politically-correct jokes, such as describing someone who's depressed as "always looking on the White side of things" or villains as "White-hearted".

The hero of this book is Creslin, son of the ruler of Westwind, who has been trained as a bard, and (unusually for a man) to become an immensely skilled warrior; however Creslin also has an innate magical skill to control the forces of weather. Creslin is destined for an arranged marriage to Megaera, the younger sister of the Tyrant of the neighbouring state of Sarrorynn, but rebels against this before having seen her, setting off on a perilous journey into the wild world to find his true self as a man, rather than as the partner of a powerful woman. Unfortunately his presence as an untrained but potentially powerful Black magician is sensed by the evil White magicians of Candar, and after many adventures as a hired "blade" he ends up their prisoner.

When Creslin is eventually rescued, ironically he has to go into exile with his intended wife as joint regents of the desert island colony of Recluse. He comes deeply to love the woman he once spurned, but the wounded Megaera sees the marriage now as one of duty only and refuses to return his love. From then on the story is of the efforts of the colony to survive on Recluse against overwhelming odds as the mainland nations fall to the evil wizards, and of the difficult relationship between Creslin and Megaera.

The three things that make this book stand out from the mass are the strong plot-line, the unusually good characterisation, particularly of Creslin and Megaera, and the well-worked-out system of magic, where each use of it, no matter how well meant, always has a balancing negative effect. *The Towers of the Sunset* is one of a very small number of fantasy book that I found extremely involving — in fact I haven't read one as good as this since Guy Gavriel Kay's *Tigana*. I recommend it heartily.

Kim Newman
The Original Dr. Shade
Pocket books, 1994, 351pp, £4.99
Max Sexton

The Original Dr. Shade is a collection of short stories by Kim Newman, a professional critic turned writer. The title story won a BSFA award in 1990 so it may already be familiar to many, but for those who haven't read it, it is an excellent introduction to the imaginative and polished fiction of Kim Newman. Many of the stories in this collection have been published in *Interzone* and *Fantasy Tales*. What they have in common is the use of sci-fi, chiefly cyberpunk, and fantasy themes for their shock value, to produce new types of horror.

The title story brings together much of the source material that Newman, in his capacity as a professional critic, has a good working knowledge of. The world of tabloid newspapers in interwoven with the story of a resurrected character from an old newspaper comic strip, the original Dr. Shade. The story opens as the Dr. Shade of the 'thirties strip battles the enemies of the British Empire, caricaturing Jewish Bolsheviks, and dispatches them to comic-book perdition. His xenophobic quasi-fascist politics are resurrected in the 'nineties by the proprietor of a thinly disguised *Sun* newspaper to create a character that will battle the socialist and foreign enemies of the New Right. The story goes part way to exploring the psychology of the far right and the fascism innate in Superheroes, made more effective by the realistic setting. While the horror comes from a creeping realisation that the story isn't so far off the truth.

The other stories are thinner, although, Newman's technique and style always produce an entertaining read. 'Mother Hen' and 'The Man Who Collected Barker' are typical oeuvres from the sleight of hand *Fantasy Tales*, replete with a visceral love of the grotesque.

The more substantial *Interzone* stories in this collection, share with cyberpunk, a dark fascination for technology and where it may be leading us. 'Twitch Technicolour' finds its horror in the technological advance of video equipment that brings long dead actors back to life. 'Patricia's Profession' takes a trend in modern living to its crazy conclusion. 'SPQR' discovers that in the near future real live heroes are manufactured and crosses the line between fiction and reality.

Kim Newman is a horror writer at bottom; his stories, perhaps too predictably, usually end with someone dying horribly. His stories are plot, not character, driven; the writing consequently, even in the form of a short story, is often a little bare. Fortunately, his inventiveness, the strength of plot, and ability to pilot a story to a satisfying conclusion, should recommend this book to readers who wouldn't normally read horror.

Rudy Rucker
Software
Roc, 10/94, 174pp, £4.99
Steve Palmer

What a superb book this is. Written in 1982, this is a no-holds barred romp around the concept of what exactly constitutes the human mind: is it software or is there an irreducible soul? What is so great is that there is a plot, and the book is written in a wonderful, zany, yet perfectly realistic future slang.

Some examples: 'wiggly' (electromagnetically high), brain surfers clubbing out at Hideo-Nuts Boltsadrome, and the dreaded nursies, which resemble something like alien pods out of fifties B-movies and which remove organs from people.

The humour is unrelenting, superb, and completely natural. There are both one-liners and more sophisticated passages. All the humour comes from the characters and their situations, which is why it works so well. There is a wonderful Southern Belle who says things like, "Ooooh nevvah mahnd. Ah'll git his laigs an you take tother eyund." So long as this is read with the voice and tone of Blanche from *The Golden Girls* it works just fine; otherwise you have to read each line twice, as in "Lllight on, Mothelfruckahs!" (Japanese). Classic stuff!

As for the actual metaphysics, that is cobblers, of course; I mean, analysing brains to tape the human personality! Interestingly, part of this novel appeared in the brain-boggling *The Mind's Eye* by Hofstadter and Dennett, two heavyweights of the Consciousness Brigade, and they pointed out that although Rucker gives both his robots and his taped humans - software inside bigger computers - a mental symbol for the self, this is a sleight of hand since it can apparently be removed, in which case it becomes a pointless concept and, thus, one too unlikely to be plausible. But don't let that spoil the fun.

I should also point out that *Software* contains the all-time classic interchange, "'I think you should kill him and eat his brain,' Mr. Frostee said quickly. "That's not the answer to every problem in interpersonal relationships,' Cobb said..."

Whatever you do, buy this book.

Carl Sargent & Marc Gascoigne
Shadowrun: Nosferatu
Roc, 8/94, 287pp, £3.99
Cherith Baldry

Readers familiar with the *Shadowrun* series will presumably know what to expect from this book, and if they liked others, they will give it a try. I had not come across *Shadowrun* before, and on the evidence of *Nosferatu*, I don't care if I never come across it again.

The importation of genre fantasy characters like elves and trolls into a futuristic urban society doesn't work for me. The plot is a mish-mash of well-worn occult themes, the characters a group of stereotypes who all, no matter what their nationality, occupy social class, use the same streetwise argot. The times when the book tries to be funny are only marginally less successful than the times when it tries to be serious.

I can't imagine that adults are expected to enjoy *Nosferatu*, but if it is aimed at a young adult audience, then it patronises and insults its intended readership. There is a minimal level of entertainment, and if you have a long bus journey or really bad insomnia, then you might want to consider it, but if I were you I wouldn't bother.

Bob Shaw
Dimensions
Gollancz, 28/7/94, 217pp, £4.99
Jon Wallace

Everyone knows (or should know) Warren Peace, that hapless Space Legion trooper from *Who Goes Here?* Well now he's back 16 years after that first adventure. And he's bored. Being an Oscar is all very well, but when you have no need for wine, women or song what can you do.

This is the dilemma that faces Warren as this novel opens. When we last met him, Warren had been turned into an Oscar, a race of perfect golden humanoids who saw it as their duty to keep the Galaxy free from evil. But Warren liked the ups and downs of being human, and now he's fed up, until a chance encounter with a lump of pryktonite restores his humanity and quite incidentally makes him suitable as an agent

for those jobs that an Oscar can't handle. This paves the way for a series of misadventures touching on alien pornography, parallel universes and evil psychopaths.

Fans of Bob Shaw's fannish output will know that he can be very funny when he puts his mind to it, and in his novels and short stories, no matter how grim the situation gets, Shaw manages to capture the warmth and sense of humour that is our defence against harsh realities. Unfortunately, his humorous novels don't quite gel. The potential is there, but somehow the level aimed at is too low, the humour is too unsophisticated to be really funny. Don't get me wrong, I laughed at this novel, but I was always aware that Bob Shaw can be better.

Wayne Smith
Thor
NEL, 4/8/94, 242pp, £4.99
L. J. Hurst

Thor is a German Shepherd dog living with mom and dad and their three kids out in the 'burbs, enjoying occasional trips to the beach, and runs with mom every morning. These mornings, Thor likes to run down and trap rabbits, which the rabbits do not enjoy mainly because they do not understand that Thor is not a hunter and does not intend to eat them.

The rest of the family are Thor's pack, and their protection is his overriding concern. Big as he is, though, Thor is not the leader of the pack, that position is shared by the mating pair, with the male dominant – lucky old Mom and Dad. And Dad is a clever lawyer when he leaves the pack and goes to work.

However, into this world of anthropology and cynosophy (if that is the doggy equivalent of man-watching), comes the world of lycanthropy. Mom's brother Ted had been away in Nepal and is a little distant when he returns, not wanting to see the pack, nor have them go visit him in the hills where torn apart corpses litter the undergrowth. Ted knows he has a problem and tries to chain himself at night to stop from turning into a werewolf, but somehow he doesn't put on the handcuffs so well.

Thor's reaction to the threat of a man who is not what he seems could be misunderstood, and the plot demands that it is.

Thor is mostly very weak horror, with the added interest of animal behaviour, but ethnology, I suppose, is a science.

Steve Sneyd
In Coils of Earthen Hold
University of Salzburg, 1993, 240pp, £6.50
K. V. Bailey

In his structuring of this substantial retrospective collection, and of its autobiographical / elucidatory notes, Steve Sneyd uses such part-chronological, part-thematic categorisations as 'South Pennine', 'The 80s', 'Making Histories', 'Dusk Fantasy', 'Future Bites'. It is in the last-named sections (though not exclusively) that poems appear which identify him as one of the most innovative genre poets of two continents (widely published in USA), with poems as cosmically surreal (and horrific) as 'We're Losing Sound & Vision On The Live Reports', and as apocalyptically post-modern as 'Sacred Kring'. Yet the imagistic roots of many of the poems of sf and fantasy are to be found in the Pennine milieu. "These places, I am described by the sound and home of Cthulu, / lie high over the flatlands that hang / high over the valleys / in which still continue the fierce ceremonies / of breeding and feasting" ('It is Cold in The High Mosses').

Legendary and archetypal figures, Arthur, Ambrosius, Robin Hood and other heroes and spectres of history, are visiting presences in landscape, earthwork and ruin. One of his distinctive haikus (or senryu), 'Time of the Goatstar', well-exemplifies this vein:

firm-buried upright
in oak-navel, this moth-eyed
man-Merkin winks aloud

These three lines convey a saturnine irony which is nowhere more evident than in those poems which spring directly from science-fictional imaginings (but often with a South Pennine counterflow). Many are too intricately woven for easy quotation, as is, for example, his powerful, 'Return' from the Grand Canal, Mars'; but their essence is distilled and can be appreciated in just this one stanza from 'On the Line of the Ecliptic':

snow is the winter comfort
of plants
even here where we cannot
even see
the sunsystem we stem
from

Sneyd, with his protean interfusings of narrative and imagery, his subtle and often esoteric allusiveness and his severe curtailment of punctuation, can be a demanding poet. Yet his verse is by no means formless: as well as the occasional haiku, he favours quatrains, couplets and three line stanzas, irregular and unrhymed. Moreover, he has a superb rhythmic sense and his free verse, far from being dismembered prose, is finely musical. Reading him 'tuned in' can be a personally creative poetic venture. As multivalent meanings are discerned and pursued, you are 'in the coils of earthen hold', negotiating their often bleak geographies, encountering at times the "fertile / new-found island" ('Dispatched Thule') only to find "the menace perhaps only temporarily deferred". It is poetry to be experienced 'on the nerve'.

S. P. Somtow
Armorica
Orbit, 18/8/94, 256pp, £4.99
Joseph Nicholas

Armorica is a sequel to an earlier novel, *Riverrun*, but if you've missed that (and I have) there's an embedded synopsis in the first thirty-odd pages which will bring you painlessly up to speed. The premise is necessarily the same: this Earth is one of a number of possible Earths, the Darklings are trying to bring them together, and young Theo Etchison is the Truthsayer who can keep them apart and restore harmony to the spheres. This time he has to mediate a conflict between the children of the dying King Strang, who in the earlier novel was apparently Theo's enemy, but here becomes a rather more sympathetic figure.

But as if this *King Lear* parallel wasn't enough, Strang also has a suspiciously Christ-like wound in his side, which will continue to bleed as long as the Earths are not healed. There is also an explicit parallel between the increasingly dysfunctional Strang family and Theo's fathers attempts to rescue the members of his own family from the different realities into which the Darklings have flung them. Then there is the river between the worlds as a metaphor for the river of life, down which at one point float the parentless heroes of myth and legend; and Armorica, in the novel the name of an alternate USA but in our world the ancient Roman province of Brittany, later the source of many Arthurian legends and thus also an arena for conflict between darkness and light... Well before the halfway mark, the story is foundering beneath the weight of its own allegory and symbology.

On several occasions, the characters discuss the work of Joseph Campbell and make explicit references to the archetypes they perceive their roles in the conflict as realising. For characters in a novel to behave in such a fashion – and for the author to effectively collude with the reader in the manipulation of the plot – is a typical post-modernist narrative strategy: but it inevitably tends to distance the reader from the story itself. One reads it at one remove, never really caught up in the events described – and finds oneself irritated by, rather than admiring of, the author's cleverness.

Collin Webber
Merlin and the Last Trump
Gollancz, 30/6/94, 269pp, £4.99
Chris Amies

Comic fantasy again, without too much of the Terry Pratchett about it. Sir Griswold des Arbres, having killed Sir Lancelot du Lac and thus totally changed Arthurian history, is removed magically from the bed of Queen Guinevere to find the solitary suicidal Wisher (or minor magician) who is capable of averting the ultimate triumph of the Powers of Darkness. This leads him into a twentieth century that he seems remarkably well at ease with; no problem of understanding 20th-century English for example when dropped from the sixth century. Dimmot, meanwhile, the solitary suicidal Wisher, is only interested in killing himself, and when that doesn't work, of playing the blues. Even when it's in at the End of Time in a hall full of drunken and homicidal daemons.

But is there too much Comic Fantasy about? Not if it's like this. *Merlin and the Last Trump* is just one Damned Thing after another, and it (usually) belts along so fast you have to trot to keep up with it. Bits of it might be too long, but Mr Webber appears to be just starting out and we can expect even better from him next time. Next time is called *Ribwash*, so watch out for it.

John Whitbourn
Popes and Phantoms
Gollancz, 11/8/94, 287pp, £5.99
Sue Badham

Like John Whitbourn's first book, *A Dangerous Enemy*, this novel combines skilful writing with a bleak view of human existence. Its hero, Admiral Slovo, is a lonely man, doomed by his world view to being a sort of mental hermit, even while he takes a central part in European and Vatican politics. The only person he has a close relationship with is a rabbi, with whom he discusses metaphysics and it's typical of him that this is the case. This is a character who has none of the comforting illusions which enable most of us to ignore questions about our own mortality and the fairness (or otherwise) of existence.

The fact that this novel manages to have such a grim main character and still be an excellent read is a tribute to John Whitbourn's skill with subsidiary characters and to his portrayal of Renaissance politics. He manages to give a new twist to things you may have found boring when you were studying history at school. His suggested identity for the people who have been manipulating events from behind the scenes is original and their motives plausible (if you're feeling paranoid).

Despite dealing with some fairly sombre events he manages to be witty and humorous and even to evoke sympathy for his main character. His version of history, both material and spiritual, makes for an interesting plot-line which keeps the reader turning the pages. Overall I can recommend this book. It's good to see a second novel that fulfils the promise shown in the first.

Tad Williams
To Green Angel Tower
Volume One: Siege
Legend, 7/4/94, 810pp, £5.99
Volume Two: Storm
Legend, 7/7/94, 815pp, £5.99
Carol Ann Green

Taken together, the two volumes of this final book of Tad Williams epic fantasy series, mounts up to 1624 pages of reading. That's almost three times the length of the average paperback novel. The question the reader has to ask him / herself is: does the book in question warrant the amount of time and effort required to read 1624 pages?

After having read both volumes I'm not entirely sure of the answer. There are many satisfactory elements to this novel. The hero and heroine finish the epic in usual fantasy mode by getting married: the hero is a character easy to identify with: there are many minor characters and plot lines to keep the read busy guessing the outcomes of their stories. And yet... Williams's writing holds no real surprises for his readers. The one transgression from formula is anticipated early on, knowing the necessity to unite hero and heroine in matrimony and high honour, leaves a clue that for one character things may not turn out as presupposed.

There is no doubt in my mind, however, that Williams is a competent storyteller. His many characters are rounded and in the main well crafted, they grab the reader's affections almost from the word go. The situation they find themselves in, is alas, almost too familiar. The forces of good are called upon to defeat the forces of evil after having been almost beat into submission in the previous two books.

In this, the third book of the trilogy; Simon Snowlock, ex scullion turned knight, must help Prince Josua to overcome his evil brother King Elias, who through the promise of his evil priest, Pyrates, has pledged his life to the forces of evil. It is up to Prince Josua to bring peace and plenty to his land once more by defeating his brother. This sets the scene for the requisite battle scenes, which though overlong in places, do point up the futilities and drudgeries of war.

In another strand of the epic, Simon, known as Snowlock for the streak of white hair he gained in one of the earlier books, leaves Josua's camp, in the company of Princess Miriamele the daughter of Elias. Miriamele wishes to return to the Hayholt, her father's stronghold, in the hope that she can dissuade him from the path he has chosen. Simon is pulled into the final struggle through his affinity with the swords of power; Memory, Sorrow and Thorn. It is the coming together of these three swords that forms the climax of the fight between good and evil.

Williams weaves the strands of his massive trilogy to a close in the final pages of the second volume, *Storm*. The hero receives due recognition and the hand of the heroine in marriage, the forces of evil are, of course, destroyed and peace is restored to the peoples of Erkynland. Yet, the question remains with me at the end of this novel, did it really need 1624 pages to bring the trilogy to a foregone conclusion? I haven't decided yet.

Steve Zell
Wizrd
Headline, 11/8/94, 310pp, £16.99
Tanya Brown

Pinon Rim is small-town Arizona, and fourteen-year-old Bryce Willems is uprooted from upstate New York and deposited there when his father decides he wants a piece of the local artistic action. There's something of the Old West about Pinon Rim, and Bryce finds himself liking the place as he begins to make friends — and enemies — among his new schoolmates. His stepsister Megan, meanwhile, is indulging her passion for caving in the region's hills and mines. Life seems pretty idyllic, no?

No. For small-town Arizona, with its quaint Indian guides and local history society, harbours — as the front of the book unfairly informs us — "horrors from the darkest pit of hell". At first, it's just a couple of missing people, an odd echo in the old mine, a dark rumour about the forebears of the lovely Connie (one of Bryce's main reasons for liking the place so much). And isn't it odd that there are so many small graves — children's graves — grouped together in the cemetery? But perhaps Bryce is just being paranoid. He's an outsider, after all.

Then it's Helldorado night, and everything goes horribly wrong...

Wizrd is an entertaining read, with a grippingly high body count and some interesting characters (most of whom die). Zell sketches teenage life in a small American town with an expert eye, and the horror creeps in slowly, hardly disturbing the atmosphere of rural bliss at first. But the plot doesn't quite hang together; too much is left to the reader's interpretation, and the final chapters unleash so much carnage, so abruptly, that the reader can easily lose touch with the fate of individual characters — and not care too much. A very readable novel despite its flaws; Zell is a name to watch for.

Orbiter Writer's Workshops

The BSFA runs writer's postal work shops — these are known as the Orbiters. Each group (or orbit) consists of five members, with one member chosen to be the coordinator of the group.

Each member of the group places a manuscript in the parcel, writes constructive critical comments on the other manuscripts in the parcel, and sends it on its way. In return they receive four criticisms on their own manuscripts. The parcels go round the group in varying times, but the average is ten to twelve weeks. It is important that each member does not hold on to the parcel for more than two weeks. (Exceptions can be made if all agree.)

If you are interested in writing, then the Orbit groups are for you. But, beware, they are not ego-boosters, they can be and should be hard work. If you think you've got what it takes to not only receive constructive criticism, but to give it; then the Orbit groups should work for you.

Currently there are seven ordinary orbit groups, two novels groups and a non-fiction group. Ordinary groups can circulate anything from short stories, to extracts from novels, from fantasy to horror. Novel groups are fairly self explanatory being for novel extracts only, again from fantasy to horror. The non-fiction group, is for people interested in writing critical articles on any aspect of SF and fantasy, including reviews; it also discusses the difficulties involved in such writing.

A quarterly newsletter is also produced, named Trajectory. This usually includes market information, competition details, and letters from Orbit members.

If you are Interested in joining any of these groups, please contact the Orbiter Coordinator: contact Carol Ann Green, 5 Raglan Avenue, Raglan Street, Hull, HU5 2JB.

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First Impressions

Paperback Graffiti