

# Vector

December 1995

1  
8  
6

THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

£2.25

## BUMPER CHRISTMAS ISSUE

### Samuel R. Delany Special

Full Transcript of Keynote Interview at Intersection  
Seri Fulten on *Silent Interviews*      Annotated Bibliography

Also

*Sciphobia* by Gary Dalkin

*Cognitive Mapping :1* by Paul Kincaid

# Vector 186

## Contents

- 3 **Cognitive Mapping: 1**  
*Paul Kincaid on Alternate History*
- 4 **The BSFA Award Winners**  
*Andrew Butler on Terry Pratchett's Pyramids*
- 5 **SF Phobia**  
*The Mainstream view of sf by Gary Dalkin*
- 8 **A Perfectly Mysterious Process**  
*Samuel Delany interviewed by Paul Kincaid at Intersection. Complete transcript.*
- 14 **Delany: A Selected Annotated Bibliography**  
*Compiled and annotated by Andrew Butler*
- 15 **Negating Silent Interviews**  
*Seri Fulten*
- 16 **First Impressions**  
*Reviews of hardback and paperback originals edited by Paul Kincaid*
- 33 **Paperback Graffiti**  
*Reviews edited by Tanya Brown*

Vector is a bi-monthly publication of the BSFA, which also brings you the news magazine *Matrix*, and the writer's magazine *Focus*. Membership is £18 per year for UK residents, £9 for unwaged. Please enquire for overseas rates.

### *New members and renewals:*

Alison Cook, 52 Woodhill Drive, Grove, Wantage, Oxon OX12 0NB, UK

### *USA:*

Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI48213, USA

The British Science Fiction Association Ltd  
Limited by guarantee — Company No: 921500  
Registered address: 60 Bournemouth Road,  
Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ

### **Managing Editor and Magazine Reviews:**

**Maureen Speller**

60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ

### **Joint Features Editors:**

**Andrew M. Butler**

Flat 3, 28 Louis Street, Hull HU3 1LY

**Gary Dalkin**

5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BH11 8SN

**Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid**

60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ

**Paperback Reviews: Tanya Brown**

E73 DuCane Court, Balham High Road, London, SW17 7JL

**Production: Tony Cullen**

16 Weaver's Way, Camden Town, London NW1 0XE

**Editorial**

This issue of Vector features a full transcription of an interview with Samuel R. Delany by Paul Kincaid, which took place at the WorldCon in August this year. The interview is rather long and because of this we debated as to whether it should be cut. Not because it is uninteresting, but because some readers might feel it outstays its welcome.

Finally we concluded that if you really don't like Delany then you will find the interview too long no matter how much we cut it. Yet if you have even just a passing interest in Delany [which surely you must have to be reading Vector in the first place] you will find his views worth paying attention to, and if you are a regular Delany reader/fan, well, surely this is the sort of in-depth coverage you would want and not be able to find elsewhere?

In an article which appeared in the TV Times to coincide with the first TV screening of [some of] *Once Upon A Time in the West*, Leslie Halliwell justified cutting large chunks from the film, not on the usual grounds of sex, violence, 'obscene' language or taste, but because he found it over-long and boring, and presumed that many viewers would too. We feel Vector should avoid this sort of lowest common denominator approach. Hence an interview with one of the most important sf writers of his generation, from the major UK SF event of the decade, complete and uncut. We would call it the C4 approach rather than the ITV version, except C4's coverage of the WorldCon whittled or cut the author down to a soundbite.

To compliment this feature Seri Fulten offers her reaction to *Silent Interviews*, which for reasons which will become apparent will make much more sense if read after the interview with SRD. Further to this Andrew has compiled a Delany Bibliography. While it is detailed it is not complete, and we would welcome any additions/corrections, together with thoughts on anything we have done with Vector in this and the previous issue.

Also this issue is the first of what promises to be a long series by Paul Kincaid. 'Cognitive Mapping' will chart many of the key topics and issues of the genre. Finally Gary offers his, highly opinionated, version of why some people don't like sf.

Apologies for the absence of Front Line Despatches. Hopefully the letters page will return in the New Year. For now, a Very Merry Christmas.

Gary Dalkin

Andrew M. Butler

Vector is published by the BSFA © 1995

All opinions are those of the individual contributor and should not necessarily be taken as the views of the editor or the BSFA.

**Cover: Samuel R. Delany at Intersection. Photo by, and courtesy of, Roger Robinson.**

## Remember

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

**Printed by: PDC Copyprint**

11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4AP

# Cognitive Mapping

by Paul Kincaid

## 1: Alternate History

The quaint conceit of imagining what would have happened if some important or unimportant event had settled itself differently, has become so fashionable that I am encouraged to enter upon an absurd speculation. What would have happened if Lee had not won the Battle of Gettysburg? Once a great victory is won it dominates not only the future but the past. All the chains of consequence clink out as if they never could stop. The hopes that were shattered, the passions that were quelled, the sacrifices that were ineffectual are all swept out of the land of reality. Still it may amuse an idle hour, and perhaps serve as a corrective to undue complacency, if at this moment in the twentieth century - so rich in assurance and prosperity, so calm and buoyant - we meditate for a spell upon the debt we owe to those Confederate soldiers who by a deathless feat of arms broke the Union front at Gettysburg and laid open a fair future to the world.

**'If Lee had not won the Battle of Gettysburg' (1932) - The Right Honourable Sir Winston S. Churchill, MP**

'The book is set now, more or less, and in this mythical world North America is an even greater centre of manufactures than it is in truth, but it still keeps Negroes and Indians in bondage as farmhands. The author is too ignorant to see how machines would take the place of slaves... "Scientific romance" my arse - no science and no romance to it that I can see: just someone who doesn't write very well proving it at great length. A world that never could be, not in a thousand years.' He let out a noise half snort, half guffaw. The book was too preposterous for words.

It is curious to think of Sir Winston Churchill as one of the great founding fathers of science fiction, but it is possible to see him as creating the sub-genre of alternate history stories. Counter-historical speculation had long been popular with scholars, and in 1907 one of the most respected of English historians, G.M. Trevelyan published a popular counter-historical essay, "If Napoleon had Won the Battle of Waterloo". It was this essay that, in 1931, prompted J.C. Squire to put together a collection of counter-historical speculations, *If it had Happened Otherwise*, which included contributions from G.K. Chesterton ("If Don John of Austria had Married Mary Queen of Scots"), Hilaire Belloc ("If Drouet's Cart had Stuck"), Harold Nicolson ("If Byron had Become King of Greece") and A.J.P. Taylor ("If Archduke Ferdinand had not Loved his Wife") among others. But these were, for the most part, straightforward speculations about the ripples that might spread out if a slightly different rock were tossed into the pool of history. It was Churchill's inspired additional twist, looking from the other world back at our own, which took the step of turning speculation into fiction.

Churchill also introduced one of the two themes that have most exercised practitioners of alternate history. The question, what would have happened if ...?, is one of the most potent in our language, it is after all one of the basic questions that underlies the whole of science fiction. Counter-historical thought is obviously popular with historians because it tests the strength of the historical imperative, and since so much of what they study rests upon the changes which constitute the onward movement of our historical progress it is valuable to consider what value those pivotal moments actually hold by considering the possible alternatives. But the hinges of history are of no less interest for the rest of us, writers and readers, because we are precisely the people who would have been caught in what Churchill calls "the chains of consequence". So it is natural that we should turn again and again to those moments when history might have changed most dramatically and which, because of their nearness to us, might have had the most drastic effect.

One such persistent theme has been, following on from Churchill, if the South won the American Civil War, which has featured in such works as Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953), MacKinlay Kantor's *Look: If the South had Won the Civil War* (1961) and Harry Turtledove's *Guns of the South* (1992). The other, even more persistent, has presented the consequences of the Axis winning World War Two, a concept that has been explored in works as varied as "If Hitler had Won World War II" (1961) by William L. Shirer, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick, "The Fall of Frenchy Steiner" (1964) by Hilary Bailey, "Weinachtsabend" (1972) by Keith Roberts, *SS-GB* (1978) by Len Deighton, *Fatherland* (1992) by Robert Harris and *Worldwar: In the Balance* (1994) by Harry Turtledove.

Other writers have taken turning points further back in history. Harry Turtledove, a historian who has been prolific in his use of alternate history, has looked at what might have happened if Mohammed had become Christian (*Agent of Byzantium*, 1986); in "Wheels of If" (1940) L. Sprague De Camp sets his turning point as the Norse colonisation of America; Keith Roberts presents a world in which the Spanish Armada had been successful in *Pavane* (1968) and Kingsley

***The Two Georges* (1995) - Richard Dreyfuss and Harry Turtledove**

Amis uses the similar scenario of the Catholic Church triumphant in *The Alteration* (1976); Harry Harrison considers a world in which America did not break away from the British Empire in *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!* (1972), a situation to which Richard Dreyfuss and Harry Turtledove have returned in *The Two Georges*, and William Gibson and Bruce Sterling suggest a technological rather than a political or military turning point when they place the successful invention of computing a century earlier than it actually happened in *The Difference Engine* (1990). Alternate history has given writers the whole of history to play in, but it is still the more recent changes offered by the Civil War and the Second World War that consistently hold the greatest fascination. (Curiously, the First World War, a more brutal and in many ways more traumatic conflict, has rarely served as a counter-historical hinge.)

Alternate history is the branch of science fiction that gives the writer's imagination fullest rein while requiring no pretence of scientific knowledge: both *Pavane* and *The Two Georges*, for example, hold nothing more technologically advanced than a steam engine. It is a form of science that leans on the liberal arts (history, philosophy) rather than the hard sciences; which may explain why it is the form that has proved most attractive to non-sf writers (Kantor, Shirer, Amis, as well as Vladimir Nabokov with Ada [1969] and Martin Cruz Smith with *The Indians Won* [1970]). Though this may also be because of the opportunities it offers for satire: since satire deliberately takes a skewed perspective on our world, and alternate history presents such a perspective as an integral part of its structure. Thus, ever since Churchill cast a sideways glance at a twentieth century "so rich in assurance and prosperity, so calm and buoyant", writers of alternate history have traditionally looked outside the world of their creation to make us feel uneasy about the shape of our own.

This often takes the form of an alternate history novel within the alternate history novel. The prime example of this is *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, the novel constructed using the *I Ching* in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. There are other examples: in *Fire on the Mountain* (1988) by Terry Bisson in which John Brown's Raid was successful in creating a Black republic in what, in our history, would have been the Confederacy, novels present Abraham Lincoln as a hero rather than the villain he was known to be. And this technique is also seen in *The Two Georges*, in the "scientific romance" that the detective heroes come across in their investigations into the subversive Sons of Liberty who want to make America free from British rule.

More than 60 years separates the two introductory extracts. In any other branch of science fiction that would be a tremendous gap, widened by changes in knowledge and theory. But, though the many worlds theory derived from quantum mechanics has started to shift the edges of alternate history into alternate worlds, as in Lisa Tuttle's *Lost Futures* (1992) or the ending of Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships* (1995), alternate history itself has changed little. So long as history seems fragile and malleable, so long as its turning points are so clear, alternate history will continue to excite the thought experiments that are the very stuff of science fiction.

## The BSFA Award Winners: 2

# *Pyramids* by Terry Pratchett

**Andrew M. Butler writes about Terry Pratchett's *Pyramids* (*The Book of Going Forth*), which was awarded the BSFA Award For Best Novel in 1990.**

The form for writing about Pratchett seems to be well established. If you've read Pratchett and like him, then you'll like this one. If you've read Pratchett and not liked him, then you won't be converted. If you haven't read Pratchett: where have you been in the last ten years?

Before focusing in on *Pyramids*, I'd like to say a few words about Pratchett's reception. After a slow first few novels - in two decades he wrote *The Carpet People*, *Dark Side of the Sun* and, still my favourite, *Strata* - Pratchett finally found his feet with the Discworld sequence, and has regularly graced the top of the bestseller lists since. When I ask the literature students I teach what they read in their spare time, the majority of students (of those who admit to reading) name Roddy Doyle and Terry Pratchett.

And yet when a student wished to write a dissertation on Pratchett, he met resistance. Whilst not feeling that I could write about Pratchett myself, I felt that it was important to establish the right to write about Pratchett. As time went by, I realised there was a great deal to say, and I wanted to try to say it before anyone else got there. The results of this will hopefully appear elsewhere.

So what, exactly, is the problem? Of course, on one level he's just a popular, funny writer. It's difficult to write about comedy, without sounding deadly serious, without spoiling the joke, without saying "This is a really funny bit". I know, I've tried. But as I thought about this, I realised there was more to him. He is a master of allusion - his texts are bricolages of other texts, as he lifts Larry Niven, William Shakespeare, silent comedy, rock music and so on for his own devices. Chaos is shown to be just a mistake away, the world becomes a perilous place with no safety net. In comedic form, Pratchett highlights the plight of humanity in the last gasp of the twentieth century.

In memory, *Pyramids* seemed hardly to be a Discworld novel at all. The setting is the kingdom of Djelibeybi, an analogue for Egypt stuffed full of all the Egyptological details you thought you'd remembered. Death and the Librarian play no more than cameo roles, if indeed the Librarian appears at all. As the on-going series stretched its legs, Pratchett seemed to be desperately seeking for models beyond sf and fantasy to parody. The pun Djelibeybi seems weak and pointless, and there are further cringe-making examples.

But returning to the book after five years, and a revelation: stylistically it is like the other novels, with the cinematic zooming-in description of space and the Discworld, poised on the back of four elephants on top of the great tortoise A'Tuin. Then there are the flaring pyramids, whose light may "in chapters to come, illuminate many mysteries... It will certainly show what our ancestors would be thinking if they were alive today". Of course, like the other books in the sequence, it is not divided into chapters, although unusually it is divided into individual books. There are the footnotes, as always, Pratchett's evolution of the stand-up comedian's control of timing. Timing is more important than usual.

After a scene of a priest waking up, the location shifts to Teppic's preparations for his assassin examination in Ankh-Morpork. This is played like a driving test, and is intercut with Teppic's days as a student. Rather than being simply a novel of coming of age - as most of the rest of the Discworld sequence are - the split chronology juxtaposes the innocent recruit with the experienced graduate. But just as Teppic reaches this maturity, he must return to become King Teppicymon XXVIII of Djelibeybi, and once more be the innocent at the mercy of the more experienced.

It appears to be seats-of-pants-plotting, but it must be careful structuring, as this doubled narrative foreshadows the chaos to follow. Everyone knows the myth about how razor blades keep a sharp edge when stored under pyramids, and if this is really true then there must be some sort of time dilation going on. Where a particularly large pyramid is built toward the end of the book, then the time dilation effects threaten to rupture reality. All the dead kings of the kingdom are resurrected from their pyramidal tombs; the line about knowing what ancestors will think of modern civilisation turns out to be a prediction.

What is perhaps more threatening for the rest of the Discworld is that the two countries Tsort and Ephebe (Pratchett's version of classical Greece) become neighbours with the disappearance of the old kingdom of Djelibeybi. At this point territorial aggression overflows - thanks to "Historical imperative", according to one Ephebian philosopher - giving a chance for a comic rerun of the Trojan Wars, complete with Trojan Horse, in fact a herd of Trojan Horses. There is a risk in dealing with war in a comic novel, although both Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut have pulled this off in the past. Death certainly occurs in the Discworld novels, on occasion in a rather grim manner. But on this occasion the action stops just short of the predicted massacre. The return of time intervenes, just in time. It would be folly to give away the ending, save to note that it has to do with time, which can be cyclical; the snake eating its own tail becomes a motif in the text.

*Pyramids* is the only novel to date to have won the BSFA Award, and was the seventh in the series. It seems difficult to say why this one won, rather than any of the previous ones. Whilst some of the jokes seem tired, Greek mythology gave Pratchett a whole new fertile ground of comic material to cultivate. And certainly, it is the most fiendishly constructed of the novels to date, yielding new pleasures on each successive re-reading.

**Readers are invited to submit articles on other BSFA award winners. Robert Edgar's discussion of the first BSFA award winner, John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, may be found in Vector 185.**

# SCIPHOBIA

## Some Reflections on the Way the Mainstream Sees SF

by Gary Dalkin

It is a sad fact that we all know someone who does not just dislike sf, but claims to hate it. Yet such people will often express a love for *Dr Who*, *ET* or *Star Trek*; on the grounds, perhaps, that these are so universally popular they hardly count as genre fictions. Ironically, having noted such exceptions to their rule, such a person will likely justify their sciphobia by denouncing the genre as embarrassingly stupid, trivial and childish. Of course such an attitude implies an ignorance of what the genre has achieved in the past, of the richness of the genre today, and the possibilities it offers for the future. Or alternatively, our sciphobe may say that they are afraid they will not understand sf if they try to read it. Either way we are faced with a false, because limited, perception of what sf is. A misperception grounded both in technophobia and cultural values regarding what 'literature' is and should be.

It can only be due to sciphobia [which you may take to mean fear or hatred of science, science-fiction, or 'sci-fi', depending on context and preference] that works by writers which appear to those within the sf community to belong to the genre are increasingly being marketed as something other, whether it be as thriller [Robert Harris, Pierre Oullette], general fiction [Michael Crichton], or 'literary' fiction [J.G. Ballard, Ray Bradbury]. Some sf currently sells better in disguise. It might even be bought by those people who 'know' that they don't like it, and they, we presume, form a significant part of a general market which accounts orders of magnitude more book sales than the hardcore sf readership. To understand why such prejudices against sf exist we need to explore the attitudes of the prevailing culture, and the most public face of sf itself. We need to go to the movies... or perhaps not, considering that this year has seen the release of more bad big budget/high profile sf films than any previous year.

Sf has enormous scope. It can be set at any time, anywhere in the universe, or in any other universe. Sf may discuss any aspect of the sciences, or journey crossways into metaphysics and religion, tell a love story, recount an adventure, detail a detective story, narrate a tale of war or politics, evoke any emotion known (or unknown) to any species. Sf may satirise, horrify, predict, amuse, outrage,

mystify, or fill with wonder. Sf can work upon the grandest of all canvases, the entire compass of reality. It is a genre with a potential grandeur of scale beyond the reach of almost all other fiction; a grandeur both of concept and geography. Unfortunately this very scale, the portrayal of epochal events against vast settings, presents almost insurmountable problems of realisation in cinematic form. Perhaps realising this very few films even try, and when they do the result often an inspired shambles. For all David Lynch's brilliance as a film-maker, *Dune* was simply too big, in all senses, for anyone to shoehorn into a Hollywood movie. Cinema does not have time for world building. It is almost impossibly cumbersome to deliver the necessary of scene-setting information. Truly 'alien' societies are all but impossible to clarify sufficiently that the audience itself is not alienated. Hollywood, always happiest when recycling successful formulas, is not comfortable with ideas, and as sf is essentially a 'what if' medium, Hollywood and sf are fundamentally incompatible. It is a marriage of convenience. The futuristic visuals occasionally capture something of the sf imagination, but mainly serve as backdrops to simplistic action and FX driven adventures.

The situation is a little different on TV. Though by cinema standards both the budgets and the screens are tiny, there is one significant advantage in that serials permit the running times to develop thematically complex narratives. We are currently seeing, with *Babylon 5*, perhaps the first fully developed TV future. However such programmes are the exception - TV sf usually functions at a level of equal mediocrity to its cinematic kin - and have a low profile against the saturation hype which accompanies each new cinema release. It is through the inescapable - even if you don't go to see them - presence of the movies that sf has come to be seen as concerned largely with killer aliens and cyborgs, virtual reality, spaceships, time travel and massive explosions. A boy's own techophallic fantasia.

If the very ambition of the best written sf makes the prospect of filming it almost impossibly daunting, finding a large enough audience prepared to follow the concepts is more so still; mass audience cinema appears to be becoming more inured to imagination by the year. Despite this, from a

mainstream critical perspective there are many excellent films made in a variety of genres [genre is much more acceptable in cinema than literature, an issue I will deal with in the second part of my argument]: westerns, crime/detective stories, romantic dramas, which are comparable with the standard of the written form, so much so that we might understand why the mainstream critic might reasonably assume written sf can be equated with the quality of its cinematic incarnation. And with films such as *Timecop*, *Star Trek Generations*, *Waterworld*, *Judge Dredd* and *Species* being commercially successful depots a general paucity of invention, coherence and intelligence, we can understand why sf might be held in such low esteem by those who have not explored its less public faces.

At this point we might ask, so long as sf is available, are such attitudes towards how it is presented and perceived really worth our concern? Well, that depends upon your own attitude to sf. If you believe it is an important, vital, creative and original literature, then yes, it is a cause for concern when its stock is so low that those working in the genre, rather than celebrating the fact, adamantly deny having anything to do with it. As if sf were something sordid or shameful. To prove that this is indeed the case, allow me to be flippant for a moment, with a quiz entitled... When is sf not sf?:

When it's...

- a) 'science eventuality'?
- b) The back catalogue of a fine writer who has belatedly received massive mainstream acclaim?
- c) By P.D. James?

If your answer was:

a) You are Steven Spielberg. When publicising *Jurassic Park* in 1993, Steven Spielberg repeatedly stressed (as if regurgitating a carefully scripted party line) that the film was 'not science fiction', but 'science eventuality'. He thereby, in one unwitting move, reduced his film to the lowest form of sf, the predictive. Yet *Jurassic Park* is old school sf par excellence. John W. Campbell would have recognised an *Astounding* Story brought up to date with gene-sequencing, cloning and palaeontology; all in a plot structured as a demonstration of an important area of current scientific thought: Chaos Theory. We may conclude that *Jurassic Park* was not marketed as sf because it was recognised that it would appeal to a phenomenally high percentage of the population of our planet. Including many of those who 'know' that they don't like, or even hate, sf.

b) You are a literary critic for a 'quality' newspaper, and have just read J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*.

c) You are P.D. James - if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck... Or rather, a lame duck. For what is wryly amusing in P.D. James' indignant claims that *Children of Men* isn't sf because it doesn't contain robots or spaceships is the implication it is something better, while in reality her book is second-rate sf riddled with flaws which demonstrate its author's ignorance of her newly adopted genre. To deny the genre, to fail to acknowledge its fecund past while plundering from its genebank is to risk, as do many 'serious' writers who dabble with science fiction's ever evolving DNA, re-inventing the amoeba.

But beyond the most public incarnations of sf, there is another reason why sf is held in low regard. The root cause of the problem rests in several dichotomies in Western culture. The arbitrary and artificial divisions between art and science, between imagination and rationality, between literature and genre.

This latter division is self-defining. What is good is literature, therefore everything else must be bad and must be genre; which can then be stigmatised as being written by grubby talentless hacks for filthy lucre. Perhaps the most blatant example of this cultural schizophrenia is the marketing of the works of Iain Banks [black and white covers equal literature] and Iain M. Banks, [colour for the downmarket genre stuff]. The blurb for his latest black and white claims *Whit* is 'exploring the techno-ridden vacuity of modern society', despite the book itself featuring nothing more technological than a CD player, a VCR and a portable phone. *Whit* reads as trademark a Banksian comedy of family betrayal, albeit this time melded to an sf writer's analysis of a the sort of exploitative pseudo-religious cult which associates itself with the fringes of the genre. However, in a technophobic and genrephobic society a genre literature expressly concerned with science in all its manifestations is perforce doubly damned, and *Whit* is clearly packaged to distance itself from the author of books which carry the legend A Science Fiction Novel in bold silver letters. To quote Harry Harrison in *SFX3*, expressing Brain Aldiss's summation of a common mainstream view: 'if it's sf it can't be any good, and if it's any good it can't be sf'.

Our society generalises the 'Arts' as being imaginative, creative, holistic, spiritual. The 'Sciences' as rationalistic, mechanical, reductive. This division may not be harmful in itself, but the extension of it is to see the Arts as intrinsically superior to the Sciences. Science has come almost to be regarded as a necessary evil, frequently viewed with incomprehending suspicion, even to the extent of being seen as the adversary of all that is 'artistic'. Such a view has become the dominant ideo-mythology among taste-forming middle-class arts-based intellectuals. That the fruits of science abused, from French and Chinese egoists blowing holes in our planet with nuclear weapons, to an alliance of our own government, chemical companies and farmers systematically polluting the food chain with pesticides, are daily in evidence serves to reinforce any anti-science prejudice. Technology is confused with science, and the literature best suited to addressing the issues surrounding both suffers the fate traditionally reserved for messengers bearing bad news.

Given this situation a massive act of doublethink is required to deny the sf content of the work of many writers firmly ensconced within the mainstream; Amis, Lessing, Fowles, Hoban, Weldon, Carter. If such works as, for example, *The Cloning of Joanna May*, or *The Handmaid's Tale*, were admitted as being sf, then it would be difficult to continue to deny the relevance of the genre to the contemporary world. However, to do so would be tantamount to an admission that we now live in an sf world. An apparently self-evident truth, yet anathema to the pro-art, anti-science axis which encompasses 'serious' press review supplements, TV/radio

arts coverage and the academic notion, firmly entrenched within the English departments of our universities, of canonical 'great' literature. It is this broad culture which defines what the well educated middle-classes should be seen reading, and by omission defines that which is beyond the pale. The implicit sciphobia ignores that many achievements in the sciences depend at least in part upon inspired imagination, and that the sciences may ultimately illuminate the 'artistic' side of humanity by revealing the universe for our wonder and contemplation; that for every scientist who is a materialist, reductionist, there is another who is an imaginative holist. Within such a culture of technophobic machine addicts there is but begrudging acceptance of the benefits of science, heavily laced with contempt for that which is accepted. No one likes to admit dependency, especially on that which they do not understand: the inability to programme a VCR or operate a PC can be a badge proudly worn. The ability to operate these machines without problem should be downplayed. Everyone will be much more comfortable if both technology and sf stay in their perceived places and conform to the expectations laid upon them by the Hollywooden vision, i.e. that they remain remote and distant and do not intrude over much upon our real lives.

If genre is without honour most despised of all are the fantastical and imaginative genres. The great canons established in literature fall squarely upon the side of the realistic, the documentary. Character is valued above story, idea, atmosphere, entertainment. An arbitrary formulation, now almost cast in tablets of stone. If it were not so the BBC would have spared us a second adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in just 15 years, perhaps offering instead in this centenary year a version of *The Time Machine*. However, the dominant culture harbours a distrust of the genuinely imaginative, ironically because such is the perceived triumph of a rationalistic science, that in the eyes of many the universe has been successfully demythologised. So much so that there remains no room for the numinous, the curious, the speculative. Our collective imagination has been deleted. Made obsolete. Folk-tales and myth-cycles have been denigrated into fairy-stories, TV skits and advertising fodder, considered only suitable for the very young in sanitised Disney versions. To retain a sense of wonder at the mystery and beauty of the universe has come to be regarded as 'child-like.' 'Science' has so successfully demythologised the world that its literature can not be taken seriously by many who consider themselves intelligent, informed adults. Such a view sprang from a myopic extension of a Newtonian clockmaker's universe, rose to full power with the victory of all things mechanical in the late glory years of the European empires, and bears no relevance to our post-Einstein relativistic reality of superstrings, black holes, and potential parallel universes. The dominant culture, as usual, has yet to catch up.

I mentioned J.G. Ballard earlier. I will end with him, one of the finest of all sf writers. With the publication in 1984 of *Empire of the Sun* Ballard, suddenly found his work on the best-seller lists, embraced with fervour by those who had previously never heard of him, despite his having been a prolific genre author for over 30 years. It took a historical

semi-autobiographical 'mainstream' novel to bring Ballard to general notice, and then the re-writing of his career began. When the critical establishment turned to appraise his back-catalogue it was found there was nothing else that could be admitted to the brave new world of serious literature, for - Dear! Oh Dear! - Ballard used to write that dreadful sci-fi nonsense! This clearly would not do. Then sometimes sf director Steven Spielberg filmed the book, and suddenly everybody wanted to read Ballard. What was to be done? The answer was to co-opt the author retroactively into the mainstream, repackage all his earlier titles in pretentious covers bearing no conjunction of the horrible words science and fiction, and meanwhile desperately hope no one noticed most of the stories had originally appeared in magazines bearing such disgraceful titles as *New Worlds* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. History was re-formatted with Orwellian thoroughness. J.G. Ballard the sf writer ceased to exist. Walk into a bookshop today and you will search the sf section in vain for his books (but then you won't find 1984 either). *The Terminal Beach* and *Vermillion Sands* have been blown by *the Wind From Nowhere* to *The Disaster Area* know as 'contemporary writers'.

Ballard is perhaps the most noticeable (by his absence from genre shelves) example of the mainstream trend to appropriate that which is approved from sf. He is far from the only one. Many libraries and bookshops now keep LeGuin, Lem, Priest and others in General Fiction. The repackaging of genre titles into large-format, deliberately 'literary' volumes, complete with a commensurate price increase, is a device designed to target a readership more affluent than the sf constituency, and which sees itself as above that readership, as being of more elevated 'taste'. When the dominant culture annexes all that is good from sf, it becomes a self-fulfilling that what remains is bad, and if the mainstream then conveniently fails to admit to the appropriation of the very best, or at least that part of the best which is not to forbiddingly riddled with technology in its texts, then it becomes a simple matter to point to the refuse and record that it emits an unpalatable stench. Brain Aldiss once served on the Booker Prize committee and tried to nominate Michael Moorcock's *Gloriana* for this country's most prestigious literary award. He was not allowed to. He reported other committee members were offended that such a book could even be suggested as being of merit. Whilst such an attitude exists, and there is no sign of a change, quality written sf will remain a derided minority interest, and the finest tool developed this century for understanding an ever more rapidly changing world, together with some of the best writing of the century, will be denied to a wider readership. The attitudes which have given rise to this sciphobia have much to answer for. While there is nothing that can be done about the general mediocrity of media sf, the perceptions it gives rise to can be addressed. It is well past time the our literary peers learnt to read, and so stop judging an enormously diverse body of work by ill-informed, culturally fascistic, prejudice.

# A Perfectly Mysterious Process

Samuel R. Delany...  
...interviewed by Paul Kincaid

*Samuel R. Delany was Guest of Honour at Intersection, the 1995 World Science Fiction Convention which was held in Glasgow. This conversation took place before a large and appreciative audience as part of the programme. A number of the questions towards the end of the interview came from the audience.*

**Paul Kincaid:** Ladies and Gentlemen, I think probably every single one of you here knows the feeling when you start reading science fiction, there are one or two writers who define the genre for you, they are the ones who set the tone for everything you expect to discover in science fiction. When I started reading science fiction, one of that very select group for me was Samuel R. Delany. So it is with immense pleasure and a hell of a lot of fear that I introduce our Guest of Honour here today, Samuel Delany.

I want to start by talking about your attitude to writing. How self-conscious are you as a writer? You come across as very self-conscious when you write about your writing.

**Samuel R. Delany:** The only attitude I think I bring particularly to writing is after the fact. Occasionally I want to be fairly analytical about what it was I was doing. I'm a fairly analytical guy; I walk around and I look at things and I analyse them, and that goes for writing as well. I like to analyse the process by which it is done, and the result is I've written a fair amount of criticism as well as a fair amount of fiction. And under my critic hat I'm busy analysing how the process works. Not the fiction itself, but how the process of writing, and often how the process of reading works, on a general level, because I think that's basically what criticism is. Because I wear several hats, a critic's hat, a teaching hat as well as a fiction hat, from time to time one of them slips and falls down over my left eye and I can't quite see what's going on for a while, but by and large it's just a matter of taking one hat off and putting another on.

**PK:** I've spoken to authors in the past who say that they hate writing reviews because it makes them too self-conscious when it comes to writing their own fiction.

**SRD:** Well, I'm a pretty self-conscious person at the

best of times, so I don't think I lose too much, I don't think I'm any more self-conscious from having turned around and written a review.

**PK:** You review your own books.

**SRD:** Only under another name! At this time, of course, the name that I have used a couple of times is fairly well known. My alter ego, K. Leslie Steiner, is pretty much an open secret and as a result K. Leslie Steiner doesn't do much any more. But a couple of times I let wishful thinking take over, so K. Leslie Steiner got to say wonderful things about a couple of books of mine that would really have been very nice to have heard. But that was basically a joke, and a joke, when all is said and done, played largely upon myself. The other thing is, most of the things K. Leslie Steiner says about my own work I violently disagree with, so take it for what little it's worth and with several grains of salt.

**PK:** All the extensive afterwords and critical commentaries at the end of *Triton* and *Dhalgren* and so forth, were they intended to make the reader stop and take a different view of what they had already read?

**SRD:** Well, they're part of the fiction. I also used K. Leslie Steiner to write an introduction to the *Nevèrjón* series, which is a sword and sorcery series (I use that term advisedly) that I wrote between 1976 and 1987 or 88, and in the course of it I tried to play all sorts of little games. For instance, there are several imaginary scholars who come to the fore in the book and write about these bizarre ancient texts that the stories are presumably based on, and in one case I got a letter from a real anthropologist at Yale, who wrote a letter to one of the imaginary critics who had written one of the appendices to the book, and took the whole thing very seriously, although obviously he had his tongue in his cheek and was playing along, and so I asked him if he'd mind if I published it in the appendix to the next book

in the series. So you've got real scholars arguing with imaginary scholars about texts that don't exist, and I thought that was quite in keeping with the way the whole book was generated, which was supposed to be based on this imaginary text, called the Culhar' Fragment, that was found in the caves when Mohammed the Wolf tossed his stone in and discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls. Underneath the Dead Sea Scrolls there's this bizarre text that produced the Nevèrjón stories. It's just playfulness, it's just a kind of having fun, and trying to make fun of a certain kind of scholarship when you're doing it. Some people have told me that they enjoyed that part more than the actual stories themselves.

**PK:** It was fairly obvious that you were writing the Nevèrjón stories addressing the whole nature of sword and sorcery. But I think more than that as well.

**SRD:** Sword and sorcery was the first genre fiction that I read: Robert E. Howard, *The Hour of the Dragon*, or I think it was then published under the title of *Conan the Conquerer*, was one of the very first science fiction associated books – sword and sorcery, of course, is not science fiction, but a sub-genre of fantasy – nevertheless that was one of the first books that was my entrée into the science fiction world as a reader. And I liked it. I was eight, nine years old. When I went back and read it as an older adolescent and then as a young man, once the nostalgia falls away, you realise there's an awful lot of very strange things going on in those stories. There is a homoerotic element to the stories, and a great deal of sado-masochism fibrulating just under the surface. Just *under* the surface? And it occurred to me, especially with the sexual revolution that had occurred, the fact that we were on the other side of Stonewall and the fact that S&M people were putting out their own fanzines, talking about their own problems, and gay liberation was fomenting all around us, what would happen if you wrote a sword and sorcery story in which you brought this stuff to the foreground and made this the central question of the story. And I don't mean some silly gimmick in which after the swordfight, Conan the Conquerer is caught in eyeshadow and skirts at the neolithic drag bar, but what would happen, for instance, if you had a man with a political mission to end slavery in a particular country in a prehistoric nation that was based on slavery, and at the same time they are sexually attracted to the whips, the chains, the slave collars that the slaves wear. Is this going to be something that pollutes the enterprise or is it going to make the enterprise easier? So this is the sort of question that the stories in *Tales of Nevèrjón* and *Nevèrjóna* and even more in the final two volumes, *Flight from Nevèrjón* and *Return to Nevèrjón*, deal with. And I think they're relevant questions for us today, because in the sexual revolution these were the kinds of questions that people were always asking. Does sado masochism, for instance, represent some

reproduction of political torture, does it replay the sort of power structures that we want to get away from, or is it different? And if it's different, how is it different? And these questions can be wrestled through in the field of sword and sorcery.

**PK:** You also use it to address AIDS, which first appeared in the early 80s.

**SRD:** Right. In the course of writing a series of stories, one of the ways that a series works, very often the solution of story *n* becomes the problem of story *n+1*, and this is a very different kind of development than you get in chapters of a novel. It's an entirely different sort of enterprise, which is what makes a series of stories different from a novel although traditionally in science fiction publishers are famous for taking different stories, retitling them as chapters and trying to put them together as though they were a novel. That tends to blur that self-critical development that I think the science fiction or sword and sorcery series has going just underneath it. But in the course of it, when AIDS became a reality in so many people's lives in the early 80s – as I say, I started the series in the middle, late-70s – I thought this was the test case: can you write a sword and sorcery story that actually deals with AIDS? At that particular point I got real experimental and half the novel, "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals", which is interlaid in the third volume, *Flight from Nevèrjón*, about half the story takes place in New York in 1983, just before the discovery of the AIDS virus and the other half in Nevèrjón thousands of years ago, which is also undergoing a similar sexual-transmitted disease. There are all sorts of correspondences back and forth, and characters who are walking down the street in one city suddenly turn around and find themselves in the other city: modern characters keep showing up in the ancient world and ancient characters keep showing up in the modern world. It was a way of talking about the kinds of mythology that were sedementing around AIDS in that period just when the announcement of the discovery of what was then called HGLB3 and what we now know as HIV was made in Frankfurt and then in the States.

**PK:** You talk about AIDS also in *The Mad Man*.

**SRD:** Yes, ten years later I returned to the subject in what I guess you'd call my most recent full-length novel, which is a novel called *The Mad Man* which comes back and talks about the general sexual landscape which AIDS is negotiating its way through.

**PK:** One thing that *The Mad Man* does raise is: what do you actually write? Your stories are science fiction or they're fantasy or they're pornography or they're comics or whatever. They're always marginal.

**SRD:** I read a lot of marginal fiction, I suppose. And what I read I often try to turn around and write. The barrier between absorption and transmission is a very funny barrier. You absorb a lot of works in one genre

and you read and you read in that genre, then something happens and the barrier falls and you're writing in that genre. How it happens is a perfectly mysterious process when all is said and done, nevertheless somehow it happens. Yes, the works tend to be in marginal genres because, I don't know, I'm a marginal kind of guy.

**PK:** You said to me earlier that as a black and a gay you don't naturally feel marginalised.

**SRD:** I don't think anybody walks around all day long thinking: "gosh, I'm marginalised." From time to time, one does. This doesn't mean that one is oblivious to the functioning of oppression, but if you spend all your time moping about the fact it gets in the way of you fighting the oppression. So I don't walk around all day carrying a chip on my shoulder. One is aware of it from time to time. Every once in a while it comes home to you: I was at a conference at Yale a few months ago and I was delivering a paper on some bizarre topic like post-coloniality, and I was talking about basically fucking my way across Europe when I was a kid and the various things I learnt from these experiences. One of the people in the audience was the Egyptian writer Nawal Sadawi, a psychiatrist and a fine, fine novelist. When we all went out for pizza later, she said, "You know, if you had delivered that talk in my country, you would probably have been arrested before the afternoon was out." That did bring me up short: the world is not a homogenous place and there are very different attitudes towards some of the things that I'm talking about and some of the things I do. One has to be aware that in different places people regard it very differently; one must not get carried away and assume that the freedoms we have here are a world wide situation by any means.

**PK:** A lot of your early books, *Hogg* and *Tides of Lust*, took a long time to appear. Was it a conscious decision to write what might be considered dangerous or objectionable to the majority?

**SRD:** No, most of the things I write are things I would like to read and can't find on library shelves or bookstore stacks, so finally I sit down and write them myself. I think that goes for the science fiction, that goes for the criticism, that goes for the pornography. In that sense, the impetus is the same in all the fields. In almost every thing that I've ever written it's because I've been excited by what's going on in the genre around me at the time I wrote it. Certainly the two earliest pornographic novels, *Equinox* and *Hogg*, which were written, respectively, in 1967/68 and 1969, very much grew out of the fact that there was some extraordinary pornography-slash-erotic writing being done in the States at the time. There were companies like Greenleaf and Random House and there were poets like David Meltser writing books like *The Agency* and Michael Perkins had written a book called *Evil Companions* which I'd been very impressed by, and these are novels which have stood up to the test of 25 years or so and people are still reading them. And because they were

exciting works at the time, I felt I wanted to do one too, you know, I was the little kid saying: "Gee, that seems like a fun field to work in." So I tried my hand at it. One of them was published and one had to wait getting on for 25 years to be published. But the impetus was not to do something that would shock people, the impetus was to do something in a field that was already exciting and I wanted to do something that was equally exciting.

**PK:** Is there a conscious difference between your science fiction and your pornography?

**SRD:** When you say "conscious"?

**PK:** Obviously the subject matter has to differ. You write a story about a space ship or you write a story about a fuck, there is different subject matter, but do you approach them differently?

**SRD:** It seems to be the same sort of question as asking a poet: is there a conscious difference between your sonnet and your Spenserian stanza. Yes, they're two different forms. At the same time, they're written by the same poet with the same life experiences and the same concerns, so there are probably going to be similarities. I see them basically as a kind of formal difference, not any kind of fundamental, transcendental, absolute difference in the heaven only knows what.

**PK:** Is everything you write done in opposition, well, in dialogue with what is going on in that genre at the time?

**SRD:** More or less, I'd say, yes. You started to say "in opposition to", and yes, there is an oppositional thrust, or at least I like to think there is. I pat myself on the back and say: yes, you're opposing things again. As I said, there is a critical side to it, not only are exciting things being done but there are things that could be done better and things that could be more exciting. If you want to do something that's more exciting, that's a way of criticising something that's been done already.

**PK:** Is that the impetus behind the experimental writing that you're starting to do?

**SRD:** Yes, I think for me that's the impetus behind all writing. Why else do you want to write? You want to do something that's like the stuff you like, but you also want it to be different from the stuff you've read up to now. Calling it oppositional is just a polysyllabic way of saying you want to be different, different and better.

**PK:** What about *Atlantis*?

**SRD:** *Atlantis* is my most recent book and I would guess you'd call it experimental fiction. It's certainly set not in the here and now, it's set in 1924 and it was a great deal of fun to research. It grew out of my Dad telling me stories about his coming to New York City from North Carolina. At one point, after he'd died and I was thinking about these stories, I ran across a comment by the German writer Robert Musil that everyone had a great deal of difficulty understanding that period, as Musil put it, from the time your father was 20 years old until the time you were 20 years old. He went on to say

that the reason you don't understand the first half of that period is because you weren't there, and the reason you don't understand the second half is because you were. So, with that in mind, I began to try to research that period and try and find what was going on historically. I started even before that, from when my father was 17, and I went back and found out what the weather was and when the moon was full and what was going on in the newspaper and what have you. And then, of course, you try to pack all this into the story so that it doesn't look as if it's packed, you try to make it look off-handed, just mentioned casually not as though you've slaved in a library for the last six months. One of the stories my father told me: he was really anxious to see skyscrapers. He was from Raleigh, North Carolina and he'd heard about the Woolworth Building and all the skyscrapers, so he figured this was what New York was for. When he got there, his older brother met him at Grand Central Station and they went immediately into the subway station, they didn't even get out of the station to do it, then they went up to 125th Street. Well up at 125th Street in 1923, 1924, all the buildings were two-storays tall. So my father got out and the first thing he said was: "Shoot, in Raleigh we've got a building that's six storeys tall and has got an elevator. There's nothing here." That was one of the things he remembered: being so disappointed with his first view of New York. The other thing he remembered was, when he finally got around to walking across the Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklyn was nowhere near as built-up than and at that time there was a cornfield at the other side of the bridge. My father had heard that Brooklyn was part of New York City and there were people who lived there, but he hadn't realised it was quite as rural as it was and he was quite appalled. And appalled enough to tell me about it with a laugh 35 years later. These are the kinds of stories that have gone into the novel about a young black man making his way in 1924 New York.

**PK:** You use some experimental fictional techniques in the novel as well.

**SRD:** Yes, but nothing to kick you out of the text in any way. There are techniques that I was using in novels as far back as 1965, like *Babel 17*. They're kind of split texts every now and then when you tell the story from two points of view at the same time and so the reader has to make up his or her mind which one you're going to read first.

**PK:** You think that literary techniques like that you can do in science fiction as well.

**SRD:** I was doing it in science fiction before I was doing it in these stories.

**PK:** One thing that struck me with all the recent books you've done: you've done *The Mad Man*, *Atlantis*, an autobiography, books of criticism. It's a long time since there's been any science fiction.

**SRD:** That is true. The most recent thing that is close to science fiction is a novel called *They Fly at Çiron*, which is based on a story that was written a long, long time ago.

**PK:** The second thing you wrote?

**SRD:** I think it was more than that, the third or fourth perhaps. But it was originally a short story that I expanded into a 150-page novel, so about 80% of it is new. That came out in, I guess, '93 or '94, but that's the most recently-done thing that relates, and that's more a fantasy than a science fiction story.

**PK:** Is it because there's nothing to oppose, or have dialogue with, in the genre at the moment?

**SRD:** No, it's just what I've been reading. I would imagine that I would be going back to science fiction at some time, probably fairly soon.

**PK:** Would that be for the second part of the dyptych?

**SRD:** It very well might be. I think there's one science fiction novel I would like to write before I get back to work on the second part of the dyptych.

**PK:** Why did it take so long?

**SRD:** For those of you who don't remember, Paul is talking about *Stars in my Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, which came out in 1984. I conceived it as a pair of novels, one to be called *Stars in my Pocket Like Grains of Sand* and the second to be called *The Splendour and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*, and the books were conceived together as a dyptych. They were to be a celebration of a lot of elements I saw in the gay world at that particular time, ways that the gay world has figured out to negotiate all sorts of sexual problems, all sorts of inter-relational problems, all sorts of ways of passing information on. I did the first volume, but one of the things they came out of was a relationship I was in at the time that had lasted about eight years and, silly me, I thought was going to go on for the rest of my life. So rarely do they. Shortly after I finished the first volume and was starting work on the second, the relationship ended, as such things do in the real world. Then, of course, AIDS came along and changed the nature of what was going on in the gay world in very important ways, so that in some way the urgency to write the second volume was no longer there. I still think that the second volume, even as originally conceived, is worthwhile doing, and I still want to do it, and I have been working on it now and then, but it hasn't been an urgent thing to write. And I've also done, as I say, things like "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" which was my 1984 AIDS novel, but it dealt with some of the things that had changed in that world, so again that took away some of the urgency to complete the project. That's essentially what happened, I assume eventually that I will finish it, and I hope that when I do I hope I can find someone to publish it.

**PK:** But you say there's another novel you want to

write before then.

**SRD:** Yes.

**PK:** Would you like to talk about it?

**SRD:** No. There's something that I call the "Saturday afternoon in the bar" effect which is that if you start talking about the book you want to write, you talk it all out and then you never write it. So I ask you to indulge my reticence here. This is a book I'd *like* to write, that's why I can't tell you about it.

**PK:** There is a feeling, after many years in which books by Samuel R. Delany seem to dribble out at an incredibly slow rate, a lot seem to have appeared in a very short time. You haven't become more prolific have you?

**SRD:** No, I basically average about a book a year. I suppose in the last few years it's been a book every year and a half. But of course I've been teaching full time for the last six years and that has, yes, slowed things down. In the first few years I may have been more prolific than that, maybe a book and a half a year, now it's a book every year and a half. This illusion of suddenly becoming prolific is purely an accident of publishing schedules. I've been turning the books out at pretty much the same rate, but publishers schedule them when they will and it just happened that about eight reprints and three new books were all scheduled between August of 1994 and August of 1995, so I've had eleven books out in the last year and suddenly it looks like the *annus mirabilis* of Samuel R. Delany.

**Question from the Audience:** Now you're settled, you've got tenure-track ...

**SRD:** Tenure-track? Honey, I've got tenure.

**Question from the Audience:** What do you feel about the plight of the urban black?

**SRD:** I don't think my view of that has changed much because I'm settled and have tenure. It's an appalling situation in the United States. It's not as bad as it was. This was brought home to me recently because I was being interviewed by – I call them kids, because I'm 53 and they were under 30 – who were putting out this black magazine, and one of them said something about this situation has not improved in 30 years. Well, it is better than it was to the extent that there is now no restaurant in Manhattan that you can go into and be told you won't be served, which, 30 years ago, could happen. And there are all sorts of other things that have changed. Nevertheless it is appalling, but the plight of the urban blacks, as somebody said very well, is not a black problem, it's a white problem. What do we do about the whites?

**PK:** You've already written about the homeless, the urban poor, in *The Mad Man*.

**SRD:** And it's an extension of the same problem.

**Question from the Audience:** What's your favourite

novel?

**SRD:** What I'm going to be working on when I get home. This is like asking a parent: who's your favourite child?

**PK:** So what's your least favourite?

**SRD:** What? You're going to get home and get trounced over the head if they hear what you've been saying about them. Novels are like that.

**PK:** Do you get tired of people constantly asking you about old books?

**SRD:** They don't do it often enough so that I do.

**Question from the Audience:** Are there any books you wouldn't want to write?

**SRD:** Well I'm not in line to do a catalogue of plumbing parts, but if I had to and read three or four of them that were really exciting and turned me on, I might just go off and do one.

**Question from the Audience:** What ideas in the current world excite you as a science fiction writer?

**SRD:** Some of the nanotechnology stuff is really fascinating, especially when you get down to the actual chemistry of it. And wormholes through space. I was listening to Greg Benford talk about a paper he had just done about a new model for the magnetic structure of the centre of the galaxy. I'm a science fiction writer: I hear stuff like that I lie down on my back and kick my feet in the air. This is what science fiction is all about.

**PK:** What about fantasy? If ideas in the current world excite you as a science fiction writer, do they excite you as a fantasy writer?

**SRD:** Not so much. Sometimes I suppose I find the fantasy easier ... if you get a sociological insight, and the sociological insight does not involve technology per se, you know, it doesn't involve computers and information technology, sometimes it's easier using a fantasy setting to foreground that, which is basically what's going on in the four volumes of the *Neveryon* stories. Because the one thing they're not about is electronic information; they're very much about the spread of new informations, but informations on a different level than the information highway that everyone talks about today. So that's when you're likely to have recourse to a fantasy structure.

**Question from the Audience:** From what you're saying about writing about what excites you at the moment, you don't have a great long agenda of things to write. But what if you change as you're writing them?

**SRD:** From the moment you take the last page out of the typewriter you're a different person. I mean that very seriously, the process of writing the book itself tends to change you and make you into a different person because you – I don't know who it was I heard on what panel say you write the book to find out what's in it, but to a large extent you do. And when you started

the book you were a person who did not know what happened in that book, and when you finish the book you are now a person who does know what happened, and to the extent that that has to do with solutions to various problems you were interested in solving and you now have some sense of what possible solutions there might be, you are a different person. So writing really is a sort of self-fashioning process.

**Question from the Audience:** Can you think of a way that the diversity of published science fiction can be increased?

**SRD:** Mainly, I think, editors and publishers have to be less scared and grow a little lax. A lot of the answers to so many of our publishing problems are: if things would be allowed to follow the path of least resistance, if there was more sympathy to the sorts of things that people are writing, if there wasn't so much fear that because it doesn't fill slot A, B or C it'll never sell and we can't afford to do it. I'd like to see less of the kind of thinking characterised by what an executive in Bantam Books once said: "We are not interested in books that sell less than 20,000 in hardcover." They then proceeded to do a science fiction publishing programme where none of the books sold over 13,000 – it's just, an end to what I call blockbuster thinking in publishing would be a nice thing to see, and to realise you're in the business of publishing books, and who are you publishing them for?, the people who want to read them. A simple thing to bear in mind, but it seems to get harder and harder as time goes on.

**Question from the Audience:** I wonder how you feel when you turn up in someone else's work.

**SRD:** I haven't had the privilege of seeing that yet, although it is very funny you should mention that. A young writer back in the States only a couple of months ago wrote me a letter and said he would like to use me as a character in a novel he was writing. He had run into me at a reading at the 92nd Street Y and he said he had written about seeing me at the reading. I think he had probably come up and talked to me, I didn't remember it very clearly. I said, by all means, go right ahead; then he said he wanted a place where one of his characters and I actually had a conversation. So we went in to some little coffee shop and he pulled out his tape recorder and asked me questions that his character wanted to ask me, and I came up with the answers. I told him about the whole thing I told you about with the scholar who engages the imaginary scholar in the Nevèryon books, and I said since he was so amenable to engage S.L. Kermit in a debate over non-existent anthropological problems, I couldn't see that I could very well refuse to be a character in his novel.

**PK:** I love the idea of novel as interview.

**Question from the Audience:** Has the accessibility of computers changed your own method of writing? Will you write a hypertext novel?

**SRD:** I'm not planning to do a hypertext novel any time in the future. I've always been a re-writer, of course, and the wordprocessor makes rewriting obsessive and the whole notion of discreet drafts vanishes in front of that screen, and you just go on and on and on.

**PK:** When you rewrite, do you cut out or add to?

**SRD:** Both.

**PK:** You've talked about science fiction as being a language, do you have to learn a new language for each new story?

**SRD:** Well, I think every new story demands its new techniques, it will have technical problems that have to be solved as you get to them. Sometimes it uses old techniques, sometimes it demands new techniques. I think I'm the kind of writer who looks for stories that will ask for new techniques. They may be very small and all but invisible to the readers, as well they probably should be.

**PK:** Samuel Delany, thank you very much.

## DELANY: A SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### NOVELS

#### 1962. *The Jewels of Apor.*

Delany's first novel, since restored (1968) and revised (1971).

#### 1963. *Captives of the Flame (as Out of the Dead City, 1968).*

#### 1964. *The Towers of Toron.* revised 1968.

1965. *City of a Thousand Suns.* revised 1969.  
A trilogy now usually reprinted as a single volume (1970, *The Fall of the Towers*); the first two books were subsequently revised in order to make the plot work, and all were revised before the collection was published. The genesis of these novels is described both in *The Straits of Messina* and *The Motion of Light in Water*.

#### 1965. *The Ballad of Beta-2.* [corrected text 1977]

A short novel which is almost an act of literary criticism as the origins of the eponymous ballad are revealed.

#### 1966. *Babel-17.*

A proto-cyberpunk novel, with autobiographical resonances. Delany's exploration of the impact of language upon identity is fascinating, if now a little dated and naive. Revised in 1969.

#### 1966. *Empire Star.* [corrected text 1977]

A short novel now published alongside with *The Ballad of Beta-2*. It contains allusions to the other work.

#### 1967. *The Einstein Intersection.* [1 chapter restored 1968]

A complex experimental novel, which contains parts of Delany's drafts and journals. Some editions omit a chapter. Delany's preferred title is *A Fabulous Formless Darkness*.

#### 1968. *Nova.*

A space opera with complex mythical overtones.

#### 1973. *The Tides of Lust.*

The first pornographic novel by Delany to be published, although its original publisher Lancer Books distributed few copies before it went out of business. There appear to be plenty of copies of the British Savoy Books edition available. Recently it has been reprinted as *Equinox* (Delany's preferred title) with light revisions.

#### 1975. *Dhalgren.*

A bestselling, complex and controversial modernist novel with an unnamed, amnesiac protagonist. This work divides people into those who love it, and those who find it unreadable. The difficult nature of the text itself has meant that there have been several corrected editions.

#### 1976. *Triton.*

Delany's first exploration of the modular calculus, with an unlikeable, gender-swapping hero. Perhaps his most acclaimed novel, it is often considered by critics alongside such feminist utopian works as *The Female Man*, *The Dispossessed* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

#### 1984. *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand.*

The only part published (and indeed written)

of a dyptych, this is a complex exploration of sexuality; the sf counterpart of the *Return to Neveryon* sequence.

#### 1983. *Neveryona.* [revised 1989]

The longest part of the *Return to Neveryon* sequence, which explores issues of power, sexuality and representation.

#### 1993. *They Fly at Ciron.*

A novel begun in the early 1960s, eventually published as a short story with James Sallis. Sallis's additions have been excised and the story expanded to novel length.

#### 1994. *The Mad Man: A Novel.*

A five hundred page work of pornography, about a graduate student whose life begins to mirror that of his subject, a murdered gay philosopher. The novel claims that it is avoiding the issues of HIV and homelessness, whilst it is set firmly in the 1980s and 1990s and includes descriptions of sexual encounters with vagrants.

#### 1994. *Hogg.*

Actually written in the late 1960s, it took this book twenty-five years to find a publisher. The first half is a description of the activities of Hogg, a murdering rapist, whereas the second part is taken up with the reported murders committed by one of his colleagues. An uncomfortable reading experience, which is surely the point.

### SHORT STORIES AND NOVELLAS

#### 1971. *Driftglass.*

A collection of Delany's short fiction.

#### 1979. *Tales of Neveryon.* [revised 1988]

Four fantasy novellas which explore a barbarian world as civilisation develops. The homoeroticism derived from its Conan-esque milieu is flavoured with Foucauldian and Derridean speculations. With debates about semiology, this work is obviously one fantasy not aimed at the teenaged market.

#### 1981. *Distant Stars.*

*Empire Star* and other short stories.

#### 1985. *Flight from Neveryon.* [revised 1989]

Further explorations of the modular calculus lead Neveryon to be juxtaposed with New York in the early days of HIV awareness. Postscripts give updated information on HIV / AIDS, and so editions vary slightly.

#### 1987. *Return to Neveryon.* [revised 1989 and title changed]

Originally published as *The Bridge of Lost Desire* in the US, and by a different publisher to the one who had published the rest of the sequence. The three stories are published in reverse chronological order, and include the first of the sequence from the first volume. A lengthy appendix gives Delany's views of the series.

#### 1994. *Driftglass / Starshards*

A fuller collection of Delany's short stories.

#### 1995. *Atlantis: Three Tales.*

The title story was apparently released as a limited edition. This may be different to one version of the current book which has a limited edition with an additional essay by Delany.

### NONFICTION

#### 1977. *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction.*

Includes Delany's speculations on how to read sf, along with insightful essays on Disch and Zelazny, Russ and Le Guin. This volume is very poorly proof-read, if indeed it has been proof-read at all.

#### 1978. *The American Shore: meditations on a tale of science fiction by Thomas M. Disch,*

#### *Angouleme.*

A structuralist reading of a short story, inspired by Roland Barthes's similarly exhaustive S/Z.

#### 1979. *Heavenly Breakfast: An Essay on the Winter of Love.*

Short account of life in a commune; to be read alongside *Dhalgren*.

#### 1984. *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction.*

More insightful essays, including examinations of Disch, Heinlein, Russ and Sturgeon.

#### 1988. *Wagner / Artaud: A Play of 19th and 20th Century Critical Fictions.*

Not sf-related; apparently an essay on Modernism.

#### 1989. *The Straits of Messina.*

Delany on Delany, or rather alter ego K. Leslie Steiner on Delany. The essays represent what Delany wishes someone would write about his work, although he has also said he disagrees with what "she" writes. It also includes introductions to the then unpublished *Hogg*.

#### 1990. *The Motion of Light in Water: East Village Sex and Science Fiction Writing: 1960-1965 with The Column at the Market's Edge.*

An experimental autobiography. The 1988 US edition had different dates, a differently ordered subtitle and lacks the appended interview.

#### 1994. *Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some*

#### *Comics.*

A collected of largely written interviews. See review on page 15.

### COMICS

#### *Wonder Woman*

#### 1978. *Empire: A Visual Novel.*

Drawn by Howard V. Chaykin, the two were operating under constraints imposed by their editor. Delany's thoughts on this are in *Silent Interviews*.

### FILM

#### *Orchid*

Directed by Delany.

### EDITOR

1970-1, with Marilyn Hacker, *Quark 1-4*. Anthologies of Speculative Fiction.

# Negating *Silent Interviews*

by Seri Fulten

It seemed appropriate, as I have twice now, to read *Silent Interviews* (Wesleyan University Press: 1994) on a train, and now come to review it in the same manner. Trains are neither one place nor another, they are between-places, between sites, between worlds. *Interviews* are a different sort of between-place: between-faces, between sights, between words. The interviewer poses the questions so as to best reveal the subject, to draw out the information of interest, to catch the subject in a new, revealing light. Sometimes the interviewer becomes the star, as a steam train on a scenic route. And sometimes they are commuter lines: everyday, repetitive revealing nothing new.

Here, in *Silent Interviews*, something is different. You cannot see the faces, and any of the apparent sparring that goes on in these interviews is fixed: the questions are scripted in advance. And the answers are revised, rewritten, and then the questions remoulded to fit. Tired of being misquoted, or mistranscribed, or just plain misconstrued, Delany took to asking for advance knowledge of the questions and began to collaborate on the answers. In some ways this becomes an issue of power and control. Information is power - is disinformation any less powerful? If so does this not negate any purpose in creating, or reading fiction? A disinformation between author and reader, a game with rules which both know and either may break to his/her peril/advantage. When the hunted becomes hunter, and Delany interviews Anthony Davis, Davis wished to edit little, and Delany has to follow suit.

It becomes yet another stage in the battle of speech against the word. Speech is direct, present, from mouth to ear. The truth can be questioned, queried or interrogated. Loose ends can be tidied up. Novelists lie for a living. And yet, even though words become detached from their owners, or placed in new contexts, we demand written evidence. Words have to be worth more than the paper they are written on. In interviews, speech becomes writing, and the subject is shoehorned into a story of someone else's devising. Whose views are they anyway? In this book Delany is coaxed, prompted and persuaded into talking (writing?) about himself.

He describes the process by which he has completed a graphic novel *Empire* in one interview, and the troubles with its publisher in another. Both, rewritten, were published in the same journal, and have been reworked since. How much can this reveal of Delany? Can Delany be truly optimistic about a project's success when a book is long out-of-print? Are the legal constraints of one age (which editor is responsible for which mistake?) those of another? Is the definition of how to read sf from one year the

same as the definition from another? If the ideas of Jacques Derrida would place Delany's thoughts in a clearer light, could Delany not discuss Derrida years "before" he read them?

Most revealing, perhaps, is the interview conducted by K. Leslie Steiner, when the topic turns to interviews. They discuss rewrites and revisions, in different rooms, in different states. This is played straight: Delany the interviewee may be a character created by Steiner and Steiner's words may be rewritten by Delany, but at no point in the interview is Steiner admitted to be a created character from the start.

Words can lie. Words can stand for other words. Words can pretend to be other words. Paul Kincaid's interview with Delany seems on the level: no questions were given in advance. Kincaid did work out an opening anecdote which he shared with several people beforehand. We have then a transcript of a tape, faulty in parts, and perhaps subject to errors of transcription. Has Kincaid rewritten parts? Has Delany? The editors of *Vector* chose to print it in its entirety. Unedited? Andrew M. Butler has assured me so. But, a few grammatical errors corrected for style perhaps... or a few created for authenticity of speech. Who would ever know? Nevertheless, you can take my word that it matches my memory of the event, and I was there. If you trust my word.

And you might not wish to as little of this was drafted on a train at all, beyond the ideas and a few quotes or pointers. Now it is rewritten on a laptop somewhere between Hereford and London, converted via a PC in Sheffield, edited in Bournemouth, layed out in Camden. Other towns could easily be substituted. Perhaps they will. There are some writers who make the world appear entirely differently to how it appeared before, or who turn ideas on their heads. Priest is one example, Delany another. He takes the medium of the interview, and reworks it. Similar ideas float through different interviews, and we don't complain at the repetition: instead the longing is for a hypertext version to view both versions, to unerase the rewrites and reorderings. Delany has pulled off the remarkable trick of redefining what the interview is for, and what it can do. But from a man who has constantly pushed at the boundaries of what novels can do (he has mixed pornography with philosophy and swords with semiotics) we should expect no less.

# First Impressions

## Reviews of Hardback and Paperback Originals

**Edited by Paul Kincaid**

**Pamela Belle**

***The Wolf Within***

Pan, 1995, 458pp, £9.99

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

*The Wolf Within* is the sequel to *The Silver City*, which told the story of Ansaryon and his defeat of the usurper Tsenit. Ansaryon's son, Bron, dedicated to the Death God Ayak at his birth, is growing up. A shy, self-contained child, he is haunted by the knowledge that the power inside him killed six thousand enemy soldiers – and that Ayak, the Wolf Within, revelled in the slaughter. Bron must keep the Wolf at bay – but he doesn't know how. His father takes him to Zithirian, the Silver City, to teach him to control his own magic, but as Bron reaches adolescence it becomes clear that the Wolf is only waiting for his chance to destroy all that Bron holds dear. The only safety he can give his family is by running away, out into a wider world of warring kingdoms. Away from his family, he can pretend to be a normal youth, playing music and travelling downriver towards the Sorcerer's Island Jo'ami, where his salvation may lie. But it is not an easy pretense, and the malevolent presence of the Wolf inside him, while preserving him from danger, cannot be kept under control forever ...

Bron's travels take him through wastelands, past ruined cities, and to a matriarchal theocracy which shows him a presentiment of his fate. He flees to Toktel'yi, the sprawling city from which the Emperor Ba'alekkt plans his domination of the known world, and his oppression of the lands he's already conquered. Here Bron meets Mallaso, 'a woman who carries the pain of her slaughtered

people'. She has no reason to love the Emperor and Bron, discovering Ba'alekkt's plans to overthrow the Silver City itself, cannot help but agree with her. It is suddenly imperative that Bron comes to terms with his own power, which may prove to be Zithirian's only defence; but is the price too high?

Pamela Belle paints a detailed and evocative portrait of a richly imagined world which has an internal consistency often lacking in fantasy worlds. It's reminiscent of our own world in the age of Alexander the Great – with the one, massive, difference that sorcery works. All sorcerers – except the divinely-cursed Bron – must take the drug Ammatall in order to use their powers. There are four rules of magic to which they must adhere: sorcery must be used unselfishly, without hurting anyone; the sorcerer must employ restraint and accept responsibility for his own actions. A laudable charter, and largely adhered to; the existence of these laws adds an extra moral dimension (again, often lacking in fantasy) to Bron's actions.

Bron himself is an appealing character; far from perfect, and, despite his awesome powers, with very human fears and failings. Even the minor characters are deftly and realistically described. Pamela Belle may be working on an immense tapestry, but she doesn't stint on detail.

Perhaps the most telling recommendation that I can make of this book is that, having read it, I wanted to read the first one – and the events of the last few pages make me keen to find out what happens in the third volume of the trilogy. Since I'm not generally a fantasy fan, Pamela Belle is clearly doing something special!

**Gregory Benford**

***Sailing Bright Eternity***

Gollancz, 1995, 404pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

*Sailing Bright Eternity* brings to a belated conclusion the series of novels which Gregory Benford began with *In the Ocean of Night* (1977) and *Across the Sea of Suns* (1984). In a more limited sense it

is the second part of the third element in the 'trilogy' begun with *Great Sky River* (1987) and *Tides of Light* (1989), whose first part was published last year as *Furious Gulf*.

Here, the two stories of Nigel Walmsley and the family Bishop overlap and merge, re-setting the relatively limited imaginative horizons of the earlier novels within the broader ideative panorama of the later ones. The joint conclusion of both stories resolves both the plot of the 'trilogy', in that it explains how Killeen's 'dead'

father comes to be still around and why it is so important to find him, and the more important super-plot of the entire enterprise, in that it explains both the strategy and the likely eventual outcome of the long war between mechanical and organic life-forms.

When I reviewed *Furious Gulf* in these pages a few issues ago I did so with a distinct lack of charity, occasioned by mere impatience; it is more than a little frustrating to be forced to wait for five years for the third part of a trilogy and then to find that the latest portion is only half of it. Now, at last, there can be no more question of impatience; the end is here and it only remains to ask whether it was worth the wait. I think, on balance, that it was, and that the strenuous elaboration of the project for two decades – the greater part of Benford's adult life (and, for that matter, mine) – has been fruitful. I don't believe that the route employed to get to the end point was the optimum one, but it's always easy to make that kind of observation in retrospect, and there's no criticism at all in observing that when the author set out on his imaginary voyage he obviously had little or no idea where it would eventually reach its terminus. All the best extended enterprises within the field of science fiction are, almost by definition, exploratory; the essence of their development is to move further and further into terra incognita as they grow. The best of all such enterprises are those which arrive somewhere which is not only new and interesting but unexpected. This one does that – and the achievement is ample justification for any number of unprofitable detours and patchwork engine-repairs which might have occurred along the way.

There is some evidence that Benford felt even more frustration, as he battled to bring the series to its conclusion, than the most impatient of his readers. The text gives the impression of a racehorse which has tiredly turned into the finishing straight, having long since exhausted its second wind and developed a distinct lameness, but which struggles gamely on to the winning-post regardless. Many of the chapters making up this concluding volume are very short; its final phase (Part VIII) packs 9 chapters, a prologue and a coda into a mere thirty pages and has a final chapter title ('The Pain of Eternity') which Benford had previously employed as the title of chapter 1 of part V of *Furious Gulf*. Only a couple of the sections carry headquotes but there may be a double irony in the use of the quotation from Swinburne which ends 'That even the weariest river/Winds somewhere safe to sea.' The great river did indeed become weary before delivering its narrative cargo to the tide which might enable it to sail more joyously towards a bright eternity, and even at the end Benford conserves a certain ambivalence as to whether the eternity in question really is bright, or whether it still remains the ominous ocean of night which formed the background to the first volume. Swinburne was, of

course, celebrating the mortality of man in typically perverse fashion and Benford really does echo that sentiment even in contemplating the extraordinarily protracted career of Nigel Walmsley, which begins in 1999 A.D. and attains its climacticon somewhat around 37,518 A.D.

The whole work of which *Sailing Bright Eternity* is the final part is Stapledonian in scope; indeed, it is a work which deliberately sets out to update and outdo *Star Maker* in presenting an account of universal history and destiny which accommodates contemporary scientific cosmology while vaulting as far beyond it as the imagination will permit. In harmony with Stapledonian precedent it even presents its results as a graph, although I am at a loss to understand why this is located on p.14, in between chapters 1 and 2 of Part I, rather than on p.405, after the summary chronology. I think – indeed, I passionately believe – that this is a job well worth doing, and that when it is well done (as responsibly and as ambitiously as possible) the result is precious enough to license almost any artifice in narrative construction. Even a plot as blatantly arbitrary and as frankly silly as that of *Sailing Bright Eternity* turns out to be – when we finally learn why everymech and his even-more-alien cousin has been trying to latch on to Killeen, his father and his son – is eminently forgivable in this particular context.

Olaf Stapledon, working within the gentlemanly tradition of British scientific romance, was able to construct *Star Maker* as a straightforward visionary fantasy, anchored within the particular frustrations of an individual of his own time and temperament. Benford, working within the constraints of the commercial genre of American science fiction, could not afford the luxury of such languid directness, and naturally elected to embed his own vision within an action-adventure plot replete with chases and crises, enigmas and exclamatory revelations, with every *deus ex machina* compensated by a devastating massacre and every expository lump balanced by an explosive liberation. This is an implicitly chimerical enterprise and it is not entirely surprising that the result – as viewed from a critical distance – is about as elegant as a crocodile crossed with a camel, but it really doesn't matter. The real point of the enterprise was to go – as boldly as possible – where no one (least of all the mishmash of sad and stupid clichés which is contemporary sci-fi) had ever gone before, and in that mission Benford has. For that reason, the book and the series are well worth reading; for anyone seriously interested in contemporary science fiction they are required reading.

As every hardened gambler knows, it doesn't matter how tired the horse finishes, or how ungainly its stride has become; all that matters is whether it wins the race and what its starting price was. *Sailing Bright Eternity* is a champion, of sorts, and it pays off at odds that are more than fair.

## Alexander Beshar

*Rim*

Orbit, 1995, 357pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills

The potted biographies of authors that publishers slip into the inside covers of books are fascinating trifles. They can be divided into categories, such as The Country Cosy ('Melinda lives in a Kent cottage with her artist husband, eight cats and five canaries, where she raises daffodils and alpine goats') or The University of Life ('Before turning his hand to writing, Brian had several jobs, including longshoreman, nursery teacher, miner, wheeltapper and emergency dentist'). Alexander Beshar's biography puts him squarely in the category of The Exotic Expert. I must confess that, for no reason other than blind prejudice, discovering that – after having been raised in Japan – Beshar became a consulting futurist for an international research group that specialized in corporate scenario planning made me ill-disposed to Mr Beshar immediately. Sorry about that.

*Rim* goes two down very shortly after opening. The novel's beginning is confusing, and it isn't helped by some clumsy prose

('... the blue sky shot through with hot, white light like a shot of mescal chasing the worm down the throat' or 'The U.S. immigration officers in the jeep were parked below in the arroyo', both on page ten). But then the hero is introduced and things decidedly improve.

The year is 2027. The world is economically and culturally dominated by New Nippon, and computer/VR technology has advanced hand-in-hand with Eastern spiritualism. Neo-Tokyo is in quarantine because it disappears every evening ('Urban dematerialization, my boy, that's the defining philosophy of our times'). This is a source of mere casual interest to Professor Frank Gobi, former psychic detective; it becomes more relevant when he has to go there. After Satori City, a VR environment, crashes, the Satori corporation recruit Gobi to help them. The sabotage of Satori City is pertinent to Gobi because his son was playing in Gametime. Trevor and thousands of other children are now comatose and will die unless Gobi can use his skills as 'an anthropologist doing fieldwork in the afterlife' to find missing Satori chairman Kazuo Harada and download his consciousness to discover the password that will reboot Satori City.

From then on the reader is taken on a roller coaster ride from America to space to Neo-Tokyo, as well as environments internal.

Gobi, a likeable hero, is caught up in a net of intrigue, conspiracy and red herrings, where it's impossible to tell who are the good guys and who aren't, and where he's embroiled in a series of erotic encounters with women who wish to use him for their own schemes (so engrossed is Gobi in these dalliances that for long periods he appears to forget about his son's predicament!) Rim is fast-paced, action-packed, humorous and entertaining, with Beshar using his intimate knowledge of Japan to create a unique future world. (The

ending is something of a mess, though, as Beshar suddenly realises that there are an awful lot of loose ends to tie up.)

All in all, Rim is an exuberant debut and, though it sometimes escapes its author's grasp, is worth checking out. Mr Beshar managed to overcome my unreasoned prejudices; it should also be noted that Orbit has produced his work in an odd-sized but handsome edition.

---

## Mark Canter

### *Ember from the Sun*

Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 330pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Helen Gould

Yute Nahadeh is an Inuit anthropologist specialising in Neanderthals. His father is fighting a mining company which wants to develop his Arctic homeland, knowing it will mean the end of his tribe's way of life. After videoing his father and sister hunting, Yute finds the dead body of a young woman. Though cold, she is not frozen, and Yute realises she is a Neanderthal. He takes her with him to study then, when a vision tells him she is pregnant, he removes the foetus. Chena, a teenage runaway who, with her boyfriend, Jimmy, is desperate for money, agrees to act as surrogate mother but when the baby is born decides to keep her. Yute is devastated

Chena brings Ember up with her own younger daughter, but Ember is always aware that she's different. She is strong and heavily built, teased and bullied for her difficulty in speaking, but with hidden talents: a fantastic memory, a superb sense of smell, and a power she can draw on in emergency. This last she discovers when she saves the life of a bully who becomes convinced that she is really Sisiutlqua, 'He-who-returns'.

Ember, desperate to know what she really is, goes to see Yute who tells her she's the only live Neanderthal. She refuses to let him study her, so he kidnaps her then, when she runs away, shoots and wounds her while trying to recapture her. Eventually she reaches Alaska and the mine where the rest of her people are, just in time to save Yute's father from being incinerated with them. The bodies are saved and Yute, the real Sisiutlqua, is able to pass on to Ember his vision of regenerating the Neanderthal race from them.

Woven into the story is the conflict between the Neanderthals

with their great understanding and modern humans with better speech.

This novel should have been a pleasure to read, but even in the first chapter the alarm bells were ringing: it didn't suspend my disbelief. I liked the intriguing idea that Tundra Woman's foods had contained a natural antifreeze, which explained the freshness of her body when found. But Yute's conclusion that she knew which foods to eat is a leap of faith no real scientist would make. Furthermore, foetal cells double quickly, so the eight cells at the time of the pregnancy test mean the foetus was only a few hours old when Tundra Woman died: but tests cannot detect pregnancy for at least 28 days. After the shooting Ember learns that her blood group is unique, so it is doubtful that Chena could have carried her without extra hormones and perhaps anti-rejection drugs. And in giving Yute a vision that the corpse is pregnant, Canter destroys the difference and value the Neanderthals have in this world.

Yute is a cold and dedicated scientist who makes a disappointing hero, and I found it inconceivable that an Inuit would not know his tribe's customs and hunting methods. Ember is the only well-rounded and sympathetic character.

In contrast to this sketchy characterisation, there is a surfeit of clinical detail and research that either didn't belong on the page or needed to be presented in a more interesting way. Incidents occurred for no apparent reason; one character's only purpose was to infodump. The fight to prevent the mining disappeared for most of the book and I thought Canter had simply dropped it, only to find it reappearing at the resolution of the story. Viewpoints and chronological order of events get muddled at times, and the plot-driven story is mostly told rather than shown. Overall, was left with the feeling of 'something and nothing': I liked the basic premise, but the book reads like an early draft and isn't the satisfying story it looked to be.

---

## C.J. Cherryh

### *Rider at the Gate*

Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 370pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Andrew Adams

C.J.Cherryh has been prolific over the last twenty years or so, winning both relatively large sales and critical acclaim, as witnessed by her Hugo-winning *Downbelow Station* and *Cyteen*.

This new one is unlikely to win any awards, however.

It's a nice tale. Cherryh describes it as 'Planetary SF', which only makes sense once you've read it and if you know her other works. It's sf set on a colonised planet with no mention of space travel as part of the plot (other than as a long-ago explanation of the origins of the society). It's not demonstrably part of her Alliance-Union Universe, although there's little to stop it being so.

The world she creates is another abandoned colony (as in *Forty Thousand in Gehenna*). We never see any of the history, apart from religious prattle told second-hand about the colony being abandoned due to wickedness which manifests itself in telepathic contact with the local fauna. The largest, most intelligent and most powerfully telepathic animal is the 'nighthorse' (Cherryh manages to avoid the obvious use of nightmare until most of the way through). Some people hear the horses (and other beasties) better than others: those who can't ignore it become riders. These riders are damned to hell, according to the local religion; unfortunately the society is in desperate need of the riders. Radio signals attract the local

predators, so communication must be done by means of phone lines, transportation is by fairly primitive wheeled vehicles and convoys need protection from the predators. The only real protection is a rider-mounted nighthorse. Thus the riders are damned to hell by the religion, but absolutely necessary for life.

This information is all handed out slowly during the book.

There are three plots, intertwined in the usual Cherryh complications: a rider, Guil Stuart, is informed of the death of his partner; a young rider who feels a debt to Stuart goes with a group following him to the site of her death; and a rider up in the high wild near the site of the death has to deal with what caused it.

The story of Guil is a complex tale of guilt and love; the boy's story is the archetypal coming-of-age; the woman's is an adventure story. They are eventually bound together quite neatly. This is a moderately well-plotted book, and moves along well enough to prevent boredom.

I found resonances to Cherryh's previous works and other sf. The structure is similar to *Downbelow Station* with various viewpoint characters coming together after separate starts, while the details of travelling through dangerous countryside recalls her books of Morgaine. The nighthorses and their relationship with the riders reminds me somewhat of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragons*: though the nature of the beasts is different, the bond between horse and rider is similar to that between dragon and rider.

On the whole, this is an enjoyable work; certainly not her best, it is far from her worst. I had one big quibble with it, however: the

editing is appalling. There are sentences which don't scan, errors in punctuation which change the meaning of a sentence or make it gibberish, and the punctuation used to indicate telepathic contact is inconsistent. Since at least one other of Cherryh's recent books (*Foreigner*) suffers similarly, one is led to wonder whether her publishers are getting lazy or if she is getting too big to edit. Someone once said that a good editor was worth their weight in gold, Cherryh needs to be reminded of this.

The editing problems verge on being annoying enough to detract seriously from the pleasure of reading, but the rest of the book just about manages to overcome this. If it was likely to solve this, I'd say wait for a second edition, but that rarely happens with fiction these days. So, one for the fans of C.J. Cherryh and telepathic alien beasties, which could have had more general appeal with a little more attention to detail.

## Richard Dreyfuss & Harry Turtledove

### *The Two Georges*

Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 422pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

Success in one field of endeavour can give an individual the freedom to experiment with other areas, irrespective of their competence to do so: sportspeople indulge themselves by playing in mediocre rock bands; rock musicians who can't act get supporting, or even starring, roles in movies; actors get to write books, or maybe have books written for them. Richard Dreyfuss has produced his first novel, an alternative history, in collaboration with one of the sub-genre's leading practitioners, Harry Turtledove. Apparently, it is a genuine collaboration – it's not just a matter of Turtledove acting as a ghost writer or an editor for the latest superstar who fancies having a novel he can call his own – and the result is not at all bad. Interestingly, the book receives its UK publication a month or so after another joint celebrity/sf writer alternative history: William R. Forstchen and Newt Gingrich's *1945*. Is this the beginning of a trend?

A major British work of art is about to go on tour in America. At a society function to launch the tour, a prominent businessman is murdered and the painting stolen, much to the surprise of ... well, certainly not anybody reading this book. However, this is no mere art heist; it very quickly becomes apparent that the theft is politically motivated. A detective is charged with the responsibility of retrieving the painting, and doing so quickly. He sets out on his mission, employing the fairly unconventional technique of conducting the investigation by eating in what seems like every restaurant, hotel and cafe in the North American continent and picking up clues along the way, almost as a sideline.

In essence this is a crime story, or perhaps more accurately a thriller because of the political dimension of the crime, yet it is an alternative history. The America of this novel is the North American Union, which remains part of the British Empire currently ruled by the Emperor Charles III. George Washington never lead the colonies in a War of Independence in the late eighteenth century, and it is the Gainsborough canvas of his meeting with King George III, *The Two Georges* of the title, that has been stolen. The North American Union of the late twentieth century (the exact date is never given, but seems to be roughly contemporary) is a reasonably contented place, whose inhabitants are for the most part happy with their colonial status. There is however an independence movement: a

political faction, The Independence Party, and a somewhat more unsavoury terrorist/freedom fighter (according to taste) wing, the Sons of Liberty, and it is this latter body that seem to be responsible for the theft.

The actual investigation is relatively conventional: virtually every major character becomes a suspect at some point, as the detective works his way around America and through a couple of romantic sub-plots, always one step behind the suspects (presumably because of the amount of time spent eating lovingly described breakfasts, lunches or dinners). The Sons of Liberty are for the most part portrayed unsympathetically, and are presumably modelled on the American militias, but to a British reader they resemble nothing so much as BNP-type neo-nazi thugs. The American Loyalists and the British are most definitely the good guys. One wonders what effect this casting, unexpected from American authors, will have on US sales.

What is more surprising is that the authors choose not to make much of their setting. It may be uncharitable but there is the assumption that Dreyfuss, as a first-time novelist, might fall into the trap of providing extensive info-dumps about the timeline he's created. Granted, Turtledove knows his way around this kind of story, but he has tended to cram as much of his research as possible into recent alternative history forays, specifically the pulpy but nevertheless enjoyable World War books. However, here the historical context is, if anything, underplayed. The major parameter, the point of departure from our history, is set out on the second page, and the overall impression – that of a society in most respects advanced to late nineteenth/early twentieth century levels – is also fairly quickly established. There are passing references to what's been happening in the last couple of centuries – we are told of a young Napoleon Bonaparte defending the Bastille in 1789 – but by and large the (to us) alternative past is largely taken for granted. This might almost be a disappointment for some science fiction readers who would want to know more about a world where the American colonies did not become independent, and why this fact seems to have retarded technological developments by between fifty and a hundred years.

Ultimately, this book invites comparisons with Robert Harris's *Fatherland*: the alternative history frame is competent enough, but this is, in essence, an enjoyable crime/thriller novel. This fact, and Dreyfuss's name on the cover, might, again like *Fatherland*, bring this book, and the alternative history sub-genre, to a wider audience which surely can't be a bad thing.

## Christopher Evans

### *Mortal Remains*

Gollancz, 1995, 319pp, £15.99, £8.99 pb

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

After three fine novels in the first half of the 1980's Christopher Evans' career appeared to be in limbo. Then came his spectacular re-emergence with the BSFA Award winning *Aztec Century*. *Mortal Remains*, a space opera, is his first novel since then, and like everything else Evans has published under his own name, it is a fascinating read.

Set when the solar system has been extensively colonised and terraformed, *Mortal Remains* begins with the crash of a bio-engineered spaceship on Mars. From it is recovered a uniquely self-sustaining womb. Since all children are grown externally in artificial

wombs, which normally must be linked to a parent (of either sex) by an 'umbilical', this particular womb becomes the focus of a complex and bloody power-struggle. Through this, Evans continues to explore his familiar themes of the corruption of power, personal duplicity, and perceptions of memory and identity.

The Noosphere is an artificial afterlife into which the essence of each citizen is transferred upon death, at, or before, the age of 100. Advances in biotechnology have permitted greatly extended lifespans, and so, in a device reminiscent of *Logan's Run* (there are even Arbiters who fulfill the 'Sandman' role), a compulsory upper age limit is enforced. Until the century is reached all citizens enjoy perfect health and a body as 'youthful' as they desire. This, however, is the acceptable limit of interference with the human form, and those Augmentists who would engineer humanity for

other environments, or to enhance bodily function, do so outside the law. Evans adds many other elements to the world he has created: a mysterious plague called (for self-explanatory reasons) The Dementia, a possible survivor from the dawn of the colonisation of the system, bio-engineering on a massive scale, powerful computer systems and a wide range of habitats, from space stations and ships to a necropolis on Charon.

It would be unfair to describe the plot Evans weaves around these elements, as a very large part of the enjoyment I derived from reading the book came from wondering just what it was all about and where it was bound for. I will just say that *Mortal Remains* is divided into three, fast moving, parts. The first sets the scene with a La Rondesque structure, each chapter following one main character, who then is replaced in the next chapter by a previously supporting character. In part two the novel really begins to intrigue, as what has previously been a minor thread – a seemingly un-connected narrative by a nameless amnesiac – moves into the foreground.

All this future is richly imagined, and Evans does not parade his invention unless the detail is necessary to the plot. Thus a complex texture hints at much more existing beyond the page, and in this there is something of Bester's *The Demolished Man*. Unfortunately the characters often seem little more than plot devices, as we follow each individual only when they play a vital role in the unfolding of the grand design. Even so, in a review you might reasonably expect to learn something of the central protagonists, however, *Mortal Remains* is a novel with perhaps a dozen main characters, all important in different ways, and to single out those around whom the novel finally depends would mean giving rather too much of the story.

As the plot untangles itself, Evans literally alienates the reader from his text by telling much of the second and third parts of the book from the perspective of a floating mind which can be relocated the moment danger threatens. Such a device facilitates a detached, God-like perspective, enabling Evans to play various meta-fictional games with his narrative, yet it dilutes the suspense to a significant degree. It is a device which functions magnificently in Olaf

Stapledon's *Star Maker*, but it is less effective in an adventure story; as if the entire novel were a collision between Evans' earlier, more interior style, and the epic approach he adopted for *Aztec Century*. Thus the book intrigues more than it involves, the very cleverness of the structure serving to detract from the excitement of the purely space-opera elements.

As I read I endeavoured to anticipate the moment when Evans, an extremely gifted writer, suddenly pulls the rug away. He does this skillfully; except that when the revelations come they are a little anticlimatic. Everything more or less makes sense, but the resolution is not only less than epic (in comparison with the scale of much of the best modern space opera), but as the complex skeen of plot-threads knot together to reveal the overall picture, the detachment involved in maintaining several different levels of reality leads to a suprisingly low key and hurried resolution. The final space battle is under-written, and the closing scenes feel rushed – as if Evans wanted to dispose of these 'juvenile' elements as quickly as possible.

Some questions remain: why are the majority so opposed to Augmentation, considering the extent to which they have adapted biology already, accepting the wholesale manipulation of the earth's genepool to create an entire bestiary of fantastical biocreations? And where were the rights activists opposed to the exploitation of the living spaceships – which we are told live most of their lives in begrudging drudgery?

Despite my reservations, *Mortal Remains* is a thoughtful, entertaining novel. If it less successfully fuses the interior and exterior than did *Aztec Century*, then it is not for want of ambition. Evans could have taken the easy route, and no doubt made his publishers happier, by re-cycling his award winner into an endless series. In this era of sequels, sharecrops and spinoffery he is to be congratulated for attempting something very different. *Mortal Remains* is not first class Evans, but it is still an intelligent, enigmatic novel more worthy of attention than 95% of what currently passes for sf.

## Paul Evenblij & Paul Harland *Systems of Romance* *Babel*, 1995, 294pp, £5.99

Reviewed by L.J.Hurst

This book comes with an encomium from Richard Kadrey and this description:

In their own country Paul Harland and Paul Evenblij received every award imaginable. Their works have been translated into many languages. Now collected for the first time in English, *Babel's* Global SF Collection brings you seven incomparable stories from the best the Lowlands have to offer.

*Babel* is a Dutch publisher. The first story, 'The Teeth of the City', is co-written, otherwise the two have each contributed three stories.

Dutch authors have difficulty breaking into genres. Two crime writers, Robert van Gulik and Jan Willem van der Wetering, have made considerable international names for themselves, though both had to write in English (as Evenblij and Harland have done) to achieve it. Baantjer, the biggest selling Dutch author, has only reached English language readers through a small publishing house formed, I think, specifically to publish him – *Babel* may have been formed for a similar purpose. There are one or two infelicities in the English: like 'Nederlands' being translated as 'Lowlands' above, and not as Netherlands or Low Countries, the terms a native speaker would use.

The other term in the cover description I would question is 'incomparable' – I would place most of these stories on that clear line which merges fantasy with some sf. It is a line that began with Lord Dunsany and passed ultimately to Ray Bradbury. Paul Harland's three stories show this influence most clearly (Evenblij's

have more sf elements). So, in 'The Winter Garden', a last garden on an old planet holds wooden beings who act like teenage boys. In this garden a rose blooms rarely, bringing a vitality into the garden which will allow a boyfriend for each boy to appear. A youth in his teenage haste picks a white rose instead of a red, and produces a monster which wrecks the struggling redoubt. There is no attempt at a scientific explanation for this.

In 'Sky Woman Sky', Harland tries another approach: a history of two women in Egypt at the time of the death of Tutankhamun. This is clearly placed in its historical period – particularly the religious struggles as monotheism had just been overthrown – but the two women have other concerns, the changing patterns of disposal of the dead. They steal the body to bury it in the desert rather than allow the priests to put it through embalming. And they manage to see its Ka – the spirit in the shape of a bird – and when one woman dies the other sees her Ka too. There is no attempt at a scientific explanation for this, either.

Evenblij's 'My Loves Speak in Different Tongues' is set in Barcelona, in Gaudi's Cathedral of the Holy Family, after the changing political unions of Europe have long wound themselves into disasters even greater than today. I had more difficulty locating the setting of 'A Name to the Pain': 'I finish this account and I will have lost you' is one line in the last section, and it is more literally true than perhaps Evenblij realised. The authors are not so different in their styles.

Their joint story comes first, and as I read on I tried to think who had introduced what. 'The Teeth of the City' describes a world of mobile cities where artists, if they don't wish to be sucked dry and re-cycled, must produce some masterpiece. Anais' lover Bedd is one such artist who doubts the value of his production; Bedd is also a member of a third sex. Evenblij is a mobile-city man, I'm sure;

Harland values the artist – though I admit, spot the author is a poor approach to reviewing.

If you want to read that Bradbury-like melding of sf and fantasy, this may be for you; if you want to know what is being

done on the continent, it is. You might be interested to find that on the continent, a United Kingdom of Eire can be envisaged, with its capital in London only sometimes disturbed by the bombs of English Nationalists. Somehow that thought had never occurred to me.

**Michael Foot**

***HG: The History of Mr Wells***

*Doubleday, 1995, 318pp, £20.00*

**Patrick**

***Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells,***

**Parrinder**

***Science Fiction and Prophecy***

*University of Liverpool Press, 1995, 170pp, £25.00, £14.95 pb*

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

The titles of these books could not be more appropriately indicative. Patrick Parrinder's epigraph is an engendering quote from Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*: 'Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present'. Michael Foot's title neatly links literary man and radical with Mr Polly persona.

Biographers, however intently objective, cannot fail to see their subjects through spectacles of one hue or another. Michael Foot makes it clear in his two prefaces that Wells was 'the hero of my youth' and that 'this is a book about Socialism', though 'personalities will constantly be allowed to intrude'. So they do; and assisted by the author's warm, if sometimes measuredly oratorical style (you hear him speaking through the print) several, Rebecca West and Moura Boudberg among them, become intriguingly alive. Michael Foot as a personality does not intrude unduly, though he was part of the late scene and in so far as the book is about socialism, his is a constant, didactic presence. The HG of the title and throughout the text was what Wells was to his friends. He emerges here, despite such privileged focusing and bestowed hero status, as a fallible mortal, an impetuous idealist, yet more prone to preach women's independence than to practise it, ambivalent as to tolerance (though cleared – just – of anti-semitism), recanting any temporary religious stance, yet withal a man of integrity, kindly, generous and a writer whose life infuses his works.

In this literary biography Foot does occasionally elevate works above their due when they serve well his story or an ideology. Thus the non-enduring *Joan and Peter* 'was as eloquent as William Hazlitt and as far-seeing as Thomas Paine'. It commands more than double the space devoted to that work of genius, *The Time Machine*, while so imaginative a novel as *The Food of the Gods* is dismissed. There are blemishes in the treatment of sf. It is the narrator, not the Time Traveller (he, pre-Baxter, had gone one knows not where-when) who finds hope in the faded flowers: a significant counter-viewpoint. And in *The First Men in the Moon* Bedford is hardly the outrageous 'strid[er] across the universe' he describes. Parrinder is more discerning when it comes to Artie Kipps and Mr Polly; and he scores on Wells as humorist and Swiftian satirist.

*Shadows of the Future* manifests a mature and scholarly appreciation of both Wells and his work, and a sure understanding of the whole sf genre. Much of its content has appeared in learned and specialist journals, but Professor Parrinder's editings and revisions have here shaped a coherent and distinctive contribution to Wellsian studies. The opening chapter paints a spectrum of fictional prophecy ranging from the sociologically and scientifically extrapolative to the mythic, noting Stapledon's distinguishing of the true from the spuriously mythic according to the validity of its

functioning within a given culture. Wells's scientific romances in their prophetic aspects are seen to be illustrations of hubris followed by nemesis, 'of a logic so neatly rounded that it speaks of poetic even more than of scientific or cognitive justice'.

In later chapters Wells is given the dual and paradoxical roles of a Cassandra, impatient of a world running to its doom, and of a Moses, impatient for a promised land denied to him. These are continuities present from the early sf to *The Croquet Player* and *Mind at the End of its Tether*. Parrinder traces how Wells's attitudinal swings are related to fluctuations in health and well-being and to changes in scientific understanding and political actualities. One chapter ('New Worlds for Old') is in effect a brief biography in terms of Wells's origins, ambitions and travels, these mirrored in scientific romances and realistic fiction, and in his geopolitical and cosmopolitan (though Kentish-rooted) perspectives. But the individual works to which most attention is given are *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr Moreau* and *A Modern Utopia*. The last-named is considered in the light of Wells's own distinction between works of fictive futurology, which carry their own impermanence, and utopian works which dream of the desirable rather than anticipate the possible. From what he defines as the 'self-reflexive strategy' of that work, Parrinder goes on to reveal how many of Wells's accounts of garden-like paradises, such as those in *Men Like Gods* and *The Time Machine*, have ironic sub-plots; and to discuss the Wellsian dualisms of which they are symptomatic. In a central chapter, *The Time Machine* is deemed 'an explicitly anti-utopian text'; the Edenic paradise is an illusion, predation underlies it, and survival is in the long run pointless. The concluding pages of Part I of Parrinder's book show Wells and his *samurai* abandoning the utopian tradition, though not an involved prophetic role in respect of medium term survival and amelioration. This is accompanied by a 'cosmic foreboding' which colours the fictions of such successors as Clarke, Asimov and Ballard.

Part II, 'Wells's Legacy', particularly in a chapter concentrating on Zamyatin and Orwell, continues examination of the future portrayed as anti-utopia, discussing the dissolution of nineteenth century stabilities and the sociologically extrapolative satires of Orwell and Aldous Huxley; and finding in Zamyatin's *We* perceptions of reality ('the self los[ing] its centre of gravity') different from those which could be expressed in the adaptations of 'Enlightenment narrative form' common to Wells and his contemporaries. Parrinder's final chapter, in following a later 20th century sf track 'from prophecy to parody', sees the scientific Enlightenment dwindling as had the 18th century Enlightenment; for while Gernsbackian scientific materialism reigned in the sf magazines, writers as varied as Aldiss, Dick, C.S. Lewis and Vonnegut were questioning and/or parodying it. He concludes by saying that the multi-dimensionality and wormholes of new theoretical physics seem almost to be parodies of science fiction and even of Wells's Mr Bedford's experiences: when returning alone in the sphere he envisioned himself as in reality 'something not only quite outside the world, but all worlds, and out of space and time ...'

**Newt Gingrich & William R. Forstchen**

**1945**

*Simon & Schuster, 1995, 382pp, £14.99*

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

It is not every day that one reviews an sf novel by a prominent American politician. Newt Gingrich is the controversial Republican Speaker of the US House of Representatives. William Forstchen is a professor of history and the author of numerous sf books, including

the *Ice Prophet* sequence, the *Gamester War* novels, and the *Crystal* series.

Together they have produced an alternate history based on the assumption that the USA did not go to war with Germany after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. America on her own easily overcame the Japanese, and Nazi Germany conquered all of Europe except the British Isles, who apparently (why?) negotiated a separate peace treaty. Soviet Russia too was beaten into submission.

Now Hitler is planning a pre-emptive strike deep into the USA to take out the secret atomic bomb project, together with an assault on Great Britain. Winston Churchill, temporarily out of office after the surrender, is now, mysteriously, prime minister again and in regular touch with President Andrew Harrison in the White House. Goebbels, Goering, Himmler and Bormann are still around, and Germans too are racing towards the development of their own nuclear weapons.

Lieutenant Commander James Mannheim Martel, a hero of the Japanese war, is head of Naval Intelligence at the American Embassy in Berlin. Through undercover contacts with German relatives he comes into possession of secret information whose full import he doesn't understand. Before he can make proper use of it, he is suddenly the victim of false allegations of treachery and returned to the USA in disgrace. How can he redeem his name and save America?

This is a political thriller crowded with one-dimensional characters who are either goodies or baddies – the major significant difference between them is their allegiance to either Nazi Germany or the USA. Most Germans are violence-loving psychopaths; most Americans are warrior-patriots. The tangle of events is convincingly enough littered with mishaps, cock-ups and disasters, but by the end

the goodies have won a temporary victory and we look forward to the next volume, which will presumably continue the battle.

Part of the amusement of this curious novel lies in spotting well-known people from our own timeline and seeing what they do in this one: George Marshall, George Bush, Rommel, Oppenheimer, Liddell Hart, Douglas MacArthur, George Patton, Glenn Miller ... older readers will feel it's almost nostalgia time.

I don't know enough to make much sense of the assorted weaponry used and discussed, and can only assume that the specifications have been checked out with experts. Skorzeny, the German military psychopath given the task of leading the assault on the centre of the Manhattan Project, is straight out of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, and indeed the conclusion, when second-level young military specialists are successfully given their heads to come up with 'creative' responses to the Nazi threat, is very Heinleinian – and I have to say, I didn't believe a word of it.

The typeface is big and black and the story races headlong throughout, so you won't have much trouble getting through it; unless, that is, you don't think politics and war are simply a matter of soldiers and battles and either-or solutions. But that would be quite a different story.

---

### Parke Godwin

#### *The Tower of Beowulf*

Morrow, 1995, 246pp, \$23.00

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

When I read the title of this book I was reminded of the image used by J.R.R. Tolkien in his seminal lecture, 'Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics'. Tolkien sees the poem as a tower, which critics have destroyed in their attempts to analyse it, while ignoring the purpose for which it was created.

The tower in the novel is something else entirely. For one thing, it's a real tower, built on the cliffs near Beowulf's hall, its origins lost in legend. Yet legend still lives in the present day of the novel; behind the tower are the passages which hide the dragon's hoard, and the dragon. At the end of the novel, it bears the pyre of Beowulf's passing.

Godwin also uses the tower as metaphor: it is the fame of Beowulf, honour for brave deeds which makes him the greatest warrior of the Geats and ultimately their king. Yet Beowulf knows that the walls of the tower are both prison and protection; behind them he cowers, small and inadequate.

The novel opens with the young Beowulf involved in a stupid raid against superior forces, and fleeing for his life. He is hidden from his enemies by a Christian priest, who later sends him safely on his way. This encounter shapes Beowulf's future, for although he never accepts the Christian faith, he is profoundly affected by the priest's attitude to life, particularly his attitude towards Beowulf's cowardice and his refusal to accept the value of the warrior code.

Set against the priest is Beowulf's father Edgetho, a hard man who values nothing but the warrior virtues. Beowulf embraces this code in an effort to win his father's respect, but knows that he is hollow, virtually dead, that for all his fame there is nothing in his life worth valuing. His heroic exploits in the novel, the killing of the monster Grendel and Grendel's mother, and finally the destruction of the dragon in a fight where Beowulf himself dies, are of less importance than Beowulf's attempts to find his way out of the tower, guided by his friend Hondshew, a brave man whose life is

centred on his home and family, not on war, and by Ina, Hondshew's widow who becomes Beowulf's lover.

Parke Godwin's two Arthurian novels, *Firelord* and *Beloved Exile*, are huge canvases, packed with characters and filled with turbulent, complex movement. Like King Arthur, Beowulf sits on the edge of history, or what might have been history, but *The Tower of Beowulf* is a much sparer book, narrower in focus if not in theme.

The novel is astonishingly close to the old English poem. The inauspicious start to Beowulf's career, the sea fight against Brecca, the visit to Hrothgar's hall to rid the Danish king of his monsters, the quarrel with Unferth, the fights in the hall and the mere and the later combat with the dragon are all there, along with the broader political scene that the poem touches on, down to such details as particular places and conversations. Even Ina, who most of all the characters is Godwin's invention, appears in the person of the Geatish woman who laments at Beowulf's funeral.

Today our attitudes are different. We may love a good monster, but we can't look over our shoulders and think: it's dark outside tonight. The novelist's technique must be different from the poet of primary epic. Godwin realises this in his treatment of Beowulf as fully realised human being as well as hero, and in his development of secondary characters like Hondshew and Unferth. We can see it as well in what he makes of the monsters: Grendel and Grendel's mother in the Old English poem are categorised as 'Cain's kin', securely part of a Biblical world view. Godwin places them instead in the Norse pantheon, with Grendel's mother, Sigyn, as the daughter of the trickster god Loki. Sigyn and Grendel long for beauty, for love, for a place in any world; at best, Loki can only offer illusion. Their destruction is inevitable, but it's not unquestioned triumph: Godwin allows them their right to grief and loss.

This is a stunning book, taking the reader into a finely imagined world. There's plenty of colour and excitement, but there's more depth than often appears in fantasy. The novel is the tower; from it we can look out and see wonders.

---

### Peter Haining (ed)

#### *The Vampire Omnibus*

Orion, 1995, 497pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

In every sense this is a monster volume: 34 short story and excerpts from novels, divided into three sections: the Prototypes, the Films

and the Archetypes. It is very heavy to hold and I chose to read it, shuddering, at a desk.

Vampire legends go back into folk history, but Haining traces the literary genre to at least the 1820s. In 1828 Elizabeth Grey's 'The Skeleton Count' was published in weekly instalments in a horrid penny paper called *The Casket*, though she may have been inspired by an 1820 dramatic version of a novelette supposedly by

Lord Byron. Subsequently others developed the theme: Haining includes 'Varney the Vampire' (1847), 'The Pale Lady' by Dumas and Bocage (1849) and 'The Grave of Ethelind Fiongula' by Julian Hawthorne (1887), and there were many others he cites but does not include. Bram Stoker's marvellous *Dracula* did not appear until 1897; Haining gives us, at the start of this collection, a section which was curiously cut from the novel as published.

Meanwhile we have Mary Cholmondely's 'Let Loose' (1890), Count Eric Stenbock's 'A True Story of a Vampire' (1894), 'Grettir at Thornhall-Stead' by the American mainstream writer Frank Norris, 'The Blood Fetish' by Morley Roberts (1908), Gustav Meyrink's 'The Land of the Time-Leches' (1920), 'The Elder Brother' by Charles Caldwell Dobie (1920s) set in San Francisco and 'I, the Vampire' by Henry Kuttner (1937). What glorious titles, I murmured, shivering to myself.

The coming of movies saw the vampire film, beginning with 'Les Vampires' (1915), a weekly serial whose leading actor became so unreliable he had to be hastily removed from the plot; there is an excerpt from a prose version. The theme took hold of the public imagination; this collection includes 'the book of the film' (or

extracts from it) by authors as varied as Paul Monette, Bela Lugosi, Simon Raven, Stephen King and (of course) Anne Rice among others. 'Nosferatu', 'Son of Dracula', 'Cat People', 'Dracula, Prince of Darkness', 'Incense for the Damned', 'Dark Shadows', 'Return to Salem's Lot', 'Interview with the Vampire' – again the titles shimmer in the mind, dripping very red blood.

The final section traces later stories which develop the key vampire elements by a mixed bag of writers, some, like Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon and Roger Zelazny, well known to us. But did you expect Woody Allen? Several of these later stories send up the genre in a mildly entertaining fashion, but on the whole I found this part of the book rather lightweight. No mention, for instance, of Van Vogt's chilling 'Asylum', a translation of the vampire theme into space fiction, which surely deserves a place.

For those wishing to research the genre further, Haining gives brief but useful information about other works he might have included and also cites histories of the genre by other hands. Of the stories included, the quality varied considerably. It is often intriguing to see the old pulp writers doing their best to make us blench; but none, to my mind, quite comes up to Bram Stoker.

**K.W. Jeter      *Blade Runner 2: The Edge of Human***  
Orion, 1995, 340pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Andrew Butler

Even when I first saw *Blade Runner* in the late 1980s, I knew that this was not the film that Ridley Scott had originally planned. There was the tacked-on happy ending as Deckard and Rachael fly into the sunset, the Sam Spade voice-over, the mysterious unicorn, and a missing android. Six replicants had escaped, killing twenty-three people, and returned to Earth where one male is fried. But Bryant only gives Deckard details of four replicants, leaving out a female. The Director's Cut removed the ending and voice-over, and adds the unicorn footage, which rather arcanelly suggests that Deckard is an android, if not number six. An industry of critics has suggested alternative candidates; most interesting is Philip Strick's early suggestion that it is Tyrell. It came as somewhat of a let down to find that it was actually Mary, the All-American Mom, who was cut for reasons of being dull.

Now K.W. Jeter, friend and protégé of Philip K. Dick, has come to write a book which is both a sequel to the film and its source, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Although nothing in the original film is negated by the Director's Cut, Jeter has started from the happy ending of the former. Having flown off into the sunset, Deckard has stolen a suspended animation device to eke out Rachael's remaining days in half-life (shades here of *Ubik*). It is not long before he is visited by Sarah, Tyrell's niece and the original version of Rachael, and brought back to L.A. to track down number six. Meanwhile Dave Holden, last seen hooked up to a life support system after an encounter with Leon, has been kidnapped by the real Roy Batty, and told to track down number six.

So the stage is set for Deckard and Holden to track each other down after Rachael and Roy drop Dark Hints about the True Nature of Things. Of course, the instinct is to cry 'But number six is female!', and so discount either of the Blade Runners from being one of the colony escapees. But it turns out that we don't know all that we think we know about the five replicants accounted for anyway, and with the apparent discovery of female versions of male replicants, things can only get more complicated.

With another sequel around the corner, it is already clear that Dark Hints dropped about the colony worlds are going to be crucial to the continuation of the plot. Here the reference must be to Dick's *The Unteleported Man/Lies Inc.* The colony worlds are not paradise after all but a spartan garrison? Were the replicants really returning

home to get eternal life, or were they an advance invasion force? Or could they, in this brave new world of topsy-turvy loyalties, be here to warn us?

Jeter obviously leaves a few loose ends, but he ties up a few from the movie. I'd always assumed that Batty had killed the prematurely aged J.F. Sebastian, if you listen carefully to the soundtrack, someone matching his description is found. But reports of his death turn out to be exaggerated. Bryant is obviously back, but Gatt is quickly killed off.

The book is also meant to be a sequel to Dick's novel, and it apparently 'resolves many discrepancies between the movie . . . and the novel'. Deckard's wife, Iran, whose use of the Penfield Mood Organ casts an ironic shadow over any human's claim to be genuinely human, is absent. Mercerism – if not the idea of Mercerism – is absent. On the other hand, J.R. Isidore, the book's equivalent of J.F. Sebastian, is reintroduced, albeit to little purpose.

It is the film that dominates. Deckard is carved out of the same plank of wood as Ford's version was. Indeed, I felt that much of the characterisation was rather flat. Jeter is surely writing with one eye on a film, long rumoured to be in production, and another on the novelisation. But can it be filmed? There are long discussions about the nature of being human, on empathy and caring for others; it's difficult to imagine Ridley Scott directing such scenes, but his brother Tony, after his exposure to Tarantino, might relocate them to a diner and make them work.

Even if the material is made to work, there is the more fundamental problem of casting. Harrison Ford and Rutger Hauer, indeed the entire cast, are ten years older; but the novel is set in August 2020. Yet I can't imagine anyone else playing these parts. The *Blade Runner* industry shows no sign of slowing down, even an entire book of essays on the film has failed to exhaust its appeal for many fans, critics and academics. Renewable forests must be quivering at the thought of the acres of paper which are bound to be filled with criticism of the sequel.

Nevertheless I enjoyed this novel: it's fun, takes nothing away from Dick that the film hasn't already taken, and puts a good deal back. I guess I could imagine Dick having written this if he'd novelised the film and was then drawn to do a sequel. And I'm just about tempted to go out and buy Jeter's *Trek* books. Maybe. And I look forward to whatever it is he's writing next, as I desperately hope that these wookieebooks are being written to earn Jeter enough money to keep him going whilst he writes the magnum opus which will eclipse even masterpieces like *Dr Adder* and *Infernal Devices*.

**Carol Farley Kessler      *Charlotte Perkins Gilman:  
Her Progress toward Utopia***

**with Selected Writings**  
Liverpool University Press, 1995, 316pp, £27.50, £15.00 pb

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born in Connecticut in 1860 and died in 1935, preferring 'chloroform to cancer' as her suicide note said. She is not the best known of American writers, not in *The Dictionary of American Biography* (until the first supplement), not in *Encyclopedia Americana* at all; two well-read friends identified her as the author of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' though I only knew her as a campaigner for women's rights.

Her most famous work was 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (which is not dealt with in this book because it is decidedly dystopian), the novel *Herland*, and the non-fiction study *Women and Economics*, which was hailed as a masterpiece when first published and translated into seven languages. In addition she wrote short stories, articles, and eventually edited and published her own magazine, *The Forerunner*, in which her own works and others supporting the women's movement appeared. She lectured throughout the USA and Europe and was one of the most important women in the suffrage movement, with radical ideas which she expressed through her fiction and non-fiction, and which well deserves study.

Carol Farley Kessler is Professor of English, American Studies and Women's Studies at Penn State, Delaware, and has undoubtedly studied Gilman in depth. Her thoroughness seems praiseworthy. This study, limited to the Utopian writings, is divided into sections on 'Utopian writing as cultural work', Gilman's biography, her Utopian fiction, a section entitled 'Writing to empower living', and a selection of Gilman's own works. The inclusion of Gilman's work

makes the book worthwhile and was, for me, the most interesting part of it.

This book is not for the general reader, it is written in jargon rather than English; thus:

Gilman might even be said to carry on a dialogic relationship with her readers, whom she invites to join in the dialogue both verbally and behaviourally, with the end of enacting possibilities she illuminates.

This is written by a Professor of English! It is a problem with academic texts that they are aimed at other academics and have to be seen to be clever, using a jargon familiar to their intended audience but excluding the interested non-professional. I think this could have been a good book on Gilman, but the writing style is so opaque and turgid that it clouds rather than clears the picture, which is a pity.

Gilman's own writings are didactic and so, at least in the extracts here, the ideas are important and the characters merely puppets to put the idea forward. But they are very easy to read and present some ideas that are still revolutionary now, so they must have been extremely shocking when they were first written.

I cannot say I enjoyed this book, but I am glad to know more about Gilman and very glad to have read some of her work because it is provocative and challenging. It is worth reading Gilman whether from an interest in Utopian fiction or in the women's movement, and from that point alone it could be worth reading this book about her. It is unfortunate that Kessler's own style is too cocooned in words to make her meaning clear, and the points she wants to make get lost in the density of the prose.

---

## Paul Kincaid

*A Very British Genre*  
*BSFA, 1995, 63pp, £5.00*

Reviewed by John Newsinger

This short history of British fantasy and science fiction is very much to be welcomed. In forty-odd pages, Paul Kincaid provides a succinct and eminently readable account of this 'very British genre' that outlines its development over the years, sets this development in historical context, and discusses a large number of individual authors with a fairminded assurance that commands respect.

One initial judgement that some will find controversial is Kincaid's decision to conflate fantasy and science fiction as one genre. While he does not argue a case for this, to my mind the decision is more than justified in the course of his history which itself stands as a persuasive case for seeing them as two sides of the same coin rather than different currencies. The breadth of his discussion that covers fantasy, horror and science fiction is most impressive.

Kincaid identifies Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a 'turning point' in the history of the genre equal in importance to the career of H.G. Wells or John W. Campbell's editing of *Astounding*. Certainly *Frankenstein* is an important book, but it was a turning point where nothing actually turned, a missed opportunity if you like. The book was too far ahead of its time, prefiguring the shape of things to come perhaps, but not actually initiating any new developments at the time.

This only happened later and, without any doubt, the key figure is, as Kincaid insists, H.G. Wells. If anyone invented science fiction, this is the man. Wells published *The Time Machine* a hundred years ago, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in 1896, *The Invisible Man* in 1897, *The War of the Worlds* and *The Sleeper Awakes* in 1898, *The First Men in the Moon* in 1901, and so on. Wells imagined science fiction for us and his achievement in this period has never been equalled, nor is it likely to be.

There is a brief but instructive discussion of the genre before the First World War and in the decades that followed. Here Kincaid pays a compulsory ritual tribute to Olaf Stapledon, an author who, I confess, has always left me cold. There are good reasons for Stapledon being a great unread science fiction writer; his 'lightly

fictionalised philosophical speculations about matters beyond the normal human ken or scale' that Kincaid praises were, in fact, a road to nowhere, a cul-de-sac that fortunately few others have been tempted to tread. Current attempts to revive interest in his work are no more likely to be successful than previous efforts.

Much more sure is the discussion of Mervyn Peake and J.R.R. Tolkien, of John Wyndham and Arthur C. Clarke. It is particularly satisfying to see Peake, one of the most important writers this century, given the prominence he deserves. His untimely death, leaving the Gormenghast sequence unfinished, is one of the great tragedies of modern literature. Personally, I had no idea that he planned a fourth volume, *Titus Awakes*, knowledge that leaves me even more depressed at the thought of what we were deprived of.

The discussion of the Sixties, of *New Worlds*, Michael Moorcock, J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, Josephine Saxton and others is the best brief account you are likely to find. Once again his judgements command respect. My own attitude to Moorcock never recovered from a review of a number of his books entitled 'Morecock from Moorcock' that I remember reading a good few years ago. Still, tastes differ.

Of particular interest, of course, is his discussion of recent years, of science fiction during the dark night of Thatcherism. It is nice to see Tanith Lee given her proper eminence, but with regard to some other contemporary writers his judgement seems too circumspect. Has Mary Gentle, for example, really lived up to the

tremendous promise of *Golden Witchbreed*? Now there was a writer! Of course, this is the section where everyone will try to think of who has been missed out of the discussion: where, for example, is Clive Barker? Nevertheless, still a useful discussion.

What is missing, then? First of all I don't think Kincaid does enough to identify what makes for a 'very British genre', what distinguished British science fiction and fantasy from, in particular, American. Of course, this would have involved a longer work but for my money the effort would have been worthwhile.

More attention should have been paid to science fiction in comics. The insufferable and overrated Dan Dare gets a mention (am I the only person who thought he was a posh dickhead and gave his allegiance to the *Lion*'s incomparable Jet Ace Logan instead?),

more recently we have had *2000 AD* (and Judge Dredd) and the remarkable group of talented writers that it nurtured: Alan Moore, Pat Mills, Grant Morrison, Alan Grant, Pete Millington, Garth Ennis, John Wagner and others. Neil Gaiman and Jamie Delano also deserve mention.

One last point: is this a one-off or the start of a brave new endeavour? Can we look forward to other occasional publications, perhaps short accounts of individual authors (John Brunner, Tanith Lee, Robert Holdstock, even Terry Pratchett) or of particular themes (Martian fiction, dystopian, feminist sf, post-holocaust)? One can only hope so. Paul Kincaid's *A Very British Genre* might well be a small step for mankind ... but for the BSFA could it be the start of something, if not big then quite large?

## Joe R. Lansdale

## *Mucho Mojo*

Gollancz, 1995, 308pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

Joe R. Lansdale is a genre writer. Not any genre in particular – he's a writer of 'horror, sf, mysteries and suspense and, for all I know, tortilla cookbooks...also a Western writer, with a love for the field that knows no bounds' says Howard Waldrop in *Night of the Cooters* – yet he's always attracted a fair degree of critical acclaim. 'Mucho Mojo' means 'much bad magic', but this is not a generic fantasy novel. It could be said to be a horror novel, although it lacks the fantastic or supernatural elements usually associated with that genre.

Two friends, Hap Collins and Leonard Pine, move into a house inherited from Pine's Uncle Chester. The inheritance, which also includes a fair sum of money and, in true mystery style, the key to what appears to be a safety deposit box, seems unusual – Chester had distanced himself from his nephew because of the latter's homosexuality. Various clues launch Hap and Leonard on an investigation into a series of unsolved child disappearances in the neighbourhood and all the evidence points towards a serial killer.

The eventual solution, including the twist, should come as no surprise to most readers, yet the solution of the mystery is only one aspect of this book. Relationships play a major part: black and white, straight and gay. Hap and Leonard are good friends – the former white and straight, the latter black and gay. Hap is attracted to Uncle Chester's (black) lawyer, Florida Grange, but she is unable to prevent the race aspect from over-shadowing their relationship. As the friends' investigation unearths more evidence about the missing children it is Hap rather than Leonard who wants to involve the police, for this is a town where the concept of racial equality has failed to penetrate the upper echelons of law enforcement. After all, it does seem that the police are unwilling to investigate the disappearance of these children, and might the fact that they're all from poor, black backgrounds have something to do with it?

Lansdale is writing about East Texas, where he lives, and he has a tremendous feel for the language and tone of the region which manifests itself in very naturalistic dialogue. Some of the characters may seem a little clichéd, such as Hap and Leonard's neighbours – McMaw, the elderly woman from across the street, and the denizens of the crack den next door – yet they still feel believable. Granted, it's not sf, nor fantasy come to that, but we all need to branch out and you could do a lot worse than this.

## Paul J. McAuley

## *Fairyland*

Gollancz, 1995, 336pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Chris Amies

Imagine Alex Sharkey in EuroDisney, when he has none of its virtues! He is there hunting down fairies: the descendants of uplifted baboons, known as dolls, who found a way to free themselves from the tyranny of an imposed biology and achieve self-reproductive freedom, via the interference of a character who first appears to Alex in turn-of-the-century London, in the persona of a little girl called Milena. Alex is hanging out as a hacker for a dodgy series of employers who include the Yardies, and seemingly spending his time in railway stations making fun of the tourists. Like everywhere else in Europe, London is full of the homeless and the dispossessed, and – for Alex, at least – ghosts.

So far so cyberpunk, the unwitting reader thinks throughout the first part. Check one drug-dealing hacker (albeit rather large: kilogrammatically-challenged?); check drugs and gangsters; check rundown urban environment. But then once he has had his refreshingly civilised encounter with little Milena, McAuley fast-forwards us a decade or two. In the first part the dolls were little more than beasts of burden, the fruits of a labour-oriented economy the way their relatives in Richard Calder's *Dead Girls* are those of an aesthetically-oriented one. In part two we *start* with being told of Alex's journey across Europe, and a long journey he makes of it; he searches for twelve years. This for a start takes it away from the c-word genre. Europe around AD 2020 is a place where industrial baroque has taken root and spawned; wars come and go, and in their wake the inevitable millions of refugees; millennial cults like the Childrens Crusade go around love-bombing the unsuspecting,

infecting them with psychoactive viruses to make them believe or injecting femtobots into the bloodstream like the one that gives the recipient a faked UFO abduction experience, and is known as the Strieber... Alex hangs out in Paris but it isn't what it was. Even the Louvre has armed guards (and the Tower of London has metal detectors; I get the feeling McAuley doesn't care for tourists). As for living, people let their dolls do that for them. Comparable to Kathy Acker's 'Give Paris to the Algerians', the Ville Lumiere is a staging post for the millions crossing Europe seeking work. McAuley has identified this elsewhere as one of the key points of the European Union over the next twenty years, a phenomenon which has already started in fact: the implication of all of us being allowed to live and work wherever in the EU we like. It isn't emigration but migration. As a Future Europe this does as well as McAuley's Alternate European History in *Pasquale's Angel*, and although Brian Aldiss has addressed the idea of future Europes since *Barefoot in the Head*, McAuley is approaching it from a perspective of one who has grown up with the continuous idea of that specifically common future.

In this non-linear Europe facing the Singularity, the fairies have retreated to their own place. As the derivative products of a postmodern world, what better place than that most derivative, postmodern and out-of-place location: EuroDisney, or Disneyland Paris, or whatever that benighted ornate burger bar calls itself nowadays? They build the Interface around it and that itself becomes a ring city where the strange is not only common but a requirement. And they've changed ... They have rebuilt themselves as a separate race with their own home that no human should disturb. There are also warewolves (note spelling), but they are humans whose personality has been overlaid with a psychotic partial. There is trouble with them in the mountains of Albania,

where a motley crew of ex-soldiers is fighting a war that gets interrupted by the Childrens Crusade. The chapter that introduces this bears the resounding title 'Cheap Holidays in Other Peoples Misery'.

*Fairyland* is itself a kind of industrial baroque novel, choked with events and weird personalities, some of whom are endearing enough to make the reader want to continue just to see what happens to them. There are some truly strange ideas – like: intelligence developed among protohumans when they ate funny

mushrooms and needed language to describe the hallucinations – and postmodern references-back to the genre, like the burning man who appears from time to time and surely is the burning man on the Spanish Steps in Bester's *Tiger, Tiger*. It is a dense novel and one whose effects are slow and cumulative, intensely interested in the science and also in the human effect of that science, and the idea of what happens when humans realise that they are not alone: that the alien invasion has come from within and that humans themselves were responsible for its birth.

---

**Anne McCaffrey &  
Jody Lynn Nye**

***The Ship Who Won***

*Orbit, 1995, 330pp, £15.99*

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Faithful readers of the novels of McCaffrey and her collaborators will know exactly what to expect from this latest volume to roll off the production line. Style, form, characterisation, even certain aspects of the plot are all comfortably familiar.

Carielle is a 'shellperson'; encapsulated in a shell that keeps her disadvantaged body alive, she is the 'brains' of a spaceship. Keff is her 'brawn', her partner in the search for intelligent life on planets not yet affiliated to the Central Worlds. Intelligent life-forms have been found, but none sufficiently technologically advanced to meet humans as equals on their own terms – this is Keff's ambition. Carielle and Keff also share an interest in 'Myths and Legends', a sort of up-market D&D, which stands them in good stead when they meet the 'sorcerers' of the planet Ozran. (Faithful readers may recall how the shellperson Simeon put his war-gaming skills to good use in *The City Who Fought*).

The first inhabitants of Ozran the pair meet are furry humanoids at a similar level of technological development to Earth's Iron Age. Subsequently, it is revealed that these gentle folk are controlled by overlords who are human in appearance but who seem to have magical powers which they use in sorcerous duels to

the death as a means of social advancement. Keff is convinced these 'mages' and 'magesses' really do have supernatural powers; Carielle remains sceptical.

Keff displays remarkable *sang-froid* when he is captured by the magic-wielders, even embarking on a romantic encounter with Plennafrey, a lovely young 'magess', during his escape – well he does spend a long time in space with only his gym equipment to work off excess energy. With Plennafrey's help, Carielle and Keff discover the true source of the mages' power, set about rectifying the mages' injustices and avert a potential planet-wide catastrophe. Evil mages repent and suffer no worse fate than falling off their flying chairs. Machinery thousands of years old still functions after it is repaired by folk who have not set eyes on it in 500 generations. And Keff does indeed find his aliens with high technology.

This is not giving away the plot, because the jolly tone of this book constantly reassures the reader that everything will be all right in the end, even if furry humanoids get blasted or poisoned by the dozen in the meantime!

If it were not for Keff's healthy sexual appetite, I would think this book had been written for children, for it bounds along with a wide-eyed naivety lacking even in other books out of the same stable. Young teenagers who have yet to develop a taste for more sophisticated fare will certainly enjoy it, and the faithful readers who have bought all the other books in the series will just have to suspend their disbelief that little bit more for this one.

---

**Phillip Mann**

***A Land Fit for Heroes, Vol 3: The  
Dragon Wakes***

*Gollancz, 1995, 263pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

*The Dragon Wakes* claims to be set in a parallel world '12 seconds' away from our reality, a reality in which the Roman Empire never fell, but went on to dominate the globe.

The early chapters are concerned with establishing the current activities of the three heroes of the previous volume, and with a series of discussions between the Emperor Lucius and the Praefectus Comitum of Britannia, Marcus Augustus Ulysses; during which it is decided that Britannia is to be deforested and turned into a series of vast sheep farms. At this point you might be interested to know that the author lives in New Zealand – if this were not the case I might be tempted to interpret the work as an allegorical Little Englander attack on EEC agricultural policy! As an environmental plea it is a little late.

Angus, Sean and Perol form, with the Giant Drummer, the resistance group the Dragon Warriors. Gwydion and Coll, the renegade son of the Praefectus, initially wracked with guilt over rape of Miranda, (who supports a hospital by tapping into healing energies, and sometimes goes nightflying with elementals Lem and Sulla), are soon spying on the Romans, who in turn are importing liquid Phlogiston ...

After a slow start, Mann builds a fair degree of tension, which develops into some exciting action. Unfortunately, the book doesn't end, but stops with the dread words 'To be continued ...' It is, therefore, literally anti-climatic. Mann is stronger on personality than either story or ideas, and the politics are simplistic in the extreme; fortunately he is a compassionate writer, and a care for his

characters, extending to an injured cat, illuminates what is essentially a formula adventure in the English pastoral tradition. Similar material has been handled with much eloquence and intelligence by Richard Cowper, Keith Roberts and Robert Holdstock.

Personally I would require a roll of industrial-strength steel cable to suspend my disbelief over the major flaws of this book. It is set in present times, and while technology has advanced to a level roughly compatible with that in our own world, society has changed not a jot from what we, and doubtless the author, remember from history lessons and Hollywood epics. It is as if Mann is unconcerned that technological and social change are inextricably entwined. Thus Britannia remains a forested wilderness populated by primitive tribes, slavery continues and gladiatorial combat is fought in machines inside the Battle Dome in a way which fuses *Transformers* with the third *Mad Max* film. There is no evidence of any social change, either in attitude or institution.

The dust-jacket sails under the false colours of the Gollancz SF logo. Do not be fooled: this is fantasy. Not content with the central absurdity of transplating the Roman Empire all but unchanged into a technological world, Mann includes elements of Celtic magic. The justification appears to be that because our Celtic legends show a belief in pagan nature spirits and giants, that such materials can somehow be assumed to have been a part of real history, and therefore, given that virtually unchanged social conditions prevail in *A Land Fit For Heroes*, they can be transplanted into a contemporary Roman world. They can't. The effect is as incongruous as a Dalek in the Rover's Return.

I have no objection to long novels, or series of novels, other than that the longer they are the better they must be to justify the amount of time that needs be spent to read them. What I do object to

is long novels split into short books for marketing reasons. If the latest James Clavell novel can contain over 1600 pages in a single volume, and it does, then there is no justification for dividing *A Land Fit For Heroes* into a quartet. After discounting the 'what has

gone before' preamble, Vol. 3 offers 251 pages. Multiply by four and you have a thousand page novel with a hardback retail price of £67.96. Given the quality of the text, I leave you to make your own judgements upon what sort of value that represents.

## L.E. Modesitt Jr

*The Order War*  
Orbit, 1995, 581pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Martin Brice

One of the alleged conventions of the traditional cowboy film is that the hero always wears the white hat, and the villain the black hat. Such traditions have been commonly carried over into fantasy and science fiction. In such novels you can be sure that 'Strongarm' and 'Happythought' of 'The White Company' living in 'Green Pastures' are the 'Nice Folk'; while 'Alberich' and 'Valkyrie' of 'The Dark Riders' coming from 'Grimland' are the 'Evil Ones'. As soon as you read names like that, you know *where* you are and *who* everyone is.

Well, in this book, Dear Reader, you'd be wrong ... you'd be very wrong.

In *The Order War*, the 'White Wizards of Fairhaven' are the baddies while 'The Black Order Wizards of Recluce', allied with 'The Tyrant of Sarronnyn', are the good guys.

In this volume of *The Saga of Recluce*, nothing is quite what it seems. You cannot be certain of people's loyalties; you do not always even know the sex of some of the characters. Or rather, some passages are so skilfully written that you are surprised to learn that *that* job is being done by a woman, and *this* job by a man. And then you realise that the gender does not matter, provided that the job is being done ... provided that all is in order.

That is the main theme of this novel. Both Black and White Wizards use mental powers to create order out of chaos, but the novel makes me wonder whether those powers really are magical. Is erecting force-fields around a ship really any different from designing electronic counter-measures? Is the Recluce blacksmith really mentally ordering the iron he is working, or is he simply

concentrating on the task at hand? Is there any difference between a wizard thought-guiding an arrow and a soldier who takes careful aim or programmes a missile's computer unfazed by the mayhem around him? Secret agents and criminals have been known to walk unseen through crowded rooms; some people have an innate sense of direction; maritime history has many tales of captains who unaccountably woke and arrived on deck just in time to deal with some totally unforeseen emergency. Reading this book makes you wonder whether we all have such gifts, but usually choose to ignore or override them.

I did not even find the spectacular flooding of a valley too fantastic a feat. During the First World War, it seemed to many participants that whenever the Allies had a chance of breaking through the deadlock of trench warfare, the fine weather ended, it began to rain, and everything bogged down again. No wonder many British soldiers believed the Germans could make it rain to order!

*The Order War* has another parallel with The Great War, when the hero invents a steam-driven tank and an observation balloon – from which he rains what seems like nuclear devastation upon the enemy.

I found the battle scenes spectacular but confusing; but then, all battles are confusing. I found the causes of the war difficult to comprehend, and had to go back over them several times; but that is true of all wars, whose causes are studied for centuries after.

Unlike many fantasy adventure novels, this one has no map – and for me this was a positive advantage, contributing towards the book's most impressive passages: Justen's ride across the wilderness in an atmosphere of lost loneliness. The reader is at one with the character who does not know how far he has to go or what he will meet – a solitary figure in an eternal landscape.

## Jeff Noon

*Pollen*  
Ringpull, 1995, 327pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Jeff Noon's first novel, *Vurt*, won the 1994 Arthur C. Clarke Award and was widely praised. I wish to enter a dissenting opinion: I found it badly written and almost incomprehensible. It was full of the short, verbless sentences, staccato paragraphs and unexplained future jargon characteristic of the worst kind of genre novel; and its basic premise, of a consensual hallucinogenic virtual world leaking into ours, was never adequately rationalised. But perhaps it never could be: the more I read, the less sense the story made, and the vaunted gritty Manchester setting turned out to consist of (a) mentioning the street names a lot and (b) a house/rave scene around the halfway mark (thankfully not set in the Hacienda, which has since closed).

*Pollen*, a not-quite sequel set in the same world, is at least better written – the narrative flows better, there is more description and indeed there is better characterisation: even if one cannot sustain an objective belief in Dog-Robot or Dog-Human crossbreeds, one does at least believe, within the confines of the novel, that its protagonists have lives, histories, friends and careers. The plotting, too, is more coherent: unlike *Vurt*, which proceeded by fits and starts, the various strands and sub-plots here manage to detail the background while continuing to advance the story (and vice versa).

But Noon's basic problem is that it all takes place in the world he invented for *Vurt*, and no amount of good writing or clever plotting can overcome its inherent implausibility. The consensual

virtual world may operate according to dream 'logic'; but so does the allegedly real one, which makes it difficult to care for its threatened take-over by the former. In addition, the further information *Pollen* gives us about the virtual world makes plain that it's based largely on Jungian archetypes and classical mythology; but though he tries hard, Noon never quite makes them as threatening as he'd like us to believe. The gimmick, after all, is that the virtual world is sending out huge clouds of pollen to give us hay-fever and thereby make us all sneeze ourselves to death – but wasn't there once an episode of *The Man from UNCLE* based on the same idea?

There was a point, about two-thirds of the way through, when it almost began to make a kind of sense – when I was listening, curiously enough, to *The Complete Stone Roses* – but it didn't last. It didn't last because one can't believe that in a future Manchester a pirate radio DJ would be obsessed with sixties' chart pop, or that future Manchester taxi drivers would need to be able to access a cyberspace map to take real fare-paying passengers around real streets (particularly not when one driver carries a real A-Z and another manages without the cyberspace map at all). Internal consistency is not always a hallmark of coherent plotting.

What *Vurt* and *Pollen* do clearly demonstrate, however, is that Jeff Noon has a highly active imagination – both novels overflow with ideas, sometimes too many for them to sustain. What he needs to do in future, I think, is learn to discipline his imagination – we may get a less flashy novel as a result, but we'll also get a more satisfying one.

## John J. Pierce     *Odd Genre: A Study in Imagination and Evolution*

Greenwood, 1994, 222pp, £49.50

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Science fiction is a very curious beast. Histories have been written about it (including Pierce's *Imagination and Evolution*, to which this volume serves as pendant), encyclopedias have tried to encompass it, we discuss the genre secure in the knowledge that people will understand of what we speak. Yet we cannot even define the subject. Science fiction, if it is anything, is a loose agglomeration of themes and notions and attitudes, tied together as much by the interest of those of us who read it as by the intent of those who write it.

In *Odd Genre* (its title a punning homage to Olaf Stapledon), Pierce attempts an examination of some of those themes and notions and attitudes. It is, perhaps inevitably, no more than a partial study. Science fiction is vast, it contains multitudes; and the dozen or so themes and approaches examined by Pierce cannot come close to embracing all the diverse idiosyncracies that we might, at some time or other, call science fiction. Still, this is a worthy and indeed valuable enterprise, at least as much for the ideas it sets in motion as for any of its achievements.

Pierce divides his book into five sections, sections as diverse and peculiar as the genre of which we speak. At times they sit oddly together, as if they belong in five different books, but somehow, taken together, they do add up to a broad if sweeping survey of sf.

He begins with an examination of science fiction as genre, as a literature that juxtaposes 'the strange and the familiar' (a chapter-length exposition of what Darko Suvin means when he talks about 'cognitive estrangement'), but after laying out his stall this way he moves on to the real meat of the book. The next five chapters look at the way science fiction uses certain basic plots, stories whose outline (boy meets girl, solving a mystery) will be familiar to readers of any kind of fiction.

This is where the book becomes interesting, it is also where it becomes frustrating. For Pierce gives no explanation for why he has chosen these particular plot formulations to consider; they by no means exhaust the plots available to science fiction writers – that most venerable of plots, the odyssey or quest, is missing. Among his chosen plots, some – for instance the one he terms 'Generations' which turns out to be the basic family saga at the root of soap operas – are, as he admits, relatively recent in science fiction and still little used. Others, such as the detective story or the puzzle story which he chooses to treat separately though they could well be linked, have been far more widely and imaginatively used than the rather literal versions he looks at. Yes, Isaac Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* is a detective story, though it is so obvious that this tells us little of interest about the book; more interesting, surely, would have been to look at the way the detective story also works as an underlying element in many of Asimov's robot stories. Certainly this thematic

approach to science fiction is well worth pursuing, and seems relatively novel in science fiction scholarship, yet I can't help feeling that Pierce, in these chapters, has raised something worthwhile which he then fails to pursue with the necessary vigour.

He is better in the next section, though here he is heading back towards more familiar territory. In these five chapters he looks at the borderlands of science fiction where it is difficult to see where one genre ends and another begins. The chapters on romantic adventure, comic book superhero, supernatural horror and postmodernism are satisfying enough (though he doesn't seem to have much of a clue about what Italo Calvino, for one, is doing in his surreal and absurd fantasies). But in the chapter on the contemporary futuristic thriller, the way the spy story has been developed by writers like Craig Thomas and Tom Clancy into a genre in which the hi-tech wizardry outshines much modern sf, Pierce really pulls out the stops, writing with an excitement, a breadth of knowledge and an insight that would have greatly benefitted the rest of his book. When, two-thirds of the way through the chapter, he abruptly switches to looking at the way romance writers are also feeding on ideas from science fiction you can see his interest dissipate just as abruptly, though the subject is surely every bit as unexpected and as intriguing.

The next section brings him right back into overly-familiar territory as he looks at science fiction writers who have left the genre for the mainstream (this seems to be mostly Ray Bradbury and Kurt Vonnegut, with curiously passing nods towards J.G. Ballard, Thomas Disch, Barry Malzberg, Kate Wilhelm, Harlan Ellison and Dean Koontz – hardly an exhaustive or even a representative list, and what *is* Ellison doing there?). Then, turn and turn about, at those mainstream writers who have ventured into the genre (again it is a matter of rounding up the usual suspects: Atwood, Burroughs, Burgess, Durrell, Piercy, Cecelia Holland and so forth). The topic is interesting (despite the amount it has been mined already) but it needs something more thorough and more imaginative than this rather rote listing.

Finally there is another abrupt change of pace when Pierce suddenly turns to look at 'The Act of SF Creation', a 40-page meditation on things like style and scope which looks like a sketch for a fascinating analysis of the craft of science fiction writing, but in this abbreviated form doesn't have time to make any fresh point. And it sits oddly with the nature of the book that precedes it. An odd genre indeed, but not nearly so odd as this book makes it out to be.

This review probably comes across as more negative than the book really deserves; it is a clear, readable and interesting survey of science fiction from an angle that is fresh and which deserves greater attention. The trouble is that having raised the notion, Pierce doesn't seem to pursue it as much as the idea warrants so that the book ends up feeling as if it doesn't thoroughly engage with its subject. Rather, it is trying to do too many things at once, and a better book has somehow been swamped in the process.

## Robert Rankin     *The Garden of Unearthly Delights*

Doubleday, 1995, 253pp, £14.99

Reviewed by John Wallace

Say farewell to plain old Maxwell Karrien, and herald in the golden age of Max Carrion, Imagineer! No, wait a minute, this is a Robert Rankin book. That means you can't take anything that happens seriously. Which is just as well really, because nothing in this book is serious.

'Maxwell scratched his head. "It would seem that I have been awarded The Queen's Award for Industry award"'

In past novels, Robert Rankin has chronicled the adventures of a star-studded line-up of heroes including Elvis, Hugo Rune and Cornelius Murphy, and Brian the Time Sprout. Now he has added Maxwell (or Max) Karrien (or Carrion) to the list. Karrien is a typically Rankin-style working class hero. He wanders through his

world righting wrongs and doing good and meaning well and generally cocking things up along the way, which makes it all the more surprising when he succeeds...

But what is it all about, you might be asking. Actually, the plot doesn't really matter. This is a vehicle for a non-stop stream of one-liners interleaved with slow building comic situations. The whole thing sort of hanging together into a ... well a good laugh, really.

In *The Garden of Unearthly Delights*, Rankin has abandoned many of the techniques that he used to great effect in his earlier novels, there is none of the mugging at the camera that can be found in *The Most Amazing Man in the World*, none of the almost-recognizable 'real' characters that usually populate Rankin books (well, there is Dave, whose clothing produces animals at inopportune moments – 'It is the curse of the Wilkinsons,' he explained. 'Some say that one of my forefathers fell out with whichever god was then in fashion' – and who seems to have sprung

from the Celtic mythology of a parallel Universe), none of the dexterous sleight of hand that hides then reveals the action. Instead we have good old traditional comic invention. Luckily this invention is undoubtedly funny. Take the Queue for example, who have been waiting for the Bus (and its driver) to take them to the Terminus for a century, or the wonderful machinations surrounding the travelling TV. Well I laughed anyway!

The flaw though, rests in what I said earlier: the plot doesn't really matter. The plot is there, there's a goal for our hero to achieve, but at the end of the day it doesn't seem to make much

difference whether he actually makes it or not. I'm sure it does to Maxwell and the rest of the characters in the novel, but to those of us reading it there is no passion, no feeling of involvement and above all no nail-bitingly suspenseful saving of the world in the end.

Don't get me wrong, this is a good book to while away the time with. There is even scope for a 'spot the myth' competition. I enjoyed it. But it ain't great Literature.

Oh, and the world does get saved in the end, but we were in no doubt about that anyway.

**Kristine Kathryn Rusch**      *The Fey: Sacrifice*  
Millenium, 1995, 550pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Consider a 'typical' fantasy novel, any one of the myriad on the bookshop shelves. Its theme can probably be summed up as Good versus Evil. A collection of Good characters battle heroically to preserve their world against the incursions of the Enemy who are probably led by a personage not too dissimilar to Tolkien's Dark Lord. The first chapter of *The Fey: Sacrifice* is written from the point of view of Jewel, grand-daughter of the Fey king, and a warrior. Jewel is obviously going to be the heroine of this novel in 'classic' fantasy fashion: she is a sympathetic character, concerned about a child who has fallen over, and she has a Vision featuring a handsome stranger – probably he will turn out to be the novel's hero.

Then the reader realises that the Fey are actually the 'Enemy', the invaders and conquerors. Surely, then, Jewel will betray her people, see the error of their ways? But no, this novel refuses to conform to the reader's preconceived ideas. Jewel is no stereotype; she will prove to be an agent of reconciliation between the Fey and those they fight against, but she will try to do what is best for her people. It is as though Kristine Kathryn Rusch has assembled all the ingredients of a 'typical' modern fantasy and then moved everything several steps sideways. The result is a novel which, while it remains within the preimeters of fantasy, overturns all the expectations of the genre in original and unusual ways.

The Fey are a magic race, their various powers manifesting themselves at adolescence. Some are Sprites who control the weather, others are Doppelgängers who can acquire the body and mind of another person. More powerful are the Visionaries, political and military leaders who can foresee the future, and the Shape-shifters. There are superficial resemblances between the Fey and the ubiquitous elves of fantasy literature, but these are slight and distorted – again Rusch is turning the conventional into the unexpected. Fey magic is gruesome, the creation of new spells requiring the use of blood and skin collected from the slain after battle. Fey lamps are illuminated by captured human souls – so much for fairy lights.

At the beginning of the book, the Fey have completed their conquest of the country of Nye and this has given them dominion over the continent of Galinas. In the path of further conquest lies the Blue Isle, a stepping stone between Nye and lands further east across the sea. Jewel's father, Rugar, leads an invasion force against

the Blue Isle but his Vision is fading and the invasion fails when the Islanders, a peaceful people who have no knowledge of war or magic, accidentally discover a means to kill Fey against which the Fey have no defence. Rugar creates the Shadowlands, an invisible place of refuge large enough to accommodate the remains of his army. Here the Fey gather, unable to defeat the Islanders and unable to escape the Blue Isle or send word of their plight to their Black King.

Understandably, the Islanders react with terror to the arrival of the Fey on their shores. Even Nicholas, crown prince of the Blue Isle, who has been taught to fight by the royal swordmaster, has had no real military training, while his father, King Alexander, lacks the qualities necessary to lead his country during war. The Islanders have had little contact with the world beyond their island and, despite the warning of the Nyeians with whom they traded, they are totally unprepared to deal with the realities of their situation. There are no glorious battles, just untrained desperate people fighting for their homes and their lives. Gradually they learn more about their enemy, piecing together scraps of evidence. They discover that some Fey can kill by touch, that they can assume the appearance of, say, a cat, or even a trusted friend. Both Alexander and Nicholas must live with the knowledge that any person who comes near them could be a disguised Fey and a potential assassin. Even when one of the Fey, tired of being despised because he has no magical powers, defects to the Islanders giving them a further advantage over the Fey, they do not know how to exploit it.

Meanwhile the Fey, confined to the dismal grey Shadowlands whose outlines are concealed in mist, are trying to discover more about the Islanders, largely through Doppelgänger spies who have managed to penetrate both the royal palace and the Tabernacle, the Islanders' religious headquarters. The Fey leaders cannot understand how a people who do not possess magic have been able to defeat them. Captured humans tell them nothing of military value. Dissension begins to grow. Jewel realises that her father has misjudged the campaign and it will be up to her to retrieve what she can from the apparent stalemate between the Islanders and the Fey.

Perhaps it is because the author depicts both sides in the conflict, Fey and Islander, so vividly that *The Fey: Sacrifice* works so well. Obviously the reader is rooting for the Islanders, but the Fey are so well drawn that most readers would probably prefer them to be reformed rather than obliterated. This novel is a highly enjoyable fantasy, and it is to be hoped that Ms Rusch will be returning to the Fey in future volumes.

**David Seed (ed)**      *Anticipations*  
Liverpool University Press, 1995, 225pp, £27.50, £12.25 pb  
Reviewed by Andrew Butler

*Anticipations*. Looking forward. Expecting (great?) things. Of course, *Anticipations* was also the name of a book by H. G. Wells. Editor David Seed notes this fact as he borrows the title for this collection of essays on fiction which anticipates science fiction, or rather fiction which might have been labelled science fiction had it been written later. A final anticipation: this is the second book of a new series which started with a Stapledon biography and pre-1920s

material; we can only anticipate when they will get around to post-war sf.

For me sf, as a genre, began in the 1920s in *Amazing Stories* edited by Hugo Gernsback; he defined it, established Wells, Verne and Poe as precursors and provided a space for publishing new examples of it. Early sf would thus be from the 1920s or slightly later. (Sf as a mode is transhistorical, it can be traced in Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* and so on). Indeed, in this book there are essays on Wells, Verne and Poe, and these are some of the better ones on offer. For me, as for Gernsback, these are precursors to sf.

Probably the best chapter in the book is Stableford's on Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*; Shelley, after Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree*, is often considered to be the grandmother of sf. Stableford cautions against reading *Frankenstein* as Gothic fiction. Is Shelley's work, then, early science fiction? Or is she really a precursor to sf? In most of the essays, we are left to decide for ourselves since Seed, in his introduction, gives no date for his starting point of sf. Frankly, it's difficult to tell. Rather than being concerned with generic problems, most of the essays rattle through titles as if

failing to mention a particular book would cause it to be forgotten forever. The erudition is swamping at times. It would be nice if more of the contributors slowed down.

Take Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*, for example. Edward James tells us that it: 'warned of British unpreparedness for war' and 'inspired seven responses' in a single year. Patrick Parrinder gives Chesney his knighthood, notes its Thames Valley setting and a few pages later gives a partial synopsis. He also notes I. F. Clarke's note of its imitators. Brian Nellist, to his credit, moves beyond the mere catalogue and devotes four whole pages to analysis, but other titles mentioned in passing do not fare so well.

This tendency to survey means that the book is mostly free of jargon: it can be written simply because complexities are largely ignored. The exception is Val Gough's piece, 'Lesbians and Virgins: The New Motherhood in *Herland*' which invokes theorists Chodorow and DuPlessis to great effect in examining Charlotte Perkins Gilman. (Gough, incidentally, is the only female contributor to the book and the only one to consider female writers other than Shelley). It is possible that Simon Dentith's essay on 'Imagination and Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Utopian Fiction' might have benefitted if he had brought his interest in Bakhtin and the carnivalesque to bear upon the subject.

It is worth remembering that Aldiss took a similar number of pages to cover this kind of ground in *Billion Year Spree*, and in as much (or as little?) detail. But Parrinder has no doubt expanded his thoughts on Wells in his Liverpool University Press volume, Charlotte Perkins Gilman is the subject of another one, and another promised volume is to be a collection of First World War prophecies. The gaps will no doubt be filled as the series progresses. Anticipation is what it is all about.

## Ian Watson

## *Chaos Child*

Boxtree, 1995, 259pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

*Chaos Child* is not a regular Ian Watson novel, but the fourth space-opera in a series tied to the *Warhammer 40,000* game. It begins, confusingly to the uninitiated, despite a 'timeline' and synopsis of the preceding volume, in full flow. The end is not conclusive. *Chaos Child* is an episode from a serial, rather than a novel.

Jaq Draco is an Imperial Inquisitor. The Inquisition has been infiltrated by the forces of Chaos and Jaq has gone underground, on the run from almost everyone except his companions, the self-exiled Space Marine Captain Lexandro d'Arquebus and the Squat, Grimm. With them they have a 'book of fate' stolen from the alien Eldar, which Jaq intends to use to find a place in the Webway – a network of paths through a version of hyperspace – where time can be reversed, so he can return to life his dead lover, Meh'lindi.

Along the way there are: a religious riot, two violent robberies, a violent (psychic) orgy, several massively violent battles, much casual suffering, the destruction of an entire planet, and a lot more violence, all reported with a sadistic gloating and a boyish emphasis on weaponry.

The background is very detailed, though much of the information is there only to lay foundations for future episodes. Invention is ripe, if frequently emetic. Some small flashes of the brilliance of *The Flies of Memory* or *God's World* do briefly resonate.

Unfortunately Watson's style often reads like a parody of L. Ron Hubbard! See how many exclamation marks! How powerfully to reinforce the drama! How much like an old-fashioned children's book! 'RAARKpopSWOOSHthudCRUMP'.

In this vast catalogue of carnage and destruction, told without any sympathy or compassion, Jaq and companions indiscriminately murder anyone who gets in their way. The tone is sickeningly masochistic: to find a direction in the webway Lex applies sympathetic magic, having Grimm drive a knife slowly into his eye to 'see' – 'Illumination through torment'.

*Chaos Child* is also deeply misogynistic. Capturing a thief, Rakel, who looks much like Meh'lindi, Jaq forces her to take a drug which enables her body to morph (painfully) into a closer semblance of the dead woman. Worse, if the effect is not periodically reinforced, Rakel is threatened that her new form will destabilise into protoplasmic jelly. Hence she is forced to stay with Jaq, who ultimately plans to kill her by replacing her mind and soul with those of Meh'lindi.

Beyond this there are two wildly gratuitous (they have absolutely no relevance to the story) dreams involving an assault upon a harem. The level of loathing and sexual violence in these passages is really hard to stomach, particularly coming from a writer we know to be as thoughtful as Watson.

Finally, there are the contradictions, irrelevancies and plain absurdities.

The inclusion of a wide range of magical devices – runes, a hand-of-glory, tarot, sympathetic magic – means that it becomes almost arbitrary what may or may not happen, so it is difficult to care what does. I am sure *Warhammer 40,000* must have rules, but they don't seem to apply here; webways are described as being protected by a membrane which 'permitted the passage of living beings but not of inanimate matter', yet 'choking dust', clothes, weapons and even Eldar Wraithships enter with ease.

Chaos is identified with change – at times *Chaos Child* reads like a collision between a perverse Moorcockian multiversal epic and A. A. Attanasio's *The Last Legends of Earth*, as retold for the *Gor* audience. This reactionary theme is centred around Jaq's inability to accept the death of his lover and face the future, instead he seizes upon the appalling abuse of Rakel as a means to recapture the past. Yet even this is contradictory, for Jaq finally wishes to change everything by reversing time and bringing about an entirely new era in the galaxy.

The ending, which does contain two surprising twists, depends upon a ridiculous coincidence, and in case you were wondering, the *Chaos Child* never appears, rendering even the title quite meaningless.

This distasteful volume has the legend 'Collector's Edition' emblazoned across the jacket. Sadly, for Ian Watson has written

much of the best SF of the last twenty years, Boxtree must mean the

collector who takes refuse away.

## Philip G. Williamson

### *Citadel*

Legend, 1995, 289pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Andrew Adams

This is the third volume in a series called 'The Firstworld Chronicles'. I remember avoiding the first of these, *Dinbig of Khimmur*, purely on the basis of the title; the second is *The Legend of Shadd's Torment*. He has also written two other books, *Heart of Shadows* and *Moonblood*.

It is not necessary to have read the previous books, there's a good introduction to the main character (the eponymous Dinbig from the first book) and the world given at the beginning, although this would probably be somewhat tedious reading if you have read the others. It takes a particular skill to be able to impart enough background to make a novel stand-alone without being boring for those who have read previous books in the series.

At the start this book appears to be an attempt at a fantasy detective novel. If this is the authors intent, then it fails miserably. Far too few clues are given as to what is going on, and some *dei ex machina* at the end don't help. But I'm getting ahead of myself. The main character, Ronbas Dinbig, an adept of the Zan-Chassin school of magic centred on the city of Khimmur, hears a strange tale of his arrest and execution in the far city of Dehut. But he has rarely visited Dehut, and certainly has never been executed there. Since he now has reason to go and find out the truth behind this story, his

superiors also send him to spy on the ruler of Dehut, one Feikermun of Selph.

All of which shows one of my problems with Williamson's writing: he has absolutely no ear for names. They are over complex and do not trip off the tongue. While his style of writing descends occasionally into ponderousness; I think he is trying to be epic, but he succeeds only in being annoying. The philosophy contained within *Citadel* is also on the obvious side. Again, I feel that Williamson is trying for something meaningful in his writing, yet only succeeds in over-reaching himself and spoiling what could otherwise have been some nice light reading.

The world he has created in this series appears to be a strange mix of sanitised medievalism with occasional bouts of savagery and horror. Sanitised medieval is fine in the right setting, such as Feist's *Riftwar*, and the true dirtiness and horror of a medieval world can be a very effective backdrop, as in Bruce Fergusson's *The Shadow of His Wings*, but taking bits from each doesn't really work. The contrasts merely show the shallowness of the creative process at work here. Some parts are very clean and others very gritty. This does not help in the suspension of disbelief necessary for the sanitised part of the world.

Unless you've read the earlier books and want to follow the adventures of Ronbas Dinbig, the Zan-Chassin adept of Khimmur, don't bother.

## David Wingrove

### *Days of Bitter Strength*

Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 457pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

The *Chung Kuo* sequence continues with book seven (of eight).

I had read the first book, *The Middle Kingdom*, but not the intervening five, so diving in again at this late stage proved daunting. Thank heavens for a synopsis of the story so far, brief biographies of the nine major characters, a list of other characters and a glossary of mandarin terms. I clung to these like a lifebelt! The glossary tells me that *ku li* (the source of the Western term, 'coolie') means 'men of bitter strength' – hence the title.

Wingrove's vision of a Chinese dominated future has reached 2225. It opens with the births of Chuang Kuan Ts'ai ('Coffin-filler') and the amoral Josef Horacek. At intervals throughout a volume concerned chiefly with major political events and players, we return to follow the chequered progress of these two children, who look destined to play prominent parts in the next and final book.

*Days of Bitter Strength* is composed of two major sections: 'China on the Rhine' and 'Days of Bitter Strength'. In 'China on the Rhine' the plot revolves around Li Yuan, T'ang of Europe, and his fifth wife, Pei K'ung. The flaws of these two – consuming lust for a young woman and overwhelming desire for world power respectively – have tragic consequences for the T'ang's subjects. This is amply illustrated by the travails of Emily Ascher, the former terrorist now living quietly in Mannheim with her companion, Lin Shamg, and their adopted children. The T'ang's advisors are also affected as China on the Rhine falls shockingly apart: Kim Ward and Ben Shepherd's work on the Web (an attempt to link the stars by means of light) and the Shell (a personal VR unit) are overtaken by more life-threatening concerns.

In 'Days of Bitter Strength' the focus widens to include Kim Ward's attempts to turn four of Jupiter's moons into spaceships by attaching gigantic fusion rockets to them. If all goes well, the moons and a fleet of starships will travel into the far reaches of space in search of habitable planets. And not a moment too soon, for back in Chung Kuo a plague, 'The Hollower', has been unleashed, killing ninety percent of those infected, and it looks like the golden-eyed survivors will have to face 'the inheritors', giant morphs created by arch-terrorist Howard DeVore.

If you want moons shifted out of orbit, AIs, designer plagues, VR sex, mutants, men becoming pregnant, telepathy – it's here, and more! Wingrove has let his imagination rip. His rapid viewpoint switching keeps the reader intrigued, and his well-honed prose drives the plot forward inexorably – and all the while the headcount rises.

The scope of the *Chung Kuo* sequence is vast, its cast of characters huge (the effort that must have gone into researching and plotting it is mind-boggling). But I found myself more interested in the fate of individuals than in the overall scheme of things – perhaps it was just too huge for me to grasp. Individuals there are aplenty, though. Some, like Ben Shepherd, Pei K'ung and Josef Horacek, are cruel and scheming bullies who sometimes veer towards caricature. But others are more well-rounded, their yin and yang more in balance, among them Kim Ward and his family, Emily Ascher and her children, little Chuang Kuan Ts'ai and her uncle, 'The Oven Man'. It was they who kept my interest, my sympathy and concern, right to the end.

For those who enjoyed the previous *Chung Kuo* books, you know what to expect and *Days of Bitter Strength* won't disappoint. For the rest? I'd start with *The Middle Kingdom* and, if it suits your taste, work your way forward – but be prepared for a very long read indeed!

## Jonathan Wylie

### *Other Lands*

Orbit, 1995, 360pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Those familiar with the usual style of husband and wife team, Mark & Julia Smith, are in for a genuine surprise with *Other Lands*. On the cover it says, 'a new kind of fantasy', and although that might be stretching it a bit, it is certainly new ground for Jonathan Wylie.

Author Zoe March, having escaped a harsh and brutal marriage to Thomas, has settled in rural Norfolk with Michael Glover, a highly successful computer games designer. She is happier than she has ever been in her life until Michael is left in a deep and medically inexplicable coma following an accident. The long hours of waiting and watching begin as Zoe tries everything in a desperate effort to bring Michael back to the land of the living.

Strange things begin to happen, which convince Zoe that Michael is trying to contact her and that she, in some unfathomable way, is the key to his recovery. In a desperate bid to do something constructive, Zoe contacts Owen Pemberton, a hypnotherapist and friend who has helped her in the past. Sceptical of the facts Zoe lays before him, and preferring to chalk it all up to stress, he embarks on a series of regressions which take Zoe back to an apparent previous life.

Emmony is wife to a powerful and brutal Lord, Jevan. Totally subjugated by him, she learns that her true love, Ghyl, lies in a coma in the sanctuary of Blue Tiles after a confrontation with Jevan. She has a strange experience where a spirit, who calls herself Zoe, shares her consciousness. Emmony becomes convinced that Zoe is the key, not only to her hopeless existence with Jevan, but to the

rescue of Ghyl. Jevan, always looking for an excuse to extend his power and his domain through politics or force of arms, plans to build a bridge ready for conquest and, maliciously, revives an old custom for appeasing the gods. With the blessing of Judge Conal who rules that Ghyl is technically dead, Jevan announces that Ghyl will be sacrificed in the foundations of the bridge. Jevan sees this as just retribution for the shame and embarrassment caused by Emmony's perceived relationship with Ghyl, as well as an opportunity to subjugate her totally.

This is a strange and engrossing supernatural tale. Zoe, convinced that Emmony and Ghyl have a connection to her own situation and Michael's recovery, is never quite able to convince Owen of this. She discovers a way to regress on her own, but her methods are not without danger, and Zoe runs the risk of becoming trapped with Emmony and sharing her awful existence forever. Emmony and Javed hold the key, but what is it?

A thoroughly entertaining read with characters one really empathises with, *Other Lands* is a wonderful blend of fantasy and realism and may well mark a very successful change in direction for Jonathan Wylie.

# Paperback Graffiti

Paperback Reviews  
edited by Tanya Brown

## ***ShipBuilding – New SF from Scotland***

Taverna Press 1995, 156 pp

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

This collection, sponsored by John Smith and Son Bookshops and Glasgow City Council was produced for free distribution at Intersection, the 1995 Glasgow Worldcon.

The twelve writers featured here have all been published before, in SF magazines and the small press, although not all their names will be immediately familiar.

Several of these stories have appeared before, in *Interzone*, *R.E.M* and *New Dawn Fades*, and these are perhaps, as might be expected, amongst the stronger entries, although curiously the story that failed to engage me most, Gary Gibson's 'Touched By An Angel', is also an *Interzone* story.

Several of the stories which open the collection are competently worked out, but unexceptional. The craft is there, but the plot devices, from a lottery to the stars, a doppelganger and a psychopathic computer simulation loose in a hospital network (why does nobody run these things on an unconnected workstation?) are a little too obvious partway into the story. The first delightfully off-the-wall entry is 'Body Politics', by Harvey Welles and Phillip Raines, where the dead - or post-citizens in the new PC terminology - are disinterred and canvassed for their voting patterns in a hung district election. In 'Lava Dick has the Blues', by Richard Hammersley, a musician from a troubled African nation, suddenly rich beyond his wildest dreams, discovers that his money, and the knowledge it can buy, are still powerless in solving his country's problems.

The last four stories are all magazine reprints, and all share to some extent, and with several other stories in the collection, a theme of genetic engineering. Fergus Bannon's 'Burning Brightly' is a bleak reverse on Sturgeon's classic 'Microcosmic God', as a xenoarcheologist watches the death of a small civilisation. Michael Cobley's cyberpunkish 'Corrosion' is rather let down by a spectacularly ill-thought info dump around the middle, while the fart-propelled spaceship joke sits oddly in Andrew Wilson's otherwise gruesomely inventive 'Viral Engineering'.

Minor reservations aside, this is a nice introduction to some of the new voices in Scottish SF, and a nice present for the Worldcon.

**Brian Aldiss**

## ***Somewhere East of Life***

Flamingo 1995, £5.99, 391 pp

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Subtitled 'Another European Fantasia', *Somewhere East of Life* is the fourth volume of the 'Squire' Quartet, and expands and links (as Mike Moorcock has done with *Blood*) stories which have appeared in the Garnett re-launch of the *New Worlds* anthologies.

Here, perhaps, we have Aldiss's version of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, but set against the political upheaval and warring background of Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The SF plot device derives from the story FOAM in *New Worlds* 1. Ray Burnell, architectural historian for WACH (World Antiquities and Cultural Heritage) has ten years of his memories stolen in a black market EMV clinic in Budapest. FOAM, Free of All Memory, of ten years of both his professional knowledge and his personal life, he is dumped on Salisbury Plain to try and pick up the pieces of his life. In his recovery, gradual clues to his missing ten years emerge. He has been married, apparently extremely happily, to Stephanie, although now divorced and carrying on an affair with Blanche, a co-worker at WACH. His memories, and particularly the intimate details of his love life are circulating as 500 copies on the black market for the new entertainment, e-mnemonicvision. To retrace his steps, and try and discover and reclaim his missing years he takes on a WACH assignment to war torn Georgia, where he is nearly killed in the brutal revolutionary struggle, and then to Ashkhabad in Turkmenistan. Here, he discovers a fragment of what might be his past in an black market EMV warehouse, but is forced to flee again as the country is overtaken by conflict.

Burnell's often naive trust - at various points he has his memory, his money and his cameras and possessions stolen - place him both in situations of extreme danger and as a sort of charmed, and occasionally exasperating, innocent against the double dealing and brutal horror of the conflict raging across Eastern Europe.

An uneasy odyssey and journal for our times, populated by colourful, if often unreliable, characters, that ends on a note of both resignation and, perhaps, hope.

**Roger McBride Allen**

## ***Star Wars: Showdown at Centerpoint***

Bantam Books, 1995, £4.99, 301pp

Reviewed by Susan Badham

This is the third book in a trilogy. I read it without reading the other two books first, which is a pretty severe test for any third book in a sequence. The exposition of what had gone before at the beginning of the book was very useful, and I hope the publishers stick to it with future books.

The book had existing set pieces that actually made you want to keep turning the pages to find out what happened next. It had several pieces of awesome kit which E. E. 'Doc' Smith would have been proud to have come up with; and I definitely approved of the villain, who did not seem to blame a bad childhood or lack of opportunities, but just got on with being evil. The alien society portrayed within the book was sufficiently different to make it interesting without being so alien as to distract from the overall flow of the story. None of the major characters acted in any way that suggested that they were different people from those shown in the films.

My major criticism of the book is that a couple of characters were left hanging around with nothing much to do until the time came for them to have an effect on the plot - literally, in one case. This seemed a pity in what was otherwise a well-constructed book.

All in all, a good read, which made me want to go back and look at the rest of the trilogy.

**Kevin J. Anderson**

## ***Dark Apprentice***

Bantam, 1994, 354pp, £3.99

Reviewed by 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; (b) Alan Dean Foster; (c) Donald F. Glut; (d) 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 un-reviewable – 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.

**Kevin J Anderson (ed.)**      ***Star Wars – Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina***  
Bantam Books, 1995, 387pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Julie Atkin

This could have been a good concept - a *Tales from the White Hart* for the *Star Wars* generation. However, what we actually get is sixteen stories, almost all based on a scene from the first film - when Han Solo slays a mercenary in the cantina, just before meeting Luke. This isn't obvious from the jacket - I expected more originality than a collection of tales each based around one character who is in the cantina at that moment. It becomes incredibly tiresome reliving the identical incident seemingly endless times, through every character's viewpoint, as part of their narrative.

Authors include Timothy Zahn, Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens, Tom and Martha Veitch and Doug Beason who provides the Stormtrooper's story - one of the better contributions, despite a preponderance of 'wolfish grins'.

A couple of other offerings manage to rise above the general monotony. Jennifer Roberson's first-person stream of consciousness, 'Soup's On', at least provides a change of pace. The Jawa's and Ranat's tales, respectively by married couple Anderson and Rebecca Moesta, read as a pair, the second supplying the twist to the first.

The whole thing resembles a fan anthology or a gaming tie-in. Until I attended a *Star Wars* panel at the Worldcon, I hadn't realised that there was an audience for this sort of thing. It may be very popular amongst that circle - but of minimal interest to the rest of us.

**Jim Ballantyne**      ***The Torturer***  
Transworld, 1995, £4.99, 350pp

Reviewed by Sebastian Phillips

I've spent days trying to think of something witty to say about *The Torturer*. I can't. It's not often that a hardened splatter reader like myself gets offended, but this book managed it.

The plot is rudimentary - the main character is a professional torturer who gets into deep trouble for dicing the wrong person. However, the devil has a little job for him to do, so he survives until the end of the road.

If you took out the supernatural elements then this would never get published. People would complain that the first fifty pages are nothing sadistic rape fantasy, its other incidents

mindless - and, worst of all, uninvolving - brutality. Put a 'horror' label on them and they sidestep criticism - everyone knows that horror readers are morally past saving and don't deserve good writing ...

If you're into this kind of thing then cut out the middle man and read de Sade.

**Alexander Beshler**

**Rim**

Orbit, 1995, 357pp, £6.99

**Andrew Harman**

**Fahrenheit 666**

Legend, 307pp, £ 5.99

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

From *Rim*: "Nothing is regular in Chibatown," Yaz told him. "But to answer your question. This is karmic cuisine. You have not heard of it in America? I am surprised. Customers who dine at Ama's do not simply 'eat' their dinner. There is an energy exchange. You assume the highest nature of the food you eat." (p. 242).

From *Fahrenheit 666*: "Congratulations on your choice of scroll and welcome to the future of almost possibilities! You are standing on the brink of a learning experience which will transport you to the World of Your Choice.: A World where YOU are no longer a passenger; Where YOU have the controls! Come with us on an easy-to-follow twenty-four step journey into the realms of Telepushy" (p.6).

Joke books can't be reviewed, save on a tedious joke-by-joke basis. Even dramatised joke-books. Even Terry Pratchett joke books. There is no such thing as near-miss humour; any given joke will either knock 'em in the aisles or hang about like a bad smell. I laughed/groaned/ yawned at different things in *Rim* and *Fahrenheit 666* (the temperature at which demons catch fire and burn?). So will you – but not necessarily at the same things.

**Lois McMaster Bujold**

**Mirror Dance**

Pan, 1995, £6.99, 614pp

Reviewed by Colin Bird

I wonder what the page tally is for this writer's monumental Vorkosigan saga of which *Mirror Dance* is the ninth volume by my count. It certainly is old-fashioned widescreen Space Opera, full of larger than life characters, rip-roaring adventure and Machiavellian diplomacy. But Bujold operates on a classier level than most of the practitioners of this sub-genre.

Familiarity with the previous Vorkosigan adventures is not necessary to enjoy this book which reunites Miles Vorkosigan with Mark, his clone brother. Mark takes the place of Miles, using his military might to carry out a personal quest to free his fellow clones enslaved on the planet of Jackson's Whole. The mission ends in disaster and big brother Miles has to attempt a daring rescue, this results in his death. This being Space Opera, brother Mark takes his identity again and attempts to recover the body of Miles for possible revivification. A short chronology at the end of the book relates the events of the previous books.

It is the characters that carry this long novel and Mark's story, his battle to assert his own personality, is affecting and well told. The structure of the book does drag a little in the middle. But the sheer size and scope of this is what makes it part of a saga and that, in itself, attracts a lot of fans who can wallow in the familiarity of the story. Even as a stand-alone novel it's an enjoyable and well written SF adventure.

**Christopher Evans*****Mortal Remains***

Gollancz, 1995, 338pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

A space opera by the BSFA-award-winning author of *Aztec Century*: another fast-moving affair, a novel split into three sections in which the action happens on a larger and larger scale.

I found this not quite so involving as *Aztec Century*, but a good read nonetheless: exciting, varied, with good scenes, an interesting (though perhaps rather underdeveloped) biotechnological setting, and lots to get to grips with. The characters are OK, though, again, they seem a little unsubtle. It could be that the characters and settings of *Aztec Century* are colouring my view here, in the sense that the former characters are overpowering those of this novel. Chris Evans has however made genuine efforts, unlike other authors, to create a different social set-up, and he must be applauded for that.

The plot revolves around two Advocates, exemplars of humanity in a psychedelic settled solar system made habitable by biotechnology. Dying people enter the psychic Noosphere: ageing is a thing of the past. I had to skip the concept of people's psyches being transferred this way and that - a standard of much fiction that saves many an author - for it is an unreasonable idea, but there is plenty else to be going on with. The metaphor for the biotechnology here is animal: like the plants of Brian Aldiss' *Hothouse* there are many compounded words, giving the impression of scorpion space-ships, vacuuming hounds, etc.; and the author displays the same colourful inventiveness exhibited in *Aztec Century*.

Getting deeper into the novel the reader encounters the heart of the plot, which is a struggle between biotechnology-augmented people and those following the social norms of the Advocates. At the end there is a hint of what is to come (not in a sequel, I would guess, merely in the thoughts of the reader) in the shape of a new human being. It's all cosmic stuff, and well-imagined.

The settings are particularly good: in fact, they support the novel in those places where this is required. There are wonderful descriptions of cemeteries on Pluto's moon Charon, of settlements on Jupiter's Io: and of more mundane houses and gardens on Mars, settlements similar to those of Anne Gay's *The Brooch of Azure Midnight*. The space scenes are less successful, but unbounded black is never easy to invoke ...

This is definitely one to try. I think it is one of those novels skimmed first, then read again at a different level. I won't be taking this book down the market to sell on ...

**Christopher Fowler*****Psychoville***

Warner Books 1995, 417 pages, \$7.99

reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Neither *Roofworld* or *Rune* struck me as particularly funny books, although the reviews and the bizarre fetish cover for *Spanky* suggested Fowler was starting to adopt a surreal comedy for his horror writing. *Psychoville* definitely follows this trend into burlesque horrorshow, a grotesque comedy of manners to rival the gruesome excesses of any of Tom Sharpe's novels.

This is Fowler's version of the Neighbours From Hell stories writ large, and a vigilante revenge tale that sits somewhere between Rambo and the frustrated sociopath who opened up with a semi-automatic in a Texan cafeteria. It is bleakly funny, as long as you don't stop to think for too long about what you are laughing at. Fowler, though, makes sure you do pause to let things sink in, and the surreal comedy takes a very bitter flavour.

The first part of the tale is a catalogue of slights, snubs and intimidation, as seen through the eyes of young Billy

March, when his working class family are rehoused slap in the middle of the golf and BMW suburban set of new-town dream Invicta Cross.

Billy's father cannot find suitable work, and finds himself in, and rapidly out, of a job as a local petrol station cashier. His mother finds her misguided notions of community neighbourliness rejected, and Billy's only two friends at school are the equally shunned and strange Oliver and April. Following an embarrassing 'meet the neighbours' dinner party, things go from bad to worse. Snubs and petty disputes escalate into vandalism, depression, and tragedy, when Billy's mother dies in an open verdict of suicide.

Billy, Oliver, and later April, have meanwhile conceived a strange obsession in the building of a detailed scale model of Invicta Cross, and discover, in the siting of Billy's house on the access of a proposed new golf club, what appears to be the reason for the domestic harassment of the Marches. This catalogue of unrelieved gloom, played out by, it must be said, caricatures rather than real characters, is apt to get wearing. A fact Fowler quite disarmingly acknowledges in the opening of Part 2, set ten years on:

"This is the part you've been waiting for, you poor despairing readers. You've ploughed through that ghastly catalogue of woes and now you want some proactive behaviour, some positive action.. You want to see heroic young Billy choke the remorse from his tormentors' throats. You want to get to the part where truths are told and good triumphs and the guilty are punished. All that will happen, I promise you. Fortune's tide starts turning now -' The Red Diaries.. April 1995."

We are back in Balmoral Close, Invicta Cross, and the new Prentiss couple in amongst the March's ex-neighbours. Affluent, immaculately groomed, they epitomise the perfect yuppie success story of Invicta Cross, if a little compromised by Polly's deranged view of life as an American 50s sitcom. This time, it is the snooty neighbours' turn to suffer from an outbreak of unexplained, and increasingly nastier incidents, the planning and execution of which are recorded in the extracts from the Red Diaries which head each chapter.

At which point Fowler puts the first of a series of twists into the story, although clues have been laid earlier (which your perceptive reviewer naturally missed on first reading, until they went off like small, carefully timed bombs).

The besieged and hostage residents of Balmoral Close move from being yuppie caricatures to real people, however unpleasant, caught in a tightening web of horror. Finally, a local reporter is prompted to investigate the past of Balmoral Close, to find who might be responsible for this series of bizarre revenge attacks and murders. At this point Fowler decides it's time to give the rug another firm tug.

*Psychoville* is very funny in places, like a psychotic and sometimes kinky game of Cluedo. Underneath all the mayhem, though, is the feeling that Fowler is making a quite different point about the heroic status of the lone vigilante revenger.

And of course it's all done in the best possible taste..

**Maggie Furey*****The Sword of Flame***

Legend, 1995, 428pp, £5.99

**Paul J McAuley*****Pasquale's Angel***

VGSF, 1995, 385pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Chris Hart

*The Sword of Flame* is the final book of a trilogy and, as with most third parts, there is a sense of a swelling climax pervading the narrative. From the first page we are placed upon the brink of something spectacular; armies gather to fortify each corner of the ring, evil on one side and good on the other; the mages are brushing up their intercontinental ballistic spells, and the hero is looking for the final piece of unlikely equipment which is going to tip the balance towards

Good. This novel has all the trappings of Hard Fantasy, including the promise of a great climax which never really arrives. The evil here is represented by Miathan, who is preparing for the destruction of Nexis (the city of the good guys). Meanwhile, Avain and the mage Anvar are seeking the eponymous Sword of Flame. All this is rendered in purple prose which has a tendency to dwell on natural details. Sometimes it's beautiful, but mostly it's no more than an overwrought attempt to lend authenticity to a mediocre and highly derivative plot. It is not by accident that the blurb contains gushing comparisons to Eddings and Jordan, as this is familiar country. I will no doubt witness Gemmell-guzzling commuters bending the spine of this book, eager to escape the humdrum of urban existence for the bucolic never-never land where everything is resolved by people named after brands of mineral water.

McAuley's version of fantasy is very different. It is set in an alternate 1518 Florence where Da Vinci's blueprints have become actuality, and have instigated the Industrial Revolution. The premise alone is a great pitch which is carried off with remarkable aplomb. Using a laconic tone McAuley manages to evoke an astonishingly vivid version of sixteenth-century Italy where people drive steam-powered cars down acetylene-lit streets. Genres collide in an ingenious and engaging plot borrowed from locked-room whodunits. The characters are sharp and lewd in the British tradition of Greenland and Harrison. I was frequently reminded of Harrison's Viriconium when the characters were speaking in contemporary idiom, rather than the artificial archaism of Furey.

When considered together, these two fantasy novels crystallise the present fantasy genre writing in Nineties Britain. Like the previous divisions between Sci-Fi and Speculative Fiction, the Fantasy genre has found itself cleft between Hard Fantasy and Fantasy Baroque. It is perhaps unfair to contrast two different fantasy novels with different intentions and different audiences. After all, these genre divisions are only marketing short-hand. However, it is interesting to note that both of them rely extensively on tried-and-tested formulas; but hard fantasy is gasping for life, and the new fantasy is a breath of fresh air.

### David Gemmell

### *Ironhand's Daughter*

Legend, 1995, £4.99, 283pp.

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

High Fantasy again from David Gemmell, but this time round a side-ways step from his previous *Sipstrassi* and *Drenai* series.

Defeated at the battle of Colden Moor, the highlanders lead an uneasy existence under the rule of the southern outlanders whilst waiting for a king to come again and unite the warlike clans. But the king turns out to be a Queen - Sigarni; silver-haired warrior, huntress, whore, and Princess of the Blood Royal.

Snatched away as a child, and hidden from the search to destroy the royal line, Sigarni survives undetected until an argument one day with the ruling Baron over her hawk, Abby. The result of this argument lands Sigarni with scars, both physical and mental, that she will carry for the rest of her life. This experience starts Sigarni on a path which mystics and fortune-tellers have predicted for years; the path of the warrior queen.

Gemmell is generally regarded as the number one British writer of heroic fantasy, and this new series does nothing to damage that reputation. He departs however from his usual thread and attempts to create a strong female lead character, women not usually being noted throughout his books as other than supplementary to men. For me, I'm not sure that Sigarni works as she is definitely not a wholly likeable character, being dour, self-centred and callous; though perhaps this is

predictable having been bought up solely by men in a man's world. Sigarni comes across throughout as a man in the guise of a woman; a woman in body, but with the mind of a man, totally devoid of femininity.

There are though, plenty of characters to like, and Gemmell's penchant for blurring the boundaries of worlds, and time, leads to yet another gripping romp through his personal multiverse (with apologies to Michael Moorcock here). An excellent read as always for those who are not deterred by that awful cover!

### Parke Godwin

### *Limbo Search*

AvoNova, 1995, \$5.50, 275pp

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Parke Godwin was previously known to me as an author of "mock" historical novels about Robin Hood but this is very different fare. *Limbo Search* is the story of a small group of space flyers, piloting Sparrow electronic surveillance craft. Their task is to monitor unmanned planets for illegal corporate exploitation and to respond with force if necessary. But when they detect an alien signal from Hydra IV the first Sparrows sent to contact the aliens are destroyed and Limbo base must send a more formidable force to establish the nature of the alien threat.

This is hard-nosed, grimy Space Opera where men are men and so are the women! There is a glossary of military jargon to help you understand the pilots tough talk. But this is a slim plot for a novel with an inconclusive end presumably the first of a series. It's difficult to engage with the characters although to be fair to Godwin there is a sort of authenticity to the dialogue. That doesn't stop this book from embracing too many genre clichés to be a truly satisfying novel. Fans of the author, however, may enjoy this if it is the precursor to a lengthy series.

### Terry Goodkind

### *Wizard's First Rule*

Millenium, 1995, 774pp, £5.99

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

It is useful for fantasies to carry maps, but here it is essential because the depicted 'boundaries' delimit the prevalence of magic in this tripartly divided world. The young hero, Richard Cypher, is Seeker of Truth, and, given the uncertainties inherent in those he encounters, his task is difficult. He is, moreover, the initiate who, though eventually proving himself, is at first but a tentative hero. Thus, when at the 'Excaliburian' moment he draws the Seeker's Sword from its scabbard, he feels the power enter into him, but, then, "not sure that he wanted anything to do with it", he sheaths it again, "glad to be free of the feelings it invoked."

Fate, however, propels him on. Emerging from and protective of Westland, which is threatened by evil magic emanating from the extreme easterly territory of D'Hara, the Seeker is accompanied by the Jungian figures of Wise Old Man (the Wizard Zedd), Boundary Guide (Chase), and Anima (Khalan, Mother Confessor, and only finally lover). After crossing the boundary into the magic-invaded Midlands, and resisting heart-hounds and treacherous Mud People, the Seeker is eventually kidnapped, tortured and temporarily enslaved by an Enchantress (Denna). All this happens during the search for a certain Grail-like box, one of three, the correct opening of which will give absolute power - that power being sought by the evil Lord Darken Ruhl. Richard's opposing mission is, at a time of separation from his companions, aided by an initially reluctant scarlet dragon and a friendly werewolf. There is a lively sub-plot progressing at the so-called People's Palace in D'Hara, where fairy-tale jealousies and cruelties are acted out, these melodramas proving, however, to be

essential to, and the Palace an appropriate location for, the story's spectacular finale.

The narrative flows easily but is often repetitive of sadistic mayhem. Humour is sly though at times twee. Twists and turns of intrigue and deception are well executed. The wizard's 'first rule', incidentally, is that people are stupid and may be relied on to believe that what they want to be true, is true.

**Charles L. Grant**

***Jackals***

NEL, 16/3/95, 255pp, £5.99

**Reviewed by Graham Andrews**

The eponymous Jackals are "... hunters who haunt a nation's highways and byways, preying on the weak and unsuspecting. They're human enough -except for their strange eyes, and the way their laughter lingers in the night air - but they have no mercy.

"Jim Scott's been hunting jackals for a long time. they took someone he loved, once, and he's never forgiven them. When beautiful, battered Rachel (Corder) turns up on his doorstep, it's the prelude to Jim's final showdown with the jackals. They come in force - but Jim no longer fights alone. Now he heads a group of jackal-killers, each determined to exterminate the human vermin" (blurb).

The phrase "I read this book in one sitting" is - more often than not - reviewerese for "I skimmed through it while pretending to watch *A Bit of Fry and Laurie*". Only kidding, Stephen... Stephen? Nevertheless, I really did read *Jackals* from-first-page-to-last without skimming, and I've no idea what was on TV at the time (Bruges v Chelsea?). It's pure state-of-the-black-arts stuff.

"Grant's style of horror takes hold of your spinal cord and plays it like a violin. His prose leaks with moody atmosphere... and the pace never lags" (back-cover quote from *Mystery Scene*). It's not clear if the Masked Reviewer was writing about this particular novel, but he/she could very well have been.

I hadn't read much work by Charles L. Grant before *Jackals*. Just *A Quiet Night of Fear* (Berkley, 1981), to be honest. Hint: NEL also publish his *Raven*, *Something Stirs*, and *Stunts*.

**Alasdair Gray**

***A History Maker***

Penguin, 1995, 222pp, £5.99

**Reviewed by Pat McMurray**

This is the future. A future of powerplants which belong to extended families, and produce almost anything under the guidance of the women who control it. A future where the largest organisations are these family groupings on Earth and the co-operative satellites off it. A future where all have immediate access to the information nets and public eyes. A future where immortality is available. A future where men play very deadly wargames to give them a purpose in life. There's nothing original in these ideas. They've all been seen before; sometimes creating a utopia, sometimes a dystopia. Here, however, they simply form part of the background structure in which Wat Dryhope and his family live, and which underpin their decisions. Wat's been off planet, turned down his chance at immortality, and come back to be the only fit survivor of his clans' warriors. An attempt is made, using Wat, to destroy his society, which is defeated not by Wat, but by the women using the information networks and the basic robustness of his society. Wat is a man to whom things happen, by and large.

This is a densely structured novel, for all its shortness, with its epilogue and prologue, notes, maps and pictures, guides to politics and economics. This is a future firmly

founded in the past, and the potential clichés of the future are firmly and realistically dealt with.

**Stephan Grundy**

***Rhinegold***

Penguin, 1995, 870pp, £6.99

**Reviewed by Lynne Bispham**

From the moment the Norse gods Wodan, Loki and Hoenir descend to 'the Middle-Garth, men's earth, swift as the storm raging between the worlds' and set in motion the events of this outstanding novel, the reader is caught up in what has to be one of the most powerful retellings of ancient myth and legend ever written. The tales that cluster around the Norse hero Sigfried the Dragon-Slayer - Sigfrith in this novel - and the cursed gold of the Rhine are possibly best known today through Wagner's Ring Cycle, although the Norse sagas and Beowulf are obviously closer to the original oral tradition. In *Rhinegold*, Stephan Grundy has vividly recreated the time when the legends must have first arisen, yet he has also captured the spirit of the tales themselves. Scenes of graphic realism merge seamlessly with scenes of magical happenings and visions. The saga of the Walsings, Sigfrith's family, descendants of Wodan, is set firmly in Dark Age Europe. Rome's might is failing and various Germanic tribes are claiming land on the edges of the empire. In this world a warrior gains fame and followers by his deeds in battle and the greatest warriors become kings in smoke-filled timber halls. Sigfrith braves the storms of the North Sea to avenge himself on his father's murderer, for raiding, looting, slaughter and feuds pursued from one generation to the next are a way of life. Yet this is also a world where a man can become a wolf, the spirits of the dead give advice to the living, a dwarf forges a sword that will kill a dragon, and a ferryman can be a god in disguise. Runes have magical powers and a warrior maiden, surrounded by a ring of fire, waits for a hero who knows no fear.

The characters in this novel are not only the splendid heroic figures of legend, but also fully-rounded human beings whose motivation and emotions may be alien to twentieth-century sensibilities and yet are entirely understandable in the context of this extraordinarily well-written book. The superhuman exploits of Sigfrith and his fellow warriors are convincing because they and the heroic society they live in are so vividly depicted. In *Rhinegold* legend is transformed into a compelling novel that satisfies the demands of the most exacting modern reader and yet retains the exuberance, wonder and power of the ancient epic. It really is a tremendous achievement. I recommend it without reservation.

**Peter F. Hamilton**

***The Nano Flower***

Pan. 1995. 566 pp. £4.99.

**Reviewed by Graham Andrews**

*The Nano Flower* is Peter F. Hamilton's third sf/mystery novel, following *Mindstar Rising* and *A Quantum Murder*. Greg Mandel heroes in all three - a psi-boostered former private detective and veteran of the English Army's Mindstar Brigade who now works for the Event Horizon conglomerate.

Setting? Twenty-first century England - Rutland, mostly. The New Conservatives have taken over from the Peoples socialist Party following "...a long dark decade of near-Marxist dictatorship just after the Greenhouse Effect ran riot" (p. 2). *Howard's Way + Blake's Seven + Doomwatch* = something that Mad Maggie might have written if she'd turned to sf instead of fantasy (*The Downing Street Years*). Mandel's latest mission next-to-impossible is: find out who/what sent a 'nano-flower' to Julia Evans, the megarich owner of Event Horizon. "The geneticists estimate the source of the planet could be anything up to a couple of billion years further up the evolutionary ladder than Earth. The gene

sphere is much larger than terrestrial DNA strands" (p. 67) These things never happen to Alan Titchmarsh. Or do they...?

I think Hamilton should dump the glum Mandel as lead character and replace him with Julia Evans. As a *Working Girl* - type, she's more like Melanie Griffiths than Sigourney Weaver; the acceptable face (and everything else) of capitalism.

Hamilton has been accused of perpetrating Thatcherite SF, with some justification; read the political thinky bits in *Mindstar Rising* and *A Quantum Murder*. What the hell - some of my best (if deluded) friends are bring-back-Maggie fanatics. Let contention thrive. I find *The Nano Flower's* New London/Crown Colony asteroid touchingly reminiscent of *Journey Into Space*, the 1950s radio serial that enthralled millions (me, too).

However, I see him as a romantic Little Englander (tautology?), like G.K. Chesterton and J. B. Priestley - two of my favourite authors, by the way. *The Nano Flower* also hints that he might even hanker after the you've-never-had-it-so good days of Harold Macmillan. Example:

[The New Conservatives...] "were necessary after the PSP fell, rampant capitalism is always a good way to build quickly, and we needed that then, we'd fallen so far. But unless you're very careful, that kind of economy becomes a runaway shark, always having to move to eat, to survive. You get unemployment in the name of efficiency, suffering in the name of market forces. That's over... They don't matter. England will benefit from Welsh secession as much as the Welsh" (p. 560).

Will (*The State We're In*) Hutton couldn't have put it better. But I must point out that it was the rampant socialism of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal that rescued the USA from depression - treating the ill-effects produced by rampant capitalism. Ditto the post-1945 UK John Kenneth Galbraith has knocked the monetarist spots off Milton Friedman. The secession bit also applies to Scotland, Northern Ireland, and certain English regions, e.g. Cornwall. Enough political-economic blathering...

*The Nano Flower* is a highly readable hard-sf novel - not an inevitable combination, believe you me! If it were my decision, future reprints would be blurbed WINNER OF THE BSFA AWARD. And, having family connections in Oakham, I appreciated the Rutland locale.

**Robert Holdstock**

***The Emerald Forest***

Harper Collins, 1995, 253pp, £4.99

**Reviewed by Pat McMurray**

This is a reprint of the 1985 novelisation of John Boorman's film of the same name. For those who, like myself, have never seen the film, it concerns a US construction engineer who takes his family to the Amazon forest to build an enormous dam. Within weeks of arrival his son is stolen at the edge of the forest by natives, The Invisible People. All his leave for the next ten years is spent searching the jungle for his son. He, his wife and their daughter become expert on the anthropology, the wildlife, and the geography of the Amazon forest.

On the tenth annual hunt-trail, he finally finds his son. The son has been brought up as a native, and marries a native girl. There is no hope of persuading him to return to a ghost-life beyond the edge of the world. The engineer leaves his son to his new life.

Another tribe, The Fierce People, decimate the son's tribe, and steals their young women to sell into prostitution among the miners and loggers. The son must travel out of the forest, The Edge of the World, to find his ghost-father among the Termite People in their stone towers, to gain his help in rescuing the women, and giving The Invisible People a chance of survival.

In the 1990s, we've come to associate Holdstock and forests. These are the forests of the imagination, of the

exploration of a physical and mental territory, of myths and of an ancient wilderness under threat. The forest is a well developed major character in its own right, and the book makes some acknowledgement of South American realism.

There's a strong thread of concern and hope for the future of the forest: it's not only ancient English woodland that has a place in Holdstock's heart. I don't want to see the film now. No film could match the promise of this book.

**Dafydd Ab Hugh**

***Arthur War Lord***

AvoNova, 3/94, 300pp, \$4.99

**Reviewed by Graham Andrews**

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

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

"A mind-altering blend of Arthurian, Merovingian, Masonic and modern-day spy suspense": Robert Anton Wilson (blurb). The 'Masonic' bit reminds me of James Mason playing Sir Brack in *Prince Valiant*; but that's my problem, not yours. I agree with Wilson - apart from the stupid 'mind-altering' bit.

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

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

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

The dubious historicity of Arthurian Britain can be put aside for the sake of the story. Dafydd's time-travel patter isn't new (the 'law of Conservation of Reality' gets another airing) but it does the job. More importantly, his insightful analysis of the current Irish 'Troubles' makes a refreshing change from the usual Celtic-twilight balderdash. *Too Long a Sacrifice* and *The White Plague* spring - painfully - to my mind. As for those (mainly American) authors who perpetrate 'retellings' of early Irish myths and legends - well, I'd need a lot more fighting room.

Dafydd deserves full credit for not writing - say - "A Comic-Cut Provo in King Arthur's Courtyard". The fifth-century scenes are so vivid that I resented being brought back to the Time-Tunnel-type efforts at intertemporal rescue / damage

limitation. Part II of Arthur War Lord appears / appeared in September 1994

### Garry D. Kilworth

### Angel

Gollancz, 28/7/94, 286pp, £4.99

Reviewed by 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'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 material).

*Angel* is set in a near-future - 1997 - San Francisco plagued by inexplicable fire-raising. (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.

### Mercedes Lackey

### Storm Warning

Millenium, 1995, £4.99, 403pp.

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

*Storm Warning* is a new series in Lackey's hugely successful *Heralds of Valdemar* series. For those unfamiliar with this series (and perhaps even for those who are), there is a timeline map in the front of the book to help the reader keep things both mentally and physically in order.

An'desha is in Firesong's Vale in Valdemar recovering from possession by the evil mage, Mornelithe Falconsbane. Miserable, and frightened that the power he contains has

somehow been tainted by this dark possession, An'desha struggles to come to terms with the emotional tatters of his life.

Charliss, the nineteenth Emperor of the east, sits the Iron Throne and ponders a means of expanding his empire into the west. He sends the Grand Duke Tremane to Hardorn, their most western border, with do-or-die instructions to find a way to achieve this. The carrot for success being the seat on the twentieth Iron Throne.

Fearing the constant threat from the east, the western lands send emissaries to Valdemar in an effort to unite the west against this threat. In Karse, a young man named Karal is chosen to be the wise and powerful mage Ulrich's secretary as emissary for Karse in Valdemar. In Valdemar, Karse's ancient enemies, Karal begins a voyage of personal discovery, firstly as Secretary to Ulrich, then as Emissary Elect. Lost in a strange and frightening land, Karal befriends the troubled An'desha - a friendship on which the future of all rests.

Toss into the mix the 'unbeknown to both sides' Storm from the title of the book, and the story elevates itself slightly above relatively standard fantasy fare. The Storm is a problem to both sides, and both feel the other is in some way responsible for this. It is An'desha who unwittingly holds the key that explains this, and Karal who must fit the key into the lock and open the door.

This is a strange book to get into if, like me, you've no previous experience of the Valdemar series. It is well written, and interesting, though if it's your first - prepare to be a stranger in a strange land.

### Vonda McIntyre

### Star Wars: The Crystal Star

Bantam Books, 1995, £5.99, 352pp

Reviewed by Susan Badham

I found this book very disappointing after coming to it with high expectations. Vonda McIntyre has written excellent science fiction and adaptations of Star Trek stories. However, with this book she seems to have decided to rest on her laurels. The book is about the kidnapping of Princess Leia and Han Solo by pro-Empire forces after the New Republic has become established.

While I can believe that people who used to be Lords under the old Empire would mount a counter-revolution (after all, apart from the danger of being throttled by Darth Vader, the perks for serving in the Empire's Civil Service seem to have been pretty good), I cannot believe that they would do so by kidnapping children, however important. Once again we have the distortion caused by the presence of the Force, which is used to drive plots and get people out of trouble whenever the writer can't think of another way to do so. Because the children are powerful in the Force they are important enough to kidnap, and by the same token you know they can't be harmed, because anyone with the Force is invincible, no matter how stupidly they act (Jedi strategy and tactics always seem to consist of finding a trap and walking straight into it).

When you combine this lack of threat within the book with the muddled writing and the bad handling of the children's characters, you get a novel where it's hard to care about what happens to anyone. This is one to avoid, even for avid fans.

### Michael Moorcock

### Hawkmoon

Millenium, 1995, £5.99, 646pp

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

This omnibus collects *The Jewel in the Skull*, *The Mad God's Amulet*, *The Sword of the Dawn*, and *The Runestaff*, in a standard-sized paperback - the 'B' size came out with the rest of Moorcock's omnibus edition three years ago. And I reckon

this gives you your money's worth - there are people writing fantasy today who've had twenty-five years to read this fast-paced, reasonably closely plotted high fantasy and they still can't do the same.

Dorian Hawkmoon has been one of the last continental warlords to resist the iron heel of the armies of Granbretan. He is, though, finally taken prisoner and has the evil jewel implanted in his skull by the forces of the Dark Empire when he is taken back to Londra. In turn he is sent out to infiltrate the last stronghold of opposition - that part of southern France called the Kamarg, where Count Brass is holding out. There he is rescued from the power of the Jewel, only to lose his new love, and then to see the Castle Brass transmitted into another dimension as it escapes the final destruction of the all-conquering Granbretanians. Somewhere along the way (and we're not halfway in yet) he discovers that the mysterious Runestaff has a purpose for him.

Moorcock wrote these novels in the sixties to help finance New Worlds and wrote them quickly, but it's not obvious. And the tricks he has used help to drive the story on, but also underpin it, starting with the reversal of making Granbretan the villain of the piece, and Londra the centre of the spiderweb of evil, and King Emperor Huon the evil spider. On the other side Hawkmoon, Duke of Kolin, could be one of Rider Haggard's heroes unspoilt by excessive introversion or doubt. Then, there is a satisfying appearance and disappearance of characters - as they seem to switch alliance. Weapons and craft don't last overlong either. Hawkmoon escapes from the Kamarg on a giant flamingo, for example, only for it to be shot down by a hunter who will become his friend. The Granbretanians, meanwhile, will pursue him from their slow and ungainly ornithopters. For this is the far future where gothic science meets mutant beast in a new Dark Age.

How far all this fits into Moorcock's Tale of the Eternal Champion, but on its own it stands as a good read, and on that I recommend it.

## Terry Pratchett

### Interesting Times

Corgi, 1995, 352pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Terry Pratchett, the thinking person's wossname; surely there can't be anybody out there who doesn't have a pretty good idea of what the Discworld books are like by now? This is the latest paperback, first published in hard covers by Gollancz in 1994, and it follows the adventures of Rincewind the wizzard (sic - on hat) and Cohen the Barbarian and his gang (the Silver Horde) on the fabled Counterweight Continent. It seems Twoflower - you remember Twoflower, from *The Colour of Magic*, the innocent, amiable tourist who turned Ankh-Morpork upside-down at the drop of a rhinu - well, Twoflower returned to the Empire Behind the Wall, and wrote - and, worse, published - a book of revolutionary thought, entitled 'What I Did on My Holidays'. This results in, well, in 'interesting times'; really very interesting indeed for almost everyone concerned. Oh yes, and the Luggage falls in love. Now go away and read the book. You had to have been there, and if you read the book, you will have been.

Not convinced yet? Well, this book is about 50% wisdom, 50% compassion, 50% humour and 50% acute observation of *all* your little character faults (and everyone else's, so it's okay, you're not being singled out for anything in particular). It is a very good book indeed.

Still not convinced? I guess there are people who don't enjoy Pratchett books. They probably take themselves, and Literature, and Life, very seriously indeed. At all times. Permission to lighten up with this book is hereby granted to everyone else. Have a wonderful time!

## Robert Rankin

### The Most Amazing Man Who

## Ever Lived

Corgi, 1995, 318pp, £4.99 pb

Reviewed by Chris Amies

In *Cold Comfort Farm*, there is a preacher who warns his audience that there is 'no butter in hell'. Just to warm them up, so to speak. Robert Rankin's dead protagonist in this novel doesn't even have the fortune to go to Hell, because that place has been closed down aeons before by a kindly God who failed to foresee that souls would just pile up and there would be a backlog in the reincarnation department. So Norman, who aspired to the gift of wings and in doing so enacted unhallowed rites in the names of beings too foul to mention, is killed by his descending dad doing an Icarus bit and ends up as a ghost. Ghosts, be it understood, remain where they died - in space - so they appear on the anniversary of their deaths when the Earth in its orbit catches up with them.

What Norman finds out is bizarre indeed. Not only the backlog in the reincarnation department, but someone is being reborn again and again on their original birthdate, replicating their own soul in several bodies. This person goes by the name of Hugo Rune; poet, bon vivant and professional liar, and father to a tall youth by the name of Cornelius, who in previous volumes has battled the powers of darkness while swanning around in a big Cadillac. Rune is bigger and nastier than before; he now has reversed-colour eyes (black around white), and is planning to electroplate the Skelington Bay piers and as a side-effect kill off everybody, including the souls waiting to reincarnate.

Well, enough said. This is the usual manic Rankin roller-coaster ride, this time attacking such targets as car-porn ("my XR3i's bigger than your XR2i") and those lost souls who tear out perfectly good Art Deco furniture to put in moquette carpet-tiles and draylon covers, and call rooms by things like the KEV-LYN Suite. There is an engagingly silly alien who looks like a sheep, and what is probably a send-up of the *Survivors* - type rural post-holocaust story. It's fun.

## Michael Scott Rohan

### Cloud Castles

Avon Books, 1995, 327pp, £5.50

Reviewed by Cherith Baldrey

*Cloud Castles* is the third book in the series which began with *Chase The Morning* and continued with *The Gates of Noon*. For anyone who hasn't read the others, the central character is a businessman, Stephen Fisher, who zooms his way up the corporate ladder while feeling emptiness within himself. In *Chase the Morning* he accidentally passes into the Spiral, where time and space work by their own rules, and in subsequent books he returns there to work out his own destiny.

All three books are a cut above the usual genre fantasy in the subtle way that the Spiral and the Core (our world) are interwoven, in the lively and unusual characters, and in the marvellous throwaway wit. But I think that *Cloud Castles* is the best of the three. In it, Stephen Fisher's involvement with the Spiral leads him to the Holy Grail, and a stunning climax that I wouldn't reveal for worlds.

If you've read the first two, you'll probably go on to read *Cloud Castles* anyway. If you haven't, I'd recommend reading them in order. Although *Cloud Castles* is a completely separate story, there's a lot of emotional depth that you wouldn't pick up if you hadn't read the earlier books.

## Michael Scott Rohan

### The Lord of Middle Air

Gollancz, 1995, 253pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

I've noticed before that the virtual collapse of the historical novel has been partly assuaged by those aspects of it which dwell on the borders of magic and legend being absorbed into the fantasy genre. Michael Scott Rohan's *The Lord of Middle Air* is blurred as "an enchanting tale of black magic" (what, a cute and heart-warming story of everyday Satanists?) but it could also be described as a historical romance of the Scottish/English borders in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott (who the author claims as an ancestor). Indeed, Sir Walter depicted the thirteenth century scholar-wizard Michael Scot (another ancestor), who plays an important part in this novel, in his *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

Set in the turbulent Border regions, *The Lord of Middle Air* is the story of another Walter Scot, who meets his wizard kinsman shortly before his father is killed in a dispute with the evil mage Nicholas de Soulis. His only route to revenge is to follow Michael into the realm of faerie, where he learns the art of war and returns fit to combat the evil necromancer - who like another Scottish villain is proof against mortal weaponry.

This, it has to be said, familiar territory - there are many similarities with the tale of Thomas the Rhymer, for instance, although the historical Michael Scot is a more shadowy figure for readers of genre fiction. It stands or falls on the author's ability to crate a good story, and fortunately Rohan does. The background is well-sketched, gritty and rough, an anarchic, lawless region where the devil might literally take the hindmost. Walter's story touches the right notes in "young lad defeats the villain and gets the girl" melodrama, while the attentive reader might note something more akin to tragedy in the way Walter's fate is guided by Michael Scot at peril to the scholar's own soul. The final revelation of the identities of Scot's two (is it?) servants/familiars adds a chill to the ambiguity which has been carefully crafted. Above all, Scottish history is fashionable at the moment: it's a shame the cover doesn't stress this a bit more.

### John Saul

### *The Homing*

Bantam Books, 1995, 414pp

Reviewed by Sebastian Phillips

John Saul's *The Homing* is probably aimed at the teenage market, so it would be unfair to judge many of its failings too harshly. It works on the principle of 'find what the readers don't like and then give them lots of it'. In this case, that is bugs - bugs crawling over people, into people's mouths, over open eyeballs and so on. Everything is geared to getting more of these lurid descriptions onto the page. If you don't like insects, then this is the book for you. On the other hand, if you aren't especially bothered by our chitinous friends, then it has little else to offer.

The big drawbacks with this novel are the lack of characterisation, the simplicity of the plot, and the uninspiring nature of the prose. It is hard to have much time for characters who seem to court death - including a doctor who finds out the identity of the murderer and then goes to confront him without telling anyone of her suspicions, or even leaving a note to say where she is going. As with many such horror novels, you don't really give a toss about any of the characters, except perhaps the dog. The 'twist in the tail' ending is obvious from about fifty pages in - earlier if you don't give Saul the benefit of the doubt.

If you know an entomophobic teenager going on a dull train journey (Dover to Aberdeen, perhaps), this is probably the book to give them.

### Robert Sheckley

### *Alien Harvest*

Millennium, 1995, 296pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

The current trend seems to be for "name" writers to be employed writing spin-offs, with Barbara Hambly writing a well-received *Star Wars* novel, David Wingrove novelising the *Myst* computer game and Sheckley himself adapting a *Trek* book as well as this. Is this an attempt to gain credibility for the Wookiee book or a sign of the collapse of the serious stand-alone sf novel? Certainly I wince at the thought of Sheckley, once one of the major figures in the field, adapting not even a film script but an *Alien comic* (Jeff Prosser's graphic novel *Aliens: Hive*).

Yet there's a flavour of Sheckley at his most characteristic here, and Sheckley has not been particularly characteristic for a long time. The story is the kind of hackery marketing departments throw up and indiscriminating readers fail to: expedition to Alien planet goes in search of a cache of the "royal jelly" the queen Aliens exude, various people get their faces ripped off, there's an impossibly beautiful female and, er, that's it. Apart from the dog. But the main character - a nerdish inventor dying of cancer who builds on his creation of an electronic ant to make Norbert, a robot Alien - is depicted with all the wryness Sheckley used to use with such good effect in novels like *Dimension of Miracles* and *The Alchemical Marriage of Alistair Crompton*. Several scenes, such as a raid upon a rich Arab by the superhuman jewel-thief Julie, are so melodramatically over the top that the interior of Sheckley's cheek has to be severely bruised by the pressure of his tongue. In short, this book is more surreally comic than it has a right to be.

Whether this will appeal to Alien fans, I don't know. I do see that Sheckley's *Deep Space 9* *Trek* novel *The Laertian Gamble* was severely panned in *SFX*. And if it does, where will they go if they decide "I want to read more by him"?

### Lewis Shiner

### *Glimpses*

Avon Books, 1995, 328pp, £5.50

Reviewed by Cherith Baldrey

I'm not the right person to review this book. It's about rock music, and as far as I'm concerned, rock music is what I'm always telling my kids to turn down. Or off. So I started reading from a sense of duty. Within the first few pages, I was hooked.

Ray Shackleford, the main character, is a failed rock musician who repairs stereos for a living. By accident he discovers that he can make his equipment play music that should have been composed but never was. As the novel develops it seems as though he creates an alternate universe in which the music can exist, and by bringing the music back into our world, he can change it for the better. But he does not at first realise the implications or the long-term effects of what he does.

There's a marvellous sense of pattern and development in which the fantasy elements affect Ray himself, his relationships, and the wider social and political world. Ray is seeking to understand himself, his marriage, and in particular his relationship with his dead father. Through it all threads the music. The atmosphere is compelling, and poignant. Lewis Shiner understands the power and the beauty of creativity, and its limitations. Writing about music, translating sound into words, is a difficult thing to do; he succeeds brilliantly.

The cover tells me that the novel won the World Fantasy Award: I'm not surprised. Perhaps I'm the right person to review it, after all. If it gripped me, what will it do to a rock fan?

### George Turner

### *The Genetic Soldier*

Avon Books, 1995, 403pp, \$5.50

Reviewed by Susan Badham

The contents of this book were a pleasant surprise. I'd been totally wrong-footed by the cover, which shows a Conan

wannabe in the sort of pose you probably find on Imperial Space Marines recruiting posters, into thinking that it would be the kind of story where mighty-thewed heroes rip alien predators limb from limb. Instead, it turned out to be a subtle exploration of human culture, set in the twenty-eighth century.

The crew of a planetary exploration ship return to Earth, only to find out that it is not the overcrowded, polluted planet they remember but a pre-industrial, stable society with totally different social conventions. They want to resettle the Earth but to the inhabitants they represent the mistakes and excesses of the Last Culture and aren't wanted. The interaction between the two cultures forms the subject of the book.

This novel manages to introduce some entirely new concepts to a reasonably familiar storyline and is more interesting as an exploration of the evolution of cultures within a rather conspiracy-based view of history than as a fast-moving novel of plot. This is the future as a foreign country, real literature of ideas, and the interest in reading is in seeing what the author is going to come up with next.

**Ian Watson**

***The Coming of Vertumnus***

VGSF, 1995, 288p, £5.99

**Reviewed by Benedict Cullum**

The back cover blurb reminds browsers that Watson has been hailed as "perhaps the most impressive synthesiser of ideas in modern SF". In this selection of 11 tales you will find a stimulating mixture: ghost story, slipstream and chiller nestle alongside the SF.

The downside is limited. The moody 'Looking Down on You' was my least favourite story, whilst the rather jarring denouement of 'Life in the Groove' perhaps betrayed the tale's themed anthology origin. First contact is twice explored. In 'Nanoware Time', seemingly benign giant centipede-like 'Serpents' from Beta Hydri tempt humanity with powers such as levitation, vacuum tolerance and interstellar travel. To the potential advantage of humans generally, the protagonist pair are able to exploit the Serpents' ignorance of the source of these powers. In 'The Odour of Cocktail Cigarettes', galactic citizenship is offered as a prize in a cosmic role-playing game!

'Swimming with the Salmon' is a darkly comic, archly told and distinctly fishy tale in contrast with 'The Bible in Blood' which tells of a man's intent on forcing the Apocalypse by means of a grisly New Testament written in the blood of concentration camp victims.

Minimal SF trappings are to be found in the title tale dealing with the effect of corporate Machiavellian plots seemingly to discredit the Green movement. As in many of the stories, all is not clear; you'll just have to read the volume to make up your own mind.

**Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman**

***The Seventh Gate: The Death Gate Cycle Volume VII***

Bantam Books, 9 Nov 1995, 358pp, £4.99

**Reviewed by Alan Fraser**

*The Seventh Gate* is the final book in this fantasy-with-elements-of-SF series, set in a universe where our world has been sundered into four Realms of Air, Fire, Earth and Water linked by the Death Gate. The series has had a dark side to it as well as some comedy, and has for me elevated Weis and Hickman (W&H) from formula fantasy merchants. There is no point in reading this book unless you know the series - W&H jump straight into the action with no recap of the story.

They open with the good guys in desperate straits - our hero Haplo has been mortally wounded, and taken by the Patryn Lord Xar to Abarrach to be revived as his undead slave. Haplo's partner Marit and the human assassin Hugh the Hand are trapped in the Labyrinth, while Alfred the

powerful Sartan magician is missing believed dead. Xar is obsessed with finding the legendary Seventh Gate, which will allow him to close the doors between the worlds, and it looks as if there's nothing to prevent the evil dragon-snakes taking over the four Realms. Now read on...

I found *The Seventh Gate* a fast and exciting read, even though it didn't end the series as I would have wished. For *Death Gate* fans this is an essential buy; for new readers I recommend starting at *Dragon Wing*. I wouldn't rank W&H as the strongest and most original writers of fantasy, but I have enjoyed reading the *Death Gate* series, and recommend it.

**Angus Wells**

***Lords of the Sky***

Millenium, 1995, 678pp, £5.99

**Reviewed by Lynne Bispham**

In the Dawntime, the Dhar, Daviot's people, came from the north and conquered Kellambek, driving out the folk of that country, the Ahn. Now the Ahn, the Sky Lords, seek to regain their lost lands. Although the Dhar are not without their own magical defences, they dread the appearance of the Sky Lords' ensorcelled airboats in their skies, for they know that these herald the Great Coming, the Ahn's invasion of Kellambek.

Daviot, the son of a fisherman, is discovered to have the ability to become a Mnemonikos, a Rememberer of his peoples' history. While a student at the Mnemonikos College he meets the love of his life, the blind mage Rwyne, and is devastated when their duties as Mnemonikos and mage tear them apart. Travelling as a journeyman Mnemonikos, Daviot discovers that the Sky Lords' magic is growing stronger. He also discovers that the Changed - people originally created by magic from animals, whom most of the Dhar, the Truemen, still regard as dumb beasts - have a sophisticated society of their own, and that they are in contact with the Sky Lords. Daviot doubts that war between Dhar, Ahn and Changed can be averted, but his dreams of dragons, creatures of legend, dreams shared by Rwyne, a Changed and a Sky Lord, reveal that there may be a way to bring peace to his world.

*Lords of the Sky* is a fantasy in which the traditional aspects of the genre and the highly original are combined to make a novel in which the reader can lose themselves completely. What distinguishes it from other fantasy novels is the vivid depiction of Daviot's world and the people he meets - in the context of the book, this is how people would talk and act. Daviot, who narrates most of the book, develops from a naive, uneducated boy to the would-be saviour of his people. He has doubts about his actions, he has to make moral choices when faced with conflicts of loyalty, and although he does what he thinks is best for Dhar, Ahn and Changed, it is not without a price. This is a splendidly-realised tale by a writer of imagination and talent, and it is highly recommended.

**John Whitbourn**

***To Build Jerusalem***

VGSF, 1995, 311pp, £5.99

**Reviewed by Benedict S. Cullum**

Set in the same milieu as the prize-winning *A Dangerous Energy*, the 1995 of this tale presents a world significantly removed from our own - wherein the Protestant Reformation, some say, allowed for a degree of scientific and technological advance that would not have been achieved under a Roman Catholic hegemony.

This England has never been central to world affairs, in fact is regarded as something of a backwater. Adam, a Papal investigator, is sent to investigate the spontaneous disappearance of Charles IV. His enquiries show that dissent is widespread and that the Establishment has abused its position, upsetting the natural feudal order.

Magic works in this alternative world, although not in a benign fashion: during the timescale of this tale its rules have been disturbed by some outside, demonic force. One of the dissenting factions, arguing that, as a creation of God although an abomination, the demon is their ally if it helps destabilise the anathemic Roman Catholic Church. Sticky ends seem guaranteed all round but, given the quasi-religious nature of the book, some sort of *deus ex machina* was inevitable.

Incidental reflections of our real world - such as the brewers, Harveys of Lewes and the Surrey Puma - abound, all adding to the sense of verisimilitude. This is an inventive story exceedingly well crafted. Not having read Whitbourn's other novels I will now most certainly be seeking them both out.

**Tad Williams**

***Caliban's Hour***

Legend, 1995, 180pp, £4.99

**Reviewed by Cherith Baldrey**

Tad Williams takes the character of Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and weaves this novel around him. The opening and closing sections take place in Naples, twenty years after the events of Shakespeare's play, when Caliban has left his island and come to seek out Miranda, to justify himself to her, and then to kill her.

The central section, the bulk of the novel, is Caliban's retelling to Miranda of his life on the island, starting from his earliest childhood, to the coming of Prospero and Miranda and his developing relationship with them. The actual events covered by the play provide the climax of this section.

This is not a novelisation of Shakespeare's play. The interest arises from the evocation of the island, of Caliban himself, and of the way Prospero both develops and warps his character. Details of setting and of daily life take up more space and matter more than the superficially more 'important' events of the play. Even so, part of the experience of reading *Caliban's Hour* is the way in which the preconceptions aroused by the play are overturned by the novel, so I'd recommend reading or seeing *The Tempest* first if you don't know it already.

I found the style impressive. It's very precise and controlled, simple, and very visual. Williams takes us to the island and makes it real, and also takes us into the even

stranger landscapes of Caliban's mind. He raises the question of where the division lies between beast and human, and answers it in a climax which is powerful, very moving, and unquestionably 'right'.

I found this different from the earlier works of Tad Williams that I've read, and although I enjoyed his other books I liked this one even more; it's going to stay with me for a long time. Now I'm asking myself where he'll go from here.

**Phillip G. Williamson**

***Heart Of Shadows***

Legend 1995, 312pp, £5.99

**Reviewed by Vikki Lee**

Set in Williamson's popular *Firstworld*, *Heart of Shadows* is a rather dark fantasy despite the typical 'fluffy' fantasy cover.

Master Frano, a prosperous and kindly merchant, returns from his latest trade venture in possession of an extremely rare and potentially valuable stone. Saddened by the horrific and inexplicable death of one of his trusted guards in the finding of this stone, he attempts to get it valued. Drawing a blank, Master Frano sends his son Sildemund to Dharsoul to get the opinion of more notable experts.

Following Sildemund's departure for Dharsoul, Master Frano and his daughter Meglan are visited by Skalatin, a dark and mysterious character who offers a fortune for the stone. In refusing Skalatin's stupendous offer, Master Frano and Meglan soon learn that Skalatin is not to be messed with, or denied. In fear for her father's life, Meglan sets off after Sildemund to ensure the early return of the stone to Skalatin.

*Heart of Shadows* is a dark tale set in a well drawn and interesting world. The utterly evil Skalatin is the very stuff of nightmares, and the mystery surrounding him that unfolds slowly as the tale progresses is engrossing, full of surprises, and keeps one turning the pages. There is also a more than bit-part appearance by the enigmatic Ronbas Dinbig of Khimmur, 'Zan-Chassin' sorcerer and rogue; popular from Williamson's other *Firstworld* novels.

I would highly recommend *Heart of Shadows*, although, if typos irritate you or spoil the flow of your reading, beware of this book! Legend manage to get more typos in 312 pages than I think I've ever noted in a book before. This must be the one that slipped through when the proof-reader was on holiday.

# Vector 186

## Checklist Of Books Reviewed

Hardbacks and Original Paperbacks  
edited by Paul Kincaid

PAMELA BELLE	<i>The Wolf Within</i>
GREGORY BENFORD	<i>Sailing Bright Eternity</i>
ALEXANDER BESHER	<i>Rim</i>
MARK CANTER	<i>Ember from the Sun</i>
C.J. CHERRYH	<i>Rider at the Gate</i>
RICHARD DREYFUSS & HARRY TURTLEDOVE	<i>The Two Georges</i>
CHRISTOPHER EVANS	<i>Mortal Remains</i>
PAUL EVENBLIJ & PAUL HARLAND	<i>Systems of Romance</i>
MICHAEL FOOT	<i>HG: The History of Mr Wells</i>
NEWT GINGRICH & WILLIAM R. FORSTCHEN	<i>1945</i>
PARKE GODWIN	<i>The Tower of Beowulf</i>
PETER HAINING (ED)	<i>The Vampire Omnibus</i>
K.W. JETER	<i>Blade Runner 2: The Edge of Human</i>
CAROL FARLEY KESSLER	<i>Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress toward Utopia with Selected Writings</i>
PAUL KINCAID	<i>A Very British Genre</i>
JOE R. LANSDALE	<i>Mucho Mojo</i>
PAUL J. MCAULEY	<i>Fairyland</i>
ANNE MCCAFFREY & JODY LYNN NYE	<i>The Ship Who Won</i>
PHILLIP MANN	<i>A Land Fit for Heroes, Vol 3: The Dragon Wakes</i>
L.E. MODESITT JR	<i>The Order War</i>
JEFF NOON	<i>Pollen</i>
PATRICK PARRINDER	<i>Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy</i>
JOHN J. PIERCE	<i>Odd Genre: A Study in Imagination and Evolution</i>
ROBERT RANKIN	<i>The Garden of Unearthly Delights</i>
KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH	<i>The Fey: Sacrifice</i>
DAVID SEED (ED)	<i>Anticipations</i>
IAN WATSON	<i>Chaos Child</i>
PHILIP G. WILLIAMSON	<i>Citadel</i>
DAVID WINGROVE	<i>Days of Bitter Strength</i>
JONATHAN WYLIE	<i>Other Lands</i>

Paperbacks  
edited by Tanya Brown

VARIOUS	<i>ShipBuilding – New SF from Scotland</i>
BRIAN ALDISS	<i>Somewhere East of Life</i>
ROGER MCBRIDE ALLEN	<i>Star Wars: Showdown at Centerpoint</i>
KEVIN J. ANDERSON	<i>Dark Apprentice</i>
KEVIN J ANDERSON (ED.)	<i>Star Wars – Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina</i>
JIM BALLANTYNE	<i>The Torturer</i>
ALEXANDER BESHER	<i>Rim</i>
LOIS MCMASTER BUJOLD	<i>Mirror Dance</i>
CHRISTOPHER EVANS	<i>Mortal Remains</i>
CHRISTOPHER FOWLER	<i>Psychoville</i>
MAGGIE FUREY	<i>The Sword of Flame</i>
DAVID GEMMELL	<i>Ironhand's Daughter</i>
PARKE GODWIN	<i>Limbo Search</i>
TERRY GOODKIND	<i>Wizard's First Rule</i>
CHARLES L. GRANT	<i>Jackals</i>
ALASDAIR GRAY	<i>A History Maker</i>
STEPHAN GRUNDY	<i>Rhinegold</i>
PETER F. HAMILTON	<i>The Nano Flower</i>
ANDREW HARMAN	<i>Fahrenheit 666</i>
ROBERT HOLDSTOCK	<i>The Emerald Forest</i>
DAFYDD AB HUGH	<i>Arthur War Lord</i>
GARRY D. KILWORTH	<i>Angel</i>
MERCEDES LACKEY	<i>Storm Warning</i>
PAUL J MCAULEY	<i>Pasquale's Angel</i>
VONDA MCINTYRE	<i>Star Wars: The Crystal Star</i>
MICHAEL MOORCOCK	<i>Hawkmoon</i>
TERRY PRATCHETT	<i>Interesting Times</i>
ROBERT RANKIN	<i>The Most Amazing Man Who Ever Lived</i>
MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN	<i>Cloud Castles</i>
MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN	<i>The Lord of Middle Air</i>
JOHN SAUL	<i>The Homing</i>
ROBERT SHECKLEY	<i>Alien Harvest</i>
LEWIS SHINER	<i>Glimpses</i>
GEORGE TURNER	<i>The Genetic Soldier</i>
IAN WATSON	<i>The Coming of Vertumnus</i>
MARGARET WEIS & TRACY HICKMAN	<i>The Seventh Gate: The Death Gate Cycle Volume VII</i>
ANGUS WELLS	<i>Lords of the Sky</i>
JOHN WHITBOURN	<i>To Build Jerusalem</i>
TAD WILLIAMS	<i>Caliban's Hour</i>
PHILLIP G. WILLIAMSON	<i>Heart Of Shadows</i>